

Epiphany literally means the revelation from above, as in God's revelation to Mary and Joseph that she would bear the Son of God, as in God's revelation to shepherds of the birth of the Christ Child in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger in the little town of Bethlehem, as in God's revelation to Simeon and the prophetess Anna in the Temple in Jerusalem that the redemption of Israel had come, as in God's revelation in the stars to magi in Persia that the Savior had been revealed.

This morning we're going to talk about God's revelation, his epiphany, his light which he shines down on us through his son, Jesus, in our lives today and what this means for our walk with him and one another.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

### **JOHN 1:1-5, 10-18**

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

**<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup> ( John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup> And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.**

St. Paul wrote, **2 Corinthians 4:6**, “**God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**” Jesus is the embodiment of God’s love for us, of God’s presence among us, of God’s ministry to us here, today.

But, alas, the darkness remains. It’s insidious, like a cancer; it comes upon us with the intent to kill. It is anarchy, lies, and sin. And we cannot see it, for indeed, it is darkness. But why? We cannot see it for it originates here, in our own hearts.

When I was a teenager, I met a man who had an irritating way of not so subtly pointing out flaws in one’s character. One time he said to me that I didn't know as much about myself as I thought I did. And to add insult to injury he said that I would probably never change.

I told him he was wrong, that I understood myself pretty well, that I was on top of things in my own little corner of the world. And besides, who was he to tell me that I would never change if I wanted to?

But then he said, "Richard, there are things about you that you can never change. The reason you can never change them is because you can't see them, and the reason you can't see them is because you’re using them to see.”

Our habits, addictions, obsessions, and compulsions – all the things we do – they are rooted in lies, things we’ve been fed by culture, the world, things which are contrary to God. That’s what he was saying.

But in the Gospel, we read, **John 1:4-5**, “**In (Jesus) was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**” There is hope.

Consider Michael Jordan, arguably, the best basketball player of all time. Some even say he changed how the game was played. But Michael never talked about himself like this. Rather, he just played ball and the world learned. Now everything on the court is measured against Michael’s game. Players even urge one another on with the words, “Be like Mike!” In a word, Michael Jordan shined light on the game of basketball and changed it forever.

That's how Jesus brought light into the world: He lived his life among us. And now everything in life is measured against Jesus' game, his light. Indeed, people, including unbelievers and people of other faith-traditions from around the world, use Jesus as a barometer for how to live. For example, Jesus said "**Blessed are the merciful,**" thus mercy is a universal virtue. I can't count the number of times I've heard some part of the Beatitudes or the Golden Rule quoted in the movies.

But that's just the beginning. The Scripture reads, **John 1:10-11, "(Jesus) was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him."**

We like Christ's moral ethic, sure, but we don't like his condemnation of our hypocrisy! He reaches into the darkness of our hearts with the light of his life and we cry, "Foul! Not fair! We like what you say and what you do, Jesus, but don't expect us to live like YOU! That's too much!"

In truth, we want to examine our lives against the backdrop of our culture, according to what everyone else is doing. When I do that, it would appear that I'm doing pretty good. Thank you very much. But this is darkness.

But we read, **John 1:12-13, "to all who did receive (Jesus), who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."**

Christ's life shines light on our hypocrisy. In him we see things as they truly are. No more hiding. No more lies. And in this light we feel sorrow, and we ask for and receive the Lord's forgiveness. And so the light which once nearly blinded us as we hid in our hovel amid the wreckage of our lives brings forth life!

The Prophet Isaiah wrote, **Isaiah 9:2, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined."**

And Jesus said of himself, **John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."**

If you were afraid of the dark as a child, perhaps you found comfort when you crawled into bed with mom and dad. So too Jesus has enveloped you under the covers of his grace and love: He holds us so close, providing us with protection and comfort. Indeed, he has dissolved the shadows in his light, removed all fear, and given us courage to live day-by-day in his presence. That's the power of Christ's light in our lives, brothers and sisters.

**We read, John 1:14, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."**

Jesus is God's grace in the flesh. There's nothing to be earned but everything to be received, with thankfulness. This is God's light, light pouring forth from a manger in the little town of Bethlehem, from a choir of angels to shepherds in a field, from a star which led magi from Persia to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

So the wreckage of my life is revealed by the light of the life of Christ. But in this light there is nothing but more light to receive; there's no room whatsoever for the darkness anymore. And I am so thankful.

St. Paul explained what living in this light looks like when he wrote to the church in Rome:

**Romans 13:12-14**

**The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.<sup>13</sup> Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.<sup>14</sup> But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.**

Earlier, I talked about how the world, even the unbelieving world, admires Christ's life and teaching. He has shone in the darkness and "**the darkness has not overcome it,**" despite itself. So too we shine as lights in the world.

For example, India is a country which is 80% Hindu, 14% Muslim, and less than 3% Christian. Yet it was Christian missionaries who first ministered to the poor in

India, building orphanages, schools, and hospitals for the outcast. This began 300 years before anyone else started paying attention.

Christians can and do change how the game is played in this crazy world. This is our call, our ministry, our mission, to be lights amidst the darkness, lights reflecting the light of our Lord Jesus, little epiphanies of God's grace wherever we live.

Friends in Christ, this week may you find peace in your life as you walk with Jesus. He is the light of your world.

This week may we walk with one another with our eyes always on Jesus. For it is in him our lives become whole.

And this week may you have an opportunity to share this good news with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.