

The Changeless Word of God (The Light in the Darkness)

Text: Sirach 24:1-12
Ephesians 1:3-14 (Series B. 2nd Sunday in Christmas) Wisdom of Solomon 10:15-21
John 1:1-18

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

Prayer

Today is the 9th day of Christmas, but our readings already look ahead a few days to Epiphany. I thought it would be a good idea to share some thoughts on the Epiphany, this morning.

The word "*epiphany*" means 'appearing, bringing something into the light, making manifest or visible what was once unseen and hidden.' The word was used for the gods in ancient Greece. When the gods appeared to men, they were said to be having an epiphany.

The season of Epiphany is about light: "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you" (Isaiah 60:1). It's about the coming of the true Light into the darkness of this world.

"Jesus Christ is the Light of the world, the Light no darkness can overcome." "In Him was life, and that life was the light of people" (John 1:4). The chief image of Epiphany is the star in the East whose light guided the Magi to the Child-King enthroned on His mother's lap.

The Light of God's love had come to shine on the Gentiles, too. "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined" (Isaiah 9:2). The Gentiles worship Him with gifts fit for a king - gold, incense, and myrrh - just as the prophet Isaiah had said. The Magi rejoice in the light, and bow down and worship Him.

Light was the first word spoken by God into the chaotic darkness of creation. "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). And there was light. Light is the energy of God. Light is the Word of God.

"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness" (1 John 1:5). Without light, plants can't grow. Animals and human beings can't see or function. Without light, there is nothing to tickle the retina and the optic nerve. Even if our eyes are a perfect 20/20, they won't work in the darkness. Without

light, there is nothing to connect the eye to the object. Without light, there is no life. Very few creatures are able to live in darkness. We couldn't.

There is a medical condition called SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), which happens when people don't get enough sunlight. When the days get short and the skies turn gray, some people tend to become listless, lazy, irritable, even depressed. They tend to hibernate; they hunker down for a long winter's nap.

Darkness means disorientation, despair. We associate darkness with death. We speak of "dark moods" or the "dark side" of someone's personality. Total darkness would be intolerable. We were created to live in the light. In fact, total darkness is probably one of the most frightening things we could experience.

We never really experience total darkness in this life. God is too gracious for that. He's given us the sun to light the day and the moon and stars to give light to the night. We add our own light - candles and oil lamps, and fluorescent lights, etc.

We keep the night light burning down the hall so we don't stub our toes in the darkness. Only on the Last Day, is there outer darkness for those who absolutely refuse to have the light of God's love shine on them.

Sin loves darkness and uses darkness as its cover. More crimes are committed at night than in the light of day. Ask the police officers who patrol the streets at night. Sin draws us into the darkness. It tries to blot out the light, to kill the light. Sin hates the light and refuses to come out into the light.

"And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:19-20). Adam hid from God in the darkness; so do we.

We hide in the darkness when we close our ears to God's Word, when we absent ourselves from the Lord's Table, when we duck the warning of a fellow Christian that seeks to turn us away from the darkness to the light, when we turn inward on ourselves and our needs. "See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples," says Isaiah 60:2.

Without Christ there is only thick darkness; no light, no heat, no hope, no life. And there is nothing we can do about this thick spiritual darkness that sin has put us in. Darkness cannot illuminate itself. It cannot become light. Darkness cannot decide to accept the light, or let light in, or ignite the light.

Darkness cannot become light any more than a sinner can become a saint, or you or I on our own, by our own efforts and struggles and prayers, can become God's children. God must work to bring light. He must speak his creative, light-giving Word into the darkest recesses of our hearts and minds. He must say to the darkness of our souls, "Let there be Light," and speak Christ into us.

Christ is the Light who has defeated the darkness by dying in the darkness. Christ is the Light who has filled the darkness of the grave with his life. Christ is the Light who absorbs the darkness into himself and fills us with his light; he enlightens us with the gifts of His Spirit.

"For it is the God who said, *"Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Isaiah, the prophet, reminds us that this wonderful Light that scatters the darkness is not something to be hoarded as our own private possession. "Jesus Christ is the light of the world." He is the Sun of righteousness, who rises with healing upon his wings. His birth and death and resurrection bring light and life to every corner of this sin-darkened world in which we live.

God is gathering His Church: a people for Himself; a people born of the Light who live and walk in the Light; a people who have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. God is assembling a congregation to proclaim the praise of the Lord. He is calling all people into his priesthood, calling them out of darkness, into His marvelous light.

The prophet of old foresaw the day that the nations would come to worship the true God, when herds of camels would cover the land, when people from Sheba would come bringing *gold* and *incense*. Israel was not permitted to keep God to herself.

Isaiah foresaw the day when the eastern wise men, Persian astrologers or Magi, would come to Israel seeking the Christ who was born in Bethlehem. He saw the day when those who once worshipped the stars would be led by the star to bow down and worship the Child who was their King, their God, and their Savior. He saw their gifts. The gifts of the Magi preach to us; they tell something about Christ. The *gold* tells of Christ's kingship and His kingdom, how this little Child whose birth star was seen in the east, was the King of all kings, the Lord of all lords, whose kingdom and reign would have no end. Their *incense* tells of His divinity. Burning incense was regarded as an act of worship for a god.

This little Child, sitting in the lap of His mother, is worshipped as God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, the Son of God made man. Their myrrh tells of his suffering and death. He is God's sacrificial Lamb, come to atone for the world's sin and to be its Saviour.

A tiny house in Bethlehem was where the wise men worshipped. Today, nations of the world gather to worship the Christ-Child, who came to save both Jew and Gentile. They offer Him their gifts. Their lives would be forever changed. They had seen the Light of God in the face of Jesus.

God still gathers his church today. There may not be camels in the parking lot, but there are the Fords and Dodge, Toyotas and VW's of the Gentiles. There may not be *gold, incense* and *myrrh*, but there are the offerings of our labours, as well as our time and talents, our prayers and praises to the almighty God.

We may not see Christ sitting on his mother's lap, as did the Magi, but we still find him in the water of Baptism, in the word of forgiveness, in the bread that is his body and the wine that is his blood. And there we worship Him.

We didn't follow a star to church this morning. But we are here because someone spoke the Word of God to us and pointed us to Christ. We are here because a friend or a parent, or a co-worker, or a pastor spoke a Word of Christ to us.

As the prophet Daniel says, "*Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever*" (Dan 12:3). You are stars, guiding others to the place where Christ is for them.

"You are the light of the world," Jesus said to His disciples and to us, His Church. A city set high on a hill. A beacon beaming out into the streets and alleys and homes, reflecting the Epiphany light of Christ, drawing all people to worship the one true God in the light of his Son.

We are like a lighthouse set, on *Grand Boulevard in NDG*, small yet bright, guiding people through the fog and the storm, shining into the darkness, guiding people to where Christ is located to save them. "*Let your light so shine before people that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:16).

Jesus is light enough to dispel our deepest darkness, to scatter the darkness of our fears, to destroy the darkest depths of our death. In this coming season of Epiphany, let Jesus enlighten each and every one of us anew with his Word and Spirit. Trust him to be our guiding Light in this life and the next.

**Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. Amen.**

January 3, 2021