

TEXT: Matthew 5:14-16

THEME: A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

To all the people gathered here tonight: **“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (Luke 2:10).**

Everyone, or most everyone, here tonight has a candle. Today we mostly use candles for decoration or for ambience—setting the mood. But the real purpose of a candle is to give light. *[Usher turns off all nave and chancel lights.]* So we can take this candle and find our way in a dark night, right? No! This candle is missing something, and all of your candles right now are missing something—the light on the candle. A candle without a flame is no help at all in the darkness. *[Light the candle and hold it in front of your face.]* Note how the candle lights all around, but it also lights me.

We are very much like the candle. The candle doesn't have any light by itself. That is like us when we follow our own way or do our own thing. No matter how hard we try, we can't get away from the darkness that surrounds us in this world. Or do you think that this world is not so bad, that it is not so dark? I could probably talk for hours about how the abuse, the anger, conflict, greed, hatred, killing, rage, senseless violence, and tolerance of anything and everything the sinful heart desires cause this world to be so dark. But instead, let's cut right to the chase, to the bottom line. What is the result of all that sin in our world? Consider this: are you not dying? As you sit at your Christmas feast this year, remember that someone at that table will see everyone else at that table put into the ground. We are dying in a sin-darkened world. Without a flame, we are nothing but lost in the dark.

*[Usher turns on all nave and chancel lights.]* But Jesus was born to be A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS. In fact, Jesus said, **“I am the light of the world” (John 8:12).** Through his Word, Jesus lights a flame in our hearts so that we believe in Jesus as our Savior. He gives us the flame of his forgiveness and love. He makes us his own in baptism and comes to us and lights our life. With the light he gives, we can see ourselves like the candle shines on us. And when we see ourselves, we know how much we need Jesus. We can see our sin, our mistakes, all the times we have disobeyed God. We know that we need Jesus to forgive us and promise us heaven with him.

By ourselves, we are darkness. With the light that is Jesus, we can shine with his light and show others the light that is Jesus, the light that makes us alive—here on earth and for all eternity. Our job this Christmas is to shine with Jesus' light to help others see Jesus as their Light, their Savior.

In this way, we are fulfilling God's promise through the prophet Isaiah: **"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (9:2).** We are those who walked in darkness. By nature, all of us are lost in the darkness of sin and we cannot fix it; we cannot make our own light anymore than a candle can. And there are no exceptions. **"There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Romans 3:11-12)** **"There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-23).** That is deep spiritual darkness.

But by God's grace, we **"have seen a great light."** That light, of course, is our Savior Jesus Christ, whose birth we are celebrating tonight. We are now his own, marked with the cross of Jesus Christ and filled with the light that is the grace of God in Jesus Christ. We have a light that guides us through this life and brings us to eternal life. This is God's Christmas gift to us.

As gifted children of God, we now walk by faith, by the light of faith in a dark and dismal sinful world. Jesus said to his believers, including you and me: **"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).** The One who is the light of the world, now names us the light of the world. By ourselves we are but an unlit candle, but we become light by the grace of God. We give off light and do not just keep it for ourselves. We shine out with the Good News of God's salvation in Jesus.

This is the Christmas message of joy. **"You are the light of the world."** The candles and lights of Christmas remind us that the light of God's salvation has come as a baby in a manger. And the candles and lights of Christmas remind us that we are light to those who still sit in darkness. The light is only complete as we give it away and shine it on the gift of life that comes to us, sets us on fire, and makes us into lights to guide and lead the lost ones to the light of life—Jesus Christ. Thank God that he sent his Son, Jesus, to be the Light of the World. Ask God to make you personally a light in the darkness for others. Amen.