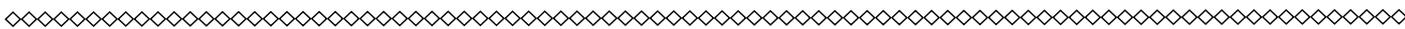




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**Sermon Brief**  
**Text: John 1:9-13**  
**Title: Christmas as Hope**  
 Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faithfully proclaim the whole council of God in scripture!



**INTRODUCTION**

Christmas is Advent. And Advent means ‘coming.’<sup>1</sup> Although the tradition of celebrating Advent began in Roman Catholic Christianity in the fourth century, today Advent is celebrated by Christians of virtually every denominational stripe. Worldwide Baptists are increasingly using these four Sundays leading up to Christmas



for an Advent celebration. This year our church will join the rest of Christianity in making this very important season of the year.

Advent, over the centuries of celebration, has focused on two directions. The backward glance is on the first coming of Jesus at His birth. The forward glance zeroes in on the second coming of Jesus at the close of human history. The conviction is that the first coming affirms the second coming and, between these two emphases, we believers in Jesus find our hope. Between these ‘comings’ stands the apex of Jesus’ death and resurrection. This is the high point and goal of His first coming. Calvary and Easter also stand as the foundation for His second coming.

The theme of this first Sunday of Advent is hope. The hope that Jesus as the Light of the world brings. The English word ‘hope’<sup>2</sup> has one set of meanings that provide very little understanding for ‘Christian hope.’ The addition of the adjective ‘Christian’ to the noun ‘hope’ shifts the meaning dramatically. In the Greek New Testament the word for ‘hope’ is ἐλπίς (*elpis*), which is used almost fifty times in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> This word expresses high level confidence in something happening that God has promised.<sup>4</sup> For the Jewish people the promise of a Messiah was major at the beginning of the Christian era. They were looking for God’s promised Deliverer to come and bring freedom from foreign oppression. Jesus’ birth was the realization of

<sup>1</sup>“Advent (from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming”) is a season of the Christian church, the period of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus; in other words, the period immediately before Christmas. It is the beginning of the Western liturgical year and commences on Advent Sunday. The Eastern churches begin the liturgical year on 1 September.[1] The Eastern Christian equivalent of Advent is called the Nativity Fast but it differs both in length and observances.

The progression of the season may be marked with an Advent calendar, a practice introduced by German Lutherans. At least in the Roman Catholic and Lutheran calendars, Advent starts on the fourth Sunday before December 25; in other words, the Sunday between November 27 and December 3 inclusive.

Latin *adventus* is the translation of the Greek word *parousia*, commonly used in reference to the Second Coming. Christians believe that the season of Advent serves a dual reminder of the original waiting that was done by the Hebrews for the birth of their Messiah as well as the waiting that Christians today endure for the second coming of Christ. [“Advent,” Wikipedia online]

<sup>2</sup>*Merriam-Webster online Dictionary*, “hope”: “Etymology: Middle English, from Old English *hopian*; akin to Middle High German *hoffen* to hope. Date: before 12th century. **Intransitive verb:** 1 : to cherish a desire with anticipation <hopes for a promotion>; 2 archaic : trust. **Transitive verb:** 1 : to desire with expectation of obtainment, 2 : to expect with confidence : trust” The German equivalent is *Hoffnung* with most of the same meanings.

<sup>3</sup>“There are several Hebrew verbs that may in certain contexts be translated “to hope” in English. One of them, *qawa* [קָוָה], may denote “hope” in the sense of “trust,” as when Jeremiah addresses God, “Our hope is in you” (Jer 14:22). He also uses a noun formed from the root *qwh* [קוּה] to teach that the Lord is the hope of Israel (14:8; 17:13; 50:7), which means that Israel’s God is worthy of trust. Another noun from the same root, *tiqwa* [תִּקְוָה], is often also translated “hope” meaning “trust.” Similarly, the verb *qawa* [קָוָה] is parallel to *batah* [בָּטַח], “to trust,” in Psalm 25:2-3.” [William B. Nelson, Jr., “Hope,” *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*]

<sup>4</sup>“To trust in, wait for, look for, or desire something or someone; or to expect something beneficial in the future.” [William B. Nelson, Jr., “Hope,” *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*]

that promise from God, even though Jesus would redefine the meaning of Messiah dramatically.

The writer of the fourth Gospel makes this point especially powerfully in the Prologue to the Gospel of John. Today I want to look at just one part of these eighteen verses in verses nine through thirteen. Jesus' coming as the divine Logos bringing salvational enlightenment is the point of emphasis. Read with me from John 1:9-13:

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.<sup>5</sup>

In this text John affirms the coming of Jesus as the Light of the world (v. 9) and then he summarizes the reaction of humanity to Jesus' coming. Both negative (vv. 10-11) and positive (vv. 12-13) responses are described. On this first Sunday of Advent with the theme of hope in mind we would do well to be reminded to the insights of John about Jesus as the divine light who came into this world to present the salvation of God to humanity.

## BODY

### I. The Light shines, v. 9

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

1.9 Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

In this beginning declaration by John, Jesus is presented as the 'true light' (τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν) who came into the world (ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον) and with His coming enables enlightenment to every person (ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον). The theme of the Johannine gospel prologue is Jesus as the divine Logos, the Word who is God and who reflects the fullness of God.

Jesus as *the divine Logos* is a central theme of the fourth Gospel. What does that mean? The Logos is the Greek word meaning 'word' in English. In the ancient world the concept was rich and went well beyond what a person would speak or write.<sup>6</sup> Jesus as the divine Logos reveals God in His fullness to human kind. Not only do the words that Jesus spoke in teaching throw light on God and mankind, but the deeds of Jesus' as the Son of God illuminate God's character and nature. This is John's central point in his gospel prologue, especially verses 1-5.<sup>7</sup> When we see Jesus we see God the Father in all His fullness.

Thus Jesus as the divine Logos comes into the world in His incarnation at birth as *the true light*. In the first century world many individuals claimed to be offering light, that is, understanding, about life and how best to cope with the day to day struggles that life brings. All kinds of philosophies were floating around in the Greek speaking world of Jesus: Platonism, Stoicism, Epicureanism etc. Every religion in the ancient world sought to 'enlighten' people on the best way to avoid the wrath of the gods and to find success in life. Even among the Jewish people numerous versions of how to please God would be found in the different groups of Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and others.

When John uses the phrase 'true light' (τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν) he is intentionally separating Jesus as light from all the others with the assertion that what one sees in Jesus is divine truth and the correct way. Truth in the Bible is not philosophically based as it is in western culture, where truth / true means what corresponds to facts. This idea of truth is philosophical and abstract. Its origin is from the Greek philosopher Aristotle in the third century before Christ. Biblical truth has no connection to such abstract thinking. Instead, biblical truth is the manifestation of the nature and character of God. Jesus as the true light simply declares that when you encounter Jesus you encounter God accurately and correctly. Truth is concrete, personal, and dynamic for it is embedded in the person of Jesus. Thus Jesus will declare later (Jhn 14:6-7), "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

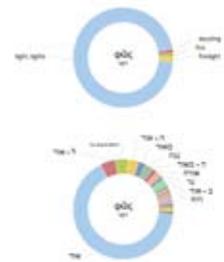
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<sup>5</sup>GNT: 1.9 Ἦν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον, ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον. 1.10 ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. 1.11 εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. 1.12 ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, 1.13 οἳ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

<sup>6</sup>For a detailed and helpful discussion, see H. Douglas Buckwalter, "Word," Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology online.

<sup>7</sup>Jhn. 1:1-5, NRSV: "1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

John declares that Jesus as the true light '**enlightens everyone**' (ὁ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον) when he comes into the world. The enlightenment here means understanding of the way of salvation. Jesus shines the saving light of God to all humanity. We're not talking primarily about intellectual knowledge here. The metaphor of light often in our world signifies 'head knowledge' and is focused on the gaining of intellectual understanding of something. But in the Bible 'light' is deeper. Light dispels darkness; light guides one's steps away from darkness; light saves.<sup>8</sup> When Jesus shines as the true light then, one can experience God's salvation. You can come to know God in a life saving and life changing manner. This knowledge of God is not intellectual knowledge. To the contrary, this knowledge is personal and relational. In coming to know God through Christ you develop a relationship with God. You don't come to church, pray, serve etc. because these are religious things to do. Not at all. Out of your personal relationship with God you come to love and adore Him. From this warm, vital relationship then comes service, church attendance, prayer etc.



This is the difference that Jesus makes in one's life. Now this 'shining of Jesus' as the true light was made available to all humanity in the incarnation of Christ. When Jesus came to earth, God's salvation became available to all as John 3:16-19 declares:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

But for this light to shine in your life, you must come to Jesus in faith commitment to Him as Savior and Lord. The saving light of God doesn't automatically shine upon you and give you salvation. It is a matter of you committing yourself to Christ personally and intentionally and with unconditional surrender to Him. As Jesus says, "Those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

## II. The Light is rejected, vv. 10-11

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

1.10 ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. 1.11 εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον.

In verses ten through thirteen John elaborates on the response to the coming of Jesus into this world as the true light. First there is the negative rejection of Him in verses ten and eleven. Then the positive acceptance in verses twelve and thirteen. In the negative rejection of Jesus as the true light John first covers the world, and then the Jewish people.



Notice how the response of each group is described by John. The **world did not know Him** (ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω). That is, the very world He created did not recognize Him as their Creator and Savior. They did not establish a personal acquaintance with Jesus as the true light. The pagan world of Jesus' day hardly knew of His existence. For example, in the Roman and Greek literature of the ancient world for the first two hundred years of the Christian era, virtually no mention of Jesus can be found. Even the one single brief reference misspells Jesus' name and contains enough inaccurate information to raise questions as to whether the Roman historian was talking about Christ or not. From the Gentile view Jesus lived out his short life in a remote, rather unimportant part of the world almost completely unnoticed by anyone of any importance in His time. Even today, some two thousand years later, the vast majority of the world does not know Christ. The majority may know a few isolated bits of information about His life and death, but the vast majority have no saving knowledge of Jesus. Things haven't changed much over time.

Next John declares that "**His own people did not accept him**" (οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον). Of the several million Jews living in Jesus' day around the Mediterranean world, only a few thousand ever came to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. The vast majority of the Jewish population refused to accept Him into their lives, as John claims. Yet, these were the covenant people of God with whom God had been dealing since the time of Abraham thousands of years before. Of all the people in that world who should have recognized Jesus as God's Son it was the Jewish people. Jesus came into their midst to teach and minister. Yet they did not welcome Him into their lives. The four gospels tell a story of initial popularity and then waning acceptance that **ultimately culminates** in the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus during the final week of His earthly life.

<sup>8</sup>For details see Michael J. Wilkins, "Light," *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* online.

John's assessment of the situation during Jesus' earthly life is largely negative. Neither creation itself nor the Jewish people accepted Jesus as God's Son and as the divine Logos bringing salvational light. In all honesty, the situation hasn't changed much in our time either. The vast majority of humanity does not have a clue as to who Jesus Christ is. In spite of massive opportunity to read the scripture and to hear gospel witness, most people remain appallingly ignorant of Jesus. Many refuse to acknowledge that he ever existed. Most will simply say he seems to have been a good man with some interesting but radical religious ideas.

Among modern Jews the same situation prevails today as did by the end of the first Christian century when the fourth gospel was written. With the emergence of the Pauline mission to Gentiles in the middle of the first century, the percentage of Jewish Christians to the total number of believers began dropping rapidly. By the end of the first Christian century only a very small minority of believers came out of a Jewish background. The very covenant people of God who most of all should have realized who Jesus is refused to accept Him as God's light and Deliverer. John makes the point that this rejection of Jesus had its start during Jesus' lifetime and was dominant during the Lord's earthly ministry. Because He refused to conform to their expectation of Messiah, they were unwilling to accept Him. They wanted only a political deliverer who would restore their country to world wide prominence and power. Jesus would only give them spiritual deliverance. And their spiritual blindness prevented them from seeing the vast superiority of this kind of deliverance. Most Jews in our world still look at Jesus the same way as their ancestors did. And consequently they remain in their sin and under the wrath of God.

The question for you this morning is simply: how are you going to respond to Jesus? You can easily side with the majority opinion and reject Jesus. But just as the gospel record affirms, such a decision is not without consequence. Note Jesus' words in John 3:18-20:

Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.

The penalty of rejecting Jesus is condemnation.<sup>9</sup> Eternal banishment from the presence of Almighty God in everlasting torments and pain will be your fate in making this decision.<sup>10</sup> No loophole around this is possible. God gives you a choice, but that choice always has consequences that are inescapable.

### III. The Light is received, vv. 12-13

12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God

1.12 ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, 1.13 οἳ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν.

On the positive side the gospel writer affirms that some did respond positively to Jesus as the true light of God. In verses twelve and thirteen a single sentence in the underlying Greek text describes the nature and impact of this reaction to Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

The core expression, i.e., main clause in the sentence, is simply "He gave them power to become God's children." The positive response to Jesus as true light brings a radical change. We move from being children of the Devil to becoming children of God. John applies a label traditionally used of Jews to believers. The legitimate children of God are not Jews, but believers in Jesus Christ. Racial boundaries are eliminated. In fact, all limitations apart from the one demand of positive acceptance of Jesus are set aside. Paul put it this way to the Galatian believers (Gal. 3:25-29):

But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.** And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

This was a radical claim in the first century, and no one that set well with the religious leaders of the Jewish people. It denied legitimacy to them as God's people, and asserted legitimacy only to believers in Jesus as the true people of God. The claim is still radical in the eyes of many people. They don't want an exclusive Christianity that insists on the truth of God being followed. But reality is reality. No one can belong to God

<sup>9</sup>John 3:18, GNT: ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτόν οὐ κρίνεται· ὁ δὲ μὴ πιστεύων ἤδη κέκριται, ὅτι μὴ πεπίστευκεν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ μονογενοῦς υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ.

<sup>10</sup>For more details on the biblical teaching, see David L. Turner, "Condemnation," Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology online.

11 For a visual diagram of the thought structure in verses 12 and 13, see Lorin L. Cranford, "Diagram of John 1:1-18," cranfordville.com.

outside of a positive acceptance of Jesus, as Jesus himself will declare in Jhn. 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

With graphic depiction John details the nature of the positive response to Jesus as ‘true light.’

First, a positive response is “all who received him” (ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν). The verb tense of ἔλαβον underscores a decisive act of positive reception of Jesus. In other words, you must consciously choose to receive Jesus into your life. It doesn’t happen automatically, nor does it take place as a continuing process. In the verb tense coordination of the Greek sentence, the moment of reception is also the moment of granting of power to become God’s child (ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι).<sup>12</sup>

Second, not only in initial receiving of Jesus does this power / authority to become God’s child take place, but emerging out of this reception is an ongoing “believing in His name” (τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ). Many modern translations misleadingly translate the Greek participle phrase as completed action, rather than as continuous action.<sup>13</sup> Thus receiving and believing are viewed as two sides of the same coin. But this is false and makes a fundamental failure to correctly read the present tense of the participle for believing (πιστεύουσιν). What John is declaring is that out of the act of receiving (ἔλαβον) comes an ongoing believing (πιστεύουσιν). The act of receiving Christ produces a continuous entrusting of our life into the hands of Jesus. Without such, no legitimate reception takes place.

Third, not only does the initial reception of Jesus as true light bring the granting of power to become God’s children, but the lengthy Greek relative clause in verse thirteen affirms this action of becoming (γενέσθαι) as nothing less than a spiritual birth experience: οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ’ ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν (“who were born, not of bloods or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God”). A birthing action occurs in the moment of reception of Jesus, and this is the means of the becoming God’s child.

With triple denial in the first part of the clause, John absolutely denies any human instrumentality in this birthing moment. The expressions, “not of bloods or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man,” has poetic thrust as emphatic denial of human involvement in “were born” (ἐγεννήθησαν). The only human response to Jesus is to receive Him. God does the rest in ‘siring’ us as His children. The phrase ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν underscores God as the exclusive source (ἐκ) of the birthing moment. As such, the male involvement in the experience is stressed. God is our Father, not our mother. We exist as His children from His ‘seed’ and thus partake of His nature and character. In the design of the sentence, our reception of Jesus triggers His granting us the right to become God’s child through this birthing moment.

What a marvelous declaration we find here. With Jesus’ coming into this world as the true light thus exclusively reflecting God, we have the opportunity to be “lit up” (ὁ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον), that is, to experience God’s saving light in our lives. And what God requires of us is centered in receiving Jesus into our life in a decision that puts us completely in His trust and leadership over us the rest of our journey. This triggers the divine action of spiritual birth that enables us to become God’s children.

## CONCLUSION

Wow! What an opportunity! No wonder we can come to this first Sunday of Advent in hope. The coming of Jesus into this world gives all humanity the possibility of change and transformation. Everyone has the chance to become a child of God. No matter your race, your education, your economic status -- nothing stands in the way of this miracle taking place in your life. God is fully prepared to make you His child through Jesus. All you must do is receive Christ into your life with full surrender and commitment to Him.

Have you made this commitment? Today is the time.

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<sup>12</sup>The consistent use of the constative Aorist tense verbal expressions underscore the events of reception, granting, and becoming as happening simultaneously.

<sup>13</sup>For example, NRSV: “who believed in his name”; NIV: “to those who believed in his name”; NLT: “to all who believed him”; The Message: “who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said”; TEV: “believed in him” et als.