

Turn on the Epiphany Lights

- ☆ thanks (vv.15-16)
- ☆ wisdom (v.17)
- ☆ knowledge (v.18-19)

In the name of Jesus, God's shining grace in the flesh, dear fellow reflectors of His light:

Not so many years ago most everyone in our neighborhood put up lots of Christmas lights. What impressed me more than how many and how bright was how long they left them up. From before Christmas...all night Christmas Eve until Christmas morning...and then every night until January 6th. It seemed my neighbors knew about the twelve days of Christmas leading up to Epiphany, Christmas of the Gentiles. Now the lights are going out, decorations away as darkness sets in on hopes of more daylight soon. Do we so quickly forget the lesson the shepherds taught as they returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen which were just as they had been told? Do we miss the message of the Magi in their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh? Today from prison the Lord's "*ambassador in chains*" (6:20) calls for lights. It's time to **Turn on the Epiphany Lights** – first in...

☆ thanks (vv.15-16)

It's a hallmark of Paul's writing, not just sending cards like generations before electronics made greetings too easily forgotten. No matter where he is, but especially in prison for Christ, the Apostle Paul is making memories in prayers of thanks for his fellow Christians. Why? Just before our text he explains. Through God's Christmas Gift of His Son, we have an eternal inheritance of hope in God's glorious grace. To be free of guilt for time and eternity – truly awesome! Even more when others hear and believe. That's what energizes Paul. "*You heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and in him, when you also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is a down payment of our inheritance until the redemption of God's own possession, so that his glory would be praised.*"¹

Paul was amazed at God's grace to him. He was thrilled that Christ's kingdom keeps growing in the hearts of others. So he prayed for all the souls he knew. Do you? Do our members give **thanks** for congregational leaders? Do you ask the Lord's blessings of wisdom on them. Do you beg the Lord for eager volunteers to help spread the Good News of sins-forgiven and heaven won? Or do we lack elected servants as another servant of Jesus said: "*You do not have because you do not ask*" (James 4:2 EHV) ?

"Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I never stop giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." As one pastor put it years ago: "Whatever you desire to have, beg from God. Whatever you have, attribute to God. Whoever does not give thanks for that which has already been given is not worthy of being given more. The downward stream of grace ceases where a returning stream does not exist."² You could say that Christians who pour out no thankful praise to God are like the Dead Sea with no outlet. Bodies can float, but nothing can live. Someone else has said, "A prayer without thanks is like a bird without wings." You can sing, but you can't fly.

A favorite prayer story: "I don't know why this kind of thing catches me by surprise....Nearly every time I conduct a Bible class at Racine Correctional Institution somebody will pray at the end of class for 'traveling mercies for Brother Phil.' I usually take those prayers for granted. But God doesn't.

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

² Gerhard, Johann. *Sacred Meditations* – MEDITATION XXVIII, "General rules for living a pious life: Piety is the highest wisdom." Wade Johnston, transl., *WLQ*, Vol. 101, No. 2, Spring 2004, p. 128.

One night last summer as I left the prison and got back on my motorcycle to ride home, the rain started. No big deal, I thought. I've ridden in rain before. But then it really started pouring. As I turned onto the freeway, the downpour was so strong, I couldn't see the road. I tried following taillights, but often I would lose them. Finally I pulled off the highway at a gas station and sat under the canopy. I caught my breath and wondered what to do next as the rain kept pouring down. Someone hollered, 'Hey, are you heading for Milwaukee?' I turned, and there was a guy with an empty motorcycle trailer behind his car. He took me and my bike to the front door of my house. That's known as 'traveling mercies.' And that's the kind of thing that happens when you pray to a God who loves answering his people's prayers."³

✧ wisdom (v.17)

"I keep praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, will give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowing Christ fully." When you hear God's call and come, then you need to grow. That's another miracle of the Holy Spirit with His priceless gifts of **wisdom and revelation** – not in so called "prophecies" popular in American politics. Epiphany shines on Jesus: ***"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."*** (Hebrews 1:1–2 NIV84) Pastors with their opinions, no matter how much you may like hearing them, if they claim their opinions are the Word of God, they are lying and deceiving by God's Name – breaking the First and Second Commandments. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: ***"I had no intention of knowing anything among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified."*** (1, 2:2) That's true **wisdom**.

Faithful words from faithful preachers are God's gifts greater than gold to help us grow up in Christ. When pastors faithfully and boldly proclaim the mystery of the Gospel, it's first a blessing for them. One veteran preacher said, "I never feel so sure of my faith as when I am preaching." God's people are enriched with the **mystery** of Christ the Light of Gentiles as Paul detailed in today's Second Reading (Ephesians 3:2-12). Then God's people can truly say in **wisdom**, "This sermon belongs to Jesus."

✧ knowledge (v.18-19)

The New Testament church did not give automatic membership without careful instruction. Now Confessional Lutherans spend to confirm young and old in faith. So why do some excuse themselves? "I just don't know what to say." Paul told Philemon (v.6), ***"I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding (ἐν ἐπιγνώσει – precise knowledge) of every good thing we have in Christ."*** You grow in **knowledge** as you go to share. "Some people listen to sermons for three or four years and still don't learn enough to respond to a single question about faith. More than enough has been written in books, but not nearly enough has been driven into our hearts."⁴ Come, grow, then go!

You have the living hope of Christ shining in you. Your kindness to others is noticed. It's wonderful to look for ways to help others. But none of your actions can plant saving hope in their hearts. You have to speak up. Only the Good News that their sins too are forgiven can save their souls. Only when they trust in Jesus as their personal Savior can they shine with the radiance of God's glory. Why would someone buy one of those four-wheeled luxury "Season-to-Remember" gifts with the huge bow, then park it in the garage out of sight and forgotten? Drive that baby! Enjoy what God has given you in the manger of your heart. Let the Light of Christ shine so brightly as you meditate like Mary that you also run like the shepherds and give like the Magi. Your prayers of thanks for leaders and your begging supplications for faithful men to step up are more priceless to God than you can know. God bless our elections. No better gift can you give in thanks God for Jesus than to lay your heart in the manger. No better thanks than to go and tell. **Turn on the Epiphany Lights: thanks, wisdom, knowledge.** Amen.

³ Chaplain Phil Merten. "The Prayers of God's People," *Compassion*, Fall 2006, p. 6. www.wlim.net

⁴ Luther, Martin. *By Faith Alone* © 1998 by World Publ. DailyReader © 1999-2001, Wheeler, Rairdin. www.Laridian.com
For *The Preacher's Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net . New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church
You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.wels.us/newlife . 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126