

THE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS - "Light of the World"

This is the 4th lesson in our series. I'm calling this lesson "**Light of the World**" and would like to call your attention to **John** chapter 1:

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. ⁶ There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. ⁹ There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name_ ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Light came into the world. And John makes it very clear that **the Light** was God in flesh_ that the Creator took up residence in human form. He made His home with man. The Greek word for "dwelt" in **John 1:14** is (*eskay-naw-ho*). It literally means God "**tabernacled**" among us. Hold onto that thought

Now, fast forward **30** years to **John 8:12** which says: **When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."** Then in **John 9:5** He says this: **"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."** Seems He had a point to make, but what was it?

Though Christmas is perhaps the most celebrated of all holidays by Christians, the high holy days in Jesus' time occurred during the **Feast of Tabernacles**, which falls in our month of October. It is a remembrance of God's deliverance from Egypt, His provision in the wilderness, and most importantly_ a recognition of God's presence among them. You may recall that He appeared as a pillar of fire at night or as a bright cloud during the day, illuminating the sky and guiding their way. He also manifested Himself as Light in the tabernacle as each family tabernacle around the camp. For this celebration, each family built their own "*little tabernacle*" symbolizing their temporary residences that surrounded the glory of God during that time.

A highlight of this feast, was that each evening, **towering candelabras** were lit in the Court of Women as a symbol of God's presence. The priests put on an all night long light show, dancing about with torches held high as the people sang and the Levites accompanied them with music from the pipes and stringed instruments. Descriptions of this part of the celebration by ancient historians portray it as a stunning vision, like a diamond in the midst of the city of Jerusalem. The temple grounds looked as if floodlights were coming up across its perimeter walls. Every night they were lit, the temple became a symbol of the pillar of fiery light that shone in the sky, leading them through the wilderness. Jewish sages said of those who had never seen these displays: "*They know nothing of true rejoicing.*" I remember saying something like that about the 4th of July fireworks at Disney. "*Man you've never seen a firework display until you've seen that.*" Some scholars believe that while the priests danced about with their lights held high, the crowds actually chanted this quote from the prophet Isaiah: **"I will be a light to the nations."**

It was during the **Feast of Tabernacles** that Jesus made His declaration. Many Messianic Jews_ those who accept that Jesus really is the Son of God_ believe He was born not on **December 25th**, but during the time of this very feast. They are convinced that the day He said, "**I am the Light of the World**" was, in fact, His birthday. They even do something I find particularly interesting_ they put up ornaments and "**Christmas lights**" to celebrate the holiday.

Now, I personally already think that our culture moves so quickly from Halloween to Christmas that thanksgiving is lost in the process_ and I don't intend to put out a nativity scene next October...but, considering the words of Jesus in their context, it would be perfectly legitimate to do so. It would certainly go farther than ghost and goblins and bats and witches to glorify Christ, the Savior. And there is no doubt in my mind that His declaration at the Feast of tabernacles was a claim to be God as well as the Messiah. That He was, as Isaiah had prophesied, "*Immanuel*", God with us.

In His declaration, Jesus claimed to be **the Light Who spoke the Universe into existence** in **Genesis 1**. Paul echoes in **Colossians** nothing was made without Him; all things were made by Him and for Him. Jesus also claimed to be **the Light who guided the children of God through the wilderness**. In **Exodus 13**. Jesus said He was even the manna they ate in **John 6** and Paul claims in **1st Corinthians 10** that He was the rock from which they drank.

And, in a sense, Jesus even claimed to be **the Light that John would later see walking among the candle stands** in **Revelation chapter 1**_. Listen carefully: ¹² I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest. ¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. ¹⁷ When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. Then He placed His right hand on me and said: "**Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.** "

No wonder some thought He lost possession of His faculties_ and others accused Him of blasphemy. Jesus was claiming to be **Immanuel_ God with us** of **Isaiah 7**, the **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Everlasting Father** of **Isaiah 9**_ and **The Light to the Nations** of **Isaiah 49**.

But He did more than just claim all this. He proved it. In fact, **John 7** tells us that during this same feast He told His accusers "**to stop judging on mere appearances**", but to make righteous discernment about His claims. He also said that they did need not just take His word on it for the testimony of His Father in the scriptures and His mighty miracles were evidence of the truth of His claims.

So what do we do now? Will we focus more on St. Nicholas than the greatest gift-Giver of all time? Will we stress out so much on decorating our homes that we neglect to adorn our lives with gratitude and praise? Will we spend so much on gifts and trinkets that will barely be remembered a year from now, with little to nothing left for Jesus?

I don't want to rob anyone of the joy and wonder of Christmas, but I don't want for our hearts to be so veiled by the traditions of men that we fail to see the Light of Christmas. And remember, He is more than light for a season, He is the Light of the World. It's Him we are to celebrate. After all, this Christ the Lord. This is Christ the Savior. And there is no other **King like this...**