

Epiphany 2014: Guided by the Light

Isaiah 60:1-6 & Matthew 2:1-12

Rev. James Ramsey, January 5, 2014



"Arise, shine," says the prophet Isaiah. "Your light has come."

This is the message of Epiphany. We can rejoice because Christ, the Light of the World, has come.

The New Year presents a chance to start over, to go back to basics, to begin again.

What will guide you in this coming year? What will be your guiding principle? Will you be guided by the Light, the true light that enlightens everyone?

We are light-sensitive people. I confess I am a big fan of the You-Tube show "Pittsburgh Dad." One of my favorite episodes is his speech about "Turning Out the Lights." Pittsburgh Dad is a simple, humorous show, starring, really, just one guy...a Dad, who lives in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh Dad has a regional bent for sure and he complains about the same things that, well, a Pittsburgh Dad would complain about...like my Dad...or me!



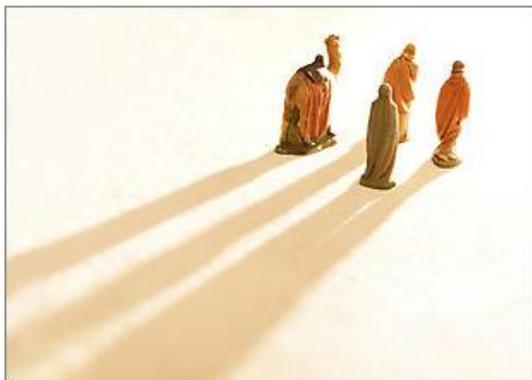
He has a real pet-peeve about his family leaving the light in his house on all the time. He comes into the living room and every lamp has been left on, as well as the overhead. He turns them off. He goes to the family room and the television is on...but nobody is watching it. He turns it off. He notices a Yankee Candle burning on a windowsill, no one is around... "I'm snuffing it out... Geez, these things cost \$20." He glances out the front door and notices the porch light has been left on.

He turns it off. He asks, "How long has that been on." Someone offstage comments and Pittsburgh Dad repeats, "Since Halloween!" And he sighs deep. "What are you paying my electric bill now?" he says to his kids.



My own kids do the same thing. The first thing they do when they wake up is to turn on the lights and then as they proceed through the house, they turn on every light in every room they enter. Not just one lamp in the living room...but every lamp. When they get to the kitchen they turn on the light over the table, the light over the peninsula, the light in front of the sink...every light. I don't understand why one light is not sufficient. Someday, I am going to wake up early and watch from outside the house and track their progression through the house as the lights come on!

It's easy for me to grumble – like a Pittsburgh Dad. But then as I was working on this sermon titled, "Guided By the Light," I took pause. Laying aside my grumpiness for a moment, I considered the metaphorical, theological implications of Ben and Fiona's behavior...and, well...a sort of light bulb came on in my head!



What if every room I came into I first thing looked for the light of Christ? What if I made it a point to find the Light of the World in each new place I came to? We could do that, you know. If we were guided by the Light, we could orient ourselves first to God in every situation and every place. If we did that every day of this New Year...it would be a good year, I'll wager.

Will we be guided by the Light this year?

Will you be guided by the light of Scripture? The Word that became flesh in Christ?

Will you be guided by the light of the church? The collective teaching and preaching here, the fellowship and support of the community of faith here at East Union?

Will you be guided by the light in worship? Will you commit to feed your soul and give praise to God on a weekly basis, through song and prayer, offering and sacrament?

Will you be guided by the light of service? Will you decide to get outside yourself, put aside your own needs in order to see that others might thrive, grow, be encouraged?

Will you be guided by the light of love? That ointment that binds us together and heals our wounds and draws us to the heart of God?

There have always been dark days. But there is a power for life in the world. This power...this life was made manifest in Christ. In him was life and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Even in dark days, there are some who have always kept their focus on the light.



Wise men from the East were guided by the light of a star, but the light they sought was not in the sky, but in the face of a baby. Over great distance they came by camel, tradition says, and after working their way around Herod they found Jesus in a house with Mary his mother (Matthew 2:1-12). They offered him marvelous gifts, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah that

they “shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD” (Isaiah 60:6). These men fulfilled the prophecy...were the kings that the prophet said would come to the brightness of his dawn (v. 3).

The wise men were guided by the light and they came and beheld the light.

Wise men and women still seek Him.

Our challenge is to focus on this light as well, to trust the light that is Christ's presence – even when the day is dark – even in times of uncertainty or chaos.

Although darkness shall cover the earth, promises Isaiah, “the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you” (v. 2).

Lift up your eyes and look around, the prophet invites us – you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice!

