

SERMON
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Immanuel Lutheran Church
Epiphany 3, A - January 25, 2026
Isaiah 9:1-4 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 Matthew 4:12-25

The season of Epiphany

- began with the account of the Wise Men
- following a mysterious star to the Baby Lord Jesus.

And as the season goes on

- and its theme unfolds,
- light shines more and more brightly
- as the Lord Jesus is revealed more and more clearly
- to be truly the very Son of God,
- and one with the Father....

“I AM the Light of the World,”

Jesus taught, and

“I and the Father are one.”

The skies are still in the news today--

- with trips to the moon and Mars
- and even colonies in the plans.

UFO's continue to be in the news

- from time to time.

Some of you will remember the movie

- called “Close Encounters of the Third Kind”--
- a term which refers to actual contact with a being from outer space.

The movie began with a lineman in Indiana

- who was out to repair power outages.
- on a DARK, lonely country road
- And darkness and light become a major theme of the story.

The lineman’s encounter, which BEGAN with seeing a light,

- changed his life.

At the END of the movie

- he is shown to be entering the alien spacecraft--
- off to the unknown....
- disappearing in a misty, yet BRIGHTLY SHINING LIGHT....

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One preacher has spoken of “the blackout of hope” throughout the world.

- It’s not a bad description of our own day.
- A blackout of HOPE.

There are countless people for whom God seems absent,

- or who have chosen to live as though God does not exist--
- and many, many people who are overwhelmed
- by the resulting heavy darkness--

- as they struggle to face life on their own--
- trying to be their OWN gods,
- which is directly contrary to the way the God
- who also created light itself
- designed us to live.

Sometimes EVEN CHRISTIANS experience

- what has come to be called “dark nights of the soul”.
- Some great saints have written about that happening to them,
- even as they still have faith and deeply yearn to keep it.

It's the feeling of being without ANY clear light

- to make sense of the present
- or to see the way ahead,
- or any bright hope to give a reason to go on.

As a pastor, I have had the experience of sharing some such times

- with serious Christians--
- and I would describe it as a great privilege.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a GREAT light-- those who dwelt in a land of **DEEP darkness**, on THEM has light shined.”

The appearance of Jesus in our world

- brought those words of God's prophet Isaiah to fulfillment.

- Those who encountered our Lord
- experienced an “encounter of the third kind,”
- but it was something MUCH more special than that.

In Jesus, people encountered GOD.

In many and various ways God

- had given minimal sightings of Himself in the past--
- by dreams and visions,
- through the words of prophets.

On Mount Sinai,

- Moses was allowed to see the back side of God
- as God passed by.

And God had given evidence of His existence in the Creation itself--

- and in the Exodus from Egypt
- with the waters parting to save His people,
- and by that pillar of cloud by day
- and pillar of fire by night
- that led them there in the wilderness,
- and in the manna from heaven,
- and the gift of the Promised Land.

But now in these last days, CONTACT!

- God sends His only-begotten Son into the world!

The one through whom all things were made,

- and in whom and for whom all things hold together,

- the Lord of angel armies

- and Ruler of the endless expanse of space.

He could have chosen to come in a powerful spaceship,

- or with an armada of them.

- He could have come in a way that would scare us out of our wits--

- and in that way FORCE us to follow Him, and obey Him--

- to go with Him and His ways out of fear.

Instead, the Lord of all--

- whose almighty power

- and overwhelming majesty

- and endless, infinite wisdom are far beyond

- our human ability to grasp--

- contacts us at the humble MANGER

- and at the unimaginably painful CROSS!

Recall how He Himself instructs us to meet Him there

- in the words of His Holy Supper.

He comes among us walking dusty roads

- and teaching by the seashore.

In HIM is LIGHT.

- In Him is CONTACT with God almighty....
- Yet He comes in a gentle, peaceful way--
- with inviting, amazingly vulnerable love
- which could be rejected.

The disciples whom He called

- clearly sensed that they were having a very, very special encounter--
- contact with Someone who was in a real human body,
- but at the same time was far beyond them
- in knowledge and capabilities.

He would know all about someone He had never met before,

- and with a word calm a storm at sea.

There was something about Him that was mysteriously magnetic--

- a winsome power
- to draw the disciples into His company.

“Follow Me,”

- He said.
- And they did, “IMMEDIATELY”.
- That word appears again and again

Not following Him to outer space--

- escaping from the troubles and responsibilities of this world--
- but instead to follow Him into greater responsibility
- and hard work,
- and troubling dangers in **THIS** world.

The disciples' vocations were changed from

- being fishers for fish to... fishers for **people**--
- fishers of men....

They followed IMMEDIATELY.

We could easily think of a dozen reasons

- for why they should not have been so hasty.

It would be normal to want to be cautious--

- to check things out carefully before choosing to leave everything behind.

But it's important to notice

- that their immediate response was not because...
- they were abnormal--
- or in some way a lot different from the way we are...

They were **BUSINESSMEN**, not fools..

- They would normally have been very cautious and responsible.
- Their unusual response tells us about **JESUS**, what **HE** is like.

In Jesus was truly light for darkness.

- In Jesus, contact at last with the Divine.

So lets allow THEIR IMMEDIATE response in following Him

- to lead us to examine OUR OWN responses--

- especially our own HESITANCY at times

- to make a definite commitment to follow,

- especially if it means to change direction

- and to leave things behind.

Like a stubborn attitude

- or a bad habit that has grown as comfortable as an old shoe,

- or a destructive pet sin

- that would make us feel as though part of us is dying

- if we gave it up.

The reason Jesus gives us to “repent”--

- to change the way we are headed--

- is because the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN itself has come near in Him.

Are OUR reasons for sometimes joyless, half-hearted commitment--

- or even complete refusals to follow--

- truly reflecting **who it is** who is doing the calling?

Are our own tendencies at times to be OVERLY cautious

- really indicating that we have **not** recognized the light in Him--

- that we have not understood
- that He is **our** CONTACT with heaven itself?
- Contact with **GOD**?....

In the movie,

- the Indiana lineman could not help
- talking about what had happened to him.

His whole behavior changed.

- His wife was embarrassed by what he insisted upon telling--
- and by his changed, seemingly bazaar behavior.
- She and his children finally left him.

But what had happened to him was more important

- than anything else that had EVER happened to him--
- and far more important than any one else's negative reaction.....

“The LORD is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?”

- wrote the psalmist.

Is He that important for us?

He wants to be.

We need Him to be

- so that we can know light strong enough
- to overcome the deep darkness all around us and within us.

“Immediately... they followed Him.”

Saint John writes,

“If we SAY we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the BLOOD of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Back to the Cross.

There on that dark, lonely hill we make contact.

- Because there we discover
 - that sinful beings like us
 - can be welcomed by the Holy One
 - and journey into the future with Him, unafraid.

There at the cross the Lord of all accepts US

- with arms stretched wide in love.

And there at the cross

- we find EVERY reason we could need to trust Him--
- every reason to give our whole lives to Him--
- to place our future into His own nail-scarred hands,
- leaving behind EVERYTHING we need to leave
- in order to follow Him.

“The LORD is MY light.”

CONTACT with the Divine--

- and every reason to walk off with Him
- in the company of Simon and Andrew,
- James and John and all the saints--
- and at the last to follow Him all the way
- to that heavenly country
- where night will be no more.....

And as Who He truly is dawns on us,

- our very souls are flooded with such a divine light
- that “immediately” is not at all too soon to follow,
- even for us unlikely sorts.

Who would want to be left behind?