

Pinning our hopes on a star  
Isaiah 60:1 Matthew 2:9-10



This is the season of Epiphany, the season of “light”. In the Bible, light is a metaphor for being in the presence of God. Darkness is used as a metaphor for living life apart from God and God’s will. Thus, when Isaiah announces that “the light of the Lord will shine” on the people who are living under occupation, whose sacred temple and city lie in ruins, they must have wondered if he had lost his mind. Even as they languish, captive in Babylon, Isaiah proclaims that “the glory of the Lord is shining on you!” Then he invites them to “Look around you and see what is happening: Your people are gathering to come home!” How their hearts must have pounded, even as they shook their heads in disbelief! How the whispers, lest their captors might hear them, must have been filled with incredulity and hope – “Do you think it could be possible – what Isaiah is saying? Is it the ranting of a man gone insane, or does he know something we don’t know? Could it be a message from Yahweh? Or is it the taunting of the devil?”

It was this same prophet, Isaiah, who declared, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. They lived in a land of shadows, but now light is shining on them. ... A child is born to us! A son is given to us! And he will be our ruler. He will be called, ‘Wonderful Counsellor,’ ‘Mighty God,’ ‘Eternal Father,’ ‘Prince of Peace.’” [Isaiah 9:2, 6]

Centuries later, out of the darkness, there shone a star – the symbol of God’s presence.

That was then. What about now? If ever the world needed to hear the promise of Epiphany, to be reminded of light and hope, surely it is now. “Arise, shine, for your light has come...” [Isaiah 60:2] We live in a time when dreams are made dim and ideals, challenged, even laughed at. The global pandemic seems unrelenting, unending. And, it’s hard to believe that peace can happen. It’s heartbreaking to consider the 10’s of millions of refugees and the countless others who live with hunger and fear. Our planet’s health and even continuing existence is in serious jeopardy.

Yet, when we are most tempted to give up hope, to stop searching for ways we can contribute to solutions to the problems of our day, we are reminded that “Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea”; that God loves us so utterly that He gave His own, His only Son for us. We are reminded that the God of all creation has become one of us, in order to be with us in our struggles and triumphs, to journey with us through even the deepest and darkest of valleys.

Indeed, into this hurting world, God paints a star in the sky, a compass by which we will find our way home, our way back to God. When all about us is spinning, seemingly out of control, in our world or in our personal lives, God sends us a promise, that we can in fact pin our hopes to a star. When we are absolutely exhausted or overcome with fear, even if it is of our own doing, God hangs a star to show us the way through the weariness, beyond the fear, out of the despair.

Epiphany – a gift for this and every day – a gift for all God’s created – simple and awesome – God loves us. No matter what else, this is sure, solid, utterly reliable.