

Pastor Graham Pfeffer Sermon for Epiphany celebrated on 5th January 2025

Text Isaiah 60:1-6 *'Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. ² See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. ³ Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

What is Epiphany and why do we celebrate this in our church year. Well as the reading above reveals, Epiphany is the revelation that Jesus is the light who has come to those living in a land of darkness. In Jesus the glory of the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Epiphany comes after the 12 days of Christmas which end today 5th January. On this day of Epiphany, the Gospel reading is of the magi or wise men following the star to Jesus. Epiphany is so much more than a story of three magi who come bearing their gifts of gold frankincense and Myrrh.

Epiphany, in the early church, was not so much about the arrival of the magi, but the revelation of Jesus Christ at his baptism to the whole world as God's one and only beloved child. While we celebrate the baptism of our Lord next Sunday, the whole Epiphany season is the revelation and manifestation of Jesus as the light of the world.

So, what is the darkness that Jesus overcomes. A read of Isaiah chapters 58 and 59 reveals the condition of people's hearts during the time where the exiles from Babylon return to Jerusalem. Living conditions are extremely difficult. Jerusalem is still in ruins. The people are divided not against an outside enemy, but among themselves.

In Isaiah 59:2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

V9 So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows.

V12-13 Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: ¹³ rebellion and treachery against the Lord, turning our backs on our God.

Now that's a dark place to be in. To have God hide his face and will not hear you. The reason the people can't find the light is because they are walking in deep shadows of darkness. It's also what we hear in John 1:9-10, ⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

The worst darkness you can be in, is to turn your backs on God. Isaiah describes it as rebellion and treachery against the Lord. Paul describes it as sinning against the Holy Spirit, of which there is no forgiveness.

Yet into this darkness, the true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. As Isaiah says, Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. ² See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. ³ Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

So, who is this light who now enters into our midst? Who is this who now actually shows us God's face, who previously had never shown his face? In the words of the song, did Mary know as she kissed her little baby, that she kissed the face of God. God's glory is no longer in some far-off heavenly realm, or his presence experienced in a cloud, but his glory, his presence, his light has come in the world in the word made flesh to make his home among us.

Isaiah speaks of the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, as a gift, and not just a gift for Israel, he says when this thing happens the “nations shall come to your Light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.” Isaiah tells them to “Lift up [their] eyes all around and see!” What are they to see?

“The wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. they shall bring gold and frankincense and shall bring good news.”

Isn't that what we heard in the Gospel reading from Matthew today, how the Magi come seeking to find the one who is born king of the Jews. They said to King Herod, we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” The magi are excited as they share this good news, about the birth of the true king, the Messiah, but King Herod doesn't find their news good at all.

However, after speaking with the King, the star they had seen, rose and went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

God who has always been in the world, is described in Psalm 145 8-9 as, the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹ The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

God revealed his mercy over all, in the birth of Jesus. Here is the one who has come to remove the darkness of sin. Yet, people still choose to walk in darkness rather than be drawn to the light of Christ. Even so, God showed his everlasting love as he manifested himself in Jesus. What does manifest mean? To publicly demonstrate something. In Jesus, God publicly demonstrates his love and mercy to the world.

Through Jesus, the world can now arise and shine, for God showed he is slow to anger and abounds in everlasting love, when he sent his light into the world in the person of Jesus. Matthew's story of the wisemen visiting the Christ-child and Herod's reaction show us that Jesus wasn't born into world where everything is sweet and nice, he was born into world of violence and wicked people. He was born into a broken and dark world, of conflict and unrest.

Do you find comfort in that? In Jesus, in his light, is what is needed to overcome moral and spiritual darkness. He is the light that strengthens and lights the way for you when darkness threatens to overwhelm you. Wherever there is darkness in your family, in your friendships, in your community, Christ has come to shed light on all those areas of all our lives to reconcile and restore peace, harmony and joy. Wherever there is darkness in our nation or in the world at large, Christ tells us to let our light shine before others, to use whatever means he gives to you to relieve the suffering of others and drive out the darkness that shrouds the lives of so many. Let the light of Christ shine through you so that the darkness of evil might be dispelled.

There is only one cure for darkness and that is Light. Jesus is the true light who has come into the world. Arise, shine, your light has come. As you go from here, arise shine, and may the light of Christ go with you, into the world.

Amen