

**Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. May the words of my mouth, the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight O Lord, you who are rock, redeemer & Renewer of us all. Amen. (Ps 19:14)**

Grace and Peace AND A Happy New Year be with you, dear Friends!

How is it with your soul? Were you able to keep your intention to make room in your heart and life for God? Your participation today could be a sign of your commitment to the Light that has come.

In our last gathering of 2021, Paul's letter to the Colossians (3:12-17) instructed us on four points relevant for the Turning of a New Year. Paul states that Christ is the gift of embodied love to pattern our lives after. We should respond accordingly:

- 1) to take off the old human nature & put on the new nature and be renewed in the image of Christ.
- 2) Remember the assurance that we are chosen, holy & loved.
- 3) To put on the attitudes and practices that reflects Christ...  
Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...be tolerant and, forgive each other. Over all these 'put on love' which is the perfect bond of unity (v14) so that the peace of Christ would reign in your heart.
- 4) And Sing psalms, hymns, and spirituals in prayer, praise & thanksgiving

Frankly, friends, this passage is one that I aspire to daily, so that all I say and do reflects the word abiding within me.

So, friends, an accountability moment... How did you reflect the attitudes of Christ this week? In words? in actions? In what ways is your soul full of peace?

Turning our attention to the scripture read today, the dominant image is The Light. It's the Lord's Glory that will appear. It's the Star that draws the

Magi to Jerusalem and to Bethlehem. In the Cookie Moment, it was that God's Word, the light of the world, was coming in person and the light was Jesus (John 1:6-12)! The last cookie cutter, a Candle, is an example of the light of Jesus.

Remember how we close our Christmas Eve services? We light candles and activate glow sticks. Last year you were invited to light your own candle as we gathered only online. This year we adapted again by taking our light out into the world...outside the church to be a visible presence in the world that Jesus has come, the Light of the World!

Light has an important role in life. The Light is first in appearing in the creation story (Gen 1:3-5). Every next thing follows Light – day/night; sky, earth, seas, plants & seeds, sun/moon & stars, creatures on earth, sky & water, and finally, humans.

Epiphany is about the Light and what is revealed by the Light. Frederick Buechner points out that 'we can't see light itself. We can only see what light lights up, like the little circle where the candle flickers'<sup>1</sup>.

*[You can prove this at home tonight: Sometime after 6:30p, take a flashlight and go outside. Point the flashlight on the ground and keep it off. Then, turn the flashlight on (still pointed at the ground), notice what you can 'see'... the light reveals the ground under the flashlight, but beyond the edge of light it is still dark.]*

The star which the Magi follow leads them to the place where the Light of the World was lying in a manger. The Christ-child was revealed to these wise ones who were seeking him based on their study of writings and prophecies. Even Herod's scribes had access and knowledge of this prophecy...yes in Isaiah 60, but also in Micah 5:2 & 2 Sam 5:2. The point is... Herod and his people didn't see the light ... the Magi did.

The Magi represent all the nations and peoples of the world. In their searching they receive the gift of light and revelation. Their desire to honor

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<sup>1</sup> Buechner, Frederick. Beyond Words. Harper Collins: New York. 2004. page225.

this newborn king establishes that Christ is for all people, no matter their culture, no matter their skin color, no matter their status in life or society.

In the letter to the Ephesians (not read today), Paul writes to second-generation believers and beyond. Paul's ministry is rooted in his own personal revelation when he was blinded by the Light of Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul writes: God has revealed to me that the plan includes Gentiles as 'sharers in the promise' of Christ (Eph 3:6).

Paul's revelation connects with Jesus' claim to reveal things hidden from the founding of the world (Mt 13:35) and 'making all things new' (Rev 21:5).

Something NEW happened in Jesus – and the Magi are among the first to draw attention to it. Paul lays the foundation of his emerging doctrine: (v10) God's purpose is now to show the rulers and principalities the varieties of wisdom through the church. The church is presented as an active agent to bring the gospel (good news) to bear on all of society.

So what does this mean? We, as the church – the body of Christ- we are the Light in our World. We are the gathered people of God in a particular location. Our mission – the work of the church- is to use our variations of gifts (4:1-16) in doing good against the powers that be to live in Christ's rule, God's kin-dom. We are called to live in the Light, revealing the word which abides within us in our words and our action.

We are the bearers of Light, dear friends. So what needs to be revealed?

Well, think for a moment- for whom is this Good News bad?

Scriptures reveal three responses to Jesus' news: 1) the Magi return home by another way for safety from Herod; 2) Herod's response was to exterminate the infant boys; 3) Jesus first sermon angers his home town such that they want to run him off a cliff (Luke 4:29). Clearly, those who are comfortable or profit from the status quo will be upset.

How might we position ourselves to see the battered, bruised, broken and disorder of the world? How can we loosen the blinders so we see the

needs in our community? How do we develop the confidence to be 'doers' of the word, not hearers only?

The foundation, friends, is in how we choose to live and love because of who we believe is the Light of the world.

Today, before leaving, I invite you to take part in an activity of Light. On the table in the Narthex are STARS. Select one to take home with you. On the star is a word. Let this star word be your gift from God in this New Year. Post the star in a highly visible place – where you will see it.

*You may find it is a word that fits you perfectly. If so, celebrate that, and see how you can be more intentional about sharing your gift with the world. You may find it is a word that offers you the encouragement or challenge you need. If so, receive that gift and let it shape you in the days, weeks, and months ahead.*

*You may find yourself resisting the word or even wanting to reject the word. If that is the case, I encourage you to sit with it for a while, explore the source of your resistance, and be open to what this word may have to teach you.*

*Live with your word, reflect upon it, journal about it, talk about it with others, and share your thoughts with me. Discover how this Star Word may shine its light on you and on your path throughout this coming year.*

Friends, What one thing will you do differently this week because of this Word? May it be so. So be it. Amen.

**Leading Into Prayer** Let us JOIN voices TOGETHER once again, to make room for the prayers for God's people, church & world, As we sing: verse 3 "Come and Find the Quiet Center" **TFWS 2128** ( *in the hymnal, the worship guide, or on the screen.*

In the Spirit let us travel Open to each other's pain Let our lives and fears unravel Celebrate the space we gain There's a place for deepest dreaming There's a time for heart to care In the Spirit's lively scheming There is always room to spare.

**THE LITURGIST, Debra Bostron, will LEAD us in prayers for God's people, church & World ...**