Have you ever heard the word “bioluminescence”? sounds like a vocabulary word on the SAT test, doesn’t it? But we can figure it out –

BIO is a prefix, like in biology, biodiversity, biography. Bio is the Greek word for “life.”

LUMIN sounds like illuminate. Lumen is the word on the package of light bulbs that says how bright the bulb is. Lumen comes from the Latin word for light.

ESCENCE means “a state of being.”

Therefore, BIOLUMINESCENCE means “the emission (or giving off) of light by a living organism.” Those big words have a very simple example: fire flies and glow worms! They are alive, and they give off light without creating heat.

In the movie “Finding Nemo”, a little fish named Nemo is captured by a fishing boat in the ocean, and ends up in a fish tank in a dentist office. His father, Marlin, and his friend Dory have many adventures swimming all over the ocean trying to find Nemo.

During their search they are chased by an angler fish. I wish I could show you a picture of that monster! It is a very large, ferocious fish with lots of long sharp fangs, and a peculiar knob dangling from its head directly in front of its mouth. The knob gives off light because it is covered with bioluminescent bacteria. Curious prey are lured close by the light and snapped up for dinner. Marlin and Dory manage to escape from the angler fish, and finally they do find Nemo.

There are other bioluminescent creatures down in that deep ocean with the angler fish – deep sea squid, algae, jelly fish, sea stars, even some sharks.

In the movie “The Life of Pi” a 17-year old boy is floating in the middle of the ocean after the ship he was traveling in capsized. There is a breath-taking scene in the movie of the boy on the life-raft in the middle of the night, surrounded by a graceful ballet of bio-luminescent sea creatures. I wish I could show you that scene! You’ll have to search it out on You –Tube!

However, the reason that I am describing bioluminescence in such detail is so that you will be able to understand the following amazing story about Jim Lovell. He became the commander on the 1970 Apollo 13 space mission attempting to go to the moon – the one where someone said, “Houston, we have a problem.”

In 1955, fifteen years before Apollo 13, Jim Lovell was a pilot assigned to Composite Squadron Three, an aircraft carrier group off the coast of Japan. The first time he flew at night in the F2H-3 Banshee plane, his instrument panel short-circuited. Suddenly he was flying “blind” – no instruments and no lights. He contacted the flight chief, who informed him that he was flying directly toward the stern of the ship, so all he had to do was to keep flying straight at the carrier. Soon, however, he lost radio contact too.
How would he ever locate the ship? And when he did, how was he going to land his plane on a moving, darkened aircraft carrier? If he came in too low, he’d crash into the stern. If he came in too high, he’d overshoot the hook which catches and slows down the plane to keep it from skidding off the front of the ship’s deck. If that happened, the plane would crash into the ocean and be crushed by the moving ship.

Lovell continued to fly straight while he went over his options. Amazingly, because there were no lights on in the cockpit, he was able to see in the darkness a slight glow in the ocean. Suddenly he realized that he was seeing the bioluminescent algae churned up by the carrier’s wake. He followed the glow for hours. As he got closer, the glowing got bright enough for him to make out the details of the stern of the ship, and he landed safely on the deck.ii

Imagine what it must have felt like to be flying in a pitch-dark sky over a blackened ocean with no instruments. Now imagine what Jim Lovell felt like when he realized what that glow was, and that the light would lead him back to his ship.

**Jesus Christ is like that light!**

In the Bible, the word darkness often symbolizes sin and death, pain, sorrow, oppression and separation from God. But into that darkness came the Light of the World – Jesus Christ – to lead people safely back to God.

Listen to these verses from the Gospel of John:

*The light shines in the dark and the darkness has not overcome it.* iii

*In Jesus Christ was life, and that life was the light of all humanity.* iv

*The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.* v

Jesus spoke to the crowd saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” vi

Perhaps the darkness in your life is an unhappy or abusive relationship. Perhaps the darkness is a diagnosis of cancer or other terminal illness. Some are worried about paying their bills or finding a job. Poor health or chronic pain can be as oppressive as a dark, humid, stormy night. You might know someone who is drowning in depression, despair, mental illness, or addictions. Perhaps you have lost a loved one to Parkinson’s disease, or to dementia, or a heart attack, or suicide. Others are burdened by feelings of regret or remorse, convicted of sins or crimes that can never be undone. Even needing to make a life-changing decision can be as paralyzing as the lights going out on that plane.

For thousands of years, mortals have searched for ways to escape from life’s darkness. People try drugs, wealth, alcohol, multiple partners, physical pleasures, travels, extreme adventures, but none of those bring more than temporary relief.

Jesus Christ is the only one who can guide you out of that darkness into the everlasting, life-changing light of the presence of God.

Jesus is the one that the apostle John wrote about, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” vii

Jesus, Son of God, is called Emmanuel – “God with us”. John wrote: “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son of God, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” viii Jesus came to reunite us with our heavenly Father.
Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus. But his birth would be irrelevant and forgotten if he had not died on the cross. There would be no celebrations, no glorious singing, no Christmas presents, no candle-lit “Silent Night”, no Saint Nicholas if Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, had not been crucified, died and buried.

Jesus died on the cross to take away your sins. By his life and death he paid the ransom and took the punishment humans deserve for their willful disobedience and wrong choices.

The risen Christ offers forgiveness, mercy and grace to all who put their faith in him. Through his resurrection, Jesus is victorious over sin and death, and all the powers of darkness.

The only way out of the darkness that oppresses humanity is to look for the light of Jesus Christ. He is able to show you the way to God, revealing who God is and what God is like. Follow that light to New Life in Christ, the way Jim Lovell followed the bioluminescence of the algae to a safe landing on the aircraft carrier.

Jesus promises: “I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Merry Christmas!

Benediction:  May Jesus Christ, the Light of the World be the light in your life.  
May His light guide you on your journey;  
May His light overpower the dark places in your life;  
May the Light of Christ lead you home. Amen.

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1 https://scripps.ucsd.edu/labs/mlatz/bioluminescence/popular-accounts-of-bioluminescence/
2 When In the Dark, Follow the Glow Like Jim Lovell, Published August 21st, 2010 by Gina Burgess http://www.everydaychristian.com/blogs/post/when_in_the_dark_follow_the_glow/
3 www.airspacemag.com/history-of-flight/in-the-museum-space-capsules-180958440/#10sFL4fvyDreSVXq.99
4 John 1:5
5 John 1:4
6 John 1:9
7 John 8:12
8 John 1:4-5
9 John 1:9,14