

God sent Jesus to bring light into our dark world.

We call Jesus the 'Light of the World', but in order to know why the world needed his light, we have to go back to the beginning.

In the beginning of the world, everything was right and full of light. It was a '*peaceable kingdom*'; there was no sorrow, no pain, no suffering; no death. It was, quite literally, 'Paradise.'

Then darkness came in, uninvited. Evil slithered in and whispered, to convinced Eve and Adam to doubt God. With one bite of the forbidden fruit, sin invaded God's perfect creation and spiritual darkness settled over the entire earth.

The power of evil fractured the intimate relationship God wanted to have with us, and our life in the Garden with God was lost. But God was not willing to let us go so easily.

In His love, God put in motion a plan that would allow us to *choose* whether or not we wanted to be part of God's life.

To do this, God created a nation of people through a man named Abraham. And through His people, God promised to make a way for all the earth to be redeemed from the grip of evil and to be restored to Him.

God's plan has been unfolding for many thousands of years. Abraham's people became the nation of 'Israel'. From Israel was born the 'Messiah', the 'Savior', whose birth we celebrate tonight. This baby grew to be a man who made it possible for each of us to live forever, with God, as He had originally intended.

God's plan was told through the Prophets, many of whom we heard read tonight. The little child born to Mary over 2000 years ago, brought the light of God into the world to shatter the power of evil and break the grip which sin holds over us.

The baby was given the name the angel had told to his mother. She called him, '*Jesus*', which means, '*The Lord is Salvation.*'

When the time came for Jesus to spread God's Word, he said: '***I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.***' (John 8:12)

Because Jesus came to earth, we can now find our way to God. Without the light of Jesus to guide us in the right path, we just wander, searching, to find purpose in our lives.

When Jesus said, '***I am the light of the world,***' he meant that he came to us, not only *bearing* the light of God's Truth, but that he himself *was* God's Light. (John 8:12)

Jesus told us that he came so that we wouldn't have to walk in '***darkness.***' If you have ever been in a place so dark that you couldn't see your hand in front of your face, you know that it can be very disorienting. Spiritual darkness is like that.

Without Jesus' light we can imagine all sorts of things about God and wander down paths that seem so right but lead to a dead end.

Many people dismiss Jesus as a myth and a religious '*fairy tale.*' Yet, Jesus is the only religious leader who doesn't have a '*system*' for people to follow to become holy. Jesus has no

'to do' list for us that will make us right with God. Jesus is the only one who is able to say, **'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.'**

Jesus promises that if we believe in him and trust in his salvation, his **'light'** will lead us to **'life'**.

In his gospel, John tells us that **life** with God is **full of grace** (*John 1: 16*). It is not full of condemnation, with God blaming us or angry at us. No, life with God is full of mercy and forgiveness. God is so glad to love us.

Not content to merely **'love us,'** God even wants to **adopt us** as His own children. God wants that kind of a relationship with us! A deep, every day, sharing-everything kind of caring for us. Imagine! John tells us, **Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.'** (*John 1: 12*)

For some people this all sounds too simple. Don't we need to do super-spiritual things like praying five times a day? What about fasting and doing good deeds? Don't all of these things make us right with God? Jesus tells us **'No.'** Jesus was born on Christmas because **only he**, as both human and divine, could make us right with God.

Before Jesus died for our sin we were separated from God. We didn't know that there was even a possibility that we could be a part of God's Kingdom, but Jesus died so that our sins would be erased.

The life Jesus offers us is life lived **like** God. Do you know a family that is just fun to be around? They enjoy each other's company. They can be their true selves with each other because they trust each other and have each other's best interests at heart. Their house is a place of comfort and encouragement and a refuge from the world.

God wants His family to live like this. He wants us to care for each other and enjoy life together. When people truly belong to God, they can't help but reflect God's family values. They love because they know God loves them. They want what is best for the other person, so they don't bicker and fight. There is no jealousy because each person knows that they are valued by God for who they are. There is together-ness because everybody wants what God wants. Life in God is living in the glow of His glory this side of Heaven.

The life that Jesus offers us is **eternal**. Jesus said, **'I am the resurrection and the life.'** (*John 11:25*) When we are **'saved'** by Jesus, we belong to God, and are safe with Him now and into eternity.

God promises that He will one day recreate the earth and everything in it. It will be **'Eden'** again. In His Kingdom there will be no more sorrow or suffering or death. Everyone who trusts in Jesus will live there together.

Before Christmas, we didn't really know who God was and how much God cared about us. Because of Christmas we now are able to share the life of the One who came down to bring Light into our darkness.

And that is the incredibly wonderful blessing of Christmas. Amen.