

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Epiphany Sunday, January 6, 2013**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 126, 134:5, 129, 138:1-3, 127.

Lessons: Isaiah 60:1-6, 2 Timothy 1:7-10, Matthew 2:1-12.

Sermon text: John 1:4-5

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Today, January 6, is “Epiphany”. That is the festival of the church year which celebrates “the twelfth day of Christmas”, also called “Christmas of the Gentiles”. The word Epiphany means a revealing, a manifestation, an enlightening. The word has been used for celebrating the revealing of Jesus Christ as *“A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”* (Luke 2:32) In our gospel lesson, you heard about the Wise Men, the Magi, coming to visit Jesus and give him gifts. They were guided by a miraculous star to Bethlehem where they came and worshiped the Savior and gave him valuable gifts: Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh.

Because of the star guiding these Gentiles to Jesus, Epiphany is considered a season of light, with the picture of the light of the star of Bethlehem pointing the way to the Savior, who brings light and salvation to men.

That picture is also taught and reinforced by John’s words about Jesus: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”* (John 1:1-5)

Today let’s talk about

**JESUS CHRIST, THE LIGHT OF MEN**

- 1. Jesus brought life – eternal life – to men.**
- 2. That life was “the light of men”.**

There are two pictures we must talk about today. Life and light. When we believe in Jesus Christ, also called The Word, we receive life and light.

First, life: To understand about life we must have some concept of death. We know what life is and what lack of life is. Every one of us has some experience with death, except the very youngest among us. Yet even children of 4 or 5 can have some concept of death. When a Christian child can learn that a Christian who is dear to him or her is dead and no longer around, they can learn and repeat the words “they are with Jesus”. That’s the beginning of an understanding of the death of a Christian for a small Christian child.

When the word of God here speaks of life this is more than just physical life or biological life. It is spiritual and eternal life. About 35 times in his gospel John uses the word “life” as a spiritual term, and he often speaks of life as “eternal life”. All true life has its origin in Jesus.

The life John speaks of comes in connection with the Word and we learn about it from the written Word. The Word brings God into fellowship with humankind. In doing this, the Word brings the life that we can experience only with God.

Biological life certainly comes from God. But those who know and believe in God through the Word, that is, Jesus Christ, have a new life with God that is comprehensive and endures forever. They have life

entirely as God meant it for us in his perfect creation before sin brought death. They have real life, God's kind of life.

Who are we without Christ? What do we have without Christ? Take away Christ and we have no saving knowledge of God; we have no real life: we have no light. Apart from the Word, Jesus Christ, there is only death and destruction, separation from God, and total darkness and death.

Let's think for a moment what you would have without Christ. Well, without Christ, you could sleep in this morning, or do anything that you want to do today. But go farther than just that. Without Christ you would probably have some system of morality and values in which what you thought was good for you at the moment would be your only standard of right and wrong. You would have nothing further, nothing more than this life on earth to look forward to. When your life ended, that's all there is. There is no more. Only death and all the darkness, damnation, eternal loss and destruction that comes with death without Christ. It is possible to live on this earth without Jesus Christ. It is possible to accumulate a great deal of wealth in this world without Jesus Christ. But ultimately, without Jesus Christ, there is nothing beyond this life except eternal darkness and separation from God, and punishment for sin. There is only darkness.

The Words of God tell us that "***In him*** [that is, in the Word, that is, in Jesus] ***was life, and that life was the light of men.***" John later quotes Jesus: "***I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.***" (John 12:46)

Life and light are in the Word. Putting it another way, we find life and light only when we believe in Christ. But by nature we human beings resist the truth in Christ because of sin. Some people never see the light. In the first verses of his gospel, John speaks of what has happened in the past but now he moves to the present tense: the light shines in the darkness and continues to shine to this very day.

***"The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."*** The darkness – the world of men, the world of sin and darkness and lack of God's light does not grasp, comprehend, understand God's light.

Keep in mind that the light is the life that is in the Word. The Word brings the light. Those in darkness, however, fail to understand what the Word is bringing and thus remain in darkness. In the same way the dark world of sin and unbelief failed to understand that Jesus was the promised Christ, the Savior. Even the religious leaders of Israel failed to see the light and chose to stay in darkness. They even crucified the Word in an attempt to silence him forever. But he wouldn't stay dead, and his light and life shine out unto this very day.

The light is identified with the Word. The Word gives light, the Word is light. The light chases away our fears, reveals the saving love of God, and guides us on the way to eternal life. The Psalmist tells us: "***The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?***" (Psalm 27:1)

Since human beings naturally resist the truth in Christ, how do they find the light and thrive with life? It is foolishness to tell the separated, the dead and the darkened to choose the word, the life and the light. They have no choice. Such were we without Christ. But the Word has come to us, given us life, and filled our darkness with his light. That life and light has become something we can rejoice in. Because it is important to us, we want others to be able to share in it, too. Now we need to present the Word, live the life, and let the light shine for others. The Word of God will make its own impression and the Holy Spirit will give faith and understanding.

This light from God means the end of the darkness that leads to hell. It lights the path to heaven. It is found in the Savior. Without Christ we are like someone in prison, sentenced to life without parole. There is no chance of getting out on our own. We need someone to issue a decree of parole and pardon.

***"That life was the light of men."*** This combination of light with life reminds us of a house plant in winter in front of a south window, deriving life and growth from its regular dose of sunshine. If plants are placed in total darkness and given no food or water, they will die. So it is with us. Christ's light gives us life. Christ's words feed us.

We today have light whenever and wherever we want it. We are accustomed to flipping a switch and having all the light we need. We can easily take electric light for granted. But anyone who has gone camping probably has some idea of the lack of light. Especially if you are camping far from civilization, you need to

provide your own light after sunset and before sunrise. That may be only a campfire, or flashlight or candle. Imagine a society where there is no artificial light except a few flickering oil lamps or candles. Imagine this room lighted only by a few candles. How hard it would be to do much after sunset, after God's created light disappeared!

Jesus, the Word of God, provides life and light. All we need. Not just physical light, but light in the darkness of sin, light in this dark world. Paul wrote about the struggle of the Christian and identifies enemies in this way: ***"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*** (Ephesians 6:12)

In winter especially, we can recognize the power of light, the power of the light of the sun. Even in the January sun we can feel the power of God's daylight.

But Jesus is an even greater type of light than the sun can give. He gives life and light so that man might live eternally! We read in Psalm 36:9: ***"For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light."*** We read in John 8:12: ***"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"***

When something is "brought to light" it is revealed. It can be seen.

Isaiah invited God's chosen nation: ***"Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD."*** (Isaiah 2:5) That same invitation was offered to us at our conversion by the Holy Spirit.

At the incarnation of the Word, the Light, the Salvation, entered into the dark world, to give all men the benefit of His glorious illumination. He and His salvation were revealed to the world so that all people in the world might see Him and His redemption. But the darkness did not accept Him and would not understand Him. The darkness rejected the light. The darkened minds of the children of darkness, that is, all men by nature, do not, will not, receive the heavenly light of the Savior. That is their way: opposition to Christ and His life- and light-giving Gospel. A great majority of the people in the world rejected the light absolutely, and they continue to do so, even when its glorious beams fall into their hearts. They prefer hopelessness and eternal death to light and life with Christ. Those who do receive his salvation have been filled with faith only by the power of the Light.

John elaborates on this light in his first epistle: ***"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** (1 John 1:5-9)

We turn to chapter 3 of John's gospel for our conclusion today: ***"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."*** (John 3:14-21)

We, too, regardless of where we are or the circumstances under which we end up there, can tell others about life and light the Savior brings into our lives. We, too, have the sacred scriptures, the Word of God.

This Epiphany season, and always, of course, let us be a light for Jesus Christ that his light may bring others to faith in the only Savior of mankind and may give them eternal life! Amen.