

Let There Be...
Rev. Matt Landry
January 6, 2019

SCRIPTURE READING

Isaiah 60:1-3

60:1 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Genesis 1: 1-5

1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, **2** the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. **3** Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. **4** And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Do you remember how the whole biblical story begins? "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. Then God said, 'Let there be...'" Through the prophets, God reminded the Israelites, "Arise, shine; for...." On Christmas Eve, we celebrate a new beginning. We welcome the dawning of a new... John tells us at the beginning of his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was..." Jesus even said, "I am..."

A new worship service begins with a bright candle. "A new day begins with a sunrise. A new year begins with lengthening days. A new life begins with infant eyes taking in their first view of a world bathed in it. And a new era in human history began when God came shining into our world through Jesus."¹ I believe you have been looking for light. Isn't that the word you have been waiting to hear? Isn't that what you have been waiting for? To discover the light in and all around us? That's a great description of the spiritual life: one seeking the light.

Even so, we find ourselves in a time of great irony. The days are lengthening; therefore, the sun is shining longer, all at the same time we begin to take down our Christmas lights. January feels like the darkest month even though December really is with the longest night being December 21st. January feels dark to me, because today is Epiphany Sunday, the end of the 12 days of Christmas and it's the traditional day to start taking down your Christmas decorations and lights. All the lights get turned off and buried again for another year. Today being Epiphany Sunday is also the day where we remember the Magi or commonly known as Wise Men from the east who follow the bright light in the star to find the newborn Jesus and his family. While tradition makes it sound like they saw the star and ran to Bethlehem, it's likely that they met a toddler Jesus rather

than a newborn. It's a story only recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, but one that has important significance.

What we recognize on Epiphany is that the giving of the Good News is to the entire world. The light shined not just for Israel, but the light was so bright that these wise men, from the east, more than likely from Iraq or Iran, not of a Jewish background at all, travel a distance to worship this baby. In the Gospel we read that "they were overjoyed when they saw the star. They bowed down and worshipped him." Now for us hearing this story many years later, we probably think the wise men were holy and devout people. They traveled so far to visit their new king, but was he? They weren't Jewish; they weren't of the right religion or ethnicity. They were people outside of the proper religious etiquette of the day. Yet, God lead them to Jesus, God guided their searching to the new born King. Isn't that a story that will be replayed again and again in this child's life? Jesus goes to those outside of the norm and tells others about the coming of the Kingdom of God. The light shines in some unexpected places and people at times.

Epiphany is a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something. It's an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure. Simply put, it means "to reveal." It's what the Wise Men from the east found in baby Jesus. They found a light revealing the reality of the divine. Jesus is an epiphany of who God really is. It's what the shepherds found in the holy family. It's what the disciples found in Rabbi Jesus. It's what we find in all of creation.

What we proclaim as a church this day is that every aspect of creation is pointing to the coming of the source and summit of all creation. Whether we go back to the beginning or to the moment of Jesus' birth or to this very moment in time, the light is always breaking through the darkness. The light is always bursting forth into creation. Do we see it or even seek it? Over the next several weeks, as we have this time between Epiphany and the beginning of Lent in early March, we're going to be looking deeper into the stories of the Hebrew Bible. It makes sense that we go back to the very beginning in Genesis, but I also added another reading from Isaiah that is usually read on Epiphany Sunday. I use these two Scripture readings this morning from Genesis and the prophet Isaiah for one simple reason. God said, "Let there be light." "Arise, shine; for your light has come!" It's all about the light!

What we learn from hearing again the creation story in Genesis, the prophecy of light in Isaiah, and the coming of the Magi in Matthew, is that there are ongoing discoveries and revelations being made. The creation at the beginning was not a one and done experience, where God created, packed up, and headed home. No, God spoke through the prophets. God came in flesh, in Jesus. God still creates today in you and me. Everyday God still speaks let there be light, and we arise, for our light has come. The light shows us the way, enlightens our path, and reveals to us a deeper meaning, when we can't find one.

The Creator God put all of creation in motion. Light. Time. Space. Matter. Motion. Sea. Stone. Fish. Sparrow. You. Me. Enjoying the unspeakable gift and privilege of being here, being alive. Genesis means beginnings. What we know from the very beginning of the Biblical narrative is that God created. There are several theories that theologians and mystics speak regarding creation. Some say the Creator had to withdraw to make space for the cosmos. Others wrote that God created the universe within God's self, so the universe in some way is contained in God, within God's presence, part of God's own life and story. There are still others who believe

that God created out there, beyond space. What we do know is that we can't be silent in the presence of such beauty, glory, wonder, and mystery. We know that we have to celebrate this gift of creation.

When we seek and find the light, we begin to feel God's Spirit, or maybe God's aliveness stirs within us. Author Brian McLaren puts it this way, "To be alive is to look up at the stars on a dark night and to feel the beyond-words awe of space in its vastness. To be alive is to look down from a mountaintop on a bright, clear day and to feel the wonder that can only be expressed in "oh" or "wow" or maybe "hallelujah." To be alive is to look out from the beach toward the horizon at sunrise or sunset and to savor in delight at joy of it all in pregnant, saturated silence. To be alive is to gaze in delight at a single bird, tree, leaf, or friend, and to feel that they whisper of a creator or source we all share."

I suppose you could say that the creation story is not over, it's never over. God created the heavens and the earth. God continues to shine light upon us every moment of every day. Perhaps our greatest task and our only task is to discover that light and to allow it to shine through us in all we do. McLaren continues, "Some people don't see it yet. Some don't want to see it. They've got some shady plans that they want to preserve undercover, in darkness. From pick-pockets to corrupt politicians, from human traffickers to exploitative business sharks, they don't welcome the light, because transparency exposes plans and deeds for what they are: evil. So they prefer darkness. But others welcome the light. They receive it as a gift, and in that receiving, they let God's holy, radiant aliveness stream into their lives. They become portals of light in our world, and they start living as members of God's family – which means they're related to all of God's creation. That relatedness is the essence of enlightenment," or I might add "epiphany."

I think McLaren is on to something here. Maybe it's not so much of defining the spiritual life as seeking the light as it is as receiving the light as a gift. We do nothing to make the sun rise, yet "Let there be light." We can't force the light to come, yet Isaiah tells us, "Arise, shine; for your light has come." Maybe it's more about discovering again the light of creation in every single new day and new moment gifted to us in this New Year. That could be the greatest epiphany we have and the only one we really need if we are going to discover the light anew and really live out the meaning of Christmas.

Do you hope to discover the light in this New Year? I believe that all we have to do is to be open to its shining, its radiance all around us, even when we least expect it, even when we can't see it, even when we don't want to be bothered with it; it's always there shining. It was shining in the beginning of creation. It was shining through the prophets. It was shining in the manger in Bethlehem. It was shining in the star followed by the Magi. It was shining when you were born. It was shining this morning in creation. It is shining in you today. It is shining, it is bright...the light that's what you have been looking for. Who would have guessed, it's been within you this whole time!

Let's pray:

O God, who breathed this world alive and sustains it day by day by your light, whose hand flung stars into space and causes the sun to rise new every morning; you invite us to rise and shine, for

our light has come. Give to us the ability and the awareness to see the light of your glorious presence all around us. We pray for the light of your wondrous grace, love, and mercy in every moment of this whole year. Give to us this grace in the name of Jesus the Christ our Lord. Amen.