

# Choosing Light . . . or Darkness

Matthew 2.1-12

Epiphany Sunday

“epiphany” (epiphaneia) - an appearing; to manifest; striking appearance

- ▶ epiphaneia appears 6 times in the New Testament and refers primarily to the second appearing of Christ

In connection to his first coming, epiphany focuses on three events in the life of Jesus:

(1) The arrival of the Magi in Jerusalem with their inquiry:

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

(2) The first public appearance of Jesus where John the Baptizer declared, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” and the voice of the Father declaring at the baptism of Jesus, “This is my beloved Son.”

(3) The first miracle of Jesus when he turned the water into wine at the wedding of Cana. In John's Gospel, this has particular significance—

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. (2.11)

This is in reference to John's statement in his Prologue:

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (1.14)

So justice is far from us,  
and righteousness does not reach us.  
We look for light, but all is darkness;  
for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows.  
Like the blind we grope along the wall,  
feeling our way like people without eyes.  
At midday we stumble as if it were twilight;  
among the strong, we are like the dead.

Isaiah 59.9-10

Theologically, “blindness” characterizes the default spiritual condition of humanity and “darkness” covers the full range of existence where God is absent—from acts of evil,<sup>1</sup> to conditions of moral ignorance<sup>2</sup> and depression,<sup>3</sup> to judgment<sup>4</sup> and eternal punishment.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John 3.19; <sup>2</sup> Proverbs 4.19; <sup>3</sup> Psalm 107.10; <sup>4</sup> Zephaniah 1.15; <sup>5</sup> Matthew 8.12

In contrast, God represents light; more than that, God *is* light, and Jesus himself declared, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”<sup>1</sup> In his last public words before his death, Jesus said: “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John 8.12; <sup>2</sup> John 12.46

The LORD . . . was appalled that there was no one to intervene;  
so his own arm achieved salvation for him,  
and his own righteousness sustained him.  
He put on righteousness as his breastplate,  
and the helmet of salvation on his head . . .  
“The Redeemer will come to Zion,  
to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,”  
declares the LORD.

Isaiah 59.15-17, 20

“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.  
. . . for the LORD will be your everlasting light,  
and your God will be your glory.

Isaiah 60.1-2, 19b

The true light that gives light to everyone  
was coming into the world.

John 1.9

# Waiting and watching—

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose . . .”

- ▶ The Magi were astrologers from Iraq who studied the stars to predict future events. How did they recognize this particular star as marking the birth of the king of the Jews? From a prophecy of Daniel which gave the specific timing of the coming of the “Messiah the Prince” (Daniel 9.25). For five hundred years, generations of Magi had been watching for his coming.

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

2 Timothy 4.8

He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

Luke 21.29-31

# Worthy of worship—

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

- ▶ As custodians of Daniel’s prophecy, the Magi had insight into God’s plans and purposes across centuries and empires. More importantly, they had revelation as to the identity of the Anointed One—the Son of Man to whom had been given “dominion, glory, and a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages should serve him . . . an everlasting dominion” (Daniel 7.13-14). And so they came to Israel for one reason: this king was worthy of worship.

# Where is the Messiah to be born?

When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written . . ."

- ▶ The chief priests and teachers of the law were also custodians of Daniel's prophecies, and also Micah's prophecy which specifically named the birthplace of the Messiah. And yet they had failed to see the signs or the timing of his coming which the Magi had been able to discern.

- ▶ The testimony of Scripture is consistent: **revelation always leads to worship**. Whenever one's eyes are opened and their mind and heart enlightened by the Holy Spirit to understand God and see Jesus, it always leads to worship.
- ▶ We can be very familiar with the truth of Scripture and know just when to say "Amen"—while, in reality, be so blind and ignorant that it has little or no effect on our proximity to and relationship with Jesus.

# When one sees Jesus—

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

- ▶ Joy, worship, and giving—these were the responses of the Magi when they encountered Jesus. Their gifts fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 60 and anticipated his death, also part of Daniel's prophecy. In other words, they had light and understanding about the true purpose for Christ's coming: to give his life in redemption for those in darkness.

# Light or darkness?

Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. (Luke 11.34-35)

- ▶ From this moment until his death, the chief priests and teachers of the law looked at Jesus but were blind to the light that was in front of them. Why? They refused to believe and to respond to the truth; they chose to remain in darkness. When we look at Jesus, it changes us; if nothing changes, we haven't seen Jesus and we remain in the darkness.

▶ The Apostle John wrote:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1.5-7)