

## “Look at the Light”

January 4, 2015

*God Revealed* series – Epiphany Sunday

Believe it or not, the days are getting longer. Darkness falls so early now. As a kid, I remember looking at the stars on clear, cold, winter nights. For some reason, I was more fascinated by stars in winter than in summer. Maybe it was just easier to see them that time of year. Maybe I was paying closer attention.

These winter months can be hard ones to get through. They can seem long and drawn out. Light seems hard to come by. But, there's light all around us. Our eyes only see visible light, but there's more light that we can't see. There are waves of light like infrared that we can't see, but they're there. Still, our eyes are specialized enough that one-fifth of our brains works to process all that we see.

When was the last time you looked up at the sky and saw stars? Sometimes we're so wrapped up in our small world that we forget how vast God's universe is. If we start thinking about the expanse of the cosmos, it gets overwhelming fast! And we have nothing left to do but to praise God for the majesty and wonder of creation!

And even though it seems so dark, we're in a season of Light. This week we enter into the season of Epiphany. Epiphany literally means to show or make known or to reveal. The early church celebrated this season to recognize God around us – God who we see in Jesus Christ. The Light of the World has come, and it's powerful for us - and for the whole world.

One good way to remember Epiphany is to say “a-ha!” I'd bet that each of us has had an “a-ha!” moment—a moment when we understood how much God loves us. It's moment of grace that changes us forever. Remember the shepherds in Bethlehem: “For unto us a child is born—a Son is given.” The angel's words changed them forever. The magi who had traveled so far came to worship Jesus and were changed forever. We celebrate that God is revealed in Jesus. But the difficult part is that we're called to do make Jesus known in trying and tragic times.

Did you hear what the prophet Isaiah said? “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.” What a strange message! The people had lived much of their lives under foreign rule. They had seen war. They had witnessed their loved ones carried away to live in exile! They had come home, but to a place that didn't look or feel the same.

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.” Before this, Isaiah has been calling the people to repent and turn back to God – and

then gives them this message of hope! God's glory will be among them. The exiles will come back home. And other nations will come to Israel and restore its wealth.

So God says, "Get up and move because my light is shining upon you!" Even though what you see is death and destruction, even though you experience trying times, even though nothing seems to be going right, get up and get ready, because God has a plan to redeem you!

Friends, Isaiah's prophecy speaks to us! Looking back, we can be dragged down by what we've seen and experienced. Even right now, we can be dragged down by our trying life situations – whatever they are. But hear it again: "Arise, shine, for **your** light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon **you**."

Light is a powerful force, and even when we don't think it's there, it's there. If you've ever flown in a plane that took off on a cloudy day, maybe you noticed when the plane finally broke through the clouds and revealed a brilliant sun like you'd never seen before. The light is there – always ready to pierce the darkness. Jesus Christ – the Light of the world – is able to pierce our deepest doubts and fears with hope and love.

Epiphany is a time to believe again - to believe in God who shines brightly in our lives, in our church, and in our world. In the early church, Epiphany was a big deal - probably as important as Easter - because it was a time to lift up the truth that God appears to us in unexpected and miraculous ways! Maybe our challenge is to be ready again - to believe that God IS at work in you, in me, in the person who sits next to you, in the person you don't ever want to sit next to, in your kids, in your co-workers, in our worship, in the hospital, at the mission, in our daily lives? How many of us came here today expecting that we'd have an encounter with the Holy - with God whose glory shines?

God is waiting to be encountered. But it can't happen if we don't believe it will happen. We have to be looking at the light - watching and sharing those moments when God shows up. On Christmas Eve, I invited our kids to color a picture of a star as a part of our celebration. We light candles together and sang "Silent Night," but what I noticed was one little boy who held up his star inviting me and everyone else to look at it - to look at the light.

The promise of light in darkness that Isaiah talks about isn't just a dream—it's now a reality. God's presence isn't something we look forward to far beyond us in the future. It's here right now, in our midst. All that has been foretold about the coming of a Savior is true. He is here—God is with us! We wait for Christ to come again, but the promise is real now. And we have work to do.

Do we believe that when we come to the table something happens? This isn't just remembering what Jesus did long ago, but anticipating God's work in us. I pray we

keep our eyes open for a new encounter with Jesus. I pray that it would be a holy moment for each of us. Jesus invites us here to his table for an “a-ha” moment – a time to experience God’s love and grace more deeply.

Just as we know the love of God, we’re called to share that love with others. And coming to the Lord’s Table is one way that we’re renewed in our faith and challenged to go out in faith.

And we need the experience of discovering and re-discovering God’s love for us. Isaiah’s promises are powerful because we come here - some of us confident in God’s love and some of us struggling to believe it. But hear it again - God’s glory, God’s light - shines on you!

Someone wrote, “The purpose of Epiphany is not to awe or impress us, but to invite – to invite us into God’s loving presence.” We’re always invited into God’s loving presence. You’re invited by Christ himself to a meal that shows his love and care for you and for the whole world.

May we be renewed so that we can serve God and others. May we see God in those who are yearning for an encounter with God - and for friendship, community, connection. May we expect God to do something incredible as we look at the light and follow where it leads.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.