

## Sermon "Light and Truth"

Scripture: Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2:1-12

Epiphany Sunday, January 6, 2019

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As we gather on Epiphany, a celebration of the light that guided the Magi from the East, our first scripture reading is Isaiah 60:1-6. Isaiah is known for bringing home God's message of inclusivity in surprising ways. In today's scripture, Isaiah not only compares the coming of God into the world as a brilliant light, but also affirms this light will transform those outside of Israel as well as those within. Listen to the Word of God.

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

*<sup>2</sup> For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and God's glory will appear over you.<sup>3</sup> Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.<sup>4</sup> Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.<sup>5</sup> Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.<sup>6</sup> 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 proclaim the praise of the LORD. Amen.*

Our second scripture reading, Matthew 2:1-12, recalls the story of the Magi. The significance of the Magi's journey is not the presents they brought. The significance is their presence in the story at all. Today we celebrate Epiphany, the manifestation of God, and the magi who followed the light of the star to greet the Light of the world. If Christmas celebrates God's embrace of humanity, then Epiphany announces that God embraces all of humanity. God welcomes all people including the Gentile represented by these who were guided by the light of a star on a sincere and persistent search for light and truth. This is the word of God.

*In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.'<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" <sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.'<sup>9</sup> When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup> On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. Amen.*

The title of the sermon: "Light and Truth"

*The text: ...wise men from the East came to Jerusalem...*

*Matthew 2:1b*

Let us pray. Holy and loving God, give us the steadfastness of the Magi whose search for light and truth was not disappointed. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Light is woven throughout Holy Scripture as a symbol for God and God's presence in the world. Light is present at every meaningful beginning. In the story of creation, we read: *And God said, "Let there be light." and there was light.* Light was at the beginning in the creation of the world. Without light, there is no order. Without light, there is no life. Perhaps that is why light is considered the perfect symbol for God... for light is life and it is our Creator God who has given us life.

In the beginning of creation, in the beginning of the story of Christ, and in the beginning of each new day we find the symbol of light, the presence of God. At the beginning of Christ's life we find the brightness of the Eastern Star...and again at the commencement of Christ's ministry, at his baptism, we get a glimpse of the brilliance of the heavens opening.

At the beginning of each new day we are greeted by the morning sun. Listen to these words from Mary Oliver's brilliant poem. "Why I Wake Early."

Hello, sun in my face.  
Hello, you who make the morning  
And spread it over the fields  
And into the faces of the tulips  
And the nodding morning glories,  
And into the windows of, even, the  
Miserable and the crotchety—

Best preacher that ever was,  
Dear star, that just happens  
To be where you are in the universe  
To keep us from ever-darkness,  
To ease us with warm touching,  
To hold us in the great hands of light—  
Good morning, good morning, good morning.

Watch now, how I start the day  
In happiness, in kindness.

Last Christmas I received two C.S. Lewis books from our son, Paul, and the inscription he wrote on the inside cover included this quote from C.S. Lewis: *I believe in God as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.*"

We gather at the beginning of a new year at Westminster Presbyterian Church to ordain and install new leadership. We are greeted by the light of a new day and a promise of a meaningful

year for ministry, and we are greeted by the star of Epiphany as a poignant reminder about the nature of the God who calls us to ministry.

According to the Reverend Luis Rivera in Feasting on the Word Commentary: *God is the God who wants to be known in order to reconcile and redeem humanity and the rest of creation. God's revelation takes place not to remain secret or within the control or for the benefit of an elite group. God's redemptive revelation in Jesus Christ reaches beyond the provincial and is for all people.*

Today we celebrate the God who is the light of the world, who joined us in our humanity, and who came for all humanity. Today, we accept the call to lead in the spirit of Epiphany; to shine the light of Christ in the dark and broken places of our world, and when that light is not as bright and clear on the pathways we travel, to accept the call to guide, to understand, to encourage, and to hold one another as we journey together. The spirit of Epiphany calls each of us to search for light and truth as the Magi did, and to welcome those who, like the Magi, seek light and truth among us.

*Light and Truth* is the motto of Yale University, whose seal with the well-known Latin *Lux et Veritas* dates back to 1736. Conceived during the Enlightenment, this motto charged students to seek truth as well as light necessary to illuminate the truth. When the Reverend Albert Hale completed his education at Yale and came with the Yale Band from the East, travelling from Connecticut to Springfield to lead this abolitionist congregation in 1835, he was seeking “light and truth” in the Spirit of Epiphany.

Theologian Beverly Gaventa reflects on the journey of the Magi in the Texts for Preaching Commentary. *Throughout their journeys, she writes, the Magi are patently (clearly, without doubt) guided by God. It is, first, a star in the East and then a text from Micah that lead them to the Christ child. When the time comes for them to leave Bethlehem, they are warned in a dream to take a different route home to avoid Herod. These strange outsiders do not stumble onto the Messiah as if by accident. They search with purpose and are directed each step of the way by a divine hand.*

May we journey into this new year with the wisdom of the Magi. Let us search with purpose and intentionality, my friends. Let us seek light and truth with diligence and resolve. None of us stumbles into the presence of our Messiah by accident. This is a journey too precious to take lightly and too important not to travel.

May we live lives that dazzle with brightness through what we say and what we choose not to say...through what we do and what we choose not to do...through the way we see the world and the way we treat one another. May we continue to shine the light of Christ in the dark and broken places of our neighborhood and our world... and may we find ways to welcome within this community those who seek light and truth and who long for respect, acceptance, and love.

This is our identity as the church of Jesus Christ and this is the ministry to which we are called as we gather on Epiphany Sunday, 2019.

Led by the star...guided by the One who holds us in the great hands of light—Good morning, good morning, good morning.

Arise, your light is come. Amen.