

A LIGHT FOR ALL

In the words from Isaiah 60, "Arise, shine; for your light has come."

The prophets and the New Testament writers often used "light" as a metaphor, and it makes a good metaphor, too.

Light is powerful. Light can affect our moods and emotions, especially this time of year.

Light reveals things; it gives depth and contrast.

We need light to see, and....we appreciate light, ....most of the time.

There are situations when,...well,..... we'd rather not see too clearly.. or.... be seen.

For example, in very low light,..... I look much younger. Without the contrast from light, I don't have any wrinkles.

Ever wonder why romantic meals are usually with candle light or very dim lighting?

Because we all look pretty good when our image is blurred.

Also, the house doesn't appear to need cleaning when the lights are faint. Light exposes dust bunnies and clutter, so ...keep the lights down, relax,..... but watch your step,.... because you don't want to slip or trip over something.

Denial thrives in the darkness,.....but avoiding the truth can be dangerous.

In addition, hide and seek is more fun in the dark. It's much easier to be sneaky when we can't be seen.

That is why we have street lights and other security lights,.. because...devious, even nasty things, use the obscurity for concealment.

And, darkness can also mean ignorance. Being "in the dark" suggests not knowing something.

Unscrupulous people do not bask in the light; they don't like the truth, and they tend to try to keep information / light from others, too.

The prophets beckoned people to the light in order to understand and to expose injustices so as to live and be in truth / the way of God.

Subsequently, a star in the night sky is an ideal means to herald the way to the Messiah / to Jesus.

Matthew chapter 2 begins with the extremely loaded phrase, "In the time of King Herod."

Herod was the family name, the last name, and this particular Herod was known as "Herod the Great".

I think he gave himself that title. He was a power hungry, nefarious, despicable ruler.

He was a smart and sly man.

He manoeuvred his way to leadership, and even though the vast majority of Judeans disliked him, he became King of all Judea by deception and his strong political supporters--the Romans.

He tried character assassination against his opponents, but it didn't work without television, so he turned to plain old assassination.

He even killed family members, including his wife and son.

No one was allowed to stand in his way.

Free speech was suppressed, research and information was rigidly controlled, as was any form of opposition.

Herod cast a huge shadow over his country.

In addition, he expanded his influence and domain by building up the military, which costs his country tons of money and resulted in cuts to benevolent programs.

He only cared about power and appeasing the rich and powerful.

He had no respect for his nation's resources or traditions. Herod even robbed King David's tomb of its treasures, and gave the fortune to the powerful -- Rome.

Yes, he was tough on crime, if you call draconian laws and more prisons a good thing,....but he tended to act above the laws. He did what he pleased, and abuses by his cronies were overlooked and the use of torture was denied.

He did invest in infrastructure and new projects in Judea; however, only if they met his agenda.....which usually modelled the flavour of his idolized Big Brother.

More and more Palestine began to look and feel Roman.

Herod brought darkness to Judea. The people / the nation lived in darkness, and I think they got used to it. Maybe they learned to ignore the light, even fear it ...because in the light....Herod may see them. So, most carried on quietly, shuffling from shadow to shadow.

That must be the reason that no one else saw the bright light in the dark sky--The Star.

Yet the Star was there. Three Zoroastrian priests, mystics they were, people of enlightenment-who searched and asked questions saw the star. They were called Magi or wise men, and they had been following the star.

Their pursuit brought them to Jerusalem, and they did the unbelievable / the outrageous--they went around asking Questions!

People in the dark Don't ask questions, especially the kind of questions they were asking.

I wouldn't be surprised if they asked, "Don't you see the star, too?" or "Why don't you follow the star? How can you remain idle, cowering in the dark?"

And of course, the ultimate shocker of a question: "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?"

All of Jerusalem became afraid when they heard the Magi's questions, and so was Herod.

The wise men were proclaiming "the light" and the birth of the Messiah..... the REAL King.

The people trembled.

It was as if they were establishing a carbon tax that could jeopardize the current system, albeit destructive system.

People in the dark don't like change, especial the masters of the dark.

Sure, Herod was afraid, but he could not make them disappear.  
Not even a ruthless leader dare kill dignitaries from a foreign land.  
He could not quiet them, just as he could not extinguish a star.

So, when confronted, Herod did the unthinkable, he sought advice from the priest and the scribes. They did not like Herod, yet apparently a few were bold enough to speak out and state where the Messiah was to be born -- Bethlehem.

After learning that, Herod "secretly" called to meet the wise men.  
Secrets are another indicator of darkness.

Then Herod attempted to cover the Magi in his shadow; he tried to deceive them, claiming he wanted to worship the Messiah too, and he would if they would report back to him once they found exactly where the Messiah was living.

Instead, the Magi stayed in the glow of the star,.... an illumination which Herod chose to avoid.

The star lead them to Jesus, and upon seeing Jesus they were filled with joy and knelt down and.... gave Jesus their gifts for the king, the true leader.

Granted, they weren't toys or nice stuffies, but....hey...the intension / the meaning is the important thing.....at least that is what we're suppose to believe.

Herod's darkness and lies did not hang over the wise men. The magi were inspired to go home by another road.

They were illuminated / they saw and knew the truth.... and the truth saved them,..... and the darkness became a little smaller.

The Star is illumination. It provided a vision of hope--hope in discovering something/someone wonderful--a divine presence. It was a vision worth pursuing.

The Star provide enlightenment. It gave information as to where and how to find the Messiah.

The star lit up the darkness. It stood out in the night, and it revealed the darkness of Herod for all to see, and most were afraid.

It exposed the lies, the evil, those idly hiding, and it exposed the truth.

The star represented the light and it was over and with the Messiah.

The magi followed the light and found Jesus, and the rest were left to decide what to do.

This is a message for all people. It was written to illuminate and expose the doubters / those hiding in the dark in Judea and for all those who read the story.

In the first century, the Bethlehem star narrative presented a conundrum for the Jews. Either they agreed with Herod, who they despised and would have dreaded agreeing with, and ignore the message of the star..... or.... accept the star and come out into the light of divine revelation.

That was Matthew's intent--to expose those hiding and force them to decide... with full awareness of their decision.

This passage is a call for the collective / for an entire society to come into the light / to embrace God's Messiah.

These days, churches tend to focus on the message that beckons the individual to come to righteousness / to receive the redeeming illumination through Jesus.  
Righteousness is how individuals embrace the way of God.

Justice is how the collective/ a community, even a nation follows the way of God....as taught by the prophets and lived by Jesus.

Both are valid and essential, and both are inseparable. We don't get to pick and chose. Either we are in the shadows or in the light, and the light includes both righteousness and justice, God's justice.

Granted it is much easier to only look at righteousness --our own, personal relationship with God.  
But if we ignore the call to expose injustice and do justice and peace, then we are not in the glow of the star, and thus hiding in a shadow.

And, illumination means questions and questioning. It demands full disclosure in the pursuit of truth. It requires research, and .... it also requires that we stand out in the light to be seen by all,... and that is truly risky.

Nevertheless, that is part of the salvation journey, just as the Magi did, so long ago.

In simple terms, people of the star / followers of Christ must be exposed by the light **and** reflect/ radiate the light to all.

We Must call our government and the world to be open, to not keep secrets or withhold information.

We must demand our nation and all nations to do justice, to empower the weak, the feed the hungry, lift up the exploited and to tenderly nurture God's creation.

We have to keep searching and asking questions.... because there is much to be seen and discovered in the light.

There is no other way, but darkness.

Our recent annual assessment was a request to share our vision for our church.

Those in the light have a vision. Without a vision there is darkness, and the people perish in the dark.

We are people of the light, and God is leading us / our Church to do bold and amazing things,....maybe to even confront Herod along the way. Herod wasn't part of the Magi's vision. That part was God's. Their vision / their hope was to journey as they were lead.... to discover the fullness of the living Messiah.

What is your vision / what do you see / where is God leading us?

The questionnaire was handed out at the beginning of the hectic holiday season,.... and council wishes to learn your vision.

So, if you haven't turned the questionnaire in, it's not too late.

Moreover, in February, we'll have a potluck and discussion time about our vision.

We are not setting goals or an agenda, but rather just sharing what we see /where we see God / the light leading us.

We are at the end of Epiphany Sunday worship, and Epiphany is a turning point in the Christmas season. Our theme of preparation, during Advent, was "out from the shadows." Today we looked at the Star / the light.

Where is that light leading us? Do we have lots of questions; I hope we do. And,...are we ready and willing to live in the light?

Again, here is Matthew's message:

Stay with Herod in fear and bondage or follow the light to the prince of peace and find home by another way.