

## **The Divine Light – Our Spiritual GPS**

(Reflection by Rev. Peggy McDonagh, January 5 2020)

### **Part 1**

In 2008 when I received a call for an interview from St. David's Ministry and Personnel Committee, I purchased a Global Positioning System, a GPS. I did so because, for as long as I can remember, I have been gifted with a misguided sense of direction that has led me on numerous adventures over the years. I purchased the GPS because I knew that without the guidance of a knowing voice assisting me, finding my way around Calgary would be quite a challenge. Even with a GPS on board, I managed to get lost on several occasions and I believe fully that I will always be directional challenged.

As is the case for much technology, the GPS has made its way into our lives in a big way. Not only can these systems help to get us to where we need to go they can track animals in the wild as well as guide sophisticated aircraft. GPS systems offer essential information quickly and many newer automobiles are built with an integrated GPS system so precise that it can track every Starbucks in the entire country. Now that is essential information. You simply program in Starbucks, and it will guide you to your nearest Chai Tea Latte.

Ever since people first walked on this Earth, they have used a variety of navigational systems to guide their way. In the ancient world, sailors navigated the seas using the sun, stars, and moon, as well as the tides and winds. The location of stars and constellations enabled them to orient the ship in the correct direction. Most ancient cultures used celestial navigation as their GPS system of guidance.

Written records about navigational techniques show that people have always been fascinated and guided by light and even today light continues to be a recognized universal symbol. Within all the great mystical and religious traditions, it is an enduring and important symbol used to navigate the spiritual life of their followers. The Winter Solstice, Christmas, Hanukkah, Devali, Kwanzaa, even Ramadan all have festivals of light. In the Christian tradition, the season of Epiphany celebrates the divine light freed from the heavens to penetrate the hearts of humanity. It is a season that draws us to the light of God's love.

**HYMN**      A Light is Gleaming  
A light is gleaming, spreading its arms  
throughout the night, living in the light.

Chorus only VU #82

Come share its gladness, God's radiant love  
is burning bright, living in the light.

**Readings:** Isaiah 60: 1-3; Story, The Gift of Light

## **Part II**

The biblical stories associated with Christmas and Epiphany tell of light shining in dark places such as a cave, or in a dream, or on a dark hillside at night. Interestingly, these seasons of light in the Western hemisphere occur during the darkness of winter.

Do you ever feel like somebody forgot to turn the lights on in your life? Does it feel hard to get up and go? For many people, winter is the time of year that they long for a little more light. Winter can be a time of Seasonal Affective Disorder when the lack of sunlight affects a person's moods and his or her ability to cope effectively with daily life. But Spiritual Affective Disorder can also be a factor as we lead lives that are too crowded, busy, overcommitted, sometimes disturbing, and uncertain. When life feels overwhelming or when unexpected darkness descends accompanied by chaos and uncertainty, we may find ourselves disconnected from our spiritual Essence.

The prophet Isaiah encouraged the Hebrew people to continue to rise and shine despite the dark challenges of the times. During this Epiphany season, we affirm that the very act of "arising" each day is a gift of God. In many parts of the world, people "arise" spiritually by lighting their darkness with lights or candles and by attending candlelight services, rituals or festivals.

During the Christmas season, many people lighten the darkness with Christmas lights and in January various communities in the Northwest Territories organize festivals to celebrate the return of the sun. Right now, in Inuvik, people are celebrating their 48 minutes of daily sun. In other cultures, lanterns brighten the darkness during their evening festivals. This lighting of the dark seems to warm the heart and give people a sense of hope.

There are many ways that we can "arise" each day. For example, make it a daily ritual this week of lighting a candle in the darkness of a room and sitting with that candle and watching how the light illuminates the room. Think about things you can do during the year to illuminate your life, to make it brighter and more meaningful this year.

Other ways that we can "arise," is to spend some intentional time with others simply having a good time or reading a funny book or watching a

comedy. Perhaps you can perform one deliberate act of random kindness every day this week. Be purposeful about getting out of doors during the light of day to take a walk. Think about one goal or intention that can bring joy to you and commit to it for at least a week.

One of the truths we know about the universe is that the moon, sun, and the stars are always there even when we cannot see them. We know the light is waiting to reveal itself and sometimes we just need to seek it, to connect with it in some purposeful way. Epiphany is like a flashlight in the dark, reminding us that God's Divine light always resides within and around us.

**HYMN** A Light is Gleaming Chorus vs. 1 VU #82

A light is gleaming, spreading its arms  
throughout the night, living in the light.  
Come share its gladness, God's radiant love  
is burning bright, living in the light.

1 When light comes pouring into the darkest place,  
it hurts our eyes to see the glow.  
Sometimes a word of hope reminds us of our fears,  
our memories and tears.

A light is gleaming, spreading its arms  
throughout the night, living in the light.  
Come share its gladness, God's radiant love  
is burning bright, living in the light.

**PART III**

Against the velvet blackness of the night sky, the star's white light drew the eye to stare at it for hours. This star really wasn't as clear and bright as other stars. Indeed, it appeared as a ball of blurred white light, but it was so much larger than other stars. And it moved. The astronomers from Babylon noticed the star and how its position differed each night. So, they decided to follow it.

The message of Matthew's birth story is that through Jesus the Christ, God's light shines in each one of us; starlight is in our DNA. As we follow the wise ones to the stable, we are led to the heart of God so we might awaken to the light within us. For many people, this biblical story inspires hope amid darkness.

The story of the sages teaches that God is not far off, distant, and separated from people. Awakening to the essence of God in dark moments in our lives is a hopeful and healing way to understand how to survive the struggles and challenges of life. Divine love was born among the people, a light in their darkness, a GPS system enabling them to navigate through the dark. The Divine light penetrates the dark territories of loneliness, grief, tragedy, loss, and pain.

Joseph Campbell was a prolific American author and editor whose works on comparative mythology examined the universal functions of myth in various human cultures. He writes, "One thing that comes out in myths is that at the bottom black moment is the moment when the real message of transformation is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light."

Out of the darkness of one of the largest exoduses in human history comes the divine light of people and countries opening their homes and hearts in Canada and other countries to welcome refugees into a safe and secure reality.

Out of the darkness of the devastating fires in Australia, the unexpected divine light of help coming from other countries provides hope and strength to persevere amid great devastation.

Out of the darkness of environmental degradation and violence, the divine light of millions of young people unite worldwide as they speak out against climate change, gun violence, and the lack of human rights.

Martin Luther King Jr., said, "I know, somehow, that only when there is complete darkness, can we see the stars." American Author Augustine Og Mandino wrote, "I will love the light for it shows me the way, yet I will endure the darkness for it shows me the stars."

The darkness of human experiences can be frightening because we can't see where we are going and don't know what to expect, and sometimes it feels hopeless or Godless. Yet it is not Godless, it is full of divine hope, potential, and possibility.

A mother recalls, "Several years ago, Christmas Eve came to our house full of darkness and fear. My teenage daughter was having all kinds of struggles with booze and drugs and many suicide attempts. Somewhere during all that, I had joined Al-Anon, and I found the courage to tell my story and express my fears. But even though I was very much a church person, I wasn't able to turn my problem over to a higher power. But that Christmas Eve, in absolute despair, I literally fell down on my knees and yelled, "God, help me!" And I was bathed with a light, a warmth, and a confidence I have never had words to describe. My daughter continues to struggle, but now

In her beautiful poem entitled "Into this Silent Night," Ann Weems speaks of the hope of light that exists in the darkness.

No matter how conflicted and dark life feels at times, stay focused on the inner light that flickers with a reminder of your strength and brilliance. When you stare at the sun, you still see it when you look away. It's the same with your inner light, it colours everything you see with optimism and opens your heart to possibility and faith.

As I say in my blessing to the children during baptism: Above you are the stars. Beneath you is the earth. Within you is the light of life. Like the stars, may your love be constant. Like the earth, may your life be grounded in your faith, and from the light within, may your spirit shine.

2 When night is round us and every shadow grows,  
a star is there to light our way.  
It tells a story of Jesus who came near to say:  
'God's light will ever stay.'

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throughout the night, living in the light.  
Come share its gladness, God's radiant love  
is burning bright, living in the light.