

Jan 7, 2024 Epiphany Sunday

Pr. Steve

Texts: Isaiah 60: 1-7; Ephesians 3: 1-12; Matthew 2: 1-12

*Arise, shine, your light has come. The glory of God rises on you. Even though night still covers the earth and darkness covers the nations, on you God is rising and over you God's glory can be seen.* [Isaiah 60: 1-2]

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

They followed the light, seeking the light. They came streaming from afar, to find the great Mystery. They came wanting to be in the presence of the Mystery, to pay homage, to pierce the darkness, to taste the peace. They journeyed all that way to discover the Mystery unknown to them.

Epiphany has been celebrated for centuries, at least 1,600 [years], on January 6<sup>th</sup>.

On this date three years ago, great shame came upon all of us, streaming from across the nation after months of planning. They came to overthrow elections, government, democracy by any means—fake electors, legal manipulation, even violence. They constructed a gallows at the Capitol, with a noose for the Vice-president. They killed people, police too, in medieval combat, and some of those officers in the weeks and months following died by suicide. It was the worship of darkness.

And today, even some of those legislators who ran through the capitol for their lives, who hid in secret closets and bunkers, deny it happened. And they happily participate in the savagery of violence against their foes.

Epiphany is the celebration of the light of Wisdom. Knowledge is not Wisdom. Knowledge must accrue. It gathers, it builds on itself. Knowledge can be terribly exciting to learn—and wonderful with new discoveries, seeing how life works—but knowledge can also be cold, and calculating, and used to control people or have power over them. In case you don't know this, Knowledge is power. *'I hope you've seen the commercials. They're serious. They're serious!'*

Wisdom begins with humility, and not knowing, and standing in awe. Wisdom can warm the heart—and it can empty the heart. Wisdom longs to be in the presence of the Mystery—it just wants to understand. And Wisdom always encourages the well-being of others. Always.

Isaiah [chapter] 60 was originally delivered in about 530 BCE to refugees returning from Captivity. They arrived home in Jerusalem, which was devastated; it was bombed out and gone. And the prophet promises, *'The light of God will shine on us again. We will return to normal. We will become an economic power again. Kings will come streaming on caravans of camels, bringing their wealth to us.'* The 'good old days' will come back.

500 years later, when the Wise Ones arrived, they were right. Jerusalem had become an epicenter of power again. Oh, yes, and that's why the Wise Ones were blinded to the light. The one they'd

been pursuing was suddenly overcome—by Jerusalem. This must be the place—the powerful are here, the rich, the hip, the cool. It's like the Bay Area, you know what I mean? *'Come on, people, where else do you want to be on this planet?'*

So, the Wise Ones ask King Herod, 'Where's the new king?' And Herod goes out of his mind. There's competition. So he goes for a consult with his advisers and says, 'What is going on?' So they quickly search the Scriptures, and they come back in fear and trepidation. And they say, 'Those new guys, they got the wrong text. It is supposed to be in Bethlehem, you know, that little nondescript, wayside, 'nowheres ville.' That's where it's supposed to be.'

You see, this is a peasant's view of a good life, right? Everybody's got enough food. There's basic harmony between us, and the children, and the animals, and, you know, someday a leader will come—like a shepherd—and he'll lead us like sheep, and we will know what to do.

Herod says *'Really. That's your best card?'* So he plays it, comes to the Wise Ones. *'All right, what you're really looking for, it's in Bethlehem. You go find that child. and then tell me. Okay?'*

The Wise Ones were looking for the light of Wisdom in the wrong places, and they turned and went in a new direction. That's the miracle—they turned and went in a new direction to find the Light and the Wisdom they needed.

We desperately need Wisdom and its Light—and we desperately need to turn in that direction. Unfortunately, Wisdom just doesn't hang out on the street corners. It can't be sold. It can't be purchased. It requires an open heart. But as our hearts begin to open, strangely it seems we are absorbed into the Light, that Light which brings clarity in darkness. and confidence where there seems to be no evidence. Because the Truth is—that Light is already inside of every one of us, and every human being. We couldn't be here without it.

And, it's the Light of Christ, who through this crucified and resurrecting Love illumines that light within us, so that we can see, and taste, and enjoy, and live by the Wisdom we need for this time.

*Arise, shine, our light has come.*

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.  
Amen.