

The Light That Draws All People Home

The winter of 1911 in Antarctica brought temperatures that could freeze a man's breath in mid-air. Captain Robert Falcon Scott and his team were attempting to reach the South Pole, navigating through endless white darkness. Without the sun for months, they relied on dim oil lamps and careful navigation by stars. One crew member later wrote that the moment the sun finally broke the horizon after those long dark months, grown men wept. They had forgotten how desperately they needed light.

We live in darkness too. Oh, our houses have electricity and our phones glow bright. But there's another darkness—the kind that lives inside us. The darkness of guilt when we've hurt someone we love. The darkness of fear when we face tomorrow. The darkness of that gnawing feeling that maybe we're not good enough, that God couldn't possibly want us.

And into this darkness, Isaiah shouts: "Arise, shine, for your light has come!"

The Problem With Darkness

But here's what makes this strange. Isaiah is talking to God's chosen people—Israel. These are the folks with the temple, the priests, the Scriptures, the promises. If anyone should be walking in light, it's them. Yet Isaiah sees them in darkness. "For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples."

It's like having a house full of lamps but never flipping the switch. The light is available, but people sit in darkness anyway.

Think about how we do this. We know God's promises in baptism, but we still lie awake at night wondering if He really loves us. We hear "Your sins are forgiven" at the altar, but we carry guilt around like a backpack full of rocks. We have the light, but somehow we're still stumbling in the dark.

The Magi understood something about darkness. Matthew tells us they saw His star "in the east" and came looking. Now, these weren't religious men by Jewish standards. They were Gentiles—outsiders. They studied stars and ancient

prophecies from foreign lands. They had no temple, no priests, no circumcision. According to the religious scoreboard, they should be sitting in complete darkness.

Yet somehow, they see the light. They see the star. And they do something remarkable—they follow it.

The Mystery Revealed

Here's where Paul enters our story with shocking news. He's writing from prison, and he uses this Greek word *mysterion*—mystery. But not mystery like a detective novel where you guess whodunit. No, *mysterion* means something hidden that has now been revealed. A secret God kept until just the right moment.

What's the mystery? "That the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

Read that again slowly. The Gentiles—the outsiders, the ones with no claim, no heritage, no right to be there—they're *fellow heirs*. Not second-class citizens. Not guests in someone else's house. Heirs. Family. Full members.

Paul says this mystery was hidden "for ages" but is now revealed. Picture a child on Christmas morning, staring at a wrapped present for weeks, shaking it, guessing what's inside. Then finally, Christmas arrives, the paper tears away, and joy floods through. That's what Paul is describing. God's been planning this gift since before time began.

The Magi show up at Herod's palace asking, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?" Herod panics. He calls the chief priests and scribes. These are the experts! They quote Micah 5:2 perfectly: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

They know the Scripture. They know the answer. They know exactly where the King should be born.

But here's the devastating detail: they don't go. The religious insiders know the truth, but they stay in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the pagan outsiders travel miles to worship.

Light For All Nations

Isaiah prophesied this moment: "Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." Not just Israel. Nations. Plural. All peoples. The light isn't meant to be hoarded; it's meant to draw everyone home.

The Magi arrive at the house—not the stable anymore; time has passed—and they see the child with Mary. And Matthew says they "fell down and worshiped him." They opened their treasures: gold, frankincense, myrrh. Expensive gifts. Gifts for a king. Gifts that required sacrifice to bring.

But notice what they don't bring: résumés. They don't arrive saying, "We deserve to be here because we studied hard" or "We've been good people" or "We have the right heritage." They just come. They worship. They give.

That's the gospel in a moment. We don't come to Jesus because we're qualified. We come because He's the Light. We come because in Him, the mystery is revealed—God wants us. All of us. Not because of what we bring, but because of who He is.

Paul says this mystery gives us "boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him." We can approach God boldly! Not tiptoeing, not groveling, not wondering if maybe today He'll reject us. Boldly. Because in Christ, we're family. We're heirs.

What This Light Does For You

Jesus didn't come just to make us feel better about ourselves. He came to actually transform us. In baptism, He claimed you as His own. When you were washed, He marked you with His light. You, who were darkness, are now light in the Lord.

The same star that drew the Magi across deserts and through dangers—that's the same Christ who draws you here, to this altar, to hear again that your sins are forgiven. To receive His body and blood. To be strengthened for the journey ahead.

Isaiah says, "Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light." This light doesn't fail. It doesn't flicker. When your own strength fails and the darkness feels thick, His light remains. His promise stands. His love endures.

You are God's mystery revealed. You are the unexpected heir. You are the one He crossed time and space to reach. And like those Magi, you'll go home "by another way"—not the same person who arrived, but changed by encountering the Light of the World.

The darkness still covers the earth. But in you, in us, in His Church, the light shines. Not our light—we didn't flip any switch. His light. The light that came down at Christmas. The light that will never, ever go out.

Arise. Shine. Your light has come. Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

Pastor Ron Breight Christ Lutheran Church Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

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