

Epiphany Reveals True Freedom

☆ Redeemed from under God's law (vv. 4-5)

☆ Rejoicing as heirs of the Father (vv.6-7)

Arise! Shine! For your Light has come – Christ the Son of God and Savior of the world:

Would you believe that within ½ mile of our house are four private ice skating rinks? Sure, because I just revealed this to you. But would believe that yesterday some hockey players kept falling down, missing the puck and finally started burning their hockey sticks to keep warm? Would you believe that they started throwing their hats and gloves and coats on the fire too? Would you believe I asked them why? Would you believe they shouted back, "It's a free country! We can do whatever we want!"

Free country, yes. Four ice rinks, yes. But the rest of the story, ridiculous. Who would do such a stupid thing? No one.... No one, except everyone – right back to our first parents. Instead of enjoying God's blessings in paradise and learning how to play the game of life God's way, they rebelled and trashed God's creation by their sin. Our society is trashing God's gifts of marriage and family, calling this "freedom." But is it? Does it make sense when we waste God's gifts of time on so much else besides God's Word? We need God to turn the lights on for us. **Epiphany Reveals True Freedom.**

☆ Redeemed from under God's law (vv. 4-5)

Let's say the story were true. How would you get through to stubborn, hockey wannabes? Put on your skates. Bring your stick. Show them your stuff. Be if you really want to impress them, watch for a rival gang to show up. Then you step up and show them a real hockey fight – for them. Before long they'll be imitating every move you make. You win them when you become one of them. One big difference, though is that the stakes in our story with God are life and death, heaven and hell.

God knew there was no better way to win our hearts than become one of us, fight for us and win for us. So "*when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.*" Jesus had to do more than teach us not to burn our hockey sticks or waste our clothes in the fire. He had to give us new clothes to wear and new tools and equipment to use under God's rules. So Christ was born of the virgin Mary. And then we hear how God set His time in the stars for the Magi to come from the east. They were Gentiles, non-Jews, like most of us. Jesus must have been a little less than two years old, based on Herod's vendetta against the baby boys of Bethlehem two years old and under. We heard last Sunday about when Jesus was twelve. What did He do in the eighteen years until about age thirty when He was baptized and began His ministry? Jesus lived under God's law. He got up every morning and obeyed His mother Mary and stepfather Joseph. He worked as a carpenter. He faced temptation and won again and again. You could say that hour by hour Jesus kept scoring one goal after another as our Captain and Champion.

Life in those days sounds too much like now. Socially, politically, morally, society was in shambles. Even heathen philosophers said it was beyond repair. Idolatry was everywhere. Shameless violence and luxury were destroying the sanctity of marriage. Sexual sins were common. Perverted rulers and judges controlled everything. Spiritual darkness covered the earth. Worship of the true God had degenerated into going through the motions. God's laws were ridiculed by religious leaders, teaching the people that this was freedom. Only a tiny remnant of faithful believers remained.¹

¹ Rein, R.C. *Treasury of Themes and Illustrations*. Milwaukee, WI: NPH, 1983, ref. 586.

Then came God's **Epiphany** Light, stepping onto the ice for all to see. He was calling again through Isaiah to all rebellious sinners to come out of the darkness. *"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.... See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."* (Isaiah 60:1-3 NIV84) Those nations first came in **Epiphany Freedom** bearing gifts for the Christ Child. When we suffer from greed and selfishness with all the rich and wealthy of our age, we see the Lord's Christ whose holy blood washed away these sins too. And we see in the Magi **Epiphany Freedom** from slavery to money. They were *"eager to do what is good"* (Titus 2:14) out of pure joy and gratitude. God accepts our gifts of thanks and praise, time and treasure in **Epiphany** light of Christ.

✧ **Rejoicing as heirs of the Father** (vv.6-7)

Our ice pond analogy is obviously riding on rusty skates and broken hockey sticks. God wanted more than a rag tag bunch of stubborn rebels. God wanted a family. So He sent His one and only Son to call us out of darkness into the glorious light of God's family. Now by faith, God gives us equal status, the *"full rights of sons."* *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."* (3:26f) *"Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'"*

"Abba" is an Aramaic word, the language spoken by Jesus and His disciples. For us it's more like "Daddy," but with the fun factor thrown in. A pastor friend years ago saw an Israeli man running down the beach with his son piggy back shouting, "Abba! Abba! Abba!" as they bounded along.

God pictured this pleasure with His people in Moses' law that required fellowship offerings. These were like family cookouts on the grill with God at His tabernacle place of worship. They were required to celebrate with joy in God's presence. Likewise, **Epiphany Reveals True Freedom** for us to be **Rejoicing as heirs of the Father**.

We certainly see this in Christ's Holy Supper which He instituted for us to celebrate His gift of forgiveness. In today's SECOND LESSON (Ephesians 3:2-12) the Lord's Apostle Paul spoke about the *"mystery of Christ."* In the Bible a *"mystery"* is something we could never know ourselves, but which God reveals because He wants us to know. On Christmas we see the *"mystery"* of Incarnation, God taking on our human flesh and blood. Today the Lord has Paul talking about *"the administration of this mystery."* The Gospel shows how God accomplished *"his eternal purpose...in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."* In Christ's Holy Supper we find freedom from fear and anxiety. We have Emmanuel, God with us, truly present.

Our **Epiphany** Gospel (Matthew 2:1-12) is like a series of power plays for **Rejoicing as heirs of the Father**. The prophecy of Bethlehem shows power none of the world's religions can match. None can predict the future, much less make it come true at the right time. We're free from man's religions to keep **Rejoicing as heirs of the Father**. For a little while the star must have disappeared. Did the Magi wonder if they had journeyed so far for nothing? Imagine how *"overjoyed"* they were when the star reappeared, then stopped over the house where God's Son was. God's Word guided the Magi away from Herod's deadly plans as surely as God's Word turns us away from the tyranny of sin and shame. **Epiphany...Freedom**.

"So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir." I pray your status as heirs will show up with great joy and determination this coming Saturday. Only once in the history of our congregation have we asked God's people to come for an all-day Bible study on Saturday and stay after an abbreviated service on Sunday. Our Self Assessment and Adjustment is not mandatory. We are free, but free to serve God and make decisions for His glory. We pray for as many to come as can. And we close with this promise: *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."* (6:7-10) Amen.