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Christmas Eve – Luke 2:1-20 – A Light in the Darkness

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*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”* So began something so wondrous we can hardly describe it or understand it – the creation. The almighty God and perfect designer of this universe spoke a Word over our world and began his masterpiece for one singular purpose: so that he might share it with us; so that he might live with us in love and joy and peace and perfection forever.

But look at us now. That light of a perfect creation lasted only days before Adam and Eve fell for Satan’s plan to snuff it out and drown this world in darkness. You know the story, don’t you? When God first created this world, he created it flawless, sinless, intending that he and his people would live together in perfect harmony for all eternity. But then one of his angels – Satan – decided he didn’t want to live under God’s power and kingdom anymore, and he didn’t want humanity to have to, either. So Satan rebelled against God and convinced us to as well. That rebellion against God is called sin, and that’s what the devil used to cloak this world in darkness – the darkness of suffering and disaster, of sickness and pain and heartache, and most of all, of death.

And that’s a shadow that still hangs over every one of us even today. Satan managed to convince Adam and Eve to take the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, and he hasn’t stopped trying to do the same to you, too. So what’s the forbidden fruit that you just can’t stay away from? Maybe alcohol or drugs, maybe pornography or sex outside marriage, maybe bad eating habits or not taking care of yourself, maybe stealing, gossiping, dirty language, talking bad about the people around you, talking down to your spouse or children, or disrespecting people in authority, the president, or the police. Whatever it is, we all have one – probably more than one. And make no mistake about it, in God’s book, the wages of sin is death – death in this world, and death forever in hell.

But here at Christmas, we’re not talking about what we deserve for what we’ve done. We’re talking about what we receive as a gift of God’s grace, because that’s what Christmas is really all about. Into the darkness of sin, into the darkness of night, there came a gift of light. It was the one that had been promised for ages past, even all the way back in that Garden of Eden, when God vowed that he would fight for his people, that he would never leave us to die; and when he told Satan that he may have won the battle, but

he would never win the war – *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

That was God’s very first promise of a light that would burn through the darkness, and so God spoke once more: let there be light – but not through re-creation. This time it came through *incarnation* – through his One and Only Son taking on flesh for us, becoming our brother to serve us, to sympathize with us, and to save us. There in a stable in the little town of Bethlehem, the people walking in darkness saw a great light – but not with their eyes. With their hearts. Mary and Joseph and the shepherds and the angels marveled that night at the power and goodness of God to make everything that’s wrong in this world right again, and to fulfill all the hopes and dreams of God’s people since the beginning of time. So on *this* night, friends, let’s marvel with them.

Yes, God himself promised to make everything right again, with us and with this dark world, and the way he did it was by sending a child, wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Maybe it didn’t seem like much at first – I’m sure it didn’t to Joseph and Mary, as they hunkered down in that cold, dark stable, amidst all the hay and dirt and manure and filth. But here was God’s good news of great joy that would light their lives and warm their hearts: Christ the Lord has come to scatter the darkness of sin and death with the light of peace and salvation.

No, Mary and Joseph may not have seen the glory of that night – at least not visibly. But it was there and even heaven itself couldn’t hold it in. Though this child was destined for a life of humility and lowliness, of service and sacrifice and suffering, for a few moments on that night, he got the welcome he deserved, and he was praised for exactly what he was: our Savior from sin. *“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you.’”*

God gave to this world the light of salvation that night. He sent his Savior to crush the devil’s head and drive out every last bit of wrong hiding in every dark corner of our hearts, because we never could. We can’t rationalize it, we can’t explain it away, we can’t bargain with God. We needed a Savior who could live the perfect life we were supposed to in our place and die the death

we deserved so we wouldn't have to, and by God's grace that's exactly what he gave us in Jesus. Jesus was born that night to rescue us from what our sins had coming, to deliver us from the guilt and shame and every evil that our mistakes bring into our lives, to save us from hell – and praise God, that's exactly what he's done for us now.

By his perfect life as our substitute, Jesus kept God's Law flawlessly for us and gave us the credit, so that now when God looks at us he sees those perfect, holy, loving companions that he always meant us to be. And by his sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus paid for all your sins and took them away forever; he defeated death and the devil, he slammed shut the doors to hell and threw open the doors to heaven, and he promises you now that whoever believes in him shall never perish but shall have eternal life with him there in Paradise forever.

And so that means that along with the light of salvation for this world, on Christmas night God also gave his light of joy and peace for our lives. The angel said to the shepherds, “*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*” [Then] Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.*”

Remember how we said before that because of our sins we were rebels against God who deserved only his wrath and punishment? Well for Jesus' sake, we aren't anymore. Because Jesus Christ came to fight and conquer the devil and all the forces of evil for us, we're on his side again and he's won the victory for us. We're not God's enemies anymore – we're his children now. We're not at war anymore, not in turmoil anymore – we're at peace with God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We're not in darkness anymore – Christ made his light shine in our hearts and lives, so that means we're not headed for hell anymore, either. We're on the path to heaven now. And that gives us a special, spiritual peace and joy that only come as gifts from God and that can never be taken away from us, no matter what happens around us, because he changed our whole world for us that night. We don't have to wonder anymore what we're doing here or where we stand with God or “Why is this happening to me?” or what's going to happen to us when we die. We see the answer now in the light of salvation, peace, and joy forever, because Christ our Savior is born.

So this Christmas, let's love the gifts, but let's love the Giver even more. Let's celebrate the blessings of the light, but let's celebrate Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, even more. After all, without him, there would only be

darkness for us; but with him, we know we're going to one day see his face, meet his embrace, and bask in the bright light of his glorious grace. And that's exactly what Isaiah prophesied about him all those years earlier, isn't it? “*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*”

God's greatest Christmas gift for us was giving us a light at the end of the tunnel – a glimpse of what life was always meant to be and a foretaste of what he was coming to make it again. For hundreds and thousands of years, the LORD himself had promised to enter our story and do for us what we never could for ourselves. He promised to take away our sin and right every wrong; he promised to share our burdens and walk in our shoes; he promised to bridge the chasm between us by coming to us to live, die, and rise again for us, because that's what he had to do in order to bring us into his heavenly kingdom to be with him forever, just like he always wanted it to be.

Yes, that was the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, the Light of the World himself, wrapped in cloths and lying in that manger – there to make good on every promise he'd ever made to us. Christmas was the first step toward the cross and empty tomb, toward our sins being paid for in full and our eternal life in heaven being guaranteed! Christmas is how we know that our God really is serious about His love for us and how far he was willing to go to get us back and make us his own again. He wasn't willing to let us die in our sins, so he himself came to save us – he left heaven's unapproachable light for us and came down to bring us that light of life, for now and forever.

You know, there's an old song I've heard that says, “*Show me the lights of home, and tell me what could ever shine as bright.*” On Christmas we remember with joy and adoration when our God sent a light in the darkness – a light for this world, a light for our lives, and most importantly, the light that guides us home to heaven. Yes, that baby – the sinless, perfect Son of God – was born to die in your place so that you will live; so that your faith in Him means peace forever for you; so that the devil's deeds of darkness in your life are gone, never to return; and so that you are perfect in God's eyes and perfectly suited to live with him in the light of his perfect presence forever. So people of God, my brothers and sisters, Merry Christmas! Amen.