

## A LIGHT STILL SHINES

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Are you ready to join the choir as we celebrate together the birth of Jesus, and even beyond that, to recognize that, because of His birth, a light still shines? We have our moments in life when we declare with some awe and reverence: That was a holy moment! That was a sacred moment or even a divine moment! But ask the question: What makes that moment holy or sacred or divine? It's when we feel God has kind of crashed past us, or even settled like a feather gently upon our souls. And you realize with delight that God has crashed your space and mine, and that divinity has embraced humanity.

And that's what happened a couple of thousand years ago, on a holy night in Bethlehem of Judea, when a baby was born – to provide an alternate way to reach god and a way in which God Himself came to show the path back to Him. As the songwriter would say: It was a world that lay in sin and error pining, but this path would lead us to heaven through a baby of whom it was said, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." O what a night when that happened – a holy night, so, so divine!

### **O HOLY NIGHT**

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining  
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining  
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.  
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!

Truly He taught us to love one another  
His law is love and His Gospel is peace  
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.  
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we  
Let all within us praise His holy name  
Christ is the Lord! O praise His name forever!  
His power and glory ever more proclaim  
His power and glory ever more proclaim!

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!

A holy night indeed! A divine night, a night when Jesus was born. But spare a thought for Mary. Nine months earlier, she had accepted in faith that she would bear a child. A few months later, she would have felt her body begin to make space for the Holy Spirit's "overshadowing". And now, here He was in the flesh. Or, as John would later put it: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

But, have you ever wondered how heaven reacted to His birth? The angels peering down at these strange unfolding events, watching the King of Kings lying in Mary's arms, surrounded by cattle. Having surrendered the splendor of heaven, He now lay as a baby, maybe listening to His mother's soft soothing songs. Ken Parker takes a fair amount of poetic license in scripting a song that brought heaven and earth together in more ways than one.

Listen to the CAP women's ensemble as they sing this beautiful song this morning.

### **ANGELS' LULLABY**

In the wind you can hear a lullaby  
The breath of a million angels sigh  
Interrupted by a baby's cry  
From a lowly manger  
And accompanied by the wind  
Hear another song begin  
Somehow quieting the stable din  
Sings the mother Mary.

Hold the baby, Ooo  
Hold Him gently Ooo  
He's the Lord of all  
Love the baby Ooo  
Love Him sweetly Ooo  
We watch from Heaven's halls.

Listen carefully to her lullaby  
And lift up your head to the starlit sky  
For amid the stars the angels hide  
Watching o'er the baby.  
Hear the softest baby sound  
Mingled with a song come down  
Mary's song is rising from the ground  
Blending all together.

Hold the baby, Ooo  
Hold Him gently Ooo  
He's the Lord of all  
Love the baby Ooo  
Love Him sweetly Ooo  
We watch from Heaven's halls.

Before we listen to our next song, I'd like to preface it or introduce it by reading a passage of scripture that has to do with Jesus about 12 years later.

Luke 2:41-47

*Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they attended the festival as usual. After the celebration was over, they started home to Nazareth, but Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't miss him at first, because they assumed he was among the other travelers. But when he didn't show up that evening, they started looking for him among their relatives and friends.*

*When they couldn't find him, they went back to Jerusalem to search for him there. Three days later, they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.*

I want you to listen to this song that brings out and captures, in a sense, the absolute bewilderment that Jesus' answers must have caused to those that He was in conversation with.

### **ON MY FATHER'S SIDE!**

Just a young boy in the temple one day,  
Shared with the doctors; they were so amazed.  
Never had they seen one so young speak so swift,  
They asked him many questions, the answers went like this.

*What's your name, son?*

On my mother's side, my name is Jesus,  
But on my father's side, they call me Emmanuel.

*How old are you?*

On my mother's side, now I'm twelve years  
But on my father's side, I've just always been.

*Where are you from?*

On my mother's side, I'm from Bethlehem,  
But on my father's side, it's New Jerusalem.

*What's your plan?*

On my mother's side, I'll be crucified,  
But on my father's side, in three days I'll arise  
And I'll sit at my father's side.

He was the Son of God, yet the son of man,  
And I can't help but wonder how Joseph must have felt,  
Through an open door that day he heard his son reply,  
He said, "You see, I'm the King of kings, that's on my father's side."

*What's your name, son?*

On my mother's side, my name is Jesus,  
But on my father's side, they call me Emmanuel.

*How old are you?*

On my mother's side, now I'm twelve years  
But on my father's side, I've just always been.

*Where are you from?*

On my mother's side, I'm from Bethlehem,  
But on my father's side, it's New Jerusalem.

*What's your plan?*

On my mother's side, I'll be crucified,

But on my father's side, in three days I'll arise  
And I'll sit at my father's side.

One of the indispensable Christmas narratives is the incredible account of the star bringing the wise men to where Jesus lay. We may never fully comprehend how this happened, but this we know: wise men sought Him out and came to worship Him.

Austin Miles, many, many decades ago, penned the lyrics to our next song saying that while the original star had led wise men to Jesus, that even today "through shadows dark and dim, we too must be led to the manger to worship Him." Two thousand plus years after Jesus was born – how wonderful and amazing to know Him as our Savior and Lord and King, and to worship Him for becoming human, living in our world and amidst its pain, overcoming temptation, yet living sinless and offering Himself as the unblemished sacrifice for the sins of all humanity.

### **STAR OF THE MIDNIGHT**

Star of the midnight gleaming, Over the shadow'd plain,  
Wake on the world to music, Joining the sweet refrain,  
Sung by the angel chorus, thronging the radiant sky,  
Echoing through the ages, "Glory to God on High!"

Star of the midnight bring us, where lies the Prince of Peace  
Where from our ev'ry torment, find we a sweet release,  
Then thro' the realms of glory, shall come an answering cry,  
Echoing thro' the ages, "Glory to God on high!"

Star of the midnight shining, Over a manger bed,  
Whereby Thy ray so wonderous, Kings of the earth are led,  
Lead us to seek the Savior, Through shadows dark and dim,  
Bring us to manger lowly, that we may worship Him.

Star of the midnight bring us, where lies the Prince of Peace  
Where from our ev'ry torment, find we a sweet release,  
Then thro' the realms of glory, shall come an answering cry,  
Echoing thro' the ages, "Glory to God on high!"

A Light Still Shines! That's the theme of our service today, that in the midst of disquiet and uncertainty, amid the shadow of the pandemic and the loss of many a loved one, in the midst of long working hours and uncertain job security, a light still shines. And it's the light of Jesus shining upon us and in us, continuing to light the way, continuing to lead us through dark valleys into His paths of righteousness. Jesus still shines!

The gospel recorder John, spoke of Him and said, "The Word gave light to everything that was created and His life brought life to everyone. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never extinguish it. Never extinguish it.

That's good news! As one writer puts it, "The Word became flesh; a package of light inside of Mary stepped out into the world and suffered under a cloud of judgment at the cross, so we could experience the cleansing joy of the light." So, you and I who bear His name, have His light within us. And His promise is that, whatever you are facing, that threatens to overwhelm you or engulf you or snuff you out, will not happen because the darkness cannot extinguish the light.

What else does the bible say about the light?

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.” Yes, we have fellowship; we enjoy one another this Christmas season. We’ll be maintaining our social distance, but we have technology. Maybe last year or the year before, we were talking about technology and bemoaning the fact that it was being used for all kinds of wild and depraved situations. And yet, this very technology has allowed us to stay in touch to still have church, to still have bible studies and small groups, and sing in choirs. The church of Jesus Christ hasn’t missed a beat. Our fellowship together because of the light that holds us all together has been sweet and encouraging and blessed.

The light also shows us the areas of temptation and compromise and sin, and offers us the chance to confess and be renewed in fellowship with the light of Jesus again.

But beloved, we are told that light must shine to be visible. It must never be hidden. It must be seen by everybody. It must be like a lighthouse shining in the darkness, warning ships of threatening reefs, and hidden rocks. It must be able to shine a path that will bring people home. So too, must our light shine. As Matthew said in his gospel, Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. Like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden, no one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under basket. Instead they set it on a lampstand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. Jesus further said that not only does it give light to everyone around, but as we let it shine it brings glory to God.

A light still shines. This Christmas season, this unusual challenging year of 2020, a light still shines and that light is Jesus living in us and shining through us, reminding a world filled with fear and anxiety and disquiet that God is still on the throne and that He will not forget His own. Though trials oppress us and burdens distress us, He never will leave us alone. His promise is true. He will not forget you. God is still on the throne.

The bible tells us that though there are ones who love darkness more than light out of ignorance, rejection, rebellion – we don’t know. But the onus is on us to let the light of Jesus shine through us this Christmas. How do we do that? let your light touch someone through an act of kindness, an act of generosity, a word of encouragement, or a message of hope. Let the light spread. As the song says, “It only takes a spark to get the fire going. And soon all those around will wake up to its glowing. That’s how it is with God’s love, once you’ve experienced it. You want to sing, it’s fresh like spring, you want to pass it on.” A light still shines.

I came across another beautiful song just yesterday, sung by Ray Boltz, which captures the persistence and tenacity and dogged resolve that must accompany our desire to spread that light. Would you listen to these words?

He used to run the mission  
This old friend of mine  
And it stood down on the corner  
Underneath a neon sign.  
Had a cross that lit up heaven  
And the message “Jesus Saves”  
And each week at the old folks’ home  
His question was the same.

Does the light still shine?

Does the light still shine?  
Is it bright enough for the lost to find?  
Does the light still shine?

Now how was I to tell him  
They tore the old sign down  
Explain about electric codes  
And zoning in the town.  
I knew that it would break his heart  
I didn't want to lie,  
So I just held his hand and smiled  
When he asked me the last time.

Well in a quiet ceremony  
I began to understand,  
After all the testimonies of this ordinary man;  
He took them in, he gave them food,  
He taught them of God's grace.  
And as they spoke I saw a light  
Shining on each face.  
And you may not believe it,  
But I tell you that it's true,  
The light kept getting brighter until it filled the room.

I heard a voice say: "This, my friend, is what I was speaking of.  
When you touch someone in Jesus' name,  
There shines a light of love."

O the light still shines  
The light still shines  
Yet it's bright enough  
For the lost to find.

Haunting words! Does the light still shine in you, in me? Is it bright enough for the lost to find? Today church buildings may be closed, and neon signs unlit; but the light of Jesus isn't in the building. It's in His people, His church. We've got to share this light and spread it and pass it on. The song 'It only takes a spark' ends by saying:

I'll shout it from the mountaintop  
I want the world to know  
The Lord of love has come to me  
I want to pass it on.

The choir is going to sing once more a glorious song that says, "I heard the angels sing – glory Hallelujah."

The light of Jesus still shines in this world through you and through me. Let's join in praising Him as the choir sings about this incredible God who loves us so much that He came down to earth for you and me. Glory, glory hallelujah!

**I HEARD THE ANGELS SING – GLORY HALLELUJAH**

I heard the angels sing "Glory Hallelujah!"  
A mighty chorus way up high;  
I heard the angels sing "Praise the name of Jesus!"  
Singing in God's choir in the sky.

I heard a thousand trumpets sounding out His glory,  
Telling the story: how He came to earth to die;  
I heard a million voices praise the name of Jesus,  
Singing in God's choir in the sky.

I heard the glorious song coming out of heaven,  
The sweetest music ever heard;  
I heard a mighty song sung by all the angels,  
My soul thrilled at every loving word.

I heard a thousand trumpets sounding out His glory,  
Telling the story: how He came to earth to die;  
I heard a million voices praise the name of Jesus,  
Singing in God's choir in the sky.

I fell down on my knees when the chorus ended,  
They shouted out a glad "Amen!"  
I fell down on my knees, prayed that when in heaven,  
I would hear that choir once again.

I heard a thousand trumpets sounding out His glory,  
Telling the story: how He came to earth to die;  
I heard a million voices praise the name of Jesus,  
Singing in God's choir in the sky.

Will you receive this benediction?

Dearly beloved, let your light so shine before men and women that they may see your good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.