



## **Sermons from Northwood United Church**

**"Lightening"**

**Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2:1-12**

**Will Sparks**

**January 3, 2016**

May the words of our mouths, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives, be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Epiphany. Festival of light. Christian equivalent to pagan solstice. Rooted in the same yearly experience of a subtle shift in the seasons, and in the rhythm of light lights our days and gives boundary to the night. Except that we Christians have wrapped around that yearly experience a story and another deeply spiritual experience of light coming into our world in Jesus and light coming into our hearts as we come to the realization that the gospel of Christ, the good news is still around, still turning us around, still waking us up, still alive in the world.

So I want to start with the experience. I have been stunned by the light these days, and I am not alone. People have been posting their experiences of light and colour in the world and here are a few things people have noticed: Show some photos:

Amazing eh? Christian theology has always contrasted light and darkness. Jesus said, I am the light of the world, which places Jesus clearly on the side of light, which of course begs the question, "where does he go in the dark?" Our theological habit that goes with the imagery and experience of light and dark is to judge the darkness as bad and the light as good- to place in the midst of the world a kind of polarizing valuation to light and darkness. "The world lay in darkness until Jesus and then we had access to light that we didn't have before." The light shines in the stable. The magi follow the light until it rests over the stable where the light of the world lies. You know the imagery. And in Isaiah we have similar imagery from 600 years previous under the Babylonian exile. "Arise your light is come!" And there is something true to our experience of life in this contrasting: darkness can bring fear, disorientation, concealment.

Interesting, Star Wars: The Force Awakens opened up last week, and I heard some significant chatter on the internet about the way it deals with light, darkness, good, evil, and where "the force" fits into that. It would appear that some of the imagery and theology within the Star Wars franchise has evolved since it first came out, but there is a thread within the movies that would say that in the world there is "the force" and good and evil both have access to it. It is a force for darkness or a force for light depending on where we stand. And it can influence us either way. Watch the movie, and come back and tell me whether you think the force is "of the light, or of the darkness" or perhaps something different than that all together.

But today is Epiphany, a celebration of light, enlightenment, lightening. And I seem to remember one of the ways we envision ourselves as a Christian community here at Northwood is as light- a place of light, hope, lightness of spirit, joy celebration. We do that in worship, in community activities like the pot luck that will happen after worship, but also in the context of some rough circumstances people experience. Hopefully 2016 will bring light to some refugees who we might have the honour of welcoming. I know that 6 families over Christmas felt lighter for the white gift project that made Christmas more full and warm. The light does shine in the darkness, and the darkness does not put it out. We are called to be light and there will be no denying the experience of darkness.

I was talking to my son about this the other day and we were remembering being in Ireland in 2006. Ireland is dotted with caves that run deep into the earth. We didn't know this until we toured around, and we ended up going into two of the deepest caves in Ireland. In one

we walked down many many steps deep into the opening of the cave. The opening was about the size of a large house, and as you went deeper in, it got narrower and narrower, but it was always spacious. They had it well lit and the paths and boardwalks were safe with railings and everything. So at no time did it feel unsafe or claustrophobic to me.

We had a guide who pointed out the huge stalagmites and stalactites and veins of different minerals. We were deep in the cave when we got to a certain point, and all the lights went out. The darkness was profound. I could not see a thing. But the guide kept talking. Don't worry. This happens. Just relax and let your eyes adjust. And you know what this is like right. Give it a minute and your eyes will dilate and soon you will begin to make out your surroundings.

After a minute I started to wonder. Because I could still see nothing. There was no light. And then the guide said, "Anybody got a lighter?" And there was a rustle and then "flick"- a flash of light from one light source, and the whole cave came back into view.

Epiphany is the festival of light and the season of enlightenment. As we move through the season the message of the gospel, like a beam of light travels out and is received. We celebrate how the source of light, enlightens us and it is like the light shines and bounces off the world and we can see more clearly. It shines and spreads on the hoarfrost making everything it touches shine. May that include us. Amen.