

*6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.*

*19This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." 21And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." 22Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" 23He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. 24Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" 26John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, 27the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." 28This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.*

Each year I believe in Christmas lights. On my street, on most every street, when the sun has gone away, drawing the light in the sky over the horizon after it, suddenly little lights appear. Sparkling lights are everywhere, a message of love beamed to every passing one. On my street night after night more lights appear. My neighbors are so wonderful, my street is so wonderful, the world is so wonderful when little lights are glowing. How I love the feeling.

But I know before long another feeling will be mine. Where little lights once glowed there will be darkness, a darkness made darker still by my memories from these days. The coming of the night will bring emptiness upon my street, and in my heart. The promise of the little lights will be broken.

Over and over again it happens with all the lights of my life. Summer sunlight so warm, so bright, turns into the red orange glow of fall. Then comes the fainter light, the diminishing light of early December.

A friendship shines full of promise, full of warmth and love. But years and distance come between, and one day we wonder whether to send a card to that one from long ago.

Or in the full sunlight of love, death brings an eclipse, sending the dark shadow over the world.

I tire of the lights being lost, spring so quickly extinguished by fall - more and more of life the darkness of winter.

Once long ago a bright light shone. A light burst into a dark, dark world. The people thought it a light from God. "There was a man sent from God whose name was John." Yes, the people thought he was the light that would not fade. The people were wrong.

"John came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light."

He was not the light. John had to make that clear: "Who are you?" the people asked. "I am not the Messiah," John replied.

And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not."

"Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No."

Everything the people were looking for he was not. He was another brightness that would come and go and not endure. He was but for a time. He had to say "no" to everyone who wanted to make of him more than that.

"What do you say about yourself?" They asked him.

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord."

Like the little lights that glow on my street. They cry, "Make ready the way of the Lord." They whisper, "The true light that will never be extinguished is coming to your street, to your home, to your heart." They sparkle the message: "Don't settle for anything less than the true light, the eternal light."

How many are the lights in our life that are ours but for a moment. How many are the joys, so vivid and intense but gone as quickly as they were ours. How many are the hopes that we think will glow forever in our hearts but then we find suddenly one evening, the lights are no longer lit. The lights, the joys, the hopes, all point us to the true light that God has sent into our world.

We treasure our moments when the family is all together at the table, or gathered around the tree. We say this is what life is all about. We work so hard, sacrifice to prepare to make the moment special.

But if we ask John, "Is this what life is all about?" John says, "No."

As precious as this moment is, this moment is not the true joy, the lasting joy. Before long you will have only a fading memory.

Fix your heart on the light that will not fade, the love that will not die.

Come to Bethlehem where the light of the love of God first shines through. Follow that light to Galilee, along dusty roads, climb on board the ship to cross the Sea of Galilee. Witness the healing, hear the teaching, follow to Jerusalem to see that even in death this light will not be extinguished, but will shine anew once more in the early dawn.

“The true light that enlightens everyone is coming into your world.”