

“LET THERE BE LIGHT”

Pastor Mike Corwin

I – DARKNESS:

I have to tell you that I am not a great fan of darkness. There are things and people who like to lurk around in the darkness...like bats...and I'm not a big fan of bats. I don't like flying mice! I'm not afraid of it, I just don't like the fact you can't see well in it.

In my profession of being a police officer I discovered that it could be used by bad people to try to conceal themselves from me as they committed a crime. It allowed them to hide. No matter the spotlight on the car or the most powerful rechargeable flashlight I had you still could not see into all the cracks and corners. I've noticed that it makes it hard to see the deer that run out in front of me on my way to work or going home late until they're right in front of me in the beams of my headlights. If it weren't for night lights and ambient light shining in the windows at night as I'm walking through the house there would be a lot of broken furniture or bones.

The only thing darkness is good for is sleeping. Thank you Lord for electricity and light bulbs to conquer the darkness.

II – BIBLICAL VIEW:

I get this same negative view of darkness from the Bible too. In the very beginning of this book (the Bible) we read in Genesis 1: 1-3 these Words of the beginning of our story with God:

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

³ Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

I see that when God started the creation he found the earth and the universe in what some translations call “Chaos” and the darkness was part of that chaos. The first thing he did was do away with the darkness. He uttered what is probably one of the most quoted lines in the Bible as people turn on lights in a room, he said “LET THERE BE LIGHT.”

On Christmas Eve we quoted the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7 about a child being born to us and all the wonderful names he would have like Mighty God and Prince of Peace. But even before that in Isaiah 9:2 we read:

The people who walk in darkness
will see a great light.
For those who live in a land of deep darkness,
a light will shine. Isaiah 9:2

II – BIBLICAL VIEW:

The prophet said all of this about the coming of the Messiah to save God's people. He says the people were walking in darkness but the Messiah would bring them a light that they could walk in instead. A light to deliver them from their darkness whatever form it too.

In this morning's reading from Isaiah we see the same prophecy. That the light will come and God's glory will be with them. A prophecy to bring hope to a people who have only despair. He is telling them that God's new age is about to dawn and they will be released from their exile. The light Isaiah is talking about is like being locked in a dark cell for ages and suddenly walking outside into a blinding light. Or getting new life when you were certain of your own death. The prophecy is about the coming of God's Messiah, of creation's Savior. The world, the people of God needed a light to shine through the darkness of their lives.

Then on Christmas Eve, Pastor Becky shared with you the fulfillment of that prophecy as she read the Christmas/Christ birth story from the Gospel of John with verses such as these:

⁴The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.

⁵The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

And

⁹The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

II – BIBLICAL VIEW:

Just as God defeated the darkness at creation with the light, he sent his one and only Son to earth to defeat the darkness that once again invaded the creation through the actions...thoughts, deeds, words, sin of the created children he gave life to.

III – TEXT:

This is Epiphany Sunday on the church calendar. The day we recognize the travel and arrival of the Wise Men to where Jesus was staying. I see in this story the examples of light and darkness and what our actions should be regarding the light. Hear the story from the Gospel of Matthew:

Matthew 2:1-12 (NLT)

Visitors from the East

¹ Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ²“Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.”

³ King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”

⁵“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they said, “for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶‘And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,
for a ruler will come from you
who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’”

⁷ Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. ⁸ Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

⁹ After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! ¹¹ They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

¹² When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

SUBTITLE: FOLLOWING THE LIGHT

Okay, so the first thing we have to see is that our traditional nativity scenes are not correct. They show the wise men coming to the stable where Jesus was born just like the shepherds did. The truth is this was sometime after the birth and the holy family were probably in a house somewhere. We don't know the exact time this story took place but we know from the scripture that follows this that it was sometime time later – up to 2 years after the birth and manger scene.

This story does show us the darkness verses the light theme started at the beginning of time. Jesus is obviously the light, Herod is the darkness. The evil one. Everyone in Jerusalem was disturbed by the news of a newborn King because they knew how Herod would react. He was an appointee of the Romans to rule over the Jewish people. He got the right to do this through the use of his own military might against his own people the Jews. Everyone in Jerusalem knew that he would react badly to this news and indeed he did having all the children 2 years or younger in Bethlehem murdered! He was a ruthless tyrant who eliminated anyone who challenged him or was a threat to him. And that's what the hint of a newborn king did to him. Immediately set in motion plans to eliminate this threat to his kingship.

Then we hear about the wise men or as our songs say, the three kings from the East. Most likely these were astrologers from Babylon. They were going on pagan prophecies and star study, but since a good number of Jews had settled there or been drug there as slaves when Babylon conquered Jerusalem and the Jewish people, they most likely even had the Biblical prophecies to look at and consider as well.

But what I want you to see this morning is the fact that they found Jesus by following the light. These men started their journey in unbiblical ways, following messages in an alien faith and wisdom, but their search led them to the God of the Bible. They followed the star based on their own notions of what it meant. They were following their own wisdom, but God put the star, the light, in the sky to attract them. These Gentiles were among the first to recognize the birth of Jesus, the Messiah.

In this story we see not only the darkness being cut through by the light, but Matthew recognizes that this light that has been born into the world is already tearing down the dividing walls between us and them, between the different cultures of Jew and Gentile.

Two weeks ago we heard about the planets Saturn and Jupiter aligning and being close to earth. An event that hasn't happened in 800 years. There are those who theorized that this was the star of Bethlehem that the Wise Men followed that first Christmas. Identifying the source of the star (super nova, comet, aligned planets, etc.) does not change the fact that faith recognizes it as God's generous gift to all of humanity. The light of God is revealed in the natural world as well as Scripture.

When they came to the light they honored the light with gifts and adoration. They found the light and their lives were changed appropriately.

IV – LIVE IN THE LIGHT:

Most people would agree that 2020 was a year of darkness. Between the pandemic and all the other human problems we saw played out in humanity, we had all kinds of darkness to work through.

But now we've celebrated Christmas. We know that the Light has come into the world. A light that all the darkness of human behavior cannot extinguish. A light that if we follow it will lead us out of the darkness and allow us to see clearly and live in the light forever.

I for one have decided to be governed by The Light and no longer be swayed by the darkness. In the weeks ahead Pastor Becky and I will be telling you how you are expected to live if you are following the light.

V- BE WISE:

The saying goes that Wise Men – and Women still seek him. Let us together follow the star of Bethlehem and give our hearts to the Light as we adore him and worship him. LET THERE BE LIGHT!

AMEN