

And then, out of nowhere, Melchior saw a star; one that hadn't been there the day before.

Balthazar was able to measure it with his equipment and Caspar could mark it down in his notes. What appeared before them seemed to be a supernatural sign, one they could grasp with their eyes, if not their hands, and one that led them right to Jesus' door.

Wouldn't it be fantastic if God performed a miracle today? An undeniable, relatable-only-to-the-Christian-Triune-God miracle so that none would doubt? This is what God should do in order to draw the nations to Himself, to bring all people to His holy hill.

Well, He did. He did many. He transformed water to wine, He multiplied bread and fish, He calmed storms and walked on water. He gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, life to the dead, and forgiveness to the sinner. He even rose from the dead, and yet people today, despite the evidence we have from Scripture—and the fact that it is a relatively consistent and reliable witness at that—people still deny that He is who He said He is, that He did what He said He did, that He is doing what He promised to do.

“No, no, Pastor. A miracle a long time ago won't do the trick. If He gave us something today, a current revelation of Himself, that would convince people to believe in Him”

This is a tempting thought. If it came to pass, it would remove a lot of the guilt from our consciences because our lack of evangelism would no longer be an issue—if He could convince everyone, that would meet His desire to spread His Gospel and therefore we wouldn't need to worry.

But this wouldn't work. Even in Christ's time the miracles He performed were at best met with a few following with true belief—most followed for a time when it was convenient; not even the account of raising Lazarus made a huge number of true followers. And so, I'm sorry to say, a large-scale, undeniable miracle is not the revelation that we need in order to increase the number of the faithful.

But our desire for this, for some quick fix for the church, demonstrates something scary. It shows our great darkness, the darkness that we wish we'd be done with by this point. One facet of our

darkness is that we don't trust God; we don't trust that He's as powerful as He says He is, nor as faithful, nor as persistent, and some days maybe not as real as He says He is. So we become nervous for the sake of the Church, we pace about wondering how we can save it—how we can get more youth in the doors, how we can retain the young adults (they're the ones having babies who will be the youth, young adults, and adults in the church of tomorrow), and how we can make sure, in the chaos of pandering to the youth, the adults and seniors don't get left out. And then, amidst all the brainstorming and panic, we feel guilty because of the ways that we have failed to address the needs of the people and we will feel guilty about how we still fail even though we have new plans of attack. This is a darkness that doesn't trust God and instead makes it our to-do list to save the church.

And if we aren't running around trying to do, we might drag our feet and just get angry. Clearly God doesn't mean it—He must not want the whole world to be saved if He isn't doing it. We get mad because His promises seem to be faltering and He is clearly failing to do what He needs to do. And after getting mad, we might either walk away or we get busy in order to satiate our guilt.

But God is working just as He always has, and in our readings today we have a wonderful picture of how He loves to run His Church and spread His love. He works through His enlightening Word.

In the beginning, He spoke and created light, revealing in His action-filled words the light and life which is essential to His being and gifting it to His new creation. And this light has remained with the Israelites, and with the whole World He loves, for centuries. And then His gift of light as love was specifically bestowed upon the Israelites during the series of plagues in Egypt; the 9th was of darkness, to the Egyptians, but not to the Israelites—the salvation He was working was represented by the light they were allowed to live by as Egypt was immobilized in the dark. And then again, they followed a pillar of fire—light—as they moved in God's salvation into the promised land. Each of these lights for the Israelites were spoken into reality, God's Word literally enlightening them.

And this is no different with the Magi. They had heard of a king who would be born in Bethlehem and they knew the Jews were awaiting their messiah's appearance—the Word led them to anticipate His coming and they were tipped off that now was the time and Bethlehem the place. A Word of prophecy and a strange light led them to the Word who is Light. It wasn't just a miracle that brought them, but a sign of the Word of God which drew them near to Christ.

And this light continued to enlighten those around Christ during His ministry. Humanity dwelt in darkness but they saw redemption in Him; salvation was seen by those who would receive Him and His Word and they recognized by the light of His Word that He was bringing an eternal kingdom into their midst.

And perhaps He shone brightest on the darkest day. Not on the eve of His birth. No, when the land was covered in darkness, the sun unable to shine, a darkness which only hinted at the pure shadow which enveloped light Himself as He swallowed up the whole of darkness on the cross. The eye could not perceive the glory of Christ that was truly His for the taking as He took onto Himself the entirety of darkness, and it was all for the sake of us dwelling in darkness, deserving of such darkness, that we might share in the light of His resurrection days later, a light eternal that is ours because of His death and resurrection. He stole from us our sin—our dark secrets—He stole from us our doubts, our laziness, our unrighteous anger and our jealousy, our lust and even our blasphemy and our rejection of the one who hung there. He was like a blackhole, becoming darkness and demanding that we hand over every piece of our own darkness. He stole it from us and He became it, so that in His death it would be done with; our darkness is no longer living as a shadow to hang over us, and it was His glory to heal us of such a malady.

And three days later that glory shone, as He was viewed in splendor and radiance by the women and men, those who followed Him and loved Him, and then by over 400 others. The darkness had not consumed Him but rather He had overcome; He had arisen and He was shining.

But now He is gone and none can see Him, neither in His hidden glory during His humiliation nor in His full glory of the resurrection. You, me, and the rest of humanity seem to be left in the dark without His radiance, and there aren't any more stars in the sky to guide us where to find Him.

And yet still He shines. He shines in His Word which creates salvation, in His Word which brings the new creation inaugurated by the birth of Christ and the rest of His life; He shines in His light which still steals away darkness and transforms those living in darkness into those who dwell in Light Himself.

This is why it is crucial, today on Epiphany when Christ is revealed to the nations—including you—and crucial for the rest of the year, that you come to where His light is revealed for you, where you are brought to where He dwells and hands out His gifts, where He tells you: "Arise! Shine!"

Now this isn't a command you must fulfill, as if you have to manage to arise, to grab a hold of your bootstraps and stand up in the middle of a world trampling you down and then create some light from your being. No, He creates what He commands; He affects what He requires. When He says, arise, shine, He is causing you to do so. From the dirt of the ground, from the shame of your sin, from the humiliation of needing to repent, you are raised up to new life, just as after your death He will command your flesh to come together again and arise to everlasting life. And He causes you to shine. He makes your face radiant with joy as you hear the news that your sins are *done away with*, that the darkness you love to hide in has been abolished and you may instead live perfectly in Christ's righteousness in His light. And because of this He causes you to shine His Gospel unto others, communicating in Word and deed what has been done for and in you.

So Arise! Shine!

This is what is commanded and in fact done here. When we say "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" we are recalling our baptism when Christ, through the hands of the pastor raised you up from a water grave and made you shine with the righteousness and love of Christ. And when the pastor says "I by the virtue of my office, forgive you in the name of the Father and of the

Son and of the Holy Spirit” you are again raised to life and filled with His light: Arise, Shine! The same can be said when you hear the Words “the body of Christ, given for you, the blood of Christ, shed for you. Take and eat, take and drink.” Here you are given the very flesh and blood which fills you with the light of life which cannot but exude from your being, even when you don’t see it. And then, when the pastor says “the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord look upon you with favour and give you His peace” He is saying arise and shine, this blessing of light is for you. As you were forgiven at the beginning of service, so are you forgiven now, and His grace, His light, is yours for every day of your life, so be beautiful with His glory.

In all these ways, you are made into the star over Bethlehem, a star marking where Christ dwells and is working, a star more than a signpost to follow but instead a star that represents precisely what is occurring wherever Christ is. This light in you is the light of the new creation, the perfect light where one redeemed is being and in fact is already made new. This great and mighty wonder, which is ever at work in the people of God, draws the nations to Zion, to the house of God where He gives His gifts. The radiance of God from His holy hill draws all people—even his enemies, of whom we were once apart of—and they are given wonderful gifts; in the gift of faith they demonstrate their allegiance and proclaim their faith in the one who is shining onto His holy people, and in the gift of perfect light those who are foreign are made one with those chosen people, they are made one with those who shine with the glory of God. By the light of the Gospel, of the work and life of Christ, the Holy Spirit calls, enlightens, and sanctifies you and me and all believers. This is how the Church survives, how she grows and goes into the world: by the light of Christ living and active in each and every enlightened believer.

This is how you leave here every Sunday; you may have come as an enemy of God and a lover of darkness, but as you go into your families and jobs, as you walk around Walmart or Bear Creek, as you send emails or browse in the library, you are a light unto the World because you are living in Christ. And just as the wisemen followed the star to find the baby Christ lying in the manger, so will people find

Christ through you, one enlightened by His Word. There is no need for an unusual miracle to convince people to come and find their saviour; His Word instills confidence and faith just fine, for this is how we have all come to be here, and it is by His gracious Word that we have remained, ever enlightened by the true Light of the world. And so we Arise; we shine.

And shine you will. "This is for me," you will say, as you communicate your confidence and hope and joy and peace which you hold in Christ's Gospel in the midst of a world marked by chaos and darkness. "And this is for you" you will say, as the enlightening Word shines into the World, even through you, drawing all peoples unto Himself, Christ our Lord.

Amen.