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Come to the light

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

It was Christmas Eve.

"The same was in the beginning with God." The narrator intoned into a perfectly dark church auditorium.

"All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made."

Outside, the biting Chicago wind sent street litter flying into the night air. The greeter at the door rocked from foot to foot trying to keep warm.

"In Him was life..."

The narrator continued.

"...and the life was the light of men."

Silence. Complete silence in the crowded auditorium. A child holding a single candle walked down the center aisle. All eyes were on the single light. The child carefully placed the candle on a decorated table in front of the pulpit.

"And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which lights every man that comes into the world."

All eyes stared at the single stationary candle.

"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

As usual, at the close of the service,

we invited everyone to bring the candle they had received upon entry to be lit from the single candle at the front. Row by row people passed by lighting their candles and returning to their seats. Soon, several hundred candles were lit. A warm glow filled the room.

As the last congregant lit his candle and returned to his seat, I spoke. "One light entered the room. Now, each

"That was me! I sat in the back in the dark and chose not to come to the light...I need help."

light you see is the result of the first. If you hold a candle, it is because you responded to the invitation to come to the light. If you do not hold a lit candle, it is because you, for whatever reason, decided not to come to the light. Two thousand years ago, the Light entered the world. In a world of confusion, hate, deceit, darkness, and pluralism, He boldly declares 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father but by Me. I am the Light of the world.'"

"God loved the world to the degree that He gave His only Son so that anyone and everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. You see, God didn't send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world. If you believe in Him you are not condemned because you believe in the name of God's only Son. This is why people are condemned — the Light came into the world but people have loved darkness instead of light because they have been doing wrong. Everyone who does wrong hates the light and will not come to the light. He doesn't want his works to be seen in the light."

"Christmas is the celebration of the Light, the alternative to spiritual darkness. The light of the world in the person of Jesus Christ comes inviting you out of the darkness of practical atheism, self-centered living, worship of self, out of the intellectual and emotional shadow lands of licentiousness, out of the moral murkiness of relativism. 'Come to the light,' he calls to you. 'Come to Me.' Why

would anyone choose to stay in darkness?" I asked.

After the service, Kenny, who grew up on the streets, came to me and told me that in the moments following the close of the service he met a man he knew from the neighborhood, an older gangbanger. He told Kenny he was walking down the street and for some reason had come into the service about halfway through. He was given an unlit candle upon entering the auditorium. When I invited people to come and light their candles, he chose not to come. Sitting back in the shadows, he watched everyone else come forward, light their candles, and return to their seats. Then he heard me explain the light and the candles and the coming and the choosing. He told Kenny, "That was me! That was me! I sat in the back in the dark and chose not to come to the light. Kenny, I need help."

This blew Kenny away as he had known this man for many years and knew him to be a hardened criminal.

What an encounter with the Light. Will he have another chance to come to the Light of the world?