

Scripture

John 3: 16 -21

New International Version

16"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. 19This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

From the time that I was a young child, I have loved the candlelight service on Christmas Eve. My very favorite part is when all of the lights are turned out and the minister lights the Christ candle at the front of the church. The first time I saw this, I had no idea what to expect. All I knew was that it was very dark until that first candle was lit. Then, the pastor walked down the aisle lighting the candles of the first person in each pew. In turn, the first person passed the light to the next and they passed the light to the next. Eventually the candles were lit throughout the church and what had been total darkness was now bright as day. It is a beautiful sight to behold as the darkness disappears and we enter into the light.

The symbolism is beautiful. God sent the light into the world in the form of Jesus Christ, his only son. Jesus, God incarnate, came because God loves us unconditionally. While we were still of a sinful nature, God chose to give us eternal life through Christ. It is right there in John 3 verse 16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

God called us to come out of the darkness and enter into a new world that was filled with the light of God's love. Christians generally understand and accept this concept with our minds. The difficulty comes when we have to translate what the mind knows into our everyday living. It is easy to proclaim Christ as Lord and Savior, but do we live as though we believe it?

If we truly love God, we are called to be like Nicodemus and be born again. That means that we are not Sunday Christians. We are called to a new way of living. It is out of the love that we have for God that we should desire from the depths of our very being to give up our selfish ways and die to self. We are called to live into the life of Christ and follow his teachings.

So, this Christmas when you stand in church on Christmas Eve, I challenge you to once again expect the unexpected. For who would have ever believed that God would love us so much that he would give us his son, Jesus Christ, the light of the world. As you stand in darkness, consciously turn your sin over to God and ask that as the light fills the room, you too will stand in the light. Ask that all that you do may be done in the light to the glory of God.

Please join me in prayer.

Holy and loving God, creator of all things, we thank you for our many blessings and praise your Holy name. As we await the coming of the Christ child, we ask that you continue to call us out of the darkness of self and into a new way of living. Help us to always follow the Light that is Jesus the Christ. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.