

## The Light Shines Best in Darkness

Merry Christmas everyone – I hope you’re enjoying the service. Our teams have worked so hard to prepare this for you and I think they’ve done an incredible job this year. In a few minutes we’ll go back to another song and our candle lighting time together. But first let me say to all of you who are here at Highlands for the first time – welcome – I’m so glad you’re here. You need to know that just over 20 years ago, we had a dream to do more than just start a new church – we wanted to create a place where people could experience God – and all that God has for them – to help people reach their full potential – because listen – God has more for all of us than we’re currently experiencing – we call it pursuing higher heights. So for over 20 years now we’ve been leading people to four things that God has always wanted for you – to know God in an intimate and real way, to find freedom in the areas of your life that keeps you from being the best version of yourself – then to discover your God-given purpose – the reason God created you, so all of us can live our lives making a difference in the lives of others. And I want to personally invite you to join us in that journey. You know the New Year just around the corner and there is no better time to get a fresh start on life and go after all that God has for you.

More on that in just a few minutes – but before we light candles together, let me share a thought from God’s Word for you this Christmas.

I’m sitting here in my living room at my house next to 2 beautiful lights – our fireplace and our Christmas tree.

And by the way – you do know that there are 2 types of Christmas tree  
The fashion statement that looks like it could be on the cover of a magazine  
And the fun tree – that doesn’t look that great but has lots of great memories on it  
Our Christmas tree is the second type – we have ornaments from our first  
Christmas together – the ornament we got when all of the kids were born  
I even have one of my most treasured ornaments – one my grandmother crocheted  
for me – I even have a couple that have been sent from the White House from a  
couple of different administrations – but the most treasured ornament on the tree –  
LSU – geaux tigers.

## Christmas Candlelight Service

---

Enough of that – but I do love our tree – but notice with me that both the Christmas tree and the fireplace are not only beautiful – but their beauty shines best the darker the room is. Let me say it this way – the light shines best in darkness. In fact – here’s the word God gave me for you this year – He sees the darkness all around you – but the darker it is – the more beautiful His light shines in that darkness.

Lord knows there have been some dark times over the past 22 months – and really beyond that – but if we’re not careful – we’ll get way too focused on the darkness – to the point that that is all we see. But here’s the thought – if you’re in a dark place – don’t focus on the darkness – look for the light.

You know Christmas is celebrated in the darkest part of the year – the Winter Solstice – the days are short and the nights are long – it’s literally the darkest time of the year. By the way my birthday is the opposite of that – I was born on June 21 which is the Summer Solstice – and it’s the longest day – just ask my mom.

Christmas is a reminder that Jesus came in the darkest part of life. Think with me for a moment about that first Christmas. It was marked by darkness – not just in the natural – night – dark – but it was dark in many other ways.

You say – PC why are you talking about darkness this Christmas?

Honestly – in 38 years – I have never seen more fear and more darkness in people’s lives. In fact – I really decided that this year I would bring a message on fear and darkness after something that happened a few months ago. Back in October I felt led to pray for people who were gripped with fear – panic attacks – sleepless nights – crippling worry – and I felt like God spoke to me that I needed to bind the spirit of fear off of people and that God would supernaturally set people free that moment. And I don’t usually do this – but asked people to stand if that was what they were going through – and much to my surprise – two-thirds of the room stood for prayer. It was in that moment that I decided to develop this little message on darkness and fear. As I studied for this message – I saw really for the first time how many times the phrase “fear not” is in the Christmas story.

## Christmas Candlelight Service

---

In at least 4 of the characters in the Christmas story – they were told “do not be afraid” or “fear not.” And I think each of these four characters in the Christmas story represent the kind of fears and darkness that people are dealing with today

Watch this...

I think the first fear was the fear the Shepherds were feeling and it represents physical darkness/fear. You know the story – the Shepherds were out in their fields working the all-nighter – a tough life and probably not the highest paying job. And I think it’s so interesting that of all the people that God could have announced the birth of His Son to – he picked people who were working hard that night. He didn’t go to the glamorous or the rich or even to the religious – He went to people whose lives were hard and physically dark.

The Bible says the shepherds were watching their flocks by night...

(Luke 2:10-11 NKJV) Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

There may be some of you here today – experiencing a physical darkness and fear  
Maybe your job – or school is really tough right now  
Maybe you fear what’s going on in the economy – worried about making ends meet – or maybe you’re out of work right now – and things are tough financially.

For others of you – you’re experiencing other types of physically darkness  
Perhaps the loss of loved one – or you’re dealing with sickness  
Or maybe your worried about the virus and fear has gripped you as they keep naming these variants with another Greek letter.

And you need to know that Jesus wants to bring light into the physical fears and darkness that you are dealing with.

But there’s another character in the Christmas story who had fear – King Herod

## Christmas Candlelight Service

---

King Herod was losing it emotionally and I believe he represents those who are experiencing emotional darkness. Herod had such a paranoia about the birth of Jesus and fear of losing his seat on the throne that he not only killed all of the boys 2 years old and under – but history records that he even killed his own sons

And when the wise men came from the East to worship Jesus – the Bible says...

(Matthew 2:3 NIV) When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

I looked up that word “disturbed” in the original language of the New Testament Greek and the word means “to cause one inward commotion” “to take away calmness of mind”. One definition said “to strike one’s spirit with fear and dread.”

I think that’s where a lot of people are today – there is no calmness of mind – there’s inward commotion. You have emotional darkness. And I’m so passionate about helping people who are depressed, have anxiety, crippling worry. And the message is the message of Christmas – that God wants to help us step into the light – and that’s not just statement – it can become a reality.

But watch this – there’s another character in the Christmas story who was in darkness and afraid – and that’s Joseph. Can you imagine how shocked Joseph was to find out his fiancé Mary was with child and she was claiming that it was God who made her pregnant. Just put yourself in his shoes for a moment and think about the decision he had to make. The Bible says he was thinking about putting her away quietly – quietly to protect his reputation and hers. And the Bible says...

(Matthew 1:20 NIV) But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Joseph had fears that so many people have today and that’s the third area – and that’s in the area of our relationships – relational darkness.

And to me – one of the darkest things you can experience – relational darkness

## Christmas Candlelight Service

---

Fear of family not working out – worries about your kids – struggles with your marriage – and not only that but in Joseph’s case – he had to be struggling with people saying things about him that was not true. Can you imagine if Joseph lived today – the people on Facebook who would be ridiculing he and Mary for something wasn’t true – and how painful that feeling is. And some of you are in that kind of darkness. Some of you are here today with relational pain and God is here to bring light into that dark place – to dispel the darkness and fear.

So there’s physical darkness and fear, emotional darkness, relational darkness, and there’s one more – and it’s found in the story of Mary – the mother of Jesus. Most scholars say Mary would have been a young teenager when God picked her to be the mother of Jesus. The Bible says that the angel Gabriel came to her and said...

(Luke 1:30-34 NLT) “Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

I think Mary’s fear represents a spiritual fear – a spiritual darkness – one that by the way she immediately overcame when she believe God and said let it be as you have said.

Mary had a fear where God was making her a promise – and she didn’t know how He could do it – for a moment she lacked faith.

Some of you here today are in the same place – your faith is weak and it’s creating darkness all around you.

You know the opposite of faith is fear and doubt  
And when we have fear our faith struggles  
And when our faith struggles – our lives struggle

Let’s be honest – some of you are in sin – and you’re convicted of it – and you feel the weight of guilt and shame – and it’s created a darkness for you.

## Christmas Candlelight Service

---

That's where I was 43 Christmases ago – 15 years old  
In trouble with law – parents – friends  
Invited to church  
But I resisted the light – didn't respond to the light  
But in my bedroom that night I couldn't take it anymore – let God in

I have a word for you this Christmas

God sees your darkness and your fear – and He wants to bring light

How? Well let me show you the first words God ever said  
In fact – you could argue that this message is the main message of the Bible  
Because they are the first words out of God's mouth

(Genesis 1:1-3 NIV) In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

And about 4000 years after God spoke these words – Jesus came to the earth and He defines His own mission this way...

(John 12:46 NLT) I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark.

(Genesis 1:3 NIV) "Let there be light," and there was light.

Webster's – Let – "to permit to enter"  
I gave Webster an "amen!" – come on Webster  
Because that's the secret to having light in the darkness – we have to permit it to enter. And here's what will happen...

(2 Corinthians 4:6 NLT) For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

## Christmas Candlelight Service

---

And that's my Christmas prayer for you this year  
It's my prayer – because I don't think the world is going to get any brighter  
But don't be afraid of the darkness – God's light shines best in the darkness

We just have to permit that light to enter

How? Well again – the opposite of fear is faith  
I think it's time we become people of faith  
What do I mean by that?  
I mean going all in with God – giving Him your best  
Being a person of faith

And here's what I know – if you do – you're not going to believe the difference  
that God will make in your life. So let me say something to you that we've been  
saying to people for more than 20 years...

“Give us a year of your life.”

What does that mean? Gives us a year and go all in – attend services – conferences  
– groups – find your purpose – serve others – let us take you on a spiritual journey  
– and watch what God will do

The new year is going to be amazing – we're starting a brand new series – we'll  
have our 21 days of prayer – go all in. And I'm not just saying that to those who  
are hearing it for the first time – I'm talking to all of us – let's make 2022 the  
greatest faith year of our lives – and watch what happens.

You know one of the things I like to do – have a focus for the New Year  
Announce it at our Christmas services. And I've prayed and prayed for God to give  
me a word for all of us in 2022 and I believe that...

## 2022: The Year of Great Faith

Not just average faith – not half-hearted faith

## Christmas Candlelight Service

---

But great faith – a faith that trusts – a faith that believes – one that will impact our attitude and make us stronger no matter what goes on around us. Great faith.

You know the Bible says that faith is the substance of things hoped for. Faith is our spiritual attitude – the belief that God is not only able – but He’s willing. Faith is the opposite of fear

Faith is the thing that paves the way for joy, possibilities, and hope, and it cultivates the calling of God in your life.

Faith is the thing that empowers you to be who you were called to be.

Faith is trust. Trusting in the knowledge that in spite of my current experience, good things are coming.

Faith is clinging on to God instead of clinging on to clarity.

Faith is clinging on to God in the midst of the darkness. When things are not going the way I thought, when it seems like life is falling apart, we can hang on to the faithful God. And that’s what God is calling us to do. To be the kind of person that hangs onto the Lord – instead of the news, circumstance, let downs, or betrayal, you hang onto God. And as you do, He’s going to bring light into your life.

In 2022 the whole focus of the year will be Great Faith

A new attitude – a new passionate pursuit of God. So let’s all give God an all-in kind of year and let’s do it together.

So let me close with this. A lot of you know I’ve grown up in church – my dad playing the organ – mom in the choir – I’ve played music my whole life – and I love the old Christmas carols and the old hymns. And there’s one we want to sing to you today – Angels we have heard on high – and the old hymn – joyful, joyful we adore you. Listen to the words...

Joyful, joyful, we adore You,



## Christmas Candlelight Service

---

God of glory, Lord of love;  
Hearts unfold like flowers before You,  
Opening to the sun above.

Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;  
Drive the dark of doubt away;  
Giver of immortal gladness,  
Fill us with the light of day!