

*May the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be acceptable in your sight in Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

This morning is Christmas. John's Gospel gives us a good study of the Christmas story. It talks about the word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth, we've received grace upon grace and it talks about the light shines in the darkness. Boy that's a lot to take in. In John 1:4; it says in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. Everyone's heard about Lewis and Clark the great explorers. Well, did you hear about the story of the Lewis and Clark Caverns North of Yellowstone National Park were discovered. One of the original explorers was walking along the top of that mountain and fell through a hole, and he dropped several hundred feet into this cavern and was stuck in almost total darkness for over a week, without food or water. He cried out every day "Help me", hoping someone would hear his voice and figure he was down in the hole. Sure enough someone came along and heard his faint sound and looked around and found the hole. They dug him out and that's how they found this giant cavern. They asked him how did you hold on to hope day after day in the dark without giving up. He said, there was one little pinhole ray of light that was coming through and I just kept focused on that ray of light.

A light shining in the darkness has a way of drawing our attention. In the midst of darkness it has a way of giving hope. John's gospel tells us Jesus was the light shining in the darkness. The darkness he's referring to is the darkness of our world evil, sin hatred, violence, poverty, brokenness, disease, death, anything which goes against God's original plans for our world. Jesus came to shed light in our darkness to bring hope into hopelessness. We have all walked in the darkness. We come from all walks of life. Some of us are old, some of us are hometown people, some of us are transplants from another place, some of us are rich, some of us are poor, some of us have love, some of us have loved and lost. Here's what we all have in common--we have all walked in darkness. Though it would seem that some of us have sinned in greater frequency or greater magnitude than others, we have all been born with something missing in our lives, a God shaped hole in our hearts, as some people call it. Isaiah and John call it Darkness.

But the good news is this, we have seen a great light and furthermore, that light comes to us. Graciously, the light has come towards us and continues to come towards us. As long as we

reject the great filling light in our presence, we will continue to walk in darkness. As long as we refuse to forgive, love, share and make peace, that "God shaped hole" will continue to be a "God shaped hole". Why? Because God loves us so much that God gave us freedom. The light is not invasive. It is persuasive, like a friend holding a candle toward you for you to light your candle. If we do light our candle with the light of God, if we do allow our souls to be ignited with the awesome power of love and forgiveness, peace and sharing, our faces will become illuminated in the presence of the Living Christ. We will finally see ourselves, and our neighbors, as "Children of God". The light makes a cross on his back, and asks us to as well. The light asks us to change our direction in life. We fill the "God shaped hole" with other things, and we think we are full until the little cracks appear in our carefully tailored lives. God's light continues to shine in our direction though, and it continues to come to us. All we have to do is dip our candle toward the one being offered to us. All we must do is dip our heads down and ask for forgiveness. All we must do is forgive others as God forgives us.

When we take on the light, our burdens are taken on by that little child laying in a manger., He is willing and able to carry our load. As things become lighter in our lives, we may even find ourselves sharing the light with others., We may turn to the person next to us and offer the light of Christ to them. In doing so, the brightness grows. God's kingdom is made manifest on earth, and more faces glow with the good news of the word and light. The light becomes brighter through our sharing, and more people in the shadows are able to see it. But for us to share the light and be the living Christ, we must walk toward the shadows. This is what Christ exhibited in a life in which he was reprimanded by the "holy men" for going into the houses of tax collectors and prostitutes. This birth that we celebrate today is not just a birth in a stable 2000 years ago, it is a birth waiting to happen.

Jesus enables us to grow the fruit of the spirit, love, peace, patience, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. These in turn enable us to shine more brightly for Jesus in our lives and to reflect the light of Christ in our lives and the world. The light of God wants to enlighten your life because God wants you to know who you really are a shining faced Child of God.

Amen.