**Message: “Darkness and Light” (Scripture: Isaiah 60:1-6)**

AHA!

Have you ever had an ‘AHA’ moment – a time when suddenly you get it!

You have a sudden realization, a fuller understanding, or an illuminating discovery of the true meaning of something

AHA!

Well, that’s the literal meaning of Epiphany. Webster dictionary defines it as

*“a sudden manifestation or perception of the*[*essential*](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/essential#h1)*nature or meaning of something.”*

In the liturgical church calendar, Epiphany is a festival celebrated on January 6th. It marks the arrival of the Magi, and it is often symbolized by light.

And it’s not difficult to make the connection between Divine guiding light and the bright star in the sky that the Magi followed.

Many of our Epiphany hymns talk about guiding light. Our first hymn today asked us:

‘Will you come and see the light ….. will you step into the light …. Will you travel by the light.’

And then our second hymn calls to us:

‘A light is gleaming, spreading its arms throughout the night, living in the light.’

Epiphany is a time when we can pause and think about how we might live in the light.

Perhaps we become acutely aware of the need for light when we find ourselves plunged into darkness. A couple of weeks ago we had a power cut here in Stratford. It was around 7pm, and we were suddenly plunged into darkness. Unfortunately, at that time I was upstairs at home, sorting through my closet – let me show you –

**(CUT – film next section in the closet)**

Ok – I know it is strange to have your Minister take you into their closet, but I want to just illustrate how vulnerable we feel when we are plunged into darkness, and how much we need light. So I’m going to turn off the light, and you can see for yourself just how dark it is

**(turn lights off)**

Now don’t turn your computer or TV off – there is nothing wrong – I am still here even if you can’t see me. But I have to tell you, it’s pretty scary being in this much darkness with no light to guide me.

**(turn light back on)**

In fact, I’ll be honest – I was so sacred that I screamed for Blair to come and help me, and he came upstairs with a flashlight to guide me back down to safety.

**(Cut -return to downstairs)**

Alright, that’s enough of your Minister in the closet, but you get the point!

When we are in darkness, then we desperately need light to guide us.

Our darkness might not be literal – like my closet – but we are almost all certain to go through times of darkness in our lives. The prophet Isaiah even proclaimed that

*“darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness will surround the peoples”* (Isaiah 60:2)

So, what is the metaphorical darkness that surrounds you?

* Perhaps you worry about health concerns or impending test results.
* maybe you have financial stresses that have been exacerbated due to Covid
* or it could be the lack of physical contact with others that has taken a toll on you and you struggle with loneliness, and the lack of social contact

These are all very real experiences of darkness that can have you spiraling downwards and calling out for help. And perhaps the long dark nights of winter just make things worse for you.

And it is not just personal darkness – I think our world is in a kind of global darkness too.

The climate crisis is out of control – we can see this in the very real effects of unpredictable weather patterns like the tornadoes in the US, the massive flooding in China, India, Europe, and BC and – and now the extreme cold in Alberta with temperatures at -45 degrees with the windchill! Wow – that’s cold!

The darkness of racial hatred is also very prevalent as we continue to call out for justice with the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as the struggle for truth and reconciliation with our Indigenous brothers and sisters.

And of course, the global pandemic has cast a web of uncertainty over the world. It has us pivoting between gathering and keeping in isolation. I know that I feel like we are up and down like yoyos, and being the voice of optimism can be very hard in these days of rising numbers. And the global inequity of vaccine distribution just compounds a sense of injustice, and darkness.

Yes – these are dark days.

But the good news is that when things are dark, it is then that we call out for the light – just like I did in the closet! It might be that we have taken the presence of light for granted all the time, but only when plunged into darkness, do we realize the need for a guiding light to bring us hope.

So where do we look for that light?

The answer of course is in God’s Divine light shining through Christ.

Isaiah tells us to “Lift up your eyes and look around.”(60:4)

But how do we see and find Christ around us?

It might be in the unlikeliest of places.

Even the Magi with all their wealth and formal education found the light in the unlikely place of a humble stable. They knelt on bended knee to a peasant Jewish toddler displaced from his home. This is not how they expected to find the light of the world.

And, what about us? How do we see the light?

How do become so engaged with the light that “we are radiant, and our hearts thrill and rejoice” (60:5)

Sometimes it might be as we gather to worship, either online or in person.

It might be through an Inspirational message that we read, or a podcast that we listen to.

Or may it is through an encounter of God in creation around us.

These are all ways that we can experience Divine light calling out to us, guiding us and reassuring us.

And, like the Magi, we might also find Christ’s light shining through others in unexpected ways.

This is what happened for musicians Lisa and Michael Gungor. They had a little girl that was born with Down Syndrome and two heart conditions. They named her Lucette, which means light. She taught them that there is light and beauty in life, even if we struggle. They created this beautiful video to affirm that all children like Lucette can shine light into the world. In the words they sing:

“*And the blind gained sight,*

*As we met our light*

*Oh the joy and fight*

*The gift of life.”*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_uioQqW8ac&ab_channel=Gungor>

The Magi found the light of Jesus in the manger, but as Christmas story fades, we must continue to seek that light.

That’s what Epiphany is.

It is looking for the light that is always shining around us, guiding us into deeper understanding with the Divine.

It is listening for the ways that the Light is calling to us to live in the light; to allow God’s radiant light to burn within us, filling us with Joy even in dark days.

It is sharing God’s light for others to see through our action of selflessly sharing and caring for others (just like the Rainbow Fish)

So, as we come into the Season of Epiphany together, may we each have that AHA moment –

may we draw closer to the realization that the God’s Light will always shine, no matter how dark things may seem,

and may we continue to follow the light and learn the mystery of all that we are meant to do and be as people of faith.

Amen.