

“Light: the Interjection of Theology into Our Chronology”
The Epiphany of Our Lord, January 6, 2019
Shepherd by the Sea Episcopal/Lutheran Mission, Gualala, CA
Pastor David Peters

Grace and peace from Jesus Christ, the Child of Bethlehem, the Light of the World.
Amen.

If you are doing some mathematical calculations, you will note that the chronology of Jesus’ life, especially in his early years, as noted by the Church Calendar, is, well, not exactly chronological. He was born just a few days ago on December 24 or December 25, depending on which day you worship for Christmas. Last Sunday, the First Sunday after Christmas, Jesus was already in the temple in Jerusalem at age twelve, amazing and probably hassling the learned men of his day. Now, today, he is back to being a small baby or child, when the three wise men come to visit his parents and bring him gifts.

This is more than likely confusing to people who demand “factual” data, but not to biblical theologians, who are into, well, “theology,” and who work with the premise that theology, whether it be Christmas theology or Epiphany theology or Easter theology, each with its specific messages, can be combined, congealed, if you will, into any particular season of the Church Year. In Christmas, there are Easter themes; in Pentecost, there are Lenten themes; and in Advent, there are Christ the King themes. In fact, today, being a Sunday, even though it is “The Epiphany of Our Lord” Sunday in the Church Calendar, is really a mini-Easter Sunday as is every Sunday of the Church Year. The Easter Season seems to get a lot of PR during the whole Church Year, and why not? It’s difficult to top “resurrection.” Births are good; crucifixions are better; but resurrections are best.

The bottom line is: every theological/biblical word is connected to every other theological/biblical word. It’s the Word of God. God speaks to us in many seasons, and for many reasons, but that word is always connected to Christ, who is “the” Word in the flesh, the center of every Season.

Whether we like it or not, we are into theology. Some people don’t like that word; they prefer biblical studies, but we “do” theology all the time. We leave chronology to the day and year counters, knowing full-well that there will come a time when there is only theological time, God’s time, when Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and the “long” Pentecost Season will be glistening and sparkling with so much light, that we won’t know what season we are in. Just eternity,

forever, evermore and evermore, as a Christmas hymn reminds us, or is it an Epiphany hymn?

So, then, whether we are in chronological time or in theological time, we need to make the most of that time. We do that by realizing over and over again what God has done for this world. In Epiphany terms, from the First Reading, that means realizing “our light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon us,” and from the Holy Gospel, seeing, that is, “observing his star at its rising.” What God has done for this world, and for us specifically, is sending Light into our Darkness. That Light just happens to be Jesus, the Child in the Manger, not some figment of our imaginations, but God in the flesh, incarnate, Immanuel, God with us.

These are exciting days for us, just as exhilarating and jubilant now as they were for Joseph and Mary, the shepherds, and the wise men two millennia ago. God has sent light into the world, God’s light, to dispel the darkness.

There is this word, a German word, in Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Christmas Oratorio,” written for the Christmas Season in 1734. You might even know the word. My maternal Grandmother loved this word. Grandma loved to sing, and it was always fun to sit with her in church, singing hymns in half-English and half-German. It is the word, “jauchzet,” which, in German, means: shout with joy. Bach placed it as the first word the choir would sing after a long musical prelude of bouncy, celebrative notes. It just slides off the page into the air, like angels’ words to the shepherds on that still, quiet night over Bethlehem: JAUCHZET! In some sense, Bach’s entire Christmas Oratorio revolves around that word. One hears it many times throughout the oratorio, with all the choir, the basses, the tenors, the altos and the sopranos, getting their chance to shine as they sing it. Can’t you just see Bach at the organ bench in St. Thomas Kirche in Leipzig, with his fingers flying over all the keys and his feet pounding the pedals, just waiting with glee to play those two notes for “jauchzet?”

During this long Epiphany time this year, from now until March 6, Ash Wednesday, we get to see Christ, the Light of the World, at work in the world bringing light to the darkness of the people around him:

- healing the ill;
- being present for people of expectation and faith;
- quelling people’s fears and doubts;
- speaking clearly about true righteousness;
- doing miraculous things for the benefit of people; and
- speaking words of care and grace, forgiveness and peace.

When has Jesus the Light of the World not brought light to this world? He has existed from the beginning of time. He shines in every season of the year, whether chronological or theological, even right down to our own time, to our own chronology, in this time and place. Right here in Gualala. Right here at Shepherd by the Sea. Imagine that!

Is this town, this congregation, so adept at seeing the light that they no longer need to see that light in their own lives? Is this town, this congregation, simply all light and no darkness? We all know the answer to that. There is so much darkness in the world, in this town and in the people who live here. The Morning Star, Jesus, shines over the little town of Gualala as well. There is darkness out there, in our world, because people do not want to look at the light of Christ, and even those who do do not have the ability to live by that light perfectly. We who are baptized know that we are in constant need of the Light, for as we travel down that road called our chronology from birth until death, we know that we need some word or words from God, some theology that will help us make sense of our chronology. Yes, there is plenteous darkness out there, but there is even more plenteous Light out there. The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Wise people, like the three wise men, Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar, know that the light shines for them. Wise people know that the Light shows us how to live in a world “theologically”, rather than just chronologically, which is what some people prefer. Wise people know that there is more to life than just chronology, i. e., the counting of days and months and seasons, in some kind of frenetic procession of time to the inevitable end of our days.

We are here this morning, bright and early, because we have seen the star in the east, and we want to welcome the light of Christ into our lives again and again. We want to be touched by God’s theology, that theology of unconditional love and grace which gives validity and value to our lives. We know that no matter how old we get to be chronologically, we will always need some input from God theologically, especially on that last day of our earthly chronology, when we will have a strong need to hear some theology about new breathes infused with resurrection. Actually, God’s last word to us is life: I am the resurrection and the life; so, arise, shine, for your Light has come.

Therefore, we want to worship the Christ-Child with our songs, with our ears and with our offerings. Certainly, we have not brought our gold and frankincense and myrrh with us to worship, today, but we have brought our precious selves, a living,

flesh-and-blood offering, as Christ was and still is for us. We are so thankful! And joyful! We have a Savior! Jauchzet!

I must say, however, that it might be quite fun, really, if one Sunday during the Epiphany Season the worshipers would bring not their dollars, but their gold watches and silver earrings, their antiques and CD collections, their favorite dress or shirt, or shiny car, or whatever other, priceless items they prize, to the altar in worship of Jesus. Wouldn't it be fantastic to see a 10-carat diamond ring sitting in the offering plate? I don't even know what a 10-carat diamond ring looks like. Big, I am sure. I am not sure what the offering counters would do with them, but I am sure the congregation's treasurer would help them figure it out very quickly.

If by chance you do not remember what this sermon is all about by dinner time tonight or tomorrow morning or at the end of this Epiphany Season, which is highly possible, very probable, as with most sermons, alas! do remember two words: chronology and theology.

Chronology is that horizontal line that keeps track of our days, months, years, seasons and all the events in them, both secular and sacred from birth to death: all the birthdays and anniversaries, all the ceremonies, all the traditions and rituals we espouse, the shopping in stores, the waiting at traffic lights, the arguing with our spouse, the rearing of children, the going to work, the cooking and eating, the sleeping, everything that encompasses each day.

Theology is that vertical line of God's Word, Jesus, the eternal Light, whose rays intersect with our chronology.

And note that every time theology intersects with chronology, there is a cross in one shape or another all along our horizontal life line. A cross here. A cross there. Everywhere a cross, cross. Not to fear! Crosses are good. It's just God, doing some theology for the people God loves, as God follows his Star-Child, Jesus, into every nook, cranny and curvy road of our horizontal world. God is so wise, so brilliant.

Chronology and theology! Theology and chronology! Great words! And that word, JAUCHZET! Chronology, theology and jauchzet! A trinity of words which define all of life! Amen

David A. Peters, Pastor in the ELCA, retired. JAUCHZET!