

Gospel lesson

For this Epiphany Sunday, we start at the beginning of the Gospel of John:



picture from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sunrise_from_ISS_5.jpg;
credit: ESA/Alexander Gerst
(Astro_Alex)

John 1:1-18

(NRSV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

² He was in the beginning with God.

³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being

⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him.

⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him.

¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,

¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")

¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. *The word of God for the people of God*

<Children's/Interactive time>

What color is the sky? <Let them respond; compare day, night, sunset/sunrise colors>

What lights do you see in the sky? <Let them respond;
compare day & night, moon varies>

Does the sun stop shining at night?
<Let them respond>

What color would you use to describe life, and why?
<Let them respond; compare usual, happy times, tough
times, transitions>

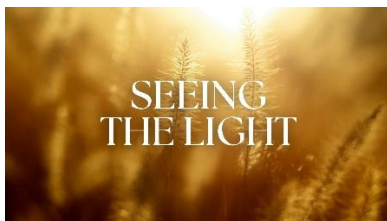
What kind of lights – that is, things that make life
better – do you see in your life? <Let them respond;
compare family, God, transient vs. lifelong friends>

Sometimes things in the world change so that we
cannot see the Holy Spirit at work (as readily) in
our lives, much as we cannot see the shining sun
during the night. Particularly in those dark times,
have faith. Remember that God is still there, has
always been there for you, and that you will see
Jesus's love more clearly filling your life in time.

<Hymn “Light of the World”

TFWS #2204>

Message: Seeing the Light



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/epiphany-of-the-lord-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/epiphany-of-the-lord-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Beautiful Light of the World, as we take time now to
further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your Word, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may be filled with your holy light and let it shine through what we do, everywhere we go. Amen.

We follow up the Christmas series today with “They All Gather Together”:

“Epiphany is all about light. The star in the sky leads the magi to Jesus, the light of the world, the revelation of divine love who came to dwell among us.”

On Christmas day, my son brought his wife and daughter to our house, and they stayed overnight. At two and a half, Vivian was pretty excited about all the Christmas festivities and staying in a different place than usual, so she did not let my son and daughter-in-law have a very peaceful night.

In our own room, Keven and I were oblivious to that until I woke up an hour or two before dawn. At that point, “Grandma” was happy to take over with Vivian and let her parents get some solid sleep.

I realized the sun was coming up when I looked out the window and saw the entire sky filled with a vibrant pink. Since pink is currently Vivian’s favorite color, I pointed it out to her as a special gift from God. I told her God colors the sky every morning and evening when the sun is on the horizon – and that the colors we see depends on what the

weather is like and where we are watching from.

Life is like that, isn't it? God gives us blessings, and what we see of them depends on what we are dealing with in our lives, the perspective we are coming from.

For Jeremiah, the Israelites were in exile - a time of great darkness for the people. The colors they had seen when dusk fell upon their kingdom were the reds of bloodshed and destructive fire.

In the midst of their deep trials, Jeremiah tells them of hope to come: God has not forgotten them! Rather, God has plans for them to be fulfilled, to turn their mourning into joy and their sorrow into gladness. In the end, they will dance and be merry.

In the dark of night, we can hope for dawn. And even in the dark night, stars can be seen - small reminders of the greater light to come. Random acts of kindness remind us of the greater love of Jesus and our opportunity to live in Christian community.

There is no greater light for life than God. In one of my classes this past semester, the sun was used as an analogy for the Holy Trinity: our Creator/Parent as the physical sun itself, Jesus as the light coming from it, and the Holy Spirit as the warmth provided by it. You cannot separate them; they are intrinsically one, though you can talk about them individually (and how they affect you). Without our

sun there would be no life on this planet. Without God, there would be no life.

The Gospel of John talks about Jesus as the light of the world, the Word of God entering our human history to drive away the darkness of sin. We know from Genesis that God created humans with the ability to choose whether to trust God's instructions, knowing that to disobey would have negative consequences (they could make an informed choice).

As the source of all life, God knows that for humans to turn away from God is for them to lose life; for humans to thrive, they must be in relationship with their Creator. However, that relationship would be broken if/when they disobeyed God's instructions. After humans initially turned away from God (sinned), God worked on restoring that relationship in a way that maintains human ability to choose.

No matter how repentant we are, if God was not willing to forgive us, we would be unable to restore the relationship that we need in order to live. Because God loves us, God wants us to thrive; therefore, God planned for the salvation of humanity before creation through the Son and the Spirit.

Through the Son, as an example for how we can be in healthy relationship with God and one another – and also because people relate to other people far better than to some abstract power. John made the point that people did not know God: “the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him...It is the only Son, himself God,...who has made him known.”

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that God “destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ.” It is great news, that despite our initial rejection, God is still offering the gift of life, a restored healthy relationship with our Creator.

Epiphany is about opening ourselves – our eyes, our ears, our minds, our hearts – to see the Light that has entered our world, to trust in God, to receive Him in love. Once we recognize that God is here and active in our lives, we can make an informed choice to embrace our source of life and live in His glory.

That is not to say it will always be easy. There is a lot of darkness out there; 2025 in particular seemed like a harsh year to me – political chaos, tough economy, extended family health issues.

Yet we can have faith that the Light of the world still shines even when it feels dark, that dawn will come with beauty – and we can help others notice that light too, by sharing the love of Jesus with them.

So as we look to the Light, let us stop holding back in fear, but rather start sharing God’s love more freely, continuing to seek Christ in all things. Let us choose to be in relationship with our Creator through the grace of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, and begin this new year by reciting together: