



“Lord Jesus Christ, enlighten your handmaid, because you are God, the true light.”

I’ll bet you don’t know who spoke the words quoted above. Because we are in the season of Epiphany, which many of us think of as a season of light, these words fit into our celebration of Jesus as the light of the world being made known for all to see. Beginning with the Day of Epiphany, on which we celebrate the Magi visiting the baby Jesus, Epiphany means manifestation or revealing, in this case the revealing of the Christ as God’s light in the darkness of this world. The themes throughout Epiphany center on this revelation of Jesus for the sake of God’s people, touching on different stories in which Jesus is “made known” in some way to the people of God. The theme of light radiates throughout the season as a natural metaphor since we think of learning something new, or having a revelation, as an event of enlightenment. The season of Epiphany reaches its crescendo on the mountaintop, as we hear the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus, when Jesus shines in glory for some of his disciples to witness, sort of a preview of what is to come after the darkness of death and the tomb. As we travel through the season of Epiphany, we encounter many stories of this Jesus as he reaches out to the people around him who are touched in some way by the darkness of this world. Through these interactions with Jesus, God’s light breaks through the darkness and those who are broken are made whole. With the darkness of this world giving way to the brilliance of God’s light in Jesus, and with stories of this light of the world being made known as Jesus interacts with and changes the lives of the people of God, it is obvious why the symbolism of light is so prominent in the season of Epiphany.

Back to our quote. On its surface, it sounds very much like it might fit well into a general Epiphany theme, and it does. However, it comes to us in a story about a figure in church history

whose name we remember every Epiphany. The words spoken above, according to early Church legend, were pronounced by none other than Saint Valentinus, or Saint Valentine, whom we commemorate in the month of February. There are a few old stories which harken back to the late Third Century, perhaps around the year 270AD, about two people named Valentinus who were executed by Roman emperors because of their faith in Jesus. Scholars think the stories relate an oral history of one courageous Christian who acted on his faith in order to make Christ known, and it cost him his life by beheading. This Christian, named Valentinus, which translates to “strong,” is said to have healed the daughter of a Roman nobleman, restoring her sight by speaking the words quoted above. The nobleman subsequently converted to become a believer in Jesus, but when the Emperor learned of this episode, Valentinus was executed, as Christianity was considered a heretical religion by Rome at the time. Doesn’t sound like a natural beginning to our current celebration of St. Valentine’s Day, does it? Valentinus, or Valentine, was considered a minor saint throughout history, whose day was commemorated on February 14. It wasn’t until Geoffrey Chaucer wrote about this day as the time of year when birds and humans begin to pair off, that the commemoration turned toward a day of celebrating love. Since then, the celebration of Valentine’s Day has grown to become a day focusing on the joy of love.

This is the other place where St. Valentine’s story meets Epiphany. While tradition has the saint speaking the words quoted above about light, which fits nicely into our journey through Epiphany, the upholding of love also is a prominent theme in Epiphany. After all, it is the “light of the world” Jesus who came to enact God’s love for God’s people. The light which defeats darkness manifests itself through love/ So, as you celebrate Valentine’s Day this year, in whatever way it touches you, may it be a reminder that Jesus, the light of the world, also came to share with us the depth of God’s love.