

- Throughout the course of her life, St. Bridget of Sweden often had visions of Jesus. Her most famous visions, though, were those of Jesus' birth. These visions became so famous that they actually changed the way artists depicted the nativity.
- St. Bridget saw Christ, illuminated with light, lying on the ground, with Mary and Joseph kneeling before Him in adoration. In fact, in St. Bridget's vision the Christ child was actually emitting light.
- Her vision of the luminescent, newborn Christ actually helped spur on artists who were just beginning to develop a new style of painting called *chiaroscuro*, which is a form of artwork that highlights the contrast between light and dark.
- *Chiaroscuro* is an Italian word that literally means "light – dark." In fact the name Chiara, which we translate into English as *Clare*, means "light that stands against the darkness."
- Generally speaking, chiaroscuro art uses contrasts between light and dark to provide a sense of volume and depth when depicting three-dimensional objects, like a human body. But Catholic artists also used it throughout the Renaissance as a way to convey theological ideas.
- For example, paintings of saints often depict them bathed in light as compared to other people in the same painting, and following St. Bridget's vision, Christ has often been depicted in art as an actual source of light shining in the darkness.
- As we consider today's feast of the Epiphany, this understanding of Christ as light makes perfect sense, for this feast is about the manifestation of Christ to the world, and we need light to see things clearly.
- To fully understand this feast, though, we need to see it in connection not only to Christmas, but also to Advent.
- Throughout the season of Advent, as we await the coming of Christ in His Incarnation and His second coming at the end of time, the Church draws heavily upon the interplay between light and darkness.
- We see this most poignantly in the lighting of the Advent wreath, which calls to mind the long time when people lived in spiritual darkness, waiting for the coming of the Messiah, the light of the world.
- And as we draw nearer to Christ's coming, the light increases as we light more candles, reminding us to prepare ourselves to receive Christ, Who is the Light of the World.
- During Advent there is also a growing darkness in our world as days grow shorter and the nights grow longer. Leaves and plants are dying and turning brown, and the glory of summer is long gone. These elements of darkness and the death of natural things, coupled with colder weather, naturally remind us of the imminence of our own death and lead us to reflect upon ultimate realities.
- But our readings and music during Advent remind us that in our Lord's triumphal coming at the end of time, we see that the night gives way to morning, that darkness gives way to light.
- Advent readings and music remind us that our divine Messiah will come to earth, dispelling the night, bidding hail to the dawn of grace. And we are told that Hope shall sing its triumph and all sadness will flee away.
- Finally, on Christmas – after 4 weeks of waiting and preparing – Christ comes! He, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Light, comes, and the whole world is bathed in celestial light.

- Christmas morning is like the sun finally breaking across the horizon after a night of darkness. And the Epiphany is like the sun at its noon apex when the daylight is at its strongest.
- And now today, on this Feast of the Epiphany, we recall that this Light, whom we know as Jesus, is not just for us who bear the name Christian. St. Paul tells us that He has come for all people, both Jew and Gentile alike.
- The Epiphany is the manifestation of Christ to the whole world. The three wise men who come from the East are the living symbols that Jesus came not just to be the Messiah of the Jews, but the Lord and Savior of us all.
- Thus in the first reading we are told to “rise up in splendor,” for our light has come. He is the light that shines in the darkness; the light the darkness cannot overcome. Christ is the light that dispels the thick clouds of sin and darkness that cover the peoples.
- As Catholics, we know that not only did Christ come to earth some 2000 years ago, but that He remains with us in our midst. We know that Jesus truly is *Emmanuel*, which means “God-with-us.” He continues to be manifested to us.
- Our Catholic theology teaches us that Jesus is manifested to and present with us in 4 very real ways at Mass: He is present in Scriptures as they are proclaimed, and He is present in the person of the priest, who is an *alter Christus*.
- Christ is also present in the gathered assembly, for He tells us that where 2 or 3 are gathered in His name, He is there in the midst of them.
- But most importantly, Jesus Christ is present to us in the Eucharist, which is really and truly His body and blood. The Eucharist is not merely a symbol of Christ, but it really *is* Christ.
- When we walk into this church, we are really in His presence. He is with us now just as He was with His apostles 2000 years ago in Israel.
- And so, my friends, as we begin this new year, let us make a resolution to spend more time with Jesus in the Eucharist. And let us make a resolution to be more reverent when we are in His presence.
- The new year is always a good time to examine ourselves and to make changes, and as your pastor, I’d like to encourage you to examine your relationship to Jesus in the Eucharist.
- Ask yourself: do I really believe the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ, and if so, do I spend as much time as I should in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament?
- Am I reverent when I enter the church, limiting my speech and guarding my actions, and do I genuflect as I should when I pass before the tabernacle?
- Am I as reverent as I should be when I receive Holy Communion? Do I receive Holy Communion when I shouldn’t? In other words, am I truly in communion with Christ and His Church, or do I ever receive Holy Communion in the state of grave sin?
- My dear friends, our feast today reminds us that Christ is the Light of the World, the Light that Shines in the Darkness. And His light continues to shine for us in the Eucharist.
- As we enter into a new year, let us resolve to be better followers of Christ by being more devoted to His true presence in the Eucharist.
- The Eucharist is His greatest gift to us because it is the gift of His very self. Therefore, let us never take it for granted, and let us trust that in being devoted to the Eucharist, the darkness of sin will be dispelled from our hearts.