
John 1:6-8,19-28. ⁶ There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.¹⁹ Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" ²⁴ Now some Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The True Light, that Gives Light to Everyone is Coming.

- 1. Reflect that Light*
- 2. Reflect on the Light*

In about eight days, on the darkest day of the year, a light will shine rather brightly in the night sky. The Great Conjunction of 2020 will brighten the darkest day of the year as the two giant planets of our solar system, Jupiter and Saturn will draw closer together in the early night sky than they have been in centuries. And so this year these two planets will be close enough together that the two will appear to be one bright shining star. Of course, Jupiter and Saturn, aren't stars, they are planets that really have light of their own, but they will be in the right position to reflect the light of the sun in a very noticeable way. At least for an hour or two, those two planets will bear witness to the brilliant light of the sun as they shine for many to see.

As John the Baptist entered the scene to prepare the way for Jesus, he came as what must have looked like a bright light in a dark place. There had not been any prophets for roughly 400 years. There was a thick political tension that hung over the people as the Romans pressed their thumb down over the Jewish people. The religious leaders of the day had also guided the people down a dark path of misunderstanding that steered them away from God's promises. These leaders instead used man-made laws to exalt the self-righteous elite and push much of the rest of the people into the shadows as they enjoyed the spotlight. Into a world darkened by sin, into a dark time of spiritual confusion - into this darkness John came. But to be clear, John was not the light, John came only as a witness to the light. *⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.* John's goal was to prepare the way for the coming Christ.

He would point others to Jesus as the true Light of the World, the Son of God, who would come and bring brilliant light and life. The Messiah would arise and make himself known through his public ministry as the Son of God who had come with blessed healing. Jesus would bring peace and joy and the gift of eternal life that was for the whole world and for all time. John simply came to reflect that light of Jesus, the true light, the Son of God.

Even when John was pushed and hard-pressed by those who were critical of him, John remained focused on the true Light. And as he focused himself and others on Christ as Lord, he did not fail to confess in the Messiah who saves. ***When the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No."²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"***

Notice how John's answers all revolved around this central truth about Christ Jesus. John was not the Christ. He was simply preparing the way and pointing others to Jesus. Even when the leaders criticized John for his practice of baptism, he used this as an opportunity to point them to the one who was greater than he, and who was coming onto the scene. John pointed them to the True and Heavenly Light, the Lord, the Christ! John knew that he himself was a sinner, born into a world darkened by sin, and so were they. They all needed the Light of Christ, and now Christ was among them. ***Among you stands one you do not know!*** He boldly proclaimed! And so John came as foretold, to prepare the way for Jesus' public ministry. And thus, with the help of God, even in a dark time, in a difficult spot, John pointed others to the Light of Christ, who had come to save us from sin and darkness and despair.

I suppose John could have easily made it about himself. That's something that sinful human beings are prone to do, especially when they are hard-pressed. The leaders were coming after John and giving him a lot of guff. And not only were they asking him who he was, but they were coming and pressing him with questions and this public interrogation of sorts. They question him and pried as they implied, "Who do you think you are?!" The leaders verbally poked him in the chest as they cried, "Give us an answer!" But John did not complain about the pressure or gripe about the uncomfortable position he was in. He did not rant and rave against those that stood opposed to him, nor did he get frustrated or angry with God that this task would be so hard. Instead, he simply spoke the truth. Even in his discomfort, he kept his focus on the one who would bring true and lasting comfort, as the one who would bring life and light for the whole world.

In a world darkened and dying under the heavy shadow of sin, John kept his focus on Christ and did what he could to reflect that light of Christ to others. May God also use

us to be witnesses to the light in a similar way! Now, I know, that John was specifically called to be a public figure, the forerunner of the very Messiah, but the Bible does tell us that we too have been called to proclaim the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. Consider how can you and I reflect the light of Christ in your life.

Well, we are living in some strange and rather dark times, aren't we? In a world troubled by sin and death, remember that we have the light and life that Jesus brings. As we near Christmas we see how Jesus came to be the very Savior that we needed. The Son of God came as one of us, and the light of salvation has dawned. The night sky would be filled with a host of angels proclaiming this message of good news of great joy that is for all people. A Savior has been born for us. He came as a child to bear our sins. He came as one of us to live and die in our place. He comes as our Savior and our King to defeat sin and even the darkness of death, as he comes to bring us everlasting life. The Light of the World comes with peace and joy! Glory to God in the highest!

This is our joy. This is the light that we have been given! But when the darkness of the day surrounds and presses in on us, we have this sinful human tendency to make things about us. When the problems of the day put a heavy shadow of uncertainty over our plans and our usual festive celebrations, the focus quickly shifts away from the light of the world and onto the problems that we are facing. Instead of shining forth and proclaiming the message of light and life that we have been given with Christ, we grumble and complain. We gripe about our situation and we lambast those that seem to be making things difficult for us - whether it is neighbors, or family members, or government officials. And instead of pointing others to the light, we are turned inward, absorbed with our own plans, focused on our personal frustrations. We may even be active and vocal in airing out our grievances for anyone to hear and see. Or it may be that we are able to keep ourselves from lashing out, but there is instead this gravitational pull that would drag us into some black hole of hopelessness and despair as we focus on that which is wrong or different this season.

Dear friends, remember what wonderful light has come, and it is not only for us, but Jesus comes as the light of the whole world. He is the light that no darkness can overcome. He brings light and life that we have been given to enjoy and to share! Do not lose sight of the reason for the season! It is not so much about us; it is about the God who came to save us! Reflect the good news of Jesus! Shine with the light that he has brought to our darkness! Be confident in the joy and peace that Christ gives! And make it clear to those around you that nothing in this world can change the fact, that God's own Son, came to set us free from sin, and death, and hell. He came in love to give us eternal life. He came in love to fill our lives with heavenly joy no matter our earthly situation. He came as a gracious gift of salvation. He is the light of the world. During this strange time of darkness and uncertainty, where the problems of sin and death hang over our world, what a blessing it is that we are able to bear witness to the light that brings light and peace and eternal joy to those lost in sin. Let's bear witness to that light

in what we say and what we do so that others may know the light of Jesus Christ and hear his message of salvation. Reflect that light!

But how can one truly reflect that light unless one first *reflects on* that light that we have been given? It is interesting to note that John mentions that all this happened at Bethany. Do you remember some of the other things that happened in that little town of Bethany? Search through those bible lessons logged away in your mind and you probably remember the name Bethany, being mentioned as the place where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus made their home. Think of that scene as Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to him speak. She sat at his feet taking in “the one needful” while Martha busied herself with the preparations. And it was Mary that the Lord held up as a shining example of faith, for she took time to listen to his Word! During this time when we may usually be busy with preparations, take some time to sit at the feet of Jesus and read through his Word, and ponder the great things that he has done for you! Consider another time Jesus approached the town of Bethany, this time darkness and death hung over the once happy home that Jesus had frequented. Lazarus had died and this time Martha stood as a testimony to the light of Christ. Grieved by the loss of her brother she came to Jesus, and Jesus approached her with compassion and words that shattered the darkness of death with brilliant light. Jesus said to Martha, ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”*** And Martha despite her pain and sadness gave this beautiful witness to her faith in Christ. ***“Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”*** And Bethany was also the scene where Mary took perfume and anointed Jesus in anticipation of his death on the cross, his burial, and resurrection. The light of Jesus would shine and believers from this small town would again bear beautiful witness to the light of the World!

There is a light shining in the darkness that is even more brilliant than a once in a lifetime convergence of planets. The Son of God has come as the light to bring life to all the world. Even before we go out and reflect that light of Christ, let us reflect on the good news of Jesus, who comes as the light that we need. The true light that gives light to every man has come into the world. He graciously comes to us through his Word and Sacraments, and soon he will come again. In these strange times filled with such darkness, let us reflect on what Christ has done for us. Let us sit at his feet and ponder all these things that God has done in sending his Son. It might be a little quieter, a little different this year, but that cannot change the fact that the light of salvation has dawned for us and for the entire world! Dear friends, the true light that gives to every man was coming into the world, he has come, he will come again. Praise his name for the brilliance of his light that overcomes the darkness! Give thanks for the joy and peace and life that he gives. And with hearts made full reflect the light of Christ for others to see and hear! Amen.