

“A Light in the Darkness”

Don't you just love the Hallmark Greeting Card Nativity Scenes? (Show pictures). The tropical vacation nativity scene. The north woods nativity scene. The Mary and Joseph ready for the Oscars nativity scene. The “have you ever seen a barn so clean?” nativity scene also known as the “yeah right, Mary and Joseph just spent a week walking 80 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem on foot and Mary gave birth to her first child an hour ago” nativity scene. Many times those Hallmark cards deceive us into thinking, “I could have done that. Aww...doesn't that look nice? I think I might book my next vacation for there.” I think we tend to do that with the Christmas history, we try to Hallmark Greeting Card sanitize it. I think we get caught up in it all – the music, the trees, the lights, the ornaments, the gifts, the cookies (all wonderful blessings from God by the way) that we tend to overlook the fact that the first Christmas was not all eggnog and Christmas ham. How many grumpy and angry people were traveling to their hometown to be counted so they could pay more taxes to the Romans? Is it possible that maybe this trip to Bethlehem caused Mary and Joseph some anxiety? We know that there was a little problem with Mary and Joseph's lodging, but are we certain that the labor went so smoothly that Mary and Joseph weren't a bit nervous? Are we certain that the animals remained quiet so that baby Jesus could sleep? Is it possible that the stable actually smelled like a barn? And let's not forget that shortly after Jesus birth his family had to run for their lives because their president, King Herod, wanted Jesus dead. The world that Jesus was born into was dark with sin too, similar to today. **“People (were) lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God-having a form of godliness but denying its power”** (2 Timothy 1-5). Some people embrace that darkness and have no desire to change proving John right, **“The light (Jesus) shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it”** (John 1:5).

Yet, just like in Jesus day, there are many people today who live their lives weighed down by guilt over the darkness of their sins, who are bothered by the darkness of the world, who have some anxiety and uncertainty about life, death, and eternity. They are ready for some good news and Jesus is that good news. **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”** (John 1:14). The truth is this – each of us has earned the right to be sentenced to spend forever in the darkness, suffering, and regret of Hell. The grace (or gift) is this – God doesn't want you to spend eternity in Hell. So God's Son, Jesus, literally dwelled among us, pitched his tent in our neighborhood. He did that because God had promised in his Word for thousands of years that he would send a Savior into this dark world. It's fitting that John calls Jesus the “Word” since Jesus fulfilled thousands of years of prophecies found in God's Word. Jesus saw the darkness of sin in this world. He was bothered by it too. He was effected by it too as it made his life difficult and uncomfortable. He was tempted by it too, but yet he never once added to the darkness with sins of his own but remained a perfect light on this earth. Today we celebrate the birth of that light, but the manger was only his first stop. One of his last stops on earth would be the cross to pay the full punishment of Hell for your darkness, for my darkness, for all the darkness. Jesus did this so that **“all who received him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”** (John 1:12). Through Christ, you belong, you are family, you are loved, you are forgiven, and you have an inheritance **“that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you”** (1 Peter 1:4).

What should we do with the gift that the light of Jesus holiness covers the darkness of our sin from God's sight forever? Martin Luther has a suggestion in his famous hymn "From Heaven Above to earth I Come" (verse 13), "**Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child, Prepare a bed, soft, undefiled within my heart, made clean and new, a quiet chamber kept for you.**" Jesus grew in Mary's womb for nine months until he had to come out. Jesus lives in each of us by faith. When we spend time in the Word of God, our faith in the Word made flesh (Jesus) grows until he comes out in our words, in our actions, in our decisions. Let the light of Jesus love, forgiveness, peace, and salvation fill your heart to the point where you can't help but deliver the light of Christ to this dark world. Let's make every place Bethlehem and let's live like every day is Christmas. Amen.