

Dear friends in our Savior,

Now what? You made it to today! You've survived all the preparations that you've been through and the parties and gatherings of this busy season. That fact in itself is something for us to celebrate. But what about after today? Now that we made it to today, what comes next tomorrow? That's what has been called the "holiday let down" or the "holiday blues." After a prolonged period of fun and excitement as we have just experienced, we might have the expectation that the fun will just keep on rolling. But when you get up on an emotional high eventually you have to come down. You add to that the physical fatigue of traveling, hosting family gatherings or shopping. Then there are the post holiday chores of putting the decorations away and then actually paying the bills that you incurred during the season. Maybe there's the emotional exhaustion from things that didn't go as well as you wanted or hoped. After a time of spoiling each other and staying up late with one exciting thing after another, it's difficult to resume your structured life with nothing immediate to look forward to. There is so much build-up and anticipation for one day that goes so quickly that you're left with the thought, "Now what?"

That is unless you are focused on the true celebration of this season. If your heart is focused on what Christmas is all about and what we really celebrate today, there is no holiday let down. The parties may end and the decorations may be put away, but the true light of Christmas keeps shining at all times. It has been ever since the first Christmas and it will continue to shine for the rest of eternity. There are no holiday blues associated with this light. The joy that we have in our hearts as we celebrate today goes with us each and every day as we celebrate the love of God in sending our Savior to this world. What we celebrate today is that this ***Light Continues to Shine***.

Our celebration can only begin when we step back to recognize the gift that God gave to us in Jesus that first Christmas Day and remember what we receive in the manger of our heart on this day. There is a temptation to look at the lowliness of Jesus' birth as Luke records it and feel like there isn't much glorious to celebrate. But as John recalls the miracle of Christmas, we can only marvel at what truly happened. This was no ordinary child born in dirty, dingy stable. This is the marvelous eternal, divine God becoming flesh to live on earth with us. This is the true light of life coming into the world to enlighten people and point them to the only path that leads to eternal life.

As John talks about this miracle of the eternal Word becoming flesh, he talks about Jesus being the "one and only." That doesn't mean that he was the only child. It means that he was very unique. He was indeed the "one and only." He existed with the Father from the beginning of the world. This was the eternal God, the creator of the world. He was here from before the time when the world began. There never has been a time when he didn't exist. He had a very intimate relationship with the Father. He had all the attributes and characteristics of the Father. He carried all power and the authority of the divine. The miracle of God's love that we celebrate today is that this eternal God became flesh and made his dwelling among us. He didn't cease being God. He didn't stop his divinity. He simply set aside the full use of his divine power and glory and assumed his humanity. The almighty, eternal God deigned to take on human flesh and was born with all the frailties of humanity. We will see this Jesus weep, sleep, eat, hurt and even die. Yet as eternal God, his humanity was free of one important element: sin.

When God became man, he did so in a miraculous way so that he was not tainted nor corrupted by sin. This is how he was able to complete the mission the Father sent him on: to redeem each person from their sins. Now the substitute that God sent could take man's place fully and in every way and yet still meet the standard of perfection that God demanded of him. This perfect substitute could then die in our place to pay the punishment for our sins. This is the salvation of God that is proclaimed this joyous and glorious day. This is why we stop to ponder the depths of God's great and amazing love for us.

As we think about the tradition of giving gifts at Christmas, we think first of the gift that God gave to us in Jesus and just exactly what this gift means to us. John said, "We have seen his glory." John had the privilege of being one of the disciples to glimpse the full glory of Jesus at the Transfiguration. We don't see that glory today. If God revealed his glory to us in this way, we could not look at it and would be blinded if we did. But at the birth of Christ, he revealed his glory in a way that we could see and believe. God's glory can be seen his grace and love in sending his one and only Son and in the work of salvation we see. The interesting name that John uses for Jesus, the Logos or the Word, helps us to see this glory. Words reveal to others what is going on inside of us. People can't know our thoughts or inner most feelings unless we open our mouths and tell them. Without Jesus, we couldn't know who God truly is or what he feels about us. Without Jesus, the Father above could only be seen as an angry judge or a merciless master. He would be seen only as one who punishes those who are guilty of sin. That means, he would only be seen as one who punishes

everyone—because we are all guilty of sin. By nature, we are objects of God’s wrath. As much as we would like to claim that we are the nice people rather than the naughty ones, we know that just isn’t true. We know the sins that we commit and we know the ways we have gone our own way and done our own thing. We are deserving of God’s eternal punishment because of that sin.

But it is through the Word that God communicates his love with us. Without Christ, we can’t know God. We can’t know the path to salvation nor how God feels about us. With the birth of Christ that we celebrate today, God reveals his deep love and care for us. He reveals his love in developing and carrying out a plan for our salvation. Take away Christ, whose birth we celebrate today, and we have nothing. We have no saving knowledge of God. We have no real life. We have no light to heaven.

Today we see the glory of God. We see the light which brings light and life to the people of this world. We see the truth which brings spiritual and eternal life to us. And when we see the glory of God and recognize who it is that we are receiving in the manger of our hearts, that affects us. It changes us forever. It did the shepherds. They still went back to their flocks. But they were different people. They had a different focus in life, different motivation to follow God, different direction and different purpose as they went about their lives. When we receive the eternal Word in our hearts (and John defines “receive” for us by stating, “to all who received him, to all who believed in him”), God gives us the right and the power to become members of his family and to receive the blessings of that family. This is John’s entire purpose in revealing this to us. Remember the main goal of this Gospel—*“These are written that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we might have life in his name.”* When that light of Jesus first shone into our hearts, it changed us forever. We became his children. We were given rights in his kingdom, most importantly the right to live with him in his kingdom forever. We were forgiven of our sins and guaranteed of eternal happiness with him. That’s what makes today so rich for us. That’s what this season is all about for us. That is something we take in our hearts and carry with us throughout the year ahead.

So many people sit in the dark and celebrate an empty Christmas. They see Christmas day as the culmination of all their shopping days. They see it as a day off of work and an opportunity to spend with family. But they don’t see the light of Christ. They are in total darkness as to what this day is truly all about. That will show in their celebration today and it will be seen in their lives throughout the year. All that they have are the parties and the gifts. This is why the holiday let down comes and with it the holiday blues. They have nothing that will last or stay with them.

We do. We have a living Savior whose light continues to shine. Just as this eternal Word affects your celebration today, it affects your life tomorrow. It affects who you are and what your life is all about. We not only see the light of Jesus our Savior today, but we carry that light with us every single day. While John reminds us here that simply through God’s grace he gives us the right to be his children, he shares with us in his epistle how that affects us. He wrote, *“How great is the love the Father has lavished upon us that we should be called the children of God. And that is what we are.”* We were not just given the label of “God’s children” at Christmas. This is who we actually are. That calling denotes purpose. We have been called to be—that is to live and to act—as God’s children. This is who we are now and guides us as we live. We live like people who see the light of Christ still shining into our hearts. That means the confidence that we have in the salvation won and proclaimed for us. That means that the news of this day leads us tomorrow to live lives that please our God in heaven. That means that our direction and goal in life is the heaven so graciously given to us and we live in such a way as not to give up that life. That means that we are now the people who with our lips and with our lives let the light of Christ shine out into our world. That light of Christ is still shining. Now it is shining through us.

We don’t have any time for holiday let down! The gift God gives and that we celebrate today not only brought us into his family, it has given us purpose, direction and motivation for our lives. We don’t ask, “Now what?” We know what! We are God’s people who continue to bring him praise and glory throughout the year ahead as we live and work for him. We are God’s people full excitement, joy, hope and thanks who could think of nothing better than to be constantly praising and glorifying God for his goodness and grace in providing salvation for us. Rather than seeing today as the end of your celebration, look at it as just the beginning. Take the time today to stop and marvel at the wisdom, grace and love of God displayed in sending Jesus to this world. Then go out and be the people God has made and called you to be—the people of God. What a joyous news we celebrate today: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us to bring about our salvation. We too see his glory in this salvation. We see the light shining into the darkness of this world. Rejoice and celebrate today and always, that this light continues to shine. Amen.