

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD
January 6, 1974

Augustana Lutheran Church - Detroit
Sermon by Rev. Peter R. Martyn
before the pulpit committee of the
Lutheran Church of the Master
Troy, Michigan

"CHRIST'S REFLECTORS"

"Arise, shine; for ~~the~~ your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."
(Isaiah 60:1)

The Gospel Story: Matthew 2:1-12

Light has always been a great source of
fascination, of comfort, and of clarify
for human existence. We've all watched an
infant gaze endlessly at a flickering light.
We've all been recently fascinated and
maybe even led to visionary predictions by
the light of Kohoutek.

How many of us as children had to sleep
under the comfort of a night light? Which
one of us would read, study, or work in
an unlighted office? We all know the comfort
of being in the light of sun, stars, moon,
General Electric or Westinghouse -- especially
do we know this comfort when it experiences
a cut back under present crisis guidelines.

Imagine our highways without reds and greens,
without streetlights or headlights. Light
is truly a source of clarification for life -
it gives meaning and purpose to human
existence which without it would be chaotic
and directionless.

Nearly 2,000 years ago we are told that
God used a light for the same reason - to give
his purpose and meaning for life a distinct
recognition and clarity. The light was a
star - the radiance from two planets which
nearly embraced each other. Their beams
rested upon a child in Bethlehem.

In that human flesh, God's purpose for life was manifested - was made known to all human flesh. He was God's light for the world - and he still is. He was not a beautiful God-created Kohoutek in the sky - he was simply the flesh and blood of God on earth.

And that has been Good News to share for these 2,000 years - for today - and for everyday. God manifested himself on earth - as a flesh and blood creature like you and me. And his light continues to shine on that child through you and me -- he continues to make himself known through the flesh and blood of his creatures here gathered.

And that's really Good News - because that makes God very real -- that makes God very much in touch with life. God ALLOWS you and me TO STAND and TO LIVE in the same light that he shed on Christ. NOTICE, I said he allows us to live in his light. He does NOT FORCE us to live in his light.

Whether atheist or Christian, we still have a choice. We can choose his light - or we can choose darkness. And all of us know, yes even as Christians, that we have often chosen the darkness.

When we've gobbled life's future resources due to our fixation with the GNP, then we know too well that we've chosen to stand in the darkness.

When we've desired arms for defense with the intention of annihilating our hands and hearts for unity (whether between nations, races, or neighbors), then we've chosen to stand in the darkness.

When a person's skin has become color-coded for acceptance or rejection, then we've chosen to stand and live in darkness.

When saving face by way of deception, cover-up, or manipulation takes precedence over honest confession, then we've chosen to stand and to live in darkness.

Yes, as Christians, we ALL know we've TOO OFTEN found ourselves choosing darkness rather than God's light. But WE NEED NOT - WE CANNOT remain in darkness if we turn back to God's ever-present light. Through the light of Christ, God faithfully continues to deliver us from the narrow, confining existence of darkness. He leaves NO ONE in darkness who returns to the presence of his eternal light in Christ.

Epiphany is this manifestation. Things hidden in plain sight are made manifest. Epiphany is God showing a constantly blundering humanity where to turn on the light -- how to be delivered out of darkness. God uses a star - some wisemen - a long journey - a crude dwelling place - and a child. Through these common, natural realities of life, God shows us BOTH his love - and a lighted pathway for our love in Him.

Yes, FIRST, he leads us to the infant boy - the son of an average carpenter and teenage virgin. And then through the life - ministry @ teaching - death and resurrection of this man, Jesus - God puts us directly center-stage in his spot light of love.

And in the process of so leading and directing us, he simultaneously reveals to us a lighted pathway for our love in Him. He offers us a great light - his light -- greater than Kohoutek - greater than G.E. - greater than even HIS greatest sources of energy. Because his light is the life of Christ - and there is no greater source of light which can give more clarity to the meaning and purpose of life.

Our lighted pathway then is to be a journey radiating Christ-like love. And to make that journey clear for us, God shares with us through Matthew the Journey of some wisemen. And although the details of this journey COULD BE

overlooked without diminishing in the least the source of God's love, nevertheless, the details can be most instructive for us. *Let's look at a few of them.*

First, the journey was a long one -- probably filled with much frustration and agony... what those wisemen would have given for a 55 mph limit! We can learn from this that the journey TO FIND and TO SHARE God's love is rarely an overnight venture. Unlike much of today's food and fun, God's love is not an instant commodity to be popped into life and heated up ready-to-serve.

Like any thing else which is of any value, God's love requires patient care and continued nurture. God does not "zap" us full of his spirit, and then let us run to and fro oozing a lot of sweet Jesus talk. We grow in his love as he continues to manifest himself to us through a lifetime *relationship.*

The problems of life - whether marital, racial, or national - continue to threaten to extinguish the light of his love. That is why we continue to seek to worship as a community of faith -- we know of our need to continually be nourished and fed by his forgiving love. Always hoping that as we receive, we will also continue to share that love.

Similarly - God's love is ~~never~~ **NEVER** FULLY manifested or experienced in a one-time exposure -- whether that exposure be in sermons, or retreats, or special prayer vigils, *crusade.* God's love to really be real REQUIRES continued exposure under different circumstances with different types of people in different settings and styles.

People who feel they can PRAY God into their lives in one quickie experience are not only FODDLING THEMSELVES, but *frustrating, they can* manipulating God. *The process of experiencing God's love is a long-term exposure.*

Another detail of God's manifestation bearing

our attention ^{finds} illumination ⁱⁿ the crude surroundings.
Luther comments on this as follows:

"Though (the wisemen) saw but a tumbled-down shack and a poor young mother with a poor little babe, not like a king at all, meaner than one of their own servants, they did not shrink, but in great, strong faith cast out all misgivings of common sense, and, simply following the word of the prophet and the witness of the star, they accepted him for a king, fell on their knees, worshipped him, and presented their treasures. . . ."

"Let us observe then how these wisemen took no offense at the mean estate of the Babe and his parents, that we also may not be offended in the mean estate of our neighbor, but rather see Christ in him, since the Kingdom is to be found among the lowly and the despised in persecution, misery, and the holy cross. Those who seek Christ anywhere else find him not. The wisemen discovered him NOT at Herod's court, not with the high priests, not in the great city of Jerusalem, but in Bethlehem, in a stable, with lowly folk. IN a word, they found him where one would have least expected."

I leave Luther's commentary to speak for itself! ~~surely he is not saying that Christ and his love are only found in the light of church sanctuaries.~~

Further, to follow in the pathway of his light does not always mean we'll be traveling with the crowd. Matthew says nothing about a full stable of Jerusalemite worshippers. In fact, there may have been more beasts than ~~people~~ people there to give glory to God. We know only too well that the voice of the Christian IS FAR TOO OFTEN a minority voice in the board rooms and other centers of corporate decision-making. Yes, it is not easy to be the only voice manifesting God's love in a world which often doesn't want to hear ~~it~~ it, *nor stand in it's light.*

But God continues to call us to follow his light which beams on ~~our~~ Master. Along the way he knows that we may be tempted by the deception of today's Herods - for wherever there is power, there is potential corruption. We all know ~~the~~ temptation to corrupt his greatness by dreams ~~of~~ our own greatness. God also knows that we may ~~I~~ confuse the light of the star~~s~~ with the spot lights and the glittering glow of our~~s~~ own sanctuaries, and our own sacred chatter.

But even with these temptations, God does not flinch from holding out his light for us. He assures us that as we again turn to his love in Christ, he will deliver us from the temptation toward darkness.

In so doing, he helps us again see that his light does not point to anyone of us or to the Christian fellowship to which we belong. His light always points to the Word -- the Word meaning, the Word which became flesh and dwelt among us.

~~me~~
That's Good News. Good News that God manifests his love in the flesh... in the flesh of people like you and me. He continues to call us to reflect this light of his love. In that way, life's relationships are given greater clarity of purpose and meaning.

And it's Good News that God calls us to manifest his love where we'd least expect to find it -- cause it's most needed in our work-a-day, regular lives, where its so often least found.

Finally, it's Good News that God continues to manifest himself in the most natural places, events, and things. He uses a star. He uses a stable. AND NOW, he uses a common meal - and common bread and wine. And he says:

Take, eat! Take, drink! And in so doing, ~~let~~ us take my love so that you can reflect the light of my love after you leave here.

"Arise, shine! for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you!"

Amen.

THE FESTIVAL OF EPIPHANY
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
January 6, 1991
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"WHEN YOU'VE SEEN THE LIGHT . . . "

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." Is. 60:1 "And behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying: "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." Matt. 2:2f

Today our bulletin proclaims "the Epiphany of our Lord." For many Christians they can hardly pronounce the word, much less know what it means. I remember one of my foreign pastor friends who couldn't even say the word -- it always came out "epiphthany." Let us never be too critical of other professions ... we have our own weird and ancient jargon, and sometimes we do a lousy job of explaining the mysteries of some of our most meaningful terms.

Epiphany basically means "showing forth" or "manifesting." Epiphany is the time that "shows forth" Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ. Even more than Christmas - it is to be the season of light. Because not until the 4th century was there a celebration of Christmas. Up to that time, it was only Epiphany - Epiphany celebrated both the birth and the baptism of Jesus. Among modern Christians (except the Eastern Orthodox), Epiphany is almost viewed as somewhat secondary; symbolically it is associated with the star and wise men. In most of our hearts and minds - Epiphany just doesn't shed the emotional light of Christmas.

But theologically - it's message is far more brilliant than Christmas -- it is certainly a lot more captivating than the Hallmark version of three wise men following a star. As you can see from the text today -- there's nothing said about THREE wise men - "three" is a creation of tradition amplified by Christmas pageants and Hallmark cards. The real message inherent in these philosophers from the East is that Epiphany announces one of the major themes of Christianity -- the gospel is not only for Jews, but for Gentiles as well. Epiphany makes clear that Jesus Christ is a LIGHT FOR THE WHOLE WORLD, not just a little land in the Middle East.

The Sundays after Epiphany graphically show us the many ways that this Jesus brings the glory and power of God among us. Whether thru his own baptism or by casting out evil spirits, all his actions SHOW that he is God's light of truth and grace in this world. With Epiphany it's no longer a baby -- it's the mission and ministry of a grown-up-God on earth. And our mission, should we decide to follow his star, is to witness to HIS LIGHT, HIS TRUTH, HIS GRACE by following his example. Like the disciples at the Transfiguration, we dare not become mesmerized by the light - merely staying in the safety of our sanctuaries. EPIPHANY ANNOUNCES THAT HE HAS COME AS A LIGHT FOR THOSE WAITING IN DARKNESS. This sanctuary merely becomes a source of stimulation -- WHEN WE'VE SEEN THE LIGHT HERE, we do not stay ... we take his light with us to overcome the darkness all around us.

As the old saying goes, "WHEN YOU'VE SEEN THE LIGHT" -- you've seen the truth, you've seen the glory, you've seen what needs to yet be done in God's name. So the question becomes -- now that "you've seen the light," what are the characteristics of that light that will glorify God? How does that light differ from all the other glitter and glow in this world?

Well - in three simple ways you and I can tell whether we are following his light. It penetrates beneath the surface of things - it is impartial to any one people - it is a permanent reality of our lives. We all know the fascination with the stars. A Gallup poll several years ago stated that more than 32 million Americans (over 20% population) believe in astrological signs. There's no doubt about it - people are looking for a LIGHT to follow, but the zodiac is not our source of guidance. WE'VE SEEN THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD ... and it's not Cancer, it's Jesus Christ.

Because first and foremost, his light penetrates deeper than what's on the surface. Almost all other lights of life reflect only that which is on the surface. The football lights show us runners, passers and blockers. The hollywood lights show us pretty faces and captivating curves. The lights of industry show us shiny-sleak body trim and ever growing profit statements (or at least they once did!). The lights of medicine show us pulsating organisms--both external and internal physiology. The concert and night lights show us sensuous movements and sweaty gyrations. BUT ALL OF THESE REFLECTIONS OF REALITY ONLY TOUCH THE SURFACE OF LIFE.

Whether wise men from the east or modern urbanites from the west -- we are all seeking the same thing: A LIGHT THAT WILL REVEAL A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING AND COMPASSION FOR LIFE ... a light that will give hope in the midst of darkness ... a light that will overcome the gloom of injustice with the glory of God's mercy. And "when you've seen THAT light of Christ," then you finally have seen THE LIGHT WHICH PENETRATES DEEPER THAN MERE SURFACE NEEDS OF LIFE.

His light seeks to overcome NOT ONLY the darkness of hunger and pollution, but the causes of hunger and pollution. His light came into this world to put an end to the darkness of child abuse, rape, family separation, racial bigotry, and every other destructive force of life.

Is it any wonder that 1/3 of Hope's Christmas offering will go to the ELCA's World Hunger Appeal. This offering will certainly buy food for hungry people - but that's only the surface need of hunger. The ELCA's Hunger program seeks to eradicate the root causes of hunger. The ELCA's Hunger program seeks to offer strategies of development for 3rd World Countries TO BECOME MORE PRODUCTIVE OF THEIR OWN FOOD. In short, our Christmas offering will be a reflection of the light of Christ -- it will get to the deeper darkness of hunger rather than merely touch the surface need for food.

That's the difference between the Light of Christ and the neon lights of this world. Christ's light not only reveals the darkness of sin and guilt, but his light offers the deeper Word of grace, of mercy, of compassion, of understanding ... so that sin and guilt might be overcome BY THE TRUTH AND GRACE OF GOD. "When You've Seen This Light" - you've seen more than the superficial realities of life -- you've seen a Christ who committed himself to a deeper involvement and a more comprehensive search to overcome the world's darkness. And when "you've seen the light of Christ" doing this ... is it any wonder that he beckons his body, the church, TO BE THAT SAME LIGHT OF HIS PRESENCE IN THE WORLD. Maybe that's why the Christian Church has urged so much caution in waging war in the Middle East -- because the light of Christ has shown that the human need for oil WILL NOT BE RESOLVED THROUGH MILITARY MIGHT. We desparately pray for some reasonable resolution to this conflict before Jan. 15!

But Christ's light not only has penetrating power, his light reveals the glory of God because it shows no partiality to any single nation of the world. God chose Israel to be HIS LIGHT TO ALL NATIONS. He called them to service, he shaped them with his Law, he purified them through worship, he gave them a land flowing with milk and honey, he instructed them with prophets, he chastised them through other nations. And what did they do with all this light? THEY USED IT TO GLORIFY THEMSELVES ... THEY CLAIMED PERSONAL PRIVILEGE RATHER THAN DIVINE RESPONSIBILITY.

So God went after other people -- known to be untutored, unclean, rebellious, and ignorant. By his own grace, he chose the Gentiles to be his light to the nations. He led philosophers from the East, from the Gentile lands, to be the first to worship and adore his beloved son. And God's grace has always worked that way -- he will use whomever his grace chooses to accomplish his light in the world. He is not partial to any one people.

For him - it is not a question of whether you are worthy or unworthy, clean or unclean, Jew or Greek, white or black. God will have none of our foolish divisions and walls of prejudice. If there is any sorting to be done, God will do it on his own terms, and he won't ask for our advice. Because once "you've seen his light," you recognize that his love is mysteriously accepting, his grace is surprisingly broad, his kingdom has absolutely no use for walls and fences and other factional dividing lines.

What a wonder that God chose Paul, the greatest persecutor of Christianity to become the Apostle Paul, the greatest preacher of Christianity. Because "when you've seen his light," it doesn't matter what you once were -- it only matters what you will become! Is it any wonder that he chose you and me. Certainly not because we're the very best - the most pure and spotless. BUT HE CHOSE US BECAUSE WE HAVE HIS POTENTIAL - WE HAVE BEEN FAITHFULLY SHOWING FORTH HIS LIGHT IN THE WORLD ... GLORIFYING GOD BY OVERCOMING THE DARKNESS ALL AROUND US.

So that obviously leads to the third and final characteristic of WHY WE BELIEVE HE IS THE TRUE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. Quite simply - because "when you've seen his light," there is no longer any permanent darkness. Certainly there can be moments of gloom and grief -- but with the light of Christ, DARKNESS IS never lasting.

Because in Jesus Christ - we have finally been shown the WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE OF LOVE, COMPASSION, MERCY AND KINDNESS. And there is no other way that overcomes darkness in this world BUT THROUGH THIS LIGHT OF CHRIST. Oh granted, there are times that we fail to show forth this light ... that we fail to love, to offer mercy, to share compassion. But even when we fail - God still offers his light of gracious forgiveness. Is it any wonder that we come to this place to be baptized in that light ... to be confirmed in that light ... to be energized and re-energized and re-energized again in that same light of Holy Communion.

And what a blessing to know ... as I have proclaimed for two more members of our household of faith this week ... what a blessing to know that when our human light begins to flicker and finally falters - WE ARE STILL ASSURED OF THE EVERLASTING BRIGHTNESS OF CHRIST'S LIGHT FOR ALL ETERNITY. Is it any wonder that the gospel writer could say with absolute confidence: IN HIM WAS LIFE, AND HIS LIFE WAS THE LIGHT FOR ALL PEOPLE. AND THIS LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS HAS NOT OVERCOME IT.

Yes, "when you've seen the light of Christ," there is no more GLOOMY darkness. So today we do not say "Merry Christmas," but rather "Happy Epiphany" -- or for some, Happy Epiphthany!" Whether you can pronounce it or not -- thanks be to God that YOU HAVE SEEN THE LIGHT, and that you are now living in it and committed to it ... FOR THIS IS THE ONLY LIGHT THAT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS WILL NOT OVERCOME IT.

AMEN.

*The Epiphany of our Lord
First English Lutheran Church, Toledo
January 6, 2002
Peter R. Martyn, Part-time Interim*

WHEN YOU'VE SEEN THE LIGHT ...

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Isaiah 60:1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we have observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage. Matt. 2:1-2

Today we celebrate "the Epiphany of our Lord." Many Christians can hardly pronounce the word much less know what it means. "Epiphany" basically means "showing forth," "a manifesting" or a "special appearing." Epiphany is the time that "shows forth" Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ. Even more than Christmas, it is the season of light. Because until the 4th century, there was no celebration of Christmas. Up to that time, it was only Epiphany ... Epiphany celebrated both the birth and the baptism of Jesus. Among this age of Christians (except the Eastern Orthodox) Epiphany is almost viewed as somewhat secondary. Symbolically, it is associated with the star and wise men. But in most of our hearts and minds, Epiphany just doesn't shed near as much emotional light as Christmas.

But theologically – Epiphany's message is far more brilliant than Christmas—and it is certainly more captivating than the Hallmark version of three wise men following a star. As you can see from the text today – there's nothing said about THREE wise men – "three" is a creation of tradition amplified by Christmas pageants and Hallmark cards. The real message inherent in these astrologers from the east is that Epiphany announces one of the major themes of Christianity – the gospel is not only for Jews, but for Gentiles as well. Epiphany makes clear that Jesus Christ came to be a **LIGHT FOR THE WHOLE WORLD**, not just a little lamp for the Middle East.

The Sundays after Epiphany graphically show us the many ways that this Jesus brings the glory and power of God among us. Whether through his own baptism or by casting out evil spirits, all his actions **SHOW** that he is God's light of truth and grace in this world. With Epiphany, it is no longer a baby – it is the mission and ministry of a grown-up-God on earth. And our mission, should we decide to follow His star, is to witness to HIS LIGHT, HIS TRUTH, AND HIS GRACE by following his example. Like the disciples at the Transfiguration, we dare not become mesmerized by the glow of his light – merely staying in the safety of our sanctuaries. **EPIPHANY ANNOUNCES THAT HE HAS COME AS A LIGHT FOR THOSE WAITING IN DARKNESS.** This sanctuary merely becomes a source of stimulation – **WHEN WE'VE SEEN THE LIGHT**, we do not stay ... we take his light with us to help overcome the darkness all around us.

So, what are some of the areas of darkness “out there” that desperately need exposure to God’s light of grace and truth? Certainly in 2001 this country has learned what many other countries have known for years – TERRORISM is one of the most hideous forms of darkness on this earth. Never before have Americans seen innocent life so devastated by the forces of evil. The world cannot tolerate nor allow any further expression of this satanic mentality. Only God’s light has the power to expose, to transform or to neutralize these evil networks out of existence. So we pray on this Epiphany Day: *“Arise, O Lord, let your light come to bring justice, transformation and elimination of the proponents of terror in this world ... and let your glory rise above all such evil expressions.”*

Equally “out there” is still the darkness of SECULARISM which seeks to deny and desecrate the importance and power of a non-material God. The liturgy of secularism commands that we sing only praises to the technological and/or consumer gods – to glorify only those things that can be sold or quantified or measured by markets or as products. Certainly God wants his faithful to give thanks for scientific and developmental progress – but not at the expense of eliminating Him from the equation of meaningful existence. Only God’s light has the power to expose and transform all the shortcomings of an obsession with human systems and networks. So we pray on this Epiphany Day: *“Arise, O Lord, and let your light bring spiritual balance into the material idolatries of this world ... and let your glory rise above all our fads and fantasies with temporary things.”*

Then we look “out there” and we see the further complications of increased darkness caused by PAROCHIALISM – by that spirit which demands sameness and exclusiveness and rigid uniformity. Is it any wonder that God’s light appears constricted when one group claims to possess the whole truth and another group demands superiority with its own version of the truth. How can the sacraments serve as divine elements of God’s grace and truth when human regulations, interpretations and dogmatic restrictions make it impossible to receive what God gave for all. Only God’s light has the power to expose and transform beauracracic and religious practices that have caused God to become captive to the sinfulness of humanity. So we pray on this Epiphany Day: *“Arise, O Lord, and let your light bring the fullness of your mercy and compassion to those traditions which too often have promoted themselves rather than you.”*

What other expressions of darkness would you name that are “out there” that need exposure and transformation from God’s light? There are undoubtedly dozens more! Certainly even with murder statistics somewhat down in 2001 both violence and criminal behavior need the light of God’s transformation. Likewise sexual attitudes and behaviors needs God’s light of direction and insight for 2002 and beyond. Equally the whole arena of faithfulness and

commitment among spouses and families could use a major exposure to God's light in the months and years to come. But as we focus "out there," we might be tempted to think that there is no darkness "in here" ... that darkness only exists in people beyond this sanctuary. So lest we suffer from that kind of self-righteousness, it is imperative on this Epiphany that we seek to expose any darkness which continues to lurk within us.

I cannot speak for any of you, but I can testify to some darkness in my own life. Since 9/11, and even before that horrendous day, I have been lugging around a mild depression – Christ's light has not revealed the radiance from me that it once did! So Epiphany has a personal challenge for me. God is asking me to "awaken his light with greater glory for His mission" – to show more brilliantly his character of mercy and love ... to be more vitally alive with his purpose and mission. That will be a major focus for my prayer life in Epiphany. I hope you will also include me in your Epiphany prayers.

And the questioning of myself leads me to speculating and wondering about all of you: are any of you struggling with unresolved darkness this Epiphany? A few of you have shared your personal or family stories that definitely confirm that you are in the midst of an ongoing struggle. Be assured of my continuing prayers. But in truth I would guess that the whole family of First English is struggling – because the crisis of your future as a faith community has not yet been resolved. How will the light of Christ reveal itself through the people of First English in 2002 and beyond?

There is absolutely no doubt about the answer to that question: Christ's light will continue to shine through every faithful person in this flock. We know that for a fact because YOU HAVE ALL SEEN THE LIGHT! For more than 120 years, the faithful of First English have been deeply committed to Christ's light. There is only one question that remains: "Where will the light be revealed from each of you in the days ahead?" Will it be merged? Yoked? Or, will it come from a new community? Only God knows that answer. But one thing we all know – it will continue to be faithfully SHOWN ... it will continue to "arise and shine as the glory of God ... it will show that the light of Christ is in you and coming from you." And after all, that's what's most important!?

May that light of Christ ... that peace, mercy and forgiveness ... always shine from you to help you overcome the darkness that comes daily to all of us "in here" and "out there" from a sinful world.

Amen