

“THE LIGHT STILL SHINES”

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Text: Matthew 2:1-12; Isaiah 60:1-6

A father told his young son to go to bed. The boy started up the stairs but realized it was dark and he couldn't reach the light switch. So, he went back to his dad, but his father told him to go on up because God was there. The boy knew that this was his father's final answer, so he started back up the stairs. But on the first step he stopped, looked up, and said, "God if you are there, please don't move or you'll scare me to death!"

I would imagine that most of us can relate to this little boy's fears. All of us, at some point in our lives, have been unable to reach the light switch. All of us, at some point in our lives, have been trapped in the darkness of this world...looking and praying for light...but not knowing where to look.

And in our Old Testament lesson for this morning, the prophet Isaiah gives us a strong message of encouragement...the light will come to us! "See darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you."

In the Bible, darkness is a symbol of gloom, oppression and sin, and the Lord Himself is portrayed as the Light! The prophet Isaiah declares that the darkness of this world will be overcome by the Light of Israel--Who is the promised Messiah! For He is the Light that was prophesied to rise upon the Jews. "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." The first coming of Christ was to have a powerful attractiveness for the Gentiles...or the non-Jews...that the Old Testament never had.

In our society we have heard a great deal about equal access under the law. The handicapped are deemed to have equal access to public places. Laws that were framed to maintain privileges for one group over another have been challenged and overturned. Minorities have successfully sued for their rights under the law.

But when it comes to our relationship with God, there are no rights of equal access or to any access at all. God told us that if we were to eat from the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil we would die. And when we did eat from this tree, we were banished from the garden...unable to reach out our hands and also eat from the Tree of Life, and live forever. However, the Bible reveals that our God is gracious and does grant us equal access, not under the law, but under grace!

And the Jews were the first to be given this amazing privilege....but now the doors to the kingdom are open to all people! The only thing that can keep a person outside in the darkness is unbelief....or a desire to remain under the miserable delusion of sin.

But the Light Shines! Jesus has come. We have access to God through His Son!

And in our Gospel lesson we read about the visit of the Wise Men. Many of us have probably seen the motto: "Wise men still seek Him." The Wise Men followed the star on a long and arduous journey to pay tribute to the new king.

And wise people are still seekers! Like the little boy in our opening story, they want desperately to be able to reach up and turn on the light switch...and dispel the darkness. Jesus encourages all of us to seek so that we might find. And once that light switch is turned on, all things become new...we are born again... "our light has come."

But this is just the beginning of our most exciting and eternal journey where God's light shines on all the many layers and mysteries of life. Yes, Wise people are still seekers! When we think we have life or God or anything else all wrapped up, we stop seeking and growing.

Christian Discipleship is an invitation to follow Christ on a journey of faith. And we continue this journey by starting our days with quiet time with God, as we regain our focus, read the Scriptures....asking for God's guidance....as new truths come to light...and we begin each day with Scripture, meditation and prayer...and we grow.

We also continue this journey as we consistently assemble together with other Christians for Bible Study, fellowship, Sunday school, and worship....and we grow.

For our calling is to be the Church of Jesus Christ--those through whom others find the light of Christ!

The prophet Isaiah is speaking to us--the Church--when he says: "Nations will come to you... Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy!" And this joy is what all Christians know as reality. It doesn't matter so much where we are on our journey of faith...but it does matter where we are going!

Unfortunately, some Christians are not going anywhere because they think that the journey is completed. Possessed by fear and foolishness, they refuse to continue to follow the Light of Christ into new truths and joys. Then, there are people who are following the wrong star. They are seekers, all right, seekers after power, fame and fortune. They are ready, at all times, to bow the knee to their gods. They, too, are foolish because their journey leads nowhere except to misery, death, and hell.

Now, when we really delve into the beautiful story of the visitation of the Magi, the implications are exciting. These Magi were a priestly class from Media and Persia, and they had a strange religion. For starters, they believed in two gods. Furthermore, they were magicians...a practice which is bitterly denounced in the Bible. The word Magi is the plural of Magus from which we derive the words magic and magician. In their priestly roles, they practiced the ancient art of astrology, believing that the stars controlled human affairs.

Even today, millions of otherwise rational people put some degree of stock in astrology. All of us have certainly been asked, "What sign were you born under?" Is there anyone here who doesn't know his or her sign? Millions of people search daily for their sign in the newspaper's astrology column in hopes that it might shed some light on their future.

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.'"

The Bible has always looked at astrology with disdain....so this account raises some interesting points. Does God guide people who are honestly searching for His Son, but follow false belief systems? What did we believe as we were in search of the Light of Life? Whatever our belief, we were in the darkness during our search. We

were unable to reach the light switch! Are there things that we now believe...which are false....that God is more than willing to bring to light if we continue our journey of faith?

If we follow Christ daily, we will learn new truths every day!!! If we do not follow Christ daily, our Christian growth is stunted, and darkness continues to envelope much of our lives....and we will often find that our lives are not radiant, and our hearts are not throbbing and swelling with joy...because darkness does mean gloom, oppression and sin. "See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples."

But as those upon whom God's Light has appeared...we are called to be the ones that reflect God's light...so that nations will come to the Light of Christ! As the Church of Jesus Christ, we have a great calling...the greatest calling of all. As the Bible declares: "So then, people ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

Are we being faithful disciples of Christ? Are we continuing to allow the light of Christ to renew our minds daily? Are we consistently, intentionally, and actively with love telling others about the forgiveness we now have through Jesus Christ our Lord?

Jesus promises: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

Something was missing in the lives of the Magi. Therefore, they sought a Savior. But they sought Him in the darkness....and behold the Lord rose upon them, and His glory appeared to them! The Light Shines! "Arise, shine...Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn...Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy...and all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord."