

## Series: Cosmic Christ

# “Radiance of God’s Glory”

December 10, 2023 A.M.  
West Side Church of Christ  
Searcy, Arkansas  
Nathan Guy

Text: Hebrews 1:1-4

C. S. Lewis once said, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen; not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” That is, everything makes sense in the light of Jesus Christ.

In the beginning, the first thing God declares is “let there be light.” There is no sun, only God and light, just as it will be in the new creation: we will need no sun, for the Lamb is our light (Rev 21:23; 22:5).

### **THE LANGUAGE OF LIGHT**

The Bible loves using the language of “light” when talking about our Lord. When God descends upon the mountain in Exodus, the proof he was there included not just thunder, but lightning (Ex 19:16; 20:18). When Moses descended the mountain, he had to wear a veil over his face (Ex 34:33-35). Do you remember why? Because, says the text, the skin of his face was shining bright “because he had been talking with God” (Ex 34:29). So, years later when Jesus ascended the mount of transfiguration, the proof that he was God’s Son included this: his face “Shone like the sun” (Matt 17:2). It is a sign and symbol that we are dealing with the Lord—the one “wrapped in light as with a garment” (Ps 104:2), who “dwells in unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16). He is the “Father of lights” (James 1:17); and we all walk in darkness until we have the light of life. And so, we cry with the Psalmist “Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!” (Ps 4:6).

This is why the Bible loves using the language of “light” when talking about our Lord. After all, it is such a fitting metaphor. When the plague of darkness hit Egypt, the poor Egyptians couldn’t move because the darkness was so thick, “but all the Israelites had light where they lived” (Ex 10:23). Of course they did; they had the light of the knowledge of God. When God led his children through the wilderness, he provided a

pillar of fire by night “to give them light” (Ex 13:21; Neh 9:12), because that is what God does for his people. He gives us light. Job reflected with his friends, “He uncovers the depths out of darkness, and brings deep darkness to light” (Job 12:22). King David once sang a song of Thanksgiving saying, “you are my lamp, O Lord; the Lord lightens my darkness” (2 Sam 22:29). So when God wanted his people to remember that He was with them always, he commanded them to set up a lamp in the tabernacle and to constantly prepare oil for it, so it would burn regularly—an always-burning lamp to remember the burning bush, the shining mountain, and the light that guided them through the desert (Ex 27:20; Lev 24:2). These images became a fitting backdrop for some of the most beautiful poetry in Scripture: “It is you who light my lamp,” says the Psalm; “the Lord, my God, lights up my darkness” (Ps 18:28). “In your light, we see light” (Ps 36:9). “O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them lead me to your holy hill and to your dwelling” (Ps 43:3).

Even the coming of Jesus—the babe in Bethlehem—is a story wrapped in light. 800 years before his coming, Isaiah wrote prophetically “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined” (Isa 9:2). He tells of the “light to the nations,” and that their light would “break forth like the dawn” (Is 42:6; 58:8). We won’t need the sun, says Isaiah, for the Lord himself will be our light (Is 60:19-20). And so, looking forward to that cool Bethlehem morning, Isaiah says “Arise, shine! For your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen among you...Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isa 60:1, 3). And that is precisely what happened.

Like the children of Israel in the wilderness, it was the flaming light of a distant star that led the wise men from the East. And the glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds. Nations came to his light; noble magi to the brightness of his dawn (Matt 2; Luke 2).

Throughout his life, the Savior wrapped his language in light. “I am the light of the world,” said Jesus (John 9:5). “I have come into the world as light (John 12:46);” “Walk while you have the light (John 12:35).” “While you have the light,” Jesus continues, “believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (John 12:36). There was darkness over the face of the land when Christ died on the cruel cross (Mark 15:33); but early in the morning on the first day of the week, the Son rose again. His face “like lightning” (Matthew 28:3), he rose forevermore. The light so piercing, so eternal, that the New Testament writers speak of conversion as being rescued from darkness and “translated” into a kingdom of light (Col 1:12-13).

## **THE WONDER OF LIGHT**

I have always loved light. I was born and raised in California, and I never had a rained-out baseball game. We lived in the high desert; it was warm, and it was bright. So, I appreciate the imagery of light. But ask a scientist, and they will tell you the story of light is far more remarkable than you could ever imagine.

Light, you see, is wonderful and strange; beautiful and baffling.<sup>1</sup> We could start with a simple question: is light a wave or a particle? Isaac Newton thought he knew the answer: light is made up of lots of particles called “corpuscles.” But nearly 100 years later, Thomas Young conducted the famous “double slit” experiment that challenged Newton’s theory. He sent a beam of light through two slits in paper. What appeared on the back wall was not two bands of light, but a pattern of stripes—an interference pattern—which proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that light is a wave, not a particle.

Well, sort of. Go forward another 100 years to 1905. Albert Einstein showed that light traveled in little packets of energy called photons. Light, it turned out, was more like a particle, or maybe like a wave and a particle. Depending.

Depending on what? Here’s where it gets weird. It depends on whether we are watching it or not. You heard that right. Light behaves differently when you look at it. Light cares about being observed. Whether by you or a machine. It doesn’t matter. If it’s being monitored or observed, it acts differently than if it’s not being observed.

For this reason, scientists say light is more like “a wave of probability.” When you look at it or ask it a question like “where are you,” it is in a single location. When you aren’t looking, it travels in all directions at the same time.

## **THE METAPHOR OF LIGHT**

Are you beginning to see where I’m going with this? Three incredible conclusions. The first is Christian evidence-y: only God could create something so beautiful and elusive, don’t you think?

My second reflection is this: what a perfect description for The Word who became flesh—the omnipresent God lying in a manger! A powerful, elusive reality that is two things at once, wishing to be seen and known, but far more than what you could ever observe. Living in a single location, and yet everywhere all at once.

---

<sup>1</sup> See this video: Astrum, “The Attribute of Light Science Still Can’t Explain,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfwaEhNg9Oc&ab\\_channel=Astrum](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfwaEhNg9Oc&ab_channel=Astrum)

My third observation is that God knew all of this when by the Word, he created light in the first place. The first thing in all creation would reflect the glory of God in a way beyond our ability to fully grasp.

And so we come to the second of the great descriptions of Jesus in Hebrews 1:1-4. Last week we discussed the pregnant phrase “through Him He created the universe.” This morning, we move to verse 3: “He is the radiance of the glory of God” (ESV). You don’t have to know Greek to love Jesus or to appreciate the power of biblical language. Comparing English translations can be very helpful. And so, we find alternative language equally dazzling:

“The brightness of His glory” (KJV), “God’s son has all the brightness of God’s own glory” (CEV)

“The Son is the shining brightness of God’s glory” (NiRV) or “God’s Son shines out with God’s glory” (TLB)

[He is] “The reflection of God’s glory” (GW)

[He] “Perfectly mirrors God” (MSG)

One of the most intriguing translations is an old one: The American Standard Version of 1901. They chose the English word “effulgence.” We don’t use that word much anymore, but a quick look at [vocabulary.com](http://vocabulary.com) give us this stunning definition: “Effulgence is brightness taken to the extreme. You may be dazzled by it, stunned by it, or even overcome by it.” ([Vocabulary.com](http://Vocabulary.com))

And so, we take all that we have learned about light today, and couple it with all we learned about the size of the universe, and how much more—infinately more—God must be. It’s stunning. Listen to two more translations:

“He shines as bright as God” (WE), “Shimmering with his glory” (VOICE).

It’s easy to get lost in the magic of it all and miss how truly distinct this language makes Jesus.

Go back to the Mount of transfiguration. It sounds so much like a story about Moses from Exodus. Both stories place “after six days.” They both go up on a high mountain, they both leave with shiny faces. But please don’t miss this important twist (that is not original with me): When Moses put a veil over his shiny face, it was because “he reflected the glory of God.” It was an outward showing of an outward experience. But

“Jesus produced the glory of God”: it was an outward expression of an inner truth. It was as if the glory of God within him burst forth, shining through every crevice. Moses became a sign and symbol for a glory greater than himself. But Jesus is the light source! The light emanates from him.<sup>2</sup>

You can't separate the claim that Jesus is “the radiance of God's glory” from the next line: that he is “the exact imprint of his nature.” Jesus does more than share and point. Remember how the NEB translate John 1:1? “What God was, the Word was.” In a highly poetic photogenic way, the transfiguration declares “what God is, Jesus is.”

## **JESUS AS THE LIGHT**

And so let us consider just what this imagery tells us about Jesus, the light of the world, the shining brightness of God. Tim Keller offers these few helpful reminders:<sup>3</sup>

First, light is the most basic source of life, and so Jesus is the source of life. We all learned about photosynthesis in school: Light feeds the planet. No light, no life. Calling Jesus the light of the world, the shining, radiating, brightness of God is to remind us that Jesus is the basic, foundational, fundamental, and only true source of life. He made us in the garden, he formed us in the womb, and he renews us in our baptism with new life and a new birth.

Second, light is the most basic source of truth, and so Jesus is the source of all truth. As any parent of a 2-year-old, I know what it's like to stumble in the darkness. I can't count how many times I left Grace's crib at 2AM to go get the milk and bread for the sleepless one, only to walk right into the closet, or the wall, or to step on who knows how many plastic farm animals. I know what it's like to stumble in the darkness. Light gives us knowledge and awareness. Light reveals things—it makes things known. Lies live in the shadows until the truth comes to light. Light is the most basic source of truth. So, calling Jesus the shining light, the bright radiance of God is a reminder that Jesus reveals God to us, he shows us what is real and what is true. He points us to things that matter. If there is no Jesus in it, there is no truth in it.

Third, light is the most basic source of joy. I learned this in science class. Some scientists have to conduct experiments for long stretches of time in parts of the world that are barren of light. Think of the North Pole, or even outer space. And the studies prove that people who live long stretches in the dark deal with heavy depression and despair.

---

<sup>2</sup> See Tim Keller, “Jesus the King:” <https://www.kingschurchkld.com/sermon/the-glory-of-jesus>

<sup>3</sup> See Keller, “I am the light,” Nov 22, 1998: <https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/i-am-the-light/>

We don't need a science lesson to prove this—just think of any of our loved ones suffering from seasonal affective disorder around this time of year. People need light—not just for life and knowledge, but even for joy! Why do you think Grace wants me to turn on the light at 2 AM? Because scary monsters live in the dark, but comfort and peace, a sigh of relief and a feeling of safe, secure joy wells up inside her when we sit in the light. Calling Jesus the radiating light of the glory of God is a reminder that focusing on anything other than Christ, taking our cues or getting out of sorts about any issue other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified is a recipe for hopeless despair. But Jesus—centering on Jesus—is the antidote to despair, for he is the hope of the world. Glory in the highest!

But we can't close without considering a shocking fourth reality about light: it is the source of life, the source of truth, and the source of joy. But it is also very dangerous. For light, unmediated, will destroy all of life, blind you to your surroundings, and it will steal all your joy. Think about that for a moment. Too much light—light sent through a magnifying glass—ends life, it burns up life. Too much light—staring directly at the solar eclipse all day—can blind you and make you walk in darkness. And when you enjoy living a lie, when you try to ignore dark realities about your life, a spotlight brings all that to light and makes it so you can't ignore it; and when you are forced to stare in the mirror and come face to face with all the problems in your life, it will steal all your joy. I had terrible acne when I was a teenager. It was so bad, I would often avoid looking at myself in the mirror. I would put my hand over my face so I could only see my hair as I combed in the morning. The Lord blessed me with some medication that fixed that awful and painful memory. But I remember very well those moments when someone snapped a photo in the blaring sun and then placed it where I couldn't miss it. Or when I walked around a corner in the middle of the day and ran into a mirror. I was unavoidably shown by the light what I really look like!

That's Jesus too, you know. We are all flawed. Tainted. Less than we ought to be. Paul says the one who thinks he doesn't have those problems knows even less. And when we see Jesus in his beauty, his holiness, his joy, and peace, and love, we don't look better in comparison; we look worse. We look hideous.

And that's both important...and good. We will never find healing until we recognize that we are sick. And we won't know how sick until we stand in the light of Jesus Christ. All that language about future judgment—the sin-sick world falling under the condemnation of God in the light of his coming—that language is moved up for us. Today can be our judgment day if we will allow it. Sounds scary, I know. But hear me out. This day, like every day, is an opportunity to stand on the Damascus road. Today we can let the light of Jesus Christ convict us. We can expel the toxic poison of sin that keeps us burdened rather blessed. We can acknowledge our need for the sanitizing work

that only Christ can do. And he-is-thorough. He will leave no part of you unscathed. But in return, you will experience a cleansing like you've never experienced before. A cleansing by fire. And the healing ointment? None other than God's Holy Spirit himself, wrapped up in Him, and declared clean, pure, and holy. New life, new knowledge, and new joy.

John the Baptist said that the Christ would baptize with the holy spirit and fire. It is fitting, that Christ gives you his holy Spirit, and the fiery cleansing of judgment for sin, but transferred to Jesus himself, there in the watery grave of baptism. For in that act, we are united with him in his death. In that act we "wash away our sins." In that act, we pledge a good conscience as we let Christ begin his work in us anew.

It's time for us to clean out our closets. Bring the light in.