

**EPIPHANY OF CHRIST**  
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January 5, 2014  
Epiphany Sunday  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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**Isaiah 60:1-6**

Rise, shine, for your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen within you.

**Matthew 2:1-12**

"Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his rising star and have come to pay him homage."

**Ephesians 3:1-12**

In former generations this hidden mystery was not made known to humankind as it now has been revealed by the Spirit.

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Whether you know it or not you are sitting in a holy place. This Meeting House—once darkened by the wounded and dying sons of our nation in September 1862—still holds their dying prayers for peace.

This is one of those—what the Celts call—thin places. This is a thin place, a wrinkle in time where angels hover and hidden things are revealed. In this place, time and time again the Holy Spirit overshadows us and conceives new possibilities in mortals.

This is a good time to gaze at a light flickering not in the sky but in your heart. Where might that light lead you this year? How will you become a vessel of transcendental love and light in your world this year?

In the next few moments of silence I invite you to ponder what the Holy Spirit may be conceiving in you. Can you like Mary say: Let it be?

[Silence--one minute]

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts find favor in your Heart, O Beloved, our strength and our joy.*

I serve on the Committee for Church Development that oversees more than 100 churches in the Shenandoah Presbytery. And I can tell you this: many churches in our Presbytery and across this nation are dying on the vine. Occasionally I am asked why this church isn't.

I usually say we're just lucky. We're lucky and blessed to be what we are and where we are. We are, after all, located in a growing and thriving region. That helps a lot.

It also helps that we are a healthy community. And—despite our conspicuous complexion—we are a rather diverse congregation. We are comprised of 12th generation Presbyterians, recovering fundamentalists, disenchanted evangelicals, disenfranchised Catholics, disoriented Unitarians, various kinds of skeptics plus a few odd ducks.

Our healthy diversity includes a grand and quirky mix of children and adults from 4-month old William Jotham Baihly Gonano to 98-year old Edna Snyder. All of that makes this a pretty fun and interesting place to be.

But that's not all that makes us distinct. It's also the things for which we stand.

For example, unlike the most popular form of Christianity in this land, we see the way of Jesus not as a way out of this world into another, but rather as a certain way of being in this world, of being in love.

And by love we mean more than a feeling. Love is a practice. It is compassion. It is treating others as we would have others treat us no matter how we feel about them. Love is more than feelings. It is action.

And some of those actions are political. The social and political expression of love is justice. Justice is the social expression of love.

So when LGBT persons are denied equal rights and opportunities we can't turn away. We stand up and proclaim the gospel of God's love for all even when many churches can't or won't.

When prisons are overflowing, when Jim Crow practices return, when the homeless have no place to lay their heads on a cold night, when the rich are favored and the poor crushed, we can't turn away.

When violence becomes a way of life in our nation, when our nation becomes the arms merchant for the world, when our nation betrays trust, we can't turn away.

When the earth is raped by greed, when mountain ranges and rivers are destroyed in the name of comfort and convenience or the American way of life, we can't turn away.

Yes, we are lucky and blessed but we also stand for certain things.

We believe God is love and those who abide in love abide in God. And those who abide in love, as it turns out, cannot abide injustice or cruelty to the least of God's children or to any part of God's creation.

Here in this place over time we have had an epiphany of love. We now see that the hidden spirit unfolding through 4.5 billion years of evolution is a spirit of

love, a spirit in labor, laboring to be born in human consciousness. We call it the Cosmic Christ. And we now see that Christ has no body but ours. That, too, is an epiphany!

The One we worship and serve heeds the cry of the needy not from a distant realm but from within our own hearts. The Holy One sees with our eyes, hears with our ears and feels with our hearts. The work of peace, love and justice is not the work of angels. The work of love, peace and justice is in our humble hands.

Whether you know it or not, you are sitting in a holy place. This is a thin place, a wrinkle in time where hidden things are revealed. Here bold, brave lovers are conceived by the Holy Spirit and sent into the world week after week, year after year. And may it be so today.