

# Revealed by the Light

## God Reveals What People Try to Hide

A Homily by the Rev. Andrew Downs

Text: Matthew 2:13–23

Christmas 2B | January 4, 2015

### The Coming of the Light

Once again, I wish you a Merry Christmas! This season in which we embrace the coming of the light.

There is something that happens when light comes to dark places: we see things. Things we couldn't see before. Things we didn't know were there.

And if we're especially observant, as my friend [David points out](#), we can see that the light in front of us, casts a shadow behind us.

The coming of the light is a joyful thing—it relieves our despair and provides great joy and hope in a time of fear and anguish.

But for those comfortable in the dark, notably the criminal: the thief and the abuser: but also those in candle sales, private ambulance companies, and all who profit from the dark; for these comfortable people, the coming light is unwelcome and threatening. There are many who don't want the truth revealed, who don't want their actions to be seen. There are many for whom the light *brings* pain and anguish.

We see this when an unwelcome report is released on torture or our church is invited to take up conversations of human sexuality. If we stay in the dark, we say, we can all be happy. Exposure to the light, we argue, is the source of the pain. Not the pain of the prisoner or the minority. No. The pain of revealed truth. Keep *quiet*, we tell each other.

### The Star and the Wise

At Christmas, we push two different stories about the birth of Jesus together. We read on Christmas Eve from the evangelist we call Luke of the birth in Bethlehem with the shepherds coming to the holy family after a visit from an angel.

In Matthew, we get no telling of the birth. We get the Wise Men being directed to Bethlehem where an out-of-wedlock birth has already happened. And this is a much more complicated story than we normally take it for. We'll hear that first part of Matthew 2 on Tuesday night in the chapel.

These wise men, who come from the East, are directed by a star—a light, which guides them from their home to this country, Judea. But they leave the star and head to the capital city. They ask around. They want to know if anyone understands this vision that they have about the birth of a special baby: a baby who would become king of the Jews.

They follow the star, but when they get close, they seek help from “experts”. They look to the authorities. They trust their vision enough to come this far, but not to finish the job, it seems.

The star which will bring them right to the place the holy family is staying.

Those are one set of players in this story.

## The Leadership

This news that the wise men bring, which they blab about to everyone in the capital, is heard with fear:

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him

Herod, who would be a monster to us, is not alone in his fear. In this world of darkness, the leadership, the capital, the ones in charge do not want the light to come near. They do not want the truth to be revealed. It works out really well for them as it is, thank you very much.

This unwelcome news leads to action. And it isn't just Herod that acts. News of an infant king is destabilizing, particularly for a usurper king and all of his supporters. Since these wise men who bring the bad news don't return with the whereabouts, it's time for plan B. We'll kill all the infant boys. That'll take care of the problem.

Here's where I remind us that according to tradition, Herod is GOD's chosen leader of the Hebrew people. He isn't merely a political ruler, but a religious one as well. His actions are to be interpreted as GOD's. A troubling thing, then to witness such inhuman cruelty from one wearing this mantle.

## The Family

The third party in the story, the holy family, have to move. They have to leave to survive. So they head to Egypt to live and wait it out.

After Herod dies, his son takes over; so Joseph doesn't take them back to their newer home in Bethlehem, instead taking them back to Galilee, to Nazareth, a small town in which they could disappear. Where the king couldn't find them.

## The Meaning

The light comes home from Egypt, not to the capital, but to the middle of nowhere, to the darkness of country.

These two images now need to be expressed directly. I'm not telling you anything you don't know; I'm merely reminding you.

That it is Egypt that brought salvation and safety to the family of Israel during the famine. And it is Egypt that would enslave the Hebrew people. It is from Egypt that they would flee, from Egypt that GOD would liberate the people. Egypt would once again serve as a temporary haven for GOD's people, for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus: the new Moses.

After their liberation, GOD came to the people in great power and vision, taking the form of a cloud during the day and a burning fire at night. GOD would travel with them in the wilderness, taking a form that could be seen easily in darkness and in the light.

The star, guiding those wise men, moving with them, leading them to the one who is the light. The light that would, itself leave for the wilderness for a time, and return to Israel, home, the promised land of the Hebrew people.

## Celebrating the Light

This is what we celebrate at Christmas. We celebrate that in our darkness, a light comes. A light that reveals. A light which guides. A light who brings hope with him.

The incarnate Word in Jesus is revelation and presence. He is how we come to understand what is around us and how we know GOD is with us.

The Good News isn't in the presents or the good cheer we spread directly, though these are good things. The Good News isn't listening to a story and feeling happy, though it can be discovered there. The Good News is found where light is shown and where darkness is beaten back. Where the way things are can no longer be obscured and our selfish desires for comfort extinguish the candles of truth.

The Good News reveals GOD and is of GOD. The rest; the darkness, the confusion; is of something else.

This is our season of truth. Our season of light. It is casting candles in the dark corners we refuse to visit. It is making new plans and making changes we've been avoiding. It is ringing in the new year with an examined courage rather than willful ignorance.

We have plenty to look at. We have plenty of truth we avoid.

But the Good News reveals this! Reveals our selfish desires and our callous relationship to our neighbors, reveals our fear of the unknown and of change and of discomfort because plenty of this is working great for us as individuals. But for us as a *people*? For us as a *church*? We struggle. We're confused and afraid because we too often find comfort in ignorance; we benefit from not talking about it.

GOD is about revealing. GOD guided the wise men to Judea, but they couldn't trust enough to keep going, so they bailed. They asked the people who liked the dark. They couldn't see that the expertise they needed was their own.

Isn't that our greatest fear? Isn't that what we so try to hide, that we maintain the cloak of darkness? We don't want to be reminded that our comforts aren't all of GOD, that our ways are not all GOD's ways, and that we, like those leaders in Jerusalem, make some pretty compromising decisions to get ahead in this world.

GOD isn't a hider, but a revealer. Jesus won't stay hidden in a backwoods town. Our own problems get revealed to the world long before we even recognize them in ourselves.

In this great season of light and revelation, may we have the courage to examine our own lives and our public life together. May we see in this illuminated state, the great beauty of creation and what GOD is showing us. And may we have eyes to see all the good we are called to join, all the evil we are called to end, and all the transforming work that GOD is already doing: to us, to our community, to all that we love and care for, here and everywhere.