

# Watchnight Service

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[ 0 : 00 ] reading from John's Gospel and chapter 3, that's page 1066 if you're following in one of the Bibles in front of you. John chapter 3.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict. Light has come into the world but people love darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. This is the word of the Lord.

Well good evening let me add my welcome to Martin's. My name's Jamie. I'm one of the ministry trainees here at St. Silas and it's my joy to be leading us through our brief time in John's gospel this evening.

It'd be a great help if you could keep your Bibles open at page 1066. And let me pray and ask that God would be at work through his word. Heavenly Father we praise you for Christmas. We praise you for Jesus.

And so as we see your great love and see the wonderful news of Jesus let us draw near to you now. Lord speak through me and guide my words at this time. In Jesus precious name. Amen.

[ 2 : 25 ] How big a deal is Christmas then? I mean bland turkey. Nice. Presents. Nice enough. Time with family. Lovely. Can't complain about some mulled wine and mint pies too. But John here says that Christmas is an infinitely bigger deal than all of that. Light and life. Darkness and death. This is the epic canvas on which John paints the Christmas story. His dramatic account of Jesus, life, death and resurrection couldn't be on a bigger scale. And so this evening if you've never heard of Jesus or if you've heard the gospel a thousand times. Even if you've thought about Jesus is coming a dozen times this week already.

Let's just allow ourselves for the next 15 minutes to marvel at how good Jesus is. How amazing it is that he has come. And we're going to do that with three points. Love, light and life. Our first point this evening is love. God's saving love that is the reason for it all. Let's read that famous verse again.

Have a look at John chapter 3 verse 16 with me. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Remarkable.

Elsewhere John states that God is love. But can God really love this rotten world? Can he love this world even as it starts war after war? As it wrecks the planet? As some hoard wealth while others starve? Can God love people even as we lie? As we hurt each other? As we fail to love sometimes even our own families? Can he love us even as we ignore him? I mean I look at my life. I those jarring memories they rack my brain and I think how can anyone love this? And yet this is precisely what John is saying. God is love and he loves the world. That includes me. That includes you.

Look at the scale of this love and its consequences. The world in its entirety is mentioned five times even in our short verses and whoever is mentioned four times. God's love is on a global scale and it's available to every single person. There is no one unloved and no one unlovable.

And God's love is utterly glorious even in himself but indeed it doesn't stop there. We gather this evening because it is a love that acts. God in his love has done something. He gave. He gave us a gift.

[ 5 : 30 ] That gift is his son. His only son. There is nothing more precious he could have given and yet he did.

It couldn't have cost him any more. And yet in giving us his son we can freely receive what we so desperately need. Have a look at verse 17. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him. The Christmas miracle is that God himself has come. Jesus has come to save. Save us from the penalty we deserve. Save us from the darkness. God's love in sending Jesus can even save us from death.

Jesus was sent to save. Not to show us how to be saved. Not to lay down the rules and regulations once and for all for how we can truly live. Not even to lay the path for us to follow. No he is the savior. He does the saving. And yet his saving, his coming does too bring condemnation. Those who do not believe in Jesus will perish. See verse 18. Whoever does not believe stands condemned because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only son. God's judgment will either save or condemn.

And those who reject Jesus can only be condemned. Yet this is not why he came. Yes, he came to bring justice and that he shall. But he came to save. To save anyone and everyone. God wants people to turn to him.

[ 7 : 25 ] He wants people to accept Jesus. So why then does this saving mission bring condemnation? Well John makes clear that throughout his gospel account of Jesus that Jesus is the light.

He calls back to creation and declares that the baby Jesus who's been born in an animal feeding trough is on the same cosmic scale as the same cosmic scale as the creation of the universe. A new beginning arrives with Jesus.

And yet the image of light is more than that. He is light shining in the darkness of humanity. For it is dark, isn't it? Painfully so at times. Despite the shiny Christmas markets and jazzy tunes, this season is dark for many. Some have lost loved ones. Some will be in hospital. Some are alone, separate from their families. Some might feel a failure because they can't provide gifts for their children. Some are just fed up. But so much of this darkness is within us. So much of the darkness is caused by us. The broken families are caused by someone lying or being selfish or arrogant. Many are without a penny because they have been exploited. Many others because they have squandered what could have been shared on sensuality.

Some are dying because of the evil wars caused by who knows what range of atrocious sins. So what does the glorious shining light of Jesus Christ do?

[ 9 : 16 ] We'll have a look from verse 19. This is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but people love darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. Light shows the truth. If you're the perpetrator, you don't want the case to go to court, and you certainly don't want the court to hear the truth. If there's a scrap outside the pub, it's hard to tell at midnight, it's hard to tell who started it and who escalated it.

But if it's the middle of the day, then all is clear to see. Burgle rays don't often happen at lunchtime. But the light of Christ doesn't just make visible ongoing crimes.

The purity of Jesus makes clear just how ugly our sins are, how filthy our actions. With Jesus walking around, you can see just how far you've fallen.

And so those who have committed dark actions run away from the light. We all know that we all do this. We see it in children all the time. If the vase is smashed, then suddenly the house is very quiet, and little Johnny is nowhere to be seen.

We may not like the goody two-shoes because they're arrogant, but we also don't like them because they show us up. Well, Jesus had no arrogance. He lives humbly and gently.

[ 10 : 57 ] But he does show us up. Aren't we terrified our darkest secrets will be made known? And yet, Jesus came to save.

The light is not to be feared by everyone. Let's look at verse 21. You see, if we accept the light, then the only thing it exposes in our hearts is the fact that we were doing all we were through God.

In the sight of God isn't an overly visual thing on God's part. It's what the light shows about whether we lived for God in the light of truth or were we against him, doing evil and running from truth.

And notice, crucially, that the distinction is not between those who do evil and those who do good. Instead, the contrast is with those who do what they do in God, who live by the light, not perfectly.

They don't lose being light people if they don't because their status wasn't earned. Remember the earlier verse, God gave his son. The life found in him is a gift.

[ 12 : 26 ] So those who believe Jesus can walk in the light without fear. This brings us to our final point.

The believing life. Notice in verse 21 that being in the darkness isn't a permanent state. No matter how inadequate you feel this Christmas, no matter who you are or what you've done, there is only one sensible response to Jesus.

Come into the light. Believe. The option of living in the light is available. John isn't asking us to purify ourselves before we go into the light.

No, he simply wants us to step into it. Don't cower in darkness. Come into the light and believe in Jesus. Why?

Well, firstly, the light will one day shine so utterly completely that all will be seen anyway. So why not come now and let your deeds be done in God and not hidden?

[ 13 : 40 ] But more importantly, look at what you get. In his awesome love, God has sent Jesus. And with Jesus, we find life.

Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Life is the gift of Christmas. There is no better gift.

Available to anyone who accepts it. Believing that you need saved from this darkness and that Jesus, the light of the world, has done that for you brings life.

Joyful, light-filled, true life. I don't know why you came tonight. Maybe you came because it's what you do on Christmas Eve. But why not consider truly believing that Christmas is about Jesus?

That the shining light, he is the shining light who can save you. Could you tonight come into the light? Will you?

[ 14 : 53 ] And for those of us who already believe, who follow Jesus, who walk in the light, then firstly, let's just allow ourselves to be reminded of this again. To see the scale of the gospel.

See the depths of the darkness around us and the darkness within us. The depths and horrors of death. And then see how dazzlingly bright our Savior Jesus Christ is.

Know how ridiculous God's love is. That he'd love even you. Remember how precious it is to know that the one whose birth we celebrate brings an end to death.

Remember that you have life in him. And as you remember, take joy. Be joyful in knowing that God loves you.

That the exposing light will not condemn you. You can have a Merry Christmas as you remember the gift of life. We can live by the truth that we know.

[ 16 : 07 ] We can live fully because we know the life won for us. We can walk in light even with the darkness shrouding us. Take a deep breath.

You don't have to be your perfect self this Christmas. It doesn't matter if the turkey's bland, if the parsnips are burnt. Because we are walking in the light.

The wonderful, loving God of the whole world has given you the greatest gift of all. His Son, Jesus Christ.

The light of the world. Well, let's pray before we sing again. Amen. Heavenly Father, we do praise you for your love.

That you would send such an amazing light to our dark world. Lord, we pray that you'd help us to respond in faith by believing, by trusting, and by walking in the light, walking in truth.

[ 17 : 15 ] Lord, guide us in remembering again this Christmas the gift that you have given us. Let us treasure the life that we have in Jesus.

In his name we pray. Amen. Thanks, Jamie, very much.

We're going to continue, as Jamie said, with our next carol, where we sing of that light coming into the darkness.