

The Light and The Darkness Epiphany/Lent Edition

A number of years ago I listened to a very wise man address the concept of evil and its origins. The premise went something like this: If a good and perfect God created everything that exists, from where did evil come? Did a good and perfect Creator create evil? The response went something like this. Does cold exist? No, there is only a lack of heat. Does darkness exist? No, there is only a lack of light. Did God create evil? No, it only exists where God is absent. I'm not so sure the answer completely addresses the existence of evil in our world but it does make sense, at least for a concise response to a prickly, existential question. Nevertheless, that process started my line of thought about light and darkness. Here are a few words to hopefully stimulate you into deeper pondering of the dualism.

The season of Epiphany, our current liturgical season, contains all sort of plays between light and darkness. It begins in a dark night sky and the observant eyes of astrologers that spy an anomaly. Something is out of kilter in the sky. A new star or, as some have suggested, the conjunction of five planets in the constellation Leo, indicating an extraordinary event on the move. We know this light brought them to Jerusalem looking for the new born King of the Jews and then, redirected, to find him in Bethlehem and there worship him. This revelatory light pierced the darkness revealing Jesus! The darkness was pushed aside for the new Light of the world.

Epiphany, defined as "revelation," has continual revelations of Jesus as the Son of God in his baptism, his ministry and healing, his pushing back the darkness of Satan's temptations so that mankind can see clearly the nature of its God. As John reminds us, "the light has shined in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." As our hymnody reminds us, "In him there is no darkness at all." Jesus incarnate is God with us and as such shines light into

our darkness, driving out the deeds that only flourish in lack of light. For many of us that kind of transparency/illumination frightens us because we see clearly and so do others. No one wants that kind of revelation and yet we are called to walk in the light. The remedy cannot be found in our trying to live better lives. It is found only in Confession and Absolution. We are cleansed by the blood of the Lamb and declared righteous and perfect in God's eyes. We can walk in the light!

The final chapter of Epiphany plays out on Mt. Tabor where the light of the Son of God shines through and he is revealed to Peter, James and John. They get a glimpse of divinity that dumbfounds them all. Now they know that he is truly who he claims to be and so do we! They did not get to build the shelters but followed Jesus down the mountain heading for Jerusalem and the cross.

Darkness and Light duel for supremacy during the 40 days of Lent. We take the time for somber reflection on the darkness in our own hearts and consequently our lives. The intonation of those devastating Ash Wednesday words, "you are dust and to dust you shall return" ring in our ears and pierce our souls for we are sinners that have chosen to separate ourselves from the Life giver and thus die. The darkness of our own death could overwhelm us just as it did Jesus on Good Friday but even into the tomb shines the Light! In spite of what we see and know, the darkness of death is not the final word for either Jesus or you and me. No wonder the Queen of the Festivals of the Church is the Feast of the Resurrection! The Light triumphs and darkness is banished! What a celebration will commence on the day of resurrection.

The thermonuclear furnace within our closest star produces photons that stream toward Earth. They bring us warmth

and, when they encounter matter of any form, light to illumine the object and now it's seen. One cannot see a photon. It is way too fast (186,282 miles/second). We only "see" it when it strikes an object. We are the objects, Jesus is the light. The dark world, and it is, sees Jesus when we "light up" with his mercy and grace as we witness in word and deed to the wonders of our God. When Jesus declares that he is the Light of the world, he fulfills it through you and me, though clay pots we may be. Join me in proclaiming light overcoming darkness in Jesus.

— Pastor Ralph



LIGHT
AND
DARKNESS

One day I was thumbing through a catalog from a Christian bookseller. You know, the catalogs they just send to you regardless if you've ever ordered from them. I suppose I get them because they've found out I'm a pastor. Regardless, I was thumbing through the catalog and a particular book description hit me. It started, *"How would you define your relationship with Christ? Are you a die-hard fan? Devoted follower? Don't know?"* So how does one define his relationship with Christ? If you ask ten random people,

you would probably get ten random answers. The way our current world and culture sees it, you are the one who gets to define every bit of who you are and what relationships you have. But According to the Holy Scriptures, you don't get to define your relationship with Christ.

God defines that relationship. He has defined it as your Creator. He has created you to be who you are – physically and spiritually. And He has placed you in a particular time and place – born of a particular father and mother. But He doesn't stop there and leave you alone to your own devices. He has now redefined each of us sinners through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Does anyone, any character in the Bible, Old or New Testament, do the defining of the relationship? Or is it that God is the one doing the defining, the choosing, and the sending? Key Point: Christ has defined His relationship with you. His definition is Himself. Paul wrote a great summary of how this happened to you in his letter to the Romans:

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

- Romans 6:3-11

Jesus has defined His relationship with you in your baptism. In Baptism, God has claimed you as His own and has attached you to the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. He molds and shapes you into who He intends for you to be through His Word, and ultimately, at your resurrection. In Word and Sacrament, Christ defines you with Himself as He binds Himself to you.

So rejoice and take heart. You don't have to busy yourself with worrying how you are or aren't defining yourself and your relationship with Christ - buying the latest "how to" book about what YOU need to do to improve your relationship with Jesus. He has already done that heavy lifting for you. Christ has forgiven you through the cross and empty tomb. You are His through water and the Spirit. And your life as a Christian is defined by Jesus. What an awesome epiphany for us! You are "in Christ." So go and be and live out who you already are!

— Pastor Jon



Family Resolutions:

Did your family make New Year's resolutions or create a family bucket list for the new year?

Here is a link, from The Family Dinner Project.org, to a Mad Lib's style family resolution activity:

https://thefamilydinnerproject.org/fun_content/fortune-cookie-resolutions/

The link above is just for some family fun. If you haven't made any family resolutions, consider creating a few. Keep them simple and realistic. How can your family shine God's light and live your faith this year?

- Do you want to improve on a particular talent?
- Do you want to improve a skill?
- Do you want to improve a personality trait like greater patience or less laziness?
- Would you like to be more assertive? Kinder with folks you find annoying?
- Would you like to get along better with anyone in your family?
- Would you like to gossip less, talk more, laugh more?
- What positive habit would you like to develop – pray before meals or bedtime, homework done before playtime, family game night or activity once a month, an afternoon/evening unplugged once a week?
- Read more?
- Family devotion time once a week or more?

Stay Up to Date this Year:

A great way to keep your calendar current and be up to date on Hope happenings is to sign up for Hope's e-news. We have two options for you to receive email updates about happenings at Hope: Make sure Ms. Debbie (dhasty@hope-lutheran.org) has your email address and let her know you want to receive our weekly email blast.

Visit the Hope Lutheran web site (www.hope-lutheran.org), scroll down to the bottom of the homepage, complete your information on the bottom right, and click "signup." That's all there is to it, and you'll stay in the know for all the happenings here at Hope.

Other options include liking "Children of Hope Lutheran," "Youth at Hope," and, or "Hope Lutheran Church, Friendswood, TX" on Facebook. Or, following "hopelutheranfwd" or "hopeyouth1804" on Instagram.

We have an app available in the App Store – hope lutheran church fwd

Also, be sure I have your current e-mail address, and you'll receive e-mails about what's happening in Children's Ministry.

Mark your Calendars -

Vacation Bible School

Rocky Railway ... Jesus' Power
Pulls Us Through

June 22nd – 26th, 2020, 9am –
Noon

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 8:38-39 NRSV

Krista Beken

Director of Children's Ministries

Oodles of Noodles!

The annual spaghetti lunch is on for Sunday, January 26th! Place a to-go order to be ready after the Bible study hour or join us at the table for a buffet of sauces to top your pasta as well as breads, salad and desserts! Your freewill offering benefits Summer Mission Trip 2020

Got New Orleans on your mind?

It's not too late to register for Summer Mission Trip 2020 working at Camp ReStore and more than 100 non-profit organizations in the New Orleans area. We are inviting 6th grade to graduated-50-years-ago to join us in this mission field. Want to bring the family? Come on along—talk to Robin Groeper about the details to have even your grade school children learn the joy and importance of serving! The trip will be July 12-16 and we are fund raising NOW! Information and update meeting, Sunday, January 19 in the youth room after the 11am service.

Trivia Night is a DON'T MISS IT EVENT!

Saturday, February 8th the fun is all in the Great Room for Hope's Annual Trivia Night! Grab seven of your best friends, your neighbors or the most "trivial" people you know! Come on your own and join a table—make new friends! Bring snacks, hit up the snack bar, peruse the prize drawings and add your tickets to the one you like most—it's all about fun, a little about challenge and definitely the place to be! Tickets go on sale January 26th

Be sure you have these future dates on your calendar:

Senior High Spring Retreat, March 27-29th

Class of 2020 Graduation service of blessings, Sunday, May 17

A banner for youth ministry with a blue and green geometric background. The text "youth ministry" is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font.

youth ministry

The new church year began with many wonderful musical worship events. I am so appreciative of the many singers and instrumentalists who share their time and talents to create the rich worship life of Hope Lutheran Church. Our various Advent Sunday services, Lessons and Carols services, and Wednesday Holden Evening Prayer services were all a joy for me. We thank the Sanctuary Choir, Festival Orchestra, Hope Brass, and Jubilate Hand Bell Choir for their contributions. Thanks are also due to Bruce Brown, Roger Hibbs and Leslie Engle who formed our Holden ensemble this year along with Amanda Gonzales and LilaJan Hibbs who were cantors. We also thank Grace Chauvin, Amanda Gonzales, Penny Thomas and Leslie Engle who were our Christmas Eve soloists.

We also had a meaningful Children's Christmas Program called *To Us A Child is Born*. Many thanks to staff and parents for helping with the program and to Penny Thomas for her frequent assistance with Children's music at Hope.

As the New Year continues, we welcome new and returning musicians to participate in our worship life.

Our usual schedule is:

Tuesday	6:00 PM Strings/Woodwinds practice
	7:00 PM Brass practice
	8:00 PM Jubilate Bells
Wednesday	5:15-6:00 Intergenerational Bells (Kids and Adults welcome)
	6:30-7:30 Children's Choir PreK-2nd
	7:30 PM Sanctuary Choir

Any questions or comments? Contact Michael Kesar through the church office or at mkesar@hope-lutheran.org.



FROM THE DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

HYMN OF THE MONTH

As With Gladness, Men of Old

Text: William Chatterton Dix 1837-1898 Tune: DIX by Conrad Kocher 1786-1872 *Lutheran Service Book* # 397

William Dix was the manager of a marine insurance company in Glasgow, Scotland. He was also a scholarly layman. Beside this hymn, he wrote *What Child is This?* (LSB 370), *Come unto Me Ye Weary* (LSB 684), and *Alleluia! Sing to Jesus* (LSB 821).

In 1858 on Epiphany, William Dix was sick in bed. He read the gospel lesson for that day, telling of the wise men visiting the Christ child. By evening Dix composed the poetry of this hymn. At first the hymn mentioned the “manger-bed” and the “manger, rude and bare”. Subsequent editions adjusted this to “lowly bed” and to “cradle, rude and bare,” reflecting that the Wise Men actually came to a “house,” probably long after the holy family had left the stable.

Dix never liked the tune that we use today to sing this hymn. Yet it bears the name DIX because it is closely connected to this text. It actually was first written for another hymn. Its composer, Kocher was a German musician, born in Ditzingen, Wurttemberg, Germany. He studied in Rome and then returned to Germany, ready to reform church music. He founded a school of sacred song in Stuttgart and was an organist, hymn writer and editor. Beside a treatise on church music, he wrote two operas and an oratorio.

This hymn is one of the few popular Epiphany hymns. The first several stanzas begin with the Epiphany story and then draw spiritual lessons from it. Each lesson begins with the phrase “So may we” as in “So may we with willing feet ever seek thy mercy seat.” The fourth stanza is a prayer. By the fifth stanza a vision of heaven is described.

As with many tunes, this one is used for more than one hymn. *Lord, to You Immortal Praise* (TLH 572, LW 496) is a harvest hymn also using the tune DIX. You may also recognize it as the tune used for *For the Beauty of the Earth*.

Tiny Treasures

It's time to start thinking about next school year. Our Mother's Day Out/Preschool program will begin priority registration (for students already enrolled in our program) for the 2020-2021 school year on February 3—6, 2020. We will then open registration to the congregation on Sunday, February 9, 2020.

If you are interested in registering your child for our Tiny Treasures program, please do so on Sunday, February 9. We will open up our remaining spots for the community on Sunday evening. Please contact Junelle Petersen if you would like a registration form in advance. This will save you a great deal of time on Sunday.

For your convenience, we will have a table set up in the Grand Hallway to accept registration forms and answer any questions. Questions? Call Junelle Petersen at 281-482-4654.

2020 Coffee Hour

Many time slots for the year are still available. Your help is greatly needed to make this fellowship happen. Detailed directions are given. Sign-up sheet is in the Grand Hallway.

Questions?? Contact Debbie Hasty at dhasty@hope-lutheran.org or 281-482-7943.

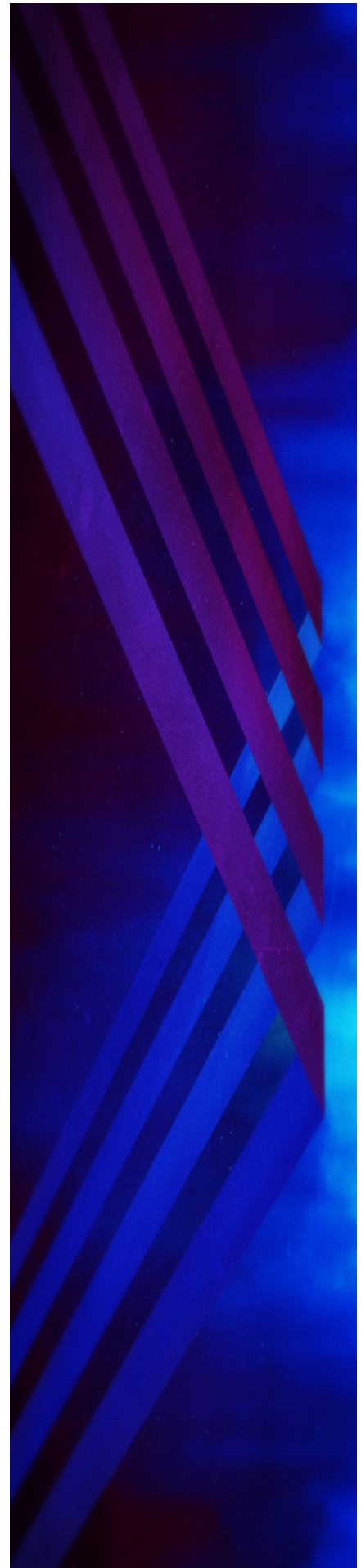
Flower Chart

The 2020 Flower Chart sign up for Altar Flowers is in the Grand Hallway. The cost is \$30.00 per arrangement. Many opportunities are still available. Get your spot — sign up today.

Questions? Contact Katherine Kohn or Debbie Hasty at 281-482-7943. Thank you.

Mark your calendar

February 16	12:15'ish PM —Potluck / Chili Cook-off
February 26	6:00 PM—Ash Wednesday Soup Supper
	7:00 PM—Ash Wednesday Service
March	7:00 PM—Lenten Wednesday Worship Services
March 22	9:15 AM—Voters' Assembly Meeting





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Jonathan E. Petering, Associate Pastor

