

“Christmas Lights”

Christmas Eve 4:30 and 6:30 pm

December 24, 2017

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and God our Heavenly Father. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction] Christmas and light go together.

You should have seen it. It stood 12 feet high and it was covered in lights.

It was the tree we had in our Florida home.

It was the old fashion type where you had to put each branch into the center pole.

You would sort the branches

– Orange As; Yellow Bs, Blue Cs, Brown Ds (there were a lot of them), and Red Es

You would fluff each branch.

Then I would wrap lights around each branch.

Twist the light to the end of the branch then back to the center.

A set of 100 lights on three – sometimes just one – branch.

When all was said and done,

there stood our towering tree covered in over 5,000 lights.

It was a beacon of light. The air traffic controllers used it to land planes.

AND...

In the cold winters of Florida, you could warm yourself by the tree.

Seriously the tree put off heat from all of the lights.

You know, I just love Christmas lights – all kinds

– mini lights, LED lights – usually warm, but cool white has its place,
rope lights, twinkling lights, C7s and C9s.

To me, Christmas is light.

[Light and Life]

In Bethlehem over two thousand years ago Light entered the world.

Heavenly Light. True Light.

The Source of all light. God of God, Light of light.

A Light that existed before God said, **“Let there be light.”**

A Light that will shine long after sun, moon and stars get snuffed out.

That Light is Jesus the Christ Child.

In Bethlehem over two thousand years ago Light entered the world,
But it is also true that Life entered the world.
Conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb.
The Word of God made flesh.

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

(John 1:4)

Light and life.

Light and life. Their opposites are darkness and death.

Darkness and death are the result of man's rebellion against God.

Sinful man prefers darkness to light, death to life.

Sinful man hates the Light and wants to snuff it out.

Sinful man hates the Life and wants to kill it.

King Herod wanted to kill the Light.

[*No Place*]

Bethlehem, His hometown had no place for Him and His virgin mother.

They are turned away from the inn, that is the upper room.

Left to settle down with the friendly beasts.

His lodging was a cave.

His bed, an animal feeding trough.

He came to His own

– His own world, His own people and nation,

but His own people did not receive Him.

Welcome O noble Guest!

Had we known you were coming,

we would have prepared a nice room,

cleaned the sheets,

fluffed the pillows and sprayed the Lysol.

Next time please call ahead and make a reservation.

We were just too busy to take notice.

Too preoccupied with ourselves to believe that you would come to dwell with us.

You know how it is. We have too many other important things to do.

Yeah, God knows how it is.

He knows how thick the darkness is.

He knows how deep the death is.

And there's only one way out. Jesus. Light and Life Jesus!
I am the light of the world... (John 8:12)
I am the resurrection and life... (John 11:25)

Into our darkness and death God shines His Light, His Son.
He came for us.
To be on our side.
To become one with us and one of us.
He came to dwell among us, full of grace and truth.
He knew we couldn't save ourselves from the darkness and death.

So the eternal "Word became flesh." Yes, God became man.
And not simply a man but a BABY cradled in the virgin's lap.
Who would have ever thought of such a thing?

Every religion of the world has man becoming god.
The Greeks had gods who appeared as men every once in a while.
But no religion has God becoming a flesh and blood human being except Christianity.

Only Christianity proclaims that in Jesus God is man;
God is born.
God hungers and thirsts.
God cries, wets His diaper and burps.
He bleeds, suffers and dies.

Behold, the eternal "Word become flesh" is THE GIFT
that was laid in the manger
FOR YOU AND FOR YOUR SALVATION.

Jesus is the Light and the Life.
He is the Light no darkness can overcome.
Not the darkness of your sin. Not the darkness of your death.

He is stronger than the darkness of your souls.
Stronger than the grave that threatens to overcome you.
Jesus overcame them!
He conquered them!
He freed you from their chains.
Not with a show of strength
but with a show of great weakness.

Behold, He is a fragile infant dependent on His mother.

Behold, He is the broken man hanging on the cross forsaken by His Father.

Now, ***“to all who received Him, to all who believed on His name, He gave the power to become children of God.”***

Jesus was born of Mary so that you might be born of God.

Jesus is received by faith

when you trust that His birth is your birth,

that His life is your life,

that His death on the cross is your death,

that His resurrection is your resurrection and

that His ascension is your glorification.

To receive Jesus is to have Him make your heart His manger.

He takes your dead and darkened heart and fills it with His light and life.

He conforms your will to His will.

He joins His flesh to your flesh.

He gives you new birth by the Holy Spirit who He sends.

He calls you His brothers and sisters.

He calls His Father “Our Father.”

You are reborn to be like Him in His birth.

You are virgin born.

Conceived by the Holy Spirit through the Word.

Born of the holy church, our virgin mother, in Baptism.

[Conclusion]

Receive the Child anew today.

Open your hearts to this wonderful Baby born in Bethlehem to save you.

Receive His Word, His forgiveness, His Body and Blood.

He will fill your darkness with true light.

He will fill you with His life.

And that is brighter and warmer than my beacon of light Christmas tree.

Merry Christmas. Amen.

“Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21)
