

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord. The One who, millions of years ago, said “Let there be light” appeared among us as the Light of the world. Isaiah could have been speaking about our world. Darkness covers the earth. Thick clouds cover the people. I know so many people who are gloomy. Some even appear to *thrive* on gloom and doom. They look at our world and see nothing but darkness. The world seems to have gone insane.

I hear many people say, “I wish we could go back to when I was a child, and everything can be like then when the world knew the difference between right and wrong, light and darkness. Oh, really? Do we really want to go back to those days? Was it all sweetness and light and innocence? I remember having nightmares in 7th grade, wondering whether we would wake up the next day or would the Russians blow us to smithereens. Our neighbor was building a bomb shelter and stocking up for Armageddon. During my youth, the president of the United States was assassinated, as was his brother the Attorney General of the United States. The foremost preacher and civil rights activist in the country was gunned down as well. There were race riots in most cities in our country, including Toledo.... And do we really want to go back to a Church that only worshipped in a language no one understood? Is back such a good thing?

I occasionally need to remind myself of the words of the author of Ecclesiastes. He writes: “How is it that you say former times were better than these? It is not out of wisdom that you say this.” (Eccl. 7:10) OK, that’s my rant over the doomsayers; I’ll move on...

Some periods of time may indeed be worse than others, but the darkness all descended upon the world with the sin of our first parents. I also remember thinking as a child, “How stupid were

Adam and Eve. They had it all and they blew it, and they blew it for us.” I thought, “Boy I’d like to meet those two. I’d give them a piece of my mind. I might hit them over the head with a stick from that tree they so wanted!”

So what are we to do? How do we get through the darkness? First, we receive baptism. In the Letter to the Hebrews, receiving baptism is to be enlightened. In the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, that was one of the most common descriptions of baptism: being enlightened. As Isaiah says, the world may dwell in darkness, “but upon YOU the Lord shines, and over you appears his glory.”

Pope Francis makes an interesting observation about this passage of Isaiah, focusing on just two words. The Holy Father says this: “The light of God shines on those who receive it. Isaiah tells us that the light does not prevent the darkness and the thick clouds from covering the earth, but shines forth on those *prepared to accept it*. (emphasis mine) And so the prophet addresses a challenging summons to everyone: Arise, shine! (In other words, get off your _____. My words not Francis’) We need to arise to get up from our sedentary lives and prepare for a journey. Otherwise we stand still like the scribes that Herod consulted; they knew very well where the Messiah was born, but they did not move.

“We also need to **shine**, to be clothed in God, who like the light is simple; we must put aside our pretentious robes. Otherwise, we will be like Herod, who preferred the earthly lights of success and power to the *divine* light. The Magi, instead, fulfill the prophecy. They arise and shine, and are clothed in light. They alone see the star in the heavens: not the scribes, nor Herod, nor any of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” (Homily 13 January 2018)

Arise and shine! By our simple lives as believers, others can walk by our light, by our shining radiance. And when the fire of

the Holy Spirit enlightens us, then *we see the world differently too*. “Then you shall be radiant at what you see, your heart shall throb and overflow,” Isaiah says. We don’t curse the darkness; we light a candle, or better yet, we live in the light of Christ, who is much greater than any candle.

The Magi, Matthew tells us, “saw his star at its rising... And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was.” Sisters and brothers, you and I are that star. If *we live* in the light of Christ, there will be those who follow that light and discover the child. Of course, not all. Some are not *interested* in the light. Darkness can be comforting. Some will even be *hostile* to the light; Herod lives. Who could have imagined that the baby in the manger was the Light of the world? Let us be the shining lights that will lead people to the Light in that manger.

Another thing I remember from my childhood, and I am sure you do as well. It is the little ditty, composed in the African American culture a hundred years ago, which we all learned to sing in primary school:

This little light of mine—I’m gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine—I’m gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine—I’m gonna let it shine
Let it shine all the time, let it shine.

Let your light shine like the stars in the universe. The Light of the world dwells in you. Let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine.