

“You know Dasher and Dancer and Prancer and Vixen, Comet and Cupid and Donner and Blitzen, but do you recall the most famous Reindeer of all? Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer had a very shiny nose.” We all know this famous carol of the Reindeer that just did not fit into the standard mold. He was mocked by everyone around him, including the often neglected tenth Reindeer. I already named nine...do you know the tenth in Rudolph’s song? Indeed, it was Olive, the other Reindeer. Olive the other Reindeer used to laugh and call him names. Why? Because he was different. His light was unusual; it was unwelcome. But the point is, he was not regarded well by the reindeer until his special light showed the way. When his light shined forth, the darkness gave way and his mission succeeded.

Just think that Rudolph is a different kind of telling of a greater story: when the true light shines, darkness disappears. Those who demeaned Rudolph gave way when his light shined forth, and they celebrated with him. Light overcomes the darkness Any way you look at it, light is integral to our lives. Science teaches us that light is a standard through which we can understand the means of universe. Speed is always relative to the speed of light, which is simply 186,000 miles a second. By the science we know now, nothing can go faster than the speed of light; it is a universal constant...unless you live on the Starship Enterprise. Practically, we cannot see without light...quite literally. But metaphorically, there is a time when we all need a little light to show the way. Sometimes we must be light. Whether it is a special reindeer, power of an iPhone, or God as a baby, we need the path clearly shown; we need light. This is the mission we honor tonight.

We have heard two accounts of Christ’s entrance into our world: the more historical, event-by-event narrative of Luke and the poetic narrative of John. Each of them has their place in how we understand the mystery of Christ’s coming. Indeed, John gives us one of

the most poetic and beautiful passages in scripture, in which the coming of Christ to earth is described as the Word becoming flesh and the light coming into the world. These images are not accidental; they mean something of great importance. We are sustained as God's creation, scripture says, by the Word and the Light. We recognize the coming of Jesus Christ to earth: not as powerful royalty but as a tiny baby, born to not a sovereign queen but to a young girl, irrelevant by the world's standards. Christ came for us to live fully and to empower us. This is what the light shining in the darkness looks like, and the darkness indeed cannot overcome it. In this season, we recognize that the darkness disappears with the power of Christ's light. This light shines in the world through us and for us.

When you think about it, what is darkness? Scientifically, it is the absence of light. It is emptiness. In scripture, it is the absence of fullness, of everything that defines wholeness. It is the absence of love, it is the absence of hope, it is the absence of joy, it is the absence of peace. It is the absence of everything that makes life worth living. Let me give you another example: as you may or may not know, I am on a Star Wars kick...with good reason. I will go see the latest movie again this Saturday at 1 PM. Can't wait. But in that universe, there are two sides of the Force: the light and the dark side. The light side is defined by compassion, caring, and goodness. The dark side is defined by anger, hatred, lust of power. The situation works here as well. The dark side is a hole within. The dark side arises from a lack of the goodness from the light. Anger and hatred arise from a lust of power, which come from the absence of compassion and caring. The dark side is ultimately self-centered and self-serving, leaving a hole within, whereas the light is other-centered and fulfilling. Darkness comes from a focus on the self; light comes from the power of love and compassion, not only in Star Wars but in life.

This other-focused light is most pointedly seen in the very nature of Christ. He is, shall we say, the ultimate Jedi Master. We see the absolute example of light in this holiday, in his coming. The most powerful part of this John passage is the last verse: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." For the first time in history, the light of God came to be among us, but "lived" is far too a bland verb for the Greek here. It is better translated as "dwelt" or "tented" among us. This is what we call the Incarnation: God dwelling with humanity like never before. Not only was the light present, not only was the light born with flesh like a human being, the light was one of us, in the same situation, in the same difficulty, in the same joys. God came to be WITH US in a way that changed the meaning of life. Jesus Christ came to be one of us while being that light that overcomes the darkness through his other-centered ministry. Not only did he come to be the light to the world, the light continues in his bodily absence as he came to be the light in us. The ministry continues.

If you know me, you know that my favorite passage of all time, the one I continually return to, is 1 Corinthians 12, which describes the reality that is the Body of Christ, the Church. We, collectively, in this building and throughout the world, whenever we gather, we take on the spirit and the role of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the Body of Christ, scripture says, for Christ has no body on earth, no hands or feet, beyond us sitting here. So, as the mission of Christ rolls on, the light is still coming into the world through us now. Take note in a few moments. We will dim the lights above us, and for an instant, darkness will be more dominant. Then there will be another light, and another, and another, and as we each light a candle, the dominance of the darkness dwindles. The song raises up, and there is a different spirit in the room. So it is with the church. We do much by ourselves;

our light shines in the darkness, but there is still darkness. As our lights grow, the darkness diminishes. When we minister to the world in our many other-centered ways, the darkness of anger, hate, and lust of power diminishes. Slowly, over time, the power of God wins out.

With that power of Christ, we cast away darkness, one step at a time, one light at a time. This is our calling this Christmas season. We all love that classic song, "This Little Light of Mine." When the Lord Jesus Christ came and then left this earth, through the Holy Spirit, he empowered us to shine our lights as his people. What gets in our way is forgetting that, like John the Baptist, we are testifying to a greater light, and that light shines through us. We easily become self-serving; we easily think of what we want over our neighbor. It will happen, but, with the coming of Christ, we remember that we are endowed with a great gift and great responsibility of being the light as the light is within you. You gotta let it shine, however and wherever God puts you. If you are musical, let your light shine. If you have words of care and love, let your light shine. If you have carpentry skills, let your light shine. If your shiny red nose can light the way for a caravan of your brethren, let your light shine. Whatever gift you have to give for the benefit of your neighbor, let it shine. This is how Christmas becomes real to us and to the world that needs the light of compassion that comes from the Christ: not in the giving and receiving of tangible gifts but in the giving of the greater gifts. So, this little light of yours, no matter what it looks like, let it shine. After all, it's God-given. The darkness disappears with the power of the light, individual and when we come together to be the Body of Christ. Let this be our Christmas prayer: for the light of the world to shine forth. May we be the carriers of that light, where we are and where we will go, to all the ends of the earth, and the darkness, indeed, cannot overcome. Thanks be to God for his everlasting light! Amen and Amen.