

LAKESIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE
Isaiah 60:1-6 & Matthew 2:1-12
(Epiphany Sunday)

An ancient Greek fable tells about a group of people who lived for generations in the darkness of underground caves. This lifestyle was a result of intolerable living conditions on the surface. But there was always a longing within these people for *light*. Stories were told about the sun and how on the “*surface*” there was light everywhere and how everything flourished in the light. Sitting around the fires in their underground homes listening to their elders, the children could only *imagine* what it would be like to live in the light. Then stories began to be told about someone who would come and lead these subterranean dwellers to the surface where light existed. And so the people dreamed of a journey to “the surface.”

Then it happened. A young man began to inspire *hope* in people’s hearts about *life in the light*. He said that if people *followed* him, they would find a way to the surface and to the *light*. As the good news spread, so also hope spread and *expectation* was at an all time high. And the day came. The young man announced that people should follow him to the surface. The journey was long, but finally the first few subterranean dwellers *emerged* into the *light of day!* And *more* followed.

However, something *unexpected* happened. These people who had lived so long in darkness ... *didn’t like the light!* It was *too bright*. It *hurt their eyes*. They complained that it was better in the shadows of the subterranean caves. They wanted to go back. They *demanded* to go back! *And so the light was rejected!*



In our Old Testament lesson the prophet Isaiah writes, “*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*”

It is significant that the celebration of Epiphany comes at the darkest time of the year. The days are *short* ... the nights *long*. There are people who are *profoundly depressed* by the lack of light.

This is also the season for a sort of *after-Christmas-let-down*. *Preparing* for Christmas was a chore, the actual *celebration* was wonderful, but the time after Christmas is for many people a season of *deep melancholy*.

And so, Isaiah’s enthusiastic directive may fall on *closed ears*, “*Arise, Shine!*” A few verses further, Isaiah writes, “*A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.*”

The reference is, of course, to the birth of the Messiah and the coming of the wise men from the East to worship him. *Epiphany* is the *celebration* of the *coming* of the magi to Bethlehem where they knelt before the Christ child and offered their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

These men followed a star to find the Messiah. I suppose if the wise men were to come today, they would come equipped with Onstar™ or a TomTom GPS device. There wouldn't be the need for them to ask Herod for the location of his birth. The helpful female voice from the dash of their car could have told them, "Proceed to the next intersection and turn left where you will travel south for another 15 miles." But these were primitive times and a star was all they had. But it was enough. They found the child with his mother, and opened up their gifts and worshiped him. In a dark and desperate world, they had seen a STAR.

The author of the Gospel of John would later sum it all up for us like this, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (1:1-5). So much meaning is conveyed in the simple metaphors of darkness and light.



SOMEONE IN THIS ROOM TODAY IS STUMBLING IN DARKNESS.

It may have something to do with your marriage, or your relationship with one of your children. It may have to do with your job or your physical health. It may have to do with your relationship with God. But for some reason, the light is very dim right now in your life. You're feeling your way along, uncertain of your next step. It happens to all of us at sometime in our lives.



Nicholas Wolterstorff is a professor of Philosophical Theology at Yale University. He wrote a book sometime back titled *Lament for a Son*. It is about his grief following the tragic death of his 25-year-old son. The boy perished in a European climbing accident. In the book you will find these words which this *grief-stricken professor of theology* wrote to God:

"Where are you in this darkness? I learned to spy you in the light. Here in this darkness I cannot find you. Will my eyes adjust? Are there songs for singing when the light has gone dim?"

What a wonderful and heart-wrenching question: "Are there songs for singing when the light has gone dim?" Do you know what he's talking about? If not, some day you will. Life happens. Hurts, terrible hurts, happen. The light dims, and we wonder – how will I *EVER* find my way?



Real estate people have learned that to succeed in the sale of a house, they need to turn on the lights in every room before an interested customer steps inside. Even on a bright, sunny day ... even in a home with many windows ... the turned-on lights add warmth and cheer, leaving no gloomy corners. We know about gloomy corners. *Someone in this room is in a gloomy corner right now.*



IF THAT IS YOUR SITUATION, THEN THE GOSPEL IS FOR YOU.

Christ came to dispel darkness, darkness that enveloped the world, and the darkness that envelops each of us from time to time. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Everlasting life isn't just about heaven. It's about light coming into a dark world. It's about joy breaking into a heart that's depressed. It's about the presence of God giving comfort and hope here and now.



In 1958, a U.S. soldier wandered the streets of Berlin to see the sights. Despite the bustling new life in *parts* of the city, reminders remained of the destruction of World War II. Walking through a residential area one evening, he saw an open space edged with flowers. In the center stood the stone front of what had been a church. The building was no longer there. The rubble had been cleared away in an attempt to build a little park. The former church's main door was shaped in a Gothic arch, and over it was carved into the stone in German: "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*" As this soldier stepped through the arch where the doors had once been, he found himself in an open space. What was once a place of worship had been reduced to a patch of stone pavement and open sky.

But the fact that the church was no longer there, did not negate God's promise. "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*"



Author and pastor, Dick Innes, in his book, *How to Mend a Broken heart*, tells about some city workers in Hamilton, Canada, who were trimming trees along a certain street. In one tree they found a nest with several baby robins in it. They decided not to trim this tree until the nest was empty.

When it was abandoned, the workers returned. In the nest they found a *piece of paper*, along with *dried twigs*, the robins had used to build the nest for their babies. On the paper were printed the words, "*We trust in the Lord our God!*"

"*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path,*" wrote the Psalmist. *THIS* is what the Gospel is all about. We don't have to stay in the darkness. We can come to the LIGHT. *We can make that light our OWN.*

Don't GIVE UP. A LIGHT is SHINING. It is GOD'S LIGHT and it is available to ANYONE who would receive it.



But one thing more: WHEN WE OPEN OURSELVES TO THE LIGHT OF CHRIST, THAT LIGHT SHINES THROUGH US AND WE BECOME A BEACON TO OTHERS.

Have you ever heard the name Karl Downs? Probably not. Karl Downs was a pastor in Oakland, California, who died of a heart attack at an early age. Several years before he died, he was asked by the Juvenile Court to take responsibility for a young man who was always getting into trouble. Karl Downs accepted that responsibility, and in a very kind, loving way he became a substitute father for that boy.

You've never heard of Karl Downs, but you may have heard of that boy. His name was Jackie Robinson. He was the first black man to ever play major league baseball. Robinson was an outstanding athlete and an outstanding man as well. If it hadn't been for Karl Downs, so many who have been touched by Jackie Robinson's life may never have known him!

What did Karl Downs *DO*? He let his little light shine.

That's what that children's song declares we sang at the gathering: "*This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.*"

That's what the prophet Isaiah says, as well. "*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.*"

This is what the Gospel is all about.

The LIGHT of God shines into our darkness.



In one of Britain's darkest hours in WW II, the people listened by their radios on New Year's Eve as their king, King George VI, gave his annual greeting to his people over the BBC. It was a *terrifying* time. The very existence of that great nation was at risk. The king quoted some words from a woman named Millie Louise Haskins that have given hope to many who stumble in darkness:

"I said to the man who stands at the Gate of the Year, 'Give me light that I may tread safely into the unknown.' And he replied, 'Step into the darkness, put your hand into the hand of God, and that will be to you better than a light and safer than a known way.'"



I invite you to put your hand into the hand of God. That will be to you *better* than a *light* and *safer* than a *known way*.

★ **Your challenge for this New Year is to GO INTO THE WORLD and SPREAD GOD'S LIGHT to *EVERYONE* you meet.**

Amen and Amen.