

January 2023 – Pastoral Message

Beloved Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you, my family, and friends, in the time after the birth of the newborn Christ. Amen.

Happy New Year! With Christmas behind us again – even though it probably looked different for us all this year!—this time of year can be a bit of a letdown. We spend so much time preparing for Jesus' arrival at Christmas, we may wonder what's next in our faith walk after the New Year. Maybe you feel a little lost after the past year and look to the new year with new hope.

The day of Epiphany comes 12 days after Christmas (*On the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...*the song goes.)The song doesn't speak of a 12-day countdown to Christmas, but the 12 days following Christmas that lead up to the day of Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Epiphany is a time of *Jesus being revealed to all the world*, represented by the visit of the Magi to the Christ child. "Epiphany" means appearance or manifestation. When the Magi visited Jesus, they showed how God's gift of the Good News is for all people.

Because Epiphany is represented by the magi who followed the star, *stars* and *light* are common images for this season. In the midst of the darkest days of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, we know that we have passed the longest night, and the amount of light we experience is growing day by day. We also know, from John 1, that "the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."

So, in our worship times during the Time After Epiphany, we hear readings pointing to Jesus as the Light of the world, the Light for all nations, and of Jesus being revealed to all people, of shining the light to the world.

We too, are called to help shine the light to the world. *We are not the light. Jesus is.* But we can do our part too. It reminds me of a great story about the meaning of life, found in Robert Fulghum's book *It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It*. He tells of a seminar he once attended in Greece. On the last day, the presenter, Alexander Papaderos, asked if there were any questions.

Fulghum had been impressed by this presenter, and so he asked, "What is the meaning of life?" Papaderos took a minute, as everyone laughed, to consider if Fulghum was serious with his question. He decided to answer it:

"He took his wallet out of his pocket and removed a small round mirror about the size of a quarter. Then he explained:

*When I was a small child during World War II, we were very poor, and we lived in a remote village. One day on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had*

*been wrecked in that place. I tried to find all the pieces and put them together, but it was not possible, so I kept the largest piece. This one. And by scratching it on a stone, I made it round.*

*I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun could never shine. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places that I could find. I kept the little mirror, and as I grew up, I would take it out at idle moments and continue the challenge of the game.*

*As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game, but a metaphor of what I could do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of the light. But light – be it truth or understanding or knowledge – is there, and it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it.*

*I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have, I can reflect light into the dark places of this world – into the dark places of human hearts – and change some things in some people. Perhaps others seeing it happen will do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of my life.”*

As we step into this New Year, I offer this image to you to ponder and wonder about: How can you reflect the light of Christ into the world? Into your day-to-day? Into the lives of others you encounter? What might that look like?

Thanks be to God that we do not have the pressure of *being* the light, but that Jesus Christ *is* the Light, and Jesus invites us to reflect the Good News wherever we are.

God bless you all and welcome to January and a new year!

Merry Christmas too!

In Christ,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish