

Sermon for January 5, 2014 - Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1-3 (ESV)

Theme: Arise, shine, your Light has come!

- 1) *Bask in the Son's nourishing rays.*
- 2) *Reflect His Light to the world.*
- 3) *Rejoice in the fellowship of believers.*

¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. ³ And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ⁴ Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. ⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. ⁶ A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD.

The cold, dark days of winter have begun in earnest. Lack of sunlight means that our bodies are not producing enough vitamin D. This affects our mood and can lead to seasonal depression and possibly other serious side effects.

Do you know what the best remedy is for “the winter blues”? Sunlight – the more the better. Subconsciously, this is one reason why we look forward to spring. More exposure to the sun means more vitamin D, which will help improve both our mood and overall health.

We understand the importance of sunlight for our physical health, but there is also another kind of light that affects our wellbeing. It's called SON-light, not light from the sun in the sky, but light that comes from God the Son who is sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven. This SON-light is vital to our spiritual health. A lack of Vitamin D could lead to rickets and possibly even physical death. A lack of heavenly SON-light causes all sorts of spiritual ailments and will eventually lead to eternal death in hell. This is why we need to bask in the light of the SON by basking in the light of Christ. With Isaiah as our guide, let us be encouraged to do this, under the theme: **Arise, shine, your Light has come!** *1) Bask in the Son's nourishing rays. 2) Reflect His Light to the world. 3) Rejoice in the fellowship of believers.*

Part One: Bask in the Son's nourishing rays.

Our text is a prophecy of both Christ's coming and the New Testament era that would follow. It uses pictures and symbols to describe spiritual truths. Our text begins:

¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.

The darkness that covers the earth is sin, spiritual ignorance, unbelief and death. But wherever God is, there is light, knowledge, righteousness and life. The problem is that mankind has been separated from God ever since Adam and Eve ate the fruit God told them not to eat. Their act of disobedience brought sin

into the world. Their act of disobedience separated mankind from God to such a degree, that God had to call out to Adam: *"Where are you?"* (Gen 3:9 ESV)

Ever since the fall into sin, man has been living in the darkness. He neither knows, nor does He want to know God. Sinful flesh gives birth to sinful flesh (cf. John 3:6) The Bible has this to say about the condition of man: *"None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* (Rom 3:10-12 ESV) And, before the LORD worked faith in our hearts, we too were a part of this darkness.

But here is the good news: God did not want us lost in the darkness of sin and death, so He sent His Son into the world in order to save it. This is what the celebration of Christmas is all about. Jesus is the light that *shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* (Joh 1:5 ESV)

How, exactly, is Jesus *the true light, which gives light to everyone* (Joh 1:9 ESV)? He's the Son of God. To see and know Jesus is to see and know God's saving love for mankind – a love that does not want a single soul to perish (1 Timothy 2:4), a love that takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11), a love that was willing to sacrifice *his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* (Joh 3:16 ESV)

Jesus is the light of God's love that came into the world and His Word is the rays that scatter the darkness – even to the point of penetrating our own sickly flesh. His Law revealed our pitiful condition - showing us our sins and calling us to repentance. His Gospel, however, is the light that revealed our salvation. It tells us that Jesus took all our sins upon himself in order to suffer and die for them. He rose again from the dead to show that all our sins have been paid for in full. We are forgiven and receive this forgiveness through faith in Him. The warm life giving rays of the Gospel melted our unbelief. Like the spring sun, it let the seed of the Word sprout into faith. Forgiveness, life and salvation, joy and happiness: these are the effects God's wonderful Gospel light - still emanating from the Babe in Bethlehem - have on us.

Part Two: Reflect His Light to the world.

But the glorious light of Jesus – radiating on us through the Gospel – doesn't only have the effect of bringing us to life. It also has the effect of illuminating us to such a degree that we turn into lights in the darkness. This is why the first words of our text encourage us to *arise and shine!*

But how do we arise and shine in this dark world? By being like the moon and reflecting the SON. As we expose ourselves to the Gospel, its rays illuminate and reflect off us into the world around us. The Gospel changes us from being a cold, dark rock, into a heavenly light. It changes our attitudes, our speech, even our actions, as St. Paul once wrote: *at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."* (Eph 5:8-14 ESV)

Faith in the Gospel has changed us. Our top priority is now to give glory to Jesus, who saved us. We will no longer join in the worldly and sinful "fun" that attracts so many. Our simple change in conduct will expose sinful behavior for what it is. This is not to say that we will be sinless. We, sadly, still have a sinful nature until the day we die. But, the Gospel will change us to such a degree that our sinful nature will no longer control us. When we sin we will seek and find forgiveness and Christ. We will also find in the message of His forgiveness true motivation and joy to live as children of light in our words and actions, as

St. Paul says: *Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.* ¹⁵ *And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.* (2Co 5:14-15 NIV'84)

The Gospel has changed us from being a dead, dark rock into a bright, full moon – a heavenly luminary shedding light on this dark world so that people can know that the SON is coming soon to scatter the darkness forever. The Gospel causes us to share Christ's concern for the people of this world, as we pray for our family, friends and community and, like St. Paul, confess to them: ²⁰ *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.* ²¹ *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (2 Co 5:20-21 NIV'84)

Part Three: Rejoice in the fellowship of believers.

And what will be the result of every believer sharing the light of Christ in the world? Our text tells us: ³ *And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.* ⁴ *Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.*

Now, understand this text correctly: it does not mean that we will always see wonderful, fruitful results as we share the Gospel – that hordes of people will come to faith through our personal sharing of the Gospel. But the Gospel will have an effect. As God's Church collectively shares the Gospel, the Gospel calls, gathers and enlightens believers from every nation under heaven. It happens – in some places slowly and in other places more rapidly. It will happen, until every one of God's elect has been brought to faith.

Many times we think we are few in number – a smallish congregation, in a small town, that belongs to a small synod. But the truth is that we are united to all believers throughout the globe. The Gospel marches on. Every day that passes, someone, somewhere is coming to faith. And this thought brings us great joy, as our text continues: ⁵ *Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult.*

A friend of mine is going to visit another friend in Africa. This is his first trip over there and He is excited to see our friend, the animals and the landscape . . . But do you know what He is most excited about? He told me on Friday: "I can't wait to go to church to see my African brothers and sisters and worship Christ with them." I know exactly what He is talking about. I have very fond memories of being able to worship with fellow Christians around the globe – Americans, Europeans, Africans, people from Asia and South America . . . It always thrills my heart to be with fellow Christians and see the Gospel call many more people to faith.

And you also have experienced this thrill. On Christmas, there were a lot of people in Church - many people you didn't know. Many of you expressed how happy you were – worshipping in a full Church. What a thrill! Yes, our hearts exult, hearing and seeing many people come to faith, and bring with them all the gifts and talents God have given them to be used in Christ's service, as our text continues: *the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you.* ⁶ *A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD.*

The wise men were the first non-Jews to come and worship Jesus. They brought their gifts to be used in service of the Gospel, and ever since that day many more Gentiles, from every nation under heaven, have come, laying down their time, talent and treasures before Christ – dedicating themselves and their lives in service of the Gospel so that many more people might believe and be saved.

You and I are a part of that throng of people, who have come to Christ. We are part of the number who work together – using all that God has given us – so that the light of Jesus Gospel might shine brightly in the world. We do this willingly and cheerfully. Why? Because we know that all that we have and are really belongs to God and has been merely entrusted to us to use to His glory. He has shared everything with us – giving us life and salvation. How can we not respond by sharing all we have with Christ so that others might believe and be saved?

Fellow children of God, redeemed and forgiven through the wonderful love of Christ: **Arise, shine, for your Light has come!** *Bask in the Son's nourishing rays. Reflect His Light to the world and rejoice in the fellowship of believers. Amen.*