

FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY, YEAR B, JANUARY 7, 2024

Today we are celebrating the Feast of the Epiphany when we hear this passage from Matthew's Gospel--the story of wise men from the East searching out and finding the Christ Child. The word 'epiphany' simply means 'showing' or 'shining forth.' It's about the light of God shining forth from this child. However, the divine light that shines in the Child is not a foreign light to the earth. It is the Light at the heart of all life. It is the Light from which all things come. So this is a story about the Light at the heart of everything, the Light at the heart of you and also the Light at the heart of me.

Epiphany, in a nutshell, is about the light that has illuminated the darkness of the world. It is a story about the light of God which blazes into the darkness of our world and our souls and draws seekers towards it. It's about journeys and how all people are looking for hope and promise. There is a painting by Fra Angelico and Filippo Lippi called the Adoration of the Magi. The painting shows a profusion of human beings of all nationalities coming to the Christ child who are seeking hope and meaning. It celebrates that God's light is for the whole world.

Epiphany is not just about wise men or magi but all of our stories and how we are all on our own journeys searching for joy in the midst of despair, peace, justice and hope in a world that darkness knows all too well. We are all craving the light of hope and love.

Yet our secular world is quick to go onto the next thing. A week before Christmas, stores were already putting out Valentine paraphernalia. Christmas Day while I was driving to my sister's at 3 in the afternoon, the Christmas songs abruptly stopped playing on the radio and it was back to the same lineup of music. It's as if we can't allow the light, the hope, the love of the season get too close to us. We have to move on to the next thing – whatever that is.

Truth is we need to let Christmas which focuses on the light of Christ continue into our lives. The Magi when they embarked on their journey blazed a trail for us which is a trail we should follow. It is a trail that leads in new directions, in new ways of relating to God. Our work as Christians is to search for the whereabouts of Christ in every situation, to see where and how and in what area of our lives we can bring his light. What places need the illumination of God's love? What new ways of being is God calling us into. Where does God's light need to shine. Perhaps we need to start right with ourselves and figure out if the light of Christ is in us.

In this Epiphany season, as we look at the dichotomy of darkness and light, how do we find the light in our own lives and carry that into the darkness? Ironically, sometimes it is in darkness that we can most clearly see the light. St. Paul wrote in Romans and Corinthians and Galatians that the Light of Christ abides in each one of us. Imagine God's own spirit deep within us. How do we tap into that? How do we see that? How do we follow that? It is that light that will guide us on where we should go, what we are called to do, into what seems at times a darkened world.

You know how during the holidays or at some historical venues they have a light show. The purpose is to have the light illuminated onto the objects but when you look away and up into the sky at the moon or the stars you see the light shining from them. This is a great metaphor for what Epiphany and the Epiphany season is all about. Do we want the kind of light that shines on things or the kind that shines from them.

A wonderful story that illustrates this point is about a man named Jacques Lusseyran. He was a French Resistance fighter in World War II. At the age of seven, Jacques was blinded in an accident and rather than following what was the cultural norm at the time, his parents kept him in public schools and mainstreamed him. His mother learned Braille right along with him and his father encouraged him to “always tell us when you discover something new.” Part of what he discovered was that even though he couldn’t see and it was darkness externally, there was a light within him and that light helped him to perceive the difference in trees and in barriers and all sorts of things around him.

He also learned that it would change depending on his internal condition. When he was angry or sad, the light dimmed; when he was joyful and happy he could clearly see the light again. What he learned was that if he wanted to stay in the presence of the light, he needed to love and that love was the key to the light.

In 1944, Jacques and 2000 French resistance fighters were captured by the Germans and put in prison in Buchenwald and he learned this lesson even more acutely because he discovered that when he would succumb to the anger and the hate and the violence that was all around him, the light went out. He started running into things and tripping over furniture. But when he could pull himself back and go to that place inside where the light and the life and the love abide, he could navigate his environment again. He could make his way through the darkness in the world that surrounded him—the hate, the anger, the violence. He was liberated from Buchenwald and wrote a book called “And there was light.”

However, isn’t that true of you and me? That if we can abide in God’s presence in our life and live out that love that surpasses all understanding, we, too, can navigate our way in this world.

The key, I believe, is truly the light that came into this world that the darkness could not overcome. Jacques learned probably the greatest lesson, that no one could turn off the light within him without his consent.

Christ came. Christ continues to come and to show us the light. The birth of the Christ Child changed the course of history. We are part of that continuing process. We are bearers of the light of Christ. As long as there is hunger in our world, as long as anyone lacks shelter, as long as there are places wracked by war and violence we are called to bring light into that darkness. Whatever the circumstances before us or the uncertainties about us, the wonder of Christmas and the challenge of the New Year is that we, empowered by divine grace, continue to be the children of light and ministers of God.

Our challenge is to abide in that light and let it lead us in love, out into a hurting and sometimes darkened world. *Star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright; westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect Light. Amen.*