

Light in the darkness



Heather Cooke *reflects on* Isaiah 60:1-6

No wonder today's Old Testament reading is the one chosen to accompany the familiar Gospel story of the Epiphany – and not just because of the camels, the gold and the frankincense! In the season that begins today, we will ponder the ways in which God's glory and light are made manifest to the world.

This passage is reminiscent of a scene from a blockbuster movie – perhaps a sci-fi film. Just imagine it for a moment – the screen is filled with a huge crowd, thousands of people, all moving in the same direction, flocking towards a mysterious glow on the horizon, as an alien spaceship descends to earth.

God came down to earth, not as some kind of alien but as a human being like us. Born in a smelly stable, as a human baby – and yet, from the very beginning, the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled, as visitors from other nations, sages from afar, arrived to worship him.

The light of the world had indeed risen and we too are called to rise and shine. As a human being, in his teaching and example, Jesus shows us what to do. Whatever darkness might sometimes overshadow our personal lives or the state of the world, God promises to shine for us, and through us.

"The glory of the Lord has risen upon you." 🙌

Glorious God, you came to earth as a baby in a stable. Help me to follow in Jesus' steps, as far as I am able, that your light may shine through my deeds. Amen.

New year, new you

Childlike wonder

by William Hepper

How are you approaching the New Year? With bold resolutions? Harboured high hopes of a new start? And how does your relationship with God direct those resolutions and hopes?

Turn to the Bible and you will find it full of the promise of newness: new creation, a new covenant, new life, new heaven and earth... the list goes on. So how about this for an idea: in Revelation 4:8, various heavenly beings praise God "who was and is and is to come". This could suggest

that God is unchanging and keeps going on and on. But God "who... is to come" could also point us to God who is not only eternally present, but also ever new. There is always more of God still to come.

When, through Christ, we live in God, we start to take on something of God's characteristics, be it ever so humbly. We tend to look for those characteristics associated with God's ancientness – wisdom, stability, and so forth.

This New Year, why not resolve to seek those qualities associated with God's "newness", such as childlike wonder and excitement? 🙌

Epiphany around the world

Part I – Eastern Churches

by Frank Garcia

Epiphany means "appearing" or "manifestation", and in the Eastern Churches (Greek or Russian) it is celebrated as Christ's baptism, the feast called Theophany ("God's appearing"). Living water is the theme of the day, and congregations gather on lakeshores, at riverbanks, beaches and quaysides, to bless the waters, often leaping in to be first to retrieve the cross thrown in by the celebrant. Water

blessed in churches is sprinkled around the home, or drunk to internalise the blessing.

The traditional hymn for the day proclaims the tremendous epiphany not just of God, but of God-as-Trinity: When you were baptised in the Jordan, O Lord, / the worship of the Trinity was made manifest. / The Father's voice bore witness to you, calling you beloved Son, / and the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed his word's truth. / O Christ our God, you have revealed yourself and enlightened the world – glory to you! 🙌

“**Resolution One: I will live for God. Resolution Two: If no one else does, I still will.**”

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), American revivalist preacher, philosopher and theologian