

“Christmas Around the World: Russia“

John 1:1-14

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All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

Special thanks to Rev. Stephen D. Shields, *“Walking in the Light”*

At the end of the Christmas Eve meal, people in Russia often enjoy *Vzvar*, a dessert drink made from water, various fruits, spices, and either sugar or honey. *Vzvar* is traditionally served at the birth of a child, so they drink it to commemorate the birth of the baby Jesus. They also enjoy *Kutya*, a porridge, often eaten out of a common bowl to symbolize unity. It is something of a tradition to throw a spoonful onto the ceiling, and if it sticks, they say you will have good luck and a good harvest in the coming year.

Russians observe Orthodox Christmas, on 1/7, though celebrations often last 12/31-1/10. On Christmas Eve (1/6) the head of the household says, “Christ is born!” Then the mother of the family puts a cross shape using honey on guests’ foreheads to symbolize sweet things to come in the new year. Russians are also thought of as cherishing the folk tale of Babushka, who met the wise men on their way to see the newborn Jesus, but felt that she was too busy to join them. Babushka had a change of heart, but was unable to catch up to them and never did find the newborn Jesus. Ironically, however, many people in Russia have never even heard this story, which was probably created by American poet and writer Edith Matilda Thomas in 1907.

Following the Communist revolution of 1917, Christmas was banned as a religious holiday in Russia, so instead of putting up a Christmas tree, many people would put up a “New Year’s Tree” and celebrate in secret. But once the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, people were free to celebrate Christmas again, but it’s still a smaller celebration than New Year’s celebrations.

Today we examine John 1:1-14, and find that John wants you to know a few things about who Jesus is. Specifically, that Jesus is God, that He created all things, and that He is the light. That third point is where we will turn our focus today. We’ll see four distinct descriptions of Jesus, the Light of the world, and then learn three blessings that come from walking in the Light.

Jesus is the universal light (See Rev. 7:9). Jesus is light for the one living the dream and the one caught in a nightmare; He is the light for the one surrounded by friends and family and the one who is desperately lonely; He is the light for the one who studies the Bible regularly and for the one who isn’t all that religious. He is the one true Light for all who need Him (John 1:9) and indeed, all DO need Him. Jesus is the light for everyone, because everyone once was, or now is, walking in the darkness

Jesus is the victorious light (John 1:5). Sometimes it’s hard not to feel like darkness is winning. That may be a sign you’re spending too much time with the media (social media included.) Sometimes we all feel the weight of the darkness around us. Spirits of darkness want you to believe that they are winning, but they are not! The only time in Scripture it

seems to say that darkness is winning is in Luke 22:53, when following His betrayal and arrest, Jesus says, **“When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”**

Darkness has no power over light, both physically and spiritually. Darkness only has power when God says so; just a short time after He was arrested, Jesus said to Pilate, **“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.”** (John 19:11a)

Jesus is the glorious light (John 1:14.) What is glory? Is it something we sing about? Something sought after by athletes and celebrities? These fall well short of God’s glory, which is so powerful that it fully lights the Holy City (the new Jerusalem), as we see in Rev. 21:22-27. Jesus reveals that light to us, and indeed, He Himself IS that light (John 14:9).

Light brings self-awareness. If you’ve ever been asked “Did you get dressed in the dark?” it is because people can see something’s wrong; something you should have seen, but wouldn’t have if you had gotten dressed in the darkness.

Paul describes those who don’t know God, saying (Philippians 4:18), **“They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.”** Separating yourself from the life that comes from God darkens your understanding, but walking in the light reveals truth.

You may not like the truth that light reveals about you. Oswald Chambers, who wrote *My Utmost for His Highest*, says, *“No one fully knows what sin is until he is born again.”* [1] *The light does not create that which you do not like; it merely reveals it by bringing a healthy level of self-awareness.*

Light helps you avoid danger. Maybe you’ve heard of Titan, the police dog in Johnstown, PA. In November of 2020, some burglary suspects were hiding in a warehouse and Titan was helping clear the building when he fell down an elevator shaft and suffered fatal injuries. The problem was that the call came in around 4:30am. Titan fell down the elevator shaft because he was in the dark & couldn’t see where he was going.

Walking in the dark is always dangerous, and when you walk in spiritual darkness, it is *very* dangerous. But when you walk with Jesus, you walk in the light, so you need not fear. Consider the words of Psalm 23:4 – **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”** No matter what darkness you may face, you need not be afraid when you walk with Jesus!

Walking in darkness is an aimless wandering; like trying to catch the wind in a canning jar. Conversely, walking in the light is a safe walk; a glorious walk; a victorious walk. *Finally, walking in the light brings eternal life. John says of Jesus (1:4), “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”* When you trust Jesus for who He said He is and what He said He has done, you have eternal life. That’s the gift given by Jesus, the Light of the World. You must chose for yourself to find forgiveness through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Each individual has the choice of whether or not they will turn from the hopelessness of walking in spiritual darkness and walk in the Light.

Joy to the World! The Lord has come! May He find a place in your heart today, and always!

[1] <https://utmost.org/walk-in-the-light/> (12/17/21)

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. **What did you find most insightful, helpful, or troublesome from this morning's message? Why?**
2. **What claims regarding The Word are made in John 1:1-3? Are these consistent with Genesis 1?**
3. **What is the funniest gift you've ever given or received?**
4. **In what way(s) is Jesus light in your life? In what ways can you help others see that light?**
5. **Why didn't the Jews in Jesus' day recognize Him? Why don't people today recognize Him?**
6. **Where is that air freshener hidden at this year?**
7. **Which promise regarding Jesus (The Light) is most meaningful to you? Why? (Don't answer this one too quickly)**
8. **Which verses describe Jesus' deity in John 1:1-18? Which verses describe His humanity?**
9. **How have you been keeping up with your Bible reading this week?**