

**Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
The Rev. Dr. Scott Couper
Sunday, January 10, 2021
Epiphany (Three Kings Day) and First Sunday after Epiphany**

**“The Light of the World”
First in a series of six entitled “The Season of Light and Knowledge”**

Matthew 2:1-12



I admit it. At first as a child during baptism, I was but a mere ‘accidental’ Christian for my parents were both Christian. I admit it. As an adolescent confirmation student, I was but a mere ‘cultural’ Christian for I loved the whole Christmas thing. I admit it. In Divinity School in training for the ministry, I was but a mere ‘intellectual’ Christian for I was academically titillated by the concept of the Trinity. I admit it. Even now, I could be considered to be a mere ‘philosophical’ Christian. The metaphors of Christianity make a helleva lot of sense as I experience this wounded and broken world. Yet as I worship and

serve with this church, I pray I am becoming with you a fuller, more mature, 'spiritual' Christian.

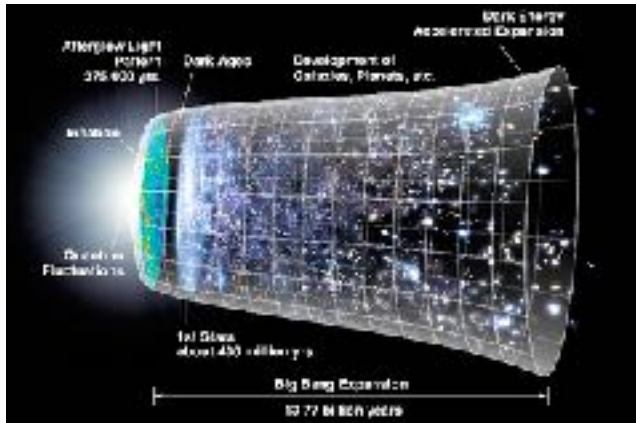
This sermon series that we begin a few days after Epiphany will dwell where I am now as a 'philosophical' Christian.



As we examine six fields of science until Lent (astronomy, biology, psychology, medicine, economics, and ecology), we will explore how Christianity speaks with much of the universe (the cosmos) that we see around us. And at the end of each message, it is my aim that together we will all inch closer and closer to being 'spiritual' Christians.

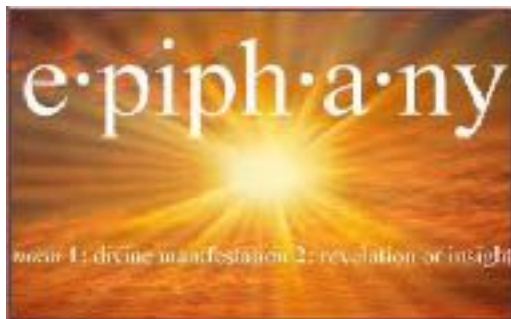


It all begins, as it always does, in Genesis. "And God said, 'let there be light', and there was light" (1:3). So, Creation began with light.



Today, astronomers call the beginning the ‘Big Bang’. Genesis occurred 13.77 billion years ago at a single point of singularity at which time and space lose meaning.¹

This morning, I would like us to focus on the concept of light that first appeared 240,00 to 300,000 years after the Big Bang.²



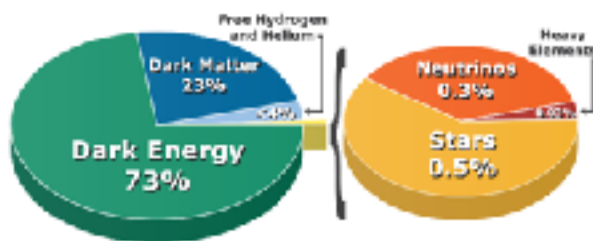
Epiphany is often referred to as the ‘Season of Light’. So, it is good and right that we should examine light. In our scripture reading this morning, it was light, light from a star, that attracted the Magi from the east to search out a new

¹ “Big Bang”, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Bang, accessed January 9, 2021.

² Fraser Cain, “When Was the First Light in the Universe?”, *phys.org*, November 7, 2016. <https://phys.org/news/2016-11-universe.html#:~:text=This%20was%20the%20moment%20of,being%20totally%20opaque%2C%20to%20transparent.>

born king. Hence, light, again, just as in Genesis, is God's 'fingerprint', if you will.

Light, or to be specific, 'visible' light, comes primarily to us from stars, and mostly from the one closest to us, the Sun. When we cannot see the Sun, we see only pinpricks of lights, other stars amidst a vast empty darkness.



Although we can see thousands, if not millions of stars, they only make-up 0.5% of the universe. Another 0.3% of the universe consists of what are called 'neutrinos'. Neutrinos are tiny particles, slivers of light that pass throughout the entire universe. So, only 0.8%, not even 1%, of all the universe, with is trillions of stars, produces light. Even though stars cluster to form nebulae and galaxies, dark energy (73%) and dark matter (23%) compose 96% of the universe.

A key take-aways from our little astronomy lesson is that apparently there is no such thing as total darkness anywhere, even though the human eye thinks there is.³ I draw great spiritual hope that because of neutrinos the light penetrates all even the vast emptiness of space!⁴ How amazing does that make

³ Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe*, (New York: Convergent Books, 2019), 14.

⁴ "Big Bang" and sub-article "Dark Matter", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Bang, accessed January 9, 2021.

the prologue of John's gospel when Christ was described as "a light that darkness cannot overcome" (1:5)?! I don't know about you, but knowing that light exists everywhere and cannot be overcome even in apparent darkness fills me with hope.⁵ Hence, it makes perfect sense to me that John's gospel has Jesus the Christ proclaim "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12) for his presence exists everywhere and cannot be overcome.

Another key characteristic of light is its constancy of speed. The speed of light in vacuum is a universal physical constant important in many areas of physics. Its exact value is defined as 299,792,458 metres per second.⁶ This astronomical constant throughout the universe is extraordinary to me. Juxtaposing astronomy with theology, we can read from Matthew's gospel that Jesus proclaimed that "*You* are the light of the world" (5:14) in addition to him and thus nothing can overcome our divine presence in the world. From God at creation, to Jesus in the first century, to you here today! All, the light of the world! How about that! What a constant! Light is a great astronomical constant that should also be understood to be a spiritual constant.

⁵ Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 14.

⁶ "Speed of Light", Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Speed_of_light, accessed January 9, 2021.



As we emerge from the political 'train smash' that was this past week in Washington, D.C., we see that there is much darkness in the world. How nauseating to see the insurrection fuelled by deceit at the Capitol.



How disgusting to see frameworks for lynching erected on the Mall. How revolting to hear here people say they are coming for 'that b*%\$# Nancy Pelosi'. Five people died. How terrifying to hear them chant they want Pence. I winced at the nationalistic and idiotic "U.S.A./ U.S.A./U.S.A." by people who heretically believe it is somehow better and more deserving than other countries.



The dogs of war, treason, insurrection, lies, secession, religious bigotry, racism, and conspiracy theories all hyped-up and fostered by sycophants of a narcissistic leader scandalized our country and made the citadel of our democracy the “abomination of desolation” (Matthew 24:15-22). It might be easy to lose hope in the darkness that was this week.



Yet from the field of astronomy, the subject of light, and the spiritual truth that our scriptures contain, we learn that there really is no darkness. Light pervades all, even the supposed vast emptiness of space. And second, we learn that light is characterised as a universal constant as is God, Jesus, and you and I. Jesus said he was the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 22:13). Just as we are but a collection of atoms and molecules

emitted from the Big Bang and are thus of the stuff of stars, so we will be and remain in and through God forever until the end of time.

The conclusion I come to therefore, in the wake of this week's national disaster, is 'the light is there', and 'the light can be found'. The problem is that there are too many people running away from the light!



This week, in your *eNews*, I quoted Plato who once said, "We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when [people] are afraid of the light". King Herod is one such character in history that was afraid of the light, though it was there and easily found.

Jesus the Christ was not nationalist and he certainly would never have agreed with the mantra 'America First'. Jesus was a universalist.



Jesus the Christ was not a capitalist and he certainly would not have agreed with evaluating a nation's well-being with stock market indices. Jesus desired justice. Jesus the Christ certainly would support the poor having access to quality and affordable health care. Jesus healed. Jesus the Christ would certainly not build a wall to keep outsiders out. Jesus was inclusive.

In Genesis, God said, "Let there be light". John's gospel proclaims that Jesus the Christ is "the light of the world".



In Matthew's gospel it states that "You are the light of the world"! So then, don't be a child who is afraid of the dark and don't be a 'tragedy' that is afraid of the light. For light is constant, light pervades the darkness, and light "allows

us to see things in all their fullness”.⁷ In this way, “we see Jesus the Christ so that we can see like him and with the same infinite compassion”.⁸

This is the word of God, and it was delivered to the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.

⁷ Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 33.

⁸ Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, 37.