

Hokusei Gakuen University

English Chapel Time

John (ヨハネ) 1:5

The Light Shines in the Darkness!

The light shines in the darkness. But the darkness has not understood it.

(New International Reader's Version)

光は闇の中で輝いている。闇は光に勝たなかった。

(聖書協会共同訳)

Hello, everyone joining in today's English Chapel Time. My name is Jim Allison. I'm happy to be here with you online in this Advent season of preparing for Christmas. At this time of year, followers of Christ remember the coming of our Lord and Savior into this world. We celebrate once again this year by announcing the good news: no matter how much darkness there is around us, the light of Christ is still shining in it!

There's a lot of darkness in our world right now, isn't there. One year ago, we were meeting in chapel in person, with no masks—some of us shaking hands and hugging! Remember that? We've gone through a lot of dark days since then, haven't we. Some of us have lost people we love, others have lost money, still others have lost job security, and all of us have faced fear of the coronavirus itself. In some ways, the usual brightness and gladness of the season seem strangely missing, and the holidays oddly quiet.

But for followers of Christ, when you look closer at the Bible stories of His birth, you see that darkness is really no surprise. It was dark in Bethlehem (ベツレヘム) in Palestine (パレスチナ、today's Israel) on the night of Christ's birthday. There were no Christmas decorations on houses or trees. No preparations like that were made to welcome the birth of the King of Heaven. Except for the stars above and probably olive oil lamps burning in homes and at least one inn (宿屋), it was as dark as any other night. There was great poverty (貧困), sickness, injustice (不正義), and many types of darkness in the world then, too.

Yet that did nothing to stop Christ, "the light of the world" 「世の光」 (John [ヨハネ] 8:12). He was born, shining into that darkness, and beginning to overcome it. Because Jesus came as a baby, lived, died, came to life again (復活した), and so made a way of salvation (救い) for all people, the writer of today's Bible words, John, was able to say years later, "The light shines in the darkness. . . ." That's the message I want to focus on with you today. I hope that this can help you find greater understanding and enjoyment every year when you see Christmas lights on a home or tree or in a candlelight service and recall their deeper meaning.

When John wrote these words, he did not just sit down one day and imagine them. He was no doubt remembering a Bible promise of God from hundreds of years

before, in Isaiah (イザヤ) 9:2. “The people who are now living in darkness will see a great light. They are now living in a very dark land. But a light will shine on them.”

「闇の中を歩んでいた民は大いなる光を見た。／死の陰の地に住んでいた者たちの上に光が輝いた。」 And this theme continued to appear in the events of Jesus’ life, and He used the word picture of light again and again in His teachings after becoming an adult. Not only did He make the bold claim, “I am the light of the world,” but He said something even more amazing in some ways to His followers: “You are the light of the world” 「あなたがたは世の光である」 (Matthew [マタイ] 5:14). Even that is possible if He is born not only in Bethlehem long ago but in us here and we make our hearts His home. Then years and years after Christ had returned to heaven, John was still telling the same hope-inspiring story. In I John [ヨハネの手紙 一] 1:5, he wrote, “Here is the message we have heard from him and announce to you. God is light. There is no darkness in him at all.” 「神は光であり、神には闇が全くないということです。」

“The light shines in the darkness. But the darkness has not understood it” (v. 5). To get at the meaning of this great claim, let’s take a little round-about way. Look at nearly the last word there, “understood.” This word (*katalambano* in the original language, Greek) gets translated a wide variety of ways in different English versions of the Bible. Some of them are focused on *understanding*. They say (with “it” being the light, or Christ) that the darkness “comprehended it not,” “did not comprehend it,” “has not understood it,” “did not perceive it,” or “did not grasp it.” In Japanese, the *Shinkyodayaku* (新共同訳) has it 「暗闇は光を理解しなかった」.

Other translations of *katalambano* are focused much more on *conflict*, or the battle between light and darkness. They say that the darkness “apprehended it not,” “has never put it out,” “couldn’t put it out,” “has not overcome it,” “did not overcome it,” or “has not suppressed it.” Those are similar to “did not seize it.” In Japanese, the *Seishokyokai Kyoudouyaku* has it 「闇は光に勝たなかった」, and the *Shinkaiyaku* and *Kogoyaku* put it, 「やみはこれに打ち勝たなかった」.

So which one is it? Is God telling us in John 1:5 that the darkness of our world cannot understand Christ? Can’t overpower Him? I don’t see a reason that these two understandings are necessarily in conflict with each other. They are not exactly the same, and it’s hard to say very strongly that he means them both equally in this particular case. But it’s also very difficult to say that John means only one and not the other. My view is that the Bible as a whole teaches both of these important things about God, our world, and us. So let’s look at each just a bit more.

First, not understanding the light. If you read the whole first chapter of John’s little book, you see that God is showing us human beings about Jesus in three ways. The first is through nature, the second is through Old Testament words of the Bible, and the third is through another John—John the Baptist.

Nature. Even the physical light we depend on for life points us to God and His ability to meet our needs. There’s a “mini-death” that we go through each night when we sleep and the “mini-resurrection (復活)” that we experience with the light of every new morning. The dead-looking trees and the shortest days of the year in

December change step by step with the promise of life toward the budding trees, green grass, and longer days of spring. Evergreen (常緑樹) trees remind us, even in mid-winter, of the gift of eternal life (永遠の命). Christ was born to bring this, and we remember it with Christmas trees and wreaths. These and many more are ways God shines the light through nature, which He made.

Then there are the word pictures in the Old Testament (旧約聖書) of the Christ who will be born (see Romans [ローマ] 5:14 and I Corinthians [コリント一] 10:4, for example) and promises of His coming. Next, the light of Christ shone through John the Baptist (バプテスマのヨハネ). John (the Bible writer) told us more about him, but the main point was that he (John the Baptist) was *preparation* for the real light, Christ Himself. Neither creation, nor Old Testament Bible words, nor John the Baptist alone could overcome the darkness fully and make God known completely. For that, we had to have the birth of Christ itself.

Then how about darkness as unable to overcome light (John 1:5)? To understand this, you have to think about where darkness is. It's in the world around us in illness, ignorance (無知), poverty, crime, war, racism (人種差別), and all the evils (悪) of our world. Without Christ, we don't understand God, the world, or ourselves correctly, and we are not in a healthy relationship with any of them. That's not good news, is it. But it gets even worse. Not only are we *in darkness*—also, darkness is *in us*. We love things that lead us away from truth, beauty, goodness, and happiness—away from life, away from the light. For example, “Suppose someone claims to be in the light but hates his brother or sister. Then he is still in the darkness” 「光の中にいると言いながら、きょうだいを憎む者は、今なお闇の中にいます」 (I John [ヨハネの手紙 一] 2:9). If we are honest, all of us can look back and think of things we wish we would not have said or done as we near the end of 2020. For example, we may have taken foolish risks or been overly careful, made choices that were self-centered, or wasted our time, chances, and abilities. That's the way our world and we are.

But the good news is even better than the bad news is bad. It's OK. The darkness is real, but it's not greater than the light. Darkness may look scary, but it's not something to be afraid of if you have the light. For one reason, darkness only has meaning in its relationship to light. Darkness of itself is not powerful. Before you go to sleep at night, you don't push a button to turn the darkness on, do you? Darkness can only have power when light is not there. When the light is not in us, darkness can have the power to hide, confuse, slow us down, make things difficult, stop constructive [建設的な] activity, frighten, paralyze, and more. But none of that can overcome us if we live in the light.



When the famous Italian artist Michelangelo was painting, for example the Sistine Chapel (システィナ礼拝堂) ceiling in the 1500s, he used mainly natural light. But to make it possible to work into the late hours of the night, he made a headlamp (前照灯、ヘッドランプ) with a special wax candle. He knew that even with great skill, he could not do his best work without the light. He also knew that if he got in its way and blocked it, he could not see very well where and how to paint. In our lives, too, we need the light of Christ to guide us if we are going to do our best in creating a life of beauty and meaning.

Christ is the light, and He has come for us. If you open your heart in faith and let the Christ of Christmas live in it as your Lord, the light is in you. And when the light is in you, you don't need to worry. You don't need to be afraid. You can learn to

“walk in the light” 「光の中を歩む」 (I John [ヨハネの手紙 一] 1:7) and “live like children of the light” 「光の子として歩む」 (Ephesians [エフェソ] 5:8). If the light has been born in you, it doesn't matter nearly so much if you have to be away from people you love. If your physical health and your finances and relationships with some people are having a little trouble, or even falling apart, you still don't have to live in darkness. If you can't go the places, eat the food, meet the people, or make the plans you want because of the coronavirus, it doesn't mean you face a dark future.

So whether you celebrate Christmas in a beautiful place with many others or in your home all alone, you can know that the light of Christmas is shining on you. In the Christmas stories in the Bible, it shone on shepherds (羊飼い) out in the fields, the wise men (博士たち) as they searched for the Christ-child, and the baby Jesus' family as they escaped with their lives to Egypt. Christ has come. They knew it. Now we know it, too. He plans for our hearts to be His home. And when the light of the world is living in us, we have great reason to rejoice. That's God's message to you. Merry Christmas! Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we celebrate with you this Christmas the birth of your Son. Even though we live in a world that can seem so full of darkness, we have heard the good news: “The darkness is passing away. The true light is already shining” 「闇が過ぎ去り、すでにまことの光が輝いている・・・」 (I John [ヨハネの手紙 一] 2:8b). Thank you for loving us enough to send your only Son to make a way for us to be saved. Shine into every dark corner of our lives and throughout your world. Fill us anew with your goodness, your beauty, and your truth. In the name of the Christ of Christmas we pray. Amen.

Now let's continue today's English Chapel Time with a well-known Christmas song, “O Holy Night.” You can click on the link below to listen, read the English from the screen, read the Japanese below, and sing along in either language if you like.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOiEtZwP1Ho>

日本語歌詞

さやかに星はきらめき
御子(みこ)イエス生まれ給う
長くも闇路(やみじ)をたどり
メシヤを待てる民に
新しき朝は来たり
さかえある日は昇る
いざ聞け 御使(みつか)い歌う

妙(たえ)なる天(あま)つ御歌(みうた)を
めでたし 清し今宵(こよい)

輝く星を頼りに
旅せし博士のごと
信仰の光によりて
我らも御前(みまえ)に立つ
馬槽(うまぶね)に眠る御子は
君の君 主の主なり
我らの重荷を担い
安きを賜(たま)うためにと
来たれる神の子なり

「互いに愛せよ」と説き
平和の道を教え
すべてのくびきをこぼち
自由を与え給う
げに主こそ平和の君
類(たぐい)なき愛の人
伝えよ その福音(おとずれ)を
広めよ 聖(きよ)き御業(みわざ)を
たたえよ 声の限り

歌詞の意味（英語版）・和訳（意識）

1.
O holy night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth.
おお 聖なる夜 星々は明るく輝く
我らの尊い救い主が生まれた夜

Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till He appear'd and the soul felt its worth.

この世は長らく 罪と過ちに縛られていた
主が現れ 魂がその価値を知るまでは

A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

希望に感動し 疲れた世界は喜んだ
新しく栄光ある朝がやって来た

Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born;
O night divine, O night, O night Divine.

ひざまずき 天使の歌声を聴くのだ！
おお 神聖なる夜 キリストが生まれた夜
おお 神聖なる夜

2.

Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.

穏やかに輝く信仰の光に導かれ
主のゆりかごのそばで 心が輝く

So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming,
Here come the wise men from the Orient land.

優しくきらめく星の光に導かれ
東方より三賢者来たれり

The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger;
In all our trials born to be our friend.

王の中の王が 粗末な飼い葉桶で眠る
試練に耐える我らの友となるべく生まれた

He knows our need, to our weaknesses no stranger,
Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!
Behold your King, Before Him lowly bend!

主は我らの求めを知る 我らの弱さを知っている
我らの王を見よ！御前では頭を垂れよ！

3.

Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is love and His gospel is peace.

主は教えた 誠に互いを愛せと
主の法は愛であり 主の教えは平和である

Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother;
And in His name all oppression shall cease.

主は我らが兄弟の隷属の鎖を解き放つ
主の名の下に すべての抑圧は終わる

Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name.

甘美なる喜びの聖歌 心地よい合唱で歌い上げる
主の聖なる御名を讃えるのだ

Christ is the Lord! O praise His Name forever,
His power and glory evermore proclaim.
His power and glory evermore proclaim.

主なるキリストよ 御名を永遠に讃えん
主の御力と栄光は永遠なり

Thank you again for joining us today. God bless you! Have a great Christmas and New Year holiday, and I'll hope to be together with you again in English Chapel Time in 2021!

References

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