

If you already count yourself as a child of the light, then I encourage you to lean into this new year embracing your identity. You are a child of the King. As such you are entitled to all of the benefits of being in the royal family. You also are entrusted with all of the privileges and responsibilities that come with your elevated status. Live your life in the light; live as children of the Light—shining Christ's light in all you do. If you haven't yet made the decision to believe in the light, I would invite you to take that step. Trust in the Rope. Go down that path. Enter into that new territory. Turn your skis downhill. Move into this new year with your eyes wide open to who Jesus is and who He wants you to be. Believing is indeed seeing!

Today we conclude our Series that we've called "Brighter." Jesus is brighter and He is altogether trustworthy. He is ready to shape you, change you, and bring purpose and meaning to your life. He wants to brighten your life, not only in the Christmas season but in every season of your life. We also finish at the place where we began—at the Table of the Lord. At the beginning of today's passage, Jesus told His disciples that He would be *lifted up and would draw His people to Himself*. What does it mean that Jesus would be lifted up? This is a parallel from Exodus in the Old Testament that refers to how God sent poisonous snakes to bite the people as just punishment for their rebellion. But in His mercy God also provided a way for the people's sins to be absolved and their lives literally spared. Moses had a staff with a bronze serpent on it that he would lift up before the people and as they looked upon it, the venomous wounds would be healed. Just as Moses lifted up his staff in the wilderness to save the people from their sins, Jesus was lifted up upon a cross so that you and I might be saved from our sins and the eternal consequences of our own rebellion.

At the Lord's Table we have a visible representation of what Jesus was talking about when He said that He must be lifted up, for our sakes, on a cross. For it was on that cross that Jesus gave His body for us. It was on that cross that Jesus shed His blood. He did so to make it possible for us to emerge out of the darkness of sin and death and come fully into the light of His forgiveness. Without the victory that Jesus won for us on the cross, we would still be in the dark and without hope. But we know that the light did pierce the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. So it is fitting that you and I should gather at His table now with thanksgiving in our hearts for Christ's great love. Thanks be to God. Believe in the Light and you indeed will become children of the Light. Amen.

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STUDY GUIDE BRIGHTER • John 12:32-36

UP: Connect with God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read our passage for the week, John 12:32-36. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Read it one more time.

- What do you notice about our passage? What stands out to you? What questions do you have after reading the passage?
- Re-read verses 35 and 36. What does Jesus mean when He says, "you are going to have the light just a little while longer" and "believe in the light while you have the light?"
- In your own words, what does it mean to "believe in the light?" If you were explaining to someone what it means to become a follower of Jesus and trust Christ with one's life, what would you say?
- Those who are in Christ are children of the light. This speaks to your identity. You belong to Jesus. You are a child of the light. The light of Christ is in you. Think about your life right now, where do you need to hear this good news about your identity?

What is a word, phrase, or thought from today's passage that God seems to be lifting up as being significant for you? How does it speak to a current situation in your life? How is God inviting you to respond?

IN: Connect with the Family of God

Spend some time praying for our church family. Pray for our witness as followers of Jesus. Pray for opportunities to share the gospel with those around us. Pray that many would come to Christ through the life and ministry of our church family.

OUT: Connect with the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

Reflect on how you first came to Christ and came to "believe in the light." Or for those who are still seeking, reflect on where you are in your journey. Share your reflections and story this week with someone.

For ideas on where to serve in our city, contact Laura Mueller at lmuller@first-pres.org.

BRIGHTER

The light of Christ is brighter than all competing lights. He is the light shining out of darkness. In our own darkness, we search for light and sometimes attach to lesser lights. Faces and rooms lit by television, computer and phone screens are a familiar scene in our world. What light are we looking for? Brighter, truer, more beautiful is the eternal light we find in Jesus Christ.

BRIGHTER • Believe in the Light • John 12:32-36 • Dr. Tom Pipkin • January 7, 2018

Good Morning and Happy New Year! Today we will be concluding our Advent Worship Series with one last look at how Jesus is the Light that shines brighter than anything else. And we will be challenged, by Jesus Himself, to consider all that we've heard and to **Believe** in the Light. Our reading comes from John 12:32-36. Jesus speaks these words to His disciples, and also to a large skeptical crowd, including some curious Greeks who were among those gathered for Passover. This was just a few days before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion:

*"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain forever, so how can you say, "The Son of Man must be lifted up"? Who is this "Son of Man"?" Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light." **When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.**" (John 12:32-36)*

As John recounts these powerful words from Jesus about the light being with them only a little longer and the sense of urgency in Jesus' voice that they must believe in the light; believe in Him, in order to experience all that Jesus had been talking about. It is no wonder that John would include these words about Jesus being the light in the prologue to His gospel. If part of this reading sounds familiar, you may recall that we read this on Christmas Eve just two weeks ago. In chapter one, John wrote:

"In (Jesus) was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (John 1:4-5, 9-13)

It couldn't be any clearer, could it? John said that all who receive Jesus and believe in Jesus' name are given the power to become *children of God*.

So we all know what it means to receive, right? Hopefully along with some giving, you were able to enjoy a little receiving last week during Christmas. We know

that to receive means to *"make something your own."* Like receiving a present from under the tree, ripping off the wrapping paper, and enjoying a gift. But what about the word, *"believe?"* To believe means more than just receiving something—simply taking possession of it. No, to *believe* means to *"put your trust in something."*

I remember when I was first learning how to do technical climbing. Although I grew up in Colorado and had done a good bit of bouldering and mountain hiking, I had never actually climbed with ropes. It wasn't until I was 22 years old and living in Florida, of all places, that I was taught how to do technical climbing. I'll never forget the first time I went climbing with my friend Steve in the North Georgia mountains. Steve was doing a top-rope belay and I was venturing up the side of the cliff with much fear and trepidation. I wanted to look confident, being a Colorado boy and all, but once I got above about twenty feet, I started to freeze up. I wanted to go back down, or for Steve to just pull me up, but he wouldn't let me do either. He just calmly told me to trust in the rope... to trust in the gear... to trust in him. And, although I was still scared, I began to trust, and as I began to trust, I began to relax, and then to enjoy climbing even when I got high up on the cliff face. I believed! I trusted!

Maybe some of you watched the movie, *The Santa Clause* over Christmas break. There is a scene in the movie, where the Tim Allen character, who has now become the new Santa Claus, is at the North Pole and he just can't believe any of it is real. And then this little elf named, Judy brings him some hot cocoa and gives him these words of wisdom: *"Seeing isn't believing, believing is seeing."* I believe there is also a similar line spoken by Santa himself in the modern-day classic movie *"Elf."* In both of these movies, there is an attempt to help disbelieving, dis-trusting people to go ahead and trust, even when their own belief systems or conventional wisdom might point to the contrary.

For us to believe means that we are going to put our trust in something or someone, *even when we don't have it all figured out.* I didn't need to have all the specs on the strength of a climbing rope, or the molecular make up of carabineers, or to see, in writing, all of Steve's mountain climbing training and credentials, in order for me to go ahead and believe that the rope would hold me; that the equipment wouldn't fail; that Steve knew what he was doing.

So for us to believe in the light means that we have come to see that God has revealed Himself in a way that we may never fully understand. It means that we

need to receive it as a gift! And then we need to put our trust in it—as best as we can. You see, we don't start with seeing. We have to start with believing. As Welsh New Testament theologian, C.H. Dodd put it:

"We do not start with cosmology, ascending to knowledge of God through His works in creation and the eternal forms behind them. No... we start with faith in Jesus, which involves the recognition that the meaning, which we find in Him, is the meaning of the whole universe—that, in fact, that which is incarnate in Him is the Logos (the Word). Only he who knows God in Jesus Christ, knows what the Logos is, by which the world was made."

So John, in his gospel, says in effect: *"Let us assume that the universe exhibits a divine meaning that constitutes reality."* And John borrows a term that was familiar to the Greeks—this word, "Logos." *"I will tell you what that meaning, that Logos, is: it was embodied in the person of Jesus."* And the fullness of Scripture, the weight of the Church of Jesus Christ through the ages, and the undeniable testimony of billions of people over the centuries, point to the same conclusion. It is true. Jesus is the Light. And He is inviting you to trust in Him. But you need to make the decision.

Making the decision to believe in the Light, as Jesus implores His followers to do, is making the decision to follow Jesus. It's a choice that requires a good bit of nerve and a whole lot of faith. It's a choice to live in ways that often go against the grain of our culture. It's a choice that you and I make every day. It means that you and I, as we move into 2018, are going into new territory and we're taking on new challenges as the days and weeks and months of this new year go by. And as we move into that new territory, we will experience some fear and doubt. And you know what? That fear will never go away as long as you continue to grow. Never! Fear will never go away. Isn't that good news? Actually, it is, because now you can give up trying to make fear go away. It just comes with the territory. But oh, what exhilarating territory it is! As pastor and author, John Ortberg, so profoundly put it, *"Fear and growth go together like macaroni and cheese. It's a package deal."*

If you are a skier, do you remember how scary it was to learn? Do you know what the key to learning to ski is? It's learning to live with fear. It's making that decision to point your skis straight downhill, if only for an instant, in order to make the next turn and then the next. If you don't point your skis downhill, you will never ski. You'll just glide along across the slope until you finally run into the trees. No, in order to ski, you've got to face your fear, make the turn, and soon you are able to make your way down the slope.

Believing in the Light means living with the fear, certainly, but it also means knowing the unspeakable privilege of being related to your Creator. Did you hear what Jesus was telling His friends and the crowd? He told them that if they believed in the light, that they would become children of the light. That's right, as we believe, as we put our trust in Jesus, we get the awesome privilege of being a part of God's family. There is a DNA testing product out from *ancestry.com*. It's supposed to reveal your ethnic, racial, make up. The commercials show how proud folks are and sometimes how *surprised* they are to discover their ancestry. When you decide to believe in the light, Jesus promises you that you are instantly considered a member of God's family. Does that surprise you? Is that something that you take pride in?

To those early Christians who had put their trust in Jesus, John writes, in 1 John 3:1-2:

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Did you hear that? As God's children—children of the light, we have unlimited potential. "What we will be has not yet been made known..." But ultimately, John says, we will be like Jesus. As children of the light, our eyes are opened and we see Jesus as He is, and we will be changed, transformed, shaped into Christ's likeness!

But it gets even better. As we become children of the light, you and I are also given the gift of the Holy Spirit. To those in Rome who became children of the light and received the Holy Spirit by believing in Jesus, Paul wrote these wonderful words in Romans 8:15:

"The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"

This wasn't just for the Christ-followers in Rome. It's for you and me too. We have been adopted into sonship, into daughtership with God as our Father. Even more than that, Paul uses the very words here that Jesus used to describe His Father as His "Abba"—the Jewish word for Daddy. The same word that a small Jewish child today would say as he or she sits upon Daddy's lap stroking his beard, "Abba, Abba." This is an intimate expression that connotes complete dependency and trust. This is what it means for us to be God's children—children of the light. His light is now in us. His light is what lights our way into 2018.