

Epiphany 1, Year A

The New Testament

Acts 10:34-43

Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ--he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

The Gospel

Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Sermon

Our lectionary is kind of strange. We were just covering the story of Baby Jesus...

Incarnate God from God, light from light,ⁱ

True God from True God,

And all of a sudden, we're reading about Jesus' ministry and baptism in the Jordan.

Jesus went from an infant to a 30-year-old, just like that. Makes me dizzy. Who chooses this stuff? All over the map, bouncing from one thing to the next. No wonder folks have trouble keeping track!

But there really is a message:

Jesus' light will fill the void in every empty heart...

Jesus' light overcomes all fear, all regret, all worry.

Jesus was always and will always be, the Eternal Light, That darkness cannot overcome.

In a world that lingers in darkness, generation after generation,ⁱⁱ Jesus is light.

Because Jesus is light, he calls each one of us to be a light, In a world that is so much like his world was: Crazy with greed, hunger, loneliness and fear.

Jesus' big renewal project is still underway. It's a Divine work-in-progress.

Jesus' New Thingⁱⁱⁱ, is all about embracing peace and Salvation.

That's a song that each generation needs to hear.

Jesus' New Thing only works because our God

Is a God of new beginnings...

It only works because God is always present for anyone with eyes to see, and a heart to hear.

Because our God is a God of new beginnings, She is eternally hard at work in our world ...

Her light is everywhere, and yet so few folks can see it.

Our God is as fresh as a Spring rose, like a *mighty redwood*, eternal and almighty,

yet as brilliant and complex and fragile, as a snowflake.

Our world, the world we have made, is complex and lonely.

For many, it is dark, and cold, and frightening.

Yet, in Jesus' warm, healing light, there are fewer shadows, fewer secrets, and fewer hidden wounds.^{iv} Come on home to Jesus. Come home to Ascension!

It has always been a struggle to come home. *A warm meal may call us, but we choose fast food.*

We've all heard about the "Pharisees".^v

In Hebrew that word means, "the separated ones".

Those ancient men, worked with an unapproachable God, who they thought required insisted on them living apart, in a kind of a social darkness, more or less alone.

We like to think that we're enlightened now.

We've got cell phones. How can there be a lonely darkness?

And yet, our political and economic systems tear us apart...like they did 100 years ago.
Maybe its gender, or age, or skin color, or where we were born and where we live now, or
how we vote or how thick our wallet is.

Darkness reigns, when we shut Jesus out. When we shut Jesus out, Darkness reigns

It's so easy to say, "I just don't want to know".

"I just don't want to know".

Even in our safest place, we close our hearts and our eyes.

Too often we choose to live in darkness.

Even in our safest place, that ancient, loveless, relentless voice reminds us of our faults,
our weaknesses, and our mistakes.

But today is Epiphany. A discovery, a realization... an illumination,
that Jesus is with us, and that our God reigns.

Epiphany is all about light and it's all about

God being revealed to each of us, through Jesus.

Jesus came to show us the Way, to light our path ... *Jesus' light never fails.*

Once, a Rabbi asked his students, "How do we know when night is ended,
and a new day has begun?"

One student answered,

"I would know when I look off in the distance, and tell the difference between my dog and
my sheep." "That's a good answer," the Rabbi said, "But no dice."

Another student said:

"I'd know the night is over, and the day has begun, when light falls on the tree leaves,
and I can tell what kind of tree it is."

The Rabbi said, "Good answer, but that's not what I'm looking for."

And so, the conversation went around and around.

One student after another bombed out. *They got bored. And then they got hungry.*

One of them, hoping for lunch, smiled and said, "We give up."

"How are we supposed to know when night has ended, and a new day has begun?"

The Rabbi told them, "Lots of people are hungry."

"You'll know that it's morning, when you look another person, in the eye and you see a
sister or brother. *Until then, it will always be night.*"

It's morning^{vi} at Ascension Episcopal Church.

May God's light shine upon us, so that we will be His light. *Right here, in Pueblo. Right
now.*

AMEN

ⁱ See, Genesis 1:3

ⁱⁱ See, Matthew 5:14

ⁱⁱⁱ Eternally new, and yet our God was ancient, when the Rocky Mountains were a single grain of sand.

^v In Koine Greek see, Φαρισαῖος, that is, “Pharisaïos” from Aramaic Pərīšā (פְּרִישָׁא), related to Hebrew p̄rûš (פְּרִישׁ), meaning "set apart, separated".

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharisees#:~:text=%22Pharisee%22%20is%20derived%20from%20Ancient,the%20verb%20p%C4%81ra%C5%A1%20\(%D7%A4%D6%B8%D6%BC%D7%A8%D6%B7%D7%A9%D7%81\).](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharisees#:~:text=%22Pharisee%22%20is%20derived%20from%20Ancient,the%20verb%20p%C4%81ra%C5%A1%20(%D7%A4%D6%B8%D6%BC%D7%A8%D6%B7%D7%A9%D7%81).)

^{vi} In that morning, when God speaks, and we listen, our hearts shall be warmed, and our pulse quickened, and the clatter of the Real World will fade away. The sick shall be healed, the lame shall walk, and the dead shall live.