

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone! As we celebrate Epiphany, the unveiling and revealing of Jesus Christ to the world, one of the most common illustrations or pictures the Bible gives us is that of light breaking into darkness. This theme is all over the Bible, beginning all the way back in Genesis 1, when God said “Let there be light.” For Jesus to come then, as the light of the world, means nothing less than a new creation. God is bringing renewal to the world that was plunged into moral and spiritual darkness by sin.

But light is more than just a metaphor: when God created the world, He really did speak light into existence, and when He led kings and magi to the city of Bethlehem, He used the light of a comet, a moving star, to lead Gentiles and foreigners to come and bow before the baby King. This is exactly what Isaiah 60 talked about: “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you...And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising...They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord.” Good news! Light for the nations.

And in Ephesians 3, Paul picks up on these two themes as the mystery of Christ: *darkness to light*, and *nations to the Lord*, and uses them to explain his whole ministry. The light came to me, Paul says, (remember Acts 9 and the blinding light from heaven?), and the Spirit has given me special insight and clarity into a mystery that wasn’t clear to the sons of men in other generations.

A mystery in the Bible is something that was secret or hidden that has now been revealed. The mystery that Paul is talking about is the one I preached about this several weeks ago, from Paul’s doxology in Romans 16: God’s mystery of salvation is revealed through Jesus Christ. If you look for salvation anywhere else, then this mystery hasn’t been revealed to you. You’re still in darkness, just like Paul was before the light of Jesus shone down on him on the Damascus road.

Paul fully expected God to save His people, and when He did, Paul expected the nations to come worship God *by worshipping the Jewish way*. Paul knew all about Jesus, but he knew that Jesus couldn’t be the solution to the mystery of salvation because Jesus talked about destroying the temple, changing the customs of Moses, and offering Israel’s blessings to the nations. For Paul, the customs of Moses and the temple didn’t need to change so that the nations could come; just the opposite: the nations needed to change and follow the customs of Moses so that they could come to the temple. In other words, we’re not climbing over the wall to come to you. You need to climb over the wall in order to come to God.

Paul had certain expectations about how God would save the world, and since Jesus didn’t conform to his expectations, Paul couldn’t believe that Jesus was the solution to God’s mystery of salvation. Jesus didn’t wait for the Gentiles to come to Him; He came for us! And He didn’t just allow Gentiles to climb over the wall; He broke the wall down! This absolutely scandalized Paul, and so he led a crusade against Jesus and His followers.

But then the light came for Paul. Paul's physical eyes were blinded, but his spiritual eyes were opened, and the Holy Spirit revealed to him the great mystery of the gospel, that Jesus was the fulfilment of God's eternal purpose, and that the Gentiles were fellow heirs along with Jews, because salvation was by faith in Jesus, not by keeping the customs of Moses or worshiping in the temple. The law of Moses was about Jesus, and now Jesus was here! The temple was about Jesus, and now Jesus was here! Gentiles, men from every nation under heaven, who came to believe in Jesus were just as much partakers of the promise as the Jews were. That's the mystery that was made known to Paul, and that's the mystery that Paul spent his life revealing to the Gentiles.

The coming of the light changed Paul completely, and by the grace of God, he was made a minister of the gospel, and given the grace of preaching to the Gentiles, to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God. Paul not only saw the light, he was filled with light, and charged with spreading that light to the nations. *Light for everyone*. That's the result of the incarnation being made known. The light *came*, and the light *spread*. Christmas season celebrates the coming of the light, and Epiphany celebrates the spreading of the light, the unveiling of the light. Christmas is about the dawn, the sunrise. Epiphany tracks the rising of the sun into the full brightness of day.

And that image of the sunrise helps us understand Paul's earlier mistake: God set the Jews up on the watchtower, to look for the dawn and to be the first to see it. All the customs of Moses and the temple were God's way of putting His people in position to see the sunrise. If anyone wanted to see the sunrise, they needed to become a Jew. But sunlight does not belong to the first people to see the sunrise! Seeing it first doesn't mean you own it! That sun is gonna keep rising, no matter who saw it first! And it's going to light up the whole world. Now, if you've ever seen a sunrise, you know what a blessing it is – it was a great gift for the Jews to be God's sunrise people. But God meant for the sun to be light for everyone.

So, how does the light spread to everyone? This passage gives us three ways: v. 5, by the Spirit, v. 8-9, through preaching, and v. 10, through the church. The Holy Spirit gives light through the Word, by inspiring the apostles with revelation from God, which is now written down for us in this book. The mystery of salvation is brought to light by the Spirit in the Bible – thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. The Psalmist wrote that before Jesus came; how much more true it is now that the Light of the world has come!

The light also spreads to everyone through *preaching*: the gospel message is expounded and explained by preachers that God has raised up all over the world! Preaching brings God's plan to light as the unsearchable riches of Christ are put into words for all to hear.

And the light spreads *through the church*. Not only as the place where preaching often takes place, not only as the instrument that God uses to raise up and fund preachers, but I think Paul means something deeper than that. The manifold wisdom of God is made known *through* the church when God's purposes are realized *in* the church. In the next several chapters of Ephesians, Paul is going to apply the gospel that he preaches by exhorting his hearers to walk in *unity* (ch. 4) and in *love* (ch. 5). That's what's going to make the manifold wisdom of God known to rulers and authorities in heavenly places! When Jew and Gentile become one in the church. When male and female are one in Christ. When rich and poor live in unity and love as the body of Christ. When sin is rejected, and God's people walk in good works.

Paul doesn't fully make clear just who the rulers and authorities he's talking about are, but the point that is clear is that the existence and life of the church demonstrate the wisdom of God. Think of it this way: imagine social disorder as a messy room. Parents, this will be especially vivid for you!

Racial pride, radical feminism, toxic masculinity, class warfare, poverty, robber barons, the 1%, injustice, sexual abuse, grumpy Baby boomers, entitled millennials, and a general attitude of anger and dissatisfaction - these are all toys and clothes and trash scattered around a room. You go from room to room, looking to find even one place with some order, one place where things are being put right.

But here's the other complicating factor: there are no windows and no lights in these messy rooms. Each room is a mess, and each room is in utter darkness. (Maybe you can even play this game when you get home: have the kids try to clean up a messy room in the dark. That's what trying to save the world without Jesus is like - trying to find and assemble a million-piece Lego set in the dark. Barefoot.)

After seeing a bunch of rooms like that, when you come to a room flooded with light, where men and women from every tribe and nation and language, old and young, rich and poor, black and white, male and female, are working together to restore order and put everything back in its proper place, that's when you see manifold wisdom. That's the kind of place that the church is meant to be, and where that work is happening in unity and love, that is a compelling testimony to the wisdom of God, and to the glory of His eternal purpose in Christ. That's how the light is revealed to everyone, and that's what we celebrate at Epiphany.

Because here's what that means: light for everyone means gospel for everyone, grace for everyone, and here in v. 12: boldness and access with confidence for everyone, through faith in Jesus. Darkness kept you from having access to God, light means that you can be absolutely certain that you have found God in Christ, and that you are welcome to come to God through Christ.

Think about this: there are people still in darkness who do not know God. *You know Him.* There are people who know that there is a God, but they can't find Him. *You've seen Him,* because Jesus gave you light. There are people who are afraid of God, afraid of judgment, afraid of punishment, afraid to come near to God because of their sin. *You have boldness and confidence,* because the gospel has been preached to you, and you've seen the light. There are people crying out for justice, looking for righteousness, pleading for peace, but they are in darkness. *You are walking in the light of Christ.*

So don't make Paul's mistake, and try to keep the light to yourself. Instead, share the light with everyone. Share the Spirit's wisdom in the Word – ask yourself this week if there is someone who doesn't know the mystery of Christ that you could invite to read the Bible with you. If that's intimidating, come talk to me – I have some great resources to help you. The light spreads through preaching – ask yourself if there is someone you can invite to church so they can hear about the unsearchable riches of Christ and the Creator's secret plan that He revealed in Jesus.

And live out the gospel in unity and love in the Church. Make it a point to spend time with someone here in the congregation different from you, someone richer or poorer, older or younger, or from a different background. And pray that God continues to bring people to our congregation whose presence will show forth the manifold wisdom of God. Different nationalities, different religious backgrounds – Isaiah's prophecy was that the nations would come to the light and bring gifts. The Magi were the firstfruits, and Paul's ministry was meant to bring the nations into the light, so that their lives could be a fragrant offering of sweet incense to God. (Eph. 5:2).

I hope that God keeps sending young middle-class families who love the Reformed faith to our church, but I also hope that He shows off His wisdom and power by sending us poor Korean grandparents with no church background, or a young single woman from India or Mexico or Russia who doesn't even believe in Jesus yet, but who one day gets baptized here in our congregation. It is a powerful testimony when a church is made up of people who have nothing in common but the gospel. It's a mystery to the watching world, the hidden mystery of Christ brought to light in His Church.

May God fill our Church with the light of Christ, so that we can bring the mystery of Christ to light for everyone.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*