

SESSION 4

LIGHT OF THE WORLD, WORD OF GOD, AND LORD

Session Objectives

This session will equip participants to:

- Understand the Gospel of John's identification of Jesus as God's Word and God's light.
- Examine the prophet Isaiah's call for righteous living that shines God's light in a dark world.

Biblical Foundations

- John 1:1-5, 9-14
- Isaiah 58:1-10

Leader Preparation

- Carefully read *Incarnation*, chapter 4 and the Epilogue, as well as this session's Biblical Foundations, noting any topics you want or need to investigate further before the session. Consult trusted Bible dictionaries, concordances, and other resources as desired.
- Preview session 4 video segment; make sure your video sharing setup is working.
- Prepare these links to share in the chat:
[John 1:1-5, 9-14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%201:1-14&version=CEB)
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%201:1-14&version=CEB>
[Isaiah 58:1-10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+58%3A1-10&version=CEB)
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+58%3A1-10&version=CEB>
Alternatively, put the Scriptures on slides to share with participants.
- Find videos online of holiday light displays.
- Prepare a slide containing these titles for Jesus discussed in *Incarnation*:
 - ◇ Messiah (Anointed One)
 - ◇ King
 - ◇ Savior

- ◇ Emmanuel
 - ◇ Word of God
 - ◇ Light of the World
 - ◇ Lord
- Prepare a slide of the prayer at the end of *Incarnation*, chapter 4; the prayer at the end of this session; or a prayer of your own.

Starting Your Session

Welcome each participant by name as each enters the virtual meeting. Ask those who attended the previous session to talk briefly about what they found most interesting, encouraging, or challenging from it, and how it affected their relationship with Jesus and others.

Screen-share the videos of holiday light displays you found before the session and ask participants for their reactions. Be sensitive toward participants with vision impairments who may experience this activity differently from others.

Tell participants that in this final session you'll explore together Jesus's title "Light of the World."

Pray this prayer or one of your own:

Creator God, in the beginning you called light from darkness, and you have made your light to shine in our hearts by displaying your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. In his light, may our spirits see light in this time together, that we may not only honor you as we celebrate the coming of your light, but also serve you as we carry your light, in the power of your Spirit, to a world in darkness. Amen.

Video Viewing

Screen-share Adam Hamilton's session 4 video segment. After the video, invite comments and questions. You might prompt discussion by asking:

- Hamilton talks about the Christmas candlelight service he leads each year. What are your congregation's usual Advent and Christmas traditions involving candles? How are you using candles in your personal or family Advent and Christmas worship?
- Hamilton mentions some memorable instances of light in Scripture. What others can you think of? What connections, if any, can you draw between them and the Christmas message?

John's "Christmas Story"

Read aloud from *Incarnation*:

"Absent [from John] are the stories of Mary and Joseph. There's no journey to Bethlehem, no shepherds, no wise men, no birth in a stable—but my, how rich is John's account of Christmas." (page 121)

Put in the chat the link you have prepared to John 1:1-5, 9-14, or share the slide you have prepared with the Scripture displayed. Recruit one volunteer to read aloud verses 1-5 and another verses 9-14. Ask:

- Why does Hamilton call these verses "John's account of Christmas"? In what ways are they also John's account of Creation?
- John claims God's Word became a human being in Jesus (verses 1, 14). The Greek word for *word* is "logos." "[L]ogos, which means 'word,'" writes Hamilton, "also has the connotation of reasoning, wisdom, or logic" (page 133). What do these definitions tell you about who John says Jesus is? What does thinking of Jesus as the Word of God mean to you?
- Hamilton notes,

"While Christians often speak about the Bible as the Word of God, the Word of God in its most decisive and definitive form came to us not as a book, but as a person." (page 134)

If Jesus is the Word of God, should Christians also refer to Scripture as the Word of God? Why or why not?

- John states that not everyone welcomed God's Word, God's light (verses 9-13; compare John 3:19-21). How do you believe God's Word is rejected today? When have you rejected or resisted God's Word and light?
- "Christmas," writes Hamilton, "is God's response to both forms of darkness, the moral and the existential" (page 127). What do you think about these two forms of darkness? How do you respond to John's claim that darkness (in both forms) does not overcome God's light (verse 5)?

Called to Spread the Light of God

Read aloud from *Incarnation*:

"As we become children of the light, we cannot keep that light within ourselves. It is meant to spill out from us naturally and touch the lives of others...."

What does carrying light into the dark places look like? Centuries before Jesus, Isaiah the prophet pointed the people of Israel toward an answer." (page 141–142)

Put in chat the link you have prepared to Isaiah 58:1-10 or share the slide you created with the Scripture displayed. Recruit a volunteer to read the Scripture aloud. Ask:

- What problem does this prophecy address? What connections, if any, do you draw between this ancient condemnation of the people's worship and modern celebrations, in society and church, of Christmas today?
- How does God promise the people can experience light instead of darkness? What implications does God's promise hold for church and society today?
- This prophecy describes the "fast" God chooses. From what must God's people fast in order to do what God wants them to do?
- How, specifically, is your congregation involved in the work to which God calls the people in this prophecy?
- Hamilton writes that we sometimes ask why God hasn't done something about the darkness in our world, but God answers, "I did do something. I sent Jesus to be the light so you could see what to do" (page 140). How satisfying or unsatisfying do you find this answer, and why?

Closing Your Session

Screen-share the slide of titles for Jesus you have prepared. Ask:

- Which of these titles from the Christmas stories mean more to you as a result of our study of *Incarnation*? Which, if any, do you still find challenging, and why?
- How has our study of *Incarnation* changed your experience and observance of this Advent and Christmas season?

Be sure to answer these questions yourself as part of the discussion.

Express your gratitude for participants and the study. Close the session and the study using this ritual, modeled on Adam Hamilton's description of the Christmas candlelight service at Church of the Resurrection:

- Tell participants: "Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world,' but he also told his disciples, 'You, together, are the light of the world.'"
- Read aloud Matthew 5:14-16, then read aloud from *Incarnation*:

"In our world, you're either bringing darkness or light. By your words and deeds, you bring joy, love, and hope to others or you take it away. You bless and build up or you tear down and hurt. Life is either all about you or it is about others." (page 146)

- Close with the prayer at the end of *Incarnation*, chapter 4; the prayer below; or one of your own.

Dear Jesus, we acclaim you with many titles and names, but they all point us to your presence, power, and love. May we shine with your light not only at Christmas but at all times, in all our words and deeds. As you took on human flesh in a unique and decisive way so long ago, may you, in smaller but significant ways, take it on again in our flesh, that the world may see and give glory to your Father in heaven and ours. Amen.

Optional Extension

In chapter 4, Hamilton mentions a prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. Listen together to a musical setting of this prayer. (Search for “prayer of Saint Francis” or “make me a channel of your peace” online.) Ask participants to think of specific times they have received and/or given God’s light in ways St. Francis’s prayer describes.

Breakout Room Option

In the Epilogue to *Incarnation*, Hamilton reflects on Matthew’s account of the magi’s visit to the young Jesus. For him, the story illustrates the New Testament’s most commonly used title for Jesus, and one of its most important: *Lord*. Send participants to breakout rooms to read Matthew 2:7-12 and to discuss these questions:

- What does it mean for you to call Jesus “Lord”?
- How, specifically, do you “kneel before” him in your daily living?
- What treasures, tangible and otherwise, do you present to him for his use?