

**Christmas Reception?
John 1:9-13**

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Light is one of the most common ideas associated with Christmas. Consider these lines from some Christmas carols.

Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting light – O Little Town of Bethlehem
Light and life to all he brings – Hark the Herald Angels Sing
Silent night, Holy night, Son of God, love’s pure light – Silent Night, Holy Night
Yonder shines the infant light – Angels, from the Realms of Glory

A repeated line in one of the songs from the cantata this morning says, “Hallelujah! Light has come, a Savior born to set us free, a promise for those who believe.”

As we continue to consider the Christmas story through the lens of John’s gospel, we see how John describes the coming of Jesus into the world as the coming of the Light. These verses tell us

Jesus the light has come into the world and those who receive him become his children.

I. The entrance of Jesus into the world shines an inescapable light on every person (v. 9).

A. The true light has come into the world.

1. John has already introduced Jesus as the light.
 - a. vv. 4-5 – in him (the Word) was life and the life was the light of men. the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.
 - b. vv. 7-8 – John the Baptist bore witness to the light.
2. Jesus is the true light that comes into the world.
 - a. True means genuine and ultimate. John is not so much thinking true vs. false as true in terms of ultimate. In chapter 6, Jesus says that Moses gave the people manna but he is the true bread. This doesn’t mean that the manna in the wilderness wasn’t real. It just means that Jesus is the ultimate bread from heaven.
 - b. The light has coming into the world. John emphasizes that Jesus, the true light, came into the world. Jesus who existed eternally with God before creation now comes into the world. John will elaborate on this coming into the world in vv. 14-18. His point is that the true light has invaded the world.

Light coming into the world of darkness is a messianic theme in the Old Testament. One of the passages we often associate with Christmas is Isaiah 9:1-7. Part of this text says, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...” The reason for this declaration? “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given and the government will be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Light has come into the world. That light is Jesus Christ, the living Word of God. But notice that the entrance of the light creates an inescapable invasion of light for every person.

B. The true light shines on every person.

1. In what sense does John intend us to understand how the true light gives light to every person?
 - a. The verb John uses means “to shine upon something, to illuminate.”
 - b. John 3:19-21 provides helpful commentary on John’s understanding of how the light shines on everyone.
 - c. John is telling us that with Jesus’s entrance into the world, the light has invaded and shines on everyone. Everyone is confronted with the reality that Jesus, the Word of God, has entered the world revealing God to us. That light shines on all of us. We cannot escape it.

Light invades and light exposes. I love the light over my desk that enables me to see clearly to study and write. But the light that comes in through my window also exposes how dusty my desk is. That is the nature of light. It invades and it exposes. Christmas means that the Light has invaded and it now exposes every person. It confronts each of us and exposes our sin. When exposed by the Light, we have two choices. We can reject the Light because it exposes our sin. Or we can welcome the Light and be saved from our sin.

The entrance of Jesus into the world shines an inescapable light on every person. Secondly, John tells us...

II. Becoming a child of God depends on your response to Jesus (vv. 10-13).

In vv. 10-13, John describes two responses to the coming of Jesus into the world. The first response is one of rejection. The second response is one of reception.

A. The rejection of Jesus.

1. The world did not know him.
 - a. John uses the term world 78 times in his gospel. It is a key concept. The world can refer to the created order. It can refer to the people of the world. But John views both the created order and the people in the world as fallen in sin and rebellion against its Maker.
 - b. The world that Jesus entered is the world he made. But it is now a world in rebellion against him through sin. So when Jesus came into the world that he created, it did not know him. It is not that the world didn’t recognize him intellectually. It is that the world failed to relate to him in humble obedience and trust.
2. His own people rejected him.
 - a. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. This is a reference to the rejection of Jesus by his own people, the Jews. Jesus came into the world as a Jew. It was always God’s plan to bring salvation to the world through the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12:3). Jesus came into the world as a descendant of Abraham, a son of David, according to God’s plan. But his own people did not receive him.

There is a commercial running right now that pictures a young girl making Christmas ornaments out of paper and glitter. After she makes each one, she puts it in an envelope and takes it to the mailbox down the road from her house for the postman to deliver. After several months, it is winter. She and her mother get in the car and drive up the long road from the house to the mailbox. Snow is on the ground. As they round a curve in the road, there is a tree, flocked with snow, and covered with hand-made ornaments. The little girl gets out of the car and from behind the tree steps her Daddy. His uniform indicates that he has been away on a long deployment. The little girl's eyes light up, she runs into the arms of her Daddy and hugs him tightly.

That commercial always gets to me. But what would you think if the story was different? What if instead of ornaments the little girl was sending little strips of paper with messages on them like, I hate you, You aren't my father, I hope I never see you again, Don't bother coming home? What if when the father stepped out from behind the tree, the little girl pushed him away, called him names, and ran from him? Or, even worse, what if she took out a gun and killed him when he stepped out from behind the tree?

We would love to think that the story of our relationship with the Light of the World is the first story. But in reality, it is the second. We are sinners in rebellion against our Maker. When he came to the world, we didn't embrace him. We rejected him. We mistreated him. We hated him. We killed him.

As John 3:16 tells us, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. Consider the world that God loved. Consider the world that Jesus came into. Though he created this world and its people, the world and its people rebelled against him, pushed him away, and ultimately killed him. D.A. Carson comments, *Therefore when John tells us that God loves the world (3:16), far from being an endorsement of the world, it is a testimony to the character of God. God's love is to be admired not because the world is so big but because the world is so bad.*¹

This is the default posture of human beings toward Jesus Christ. It is a posture of sin, rebellion, and rejection. The Bible says that all of us are sinners. We are born into this world with our backs toward God. We willingly violate God's law and reject his truth. Jesus did not come into nice world with the plan of making it nicer. He came into a rebellious world with the plan of rescuing rebels.

If this is where the Christmas story ended, it would be a grim story. But it doesn't end there. Though Jesus came into a world that rejected him, there are those who turn from their rejection of Jesus to embrace him by faith.

B. The reception of Jesus.

1. But to all who did receive him, who believe on his name.
 - a. Out of this world in rebellion, there are those who turn from their sin and receive Jesus rather than rejecting him.

¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 123). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

- b. Receiving Jesus is further explained by the phrase, “who believe on his name.” To believe on Jesus’s name is to accept his claims to be the Son of God and Savior of the world, to trust him, and to gladly confess him. There is much more here than just a bare knowledge of facts or mental assent to the truth about Jesus.

John Piper put it this way. *Receiving Jesus means that when Jesus offers himself to you, you welcome him into your life for what he is.*

- *If he comes to you as Savior, you welcome his salvation.*
- *If he comes to you as Leader, you welcome his leadership.*
- *If he comes to you as Provider, you welcome his provision.*
- *If he comes to you as Counselor, you welcome his counsel.*
- *If he comes to you as Protector, you welcome his protection.*
- *If he comes to you as Authority, you welcome his authority.*
- *If he comes to you as King, you welcome his rule.*

We have a saying that has entered our cultural vocabulary from the popularity of Texas Hold ‘Em. When a player is betting everything on their hand, they push all their chips to the center of the table and they say, “I’m all in.” They are placing everything on that one hand. We use this phrase to mean “I’m committing my all.”

Receiving Jesus and believing in his name is when you hand your life over to Jesus and say “I’m all in.” You place everything, your life, your eternity in the hands of Jesus because you believe he is the Son of God and the only Savior who can forgive your sins, rescue you from eternal judgment, and give you the gift of true life.

2. Those who receive/believe in Jesus are granted the right to become children of God.
 - a. Those who believe in Jesus are granted the privilege of being God’s children. This doesn’t refer to some inherent right we possess. Rather, it refers to the recognition of our status as children of God only for those who believe.
 - b. To be a child of God means that I am now part of God’s family. I am forgiven of my sin, receive true spiritual life, adopted into the people of God with all the benefits and blessings of being God’s child.
 - c. Becoming a child of God is nothing less than a spiritual birth.
 - 1) This birth is not a matter of physical descent (blood).
 - 2) This birth is not a matter of physical desire (will of the flesh).
 - 3) This birth is not a matter of human will or desire.
 - 4) This birth occurs because of the power and will of God. It is a miraculous, spiritual birth that can only happen by the power and will of God.

Perhaps the most important question a person can ask is “Am I a child of God?” John makes it crystal clear how to know if you are a child of God. The children of God are those who have received Jesus and believed on his name. They are those who are “all in” and rested the weight

of their lives and their eternities on Jesus Christ. They believe his words, trust in him, and welcome him into their lives.

Have you done that? Going to church doesn't make you a child of God. Being baptized doesn't make you a child of God. Listening to Christian radio doesn't make you a child of God. Identifying with a certain political party doesn't make you a child of God. Trying to be good doesn't make you a child of God. Having a basic respect and admiration for Jesus doesn't even make you a child of God.

Receive Jesus and believe in his name. Then you will be a child of God.

And may I remind you, Christian friend, when you received Jesus and believed in his name, you became a child of God! He has adopted you into his family. You are forgiven of your sin. You belong to the kingdom of God. You have been born into new life by the power of God. You have God as your Father and you are His child. You feast on the living bread. You drink the living water. You no longer walk in darkness but have the light of life. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down his life for you and you belong to him. Nothing can snatch you out of his hand. Rejoice that you are God's child.

Conclusion

This is the season for 24 hour Christmas music on some radio stations. I like Christmas music. I don't mind turning on the radio and hearing some when I'm driving around. A lot of those songs are not sacred. They are quite secular. But there are some so-called Christmas songs that annoy me. They are not the Santa Claus songs, snowman songs, sleigh ride songs, and holly jolly songs. The ones that really annoy me are the secular self-help Christmas songs. These are the ones that suggest peace on earth, an end to violence and war, universal love, and the brotherhood of man would all come about if we would just do more. One of those songs, written by John Lennon says, "So this is Christmas and what have you done?" The implication is that if we would just do more, we could realize the values of Christmas in our world.

I suggest to you that this is exactly the opposite of the Christmas message. The Christmas message is not that we can bring peace on earth by what we do. We've done plenty. We messed up the world God made by sin and rebellion. Christmas is about God entering into our world, coming down to rescue us and put things right by sending Jesus, the true Light, the Word of God to die, rise again, and save us from our sins.

Christmas is not "so this is Christmas and what have you done?" Christmas is "so this is Christmas, look what God has done!"

"Hallelujah! Light has come, a Savior born to set us free, a promise for those who believe."

Do you believe?