

“New Year’s Revelation”
Isaiah 60:1-6, Ephesians 3:1-12
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On the second Sunday of Christmas, we are getting a little ahead of the liturgical calendar by jumping ahead to Epiphany, which is not until Tuesday, but since Epiphany falls between Sundays the only options were an early observance this week, a late observance next week, or no observance at all. I guess an extra service on Tuesday would have also been an option, but I went with the first option, so today our focus is on the glorious revelation that a light has come for the people of every nation and that light is Jesus Christ.

In our reading from Isaiah, we see that even in Old Testament times, there were hints that God’s plans for salvation and restoration went beyond the restoration of Israel alone- promises waiting to be fully revealed. Then, in the Gospels we see more signs pointing in that direction. We didn’t read it today, but the story of the Magi – gentile visitors who came to pay homage to Jesus – is traditionally central to Epiphany because it reveals the wideness of God’s saving purposes. As the story continues in the book of Acts, we see how this revelation begins to take visible shape as Gentiles hear the gospel and a new community of Jews and Gentiles is formed through faith in Christ and baptism. The Apostle Paul is a central figure in the book of Acts and after receiving his own revelation of Christ, he became the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul’s transformation story is one of the most famous in all of Scripture. He was proud of his Jewish heritage and deeply committed to observing the religious law. He wasn’t just opposed to the followers of Christ, but he actively and violently persecuted them.

The last thing he would have ever imagined was that he would become a follower of Christ and a champion of the gospel even to the point of enduring beatings, and imprisonment, and shipwrecks, but that is what happened. As a result of his encounter with Christ who appeared to him in a blinding light, his life took on a whole new trajectory, and he devoted himself to passing on the good news that he had received. Paul references this experience in our reading from Ephesians when he talks about the mystery being made known to him by revelation and when he says that he became a servant of the gospel. He is talking about his personal experience with Christ and the personal calling he received, and though his was a unique calling, he also makes the point that every member of Christ's body shares a common calling to help make the mystery of God's salvation visible to all people.

We don't all have a story like Paul's story. For many of us, our conversion story doesn't even really feel like a *conversion* story. We were raised within the faith community and don't remember a time when we didn't believe. Faith seems to be something that has always been a part of our lives not because of a dramatic encounter but because it was nurtured over time. Even if this is true though, the pattern of Paul's own story is a pattern that holds true for us, too. First, there is the revelation – maybe a blinding light or maybe more like a deep knowing in our hearts - that tells us that Christ is our Savior and that we have received grace and mercy through him. And with the revelation comes the call to pass on and share the good news that has been revealed to us.

On this first Sunday in January, you may already be thinking about another kind of personal transformation if you've been thinking about new year's resolutions. Maybe you've been thinking about some improvements that you want to make by trying to let go of some bad habit or by trying to add some new good habits to your life. I know

in our household we've been talking about all the usual kinds of things that people make resolutions about – cutting out junk food, getting more exercise, saving more and spending less. Those are things that we would like to do in the pursuit of our own plans and goals for our lives, and I think it's fine to make resolutions and to pursue personal goals, but, today, as I listen to the Scriptures and reflect on Epiphany, I sense that God is inviting me - and all of us- to think not just about resolutions and how they might shape our lives but about *revelation*: what God has made known to us in Christ, and how that revelation might shape our lives as we move forward into a new year.

And remember. Paul didn't change because he just decided that he was going to start being nice to Christians instead of persecuting them. Paul received a revelation from God and that was what led to the change in his life and actions. Thinking about how revelation shapes our lives then isn't so much about resolving to do better as it is about paying attention to what we have already received. When we remember with gratitude who Jesus is and what he has done for us- when we focus again on the grace that has come to us through Christ – our lives begin to change in ways that grow naturally out of that gift. One change might be that we find ourselves feeling compelled to ask and answer some simple questions like this.

How can I be a light to others—a light that reveals Jesus? This is probably something that you do ask yourself from time to time, but if you're like me, it's a question that often falls behind the ordinary concerns of daily life: What meetings do I have today? When can I go to the store? What are we going to have for dinner tonight? When all that stuff feels so urgent, it can become easy to lose sight of the things that God says are deeply important – things like God's call to

share the light and love of Christ with others. Imagine what a difference it might make to you and to others if each day we were intentional about remembering and reflecting on the grace we have received from God in Christ and then asked God in prayer, “how can I be a light to others that reveals Jesus?”

Or, as we reflect on what having the light of Christ shining into our hearts means for us, we might find ourselves asking, *where do I see darkness that needs the light of Christ?* It might feel like we don’t even need to ask where we see darkness because we see it everywhere, but Epiphany invites us to pay attention to our particular position in the world and to the darkness we encounter in and around our own circle of influence. The truth is it can be very easy for some of us to move through life without really seeing the darkness around us. It’s possible to insulate ourselves from the pain and the problems that other people are experiencing. There are parts of town that we never have to drive through, for example, and we don’t have to get to know who our neighbors are. You can easily come and go from your own house without ever speaking to the people that live in the houses around yours, and for all you know, someone right across the street is overwhelmed with the darkness of loneliness and doesn’t know that they are beloved child of God. Imagine, again, what a difference it could make in your life and in the lives of others, if we practiced asking daily where God is sending us to bear the light of Christ?

This morning, in just a few minutes, we will be invited to share our first communion meal of the year with Jesus at his table. At his table, he is present with us and there we are given a fresh revelation of who he is and what he has done for us. At his table, the good news about the wideness of God’s mercy is made visible as Christ

welcomes us - no matter who we are and with all of our differences. He gathers us as his beloved brothers and sisters and gives himself to us in the bread and the cup, symbols of the sacrificial self-giving that saves us, and the means by which he pours out grace anew. As he loves us and feeds us, he sends us again to be his witnesses and to share his love, and with that call he offers all of the strength and power that we need to respond with faithfulness. Christ is made manifest for us and because of what we have seen we have been made new. May we go today from Jesus' table and into the new year knowing that Christ goes ahead of us to light the way, and as we walk in his light may we be the bearers of his light to a world in need. Amen.

