

What do we know about St. Paul, to whom the Letter to the Ephesians is often attributed? Why are his letters so important to Christian Scripture?

Paul is often called the Apostle to the Gentiles because he spread the teachings of Jesus to non-Jewish communities in the first-century AD. The letters of Paul, known as the Pauline Epistles, are thirteen books in the New Testament attributed to Paul or his followers. He is generally regarded as one of the most important figures of the Apostolic Age. He founded several Christian communities in Asia Minor and Europe, including the City of Ephesus, one of the most important port cities in the ancient world, to whom this Letter was addressed. His letters provided theological insights and guidance not only to early Christian communities but also to theologians today.

Paul was not one of the original Twelve disciples and he did not know Jesus during his lifetime. Nonetheless, Paul was a contemporary of Jesus and knew Peter and John, and John's brother James. Paul had intimate knowledge of the life of Jesus and his teachings.

So, now let us listen carefully to what Paul tells us in Ephesians. He gives us a striking reminder: "For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light." Notice that Paul does not say we were merely **in** darkness. He says we **were** darkness. That was our identity. But through baptism, Christ has changed who we are – at our very core. We are now light!

The Message Bible, which Fr. Joe frequently cites, and which describes itself as a "contemporary rendering of the Bible from the original languages,

crafted to present its tone, rhythm, events, and ideas in everyday language”, puts it this way: “You groped your way through that murk once, but no longer. You are out in the open now. The bright light of Christ makes your way plain.”

St. Paul speaks to us today, reminding us who we truly are. Lent is not about becoming something new through sheer effort. The voice of Lent calls us to remember the truth of whom we already are in Christ. We fast, pray, and give alms during Lent not as a self-improvement project, but as a way of clearing our vision; removing whatever dims the light within us.

Paul urges us: “Live as children of light.” Light warns and light reveals. Through our Lenten disciplines, we hope the light of Christ will expose what is hidden within us. Or perhaps what we prefer not to see: resentments, selfish habits, indifference to the poor, compromises with honesty, self-importance, and other quiet shadows in our lives.

The Message Bible interprets it like this: “So no more stumbling around. Get on with it! The good, the right, the true – these are actions appropriate for the daylight hours.”

When Christ’s light shines and reveals what we would rather avoid, it can feel uncomfortable. Yet even that discomfort is grace. Light becomes a healing gift; it exposes us in order to heal us.

The reading ends with what may have been an early Christian hymn: “Sleeper awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

This beautifully describes what Lent can be for us: **an awakening**. An awakening. We may pass through life half-asleep, distracted, spiritually drowsy. This holy season gently shakes us and says: Wake up. Remember who you are. You live in the light.

Do we, as The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, radiate the light of Christ to the surrounding world? Are we being called to shine more clearly by addressing issues we have overlooked? Where is the darkness among us, and around us, and who is affected by it? How might we shine a steady light of compassion, justice, and forgiveness? By Easter, we hope we can say that the light of Christ has grown stronger in our Good Shepherd community — a light that helps us see the needs of our world more clearly and shows us how we must act.

There is a strong link between the reading from Ephesians and today's Gospel from John. In Ephesians we hear, "Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light." Paul is not merely teaching ethical behavior; he is reminding believers of their new identity. In baptism, we passed from darkness into light. Our task now is to live outwardly what we already are inwardly.

This transformation is dramatized in the Gospel story of the man born blind. Jesus declares, "I am the light of the world," and then gives sight to a man who has never seen. The story begins simply with these words: "As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth." The physical healing, however, is only the beginning. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that this is not just a story about eyesight.

The man's *spiritual vision* develops in stages. First, when talking with neighbors, he calls Jesus "the man", as he said, "the man called Jesus made mud and spread it on my eyes." Later, while being questioned by the Pharisees, he calls him "a prophet." Finally, in his conversation with Jesus, he confesses, "Lord, I believe," and worships him.

Meanwhile, the irony deepens: those who claim to see – the religious authorities – grow increasingly blind. They cling stubbornly to their certainty by declaring they are disciples of Moses, and refuse the very light standing before them.

During Lent, Scripture invites us to examine our own sight. Is it possible to be religious and still miss what God is doing in our lives and in our world? We may know the language and doctrines of faith yet resist the transforming light God offers us this Lent. Inspired by today’s readings, we might ask: Where am I still blind? What truths about God, myself, or others do I avoid? Do I truly want to see?

The man born blind comes to faith in a rather simple way. He goes, washes, and gradually speaks the truth he is experiencing. He is a model for us. Change comes gradually. Insight unfolds step by step. We do not move from darkness to light instantly, but we do move toward it.

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is traditionally called “Laetare Sunday” — from the Latin Laetare, meaning “Rejoice.” Even in the midst of fasting and penance, there is joy. The light is already shining. Christ does not shame or accuse the blind man; he seeks him out, even after others cast him aside. Christ’s light is not a harsh interrogation. It is healing illumination.

Our Good Shepherd community is called not only to walk in the light ourselves, but also to be light for those who are excluded, judged, or left in the shadows. When members of the Christian community reflect the patience and mercy of Christ, people begin to see that Lent is about stepping into the light — trusting that the One who opened blind eyes is still at work among us.

The Scriptures are clear: we are called to be light not in the abstract, but for real people in real darkness:

- Those grieving or lonely
- Those burdened by shame or failure
- Those struggling economically
- Those excluded or judged
- Those who feel invisible

We may not have all the answers, but we can bring Christ's light into the darkness. Light may be as simple as a kind word spoken, a steady friendship, a courageous stand for what is right.

While many stumble in the shadows, even a small flame can make a difference. Christ does not ask us to create the light. He asks only that we let his light shine through us.

So, today, this Lent, may our simple hymn of praise be the song many of us learned as little children –

This little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine
Oh, this little light of mine
I'm going to let it shine
Let it shine, all the time, let it shine

Today is Laetare Sunday. Today we REJOICE. Jesus brought light into the world. Into our world. Rejoice. Thanks be to God. Amen