

Word For The Week

21 December 2018

Preaching Dates

23 December 2018

Phill March (am) at Langdale Church
Dunstable, Bedfordshire

Charles Sommerville (am) at
Carbrain Baptist Church

Jim McNulty (am + pm) at
Islay Baptist Church

25 December 2018

Alastair Crockett (am) at Christmas Day
Service, Cupar Baptist Church



“Light in the darkness”

By Chris Townsend

God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Gen.1:5)

It's a strange phrase, 'the shortest day of the year'. It was still 24 hours long. Our alarm clocks still rang, we still got up, went to work and came home again at the same time. Buses trundled, trains rattled. The news came on at six. Yet something about it was a little bit harder to deal with. So soon after the summer of the century, we got out of bed in pitch darkness. We took our seats at our desks before sunrise. The car's headlight switch was permanently in the 'on' position.

The difference, of course, is the daylight - or lack of it. The sun drifted, low and reluctant, across the gloomy, cloud-swept sky for six pale hours and a handful of minutes. It was gone in less time than the average adult spends in bed. That poses a problem, for our need for light is instinctive. We are made to operate in the light. The first thing we do when we enter a dark room is reach for the light switch. These darkest of weeks, our national custom is to fix the problem by stringing up lights around our homes - not for practical light to see by; we have torches and security lights for all that - but simply to keep that sense of darkness at bay.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. (Jn.1:9.)

So deep is this human need for light that it has been finding its way into customs and religions, all over the world, for as long as such things have existed. Wherever Christian missionaries have gone, they have found pagan fears that the midwinter sun might not rise the next day. One of the greatest successes of those early Christians was the toppling of ancient midwinter superstitions and the turning of the hearts of men and women towards the joyful hope at the dawn of true Light. Christmas Day itself deposed a feast held in honour of the 'unconquerable' Roman sun god, *Sol Invictus*: a pagan deity who, it turns out, was thoroughly conquered by a far greater Name.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined. (Isa.9:2).

We wear our pulpits smooth at this time of year with our lamentations of what Christmas has become. We rail against the tinsel and trappings, the eating and drinking, the ever-larger illuminated tableaux on our neighbours' lawns. Yet our neighbours' instinctive need to see light in the midst of the deep darkness of midwinter is God-given. It is a need we are called not to scoff at, but to see met. It is a need the earliest missionaries confidently proclaimed had been met, truly and wholly, in the birth of the Christ Child, whose birth they celebrated that same week. It is a proclamation we make again this week, perhaps the one week of the year when our neighbours' hearts and eyes are truly open to receive it. Let us do so as loudly and as boldly as those first missionaries did, assuring them of Jesus' own words:

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. (Jn.8:12b)

