

## SHINE ON

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*O little town of Bethlehem  
How still we see thee lie.  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The shining stars go by.  
But in the dark street shineth  
The everlasting Light.  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight.*

Most of us have been singing that Christmas carol all our lives. But do we really listen to the words? The hopes and fears of all the years come together on this night – this holy night.

For many folks, Christmas Eve is one of their favorite nights of the year. Others are just waiting for Christmas to be over because it's far from happy – in fact, if anything's wrong in our lives, Christmas can just make it feel worse. Still others are already anticipating Christmas day – presents and family and good food and lots of fun.

However it is for you, I believe what the carol says: on Christmas Eve, out of all the nights of the year, our hopes and fears come together, and we hold them deep in our hearts.

Fears? We all know there are lots of things to be afraid of. Money problems, unemployment, illness, worldwide and personal conflicts, grief and loss – why are these things happening? Christmas makes them loom larger, every year. Depression becomes more painful. People are lonely. What does the future hold?

We have fears. We really do. And they're in our hearts tonight.

And hopes? What do we hope for? We're hoping for good lives for our children and grandchildren; a job, for ourselves or someone we love; extra money coming in; happiness; someone to love, someone to love us; physical healing, emotional and spiritual healing – the hopes and fears of all of us, of all the years come together on Christmas Eve.

We need a Savior. Two thousand years ago, when the birth we celebrate at Christmas actually happened, the world needed a Savior just as it does today. It was indeed a dark place: there was sin, and oppression, and rampant cruelty and deceit. Those who loved God at that time had many fears and only one hope to cling to – the Messiah was promised, and someday he would come. They needed a Savior.

So what has changed? We've still got many dark streets in our world. Only one thing has changed, actually: the Messiah HAS come. We have a Savior.

John's gospel says, "The goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared – not because we deserved it, but because he is merciful."

In the midst of our fears, pain, or illness, sometimes that truth hardly seems real. Yes, we know Jesus is our Savior. But we're not feeling it right that minute; the darkness feels overwhelming, and hope seems far away. And that's reality, too. Sometimes I wish our Savior was our magic genie, to make all the bad things go away and give us everything we want. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

“What has come into being in him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

We’re not God. We’re only people; children, in fact – God’s children. We see things the way they are now and we want them to change. We want what we want when we want it. And we call that life.

But what if God is seeing something different, something bigger, something eternal? What if God sees not just the things we need and want and believe will make us happy, but he sees US – who we really are, and what we really need. And God loves us so much that he wants us to have joy and peace right here, right now. But most of all he wants us with him forever, when our real life will begin. Everything God does, including the birth of his Son, works together to make that happen.

Jesus knows our fears and our hopes, and he’s with us in the midst of them, right now, every minute. If we only had eyes to see, we’d realize the light shines in our lives in a hundred different ways every day.

And one thing never changes, no matter what. Our hopes and fears of all the years are with us tonight – and the light shines on. There is no darkness, in our lives or on the earth, that can EVER overcome that light, that life in Jesus.

Jesus is the light of the world. He is the light of your life. And no darkness, no matter how fearful, can ever overcome that light. It’s steady, and strong, and sure and powerful. We are not alone. And the light shines on.