

## Scripture and Background Information for December 23-29

**Lights do more than just decorate our houses. John tells us that light has come to give life in darkness and all that darkness might hide—light gives us an opportunity to respond to new life.** To prepare for discussion each week, group members should use the **Discussion Guide** to complete the **GOD’S WORDS** and **MY WORDS** columns using the scriptures at the bottom of this page. You will notice that we are continuing the pattern of your discussing scripture *after* the Sunday message on that passage.

### Background for John 3:16-21

During this Christmas season, we have been looking at light—how light gives hope, gives a name, encourages seeking. Now, we turn to look at how light demands a response.

John 3:16-21 stands as one of the most famous passages in the Bible. However, looking at Nicodemus’ story at the start of chapter 3 offers a glimpse into why John (empowered by the Spirit) might have felt the need to include this section.

In vs1-15, Nicodemus was a Pharisee who represented the nation of Israel. Yet he could not understand some of the simplest things that Jesus was communicating to him. First, he comes to Jesus at night so that no one can judge him for asking Jesus questions. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be “born again” which could also be translated as “born from above.” Nicodemus was probably certain that Jesus did not mean anything absurd, but he failed to recognize the exact meaning of what Jesus was saying. Jesus questions how Nicodemus can be a leader of the people as a Pharisee and have no concept of “heavenly things.”

So, John 16-21 is meant to be read as an explanation of what Jesus was saying to Nicodemus. Jesus is the light who enters the world to bring new life to those who accept it.

\*\*Vs14-15 refers to the story in Numbers 21:4-9 where God tells Moses to craft a snake of bronze for those afflicted with snake bites to gaze upon. Those who looked upon the snake which was raised up would be saved from their venomous bite. Jesus is telling Nicodemus, “In the same way that the snake offered salvation to your ancestors, I will offer salvation to you if you lift me up.”