

Theme: **The Love of God is revealed by His Light.**

Text: John 3: 16 – 21 & 2 Corinthians

Season: 4th Wednesday in Advent

Date: December 20, 2017

Place: Shepherd of the Rockies LCMS, Bailey, CO

Grace and peace to you as you let the Light of God shine in your life, from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

During this Advent season, we have been talking about the light of God that is coming and has come into our lives. We have talked about how the tradition of selecting and bring in a Christmas tree into our homes can help us remember the importance of the Advent season and the need to prepare for the coming of Christ as we prepare for the celebration of His first coming as a tiny baby. We have talked about how the Christmas tree is beautiful in its own nature but yet it reminds us of the darkness of this world without the light of God shining on it, thus the true beauty of the Christmas tree is seen by the lights shining from it. Yes, it is important for each of us to shine the light of God in this dark world and as we work together to shine the light of God in the darkness of this world we become an even brighter light, showing the hope, peace, joy and love that God has given to each of us.

Last week we talked about the ornaments that we put on the Christmas tree and how they can make the tree look beautiful while telling us about the blessings the we need to remember as we get ready to celebrate the birth of the Christ child. By the Chrismons that we hang on our tree here we are reminded of why Jesus came into this world to be our Savior, our anchor, our focus, our shepherd, our guardian, our king and our identity as we reflect the light of God shining in our lives.

Yes, the traditions of putting up the Christmas tree and decorating it can get us ready for the celebration of Christ's birthday and His coming again on that last day. This year during this Advent season we went from bringing in the tree, to putting on the light and then the ornaments and now this week, we look at the final step of decorating the Christmas tree that many of us do, as we talk about putting on the garland. Some would say that the garland on the Christmas tree is the crowning decoration of the tree, as it glistens in the light. For the Romans and Greeks of the first century, garland was used to crown someone for a great victory and it was used to identify someone of royal office and power. So, it is quite fitting to crown the Christmas tree that is reminding us of all the achievements that the Jesus Christ has done for us would use garland

to acknowledge the glory and honor that He has accomplished by His life, death and resurrection for us.

Jesus through the Apostle John summarizes why He came into this world with these words, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His Only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not sent His Son into this world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”** (Jn 3: 16-17)

Jesus was born as a baby through His mother Mary, for the purpose to bring us to eternal life. That’s why we use an evergreen tree for our Christmas tree each year. That’s why we use garlands of pine boughs in the form of a circle, a wreath, each year to remind us that Christ came to give us the hope of eternal life by the love of God for all eternity and He will come again to bring us to that heavenly home. The Light of God has come into this world and wasn’t understood by the world, in fact the Devil and all the evil of this world wanted to stop the light of God from shining in the darkness of the world. When we are confronted by the misunderstanding of this time of the year we need to remember what the Apostle Paul says, **“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”** (2 Cor. 4:4)

When most of the world looks at a brightly decorated Christmas tree they don’t see the hope of the eternal life promised to us even in the darkness of this world. They even have a hard time seeing the lights of the Christmas tree as a reminder that by the power of God in our lives we are given a peace that is beyond the worlds understanding that shines out into the darkness of this world. Oh, most of the world wouldn’t put up Christmas ornaments that proclaim all the great wonders that God has done for us that gives us Joy now and for all eternity. Yes, some will say that the garland on the Christmas tree is just too much, but then they don’t understand that our sins crowned Jesus, that tiny baby born on Christmas Morning with a garland of thorns instead of rose peddles and gold like they used for most of the kings who won a victory against their enemies back in that time. The Christmas tree is not just a symbol of the Christ Child being born but of all that He has done for us so that we can have the true hope, peace, joy and love that God has given to us by His life, death and resurrection. Yes, the resurrection of Jesus Christ should be crowned as the greatest event that has ever happened or will happen in the world, but

that's not light that the world wants to see. That's why Jesus goes on to tell us in the gospel of John, **"And this is the judgment, the light has come into this world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."** (Jn. 3: 19 – 21)

The crowning moment of the world was when God sent His Only Son into this world to conquer the Old Evil Foe that we all have fallen under. With the birth, life, death and resurrection Jesus Christ, He has won the greatest victory of all and it should be remembered with garland of evergreen and gold so that we are reminded that Christ has given us the eternal life of freedom from the darkness of sin in this world and has prepared a path to that freedom by the light of the Gospel shining in our lives and from our lives. Yes, the garland of peace should be a part of this celebration of joy because God's loving grace has given us a hope that is something we could never earn as the Light of God guides us through the darkness of this world to our eternal life that God gave to us on that first Christmas. The Apostle Paul reminds us, **'For God, who says, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.'** (2 Cor. 4:6)

The light of the knowledge of the glory of God has been given to us and can be shown by a Christmas tree shining out into the darkness of this world, but it is only understood if it has been connected to true source of that light, Jesus Christ. As we let the light of God given to us by His Word and Sacraments shine into the darkness of this world we sharing with those who sit in the darkness of this world a knowledge that may be shining in their face but is not understood. Oh, traditions are passed down from generation to generation but the evil of this world would want us to forget the knowledge of the light of God who came into this world to save us from our sins so that we would have a hope beyond the darkness of this world, a peace that doesn't come from the things of this world, a joy that lighten up our whole life and the love of God now and for all eternity. This may not be the reason why many people bring in a Christmas tree and decorate it with lights, ornaments and garland today. But still there are many Christmas trees decorated in many homes and other places and maybe that's the light God wants to give to each one of

them with the right knowledge. The knowledge of why the light came and is coming again is a knowledge that we can use as we talk about the Christmas trees and their beautiful decorations, for it may be our opportunity to share the light of God's hope, peace, joy and love with them. Amen.