

# Light in the Darkness

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Then Christ Came #4 | Dec 24 | 8:00, 11:00 AM; 6:00 PM | Preached by Steve Howell

## Opening



**Watch Video – [“Christmas According to Kids – Southland Christian Church”](#)**

We’ve watched this video a few times over the years – lots of times as a family, and a few times here at church. I’m so thankful for Southland Christian Church in Lexington KY putting this together with some great storytelling and acting and humor. It never gets old!



When kids try to wrap their brains around a story that they don’t quite understand, it can be adorable. As they get a little older, though, you and I have an expectation that they will move on to a less-cute-but-more-accurate version of events. With maturity of age should come maturity of thought. In other words, we should have a better grasp of the story of Jesus...not just correct details, but a correct understanding of what it means.

On this Christmas Eve, we are concluding our Christmas sermon series entitled, “Then Christ Came.” In this series we have been looking at the way our gospel writers introduce us to Jesus. Instead of presenting Jesus’ arrival at the chronological start with the traditional nativity scene, the gospel writers give us our *first glimpse* of Jesus in *other* ways. They might *include* the birth narrative, but their *introduction* starts elsewhere. They tell us some information, and *then...Christ came*.

- We started with the **Gospel of Matthew**. Matthew’s introduction was wrapped up in a carefully constructed genealogy, helping us to have **confidence** in the **legitimacy** of Jesus as the Messiah!
- Then we met Jesus in the **Gospel of Mark**. Mark helped us to build **anticipation** as we awaited the **resolution** of God’s plan. We *anticipated* as the prophets prepared us for the arrival of John the Baptist; then we heard John the Baptist

prepared us for the *resolution* that came with Jesus.

- Last week we explored the lengthy introduction to the **Gospel of Luke**. We met a number of different people in the story, and we saw how they exhibited **belief** in God's plan. Then...Christ came (in the traditional Christmas birth story you know and love). But Luke also made it very clear that the response to Jesus' arrival was **worship**. The arrival of Jesus demands more than knowledge of an intellectual fact; it deserves adoration and praise!

Today, we arrive at our final gospel in the New Testament, the Gospel of John. But before we share his perspective, I want to ask *you* a question:

### Who do you say Jesus is?

I want that question to sink in. *Who do you say Jesus is?*

That question has been around since the days of Jesus himself. Yet your answer to that question is still important. It impacts your approach when He does arrive in your life. When you are confronted with Jesus in a conversation or a relationship, does he "stink?" ...or is he "da best baby in the world?"

Who do you say Jesus is? Here are some answers that are fairly common.

## Jesus is Unimportant

Sometimes when people are confronted with Jesus, they simply think he is unimportant.

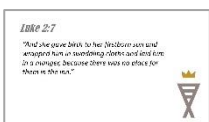
*I was reading an article the other day about the 'nones' in the United States (these are people who mark "none" when asked about their religious affiliation). The 'nones' are the fastest growing religious group in the US for a number of reasons.*

*You might think that they would reject any association with church. Yet many of them are now joining "spiritual communities" that meet weekly. They retain a lot of the basic structure of Christian services – music, teaching, fellowship – but they reject dogma. People of any faith – or no faith at all – can be part of the community. Their personal views on Jesus don't really matter...because Jesus doesn't matter to them or their purpose.*

As we read the traditional Christmas story, we find an example of someone who is confronted with Jesus and thinks he is unimportant. I'm thinking about you, innkeeper.

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was **no place for them** in the inn. (Luke 2:7, ESV)*

I get that the inn was busy, but you know that Joseph was trying everything in his power to find accommodations for his expectant wife.



- Maybe he offered extra money (“How much, really?”)
- Maybe he tried to pull the family connection card (“Dude, my family is from here!”)
- Maybe he tried sympathy (“Just look at her!”)
- (*I’d rather not think that he tried threats of violence*)
- But at some point, he just had to pull out the miraculous birth card (“Don’t you know who this is?!?!?”)

The innkeeper didn’t really care. He didn’t move anyone else out of a room, or interrupt any of his current guests. He just treated Jesus like any other paying customer. Offering the stable was a good move from a customer service standpoint, but it wasn’t because Jesus was special. It was just business as usual.



## Apathy

If you have it in your mind that Jesus isn’t going to be any more important than anyone else, you will likely be apathetic about his arrival.

He isn’t important. He isn’t relevant. He just doesn’t matter to you.

If we’re being honest, a lot of your neighbors and family members fall into this category. I’m realistic enough to know that many of you came to church today because of a family request or tradition, not because you wanted to worship. You might have it in your mind that Jesus isn’t that important...not in your day-to-day life. He doesn’t pay the bills; he doesn’t help with childcare. He just doesn’t matter that much.

And when someone shows up and wants to talk about Jesus (like this preacher guy), you might listen politely, but you’ve already decided to ignore the message. You just don’t care that much.

You would say that Jesus is *unimportant*.



## Jesus is a Threat

Others, when confronted with Jesus, think He is a threat. They aren’t apathetic; they are upset!

In the traditional Christmas story, the perfect example is that of King Herod.

*Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” (Matthew 2:13, ESV)*

And Herod did. He was a paranoid man, so he searched out all the baby boys in the area and eliminated them to make sure that none of them could grow up to take his place as king. Jesus, he thought, was a serious threat to his rule.

Others were threatened by Jesus, too. You can think about his later life and ministry and the opposition he faced from religious leaders. They feared that he would undermine their authority. He was a threat, and so they patiently plotted to put him to death on a cross.



## Anger

The historical person of Jesus has been gone for over two thousand years, yet some people are still angry when He shows up in conversation. They react strongly...even violently...when someone suggests that Jesus is still alive and that He still has a claim on our lives.

Lots of folks consider the idea of Jesus being in charge as a threat to their way of life. They worry that He will make them *give up* things that they love, or *demand actions* for Him that they don't want to do. They hate the idea of submitting to Someone who will make them change their life.

You've probably seen videos of people railing against street corner preachers. It's more than just annoyance; it is hate.

If you have it in your mind that Jesus is going to upset your life, an angry reaction is justifiable. You don't listen politely when He's introduced into your situation. You just protest or yell or cuss and tell the person who talks about Him to shut up...or else!

More people in society are apathetic rather than angry, but anger is still primed and ready to confront the threat of Jesus.

## Jesus is an Unknown

For still others, Jesus is unknown.



*I was at Sam's Club this week picking up supplies for our family trip when I ran into my favorite associate, Lu'ul. Lu'ul is always at the exit ready to check your receipt, and she's super nice. Deb and I ask about her family, she asks about ours and how the kids are doing.*

*I was about to ask her about her Christmas plans this week when I paused...and looked at the Muslim head covering she always wears. "You know, Steve," I thought, "Lu'ul probably doesn't have a lot of Christmas plans this year!"*

*So I fumbled and scraped together some weird well-wishes and went on my way.*

Lu'ul is part of another group that just doesn't know much about Jesus.

*Who would she say Jesus is?*

It's hard to have much of a reaction to something you don't know is happening. There was an entire village of Bethlehem that was unaware of what was happening in their town that night. They couldn't react because they didn't know what they were looking for.

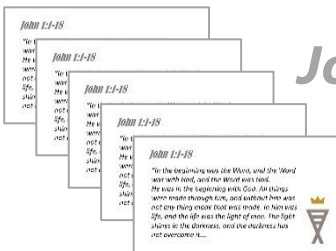


## How John Views Jesus

But now, here we are this Christmas Eve. And instead of those reactions, we have a chance to hear a different perspective from the Gospel of John.

John's introduction is written by Jesus' friend and follower. This is a man who knew Jesus well in real life, who saw and heard things that give him a bold perspective on who Jesus was. He shares a profound and important introduction to Jesus in his gospel.

Please follow along in your Bible as I read.



### John 1:1-18

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

*He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*

*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

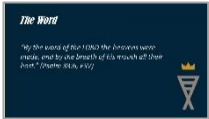
*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.' ") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace*

*and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.” (John 1:1–18, ESV)*

## Who is Jesus?

Before John gets into the details of the life and ministry of Jesus in the rest of his gospel – before Christ comes -- he sets up the most sweeping and spiritual perspective of Jesus imaginable!

This is a theologically rich passage, filled with stuff we could talk about for days. Jesus is presented as...



### **The Word**

Jesus is “the Word” – the embodiment of divine action in creation.

*“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.” (Psalm 33:6, ESV)*

Jesus is “the Word” – He is the full communication of God.

The descriptions here speak of Jesus as...

- Eternal/everlasting
- Creator
- God



### **The Light**

Jesus is “the Light” – the identification of divine presence and glory.

*“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (James 1:17, ESV)*

Jesus is “the Light” – He is the full picture of perfection.

The descriptions here speak of Jesus as...

- Good
- Pure
- Life-giving



### **Incarnation**

Jesus is God incarnate – a word that means “in flesh.” Hear what John says, once again:

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14, ESV)*



# How We View Jesus

Do you see who He is now? Do you see who babe in a manger really is? When we encounter him, John says, we can't do so considering him to be an ordinary child. There is no room for standard views of Him...no room for the kind of reaction that sees him as unimportant or a threat or an unknown.

He is the Word. He is the Light. He is God.



*In the animal world, some creatures have senses that go beyond ours. Dogs hear frequencies that we can't and smell things that we don't.*

*There are birds that see in ultraviolet light, meaning that just outside of our normal view, these birds have amazing and brilliant displays. We can only see these colors when we use the right tools to look at them.*



*In the same way, John gives us tools to see Jesus in his fullness.*

John paints a cosmic, spiritual view of Jesus that we should not ignore.

John points out that people, from the beginning, have missed out on who Jesus was. They failed to comprehend him; they rejected and ignored him.



*“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”*  
(John 1:9–11, ESV)

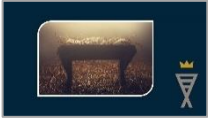
But John doesn't want us to make the same mistakes. His introduction to the gospel he wrote is designed to help us see past the physical and view the spiritual truth that undergirds it all, like a UV light pointing out Jesus' true nature.

But John also makes sure that we don't view Him from a distance.

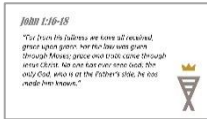
Jesus dwelt where?

“Among us.”

“We have seen his glory.”



John makes sure we recognize that Jesus has brought glory, grace, truth, and revelation to us – not just into the world, but to us.



*“For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”*  
(John 1:16–18, ESV)

This is his full identity. This is who Jesus is.



## ***Closing***

Now, here we are. John gives us the full picture. He lays all the cards on the table. He tells us what we need to know about Jesus.

How will you respond?

Will you ignore him, treating him only like an irrelevant religious figure or a holiday character?

Will you reject him, pushing him away in anger if He makes demands on your life?

Or will you bow in humble adoration to Him? Will you accept His gifts of salvation and adoption? Will you allow His grace and truth to transform your existence?

When Christ comes to your life what will you do?

## ***Prayer***

## ***Invitation***

I want you to think closely about this Jesus as we sing our song of invitation. If we have any elders or deacons here, I invite you to come up to the front at this time.

As we sing, please pay attention to the lyrics. They sum up everything you need to know about the Word and Light. They paint a picture that demands a response.

If you need someone to pray for you...to help you on this spiritual journey toward Jesus, please come forward and allow these men to pray with you. Share your requests with them, and take the first step of responding to Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Let’s stand together and sing....

## ***PRAYER REQUESTS:***



# Notes

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***Who do you say Jesus is?***

***Jesus is Unimportant (Luke 2:7)***

*Apathy*

***Jesus is a Threat (Matthew 2:13)***

*Anger*

***Jesus is an Unknown***

***How John Views Jesus (John 1:1-18)***

*The Word (Psalm 33:6)*

*The Light (James 1:17)*

*Incarnation (John 1:14)*

***How We View Jesus*** (John 1:9–11, 16–18)

# Sermon

## Discussion ?s

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*Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.*

### ***Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose***

- How much does Jesus factor into your family's Christmas traditions and plans? What are some ways that you could shift the focus more to Him next year?

### ***Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters***

- Who is John, the author of the gospel of John? Share any facts you know about him. Read John 13:23 and its description of John. How does this relationship with Jesus impact the way you read his gospel?
- Read John 1:1-3. What attributes of Jesus are described in this passage? Do you typically apply these characteristics to Jesus or to God the Father? Why?
- In what ways is Jesus “the Word?” (1:1)
- In what ways is Jesus “the light?” (1:9)
- Who is described in John 1:6-8, 15? Why is so much attention given to him all four gospels? How does a second witness add to Jesus' credibility?
- Read John 1:9-11. Why is it so difficult for the world to accept Jesus for who he really is? Have you ever struggled to receive and follow Jesus? Share your story.
- Read John 1:12-13. What are the benefits of receiving and following Jesus? Which do you tend to focus on more – salvation or adoption?
- Jesus became flesh. Think about him at different stages of human development. How does his humanity make it easier or harder to see His glory (1:14)? What does that tell you about your own ability to reflect God's glory?
- Which gospel's introduction to Jesus made the biggest impact on you through this study? Why?

# ***Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God***

- Thank God for sending His one and only Son! Praise him for revealing his glory, grace, and truth through Him. Ask God to help you worship Him fully and exclusively in your life!