

Sunday, January 10, 2020 – Epiphany (Observed)

“All About the Light”

Ephesians 3: 1-12

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Adapted from CPR

The past several weeks we have been talking and singing about light—about Jesus, the Light of the world. In Bethlehem’s dark streets “shineth the everlasting light,” or “Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!... Light and life to all he brings,” or “Son of God, love’s pure light... beams from your holy face, Jesus Lord, at your birth.”

Today’s Old Testament lesson proclaims, “Arise, shine, for your light has come.” The Lord has appeared and the whole world should see the light of his coming. It’s Epiphany! Epiphany is about light – shining on Jesus, showing us our Savior.

In that sense Epiphany is a mission festival. The light is moving out. We hear about the Wise Men from Babylon in the east—the first Gentiles to worship the king of the Jews. The Light came for the Jews and the Gentiles to dispel the darkness that covers the earth and all its peoples. This Light that is Jesus, has to get out!

But there are barriers – some literal and some of heart and mind. We don’t often notice it, but our building has walls. Walls that divide “us inside” from “those outside.” The walls also have *doors*—there, and there, and there. The walls aren’t there as a barrier. Anyone can come through the doors; in fact, we *want* them to come in! The walls simply hold up the roof and keep us from the elements, that’s all.

But from the outside, walls can be a very real barrier. People looking at our church wonder: *can* they come in? Are they welcome? Will they fit in? What if they come inside and find they are still “outsiders”? We on the inside have to realize that the walls can be barriers between us and those outside—even if those outside only *think* they are barriers.

This is why Paul wrote the message to the Ephesians that is our Epistle lesson. He tells them about the mystery that was once known only to God but has now been revealed to the apostles and prophets, and through them is revealed to us. The mystery is that the Gentiles—the outsiders of Paul’s day—are heirs together with the Jews of Christ’s inheritance. “Outsiders” and “insiders” are one body with Christ, are partakers together of his promises. There is no division. The doors are open. Jesus opens the door, and no one can shut it.

For us to get the full impact of Paul’s words, we need to remember that we are the outsiders in this text. Most of us were born Gentiles—not the inheritors of the family promise, not the descendants of Abraham, not part of the people God set apart for his holy purposes. But thanks be to God! The plan God fulfilled in Jesus Christ gives us access to his presence—free and confident access to the throne room of God—by faith in what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us.

As far as God’s eternal plan of salvation is concerned, that we Gentiles are on the “inside” is the surprise. It was once a mystery known only to God. It was Paul’s great joy to unveil the mystery to us, the Gentiles: “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” Also for us, Jesus was born, died, and rose again. Also for us, he gives citizenship in heaven and eternal inheritance with the Father forever.

Jesus came as a volunteer, willingly to remove the barriers that would keep us from God. Today we also celebrate Jesus’ baptism, when he voluntarily, despite John the Baptist’s objections, received a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He had no sins, needed no repentance, but he stood with us, who do. In weeks to come, we will hear more about how he lived and taught and touched and healed people. He let his light shine, but he also let that light be covered with the darkness of sin and cross and death.

Yet even on the cross, his light was shining. He did not die for his crimes. He died for the crimes of others for outsiders. He died for people who would have ended punished eternally for their sins. When he said, “It is finished,” our death and our punishment were finished. The Son of God provided new life and love for us. That is light shining out. That is the light we need for our lives. That is the light we need to shine.

Compared to the barrier between the sinless Son of God and his sin-polluted creatures, the barriers between Jew and Gentile pale. The barrier between us and our “unchurched” neighbor is no barrier at all. If you’re worshipping with us today and don’t have a church home, know that’s who we are and how we see ourselves – no different than you. We aren’t perfect, we don’t have it all figured out. We muddle through and we mess up. We are, both of us, sinners who need a Savior. The good news is, we have one. Jesus has appeared. Jesus is here. Let there be light.

Let there be light, first of all, in our lives, where there is still too much darkness. We still try to hide too many shadowy corners from the light. We still try to keep God at a distance. Paul said it to the Ephesians: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light. Everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: ‘Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’” (Eph 5:8, 11, 13-14).

Let there be light here in the church, where we gather around the Word and message and gifts of Jesus Christ, our Light. God’s Gifts are perfectly good and capable in and of themselves to do His will but our own habits, activities, attitudes, and expectations can block the light from shining fully. We are here because Jesus Christ is the light of the world—the light no darkness can overcome. If we obscure that light, how can people who don’t bring that light in with them find it here?

Most of all this Epiphany season, let’s dedicate ourselves to the task that was Paul’s joy and make it our own—that light shines into the lives of people who need see it. “Jesus Christ—also for you!”

If we are not the best witnesses, then so be it. As we talk with people, we can simply tell what promises we rely on, what God has accomplished for us, and why we boldly and confidently believe that we have access to God. When we talk about those things, we offer light to others—the Light of the world.

Think of it—everyone we know or meet is a fellow heir with us in Christ’s inheritance, a fellow member with us of the body of Christ, and potentially a fellow recipient of his promises. Just like us. Everywhere we go we bring the Light. Arise. Shine. Your Light has come. And He shines forever. In Jesus’ name, Amen.