

Epiphany Sunday  
January 5, 2014  
Isaiah 60:1-6

In Christ Jesus, who is the Light of the world, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Darkness, pitch black darkness can be a very scary thing. Scripture calls wickedness and unbelief, living in spiritual darkness. It calls damnation wandering in the blackness of darkness and being cast into outer darkness. So dark you cannot see anything. How scary!

Astronaut Jim Lovell was returning from a combat mission and couldn't find his aircraft carrier. It was pitch black over the sea and because they were under combat conditions, the carrier had all of its lights off. His radio navigation equipment was of no use because they were under radio silence to avoid enemy detection. In a last attempt to determine his location, he turned on his map light to see if he could calculate his position. Suddenly an electrical short caused all of the lights in his cockpit to go out. It was then that he saw it! In total darkness there was a luminescent glow in the water. It was the glow of the sea plankton that is generated by the wake of a ship as it passes through it. All he had to do was follow this glowing sea plankton, like a "lighted highway" to the ship. Astronaut Lovell said, "You don't know what will transpire to lead you home. If the map light had not shorted out, I would never have seen the glowing wake."

That glowing plankton guided Mr. Lovell home in pitch blackness. And Isaiah this morning tells us that we too have a **Guiding Light** that shines upon us. We read again verses 1-2: **ARISE, SHINE; FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME! AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD IS RISEN UPON YOU. FOR BEHOLD, THE DARKNESS SHALL COVER THE EARTH, AND DEEP DARKNESS THE PEOPLE; BUT THE LORD WILL ARISE OVER YOU, AND HIS GLORY WILL BE SEEN UPON YOU.**

These powerful words of Isaiah, first written to the Jewish people, are like the loud ringing of an alarm clock going off in the darkness of the early morning, rousing them to awaken from their sleep. They had fallen asleep spiritually and many had sunk into the deep darkness of despair, unbelief and spiritual death. Now it was time to wake up, to "rise and shine."

But its one thing to hear the command and quite another to do what is commanded. But this command to "rise and shine" contains the message of God's grace, which gave Israel the ability to get up and rejoice, for their **"light has come and the glory of the LORD has risen upon"** them.

Who is this light and what is the glory of the Lord? Simply put it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The message of God's love to mankind as seen in the person and work of the Messiah, the Savior, Jesus. There was good reason for Israel to **RISE** from the gloom of despair and spiritual sleep and **SHINE** with the joy of salvation, for God's prophet saw the fulfillment of God's greatest promise to His people--the promise of the Savior, the Light of the world.

**I: NOTICE HOW THAT LIGHT HAS SHINED UPON YOU PERSONALLY.**

The world today is no different from that of Isaiah's day. Total depravity completely covers everyone everywhere, leaving all in darkness. This spiritual darkness is much more scary and dangerous than any physical darkness can ever be--a darkness of spiritual falsehood and lies, of evil and empty vanity, of deception and death, of wickedness and waywardness.

That was how life was for us once also. Living with the lie of self-righteousness, the vanity of thinking that we could save ourselves, the evil of knowing how vile our heart really is and yet the deception that we somehow could atone for it all by being good enough.

But the Light of the Gospel has shined into our hearts and we have been brought to a saving faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Paul writes in Eph. 5:8 **FOR YOU WERE ONCE DARKNESS, BUT NOW YOU ARE LIGHT IN THE LORD. WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT.** Thank God that He sent His Son into this sin-darkened world. We read in John 1 **THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US, AND WE BEHELD HIS GLORY, THE GLORY AS OF THE ONLY BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH...IN HIM WAS LIFE, AND THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN. AND THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS...THAT WAS THE TRUE LIGHT WHICH GIVES LIGHT TO EVERY MAN WHO COMES INTO THE WORLD.**

But unfortunately the majority of the world did not and still does not see the Light, does not receive

Jesus, does not believe in Him. What a blessing of God's grace that we are no longer living in the darkness of spiritual death and unbelief, in the fear and panic of what will happen when we die, or in the despair of sadness and grief. We can "Rise and Shine" with joy and gladness even in the face of great sorrows and problems, even in the midst of death and sadness because the Lord Jesus rises over all of our problems and His glory is seen by us, as a Guiding Light to lead us out of sin and death into the marvelous light of the good news of sins forgiven by Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. The Light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ has shined upon you and me, personally!

## **II: NOW BE ACTIVE IN LETTING YOUR LIGHT SHINE OUT TO OTHERS**

We read vs. 3-6 **THE GENTILES SHALL COME TO YOUR LIGHT, AND KINGS TO THE BRIGHTNESS OF YOUR RISING. 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 NURSED AT YOUR SIDE. THEN YOU SHALL SEE AND BECOME RADIANT, AND YOUR HEART SHALL SWELL WITH JOY; BECAUSE THE ABUNDANCE OF THE SEA SHALL BE TURNED TO YOU, THE WEALTH OF THE GENTILES SHALL COME TO YOU. THE MULTITUDES OF CAMELS SHALL COVER YOUR LAND, THE DROMEDARIES OF MIDIAN AND EPHAH; ALL THOSE FROM SHEBA SHALL COME; THEY SHALL BRING GOLD AND INCENSE, AND THEY SHALL PROCLAIM THE PRAISES OF THE LORD.**

The picture Isaiah is drawing for us here is like that of seeing those bright beams of light that shine from those large light machines up into the sky. You see the beam from a distance and you want to find out where it is coming from. It draws you to it.

In this dark world of spiritual ignorance and unbelief the Church of God, you and I and all believers, are to let the Gospel shine forth and beckon others to come and see, see where this light is coming from and the Lord promises us: **Gentiles shall come to your light.**

Lift up your eyes and look around you! See what wonders God is doing in our midst. The Gospel message is going out from Peace Thru Christ. Every year the Lord has called out from spiritual darkness those who now know Jesus as Lord and Savior. They are now our spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ, whom we pray with and pray for, are concerned about, carry in our hearts and nurse with the Gospel of Christ's forgiving love. Every year our little children hear this message in our Sunday School and Christian Day School as they learn to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. What radiance is shining forth from within these walls. The Light of this world. God is keeping His promise!

But that Light of the world can only shine into the hearts of others if we take it with us and share it with others outside of these walls. When we do that how does Isaiah say we will feel: **YOUR HEART SHALL SWELL WITH JOY.** When we see the Holy Spirit lead others to respond to the Gospel message by creating faith in their hearts, we cannot help but swell with joy! Paul wrote in I Thess. 2:19, 20: **FOR WHAT IS OUR HOPE, OR JOY, OR CROWN OF REJOICING? IS IT NOT EVEN YOU IN THE PRESENCE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AT HIS COMING? FOR YOU ARE OUR GLORY AND JOY.**

Here is why we are to "rise and shine." The world is dying and needs our witness. The world needs to see the light, the truth. The Gospel message is that light and truth which leads to Christ and salvation. There is surely nothing more moving, more meaningful or more joyful for a Christian and a Christian congregation than to hear that many will be brought into God's kingdom as Jesus' disciples. It may appear that the Church of Jesus Christ is losing the battle for souls, that we are losing the battle against sin and Satan, that the darkness of unbelief is spreading more and more blackness over this world and that there is no way we can stop it and win.

We see people living in unrepentant sin, others neglecting the Word and many act with indifference when the Word is proclaimed and preached. But Christ Himself reminds us that the gates of hell shall not prevail against or overcome His Church. We can go forward in confidence knowing that even as over the centuries countless millions have been **CALLED OUT OF THE DARKNESS INTO HIS MARVELOUS LIGHT**--the Lord will continue to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify His own through the Light of the Gospel we proclaim until He comes again.

Verses 5 and 6 reveal another reason for the great joy we as people of God experience when we watch converts streaming to the Light of Christ Jesus: these converts don't come empty-handed. Isaiah mentions the wealth of the seas and the riches of the nations among the treasures the Gentiles shall bring with them into Christ's kingdom. We see that with the Gentile Wise Men and the gifts of gold,

frankincense and myrrh. But we also see that in the offerings of their time, talents and thanksgiving.

We too have seen that in our midst. These past two years have been the best years for our love offerings to our Lord for His work. The Lord moved the hearts of His people to support the remodeling of our church inside, a new church sign and new windows and siding on the parsonage within the past few years. Our Sunday morning Bible Class attendance has increased. These are all visible evidences of the invisible faith in our hearts. Jesus' followers will give the very best of their time, talents and treasures for the sake of the Gospel light.

When we see these things happening it leads to songs of praise and thanks to God. The glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds and they went to see the baby Jesus and rejoiced, **praising God for all the things that they had seen and heard, as it was told to them.** The Wise Men **rejoiced with exceedingly great joy when they saw the star** and fell down and worshiped the Christ child and presented Him with precious gifts.

**RISE, SHINE FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME!** May we be active throughout the coming New Year letting our light shine to others to the glory of our God and for the welfare of lost mankind. This Wednesday we will have the blessed opportunity to learn more about how to spread this Good News to others, to learn how to look for the right times and places for religious discussions and how then to start religious discussions with others and how to use social media to witness about Jesus. We pray you will take the time to come and share your talents with us.

Jesus said, **YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. A CITY THAT IS SET ON A HILL CANNOT BE HIDDEN. NOR DO THEY LIGHT A LAMP AND PUT IT UNDER A BASKET, BUT ON A LAMPSTAND, AND IT GIVES LIGHT TO ALL WHO ARE IN THE HOUSE. LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE BEFORE MEN, THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.**

May we move boldly into this New Year, because the light of Christ floods our hearts, giving us the confidence and assurance to shine the bright light of the Gospel to all in this sin-darkened world. Remember the truth, that one little candle can light up a whole room. So one little light, one believer speaking the Gospel of Christ can enlighten the unbelieving world around it.

Amen.