

“The Light of Epiphany”

Ephesians 1:3-14

John 1:1-18

“Your eyes: even at a distance of ten miles—the length of 146 football fields—they can see the light of a single candle. Your eyes are amazing.” If you’ve watched television anytime in the last few weeks, you’ve probably heard Martin Sheen’s voice on this ad for Centrum Silver vitamins. To be able to see the flame of a single candle from ten miles away is certainly amazing.

But I’m not convinced the most amazing aspect in this scenario is our eyes. I’m more convinced that what’s amazing is that in complete and utter darkness, the light of a single candle can travel up to ten miles, or twenty, or even thirty. What’s amazing is the power of light to overcome darkness.

“What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of the people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

In Matthew and Luke’s Christmas stories, we get all the characters: Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men. But in the Gospel of John, on this second Sunday after Christmas, we just get Jesus.

Jesus as the Word, the way all things came into being. The light. The one who pitched his tent and lived with us—a more literal way to translate the Word becoming flesh and living among us.

Instead of shining a light on the stable scene, the Gospel of John zooms WAY out for the big picture of the universe, and then zooms *way in* on what it means for us to have the Word living among us, “[For] to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”

Can you see that one candle shining in the darkness? That is the light that moves you into relationship with God. Sometimes, that light is bright—it’s clear for some of us to see it in all the ways we are blessed and brought up to believe and loved. But for those who feel the weight of the darkness, all it takes is focusing the eye of one’s heart on one small beam of light in the darkness. And then we too become part of God’s family. Even if the glow of the whole stable doesn’t make sense to us, even if we didn’t grow up in the light of Bible stories and youth group, even if we can’t quite figure out how God became a human being, we can still see that light and become children of God.

Paul writes in Ephesians of this relationship as adoption: “[God] destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of this will.” And in this adoption process, as we become part of grace larger than our own family or our own congregation but rather brothers and sisters with the children of God, we are given an inheritance—an inheritance of hope, glory, and light.

That’s part of what we celebrate in communion at this table. It reflects the hope that we will—all of us as children of God... throughout all the ages—be gathered at God’s table. Part of the body of Christ, together living in that light.

On this Epiphany Sunday—this Sunday when we mark on the calendar the arrival of the wise men to see Jesus—we focus on light the way they kept their eyes on that star rising over Israel. Maybe there is a lot of light in your life—maybe it's easy for you to see God at work and to know God's presence. Thanks be to God!

But maybe it's hard for you right now to understand God or to see how God is knitting your life together for good. May you trust that even the light of one single candle from miles and miles away can still bring you into communion with God.

My friend, Anna Murdock, a lay speaker at her Methodist church in North Carolina, sends out an email each week reflecting on the lectionary passages for the coming Sunday. On Monday, she wrote: "As I look back, it was one of those 'should have' moments. Several years ago, an acolyte, seeing that no one was dressed as magi for Epiphany Sunday asked, 'Where are the magi? Are there no wise men today?' My answer was, 'No, not today. Not this year.' I kept hearing her question, replaying over and over again during the worship service and I shook my head at my own answer. Why did I say that to her? I should have said, 'I am looking at one when I look at you. You are looking at one when you look at me. To follow the star, to not only look heavenward but to journey with others, to ask where Jesus can be found, to bow in worship in the presence of our Lord, to present our best gifts to God ... these are the makings of magi.' I should have said that."

May we, like all the wise, still seek him, worship him, and bow in the presence of our Lord. Amen!