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Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1-6

**Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD is dawning upon you. <sup>2</sup>Look, the darkness covers the earth, and deep darkness covers the peoples, but the LORD will dawn upon you, and his glory will be seen over you. <sup>3</sup>Nations will walk to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. <sup>4</sup>Look up. Look all around and see! All of them are gathered. They come to you. Your sons will come from far away, and your daughters will be carried on the hip. <sup>5</sup>Then you will look and be radiant. Your heart will race with excitement and burst with joy. For the great riches of the sea will be delivered to you. The wealth of the nations will come to you. <sup>6</sup>Caravans of camels will cover your land, young camels from Midian and Ephah. All of them from Sheba will come. They will carry gold and incense, and they will announce the good news of the LORD's praises. (NIV 84)**

Theme: Arise and Shine!

1. The Light of Christ has come
2. That Light attracts others to the gospel
3. That Light fills us with Joy.

It's Saturday morning about 10:00, the sun is shining, it's a nice day out and there are a lot of things to get done. But your teenagers? They are making good use of those black-out curtains in their rooms. The alarm on their phones went off hours ago but that didn't get them up. So what do you do? You burst into their rooms, yell "rise and shine" and open up the curtains—maybe even the windows. You might here some moans and groans, but the sun shining in their previous dark rooms will cause them to get up and get on with their day!

Today isn't really God's wake-up call; but he is telling us to look at the light of Christ and all the blessings he gives us day after day.

Earlier in this book Isaiah prophesied about the Babylonian captivity. This wouldn't take place for over a century later, but eventually it did happen that the people of Judah and Jerusalem were taken into exile. God would forsake his people, turn their back on them, and let their enemy nations destroy their cities and kill their people. So Jerusalem

Holy Cross, Standish, MI.

January 8, 2017

including the temple was destroyed, and the people lived as foreigners and captives.

Isaiah sees the people in exile as living in darkness. The people would mourn that God has cast them off completely and forgotten about them forever. This was a punishment of God because of their unbelief, rebellion, and sin. The weight of their sins and the consequences of their actions hung over them like a dark cloud.

We live in a world that is darkened by sin. Isaiah wrote, **the darkness covers the earth**

This is the darkness of unbelief and sin. The world is covered in sin. There is nothing that isn't affected by it. Pain, sorrow, sickness, death—they are all results of sin. All one has to do is to look at the crime going on in the world today, all the strife and discord, the natural disasters, the hatred and disgust for God's word and those that follow it, to know that the darkness of sin covers over the world. It is also the darkness of unbelief—a heart that doesn't know or believe in God is blind to the way of salvation and it is a life that isn't obeying God or love others; and so it contributes even more so to the darkness of this world.

But Isaiah continued, **deep darkness covers the peoples.** It's still the same darkness—the darkness of sin and unbelief. There is a thick darkness that covers over all of us because we are all sinners. It doesn't matter how good you think you are or try to be, or how happy and cheerful, a dark cloud covers you. It's like one of those puffy white clouds, rather it's one of those large ominous black clouds, the kind that makes the street lights come on and warns you that trouble is coming. It isn't just a cloud that follows over the top of us like some cartoon, but it is a deep darkness that envelopes us.

Some of us might take exception to such a description, "I'm a good person, I strive to do what is right, to show love to others, and so on." Yes, you are that way now, but not by nature. And at times our sinful nature rears its ugly head. Our sinful nature loves the darkness of sin and unbelief; it loves the way of the world. It doesn't gravitate toward God's Word. It looks first toward itself. It is concerned with satisfying its wants and pleasures. We often join in with the dark deeds of the world. And by nature we are no different than the rest of the world—a thick cloud of darkness envelopes all of us.

When it's dark out you can turn on a light in order to see—and it helps, but only in a limited way. It's still dark out; you can't get rid of that darkness. The only true remedy is the sun's rising at dawn. For sin's darkness the only remedy is the Light of Christ! Isaiah writes, **Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD is dawning upon you... the LORD will dawn upon you, and his glory will be seen over you.** That light is Christ. He brings the light of forgiveness through the gospel, the light of salvation through faith in him alone. Christ paid for our sins through the shedding of his blood. On account of him we are declared not guilty by God. As great as the darkness of our sinful nature is, Christ is greater. He alone is the answer to the darkness of unbelief and sin that dwells in our hearts by nature. Like the sun rising in the morning to shine light on the dark world, so is Christ who shines light on this sin-darkened world. He has overcome the darkness of sin for us.

Not only is Christ called Light, but he is also called the "Glory of the Lord." This term is found in numerous places in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. For instance it was the Glory of the Lord that was in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that led the people in the wilderness. When they were camped it dwelled in the tabernacle, which was like their portable temple. It was the Glory of the Lord that dwelled on the top of Mount Sinai when the Lord gave the 10 commandments among other laws to Moses. It is a manifestation of God's glory—giving them a glimpse of his divine splendor. It was an indication of his love, that he was with his people. The Glory of the Lord is often appeared in a cloud or something of the sort—bright and magnificent. By nature we are so dark with sin and God is so great and glorious that we cannot look upon him and live. So God needed to hide himself while showing the people his glory. And that is what we see in the baby Jesus at Christmas. John writes in the first chapter of his gospel, **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.** In Christ we see the glory of God—hidden in the flesh of mankind. We get glimpses of Christ's divine glory from time to time like when he

performed a miracle or on the Mount of Transfiguration, but for the most part God's glory remained hidden in the flesh of Jesus. But that is why we came at Christmas, isn't it? We see the Christ-child, God taking on flesh and living among us! Christmas is a glorious and happy day, filled with joy and songs of praise and thanks. A child was born to us—the gift of a Savior! Let that joy of Christmas continue throughout the year. For this gift of Christ isn't like a gift that you see or use only once; it is a gift that you make use of every day and gives you eternal life! So as we came to worship on Christmas Eve, let us continue to do so throughout the year! We had about 40 visitors on Christmas Eve. How did that make you feel? Were you happy to see them, glad that we had a full house? Or were you annoyed that they took your parking spot or sat in your pew? Of course you were happy and glad—dozens of non-members got to hear the Christmas gospel and joined together praising our God and Savior, Jesus Christ—we'd welcome such visitors any day of the year! Isaiah writes, **Nations will walk to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Look up. Look all around and see! All of them are gathered. They come to you. Your sons will come from far away, and your daughters will be carried on the hip.** Isaiah sees people from all nations flocking to Jerusalem. Jerusalem that would lie in ruins during the exile but the Savior would come—the light of the gospel would shine brightly upon the city and it was like a beacon that summoned the people. From all over the world—Jews and Gentiles alike—people would come to Jerusalem. They would hear the gospel of Christ. Like insects being attracted to a light in the middle of a summer's night, so the gospel attracts people of all nations. Just as the many visitors we had on Christmas Eve were a welcome sight, so the Gentile visitors were a welcome sight in Jerusalem! Our work and labor in the Lord are not in vain—so let us do all we can to share the gospel that others may join us in singing the praises of Christ.

Through the gospel God added more and more people to his Church—Jews and Gentiles alike. We see an example of this today. In just a few minutes Kayla will stand up here and confess her faith in the one true Lord. In a sin-darkened world where very few confess their faith

in the Lord and fewer adhere to all of God's Word—that is what Kayla will do today. The Lord has strengthened her faith through the gospel to reject what society and reason says is right and true in favor of Christ and his Word! God willing we'll see another example next week when we have a baptism; God is adding to his Church and our church.

These are great occasions—don't just pass over them or barely blink an eye, even if you have no connections to those getting confirmed and baptized. God is adding to his Church; people are being saved and forgiven, the truth is being taught and people are believing. Those who were once in darkness are basking the light of God's grace, in the forgiveness of sins and his free salvation! Be joyful that the Lord is adding to our family of faith; you are gaining brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Gentiles who were brought to faith, didn't just fill the streets of Jerusalem; they weren't part of God's family by name only. No, Isaiah writes, **They will carry gold and incense, and they will announce the good news of the LORD's praises.** They produced fruits of faith. They sang the praises of the Lord, they shared their new-found faith. They couldn't hold back their worship and praise. For they were brought out of the darkness of unbelief and into the light of the gospel. They had been brought to see the way of salvation and so they had to announce the good news of Christ!

And they brought offerings to the Lord. Of course, we think of the wise men giving gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the little boy Jesus; but that is only the first occurrence. For 2000 years God's people have been giving gifts to Jesus. It is our way of showing our thankfulness to the Lord for all he has done for us and for supporting the spread the gospel so that others may be brought out of darkness and into his wonderful light. The more people who are brought to faith, the more the Lord is praised and the more who are able to help spread the light of the gospel!

The Lord has been doing the same thing through the same gospel for thousands of years. He shines the light of his gospel on sin-darkened hearts. He brings to light what was previously hidden, he makes sinners into saints. He brings to faith and keeps them in the faith.

He rouses and awakens! The gospel shines in our hearts and the hearts of many others. Let us look around and see the great deeds of the Lord: from darkness to light, from unbelief to faith, from death to eternal life—that is what the Lord has done. That joy we had at Christmas—let it dwell in our hearts over and over again for Christ's grace is never-ending. Amen.