

## Equipped to be dazzled

I reckon that one of the best known dates in December is the 25<sup>th</sup>. In the run-up to this date, media sources love to remind us that we have only a certain number of shopping days left and, as this number dwindles, activity in shopping centres and malls increases. But there's another date in December that receives less attention and it occurs each year between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of the month. What is it? The shortest day of the year.

In some ways, it would seem more appropriate to call it, not the shortest day, but the longest night! For those of us living in the northern hemisphere, we go to work in the dark and come home in the dark. Lights are on in the house or office for most of the day. It's perhaps not a favourite time of year for many of us. One thing I do like, though, is going out in the dark for a walk with our dog, Rowan. Where we live there are no street lights and some nights it is *really* dark. And in the dark even the slightest light is dazzling.

One night I was out walking when a text message came in to my phone. I quickly read it and tried to reply. Next thing - WHAM! I felt something crashing into my face. At first I thought I had been struck by a mugger and then I realized I was in a ditch with my head in a barbed wire fence! I thought I had been walking in a straight line but the light from the display on my phone had dazzled me and I'd gone off the road. If you think I'm making it up, I still have the scars on my face to prove that when flesh meets barbed wire, the wire wins!

The Christmas story is very much a story of dazzling light shining in darkness. Long before Jesus Christ was born, the prophet Isaiah predicted that the people who walked in spiritual darkness would see a great light.

My favourite Christmas bible reading is John 1. John gives an unconventional slant to the Christmas story, expressing it in cosmic terms with Christ as the Eternal Word making a gigantic step down to be born as a baby and live on earth among people. The theme of Christ as the light of the world is a prominent one in John's Gospel and his letters. In one of these letters we read that "*the light shines through the darkness and the darkness can never extinguish it.*"<sup>1</sup> Dazzling light shining in the darkness. Dazzling light dispelling the darkness. Dazzling light conquering the darkness. The shepherds were literally dazzled as the glory of God shone around them. The wise men were drawn, fascinated, to the place where Jesus was, guided by the light of both a star and prophecy. The shining of the light of Christ's coming dazzled and disorientated Herod the king and his advisers and they ended up in a ditch of hostility and apathy. This dazzling light of Christ's presence cannot be extinguished, and as his followers, it is our privilege to let that light shine as we exalt him in our daily living.

Another possible translation of John 1:5 is "*the darkness has not understood it*" (NIV). Have you ever had the experience of someone just not getting it, no matter how clearly you explain it? Don't be surprised if when you proclaim Christ this Christmas some people are like "so what?" or "duh?" A danger for us is to feel we have failed if some people don't get what we're saying. Sure, it's up to us to communicate the truth of Christ's coming to people as clearly and accurately as we possibly can, but only his Spirit can turn the lights on in the minds of our hearers. Let's do what we can, but leave the Spirit to do what we cannot do - change people.

Happy Christmas! May the light of Christ dazzle you and draw you to him in wonder, love and praise!

P.S. Remember not to text when you're out in the dark!

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:5 (NLT)