

The Epiphany of our Lord
January 6, 2019

Text: Ephesians 3:1-12

Theme: “Bright Idea”

Bright ideas, are there not many? Often such ideas come from the brightest of minds. Those ideas brought into reality have made our world a much different place than in the days of our text. The apostle Paul would be amazed, maybe wonder how people so connected could be so unconnected.

I have in my pocket a bright idea that is not so high tech, but has been enduring. As you can see it is a clothespin. Let me share a little about the clothespin. From 1852 to 1887 there were 146 separate patents for this little device in the US. The first that resembled our modern clothes pin was that from inventor David Smith in 1853. It was described as a “spring-clamp for clothesline.” In 1887 Solon Moore brought us the “coiled fulcrum” from a single wire. Clothes could now be kept securely on the line even in the face of wind. It was, and still is, a bright idea.

But now suppose, I take this nifty device and add a few more to it. I put them in a line, attach a grip. Now I go down to the nearest Dollar General Store and demand the contents of their cash register. Now it’s not such a bright idea. The day after Christmas, just last month, 52 year old Leida Crisostomo of Naples, Florida robbed a postal worker not with clothespins, but with a toy gun. She made her getaway on a tricycle (I assume adult size). She was soon apprehended and while being handcuffed yelled that she was God and that voices were telling her to do things. No, not so bright an idea.

But Epiphany is all about bright, the brightest of stars showing the way to the brightest of lights. “Brightest and Best of the stars of the morning, dawn on our darkness

and lend us thine aid.” We certainly have need of aid. We fallen humans have a problem with brightest and best syndrome. If we were light bulbs would we not be one like this? Now the world is full of bright ideas from those so infected. This is why the world can be such a dark place.

We certainly see, maybe even feel that darkness in our Gospel lesson. The star proclaims the King is here; But, Herod why this senseless fear? For He who offers heav’nly birth Seeks not the kingdoms of this earth.” (LSB 399, stanza 1) That senseless fear of Herod started with the question, “Where is he who has been born the king of the Jews?” (Matthew 2:2) Herod had a keen sense for threats or challenges. It was beyond keen. He was paranoid. He had not been born king of the Jews. His father, Antipater, had been procurator of Judaea under Julius Caesar ((FF Bruce, *New Testament History*, Double Day, 1980 edition, p. 13). Herod had been proclaimed King of the Jews by the Roman Senate, but to begin his rule he had to raise an army and take Jerusalem from the Parthians, which he did in 37 BC. How could another now have been born king of the Jews? Herod would deal with it quickly and decisively. His bright star needed to continue shining. How could it be otherwise?

Our light has come, Christ our true and only light. But the pseudo light of darkness is always at hand. There is a difference between plain bone head ideas and deeds of darkness. We can think of our less than bright moments. “I’m pretty sure that I have that circuit breaker off.” “Oops, I really thought that glass door was propped open.” Yes, we have had these and will have more. These can be life threatening, but not soul threatening. Paul writes in chapter 5 of Ephesians, “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light.” (vs 8)

We have the light yes, but then we have auxiliary lights, think we are light. Paul writes, “You can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ...” (vs 4). He is not bragging. This has “been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” (vs 5) Paul is revealing what has been revealed for hearers’ and readers’ edification. But you and I are not apostles, pastors included. We are bound by the light of God’s Word. Yet we do think “my insight should be obvious.” God’s Word may say this, but when you add the wrinkle of my insight, that right/wrong needle may be moved in the direction I would like. Does not my happiness matter most of all? So is my bright idea.

But how bright, really? I think I can demonstrate with this bulb. Now I will just rub my feet on this carpet and touch the end of the bulb to my nose, and—nothing! So let me try again. I’ll rub more and touch my nose, and this time I’ll put my finger on the outside of bulb to complete the circuit, and—still nothing! My insight is not so bright as I suppose it to be. I don’t have the power or the wiring to get the job done. You see the black on this bulb? It’s burnt out. It makes me look pretty ridiculous, right?

We, by nature, suffer from the god delusion. I’m not talking about the Richard Dawkins idea here. No, I’m referring back to the bright idea of the garden. Eat this and you will be like god! It’s a different kind of delusion than the woman in Naples, but deluded non the same.

But there is light, light from above. Today is Epiphany! God’s bright idea is redemption, restoration, deliverance. That’s always been the plan, been the plan since, well, before the beginning. God foreknew the Fall, didn’t take pleasure in it, didn’t cause it, but knew it was coming and knew He would work through it. He was thinking of us all along. “Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...He predestined us as sons through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:4, 5)

God was dawning His light on those in the darkness. It was a though He was adding bulbs. He speaks of the seed of the woman, then the blessed seed of Abraham, and a prophet like unto Moses. There is the light of intended curse words of Balaam coming out words of blessings, “I see him, but not now...a star shall come out of Jacob.” (Numbers 24:17) The years go by, the more years the more light. The light reveals the coming Son of David. Isaiah tells us more than a son, David’s Lord. Micah, the small town contemporary of Isaiah tells us more. Troubled Herod tries to find the location of his trouble and scribes find the answer in Micah. Out of Bethlehem there will be a ruler, a rule whose origin is from old, even ancient days. Yes, more light, but it’s all still a shadow compared to the fulfillment.

The Light has come. The Wise Men follow the light of the star to the true Light. They leave gifts fit for a king and then then leave another way following the light of divine revelation in a dream. God is working His plan for the shining of the Light, light no darkness would overcome. There would be plenty of darkness. There is the dark plot of Herod supposing he can get the one through the many. There would be the increasing darkness of those who were upset that Jesus would not bask in their light. In that darkness they would plot against Him. Even as the Wise Men come to see this Child we know He’s destined to face the darkness in the middle of the day. It’s not a plot. It’s a plan, the plan. The Light takes on the full darkness of our sin. It’s not the one through the many, but the many through the One. To those not privy to the plan, it looked like anything but a bright idea, pure foolishness.

Yet through the darkness shines the light. The God who said let there be light has caused to shine on us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Those formerly dead in transgressions and sins have been made have, made alive in the

One who died, was buried, even descended into the depths, but now is risen and ascended taking captivity to sin and death captive. He is ascended far above all the heavens (4:10). Those in Christ are even raised up and seated with Him in heavenly places (2:6) Those far off have been brought near, no longer foreigner and aliens, but members of God's household. It is for all nations.

The coming of Wise Men is a small part of a much larger whole. Isaiah's light foreshadows it, "All nations shall come to your light." (60:3) The fullness of this all will be revealed. Last week we saw Simeon take the child in his arms with the words, "a light to lighten the Gentiles." Simeon was among those waiting for the consolation of Israel. God was going to shed light on the fullness of Israel. Israel is not a matter of the flesh, but of the faith. Paul shares his insight on the mystery. By the light of the Spirit he demystifies the plan. "This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body." (v 6) Paul says members of the same body, fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel (v 6). God has made one new man out of the two. It is no longer Jew and Gentile. And it will not be sons and servants, but all sons, fellow heirs of the promise. This is God bright idea, His reality.

But there is more. We, brothers and sisters in Christ, are God's bright ideas. We are so together and individually. "Arise, shine, for Your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you." (Isaiah 60:1) The imperatives and the pronominal suffixes here are feminine singular. Who is this lady? Is it not the place of God's dwelling with His people? Here we see the kingdom of grace on earth. The church is really something. Paul makes it clear. "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

(Ephesians 1:22, 23). “In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:22)

Each of us is light. “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them... Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” (Ephesians 5:8-10) We are not called to be blinding light. What good is blinding light to the blind? The light that we are in Jesus is even something you can touch. Ours is illuminating service. Clothespins can serve to illustrate. How so? Is it because they work in a pinch? Certainly, but the point is they are simple and serving. They meet the need at hand. What need is there in front of us just waiting for the touch of our hand to be met?

Amazing is our God. His ideas are truly bright. Because he is able to do far more than what we think or ask they are fact. We are part of that fact, the body of Christ, the fullness of our Lord in this world. We ask for His continued strength that the light of His deliverance may continue to go forth. In Jesus' Name. Amen