

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Matthew 2:1-12

The Light for All and the Light is within You

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January 6, 2008

A. Introduction

Today is Epiphany. *Epiphany* is a Greek word that means 'to reveal' or 'to make known'. Epiphany marks the final day of the Christmas season, which is twelve days long. On this day, Christians world-wide celebrate the day Jesus was revealed as the king of the world by the magi's visit to the Christ child.

Today, throughout the world Christians will focus on four texts from Scripture: Isaiah 60, Psalm 72, Matthew 2, and Ephesians 3. The major theme running through all four texts is that God is coming as Light to the world and that Light heals and restores people.

B. Isaiah 60

Isaiah 60:1-6. ¹ "Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ² "For behold, darkness will cover the earth, And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you, And His glory will appear upon you. ³ "And nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. ⁴ "Lift up your eyes round about, and see; They all gather together, they come to you. Your sons will come from afar, And your daughters will be carried in the arms. ⁵ "Then you will see and be radiant, And your heart will thrill and rejoice; Because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, The wealth of the nations will come to you. ⁶ "A multitude of camels will cover you, The young camels of Midian and Ephah; All those from Sheba will come; They will bring gold and frankincense, And will bear good news of the praises of the LORD (NRSV).

Isaiah 60:1-6 proclaims that the light of God is for all people and all creation.

Isaiah is addressing Jews/Hebrews in the fifth century BCE. They had begun to return to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon. However, their hopes for a better life in Jerusalem were in vain. A significant number of them found themselves marginalized by others. A dominant, oppressive priesthood gained control. The marginalized—the poor, weak, powerless, unemployed—had life squeezed out of them. Listen to Isa 59:9-10:

Isaiah 59:9-10. ⁹ Therefore, justice is far from us, And righteousness does not overtake us; We hope for light, but behold, darkness; For brightness, but we walk in gloom. ¹⁰ We grope along the wall like blind men. We grope like those who have no eyes. We stumble at midday as in the twilight. Among those who are vigorous we are like dead men.

This is not a happy bunch. They felt weak and don't have any hope. They have no more light. They are burned out. They were like blind men groping along the path. It is to this group that Isaiah speaks. He invites them to imagine a different world! Isaiah invites them to dream of a future beyond their darkness.

He envisioned it as the dawning of a new day, a glorious new beginning which would attract widespread (international) attention. It is difficult it is for us, who are obsessed with artificial light every hour of the day and night, to appreciate the power of Isaiah's metaphor of light. During Isaiah's day, people experienced total darkness suddenly vanishing with dawn to be followed by the stunning brightness of the rising sun.

Isaiah says that our darkness—whatever our darkness might be—will vanish with the stunning brightness of God's glory. How intense will that coming become? Isaiah's answer is found in verses 19-20:

Isaiah 60:19-20. ⁹ "No longer will you have the sun for light by day, Nor for brightness will the moon give you light; But you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And your God for your glory. ²⁰ "Your sun will set no more, Neither will your moon wane; For you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And the days of your mourning will be finished.

What does Isaiah mean by this—that we will not longer need the sun and moon because God will be our glory? This powerful metaphor, but for what? Each of us will have to answer that for ourselves, but Isaiah provides three broad strokes for his people at his time.

Isaiah announces that God's light is available to all people. The Jews/Hebrew of Isaiah's time simply provides an example of God's transformation. In their world, prosperity and military might were signs of the blessing and power of a tribal god. But Isaiah describes a different kind of God—a God for all people, a God who restores and renews all who are defeated.

This is good news, because all humanity suffers defeated. All people suffer defeat whether they know it or not. All people experience defeat in the sense of separation from God and each other. The returning exiles provide an example of that defeat. They wanted to go home, back to Jerusalem, but when they got there they didn't experience it as home.

Only God, our Divine Source, is home. Anything less than coming home to God is defeat. The Jews wanted Jerusalem. They thought it was home. They got Jerusalem, but still didn't feel like home. What is your Jerusalem? What home are you trying to return to? A good family? A good job? A spouse? More money?

For me, home was a Ph.D. But once I arrived at that Jerusalem, it was not enough. It was not home. Isaiah points us toward our true home—God Him/Herself. Isaiah tells us to return, not to Jerusalem, but to God. When we return to God that Light makes all other lights disappear. Our task, then, is to find our way back to God, the True Light.

To summarize, the prophet Isaiah sees the coming of God into the world as a brilliant light. That Light will raise and transform the Jewish/Hebrew people and the Light within them will draw non-Jewish/Hebrews to God as well.

C. Psalm 72

Let us now turn to Psalm 72. When you think about voting, what one characteristic must a candidate for the highest office in the land exhibit? What is a second trait?

I've asked several people to read portions of Psalm 72 (A:1; B:2-4; C:5-7; D: 10-11; E: 12-14).

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14. *Of Solomon.* Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness.

² He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. ³ The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. ⁴ He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor.

⁵ He will endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. ⁶ He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. ⁷ In his days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more....

¹⁰ The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. ¹¹ All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him.

¹² For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. ¹³ He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. ¹⁴ He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight (NIV).

Let's dialogue about Psalm 72.

1. This Psalm is dedicated to Solomon. To what other king does it allude? (See Isa 9:6-7; Zech 9:9-10)
2. Look at the Psalm. What qualities will the king bring the people (vv. 1-4)? What should he do about oppression? Why aren't middle or upper classes mentioned (vv 12-14)?
3. How long will he rule (vv. 5-7)? Over what boundaries (v. 8)? How will the nations respond (vv. 10-11)?
4. This Psalm is regarded as "messianic" by Jews and Christians. Given this Psalm to work with, how would you explain the Messiah to someone else?

5. How do you feel about nationalism? Who rules you? Why have human governments? Does God approve of all world leaders and their actions?

D. Matthew 2

Matthew 2:1-12. ¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him."

³ And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he *began* to inquire of them where the Christ/Messiah was to be born. ⁵ And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, ⁶ 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, Are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; For out of you shall come forth a Ruler, Who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

⁷ Then Herod secretly called the magi, and ascertained from them the time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and make careful search for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, that I too may come and worship Him."

⁹ And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. ¹⁰ And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned *by God* in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their own country by another way (NRSV).

Let's play some "role dialogue." I want you to play the different voices within the infancy narrative we just read. Each of these voices are within you. Each of you have the voice of Herod, the voice of the magi, the voice of Mary, and the voice of the God, the implicit Voice behind the narrative and our lives.

1. Many voices within

First, we have to recognize there are many voices within us. Two psychologists, Hal and Sidra Stone, recognized there are many sub-personalities or voices within each of us. ¹

¹ Hal and Sidra Stone, *Embracing Ourselves: The Voice Dialogue Manual* (New World Library, 1998).

Think of yourself as large corporation with many employees.² How many? No one knows. Over many years, we hired these employees. We didn't train them. We didn't tell them who they worked for. We just said go to work. What kind of company is that? It's dysfunctional. In Voice Dialogue we're going to interview each employee one at a time.

Some of these voices are very clear. But there are other aspects of ourselves that we leave unacknowledged. At times in our life there are certain aspects of ourselves that we disown, denied, and disassociated from. We disown them for a reason: We didn't like them.

Let's say, I don't believe its right to be angry, or my parent taught me it's not good to be angry, then what I do is I disown my anger. I disassociate from it. And my anger goes underground and, unconsciously, it undermines me.

And what the Stones found out was that all you had to do it reveal the disowned voices, was to ask to speak to them. Voice Dialogue enables us to give voice to these disowned aspects of ourselves and begin to re-integrate them into our lives.

Similarly, the divine within is often a disowned Voice or a Voice that has never been awakened. There are certain aspects of our selves that have never been awakened or have never been owned. For many of us, the divine Voice needs to be awakened within—the Living Water within. Now, let us try some Voice Dialogue.

2. Controller

May I speak to the Voice of the Controller (i.e., the ego)?

Ask them to make a subtle bodily shift when they have made the mental shift to the Voice of the Controller. The person will respond: "I am the Controller." [When you identify with the Controller you speak as that voice in the 1st person and about the self in the 3rd person as he or she.]

Who am I speaking to?

What is your function?

Controller, may I speak to other Voices? Controller, can I ask you to keep the Skeptic and the Doubter out of the conversation for now?

3. Herod

Controller, may I speak to the Voice of the Herod, please?

Could you describe to me your function and your purposes?

² This is from Dennis Genpo Merzel, *Big Mind, Big Heart: Finding Your Way* (Salt Lake City: Big Mind, 2007)39.

What is your perspective on Jesus?

Thanks for sharing.

4. Magi

Controller, may I speak to the Voice of the Magi, please?

Who am I speaking to?

What is your perspective on this Jesus?

I appreciate your honesty.

5. Mary

Controller, may I speak to the Voice of Mary?

Who am I speaking to?

What are your concerns? What is your view of Jesus? God?

6. God

Controller, may I speak to the Voice of the God? Can you open door and let God come into the conversation?

Who am I speaking to?

What is your relationship to the self within whom you dwell?

[The Voice within that goes beyond the boundary of the self.]

Can the Self within whom you dwell fully comprehend you?

Does your care and compassion go beyond the Self within whom you dwell?

Are you afraid of anything? Are you damaged in any way? Are you angry?

Thank you for sharing.

7. Return

Controller, thank you for opening the door for God's Voice. Would you allow all the Voices that we have called out to reintegrate the whole person. Once that have made that mental shift, make a bodily shift.

Who am I speaking to now? [Say your name.]

G. Reflection

[Open debriefing and discussion]