

A Light for All  
[written in oral form]

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12  
Epiphany Year A

January 8, 2023  
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In the words from Isaiah 60, "Arise, shine; for your light has come."

The prophets and the New Testament writers often used "light" as a metaphor, and it makes a good metaphor, too.

Light is powerful. Light can affect our moods and emotions, especially this time of year.

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I cannot remember the last sunny day.  
Dreary, darkness can sure bring us down.

Moreover, light reveals things. It gives depth and contrast.  
We need light to see, and we appreciate light, ....*most of the time.*

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There are situations when,...well,..... we prefer to not see too clearly.. or.... be seen.

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For example, in very low light,..... I look much younger. Without the contrast from light, I do not have any wrinkles.

Ever wonder why romantic meals are usually with candle light or very dim lighting?  
Because we all look pretty good when our image is blurred. Light brings out the truth, and that's the truth.

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Also, a house doesn't appear to need cleaning when the lights are faint. Light exposes dust bunnies and clutter, so ...keep the lights down, relax,..... but watch your step,.... because you do not want to slip or trip over something.  
Denial thrives in the darkness,.....and **avoiding the truth can be dangerous.**

In addition, hide and seek is more fun in the dark. It is much easier to be sneaky when we cannot be seen.

That is why we have street lights and other security lights,.. because...devious, even nasty things, use obscurity for concealment.

And, darkness can also mean ignorance.  
Being "in the dark" suggests not knowing something.  
Unscrupulous people do not bask in the light; they do not like the truth, and they tend to try to keep information / light from others, too.

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The prophets beckoned people to the light in order to understand and to expose injustices so as to live and be in truth / the way of God.

Subsequently, a star in the night sky is a symbolic and ideal means to herald the way to the Messiah / to Jesus.

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Matthew chapter 2 begins with the extremely loaded phrase, "In the time of King Herod."

Herod was the family name, the last name, and this particular Herod was known as "Herod the Great".

I think he gave himself that title. He was a power hungry, nefarious, despicable ruler. He manoeuvred his way to leadership, even though the vast majority of Judeans disliked him.

He became King of all Judea by deception and the strong political support from the Roman conquerors.

No one dare resist him. He killed all opponents.

In addition, he expanded his influence and domain by building up the military, which costs his country tons of money and resulted in cuts to benevolent programs.

*I wonder why a country cannot simultaneously invest in enhancing life and also weapons to destroy life?*

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I suppose the choice reveals devotion / ideology.

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Herod even robbed King David's tomb of its treasures and gave the fortune to the Romans.

Increasingly, Palestine looked and felt Roman.

King Herod represents Darkness.

Herod brought darkness to Judea. The people / the nation lived in darkness, and I think they got used to it. Maybe they learned to ignore the light, even fear it ...because in the light Herod may see them.

So, the people, known as the children of God, supported the corrupt system with their silence.

The affluent even benefited by the controlling, established rules.

That must be the reason that no one else seemed to see the bright light in the dark sky-  
-The Star.

Maybe they did not look up?

Maybe they did not want to see the light?

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Yet the Star was there.

Three Zoroastrian priests saw the star in the night.

They were mystics, people of enlightenment-who searched and asked questions. They saw the star.

They were called Magi or wise men, and they had been following the star.

This is profound!

The light, THE LIGHT, was given and received by outsiders / non-Jews.

They were Not even Christian.

What does this tell us about God?

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The Magi's pursuit brought them to Jerusalem, and they did the unbelievable / the outrageous--they went around asking Questions!

They were casting light from the light into the darkness.

People in the dark Do not ask questions, especially the kind of questions they were asking.

I would not be surprised if they asked, "Do you not see the star, too?" or "Why do you not follow the star? How can you remain idle, cowering in the dark?"

And of course, the ultimate shocker of a question: "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?"

All of Jerusalem became afraid when they heard the Magi's questions, and so was Herod. He was not an heredity king.

The wise men were proclaiming "the light" and the birth of the Messiah / God's light for all. The people trembled.

The Magi were searching in hope / looking forward.

The people in darkness and Herod were holding on to the past.

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Illumination usually is transformative. It brings change.

Change tends to open a gateway to the unknown.

Following a star to "who knows where" demands faith.

Faith in an ultimate being that is showing a better way.

Yet with change:

Yet, the stock market may crash! The economy may no longer benefit the keepers of wealth.

Pension plans may tank?

Who knows what will happen,.....except more openness.

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What is really hidden in the fear of uncertainty?  
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Carl Jung said:

“That which you most need will be found where you least want to look.” [repeat]

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Some say that the pandemic ushered in a darkness.

Perhaps, the opposite has happened?

Like a bright star that catches our eye, the mandated simplicity caused us to look out from our darkness.

We were prompted to examine our priorities and values.

We were forced to be honest.

Fears were exposed, as were inequalities.

Passions and devotions were revealed.

Habits were broken.

Some people ceased to attend church.

Some hid and some protested the opportunity to change.

The seekers of reward followed their obsessions.

They tend to go where their needs and desires take them.

If **we** are self-absorbed, then we have arrived.

Our self constructed fortress obscures the star above.

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Yet, there are those who ventured to the opening gate to the unknown.

Those, and I trust we are in that group, are seeking and following the light. We do not know what is next.

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King Herod, through deception and lies, sought to end the light / to extinguish the star.

The star united with the light of the world and rested as a hopeful infant in Bethlehem.

The Magi arrived there and were overwhelmed with Joy.

*Imagine being overwhelmed with Joy. It happens!*

The Magi knelt down before Jesus and presented their gifts.

They were not practical gifts such as diapers, clothes and wet wipes.

They were Biblical gifts for the ultimate sovereign.

The gifts were symbolic, just as Herod was and the star in the night.

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The Magi's journey was not finished.  
No journey is complete.

Darkness still abounded, so they were warned in a dream to go home by another road.

These faithful sojourners were under God's benevolent care. Outsiders, foreigners under God's care?

Clearly God's light is for everyone.  
God's love is for everyone.

One's label, religion, pedigree does not matter.  
A person's culture, sexual identity, orientation, or skin pigmentation Does Not matter.

God's light is for everyone. God's love is for everyone.

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I once had a parent come to me concerned about their adult child's partner. The relationship was getting serious.

The parent said that the partner was against religion and claimed to be an atheist.

With a reassuring smile I said that our religion is just a helpful language. It is Not the "end all."

I pointed out that the partner was a social justice activist and against war and violence. Moreover, the partner was very humble and loving, and did not appear to be selfish or greedy.

I think that person was living in the light, but simply refused to label it.  
Time would tell. The journey continues.

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**The Light** is God's love, God's Spirit, and God's way of being.

The light was clarified and manifested in Jesus.  
God's Light is brilliant today and there to be experienced and received.

The light was present from the beginning. The light is God's connection to humanity.

Isaiah referred to it.

Solomon talked about it as a person / the Messiah in Psalm 72.

Psalm 72 presents God's way / God's passion and the results of the light's inspiration.

Some citations:

“He will defend the cause of the poor...”

Righteousness will flourish and peace will abound.”

He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.

From oppression and violence, he redeems their life.”

Note, there is no mandate about believing a set doctrine.

This is all about living and being.

This is God’s way, God’s illumination.

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So, why do we need the church?

If anyone can be in the light, why do we need the church?

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The church is Christ in the world today.

The church is called to be the Light.

Therefore, we are needed to illuminate injustices.

We are needed to change current unjust systems.

We are needed to compassionately care for the weak and poor, AND empower them.

The need is too big for individuals.

A collective Christ is needed.

We are called to shine God’s light / to be Christ /the light.

If we are truly people of the light, then we will be recognized by all.

Moreover, we will be people of hope.

Light is hopeful.

Subsequently, we can expose what scurries in the dark.

For example, let us point out the flaws of conspiracy theories.

Let us proclaim, “Beware of closed sources of information that reek suspicion.” Herod was suspicious.

Suspicion thrives in the darkness.

Sources of information must be accountable / out in the open / out in the public for all to see and question.

Yes, question. But question with hope for new insight.

The Magi assumed the best when they questioned Herod.

Questions to entrap squelch the light.

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And finally, hope is radiant.

May we be people of hope.

May we always look for the light to show us the way, Not our way, but God's way.

May we know that when all seems blocked, God will show us another way home.

May we live the faith we claim, believing / knowing that God is illuminating the path before us.

The sun will shine. God's glowing love will prevail.

The journey to and with Christ continues, and there will be overwhelming Joy.

This is our Epiphany.  
Let it shine.