

Date: November 27, 2022

Series: *A Chrismon Christmas!*

Title: *Jesus: The Light of the World*

Text: John 8:12-59

Preacher: Mark Adams

Our first service at Redland was Christmas Eve, 1990 and I remember being bowled over at how beautifully the church was decorated. As you entered this morning you saw what I'm talking about. One of the first things that caught my eye back in 1990 was a Christmas Tree in the foyer with all white and gold ornaments---lit up with hundreds of white lights. I was told this was the Chrismon Tree and I remember thinking, "*What's a Chrismon Tree?*"

You may be asking the same question, but before I get to an answer, I want you to know that tree has been there every Christmas ever since---decorated by Linda Rowe and her crew of elves as part of the massive job of decorating the foyers, and the Sanctuary for Christmas. If you are thankful for them and their labors say, AMEN!

But, back to my question---WHAT IS A CHRISMON TREE? Well, basically it is a Christmas tree that is decorated only with ornaments called Chrismons. These special ornaments are white and gold and many are fashioned in the form of centuries-old religious symbols. The tree is always lit by hundreds of white lights.

Chrismons first showed up in the Ascension Lutheran Church, in Danville, Virginia and were "invented" in 1957 by a woman named Frances Kipps Spencer. Mrs. Spencer was concerned about decorations for her church's Christmas tree---some of which she felt were inappropriate---and that led her to make the first Chrismons.

As I said, many of these special ornaments were based on ancient monograms---including Greek symbols---but all Chrismons live up to their name---in that they always honor Jesus Christ and His teachings---which means there are no Rudolph Chrismons or Frosty the Snow Man Chrismons or Star Trek Chrismons.

Mrs. Spencer said, "*Early Christians used symbols of the early church to transmit the faith and beliefs of the artist/teacher to the viewer. In this way the inspiration was shared and passed on.*" She chose the White and Gold colors to represent Christ's purity and God's majesty. The evergreen tree backdrop symbolizes the eternal life Christ offers His followers. The tree's white lights proclaim Jesus' role as the Light of the world. By the way, the Smithsonian Institute has housed several Chrismon trees over the years.

So basically, a Chrismon tree tells us about Jesus---and that is why I thought it would be a great theme for Advent this year. Linda has moved the tree in here---and as part of each sermon this Advent Redland members will hang the ornament on which the sermon is based---ornaments Linda designed and made for this sermon series.

As you leave each Sunday---thanks to the help of Carrie Carbonell and HER elves---we have little kits prepared in little baggies so you can go home and make your own Chrismon ornament---as a way of remembering what we learned about Jesus in worship that day.

I for one, applaud Mrs. Spencer's invention because a Chrismon tree is a powerful way to teach people about Jesus. And it's important we do---because---Jesus does and always has caused people to wonder about His identity and nature.

This began when He was just a child when Jesus was left behind in the temple in Jerusalem. Luke tells us that Mary and Joseph found the 12-year-old Jesus, "***...sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all those who heard Him were astounded at His understanding and His answers.***" (Luke 2) They wondered, "*Who is this Kid?!*" I'm also thinking of Jesus' first followers who watched Jesus stand up in their boat and calm the storm. They asked, "***What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey Him!***" (Matthew 8:27) And then do you remember when the temple police sent to arrest Him by the religious leaders came back empty handed? When asked why they said, "***No one ever taught like this Man.***" (John 7:46)

One unknown writer expresses all this WONDERING about Jesus with these words:

*“He Who is the Bread of Life began His ministry HUNGERING.  
He Who is the Water of life ended His ministry THIRSTY.*

*Christ hungered as a MAN, yet He fed the multitudes as GOD.  
He was weary, yet He is our rest.*

*He prayed, yet He hears our prayers.  
He was sold for 30 pieces of silver, yet He redeems sinners.*

*He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He was the Good Shepherd.  
He died and by dying destroyed death.”*

With all this wondering about Jesus---it’s important that we study His life---to answer our questions. And Mrs. Spencer’s Chrismon tree provides us with a great teaching tool to do exactly that. This morning we begin by looking at something Jesus said about Himself in John chapter 8:12: ***“I am—the LIGHT OF THE WORLD.”***

As I often tell you, the setting of a text is always important—so let’s start there. When Jesus uttered these words about Himself, the feast of the tabernacles was going on—the purpose of which was to celebrate the exodus---those 40 years when God guided the Hebrew people from bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land. The events in John 8 took place in the court of the women—that place in the temple beyond which a woman could not go. Now—in this courtyard there was a place set aside for the temple treasury. As you can see, all around the Court of the Women there was a colonnade---or porch---and in that porch, set against the wall, there were 13 treasure chests into which people dropped their offerings. These treasure chests were called “THE TRUMPETS” because they were shaped like trumpets: narrow at the top and swelling out towards the bottom.

Each chest was for a specific offering.

- The first two trumpet-shaped chests were there for every Jew to pay their half shekels that went towards the upkeep of the temple.
- Into the third and fourth were placed the offerings used to purchase the two pigeons which a woman had to offer for her purification after the birth of a child.
- Into the fifth trumpet chest were put contributions towards the cost of the wood which was needed to keep the altar fire burning.
- Into the sixth were dropped moneys used to defray the cost of incense used in temple services.
- The seventh was for upkeep of the golden vessels which were used in Temple services.
- Into the remaining six trumpets people dropped anything extra they wanted to give—as if anyone would have any extra money to give after all that!

With all these offerings, the Temple treasury area was a busy place—perhaps the busiest place in the entire temple. It was constantly flowing with worshipers. I mean, this is where the DEVOUT Jews went—so it was the PERFECT PLACE to collect an audience of devout people to teach! Well, on the opening night of this feast four GIANT candelabras were lit in the Temple---so bright that they lit the entire city. As you can see in these pics, each candelabra was said to be 75 feet tall with huge bowls at the top. Each bowl held 10 gallons of oil. The wicks were made from the old, no longer useable garments of the priests. These huge lights were meant to symbolize the pillar of fire by which God led the people through the wilderness—the Shekinah glory of God.

Throughout the week these lights burned brightly as the wisest and holiest of Israel’s men danced before the Lord and sang songs of joy while the people watched and waited. The celebrations surrounding these candelabras both reminded the Israelites of the glory of God dwelling among them during the exodus---and the promise of God to send a future LIGHT, the anointed One—the Messiah.

This all continued until it's culmination on the final day—when these huge lights would be extinguished as a reminder that God had not yet sent the Messiah.

Well, at this point, right after the candelabras were extinguished—in the PERFECT PLACE—at the PERFECT TIME---right after the candelabras were put out and darkness filled the courtyard—Jesus stood up, and in the silence said to that huge crowd of pious Jews, ***“I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”*** (John 8:12) I'm sure you will agree that there couldn't be a more spectacular way to say this—a more powerful time and place for Jesus to declare exactly Who He was---not “a” light but “THE” light—the long-awaited Messiah of God.

Well, the Pharisees knew what Jesus was saying so they immediately challenged Him on this. In fact, over the next 47 verses they interrupted Jesus TEN times in a very heated debate. We don't have time to read all 47 verses but if you haven't already done so, take your Bibles and turn to John 8 and follow along---as I give you a quick summary of the blow by blow—beginning with verse 13.

Let's imagine we are there---listening to this “conversation.” First the Pharisees say that Jesus' claim to be the Messiah is not valid because there are no WITNESSES to back Him up. Jesus responds by saying they are mistaken because He in fact has two witnesses: Himself, and His Father. They ask where His Father is, and Jesus told these religious leaders that they didn't know His Father—because He is from above and they are from below. Then—ignoring what Jesus just said—they ask Him to identify Himself and Jesus reminds them that He's been telling them all along Who He is and why He has come. They continue to feign ignorance, asking Him once again Who He thinks He is, so Jesus prophesied His own death and said they would understand Who He is after He is lifted up. Then He tells them that if they hold to His teaching, they would know the truth and the truth would set them free.

But they get defensive and say that as Abraham's children they don't need to be freed because they have never been enslaved. Jesus warns them that sin enslaves everybody—even the descendants of Abraham. Then He chastises them for their pride and says they are acting like Satan is their father—not Abraham. They piously respond by telling Jesus that God is their father—and that, by the way, He shouldn't bring up the subject of parentage because as everyone knows He was illegitimate. And—if that jab weren't bad enough, they follow up this verbal blow by calling Jesus the worse name they can think of---a Samaritan and a demon-possessed one to boot. Jesus counters by telling them He knew Abraham. That gets their attention so they say, ***“How could you know Abraham? You're not even 50.”*** And Jesus says, ***“Before Abraham was, I AM”***—and with those last two words—that phrase God used to identify Himself to Moses—Jesus was once again claiming to be God become flesh. They understand this claim, so they begin to throw more than WORDS. They bend down and look for STONES to throw at Him—but Jesus slips away.

Now—before we go any further, I want to make an important point. These Scribes and Pharisees act like the enemy—but they were really victims of the enemy. I say this to make sure you know that Jesus loved these men. Our Lord's love is not selective. He loves ALL people—even His enemies. Remember, as He hung on the cross, He prayed for the men who had put Him there. I'm sure His heart broke for these religious leaders who rejected His love. I imagine He spent many hours praying for them before the cross. And if you have an enemy—someone who treats you as hatefully as these guys treated Jesus—you need to follow our Lord's example and love them and pray for them!

But let's get back to the statement Jesus made that ignited this lengthy 47-verse-debate. Do you remember how it all started? Jesus stood up as these huge candelabras were extinguished as the traditional symbol of the hope for the coming Messiah and said, ***“Hey—it's ME. I am here! I am the Messiah, the LIGHT OF THE WORLD.”***

I'm going to ask --- The Miller Family (8:30) --- the Toomey family (11:00) --- to come and hang the Chrismon ornament for today's message. As you can see it is in the form of a star and along with the white lights it is great reminder that Jesus is THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. Thank you, Millers --- Toomeys.

In this statement Jesus claimed to be GOD become flesh—and it's no wonder the Pharisees and Scribes understood His claim because so much of the Bible uses this metaphor. I mean, light is used throughout the Scriptures in connection

with the Christ of God. For example, Isaiah 9:2 says, ***“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great LIGHT; those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a LIGHT has shined.”*** This is continued in the New Testament. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist prophesied the coming Christ when he said: ***“The Dayspring from on high has visited us. To give LIGHT to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.”*** (Luke 1:78-79)

When the aged Simeon took baby Jesus into his arms as He was dedicated at the temple he spoke of Him as, ***“A LIGHT to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”*** (Luke 2:32) John began his gospel by saying, ***“In Him was life and the life was the LIGHT of men. And the LIGHT shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”*** (John 1:4-5)

The question I want us to consider this morning is what does this metaphor tell us about our Lord? How does this statement of Jesus and the Chrismon ornament that represents it---how do they help us understand this particular Chrismon? Let me answer by pointing out four things that LIGHT DOES---things that Jesus ALSO does.

### **(1) Light gives LIFE.**

Think about it. Light sets our biological clocks. It triggers in our brains the sensations of color. It even supplies the energy for things to grow. Without the light of the sun, plants die—and so would we if we didn’t get vitamin D in some other way. Light is literally a life-giving thing. Light literally gives life—and so does our Lord—abundant, meaningful LIFE! In fact, as we get to know Him and join Him in His purpose---we begin to realize that life without Jesus—is more like death than life!

I remember reading that for people who live in the far northern parts of Alaska in winter the darkness of “night” can last a long time. The farther north you go the darker it gets. In fact, in Barrow, Alaska during the winter there are 67 days without sunlight. All this darkness is not good for us---especially babies and children---so they have set times every day when they play under ultraviolet lights. Without that these kids would not grow properly. They would *“fail to thrive”* as docs put it. Well, this ailment is a good illustration of the human condition—without Christ. Without the light of Jesus—people fail to thrive.

Without Him people wander through dark meaningless lives. Without God people search in vain for true joy. This is why so many books are published every year on the subject of how to be happy. People yearn for purpose and hope and joy—but look for it in all the wrong places. The fact is without God, our lives are lifeless. We fail to thrive. We miss out on abundance.

In his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard writes that although we have tended to think of the word “salvation” as the forgiveness of sins or the escape from punishment---it actually has a much more robust meaning for the writers of Scripture. Willard says,

***“The simple and wholly adequate word for SALVATION in the New Testament is ‘LIFE.’ Jesus said, ‘I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.’ —and ‘He that hath the Son hath life.’ Paul said, ‘Even when we were DEAD through our trespasses, God made us ALIVE together with Christ.’”***

So, this is the fallen human condition—failure to thrive. Without God that’s what our dark lives are like—but when the Light of the World comes in, He brings us life—meaningful life—joyful life. As John says in the beginning of His gospel, ***“In Him—in Jesus—was LIFE—and that life was the LIGHT of men!”***

### **(2) Light REVEALS.**

Light enables us to see things that were there all along — but were hidden by the darkness. Let me put it this way. Darkness CONCEALS and light REVEALS. In a similar way Jesus—God in the flesh—shines the light of TRUTH on our lives—and when He does, we see or understand things we wouldn’t see or understand otherwise.

In the Christian movie, *Do You Believe*, there is a gang member named Pretty Boy whose older brother pulls into a life of crime. After they rob a drug lord and are chased by the police Pretty Boy hides in a budget motel and while there, he reads the Bible that he finds in the nightstand.

God's Word shines the light of truth on his life and he sees how messed up he has become. He sees his need for Jesus' forgiveness and restoration.

Well, countless billions have had the same LIFE REVEALING experience—in their encounter with Jesus. I like how C. S. Lewis puts it. He said, *"I believe in Christ like I believe in the sun. Not only because I see it, but because by it all things are seen."*

We see this principle here in John 8 because in His "discussion" with these men our Lord shined the light of truth on things they were blind to. For example, that day Jesus illuminated the fact that the Jews' HERITAGE would not save them. They needed a RELATIONSHIP with God. The problem was these Jews had gone too far in their admiration of their father Abraham. They thought that Abraham was so good that he had earned favor with God not only for himself but also for his descendants. Well, Jesus was trying to open their eyes so they could see the flaws in that line of reasoning. And unfortunately, we find people who are blinded by that same faulty reasoning today. People say, *"Of course I am a Christian. I was born a Christian!"* or *"I'm from a Christian family."* But being a Christian has nothing to do with birth.

- The founder of *Playboy* --- Hugh Hefner was a P.K. --- a Pastor's Kid.
- Joseph Stalin studied for the priesthood.
- Mao Tse-tung, founder of Communist China was raised under missionary teaching.
- Brad Pitt, who describes himself as *"80% agnostic,"* was raised in a devout Southern Baptist home.

So, you see, birth—heritage—doesn't get us into Heaven. REBIRTH is required—the rebirth that results when as individuals we make the personal decision to confess our faith in Jesus as the Christ of God—the Savior of the world.

Another bit of truth Jesus highlighted that day was when He told those men they were ENSLAVED and that He had come to free them. These religious leaders were incensed by this comment—because they placed a very high view on freedom. Even to suggest to a Jew that he was a slave was an insult. You may remember that when the Romans cornered the Jewish zealots on Masada, they committed suicide rather than be taken into slavery. Well, Jesus was saying, *"You are living in denial! OPEN YOUR EYES—you are enslaved. Sin enslaves you. Everyone who sins is a slave."*

I'm reminded of something Socrates said, *"How can you call a man free when his pleasures rule over him?"* Without Jesus living in us—we are all slaves to our pleasures—our desires. Without the freedom that He makes possible, we are all enslaved by sin. What's worse is the fact that without Him we don't SEE this. Before long we don't even see sin as sin.

Did you know that there is an app that allows sighted people to *"lend their eyes"* to those with visual impairments.? It's called *"The Be My Eyes"* app and it was developed by a visually impaired man in Denmark. It connects blind people to sighted volunteers through video chat. The volunteer can answer questions because they can see the blind person's surroundings using that person's smart phone camera.

We see an example in this pic of a blind woman holding her iPhone up to a can. Her sighted friend can tell her what's in the can. She can then decide, *"I don't want cream of celery soup for dinner."* Then if she points the phone to the top--- he or she can tell her the expiration date.

As fallen human beings we are blinded by our sin—and Jesus in essence lends us His eyes—eyes that can see sin we can't. Jesus helps us to see the damage our sin can cause and then decide to turn from them.

### (3) **Light brings HOPE.**

In Acts 27:20 Paul refers to Jesus as *"The HOPE of Israel."* In Romans 15:12 Paul quotes Isaiah's Messianic prophecy: *"The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will HOPE."* Referring to Jesus, Hebrews 6:19 says, *"We have this HOPE as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."*

Bob Russell tells a story about a Christmas early in his ministry: *“About twenty years ago a house near the entrance of our subdivision kept their Christmas lights burning long into January, even though the Christmas season was long past. Even through the first of February those outside lights were burning every night. About the middle of February, I became a little bit critical and said, ‘You know, if I were too lazy to take my Christmas lights down, I think I’d at least turn them off at night.’ But about the middle of March, a sign outside of their house explained why they’d left the lights on. It said simply, ‘Welcome home, Jimmy.’ We learned that family had a son in Vietnam, and they had unashamedly left their Christmas lights on in hopeful anticipation of his return.”*

Lights are a symbol of hope. A person lost in a dark cave turns a corner and is relieved to see a ray of sunlight breaking through a crack. A person adrift on a life raft in the middle of the ocean at night is excited when he's able to say, *“I see the light of a ship on the horizon.”* In John 12:46 Jesus said, ***“I have come into the world as a light so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”***

The world in which we live is engulfed in spiritual darkness. They are lost and without hope.

But Jesus said, ***“I am the light of the world.”*** The attributes of light reflect the hopeful impact that the light of Jesus Christ still makes on our lives today.

#### **(4) Jesus—the LIGHT of the WORLD—banishes FEAR.**

It’s like the comforting feeling you have when you wake from a nightmare and turn on the light—and realize it was only a dream. Well, this fourth phrase about Jesus is good news because life on this fallen world of ours is full of things that make us afraid—real, live nightmare scenarios.

- For example, we all dread hearing the “C” word and I don’t mean COVID. It seems like the other “C” word is being heard by more and more people these days.
- Then there are financial fears—so many people are just one paycheck away from homelessness.
- Others listen to the daily stock market reports with fear and trembling because they know one bad dip could wipe out their retirement fund in an instant.
- Of course, this is not to mention the fear we experience when we hear about the latest mass shooting.
- Thanks to terrorism, we have learned to be afraid that the mall we frequent or even the church we attend will be the next soft target.

I’m saying this is a scary world—fear is a part of life. And as adults we all yearn for the comfort our parents would give us when we were little. When we were afraid those big strong arms would hold us and whisper, *“It’s okay—don’t be afraid.”*

You know, when I was in college, I learned what was then a “new” game—a game called ROOK.

How many ROOK players do we have with us today? It’s like SPADES. Well, my college friends and I LOVED to play ROOK. At the Baptist Student Union we’d even cut class to play. And one of the first things I learned about the game is that this card—the ROOK card—beats every other card in the deck. The 1 is a powerful card—the most powerful in any suit—and every other player could play the 1 but if you had the ROOK, you would still win that trick. In the game of ROOK a color is chosen as trump—and a trump color beats anything—except for the Rook card.

You could say the ROOK card trumps everything.

Well, Jesus is like that ROOK card—because He is BIG enough and POWERFUL enough that no matter what other card you have in your “life’s hand,” He beats it—HANDS DOWN. Let’s say you have financial problems—you don’t know how you’re going to make it. You worry about feeding yourself or your family. Well, if you have Jesus you don’t have to fear that because He promises to meet our needs. In Matthew 6 Jesus says, ***“I tell you do not worry about your life, what you eat or drink. Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.”***

What if you worry about war or terrorist attacks? Jesus said, Matthew 24:6 – ***“When reports come in of wars and rumored wars, keep your head and don’t panic.”*** And here’s WHY you don’t need to worry about those things. In Matthew 14:27 and 28:20 Jesus said, ***“Take courage! I am here! I will be with you always—even to the end of the world!”*** And in John 14 – ***“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in Me.”***

But here’s the bottom line. Jesus is all-powerful. He loves us and nothing—NOTHING can trump that. As Paul puts it in Romans 8 Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction?

Everyone say, “NO!”

Can anguish—fear? --- NO

Can persecution? --- NO

Can famine or being so poor we only have the clothes on our back? --- NO!

Can danger or sword? --- NO

Here’s the BIGGY. CAN sickness—surely DEATH itself can separate us from our all-powerful loving Lord?

OH NO it can’t!!!

As Paul says, ***“In ALL THINGS we are more than victorious through Him Who loved us,”*** ---because JESUS is our ‘ROOK card.’ He trumps everything that comes our way. Nothing has the power to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!” The comforting, encouraging fact is that, as Psalm 27:1 says, ***“The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid.”*** Like the BRIGHTEST light imaginable—Jesus drives away the darkness of fear. He trumps ANYTHING that would cause us to be afraid.

Remember all these things about Jesus being the LIGHT OF THE WORLD when you look at this particular Chrismon.

As I said earlier, the Jews had been waiting for the Messiah for hundreds of years. Those people had walked in darkness for a long time—but when the Light finally came—most of them missed it. This morning some of you may be walking in darkness like they were. You are living—but not really. Your life is more empty than full and you long for more. You want direction—you want help to deal with the fears of life—and death. If that describes you, then please hear me. Don’t miss this opportunity. You don’t need to walk in darkness any longer. You don’t need to be afraid anymore. You can begin a NEW life today—a life of purpose. All you need to do is confess your faith in Jesus—the Light of the World! We would love to talk to you about that. Some of you may feel God’ guiding you to join our church family....or you may have something you’d like us to pray with you about.

Come as God leads.