

The Rev. Josh Stephens  
St. John in the Wilderness  
January 16, 2021  
Epiphany 2

“It’s too dark in here!” So my daughter whispered to me recently as we tried to sneak into my bedroom while my wife slept in after working into the middle of the night. That’s how it goes being married to all sorts of healthcare providers. And my daughter was right. It was too dark in there to see much of anything, much less to get ready for work and school, to get dressed, to grab what you need as the day begins.

“It’s too dark in here” is a resonating refrain for many of us, much of the time in recent months and years. Disease and anxiety spread like and as a virus. Older folks – many of whom once relished the idea of letting go of other people’s rhythms and having a bit of peace and quiet – now find themselves with a whole lot of silence and solitude. That can be lonely. Younger folks struggle to keep up with COVID protocols at work and school, often having to rearrange their lives for weeks at a time when schools close or a family member is exposed. At times it seems all of us are traveling farther into the shade – farther into an odd science fiction story – where it’s way too dark for way too long.

Yet moments like these which rip out of our hands the illusions of control, safety, and health should help us – perhaps for the first time in our entire lives – to embrace the warm, loving, light of Jesus Christ who has come to us in our darkness. Today we journey deeper into the Epiphany of our Lord which we celebrated on January 6 with a festive Eucharist in our Parish Hall. If at Christmas God enters the world – that unbelievable yet truly present Light in the birth of Jesus Christ – at Epiphany we realize that the Light of God cannot be contained. It cannot stay in Bethlehem in a manger. It cannot stay as words on a page but it must break loose into the world to shine on those who walk in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Chances are that you have probably moved on from Christmas – understandably so – and perhaps even Epiphany is just a blip on the radar screen of your life. But let’s

not let it go so fast. Let's ask the question: Where does the Light go upon entering our world? Where is this Christ seen again? What does God do next?

Epiphany has three main Scripture passages associated with it that Christians have been reading and remembering since the early days of the Church. Indeed, this feast pre-dates Christmas and celebrations of the birth of Jesus likely came out of Epiphany rather than the other way around. The Epiphanies of Scripture include the Wise Men's seeking of a star: the Good News immediately leaving the tribe into which God was born and finding a home in worshipping Gentiles who have traveled afar. Then we heard last Sunday this other Epiphany which is the Baptism of our Lord. After three decades of silence, Jesus appears at the river Jordan and is baptized by John. A miracle happens with the Spirit descending on him as a dove and a Voice from God the Father smiling down onto the Son in whom God is well-pleased. Now people are paying attention and wondering, "Could this really be God's Son, the Christ, here for us?"

In our Gospel reading today – during Year C in our lectionary – we actually get the third ancient story that the Church has read aloud and prayed over for Epiphany. It's this beautiful account of Christ at a wedding with his friends and family in Cana of Galilee. Many of you will recall the story:

People have been partying for days. This is no Methodist wedding reception! This is a Jewish festival with feasting, drinking, and dancing. And after days of celebrating, we get a little insight into what it was like to parent Jesus.

Mary says to Jesus, "They have no wine," while she gives him that look which God gives to all mothers including the mother of Christ himself.

"Woman, what concern is that to us? My time has not yet come," Jesus responds, thinking he can avoid doing what his mother asks him.

"Do whatever he tells you." Mary concludes.

And so Jesus instructs the caterers to fill up these huge containers – twenty or thirty gallons each – with water and to pour a glass for the chief steward, the MC,

the cousin who won't put the microphone down. When he tastes the water that had become wine, he does not know a miracle has happened, he just knows that it's good. It's really good. And he's amazed they saved the best for last. But the servants and the disciples saw it all happen. They saw the jars filled with water and then they drank it and it was a most heavenly wine. And the story ends saying that Jesus did this thing: it was the first of his signs and it *revealed his glory* – EPIPHANY – and his disciples believed in him.

Sometimes – and I know I don't have to tell you this – but sometimes it can get pretty dark in here, but the light has come. The light has come and he is being revealed again and again. The light keeps on breaking through.

And the light breaks through that darkness which exists inside of us, too. Perhaps that's the place to start. It can get pretty dark in here, too. But our prayer – our collect for this Sunday spells out this Epiphany move:

“Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the *light of the world*: Grant that your people, illumined by Word and Sacrament, *may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory*, that he may be known throughout the world.”

When we take in the Scriptures and when we receive the Sacraments, our hearts and souls and hands – our very lives are illumined by Christ's glory. We begin to shine with his light. We begin to share in Epiphany, also. So the prophet Isaiah writes to God's people and now to you:

“You shall no more be termed Forsaken; your land shall no more be named Desolate.... You will be called Delightful for the Lord delights in you and rejoices over you.”

And in 1 Corinthians, we begin reading through several chapters of this great letter today, when Paul confirms that you and I have been given spiritual gifts for the common good. That light of Christ – that Spirit of God – is at work in you and made manifest in you in all kinds of different ways so that the words we say, and the work that we do, and the friendships we you hold are not just about getting what we want or our own self-preservation. No, you have been given gifts of light

that are to shine with the glory of Christ himself. So the attorney knows, “My work isn’t about billable hours; it’s about justice in the world.” The doctor can know this isn’t just about controlling disease; it’s about being with people who are hurting and giving them hope when things are dark and scary. The parent and grandparent whose light is shining doesn’t simply give, give, give, but takes time to seek out that light of Christ so they have something to share and invites kids and grandkids into its warmth and gentleness.

You have been given God’s light in Jesus Christ. He is with you and in you, shining so brightly through you, revealing God’s very self through your gifts and through your love. That’s the grace of Epiphany revealed to us.