

“Epiphany Light and New Year Resolutions!”

January 8, 2023

Advent Sunday

Scriptures: Isaiah 60 (selected Verses) and Matthew 2:9-12

Isaiah 60 "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy... Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels... will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD... to the honor of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor. "Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you... No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders... The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end..."

Matthew 2:9-12 When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Sermon

According to the dictionary, an epiphany is: "a manifestation or a striking appearance - an experience of sudden and striking realization."

Its Greek origins usually refer to an insight provided through divine revelation. Christian Churches in the "west" have generally celebrated this sudden Divine "revelation" of the God's presence with the arrival of the Magi on January 6 each year. Orthodox churches in the "east," however, follow the Julian calendar and so do not celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany until January 19. But here at the Mennonite Fellowship of Ft. Collins, we usually celebrate it whatever Sunday follows the 6th. And so, I guess you can decide for yourself if we are either a couple days late or a couple weeks early this year?

Our theme during Advent, as you may recall, was "Restoration!" Our hope for this restoration was kept alive by the words of the Psalmist, the prophet Isaiah and the Gospel according to Luke. Each proclaimed the promise that God's salvation "was on its way!" No

longer are we cursed to live without hope, fumbling along and trudging alone through the dark. The light of God will pierce the cosmic darkness, hope will be reborn in us and in the world, just like a baby born at night. The incarnation, Emmanuel, God promise to be with us in our darkness, also arrives with the illumination to both see it and to understand it.

Epiphany reminds us and challenges us. It is the “experience of sudden and striking realization” of Jesus’ birth that can occur and must reoccur in our lives each and every day. Isaiah's words this morning again call to us to wake up, but using the past tense this time, he remind us that indeed THE light HAS come and so now we can walk in that light!

But even though an epiphany can be a sudden and striking realization like “restoration,” it too can become a labor intensive process at times until those new manifestations begin to truly sink in.

It is sort of like “resolutions,” which makes me curious – how many of you made New Year’s resolutions this year? How many of you make them nearly each year?

Now I know some folks are very serious about doing this - maybe even religiously so. Some set aside time each year towards the end of the year to carefully sit quietly, pray and reflect back the previous year. (Maybe keeping careful notes in a journal?) And then with laser focused attention on the new year ahead, they begin to consider what things need to change. I know that there was a time in my life when I actually did that!

Others, on the other hand, likely avoid this process as if it were the plague! Maybe last year was so bad that actually recalling some of the events can be overwhelming - even traumatic!

For some this whole process seems like an exercise in futility. “Why bother since I am likely to fail anyway?” I know that I have said and felt that way many times.

Some years we were just too busy to take the time or perhaps were pretty content with who we were, while other times, maybe we were just too lazy to even bother. And finally, for some, the new year ahead can actually bring some major anxiety or, “reservations?”

The year ahead maybe scary for some, with anticipated events that we would much rather avoid like major surgeries, the loss of friends and relatives, or the anniversaries of past painful events?

So maybe we shouldn’t just rely on “resolutions” alone, but be open to some other “R words” in the new year? Maybe we should be expecting some new “revelations” that can lead us to new understandings of ourselves and others. Perhaps we need to consider making some “restitutions?” - seeking both forgiveness for our mistakes but also engaging in forms of “restorative” actions?

Maybe we need to become more aware of the “ramifications” of our behaviors and lifestyles and seek to “rectify” them? Certainly, we need fewer “recriminations” in our current society, as well as less “rejections” of others simply for not being like us.

Maybe we need a “revolution” in the year ahead? Not a violent overthrow of the “government,” but maybe significant parts of the status quo in our families, our local community, and in our nation need to be turned upside down!

Or how about some “re-imagination”? Maybe those same old problems we face are in need of new solutions? What’s the definition of insanity again – doing the same things over and over, yet expecting different results!

And how about we try “reconnecting” with some of those people or things that are truly important to us? I know that many of us are seeking more “recovery” of those best parts of us so that we can become more who we truly are.

We could probably keep going for another hour because there are certainly a whole lot more good “R” words out there. But let me end this morning with one more very important word, and that is “recollections.” I believe that before I can really move forward, I must first look back and remember where I have been.

I think it’s relatively a wise thing to first take stock and to recall those people, places, and events that have impacted me. It is helpful to look down the path that I have trod. But as important as this is I must also quickly remind myself that the purpose of this exercise is to assist me in moving forward.

Far too I often, however, I have gotten stuck - swamped in the mud of “redundantly” “rehashing” and “reanalyzing” past mistakes and wounds. This in no way serves to “re-energize” me, but instead sucks up all the energy that would otherwise be better used at moving forward to a more “renewed” self.

But as a new year begins once again, Isaiah’s, clarion call comes to us: *“Arise, shine, your light has come!”*

“So wake up! Get up and get going!” “Lights, camera, action!”

Epiphany is here, a blinding light bursts through all those cracks in that rickety old stable and the light for our new pathway forward streams from the Divine source that is a poor, defenseless child!

Now some may say that “What’s the big deal?” It is only the simple turning of a page on the calendar. But combined with the spiritual “reminder” of Epiphany, it can lead us “resolutely” into the boundless possibilities that always lie before us.

And the path is so clearly illuminated in that light. But it is a new path, one that has never been trod before. It is now a journey away from the manger, because that crib that cannot contain the Divine incarnation. As we said last year, “Advent means “coming” and it is an active season.

The primary actor is God, born in human likeness, into a real world. But the created world has its share of action too, with dramatic stories of angelic visits, forced relocations,

homelessness and harrowing life and death escapes. We too are active as we long for light, seek hope, and try to restore a broken world.”

Together, now, we leave the cave of Christ’s birth, “reborn” to join in with our God’s “restorative” process within all of creation! And without a doubt we desperately need all the light we can get! Whether it shines from a distant star, or the flashlight held by a friend, or even that which emanates from the campfire of a small community of simple folks who come along side to travel this new path with us.

Each is essential and all can be illuminated by the same epiphanal fire of the Christ child born so long ago. So, come on “Baby, light my way!”

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