

“PREPARE THE WAY – 1”

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word – God. And absolutely nothing else. Only darkness. Thick darkness. Darkness so unbelievably dark that nothing else could possibly exist. And then God spoke. The Word came into his own. God spoke and shouted light into being. The Word illuminated. And in that moment a universe exploded into life. From nothing came a bang that shot stars and planets, suns and moons, galaxies and nebulae out from the dark centre and life began. Everything came into being in that millisecond of energy and imagination.

God speaks and shines his light and things happen. The light that allows life shone out through creation as rocks and rivers, trees and flowers, microbes and mammoths, men and women populated the new world. God’s light shone brightly over his creation. And it was very good.

Then, somehow, evil turned up. Things began to go wrong and the whole amazing masterpiece started to grow dark again as evil pulled the shades over God’s light. In the shadows, evil did its dirty work, polluting creation and poisoning the minds of humanity, leading them down dark alleyways of fear and frustration, pointing them towards decisions with eternal consequences, hiding from them the radiant, life affirming light of God’s utter goodness.

To be sure, there were still glimpses of that light to be had. The rays of God’s goodness still flashed into the world. He still spoke to men and women. He still did his best to let them know the light was still there and to tell them to pull back the shades of evil and look for him. The light flashed from Sinai and filled the Tabernacle and Temple. It was reflected in the face of Moses and shone through the words of his people’s prophets and poets. God was still, there and still wanted to enlighten his creatures.

And then, when the time was just right, when God knew that it would have maximum impact, the Word was uttered once again. The Word – Jesus – came into a world shaded by evil and obscured by sin. As John puts it in the words we just heard, *“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”* The light was back, bringing with it the life that God wanted everyone to enjoy, life in all its fullness, abundant life that starts now and will go on for all eternity.

Jesus came to shine light into our darkness, to bring help and healing and hope to anyone prepared to look out of the shadows and into the glorious light. This is light, as Jan’s reflection puts it, *“Blazing through the fog of confusion, Illuminating pathways of disillusionment and doubt, Igniting purpose, overturning chaos.”* It banishes the fear that so many feel in the darkness, when things aren’t clear. It illuminates the

way, clarifying the path to God and towards his good purposes for us. It gives meaning to life and opens up hitherto unknown eternal possibilities.

John the Baptist, the last great Old Testament prophet, came along *“as a witness to the light”*, but he wasn't the light. Like Moses, he reflected the light, but could only point towards it. He continued the task of the prophets as they had tried to prepare people for the coming of the light – but, unlike his predecessors, he could physically point to that light as Jesus strode into view across the Galilean hillside. Jesus, the Word, the Son of God, the Saviour of the World, the person who declared, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* was here.

This is the light that cannot be extinguished, even by death – the light that shines on for ever to bring God's world back to the way he wanted it and intended it to be. This is the light that brings hope in our dark times, the light that signals a future secure in God's love. Despite the darkness of evil, despite the shadows of confusion, despite the attempts to conceal the light, it's still very much there, blazing out for those who want to see it and be guided by it. Why flounder in the shadows when you can enjoy the light? Why stumble around in the gloom when you can tread confidently in the light? Why lose out on all the great things that you can enjoy in the light because you're so used to the darkness? As Roger Waters says at the end of the documentary about the making of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*, which was aired again last weekend, *“Walk down the path into the light, not back into the darkness”*. This Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus, walk down the path into the light and receive the gift of hope that God holds out to you.

PREPARE THE WAY – 1
"THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD"
John 1:1-14; 8:12-20

Jesus is at the Feast of the Tabernacles, similar in many ways to our Harvest Festival, at which great lamps are lit in the Temple courtyard. On the last day of the Feast, the lamps are extinguished and Jesus uses the occasion to make a dramatic statement about himself and his mission. For the Jews who would have been listening to him, "*the Light of Life*" was God himself, so Jesus' words would have had immediate impact.

As so often, Jesus' meaning goes beyond the merely physical and material: he is talking about the true light and its effect on the lives of those who accept it.

1. Jesus is the light which brings life

Physically, light is necessary for life – the reason why God created it first. But Jesus goes far beyond that and his light allows us to live eternally and spiritually. (Look at *John 1:4; 2 Corinthians 4:4*). From an eternal point of view, not knowing Jesus is as bad as not having light for physical health.

2. Jesus is the light which brings leading

Jesus talks about "*following*" the light. You need to have the light in front of you if you are to find your way in the dark. If we are to make our way safely through this life, we need to fix our eyes on Jesus (*Hebrews 12:2*) and to use the light of his Word (*Psalms 119:105*).

3. Jesus is the light which enables us to learn

Light is often associated with learning (e.g. *enlightenment*). Jesus, as the light of the world, brings us knowledge that will help. Look at *2 Corinthians 4:6*. We need to recognise that the Devil is trying to blind men and women to the truth of the gospel.

Questions for discussion

- 1) In what ways does Jesus make himself known as the light which leads? How can we know his guidance in our everyday lives?
- 2) Many religions talk about enlightenment as a process. Is there a sense in which we become more "enlightened" as we grow in our faith? Does that make us better Christians?
- 3) Some people believe that the Light of Jesus shines in other faiths, but they call it by different names. Do you believe that there is something of Jesus in all religions? Why/why not?
- 4) In what ways can we "*keep our eyes fixed on Jesus*"?
- 5) Can you think of any other parallels between light and Jesus?