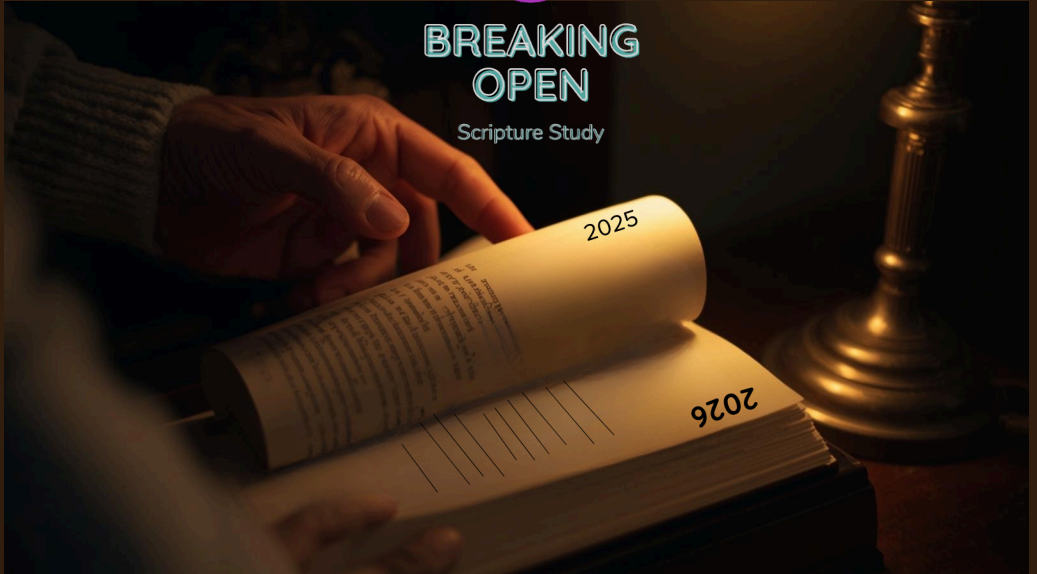




BREAKING OPEN

Scripture Study



ARISE!

Dennis Webster

A weekly reflection based on the teachings at St Peter's by the Lake, Paynesville, together with a study guide based on the readings, some liturgical resources RCL Lectionary, and a weekly devotion

Revised Common Lectionary Related

Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalms 72:1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

O God, who by the leading of a star
didst manifest thy only-begotten
Son to the Gentiles;
Mercifully grant, that we,
which know thee now by faith,
may after this life have the fruition of thy
glorious Godhead:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever felt lost in the wilderness, searching for direction — not because faith was absent, but because the way forward was unclear? Scripture is honest about such moments. Again and again, it tells of people who navigate uncertainty by trusting a light they did not create, but learned to follow.

Epiphany places us alongside the Magi: travellers attentive enough to notice a star, courageous enough to follow it, and humble enough to kneel when they arrived. Their journey mirrors our own search for meaning in a complex and changing world. God's light does not overwhelm or force; it persists — quietly shining, patiently guiding.

This reflection draws together memory and place: a mother's New Year ritual of consulting an almanac — not to predict the future, but to begin the year attentively — and the familiar experience of dawn over the Gippsland Lakes, where light arrives gradually, softening the horizon and revealing what was always there. In such moments, a deeper truth emerges: God's faithfulness is steady and dependable.

Epiphany reminds us that faith is not primarily about information, but about **transformation**. The Magi did not leave with answers neatly arranged; they left changed, returning home by another way. God's guidance is less like a set of instructions and more like a lighthouse — steadfast amid uncertain waters, offering orientation rather than control.

Yet this light also exposes resistance. Like Herod of old, structures of power often cling to certainty and self-preservation, resisting the vulnerability required for genuine openness to God. Epiphany confronts us with a searching truth: being close to religion is not the same as being open to God.

As our community looks toward 2026, we are invited to turn the page — not with bravado or denial, but with gentle trust. The shadows of what has been may still fall across the page, yet it is written in light. Not all questions are resolved, but God's presence remains constant.

This is why Isaiah's ancient call still speaks with quiet urgency:
"Arise, for your light is come."

Not because the darkness has disappeared,
but because it no longer has the final word.

As we walk lightly on sacred ground,
teach us Lord to make known your kingdom,
and let this reflect in all that we do and say.

Arise!

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalms 72:1-7, 10-14

Ephesians 3:1-12

Matthew 2:1-12

Sometimes, wisdom gives us an unexpected gift. Wisdom, *_sophia_*, brings old truths to light, even as the world seems dark and unfair.

Earlier this week, at our Tuesday service, I was not especially inspired by the reading from Ephesians. I did not feel ready to hear Isaiah call out, "ARISE! Your light has come!"

A parishioner recommended a quiet reflection to begin and end the year. No resolutions, no superstitions. Just an invitation to see the year as a way of marking time, and to turn the page.

One image — a voice crying in the wilderness — stayed with me, helping me see my wilderness moments last year in a new light. We all experience such times and lose sight of our leading light. But each new page offers the possibility of letting the past rest and living as people of light, courage, and hope. God, the author of our lives, is still writing. Our story continues in the slow brightening of first light.

When I was young, my mother had a small New Year ritual. She would hang the new almanac on the kitchen door. If no new almanac appeared, it felt like a bad sign. After the music and the horns, we took down the old year's pages and hung the new one. She would smile and say, "It's late. Go to bed." I would reply, "Happy New Year, Mum."

We like to imagine the new year as a fresh, blank page — untouched and perfect. But Epiphany tells the truth.

When we turn the page, the shadow of the old one still lies across it. Our

memories crease the paper. Grief, uncertainty, and unfinished stories don't vanish at midnight. Yet Epiphany quietly insists: The new page is still written in light.

Not an overpowering light or shallow cheerfulness, but the first gleam of dawn, arriving while darkness still lingers.

"Arise, shine; for your light is come."

Isaiah's call doesn't start with comfort; it begins with courage.

Before the light breaks through, a moment of introspection: What then, when faced with the shadows? Not wait. Not hide. Not curl up until things improve.

Arise.

The prophet doesn't deny the darkness—even "thick darkness covers the peoples"—but he affirms it is not the final word. God's light rises not because the world is ready, but because God is faithful. In our world today, we can see this light emerge in the collective support for humanitarian efforts addressing global crises such as the refugee situation in multiple regions. This movement, driven by compassion and a desire for justice, reflects God's rising light, offering hope and illumination in places long overshadowed by despair.

At Gippsland Lakes, dawn arrives quietly: the dark thins, shapes soften, and the horizon regains its colour. Suddenly, you realise: you can see again.

Epiphany is that kind of morning.

Matthew tells us of the Magi who trust a star. They are not insiders; they are not in charge. They are simply attentive. Like the Magi, today's seekers often find themselves on the outside, searching for meaning beyond traditional structures. Inviting us to see ourselves as contemporary strangers attentive to light broadens our understanding and empathy, uniting us across boundaries and traditions. They don't make the star. They follow it.

This is navigation, not control.

Life by the water teaches us this. The tides heave with their own rhythm, and the winds breathe across the surface. You do not argue with these forces or command the weather. Instead, you learn to read the signs:

stars, wind, markers that guide you when the shoreline disappears.

A lighthouse does not move. It does not chase after boats or call out. It stands, steady and faithful, offering light that says, You are not alone. You are not lost.

The steeple is like that. Not a symbol of triumph, but a quiet witness. It does not shine for itself. It points the way.

Epiphany brings a light that the Magi follow, a light that unsettles Herod's darkness. Power prefers the shadows, where it can propagate fear, manipulate narratives, and suppress truth. Yet this light challenges that comfort.

Herod knows the Scriptures. He lives near the Temple. He holds power. Yet he misses what travelling strangers recognise. Epiphany reminds us: being close to religion is not the same as being open to God. In today's world, similar forces are evident. Modern power structures often find comfort in maintaining control and resisting the vulnerability that genuine openness to God's light requires.

We see it in the reluctance to address systemic inequalities, the desire to prioritise profit over people, and the ignorance of those marginalised voices that challenge the status quo. By recognising these parallels, we are invited to reflect on where we might ethically position ourselves in the face of such power.

The Magi kneel. Herod schemes.
Light calls for a response.

After meeting the child, the Magi go home “by another way.” Epiphany doesn't just give information; it changes direction.

Paul writes to the Ephesians as someone amazed by the mystery of Christ, not as someone who owns it:
“I am the very least of all the saints.”
This is not self-hatred. It is a clear vision.
Paul knows that God's light doesn't puff us up; it humbles us. To stand in Christ's light is to see that everything we carry is a gift before it is a responsibility, enveloped in grace. This perspective fills us with wonder, transforming the weight of obligation into a joyful acceptance of our role within God's plan.

The mystery revealed — that God's promise is wider than anyone thought — is not Paul's to control. It is his to share. He is entrusted with light, not rewarded with status.

Epiphany doesn't make us important; it makes us responsible.

How do we turn the page into this year? As we stand on the brink of 2026, I find myself carrying a specific uncertainty about what lies ahead for our community. This unresolved fear lingers as a reminder that, despite our preparations and hopes, not everything is within our grasp. Yet it is precisely this uncertainty that invites us to lean on our faith, trusting that the gentle turning and faithfulness will guide us through.

Not with noise and bravado. Not with denial. Not with pretending the hard things aren't real.

We turn it gently, trusting that God's light will hold.

Like morning light over the water. Like a lighthouse in fog and tide. Like travellers who keep walking, one small step at a time, guided by a light they do not own and cannot control. Will you let it guide your next step?

“Arise,” says Isaiah — not because everything is solved, but because God is with us. “Arise, for your light is come” — and it will not be taken back. “Arise,” because the Church's task is not to chase away darkness, but to stand faithfully where God's light already shines.

I wrestle with the present tense of the light: 'is come.' Though modern grammar prefers absolutes, God's light speaks eternally in the present.

As we begin this new page of the year, let us do so not with a whimper, but with steady faith, humble trust, and eyes trained to notice light wherever God chooses to place it.

Today, the page is turning — not afraid, but in hope. The author of life is still writing. What is being prepared for us is marked by grace, guided by wisdom, and filled with purpose.

So, people of Epiphany, let us declare our commitment together. We will arise. We will move forward in faith. Our light is here, guiding us onward. Epiphany doesn't make us meaningful, but makes us responsible. 1.

1. What do you think this means for how we should approach our faith and service to others?

- Paul writes as someone amazed by the mystery of Christ, saying, 'I am the very least of all the saints.'
- The sermon explains that this isn't self-hatred but a clear vision: everything we carry is a gift before it is a responsibility.

2. In what areas of your life do you need to shift from seeking importance to embracing responsibility?

- The sermon mentions that 'being close to religion is not the same as being open to God,' using Herod as an example.
- How can we ensure we're truly open to God's guidance rather than just going through religious motions?

3. Herod knew the Scriptures and lived near the Temple, yet he missed what travelling strangers (the Magi) recognised about Jesus.

- What are some ways you might be acting like Herod - knowing about God but resisting genuine openness to His direction in your life?

4. Isaiah's call 'Arise, shine; for your light is come' starts with courage, not comfort. Why is this distinction important, and how does it apply to facing challenges in our faith journey?

- The sermon emphasises that God's light rises not because the world is ready, but because God is faithful, even when 'thick darkness covers the peoples.'
- What situation in your life right now requires you to arise with courage rather than wait for comfort?

5. How does the image of a lighthouse as described in the sermon help us understand our role as Christians in the world?

- The sermon describes a lighthouse as something that doesn't move or chase after boats, but stands steady and faithful, offering light that says 'You are not alone. You are not lost.'

6. In what ways can you be a steady, faithful light in your community without trying to force or control others?

- The sermon discusses how the Magi went home 'by another way' after meeting Jesus. What does this tell us about how encountering Christ should change our life's direction?

7. Epiphany doesn't just give information; it changes direction, suggesting that genuine encounters with God lead to transformation.

- What 'different way' might God be calling you now?

This five-day devotional will shed new light on the sermon from this weekend. Join us as we explore the themes of light, courage, and hope, encouraging us to turn the page in life with faith and trust in God's steady guidance.

Day 1

Isaiah 60:1



The light spoken of in Isaiah is not only a beacon of hope but also a call to action. As darkness lingers around us, we are invited to arise and shine, reflecting the divine light within us to the world. This is not a passive observation but an active participation in bringing God's presence and grace to the forefront of our daily lives.

This illumination does not call us to ignore the shadows but to face them with courage and resilience. Our task is not to erase darkness but to stand firm and faithful where God's light already shines, illuminating paths for others who may be lost or afraid. Through this steadfastness, we become bearers of the light, helping to guide others towards Epiphany's promise of hope and revelation.

- When have you experienced being a light in someone else's darkness?
- How can you actively arise and shine in your community today?
- What are the shadows in your life calling you to respond to with courage?
- Pray for strength to become a source of light and hope to those around you.
- Ask for the guidance to see where God is calling you to arise and illuminate the darkness.

Day 2

Matthew 2:2

The journey of the Magi is one of distance and discovery. Like them, we are called to be attentive to the signs God places along our path, ready to follow the light without knowing where it will lead us. The Magi show us that faith is a dynamic and daring decision to move beyond our comfort zones in pursuit of divine truth. They were led not by their own understanding but by a star that pointed to something greater than themselves.

Today, we too are invited to trust in the navigation provided by God's signs. This requires humility and openness to change, guiding us away

from familiar territories and into new realms where God's light shines uniquely. In following this light, we find ourselves transformed, returning to our daily lives with fresh perspectives and renewed faith.

- Reflect on a time when you were led by faith to explore unfamiliar paths.
- How do you recognise God's signs in your everyday life?
- What areas of your life do you need to open up to God's transformative light?
- Pray for a trusting heart to follow God's guidance even when the way is unclear.
- Seek openness to new directions that God may be calling you to explore.

Day 3

Ephesians 3:8

Paul's letter to the Ephesians speaks of humility and awe in the presence of the mystery of Christ. He recognises that God's promise is far larger than any one person or group, calling us to share in the light of hope with others. We are humbled as we realise our own smallness in the grandeur of God's plan, yet encouraged to take part in it as active participants, sharing light and love.

Epiphany reminds us that we are entrusted with the light, a gift to be shared with the world rather than a possession to hoard. This requires us to set aside personal pride and act with grace and responsibility, ensuring that through us, God's light reaches the darkest corners of the world, offering hope and warmth to all who encounter it.

- What does humility in sharing God's light mean to you?
- How can you ensure that your actions reflect the light entrusted to you?
- What are you doing actively to spread hope and love in your community?
- Pray for the humility to recognise God's grandeur in your life.
- Ask for guidance in being a faithful steward of the light within you.

Day 4

John 1:5

The verse from John reassures us that light is an eternal presence that darkness cannot comprehend or overcome. This message underpins the courage we need to face the uncertainties of life with faith and assurance. Despite the shadows that may loom large, God's light remains constant, a

beacon of hope and strength.

As followers of Christ, we are called to embody this light, using it to guide our own journey and those around us. In doing so, we also challenge power and injustice, ready to make known the truth and peace of the Gospel. We stand firm in the knowledge that God's presence is more powerful than any darkness, leading us through even the most challenging times.

- How does knowing that light cannot be overcome change your perspective on challenges?
- What areas of your life need the reassurance of this eternal light?
- In what ways can you stand against darkness in your community?
- Pray for courage to face life's shadows with the assurance of God's light.
- Ask for wisdom to act as a beacon of hope to those in need of illumination.

Day 5

Psalms 119:105

The Psalmist tells us that God's word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. This embodiment of divine guidance empowers us to take steps forward in confidence, assured that each small step is enveloped in God's grace and purpose. As we navigate the complexities of life, this light steers us away from pitfalls and into a deeper relationship with God. The Epiphany season encourages us to see our journeys as divinely guided rather than self-directed. We walk by faith, not by sight, trusting that God's light will illuminate even the most unsure paths. Embracing the light means acknowledging the need for guidance, recognising our own limitations, and leaning on God's eternal wisdom and direction.

- Reflect on moments when God's word clearly directed your path.
- How do you rely on God's light when faced with decisions?
- What steps can you take to deepen your trust in His guidance?
- Pray for a heart open to the direction and wisdom found in God's word.
- Seek clarity and reassurance as you follow the light God provides.

End notes and further reading

End notes and further reading

Harrington, Daniel J Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew



Brabarlung Totem

This is produced on
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