

Epiphany, 2022—

So, I have a question for you. Have you visited the home of someone you think is great, someone you admire, say, George Washington's home—Mt. Vernon—or Elvis Presley's Memphis home—Graceland?

During my last summer's vacation, I visited one of these special historical homes. It's the home of Louisa May Alcott. She lived when Abraham Lincoln did.

Alcott is the author of one of the most famous and popular novels of all time—*Little Women*. That novel has been adapted into a movie seven times—and into made-for-TV movies twice. There have been multiple Broadway plays. There's been a musical—and even a ballet.

The book, two recent movies, and the historical house I visited—beautifully capture the reality of life in the 19th-century. In particular, they remind us of something which many of us may take for granted today.

It's...Light!

So, imagine what it would be like to live in a world without electricity—with candles and lamps giving off whatever light they can.

When the main character in *Little Women*—her name is Jo March—when Jo March embarks on her career as a writer, she often has to write in the evening, using only candlelight, or gaslight, or the flickering flames from logs in the fireplace.

Even during daytime, the natural light inside the March family home—any home of that time—must have been drenched in shadow in parts of every room. In the 1800s, you couldn't just flick a switch on the wall or click your iPhone to get more illumination. You made do with whatever daylight or artificial light was available. Considering that now, we can realize how much light changes everything, and how electricity and the light bulb have transformed the world we live in—and done it, really, in just 150 years.

Imagine, then, what it was like thousands of years ago—and how much light meant to people at that time—people living so very often in deep darkness, especially during wintertime.

One of the Scriptures we heard during Advent tells us: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” You know, we are that “people” referred to there. We're among the people who now see that

God light even more clearly.

This glorious feast of Epiphany that we celebrate this weekend, is very much a feast of light.

The very name, Epiphany, means manifestation—or revelation. It means to see what usually is not seen—or what is unseeable—what is unknowable.

It reminds us, in many ways, of how our lives are transformed by light.

The Scriptures today celebrate that—and celebrate, as well, the presence of God’s spirit light in our world, the light that is Jesus Christ. “Your light has come,” Isaiah cries out. “Upon you, the Lord shines. Nations shall walk by your light.”

And Matthew’s Gospel underscores the astonishing fact that the newborn king of the Jews is revealed, in fact, by light—the light of a star—a starlight that guides the Magi—a light that points the way and scatters the darkness and reveals for all to see...our salvation.

Light changes everything. At this moment, as we wade into a New Year and give thanks for the light that is Our Lord, we remember that the very first words God speaks in all of Scripture, his first line in Genesis, defines everything. “Let there be light.”

God has always intended for us to live in light—to be people of his...light.

But you and I know... so often, too often, we choose the dark. The dark of selfishness. Of anger and vengeance. Of pride.

And so it is fitting that the coming of Jesus—the arrival of our salvation—is announced, once again, with light.

In this Gospel, as the Magi follow their star, God once again says: “Let there be light.” And these words, in effect, also say: Let there be hope. Let there be empathy. Let there be healing. Let there be love. Let there be...light.

God said “Let there be light” to each of us at our Baptism, when the flickering flame from the parish church’s Easter Candle lit our own Baptism Candle, and the priest or deacon said: “Receive the light of Christ.” Even there, at our own beginning: Let there be...light. In other words, let you and I be the light the world so desperately needs.

Epiphany reminds us where that light began—with stunning starlight from the heavens—with a

declaration from God—with a baby that came into the world to grow and to live and to teach and to heal—and to suffer and to die for our sake. The great wonder and mystery of our faith is that this light lives on. It cannot be extinguished. It really burns more brightly if we incline ourselves to see it—and to use it.

It lives. This light lives. It lives in missionaries, carrying the Gospel message to distant corners of the world that even now may not have electric lights—and, even now, may not have heard the name of Jesus.

It lives in Fr. Xavier and every priest who, during each Masses' Consecration, elevates a circle of bread like another star, radiating still more light.

It lives in every believing Christian who has received the light of Christ and wants to pass it on, giving dignity to those on the margins, or care to those who are forgotten, or simple kindness and mercy to those for whom the world has been cruel and merciless. It lives when we proclaim how much we cherish and respect life—and how fervently we pray for peace in the name of the Prince of Peace.

It is a prayer we are offering today with special urgency and hope. We pray for peace in our troubled, confused, and hurting world. And we look with gratitude and love toward the light that has redeemed us and pray at the start of this New Year that we may embrace that light with greater gratitude, understanding, and fidelity.

If you're still looking for a resolution for this New Year, you might consider this: to remember God has given us his only Son, and that we have received, by virtue of our Baptism, the light of Christ.

That's our gift! And we can make that be our hope. We can make that be our prayer. In whatever darkness we find ourselves right now—amid whatever shadows we live in—God's first great command—"Let there be light!"—still calls to us. And it is a call we need to carry forth to others, right? Four words that, if we can live them a little better, our personal world can change, and, in some small way, the larger world, as well. On this Epiphany—and always—if we so choose—if we so commit—we can be God's people of...light.

Please give it some thought. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!