

Prayers

Opening prayer

Hear our prayer, O Lord. You have seen so much more than we have seen, You have heard so much more than we have heard, You have touched more lives than we can ever know. Therefore, make us humble before Your majesty, Your greatness, Your experience and Your wisdom, and help us always learn of You, this Christmas and throughout our lives. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: CHRISTMAS

1. For yourself

Ask the Lord to help you remember the wonders of Christmas in the coming months and year. If you have a diary, write down the things that have spoken to you especially, and wait to see how the Lord will use them.

2. For your friends and family

Ask the Lord to bless your family and friends at the turn of the year. Praise God for the good things of the past year, and off to Him the difficult things

3. For the church and its work

Thank God for the year that has passed by and especially for the good work that has been done by your church and its fellowship. Pray for those who have put themselves into the life of the church and blessed many by their work.

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Thank God for your country and for the many good things you enjoy about it and your privileges of citizenship

Meditation

Jesus is the bright light of God;
And through Him we have life in all its fullness.
He shines with brightness and clarity;
And by His light we see the beauty of our surroundings.
He shines across the whole of the world;
And by His light we know the Creator may be found.
He shines to expose all our darkness;
And by His light our troubles and sins are resolved.
He shines into the depths of the soul;
And by His light we can find eternal forgiveness.
He shines between heaven and earth;
And by His light our future is eternally secured.
Come, Lord Jesus, and shine on me.

Bible Study

Bible passage – John 1:6-9

⁶ There was a man who was sent from God, and his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that through him, all people might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came as a witness to the light. ⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

Review

In the first five verses of his Gospel, John begins by describing Jesus as the 'Word'. This is his way of saying that Jesus is God, and was present at Creation. John then describes Jesus as the 'Light'; the One who has come into the world as the Light of Salvation and has therefore broken the powers of darkness (John 1:1-5). From this point in the first chapter, the idea of Jesus as the Word disappears, and John now concentrates on Jesus as the Light. But there is another switch. Instead of focussing on Jesus exclusively, John describes the testimony of the other John, the man we know as 'John the Baptist'. This is the same man we know from the other Gospels, who preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins and also told people to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. John was not divine as Jesus was, he was human, and so his testimony is that of a prophet, '*he came as a witness to testify about the light ...*' (1:7).

It is most likely that the John who wrote this Gospel was the same John who was a disciple and one of Jesus' closest friends (described elsewhere as the '*disciple Jesus loved*' - see John 21:20), and we should not confuse the two. However, a little known connection exists between the two that suggests John (the Gospel writer) was himself deeply influenced by John the Baptist. In this passage, John (the Gospel writer) says of John the Baptist, '*he came ... so that ... all might believe*' (1:7), and quite remarkably, this is almost the same as conclusion to the Gospel of John found towards the end of his Gospel; '*these are written ... so that ... you might believe ...*' (John 20:31). John the Baptist may have been the first to bear witness to Jesus as the Light of the World, but John the other disciple realised that it was their task to continue this witness, and so now we do the same, '*so that ... all might believe*'.

The Gospel of John does not bring a conformable message, but one that challenges us to the core. John wrote about Jesus as '*Light ... coming into the world*' (1:9), and the emphasis here is on the Universal nature of the Gospel, with words like 'all' (1:7) and 'everyone' (1:9). In today's world, Christianity is regarded as one religion amongst many, and there is great pressure from society, and even from some sections of the church, for Christians to accept that religion is essentially pluralistic. Some suggest that Christians bring to the world a valuable, moral 'spirituality' which enriches humanity along with other faiths. This, however, is utterly contrary to the Gospel we have received. John's Gospel appeals to us to accept that one God has made the world and shows Himself uniquely as one 'Light'. This light is found in Jesus, and His revelation of God is valid for all people and for all time. Jesus is the Saviour of all humanity, and together with John, we must bear witness to Him alone. Christianity is not a religious system reflecting human choice about life; it is the truth about God and His relationship with people through the Saviour. John could not be clearer about this.

Scripture reveals one other thing to us, which is that God is always one step ahead of us. He sees what we do and has to deal with our sins, yet His plans for the world and for us always come to fruition because He is in command of His world. John the Baptist was one who, by the grace of God, came close to the steps of Jesus; in earthly terms he was one step ahead, but in heavenly terms he was one step behind! He announced to the world that the Light was coming (1:9); and even as he began his ministry (see the other Gospels, e.g. Matthew 3) Jesus was growing up in Galilee, preparing His ministry and maybe even aware of the preaching of John. God's plan is set!

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. How important is the testimony of John the Baptist, and how may we follow in his footsteps?
2. Why does Christianity claim to be the truth about God, in the face of claims by other religions? How can we expect other people to respond to such a claim?
3. What does it mean to talk about Jesus as 'the true light, which gives light to everyone'?

Discipleship challenges

- *Have a good look at what John (the Gospel writer) says about John the Baptist, and identify those points at which you feel challenged by the testimony of John. What does this text say to you, and how will you respond?*
 - *Where does the 'Light' need to shine in our world today? Talk to some other Christian friends about this and try to create a plan of action that responds to this challenge.*
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Final Prayer

Jesus Christ, Your servant John the Baptist announced that You were coming. May we have the courage to do as he did, and announce to the world what You are doing. May we follow our commission as he did, without fear and with commitment, and as he did, may we stand firm in the face of adversity. Thank you for the testimony of John. AMEN
