

## LIGHTS AND OUR LORD

December 28, 2014

AS THE CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS WIND DOWN IT IS INTERESTING TO LOOK BACK AND SEE THE LARGE PART THAT LIGHT HAS PLAYED IN ALL THE CELEBRATIONS. WE ALSO NOTICE AS THE NEW YEAR IS ABOUT TO BEGIN THAT ONE OF THE MOST WELL-KNOWN CELEBRATIONS IS ONE OF LIGHT – THE DROPPING OF THE BALL IN TIMES SQUARE AT MIDNIGHT WITH OVER 32,000 LED LIGHTS.

WE CAN AS DISCIPLES CONSIDER THE IMPORTANCE OF LIGHT IN OUR WALK. THE WORD “*LIGHT*” APPEARS IN THE BIBLE ALMOST 180 TIMES. RIGHT FROM THE VERY BEGINNING IN GENESIS IN THE THIRD VERSE GOD SPOKE “LET THERE BE LIGHT”. HERE IS THE PRESENCE BY THE TRINITY IN ACTION, AND LOVE BY TRINITY IN LIGHT FROM THE TIME OF CREATION. LIGHT FROM ANCIENT TIMES HAS CARRIED WITH IT A MEANING OF GOODNESS, TRUTH, AND REDEMPTIVE POWER.

JESUS HIMSELF PROCLAIMED THROUGH THE GOSPELS OF BEING THE “LIGHT OF THE WORLD, *THE “WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE”*. LIGHT REPRESENTED THE TRUTH AND SURELY JESUS DID. JESUS WAS CALLED THE “GOOD SHEPHERD” REPRESENTING THOSE THINGS THAT WERE GOOD. AFTER ALL JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH FORETOLD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES. GOD IS NUMEROUS TIMES MENTIONED AND CALLED UPON IN THE PSALMS AS MY “*LIGHT AND MY SALVATION*” THAT REDEMPTIVE POWER, ACTION BY BEING “*A LAMP TO MY FEET AND LIGHT TO MY PATH*”, AND HIS PRESENCE GOING BEFORE ISRAELITES AS WELL AS BEING OUR JOY IN HIS PRESENCE!

DO WE NOT EVERY SUNDAY LIGHT THE CANDLES TO REPRESENT CHRIST, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD COMING OUT TO US DURING WORSHIP? HOW MANY OF US HAVE CANDLES SOMEWHERE IN THE HOUSE? THOSE CANDLES SERVE MANY PURPOSES – DURING A STORM CAN PROVIDE LIGHT, CALM FEAR, AND GIVE A SENSE OF SECURITY WITH A WARM GLOW SETTLING OVER THE ROOM. SCENTED CANDLES GIVING OFF SWEET AROMAS CAN PROVIDE MANY OF THE ELEMENTS I HAVE JUST MENTIONED. GOD AND JESUS ARE BOTH REFERRED TO AS A SWEET FRAGRANCE.

LIGHT FROM CANDLES ALONG WITH EVERGREEN BRANCHES HAVE REMINDED PEOPLE SINCE THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY OF THIS SEASON. PEOPLE WOULD ASSEMBLE A RING OF BRANCHES ON THE TABLE AND ADDED A CANDLE ONE AT A TIME WITH THE LIGHT GROWING BRIGHTER AND BRIGHTER WITH EACH ADDITIONAL ONE AS CHRISTMAS DREW CLOSER WITH THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST. THE GREENS IN THE CIRCLE SYMBOLIZED THE LOVE OF GOD FOR US NEVER ENDING. THE GREENS, EVER GREEN, WERE A SYMBOL OF ETERNAL LIFE, WHICH WITH THE BIRTH OF JESUS BECAME A REALITY.

THE GREENS CAME TO REPRESENT A MEANING DRAWN FROM I CORINTHIANS 9:24-25. THE VERSES SPEAK OF RUNNING THE RACE AND HOW THE VICTOR IS REWARDED A PERISHABLE

WREATH, BUT WITH JESUS AND HIS VICTORY OVER SIN AND DEATH WE ARE TO RECEIVE A CROWN THAT IS **IMPERISHABLE**. SO PEOPLE HUNG WREATHS OF GREENS IN THEIR WINDOWS OR ON THEIR DOORS, FREQUENTLY WITH A CANDLE IN THE WREATH TO PROCLAIM THIS VICTORY WON BY JESUS FOR US. IN ISAIAH WE ARE TOLD AFTER WALKING IN DARKNESS WE WILL SEE A GREAT LIGHT AND THE LIGHT WILL SHINE ON THEM. JESUS CHRIST, WHO NOT ONLY SHINES FOR US, BUT WITH JESUS INSIDE US HIS LIGHT SHOULD SHINE FROM US TO OTHERS.

IN MANY COUNTRIES THERE IS A TRADITION OF PUTTING A SINGLE CANDLE IN THE WINDOW BY WHICH YOU WELCOME THE CHRIST CHILD WHO IS SAID TO WANDER THE LAND ON CHRISTMAS EVE TO FIND WHERE HE WAS WELCOMED. IT WAS A WITNESS BY THIS CANDLE IN THE WINDOW TO OTHERS THAT YOU WELCOMED JESUS INTO YOUR HOME AND YOUR HEART SO HE CAN RESIDE WITHIN.

IN 2 CORINTHIANS 4:6 THE VERSE SAYS *"LIGHT SHALL SHINE OUT OF DARKNESS IS THE ONE WHO HAS SHONE IN OUR HEARTS TO GIVE THE LIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF CHRIST"*. WE ARE ALSO REMINDED TO RECALL THE VERSE IN MATTHEW 25:40 OF WHEN YOU DO THIS TO THE LEAST OF THEM YOU DO IT TO ME. WHEN WE WELCOME OR HELP STRANGERS WE NEVER KNOW WHO IT REALLY IS, DO WE?

RIGHT ALONG WITH THIS TRADITION AND VERSE I FOUND AN AMAZING PASSAGE IN PROVERBS 20:27 – *"THE SPIRIT OF MAN IS CANDLE OF THE LORD"*. OUR VERY BEING IS COMPARED TO A CANDLE. WHAT WE ARE FROM THE VERY DEPTHS OF OUR SPIRIT IS MEANT TO SHINE OUT TO OTHERS AND PROVIDE A GLIMPSE OF WHAT OUR GOD IS LIKE IN PRESENCE, ACTION, AND LOVE.

CANDLES REMIND US OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE FOR US. WHEN WE WATCH A CANDLE BURN IT REALLY IS CONSUMING ITSELF. JESUS CHRIST GAVE UP ALL HEAVEN HAD TO OFFER, TO COME TO EARTH, DWELL AMONG US, AND HUMBLING HIMSELF ON THE CROSS FOR US, FOR OUR SINS, IN ORDER TO RAISE US UP THAT WE MAY STAND BEFORE THE FATHER, BLAMELESS AND WHITE AS SNOW!!! HE GAVE HIMSELF JUST AS A CANDLE IS CONSUMED TIL THERE WAS NO MORE. THANK YOU JESUS!!

LIGHT BY PUSHING BACK THE DARKNESS REMOVES FEAR. IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE CHURCH WHEN CHRISTIANS HAD TO MEET IN THOSE WET, MUDDY AND DARK CATACOMBS AND WERE HAPPY FOR ONE SINGLE CANDLE IN THEIR MIDST. I IMAGINE IF YOU WERE DOWN THERE WITH YOUR PARENTS YOU WERE THANKFUL FOR THAT LIGHT OF A CANDLE. (STORY OF TREE AND SINGLE CANDLE)

JESUS IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD AND FOR PEOPLE THAT HAVE NOT SEEN THAT LIGHT. IT IS OUR MISSION AS A CHURCH AND MINISTRY AS A DISCIPLE TO BRING THAT LIGHT TO THOSE WHO HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED YET ITS WARMTH AND LOVE. AFTER ALL YOUR WITNESS, YOUR LIGHT AS A HUMAN CANDLE, A CANDLE OF THE LORD, CAN MAKE SUCH A DIFFERENCE!!!

THERE ARE SYMBOLS OF CHRISTMAS THAT WE MAY NOT HAVE THOUGHT AS ONES OF LIGHT. ONE SYMBOL WIDELY FOUND AT CHRISTMAS IS THE POINSETTIA. THE POINTS OF THE FLOWERS REPRESENT THE POINTS OF THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM AND THE LIGHT THAT GUIDED THE WISE MEN AND OTHERS TO JESUS.

IT IS TOLD THAT MARTIN LUTHER, NEAR CHRISTMAS TIME, WALKING IN THE WOODS AMONG THE EVERGREENS GLANCED THROUGH THE BRANCHES OF THE EVERGREENS AND VIEWED THE STARS. THE SIGHT SO OVERWHELMED HIM THAT HE SOMEHOW WANTED OTHERS TO WITNESS AND SENSE WHAT HE HAS FELT. SO HE CUT DOWN AN EVERGREEN TREE, BROUGHT IT IN THE HOUSE AND PUT CANDLES ON IT TO DUPLICATE HIS OWN EXPERIENCE. IN GOD'S CREATIVE POWER THE TREES HE CREATED HAVE BECOME ONE OF MOST WIDELY DISPLAYED SYMBOLS OF CHRISTMAS WE KNOW – THE CHRISTMAS TREE! IN I CHRONICLES 16:33 *“THEN THE TREES OF THE FOREST WILL SING FOR THE JOY OF THE LORD”*.

GOD DOES PROVIDE, EVEN IF IT TAKES AWHILE FOR US TO REALIZE IT!!! ACTUALLY DAVID THROUGHOUT THE PSALMS PRAISED AND ACKNOWLEDGED HIS GOD FOR HIS CREATIVE POWER IN THE CREATION.

LIGHT PRODUCES IS HOPE. WHEN CHRIST WAS BORN, THE MESSIAH HAD COME INTO THE WORLD PROPHECY MADE HOPE ALIVE FOR ALL. HOPE WAS AND IS FELT IN THE HEART, WHETHER IT BE IN THE HEART OF A NATION OR AN INDIVIDUAL. WITH CHRIST, HOPE WAS OPEN TO SERVE. I HAVE REPEATED THE WORDS OF JESUS MANY TIMES FROM MATTHEW 20:28 *“FOR EVEN THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE OTHERS....”*.

HOPE IS INDEED A PRECIOUS THING, IT IS NOT JUST A WORD, BUT IT REPRESENTS ACTION. WE ARE TOLD GOD HAS GIVEN US NEW BIRTH INTO A LIVING HOPE THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD. **AND IF** THAT LIVING HOPE IS IN JESUS THAN IT IS ETERNAL – THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY, RIGHT NOW AND IN THE FUTURE, AND IN US TOO!!!

IT IS GOOD TO RECALL SYMBOLS OF CHRISTMAS, THEIR ORIGINS AND TRADITIONS; HOWEVER IT IS THEIR MEANING AND THEIR “LIFE” THAT BRINGS IT ALL HOME TO US.

LIGHT IS A QUANTITY AROUND US IN OUR WORLD DAY IN AND DAY OUT. WE FLIP A SWITCH AND INSTANTLY DARKNESS IS GONE AND WE HAVE LIGHT AND CAN ACCOMPLISH TASKS IN THAT ROOM AND FEEL COMFORTABLE. WHEN THE SUN RISES EACH DAY WE ARE PROVIDED LIGHT TO CARRY ON OUR LIVES. LIGHT FROM THE SUN PROVIDES THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT BY WHICH PLANTS GROW AND PRODUCE. LIGHT FROM THE SUN GIVES US WARMTH, SOMETIMES TOO MUCH AND SOMETIMES VERY LITTLE.

THEN HOW MUCH MORE IS THE “LIGHT OF THE WORLD” PROVIDING FOR US, OUR LORD AND SAVIOR? AFTER ALL HE IS WITH US DAY IN AND DAY OUT. WHEN WE CALL OUT TO HIM IN DISTRESS OR NEED HE IS THERE, INSTANTLY! JUST LIKE FLIPPING THE LIGHT SWITCH. HE CAN HELP US; GUIDE US TO ACCOMPLISH MINISTRY AND MUCH MORE. FOR THOSE WHO LOOK TO

AND RELY ON HIM, HE IS THAT “ESSENTIAL ELEMENT” FOR OUR LIVES THAT MAKE US GROW AND PRODUCE. HE GIVES US HIS LOVE AND STRENGTHENS US, BUT IF WE CHOSE TO KEEP HIM AT A DISTANCE THINGS CAN BECOME DARK, FEARFUL, AND COLD. DESPITE ALL, WE ARE PROMISED THAT GOD SENT JESUS TO TURN OUR MOURNING INTO GLADNESS AND WE WILL SEE A GREAT LIGHT. JESUS CALLED HIMSELF “*THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD*”. LIGHT IS ALL ABOUT OUR LORD JUST AS CHRISTMAS IS AND WILL ALWAYS BE, WHEN WE HAVE CHOSEN TO WELCOME HIM INTO OUR HEARTS.

### *REFLECTING THE LIGHT*

A well-known Bible teacher has just finished speaking to a large class of business people on the Christians' responsibility to be light in the world. He had emphasized as believers we all have the obligation to reflect the light in the world, the Lord Jesus. After the class, one the members related to him an experience he had in his home that impressed upon him the same truth. He said that in the darkest corner of his basement he had made a surprising discover. Some potatoes in that darkest corner had sprouted and where growing. At first he could not figure how they had gotten enough light to sprout and grow. Then he noticed that near the basement window was a shiny copper kettle hanging from the ceiling that was brightly polished. It was in the perfect position to reflect the sun's rays onto the potatoes in that darkest corner of the room. The person relating the story said, "when I saw that, I thought, I may not be a preacher or a teacher with the ability to expound scripture, but a least I can be a copper kettle catching the rays of the Son and reflect His light to someone.

IN A FEW MOMENTS WE WILL COME TO COMMUNION. AS YOU NOTICE IN THE BULLETIN IT IS KNOWN AS THE SERVICE OF WORD AND TABLE. HOW APPROPRIATE SINCE GOD INVITES US AND JESUS, THE LIVING WORD, IS AT THE TABLE. DOING THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF HIM WE GREET THE “*LIGHT OF THE WORLD*” AND WILL SENSE THE WARMTH OF HIS LOVE AND FORGIVENESS. THEN FORGIVEN WE ARE TO GO AND REFLECT THAT LIGHT TO OTHERS JUST AS THAT COPPER KETTLE DID, INTO THE DARKEST CORNERS OF YOUR WORLD. AMEN.