



SIMPLE CHRISTMAS
REJECT OR RECEIVE TRUE LIGHT?

John 1:9-13

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The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Introduction

Choices, choices, choices! If there's one thing we have in abundance in America, it's choices. And there's no time like Christmas to remind us of the fact. Deck the malls with boundless choices – fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!

Perhaps it would be fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la, if it wasn't so frustrating at times. Consider something as simple as wanting to surprise the family with a new TV. So you head to Best Buy, assuming they'll have a few to choose from. But when you get there, you realize you've just entered a basketball stadium full of televisions! Several square miles of televisions, in fact, and you only need one of them.

You've got, then, a few choices. First, you've got to decide what kind of television: an LCD or an LED or a Plasma or a front-projection or a rear-projection. Then, you need to choose a size: 23" or 32" or 44" or 48" or 50" or 55" or 60" or something obscene beyond that. But then there are brands to choose from: AOC, Epson, Hitachi, Insignia, JVC, LG, Mitsubishi, Optoma, Panasonic, Philips, Polaroid, Samsung, Sanyo, Sharp, Sony, Toshiba, ViewSonic, Vizio or Westinghouse.

Once you've finished making these choices, you're ready to talk features. And here's, of course, where the fun begins! Do you want 3D, 120Hz, 240Hz, 480Hz, or 600Hz, internet connectivity, Wi-Fi connectivity, certain aspect-ratio adjustments, film mode, DLNA, CableCard slots, picture-in-picture (PIP), an illuminated remote, anti-glare screens or anti-burn-in features, keystone correction, lens-shift mechanisms, or manual or dynamic iris?

Of course, by the end of this you're ready to bag the whole thing and stick with your old fashion tube television; you know, the one that's still powered by a hamster wheel.

Simple Christmas—that's been our theme these past several Sundays of Advent. But today our theme comes into sharpest focus around a very simple choice: Reject or receive the true light? Which will it be for you this Christmas?

Amidst all the other decisions to be made this Christmas, only one ultimately counts. Understanding this is the key to Simple Christmas. Each and every one of us must come to terms with a simple choice: Will you reject, or will you receive the true light?

The True Light Has Been Revealed (1:9)

The true light has been revealed, John tells us. “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” (1:9).

John has already prepared us for this when he said: “The light shines in the darkness” (1:5). Notice, this means that the light shines in the darkness, but not from a distance.

Often I’ll stand at a distance, when I shine light into a dark or uninviting place, like a crawlspace or a cobweb-infested attic. I’m quite happy to send the light in. But I’d rather not go myself; I’m always a little nervous about what I might see crawling around in that darkness, or what I might touch or step on. Cockroaches, mice, rats!

This light that shines in darkness, however, doesn’t do so from a safe distance. God doesn’t simply stand afar off in the safe confines of heaven, and with his flashlight send rays of light into the world, but himself stays out of the dark.

Instead, God *is* the light that shines in darkness; he has himself entered into the very darkness of the world. And he’s done so fully and completely; bodily, in fact, in the Incarnation.

God himself, in the person of his Son, has descended into the crawlspace of the world, and there he’s seen cockroaches in business suits, mice wearing make-up, and rats running the world, creepy-crawly things like you and like me. Morally and spiritually speaking, rodents and pests for whom he died!

This is what we must hear, when we’re told: “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world” (1:9). *Not an abstraction but the Incarnation*. Therefore, not just light, but love’s pure light, which radiantly beams from the Father’s holy face.

This is what we see at Christmas, this is what we see with the dawn of redeeming grace. This is what we see in the baby lying in a manger; this is what we see in the Son of God dying on a cross—*love’s pure light has stepped into the darkness of the world, into the darkness of that silent night . . .*

Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth

You Can Reject the True Light (1:10-11)

Oh, but you can reject true light! You can ignore it. You can avoid it. You can shut your eyes to it. You can hide from it.

People have been rejecting this light for two thousand years. And not just a few people—tens of millions! Perhaps some of you sitting here this morning have rejected this light; perhaps you're rejecting it even now.

There's a tragic irony, you know, in rejecting the true light. John underscores this irony in the way he describes things in verses 10-11. Here's the way he puts it: "He was in the world, and [though] the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him" (1:10).

We sometimes use the expression, "Don't slap the hand that feeds you." How about rejecting the very Person who made the entire world?

There's an even greater and sadder irony here: that the true light was also rejected by *his very own people*. Not strangers, but his own family. This is what John, in verse 11, tells us did in fact happen: "He came to his own, and his own people [i.e., the Jews] did not receive him."

Sadly enough, this same situation persists even today, two thousand years later: his own people, the Jewish people, have largely rejected him. Hanukah continues, when it ought to be Christmas. Hope for the Messiah's advent continues, when there ought to be rejoicing that he's already come.

A partial hardening has indeed come upon Israel (cf. Rom. 11:25). "For to this day," as Paul says to the Corinthians, "when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away" (2 Cor. 3:14), which explains the continuing sweeping rejection of the Jewish Messiah by the Jewish people. A very sad and ironic state of affairs indeed!

But rejecting the true light is not only a sad irony, it's a *tragic irony*. Ultimately, it's a very tragic thing to reject the light because that will leave you right where you are: *in darkness*. "I have come into the world as light," Jesus tells us, "so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness" (John 12:46). And here's the tragedy: "The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going" (John 12:35).

It's not much fun groping around in the dark, looking for something you know is somewhere in the room but you just can't seem to find it. If only you had a little light! But you don't, so you continue slowly feeling your way around, bumping into this and tripping over that. In vain, searching for something you likely never find.

That's a parable of what it's like to remain in darkness, moral and spiritual darkness. You can see with your physical eyes; you can pour yourself a cup of coffee, drive your car, even shoot a basketball. But the *eyes of your heart* are still darkened, and so you don't see spiritual realities that are there; nor do you see the glory and beauty that is to be found everywhere as well. You simply can't see it. You're still in darkness.

You Can Receive the True Light (1:12-13)

Does this describe where you're at, friend? Is this your experience? If it is, there's an alternative to continue to fumble about in the darkness: *you can receive the true light*.

For what John said two thousand years ago is still just as true for us today: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (1:12).

Yet what would it mean for you to receive this true light? Let me tell you, first of all, it would mean that you’re relying upon the person and work of Jesus Christ for true life. John says it this way: “to all who did receive him, *who believed in his name.*” Receiving *is* believing; that’s what it means to receive.

But understand that believing is not a one-time thing; nor is it something you do simply with your head. No, it’s a matter of the head and the heart—an embrace—and it’s a whole change of life—a new relationship. It’s not so much about a decision you made some years ago, but about the way of life you live today—a life defined by believing in Jesus’ name.

Let me tell you, secondly, what *results* from receiving the true light. If you receive him, you are given a gift—a right—a birth right. You are given a legitimate claim to everything that belongs to God’s children. When you receive the true light, you are given a new birth right: “the right to become children of God” (v. 12).

This is not something you’re born with or possess from birth; it’s something you only receive from being *reborn*. It’s not an ‘inalienable right’; it’s a ‘given right’—a gift. To be given this right is to be given authorization or a legitimate claim to the status of being a child.

This is what our two boys, Addis and Rager, received when they were adopted. This was the Court Order:

It is therefore ordered, adjudged and decreed that from this date the minors shall, to all legal intents and purposes, be the children of the petitions and, for the purpose of inheritance and all other legal incidents and consequences, the same as if born them in wedlock.

Similarly, when you receive the true light and believe in Jesus Christ, you receive the right to become children of God: for the purpose of inheritance and everything else, as if you were God’s natural born son or daughter!

But there’s a third thing you should understand about receiving the true light. You should understand *what* enables you to receive the true light into your life.

As this passage has been emphasizing this simple choice you have, of whether to reject or receive the true light, you could be tempted to think that the decision is *wholly within your own power to make*. And, in fact, some well-meaning Christians may well tell you it’s wholly within you power to make this choice.

But it’s not. You see, those who receive this light, who believe in the person and work of Jesus, are given the gift of sonship by God the Father. But who are these people who receive and believe? They are, as John tells us very plainly, those “*who were born*, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (1:13).

You see, your receiving the light or believing in Jesus is *the expression of new birth, not the cause of new birth*. The cause of new birth is actually entirely out of your hands.

That shouldn’t be so terribly hard to understand because it’s happened once before to every single one of us. A quick quiz to confirm: Raise your hand, would you, if your mother and father

consulted you before you were born? Did you make a recommendation, register a vote, petition, send a Tweet message or a text message? No, your natural birth was entirely out of your hands.

So, too, is your spiritual birth. It's not affected, you see John tells us, by natural descent or lineage; it's not the result of being born into the right family. Nor is new birth itself the result of human choice or decision; it's not "of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man," John says. Instead, new birth is God's business—and his alone. All who believe do so because they have been born of God.

This should both warn and encourage each one of us. We should take this as a warning that we can decide to 'receive' the true light and yet not do so as an expression of a genuine new birth. And I'm afraid to say that the likelihood is that some of you are in this precise situation. You have 'received' Christ but never been born again. And thus your 'receiving' is not true receiving, and thus you don't have the right to become a child of God.

But this should also be an encouragement to each one of us, as well. Because it reminds us that what flesh and blood is ultimately unable to do—i.e., cause you to be born again—God himself is *more than able* to do. What flesh and blood cannot do, God himself does by the power of his own Holy Spirit.

A wise Jewish leader named Nicodemus came to Jesus under cover of darkness. They got to talking and Jesus startled this learned scholar by saying that unless you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God (3:3). "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" To which Jesus responded: "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (3:5).

Not just natural birth, but spiritual birth is what's required. Why? Because, as he says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Fallen human beings only give birth to more fallen human beings! What's required is an intervention by Almighty God himself, if this is ever going to change.

"Do not marvel," then, Jesus says to Nicodemus, "that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (3:8).

Conclusion

Simple Christmas has been our theme these past several Sundays of Advent. But today, as I said at the outset, our theme comes into sharpest focus around a very simple choice: *Reject or receive the true light?*

Which will it be for you, this Christmas? It's a very simple question. And it's the very simple choice you face this Christmas.

In fact, the importance of this choice for each of us ought to put everything else in perspective; it ought to simplify everything else this Christmas.

In light of this choice, nothing else ultimately matters. Everything else becomes secondary, or even tertiary, in light of the choice to reject or receive him, the true light, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, God's one and only Son.

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

Amen.

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