John 1:1-14

Have you ever experienced absolute darkness? Some years ago, our family went to the Yarangobilly caves. We had a guide who took a group of us down a steep tunnel with many steps and ladders, into one of the deepest caves. The way was lit by lights on the sides of the tunnel, and the guide had a bright torch. At one point he stopped the group and invited us to experience true darkness. He turned off his torch and then all the lights. It was BLACK. There was not a glimmer, not a molecule of light. We were instantly, totally blind. Had we remained without light, we would have been completely helpless, with no hope whatsoever of finding our way out!

All of us - whether we acknowledge it or not - are born into this world in a state of spiritual darkness. We are cut off from God, and have no hope of saving ourselves, until we come to Jesus, who is the Light of the World.

Our reading from John this morning speaks about “the Word”. The Word here is another name for Jesus. Let me read you the first verse again, but using the name Jesus.

“In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.” - Men of course meaning humanity.

When Jesus came to earth on that first Christmas morning, he took on our humanity and entered our world, in order to bring light and life to the human race.

God is our maker and God is our Father. So we’re not just flesh and blood – we are spiritual beings as well. And when God made us, he made us not only to live in this beautiful natural world he’s given us, but also to have a relationship with him – our creator and Father. He loves us very deeply, and we are wired to love him in return – just as any child naturally loves a devoted parent.

But we all know love can’t be forced. As children grow up, parents know they can’t tie them down and order them to love them. Love is something that must be freely given.

So when God made us, right at the beginning of creation, he gave us the choice of whether we would remain in his family and love him, or whether we would go it alone. We made the wrong choice, and we walked away from him, into the darkness of a world where we choose to live our own way rather than God’s. That’s the place humanity is in today.

And it is a pretty dark world when you think about it, isn’t it? There is the darkness of terrorism and war. There is the darkness of greed and materialism. There is the darkness of cruelty and self-centredness. There’s the darkness of being ill, or alone or depressed. Our efforts to manage things without God have not been greatly successful!

Jesus came at Christmas to bring his light into a dark world, and to show us the way out of that darkness. Sadly, though, many people have become accustomed to the darkness, and prefer it. Others may even maintain there is no darkness. But unless they find a way out, it will not end well!

I remember seeing an incident on the news some years ago about a toddler who had wandered off her parents’ property, and out into the bush that surrounded her parents’ home. The child got hopelessly lost, and was missing for two days. Her parents were frantic. A search party finally found the toddler a couple of kilometres from home, and brought her to safety. She was suffering from dehydration and exposure, but they found her in time, and she was restored to her very relieved parents.

What would have happened, I wonder, if that child hadn’t been found? If she’d continued to wander around in the bush, separated from her parents and her home? I think it’s pretty safe to assume she wouldn’t have made it. The consequences would have been pretty grim. She wasn’t meant to live alone without her parents care and guidance!

There’s a sense in which we are much like that little toddler. We’ve wandered away from God, whether we acknowledge it or not. And there will be consequences for us too. Just as that toddler would have died without her being reunited with her parents – so too we will ultimately die, unless we are reunited with God our Father.

Like the toddler, we’re lost. We’re stumbling around in the darkness of a world without God. And if we don’t do something about it, we’ll ultimately face an eternity without God.

Of course like the toddler’s frantic parents, God could not just sit back and let us perish. He had to act. On that first Christmas morning, He sent Jesus to rescue us – that’s what the cross was all about – and to show us the way home.

Jesus said of himself: "I am the world's Light. No one who follows me stumbles around in the darkness.”

A couple of years ago, I was with a busload of young people from the Canberra region, heading down to Tathra for a camp. It was a very long drive, so we were scheduled to make a comfort stop just out of Nimmitabel. The trouble was, it was a dreadful stormy night, and there was a blackout. As the bus pulled into the carpark, you couldn’t even see the buildings, it was so dark. We wondered how we were going to find out way to the conveniences, when one of the girls pulled out her mobile phone which had a bright torch in it. All of a sudden, the light dispelled the darkness, and we could see around us. We were able to find our way to the amenities block. LIGHT! We’d have been in trouble without it!

Jesus is the world’s light! God sent him to show us the way through the darkness. If we commit ourselves to him and follow him, the way back to God is clear.

But it takes a response from us. Just like a drowning man has to respond by grabbing on to a life preserver that is thrown to him, so we have to respond to God by choosing to follow Jesus; by committing our lives to him and trusting him to lead us. It takes an act of our will. It’s a choice and a decision. God doesn’t force it upon us.

All we need to do is to pray – to tell God we’re sorry for ignoring him, and that we now want to follow him. He then sends his Spirit to live within us in response to that decision – and the light goes on!

Once we are joined to the Light of the World through this simple decision – as Jesus himself said – we will no longer walk in darkness. We will find his guidance in times of confusion; his strength in times on weakness, his courage in times of uncertainty; and the most amazing thing of all is that our spirits become infused with his eternal life! His presence will be with us always.

As we give and receive gifts this Christmas morning, may we be reminded of the greatest gift of all – God’s only son, who came to be our light and our life! As we reach out and receive him, let us rejoice this day that he has given us the power to step out of the darkness and into the light, to become the Children of God.

Let’s pray,

If you think back to our illustration of the Queen – my friend supposed that that an intervention in his life by earthly royalty would have quite an impact, and would change many things. How much more of an impact there is when the King of Heaven intervenes in this world. Christmas is a celebration – but it’s also an invitation. It’s an invitation to allow the king of heaven to intervene personally in our own lives. To free each one of us from the penalty of our own selfishness and sin, and to reveal to us the wonder of knowing God.

During this Christmas season, can I encourage you to not just participate in the celebration, but to accept the invitation to allow God to personally intervene in your life. And if you have not done so before, as the scripture says, to receive power to become a son or daughter of God.

Let’s pray.