



In the Dark Streets Shineth: Week 1

December 3, 2023

**At Christmas, we celebrate the arrival of Jesus
with decorations, dramas, and songs.**

*O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight!*

**What does the song mean by “dark streets”,
“hopes and fears”, and “everlasting light”?**

Dark Streets:

Jesus came into a world where God’s people were faced with awful circumstances. Politically, they were being occupied and oppressed by the Romans and had no autonomy. Economically, they were barely subsisting. Socially, people were betraying their faith and their people to make ends meet by becoming tax collectors, pig farmers, or prostitutes.

Hopes and Fears:

The Jewish people were anticipating with hope that a “messiah” would come and save them. Prophecies told of a king who would rise from the line of David and rule over God’s people. That king would also be a high priest that restored people to living faithfully by God’s law. But many feared the messiah would upend social and political orders with violence or bring about the end times.

Everlasting Light: John 1:1-5

1 In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He existed in the beginning with God. **3** God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. **4** The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

John's Christmas story sounds an awful lot like a Creation story

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **2** The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. **3** Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. **4** And God saw that the light was good.

Genesis 1:1-4a

If Jesus came as a light to the world, why do our streets still feel so dark?

If Jesus really was the "messiah", why didn't he fix our broken systems like a king should? And if Jesus really "conquered sin and death" like we sometimes say, why are people still so stinky and sinful?

Jesus brings light not by fixing the mess *for us*, but by entering into our mess *with us*.

By entering into our mess with us, Jesus becomes a light in the darkness that brings hope. If we are faithful and follow that light, it leads to everlasting life with him. Jesus brings the hope of new life... in this one and the next.

REFLECTIONS

1. What Christmas decorations, movies, or carols are special to you? When was the last time you stopped to unpack the significance or meaning of your favorite symbols of the holidays?
2. Where do you find similarities in our world today to the dark historical circumstances that surrounded Jesus's birth?
3. What hopes, expectations, or fears do you find yourself placing upon Jesus as the "messiah"? Have you ever hoped that Jesus would just fix all your problems?
4. What does it mean to you that Jesus demonstrates his love by entering into our mess with us?
5. Where do you find hope in Jesus' proclamation in John 8:12? "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness because you will have the light that leads to life."