

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera
7th January 2024 - Epiphany

Ephesians 3:1-12

GOD'S LIGHT SHINING THROUGH

If we were to try and list all the great technological inventions human beings have come up with throughout history, and then to rank them in order of their importance and usefulness for people, I am sure it would be a very subjective list, with how each invention and innovation affects our lives determining where we place them. And I am pretty sure that, not so much today with the GPS and mapping technology available, but in times past if you were to ask a sailor what has been the greatest invention, they would probably say a lighthouse. On a cloudy or stormy night, when the stars were covered so they could not navigate by them, a lighthouse both gave passing ships their own position, and told them where the danger was. It's hard to imagine the hope and relief which that light shining out gave many a sailor and ship at times when they felt totally lost and alone.

Inside many big inventions are a number of smaller ones which make it all possible. For a lighthouse, no matter how big and powerful the light is, it would not be able to shine its light out the way it does without the lense. What an amazing piece of equipment that is! It is made up of not just one lense, but many, and its purpose is to magnify the light and spread it out into the darkness in a way that the light could not do alone. And it is not just one lense, but many, all working together to spread that light out and bring hope and direction to those who are looking for it. The light shines, that's where it all starts, and then the lenses magnify and spread that light all around them.

The light shining in the darkness, bringing hope, security, direction, and a knowledge of peace and safety.

The season of Epiphany, which we begin in the Church year today, is about light, and shining, and revelation, and about a message of hope, and security, and direction, going out to all

people. That theme of 'light shining in the darkness' has been with us through Advent, into Christmas, and now continues into Epiphany; not surprisingly because they all revolve around Jesus, the light who came into the world. In our first reading for today, from Isaiah 60, the prophet talks about the light shining in the darkness; the light of God's glory coming into the world for all people. The Gospel reading, Matthew 2, brings us the account of the Wise Men, who of course followed another guiding light, the star, from a long way away to come to see and worship this King who had brought light into the world. The word Epiphany itself means, 'insight' or 'revelation', as in, "wow, I didn't know that! I've just had an epiphany!" This is a time when we particularly focus on the light of God's love, shown to us in Jesus, shining into our world and our lives.

And while the reading we are focusing on today, chapter 3 of the letter Paul has written to the Ephesians, doesn't actually mention light and darkness, Paul is in fact breaking it all down, telling us how it works, and also telling us the 'why' of the light coming into the darkness. The focus first of all is on what the other parts of the Bible call the 'light'; God's love shown to us in Jesus. This light is about God's love for us, so great that He sent His Son to die for us. Here Paul calls it the 'mystery of Christ', which is a great way to put it because it is a mystery to us; both how it happened and why it happened. It's a mystery because God loves us even when we are not very lovable. It's a mystery because God loves us so much, and wants so much to have a relationship with us, that He was and is willing to do all He can to make this happen. Paul talks from personal experience of how he has known this underserved grace, and he loudly talks about how it is there for everyone. And this love and grace is a mystery, literally, because we don't even come to know about it until God through the Holy Spirit reveals it to us. The mystery of God's great love for us in Jesus is the light in the lighthouse ready to shine out its beacon of love and hope.

The light shines, but to really go out the light needs the lenses, and in this case the lenses are, us. In verse 7 Paul writes; 'God treated me with kindness. His power worked in me, and it

became my job to spread the good news'. We can each apply those words to ourselves, so have a look at them again, and think about what they mean. We are the lenses, many lenses coming together and shining out God's love to those around us. Think again of the image of the lenses put together in a lighthouse; all perfectly placed, with perfect surfaces, just the right angle, each one fitting in and working perfectly with those around and beside it. God's people and the Church, us, are specifically mentioned here as the ones who will reflect and shine this light out to all people and to the world. As lenses coming together, how do we go with that?

Each lens around the light in a lighthouse has its special place, we might say its 'calling', and its role to play, and each works in perfectly with those around it. Is that a good image of the Church, both as a whole and all its parts, including our own church family? What messes it up sometimes, puts at least some lenses out of alignment, maybe cracks, or even completely shatters, some of these delicately placed and shaped, loved by God, lenses? What would we say to that? Our pride, our stubbornness, our inability to forgive, our desire that ourselves and our needs are met rather than focusing on being a big lens together as we have been called to be, personality differences we can't move past because of our intolerance, not being willing to consider the views and perspectives of others. The more we think about it the list of what distorts all these lenses working together becomes pretty big, doesn't it? Try to look at it not as looking out at what we believe others are doing to contribute to this distortion happening, but as a mirror looking back at ourself. Our call, our role, our task, as those who know this mystery of God's love, who know what the light of His love shining in our lives means for us, is to come together to shine this love out so that it is no longer a mystery to others. And as part of doing that, we need to think about what we are doing, and could be doing, as one of those lenses who now shines this love out.

But still, despite our distortions, despite the imperfections we bring to this lens, despite the fact that we don't always work together, the light of God's love continues to shine through us. Paul uses strong and straightforward words here, but he knew that neither he nor anyone else was

or is perfect in doing what he talks about here. That's not an excuse, it's a reality, and still something we are called to each work on every day. Over all that is the message, the mystery, of not just Epiphany, or Advent, or even Christmas, but of the whole Bible and all of God's relationship with His people; the light of God's love, shining through the cross of Jesus, continues to shine in and through us as His people so that all people can now come to know Him. And as well as being important for us in our lives, that love is also about bringing the Christian community, which is for all people, together.

Isaiah talked about the light which shines in the darkness. The Wise Men followed the light of the star so they could know and worship the Saviour. Like the lenses which shine the light of a lighthouse out far and wide so that all can see its light, and there have hope, and safety, and peace, may we also together and in all our parts continue to be the lense in which the light of God's love continues to shine through. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Is there a particular image or example which comes to your mind when you hear this common Bible teaching of God's light shining in the darkness?
- The light of God's love shining out begins with this light shining through Jesus. Think about/share what His love means for you in your life: How would your life be different without it? Are there any particular times or circumstances in which it gives you particular strength, hope and comfort?
- When we know the light of God's love in Jesus, we are each called to be the lenses in which this love shines through to others, both alone and with others. Think about that and what it means for you. How is this light shining through you already (it's probably happening a lot more than you think it is!)? Are there opportunities to shine out the light which you are passing up? Are you sometimes a lense which is cracked or out of alignment with others – if so, do you need to ask for God's help in correcting that?

Pray: thank God that you know the light of His love, which shines through Jesus, in your life. Pray for His help to be a lense which both alone and with others shines this light out to everyone around you.

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