

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
COMPASS, PA

January 17, 2021 – EPIPHANY 2, YR. B

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*Shine On!*”

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (The prophet Samuel responds to God’s call)  
Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17 (God has known us from before we were born)  
1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (Our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit; therefore, treat them as such)  
St. John 1:43-51 (Nathanael recognizes Jesus as God’s Son)

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Like Nathanael in today’s Gospel lesson, we are all looking for signs. We search high and low, near and far, for some confirmation that God is with us. Yet, as Jesus says to Nathanael, we will see even greater things, if only we will open the eyes of our hearts.

It can be as easy as listening to a song. Judy Garland, in the 1944 MGM musical “Meet Me in St. Louis,” introduced a song called “Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas.” It began, “Have yourself a merry little Christmas, Let your heart be light.” While this may seem a bit of a saccharine prescription, letting our hearts be light is what God is inviting us to do.<sup>1</sup>

Epiphany is the season of light—a time in the Church when we are encouraged to reflect on how our hearts and lives can be more filled with the Light of Christ. Amid the dark of winter, picture your spirit as a light with a dimmer switch, as God gently turns it toward the brightest possible setting.

One of the Scripture readings for Christmas Day, from the Gospel of John (1:2-5), proclaims about Jesus: “He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him .... In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

On this Second Sunday of Epiphany, we prayed: “Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ’s glory ...” And in the Collect for the First Sunday after Christmas, we pray: “Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives ...”

The verb “Enkindle” means “to stir up,” “fire up,” “inspire,” “rouse,” “awaken,” “ignite,” or “incite.” It is a way of saying that the Incarnation—in which the Word of God becomes flesh and dwells among us by taking up residence in our hearts—lights His blazing Light of Life within us. As Christ makes His home in our hearts, He creates there a bright and cozy space, alight with the warmth and glow of His Holy Presence. However, the Light that is given to each believer is not meant only for ourselves; it is meant for others, so that in Christ’s light they may better see the Truth, and receive many of God’s other gifts.

My last year of living in upstate New York, I taught part-time at The College of St. Rose in Albany. The school’s motto is: “In Thy Light We Shall See Light.” This is precisely what Jesus is talking about when He urges us not to hide our light, not to put it under a barrel, but to put it on a lamp stand so it will give light to the whole household—which, in biblical terms means “the Household of God.”

The Bible uses the Greek word *oikos* for “household,” from which we derive English words such as “economy,” *oiko-nomos*, the law of the household, and “ecology,” *oiko-logie*, study of the larger household in which we live, that is, the environment, the world.

We have each been given the gift of inner Light, the Light that is the Life of the world, who is Jesus. This Light is what unites us with God in Christ. And God means for us to give Light and Life to the whole world, to everyone, to all people, to God's "household." By giving it away, by letting go of our *selves*, we will receive the perpetual light of eternal life, in return.

After all, what good is a lamp unless it's turned on? When it is, others can see more clearly by its light. So what good are we to the world, unless the Light of Christ shines forth from us? To hide this Light from others—that is, to withhold our knowledge of the Truth, our love, and our gifts—will result in a world that grows increasingly darker, spiritually. Withholding our Light may cause others in God's household to find it difficult to see God's Light shining within them.

If too many of us hide our lights, the entire household—the world itself—will be in danger of slipping into night, returning to the darkness that covered the face of the deep, before God spoke and there was Light.

Each of us struggles with God's call to "Shine on!" Some of us find it hard to believe that God would give us His Light at all. Secretly, we feel as though we are just groping along in the shadows. That is why, at this time of year, Christ comes to us once more with the light of that Epiphany star, to recharge our batteries and rekindle our inner lamps. We can keep His Light burning brightly by stoking it with prayer, God's Word, the Sacraments, carrying out Christ's mission and ministry, and by sharing warm fellowship with other believers.

A story is told of a fundamentalist preacher who went about town loudly bellowing, "Put God in your life! Put God in your life!" Then he encountered the town's Rabbi, who said, "We don't need to put God in our lives. God is already there! We simply need to realize and believe it."

The Lord will always be the ground of our being, whether we are aware of this or not. And by His grace, it is not possible for there to be a separation of the relationship between God and us, His beloved children. It is not possible for God to be absent. He is always at home—in His heaven, as well as in our hearts. It was Meister Eckhart, a 13<sup>th</sup>-century German theologian, who reminded us that we are the ones who are not at home. Many of us feel so alienated we are not at home, even within ourselves.

In today's Gospel lesson, we hear the following exchange between Jesus and Nathanael: "Nathanael said to him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.'" Just as Jesus knew Nathanael—whose name in Hebrew means "gift of God"—before Nathanael ever knew Jesus, our Lord also knows each of us intimately, and calls us to Himself.

If you truly believe that as you pray, little by little Christ will reveal to you how much He is at home in your heart. And then, you will want Him to turn up your inner light, so that the Lord of Life will not have to sit in darkness. By that Light, you will also gain greater insight into the things of God, as Jesus also promised to Nathanael in response to his faith.

All of this is so that you may do something beautiful with your life and bear much fruit for Christ. The world needs you; the Church needs you; and Jesus needs you. They need your love and your Light. As Jesus continues to live in you, go forward with Him boldly into this new year.

And, have yourself a merry little ... Epiphany season, and let your heart be light! Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapt. Kirk Alan Kubicek "Let Your Heart be Light," 18 January 2015, [Sermons That Work](http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2015/01/05/2-epiphany-b-2015/) <<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2015/01/05/2-epiphany-b-2015/>> 16 January 2015