

The Rev. Joel Petruschke  
Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
Baptism of our Lord  
January 8, 2023

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, we are now in the season of Epiphany.

And this season is all about light.

From the top to bottom, beginning to end, Epiphany is about light.

Now, we may have thought that the Christmas season was all about light.

I mean we have had lights on our Christmas trees, lights on our houses, lights on our advent wreath.

And so, we probably thought we had finished up with the theme of light when we concluded our Christmas celebration.

But, oh no, we are only getting started.

The focus on light in Christmas morphs into Epiphany, when we experience even more lights.

Yes, Epiphany is the season of light, top to bottom, beginning to end.

Indeed, the season began two days ago on January 6<sup>th</sup>, with the wise men making their way to the Nativity of our Lord by following the LIGHT of the Star of Bethlehem.

So, we have that light—the Star of Bethlehem.

And, Epiphany ends with the Transfiguration of our Lord, when Jesus is transfigured on the mountaintop, such that his appearance radiates a dazzling LIGHT.

And along the way from the beginning of Epiphany to its close, we have more experiences of “LIGHT.”

Today, for instance, we have the Baptism of our Lord, where God says, “This is my Son, the Beloved.”

Next week, we read from John’s gospel about how John the Baptist pointed out Jesus saying, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

And in two week’s time, we read from Matthew’s Gospel how the prophet Isaiah’s words were fulfilled in Jesus: “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great LIGHT.”

So then, the LIGHT in Epiphany is not just about physical light that illumines space...

It is not just about physical light that literally lights up darkness.

No, the light of Epiphany is also metaphorical, indeed most importantly Epiphany is about the metaphorical light.

The LIGHT of Epiphany is ultimately about Jesus...the Epiphany season is about shedding light on who Jesus is, what he is about, why he came to be among us.

You see, this church season is well-named. This church season wants us to have an Epiphany.

This church season wants a lightbulb go on in our heads...such that we say, “Oh, I get it.”

This church season is like those cartoons.

Remembers those cartoons where a character is depicted as finally getting it, as finally seeing it, as finally having that revelation, and the character is depicted in the cartoon with a lightbulb above their heads.

That is the Epiphany season. It is about having an epiphany.

And the LIGHT then is the revelation we have about Jesus—who he is, what he is about, why he came to be among us.

Now that we have had this great birth at Christmas, we need to know exactly who this baby Jesus is.

And thus enters the church season Epiphany onto the stage to help us understand, to help us see the gift we have received at Christmas.

PAUSE

And so, yes, we have the Baptism of our Lord today.

And what do we find in our gospel reading, but a voice from heaven, i.e. God's voice, declaring at Jesus' baptism those words, "This is my Son, the Beloved."

And so WE HAVE a light shining down on Jesus, a spotlight in fact...

We have light shining down to explain who Jesus is—He is God's Son.

And that is why next week WE HAVE John the Baptist declare these words when he sees Jesus walking by: "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Again, a light is shining down on Jesus, a spotlight...

We have light shining down to explain who Jesus is—"He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

So on and so forth throughout the weeks of Epiphany, we have texts that help understand Jesus.

This is what the season of Epiphany is about, so that we say, "Oh, I get it."

It is about revealing, shedding light, on who Jesus is, what he is about, and why he came to be among us.

And this is why the Epiphany season piggybacks on the Christmas season.

To explain the gift that has come to us in this child born in Bethlehem.

So, yes, Christmas was all about light—Christmas tree lights, house lights, Advent wreath lights.

And yes, Epiphany is about the metaphorical light, shedding light on who Jesus is, what he is about, and why he came to be among us.

But even more profound still, EVEN MORE PROFOUND STILL is the fact that all of our Christian lives is about light.

We speak of Jesus as the Light of the world.

We speak of Jesus as bringing hope and redemption (LIGHT) to a world that is steeped in darkness (SIN AND DEATH).

And so, yes, Jesus is the Light of the world.

But there is another way to think of Jesus as the Light of the World.

Jesus is the Light because by our FAITH IN JESUS we come to understand the world more clearly.

It is like what C.S. Lewis said, one of my favorite quotes, which I regularly have shared with you.

C.S. Lewis said, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

And so, Jesus is the Light of the World, because through Jesus, or by Jesus, we see everything else more clearly.

And, when I say that we see everything else more clearly, I don't mean that in some flippant way, like everything is rosy now because we know that Jesus is the savior.

No, Christians really do see how the world operates more clearly.

And since today is the Baptism of Our Lord, it is worth noting that one of the ways in which early Christians spoke of baptism was as illumination or enlightenment, both terms are obviously associated with light—illumination or enlightenment.

Baptism was called illumination or enlightenment by the Church early on in its history, no doubt because with baptism comes the sense that we see the world more clearly.

Again, this is not some flippant understanding, that all is now rosy, that because of Christ everything is now rainbows and unicorns.

No, but that we see how the world operates more clearly.

So, for instance, in the Bible, we read that when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve hid themselves from God.

Why did they do that? Why did they hide, but because sin does not want to be brought out into the light.

And so this is why people tell lies in the world.

Lies are a means for hiding the truth, because sin wants to hide.

And this is why then in the news when we are watching the television and persons are arrested, this is why when we see those persons being taken away by the police, they are trying to hide their faces.

Sin does not want to be revealed. Sin wants to hide behind lies, and behind hidden faces.

And thus, in this example, we see how by Faith we are more attuned to how the world operates. We see why things are the way they are in the world.

Or, think of the Ten Commandments, as another example.

And in thinking about the Ten Commandments, Martin Luther is extremely helpful here.

Luther is helpful here in terms of interpreting the commandments for us, because in essence, he says we all, WE ALL struggle with idols.

For Luther explained that the single most important commandment is the First Commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

Luther said that if each of us was to follow the First Commandment perfectly, there would be no need for the other nine commandments.

For the other nine commandments are about how we humans make things into gods, how we make things into idols.

So, the third commandment says, "Honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy."

We are to rest on the Sabbath, and do no work. And so the third commandment is about how we make work into an idol.

And we know there are persons in the world where working, and making money through work, or being important through work is all they think about.

Yes, there are workaholics who make work into an idol.

And then there is the fifth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."

We are not to physically harm or hurt another person.

And yet, we know there are persons in the world who are all about power and control and authority.

A certain Russian president comes to mind.

And so, yes, power, and control, and authority can become an idol.

So, to be sure, Luther has shown us through his interpretation of the Ten Commandments, he has shown us all the ways in which we humans make idols of various things in the world.

Luther helps open our eyes of Faith to see how the world truly operates, that WE ALL struggle with idols, and how important then, it is to know the idols we struggle with.

In this way, Luther reminds us again of Lewis' quote, "I believe in Christianity like I believe in the sun, not only do I see it, but by it, I see everything else."

By means of Christianity we see how the world operates.

Through Christianity, light shines brightly on the workings of the reality around us.

PAUSE

All of this is by way of saying, again Epiphany is all about LIGHT.

It is about knowing who Christ is, what he is about, and why he came to be among us.

And through Christ and the Christian Faith, we do indeed experience a baptism of our minds and our eyes, such that there is illumination and enlightenment, such that we see more clearly how the world operates.

That is the gift of our Christian Faith. That is one powerful and wonderful aspect of our Baptism into Christ, to see more clearly.

For the Light of Christ does indeed shine in the world and by grace the God then, we see with open eyes.

We see with open eyes. Thanks be to God. Amen.