

Text: John 1:6-8, 19-28. 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent. **December 21, 2014**

**Jesus is the light of life. Jesus is the light of the world – Amen.**

Who invented this? [hold up light bulb] Anybody? History buffs? Long before the iPhone 6... Some say it was Thomas Edison in 1879. I suppose many textbooks and trivia games would agree... but it's technically not true. A British guy named Joseph Swan was doing the same thing at the same time across the pond. Even then, scientists were purposely playing around with electric current a hundred years before! So Thomas Edison really didn't invent this [light bulb]. He just made it better. Safer. More affordable. After many failed attempts and faulty materials... using a carbon filament inside an appropriately-sized glass vacuum, Edison got his first light bulb to last 13.5 hours! If your light bulbs at home last for half the day, better go the store before they're obsolete!

Man-made light is still a marvelous thing, isn't it? Thank you, Tom Edison.

So much artificial light all around us... after a while do we tend to downplay the *God-made light* that's out there? Maybe. Maybe we're slow to acknowledge the light of the *sun*, and even at this time of year, we may altogether forget about the light of *GOD's SON*, our Savior Jesus.

Who invented the light bulb? Ultimately, *God did*. He gave us the intelligence and means to, in a sense, make more daylight. But before we get ahead of ourselves, remember that at the beginning of time, God also *created light*. Oh. And what's more... he got it right on the first try! Our God didn't need to go through a whole trial-and-error process. He simply said, "**Let there be light,**" and there was light.

And God's "light invention" was more than a humorous "Aha!" moment that came by his whimsy. More than just a "bright idea" that may need some tinkering with. God's light is the *brightest idea* because it was his PLAN from the beginning – "**For God who said let light shine out of darkness made his light shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.**" Just as the light of the rising sun is unavoidable, so also the light that is the baby in the manger has *spread* through its life, death, and resurrection, and this light and this joy that are – yes, found in a baby! – it's all unavoidable!

Thomas Edison's invention – or should we say his *advancement on technology* – was unavoidable. It was only a matter of time – he secured his patent and unleashed man-made light to the masses for the first time. In a similar way, *John the Baptist* brought word of *Jesus, the God-made light*, to many people for the very first time. John didn't have anything to do with inventing or creating this light. And of course, John wasn't *THE* light. But, as the Gospel shares, "**John came only as a witness TO the light.**"

I think there's a small part in each of us that might think, "*Why is John the Baptist so important? It seems so random for the Bible to include him here, and to stress the fact that he is a witness. Can we trust him? And can we even trust this Jesus he was bragging to everyone about?*"

If John the Baptist was truly a *witness*, then by definition – he 'had knowledge about some event or some matter of interest.' Not only that, a good witness better retain that knowledge (*motion to the head – MIND*), make it their own (*hand over the heart*), and also *give honest testimony* to that knowledge. That's... a *good witness*.

So John was a witness – in fact, one of the first documented witnesses – **to the light of Christ**. But again, what makes a man who ate grasshoppers and dressed funny so reliable??? Well, he was sent by God. Good enough? There are more reasons if you like: John the Baptist was the *first prophet in 400 years* – everyone knew he was special – even his outspoken enemies, the Jewish authorities. This was mostly because John came from a *priestly family* himself. His background check comes up clean. Again, *his birth was both miraculous and prophesied* – remember, Gabriel announced his birth to old man Zechariah and when Mary met Elizabeth, the unborn baby John jumped inside Elizabeth's womb. John was the real deal!

Not only is John the Baptist a credible witness based on God's obvious miracles, but also... just listen to the *things John said* and *how he said them*. He came preaching a totally different message from the Jews – one Gospel, not countless laws – and John *even lived apart from the religious system in Israel* (Hence, the camel's hair outfit and the wild honey/grasshopper diet!). So when the Jewish authorities, full of skepticism, found John, he fired back at them. He called them a "brood of snakes" and flatly denied that he was the Christ. John's witness *was clear and unequivocal*. He never wavered or waffled, but rather blurted out stuff like, "**Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**" And in today's Gospel it can only mean one thing when John confesses freely and EMPHATICALLY, "**I am NOT the Christ.**"

John the Baptist and his **witness TO the light** were designed to distribute the light of Jesus to *many people*, much like and *much better than* Edison's breakthrough with the light bulb. But even while Edison may have stumbled upon success by accident, John the Baptist's glorified purpose in life was to loudly and publicly *declare Jesus*. In fact, toward the end of John's Gospel, you can find a

sweet summary of his work, a truth many of us have sung to music here in church – John writes: **“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”**

You know, if John the Baptist was out to gain personal fame or political influence, he failed big-time. He had the Pharisees’ attention for a short while, but ultimately lost it. If John was doing this ministry thing for himself, he did a horrible job – he gained nothing from his testimony and his so-called **witness to the light** – in the end, he was put in prison, and his head was brought to King Herod on a platter. Praise God – *all of this only strengthens John’s credibility!*

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John the Baptist – such a live, vibrant example of letting one’s light shine for Jesus! It’s not often you see *anyone* walk around like him, loudly proclaiming and pointing to Christ. But alas...the guy’s been dead for 2,000 years. His “voice calling in the desert” is now just words on a page. Too bad. Hopefully someone else comes along like that, right? That would be fun to witness. Let’s hope so.

**Well, here’s a bright idea...!!!** *You’re the witness.*

At first blush, it sounds insane. It is a FRIGHTFUL thing, indeed. Because... our lights are flickering compared to the floodlight of John’s bold confession. Just ask me – I feel feeble, afraid, and totally unreliable. I may be standing up here, saying good things, but later, my actions in life say something quite different. Quite honestly, my Christian confession on holidays and Sundays doesn’t always line up with my life on weekdays. My light burns brightly and uniquely for a few strong minutes, but there are vast stretches of darkness when my light is all but invisible. My light may shine for 13.5 hours – reading, praying, studying. But then it fades, even fades to black... and the next 72 hours are blackened by fear, doubt, worry, then guilt. So who will listen to me? Who will let me shine the light of Christ on his or her heart, unless my own life is bright and shiny day by day? Do I need to be John the Baptist?

No. In fact, John himself would hate that. He’d say: “Don’t be like me. BE LIKE CHRIST!” And lest you become more frightened or feel more hopeless, remember... **Jesus is our perfect witness.** The little babe in the hay is LOVE’s PURE LIGHT. He is brighter than you, brighter than me, even brighter than John the Baptist. Jesus’ light is *our perfect light*, and this **bright idea from God** involves so much more than just a beautiful shimmer and sheen on Christmas. This light – Jesus – entered a dark world to enlighten people like us who are deeply darkened by sin. While all our deeds of darkness pile up around us, Jesus’ light of life was too overwhelming to stay hidden. He brings our sins to light – what a fright! Yet he brought all our sin... to the cross. No more darkness, no more strife. We need not worry when the lights grow dim, whether by failure, disappointment, depression, old age, even death! Just when we need it, Christ shatters all darkness and his light bursts forth from the grave! And finally, the blinding light of the resurrection is the news that enables us to take the light and run. Not to hide, but to share it, to spread it far and wide.

The light of the world himself encourages each of us: **“Don’t be afraid to witness to my light.”** **“I am with you.”** He also said, **“You WILL BE my witnesses... to the ends of the earth.”**

Yes, I suppose John the Baptist is the first witness and probably the most notable one. Plus, he’s perhaps THE most crucial EYE-witness. But through the eyes of faith... YOU and I are equal **witnesses to the light** – and John’s testimony is our very own! **“Look, the Lamb of God!”** echoes from our mouths too, and our **modern witness** finds common ground with John’s ... **IN CHRIST.** We are the ones John is speaking to. WE are THEY who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God!

Especially at CHRIST-mas, you don’t need to *be* Christ. Let Christ be Christ – let HIM do the saving. And let his light shine for itself! Instead, be like your brother in Christ John the Baptist. Follow his awesome lead. Spend some time pointing and proclaiming.

You can start simple – use a few words, just like John did. If you look at John’s replies to his bothersome enemies... notice how he became increasingly direct and clear with them. **“I am NOT the Christ.”** **“Are you Elijah, then?”** **“I am not.”** **“Are you the Prophet?”** John answered, **“No.”** People tried again and again to turn the spotlight on him – on John. Anything or anyONE besides Jesus who was right in front of them. But John refused to take center stage. *He kept the light... squarely on Jesus.*

Jesus and his forerunner John the Baptist illustrate the important, life-saving difference between two words: *“in”* and *“through.”* Two little prepositions, but so important when it comes to BELIEVING. What do you believe concerning miracles? How about Christmas miracles? Are they real? What do you believe about the afterlife? Is that real? Here’s where it matters. Do you believe **IN** your own reason, your own humanistic spirit, or yourself?!? **No – you believe IN the Christ-child, the Son of God.** Do you believe that you’ll earn God’s favor and a spot in his heaven merely **THROUGH** Jesus as a seasonal push to get you there? Worse yet, do you believe you’re set to go **THROUGH** your own good works and attitude. **No – you still believe IN the Savior’s once-for-all work, and you cling to this good news by faith THROUGH the work of God’s Holy Spirit. Through people like John who point you to the sinless babe and Lamb of God, who came on Christmas Day to take your sins away.**

God had this **BRIGHT IDEA** from the beginning of time. Not some “reactionary light bulb” that started blinking when we messed things up. But a good and gracious **PLAN** that involves Jesus, me, and you (John the Baptist too!). A **PLAN** that illuminates the dark

path of this temporary life. His PLAN forgives and casts aside our darkest moments – past and present – and presents to us the brightest future that will last forever. WE WON'T NEED ANY LIGHTS! No screens, no bulbs, no lamps, no sun. Just the light of Jesus, God's Son – Amen.