

Denice K. Leslie  
January 6, 2008  
Epiphany Sunday C  
Isaiah 60: 1 –6  
Matthew 2: 1 – 12

## Let There Be Light

Christmas snapshot:

Stephen Shadeeg is an Arizona Businessman and the father of four children. Stephen tells a wonderful story of Christmas morning at his house.

They had a rule in their home that none of the children could go down to see gifts under the tree until the rest of the family was awake and they could all go together.

The year their youngest child, David, was 7, he came bounding into his parent's bedroom at 4:30 a.m. in the morning (!) his face gleaming with excitement, and his mouth running at about 90 miles an hour: "Daddy! Mother! Come quick! I saw it!"

As they wiped sleep from their eyes they surmised what had happened: the rule had been broken. David had already discovered the new bike he had been wanting for two years.

They felt cheated out of seeing his discovery, but it was Christmas, after all, and they couldn't scold him for being overanxious.

They climbed out of bed, pulled on their robes and slippers as David took them by the hand and dragged them down the hall.

They woke the other kids and with the whole family in tow David led them down the stairs and through the darkened living room toward a window on the eastern side of the house, *totally oblivious to the bicycle which sat unnoticed beside the tree!*

**He pointed his little finger to the eastern sky and said, "Look! The Star of Bethlehem! I've seen the star!"**<sup>1</sup>

Wow! What a powerful message! So fittingly seen through the eyes of a child! If only we could see as this child sees! If a picture is worth a thousand words— doesn't this one say it all?

Another Christmas snapshot—from long, long ago:

Three learned, elite men— scientist/scholars of their day—searching the heavens, see a star; find it a sign of a promise fulfilled-- gather gifts fit for a new born King in a land not their own and head out on a long trek to honor him.

Where do they find him? What do they see? No new baby king in the capitol city of Jerusalem. No new borns at the palace of King Herod.

Starlight and scripture lead them to little Bethlehem, to a modest home and a small child.

Three affluent, learned foreigners kneel down and offer this little nobody kid gifts suitable for the palace clientele.

On the face of it, both stories strike me as completely implausible. An American kid who longs for two years for a bike is oblivious to it for a star??

Three foreign upper class research scientists travel several months to find a baby in a nowhere suburb of Jerusalem? And give him company shares worth a small fortune?

By the light of today's experience I can't see it for real.... Can you?

Unless—unless we chose to allow our sight to be guided as David's was. Unless like the three wise men—we are seeking a wisdom that is greater than knowledge, political power, wealth or class.

The Wisdom of the 7 year old and the wisdom of the very learned add up to the same conclusion: There is a power in the universe—a light source—a meaning source that outdistances any human source of satisfaction.

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<sup>1</sup> Harnish, James A. Christmas Eve, 1993, Tampa, Florida.

The eyes of innocent wonder and the old eyes of the experienced both see it. Do we? What do we see? Is Christ the Light by which we govern our lives, gage our priorities, guide our actions?

Is the amperage of that light stronger than the pull of CNN's nightly business report? The debates between presidential contenders and the faith we place in one or another of them to be the new Messiah?

Do we trust the Light of the World with the same kind of confidence we place in the expertise of our primary care physician?

Or maybe we don't experience that kind of trust at all in any of these things and so can't fathom trusting anything or anyone.

Ned Flanders is the next-door Christian neighbor on *The Simpsons*, a character who is never without a Bible and who believes that a good life requires, "a daily dose of vitamin church."

Although he is the frequent object of satire, he also plays the role of the truly good neighbor.

Ned takes literally the words of Jesus, "Greater love has no one than this, to lay down his or her life for a friend."

In one episode, Ned, the volunteer fireman says a prayer as he risks his life to save Homer Simpson from a house fire, and almost loses his own in the process of rescuing Homer.

As the fire spreads, the instantly ungrateful Homer observes that God is not sparing Ned's roof from fire, despite his faith and churchgoing.

Suddenly, a cloud appears above Ned's house and drops rain to douse the blaze. Then a rainbow appears above the house!

Ned is endlessly cheerful because he is pure in heart. He treats everyone around him with generosity and kindness and can't imagine they wouldn't treat him in the same way. He is incapable of cynicism or contempt.

He may be a fool in Holmer's eyes, but he is a fool who lives in the light of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

There are two kinds of light: the glow that illumines and the glare that obscures.<sup>3</sup> Ned's light illumines but Homer's light glares. One permits him to see and the other to remain blind.

Whose light will we live by? The light of our own eyes? Or the light of Christ that penetrates past the usual, everyday idolatries that obscure the really good life?:

- Those things that in the end are just things,
  - or that disappear with time and age,
  - or once we have them are incapable of giving us what really makes us happy and content:
1. like abiding love and fidelity in our relationships,
  2. like the staying power of true friends through thick and thin.
  3. like the ability to speak truth to power regardless of the fall out because it's never okay for some people to benefit from the hurt of others.

Epiphany people is about a new light penetrating the darkness of this world. That light is Jesus. He's God's flashlight sent to help us find our way. Sent to help ALL OF US in this world find our way.

Someone once said, "*I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.'*"

*And the gatekeeper of the year replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be for you better than light and safer than a known way!'"*

Christ is the Light of the World!

May his light so shine in our lives that others may find their way.

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<sup>2</sup> Christianity Today, Feb. 1, 2001, Mark Pinsky and Frederica Mathewes-Green on Belefnet.com.

<sup>3</sup> James Thurber