

SERMON FOR EPIPHANY SUNDAY – January 5, 2014
Isaiah 60:1-6 “Christian, Let Your Light Shine!” ILCW-C

Dear Friends in Christ, the Light of the world!

For many weeks now our cities, stores, offices and homes have been ablaze with lights. Many hours and much effort are expended in brightening our holidays. So many shining lights add a sense or feeling of expectation, excitement, and exuberance to the Christmas season. January 6, Wednesday, is Epiphany. It marks the end of the formal Christmas celebrations. Those who have not already packed away their lights will do so speedily. Our Epiphany reading from Isaiah, however, gives us this challenge:

“Let the Gospel’s Light Shine on and through you!”

However, far from being an appeal to extend the dazzling display of electrical lights, God urges us to get to the heart of our purpose in life and to join our children in letting “this little Gospel light of mine” genuinely shine! And it is, to be sure, our Gospel light, but the only reason that we can shine is that His light shines on us. If it were up to us to produce light, happiness, peace, or fullness of life, we should have given up yesterday. We live in a world that, for all of its artificial glamour and light, is in darkness.

I. The Darkness in the world is appalling.

Mankind, by nature, doesn’t know anything but darkness. Sin envelopes all of life. Isaiah is right on target: **See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples** (v. 2). Even Israel of old repeatedly became engulfed by the darkness of sin. The prophet of the Lord minces no words in the chapter preceding our text: **Your iniquities have separated you from your God: Your sins have hidden his face from you...So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness: for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight: among the strong, we are like the dead** (59:2, 9-10).

Isaiah might well have been a reporter for any newspaper in any city or town in our nation. He would need no investigative skills; he would only need to observe people in life each day – all under the influence of sin.

- How people love to disobey and despise those whom God has placed over them! It makes little difference whether it is a parent, employer, or government official. Just ‘cut them down to size’ and then do your own thing.
- How people who claim to be among the most civilized on earth – love to maim and murder. About a million and a half unborn babies murdered by abortion is the U.S. every year! The darkness of sin is appalling!
- The beautiful, powerful, God-given gift of sex and sexuality is perverted by many for little more than fun and games, power and money.
- Many are too busy trying to accumulate things to care about their neighbor’s physical well being.
- Yes, people are too busy for God, but if things don’t go their way, they quickly blame Him for ‘letting this happen’ to them.

Yes, the darkness of sin is appalling: homes are broken, dreams shattered, relationships broken, and guilt multiplied. Yes, even as the Gospel is proclaimed so often and so clearly in our land,

people prefer to cling to their sin. Listen to what Jesus says: (John 3:19) **"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."**

Yes, we live in a dark world. We feel the lure to join its ways and experience its 'joys'. But the appeal of darkness is appalling. The stolen moment of bliss, the temporary bypassing of God's commandments, the ignoring of others' needs only throws us back into the misery of shame, guilt, and darkness. When the flashing neon lights of the world fail, there is darkness, and it is appalling, frightening.

II. Christ Dispels our Darkness.

But thank God, it need not remain either appalling or frightening. The Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that He dispels our darkness! His light shines on you! The devil may paint a picture of doom and gloom for us because our sin dishonors God and disgraces us. But God brings a bright new light into our lives.

The nation of Israel had chosen to live in such darkness that God in his love disciplined them through the nation of Babylon that led them into captivity. What a beautiful new day would dawn when He would recall them from their exile to His land of promise! Yet, He had something even better in mind for them, better than the pillar of light that He gave them in the Old Testament. God would bless them with the glory of His presence in the person of His Son. **"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you (v. 1).**

And isn't that why we celebrated Christmas? There is certainly more light inside Christian churches than in the stores and streets. For it is here, in God's house, that we hear the Good News that "to us a son is given." This Son, Jesus, born in Bethlehem, is indeed **"a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel (Luke 2:32).**

In His ministry, Jesus claimed concerning Himself: **"I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12).** Light disperses darkness.

- Even the crawling insects of the night in the garage or basement run in haste when the light is turned on.
- Thieves flee when the spotlight is turned on them. Evil is conquered when exposed to the love of God in Christ.

This does not mean that sin and its evil consequences just sort of melt away. Jesus in His love takes them away. He proved that by his life and ministry. He proved it when He absorbed all the darkness of hell itself on Calvary's Cross. God put all our sin on Jesus. Then the glorious Light of Easter dispelled the gloom of that black Friday!

The light of His love now shines (falls) on us. What a privilege to join the Wise Men in adoring Jesus as our Messiah/Savior!

- What joy to know that His Holy Spirit has called us **out of darkness into his marvelous light**, making **"His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (II Corinthians 4:6)!**
- Just as the rising morning sun quickly scatters the darkness of night, so Christ in His forgiving love quickly and effectively rids us of all guilt and condemnation. His love shines on us, dispelling our darkness.

However, His light not only shines on us; it also shines through us. How significant that preposition 'through' really is! The light of God's love is to reach others through us. Isaiah's words begin with two imperatives: "**Arise! Shine!**" Christians are not to be mere sponges, soaking up and storing God's love. They are to be lights, illuminating the darkness of the lives around them.

- God's work is not done when He has worked faith in us; He continues to work through us.
- If He only wanted to bring the light of his love to us, it would be best for us to die as soon as we become his children by faith.
- But He calls us to be His light, His witnesses to others.
- So, to let others see God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ through our words and lives is a responsibility that no Christian can deny. Yes, we are to "Let our light shine!"

Today we celebrate the journey of the wise men, coming from afar, led by a star to Bethlehem. However, it was not the star that they followed but the Child they found in Bethlehem that really gave them light. For this infant Jesus was their Savior! Isaiah was right! The light of Jesus would shine around the world, and it started already at his birth. Think of how many people heard about this newborn king from the lips of the wise men on their way back home.

It is the privilege of every generation of Christians, not only to pass the light of the Gospel on to it's own children, but also to enlarge the family through its witness. It is because Christians care enough to have the light of the Gospel shine through them and because God's Spirit blesses such witnessing to His Word that St. John pictures the ultimate scene of heaven as **A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language**, standing in white robes before the Lamb and praising his holy name. The light of the Gospel is shining through you and me as we send out, pray for, and support missionaries around the world.

Today the Lord challenges us to do more than support missionaries and bible translators overseas. He challenges each of us to let His light shine through us in a very personal way.

- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you recognize and seize opportunities to witness to one specific person about your Savior.
- Pray for guidance as you witness.
- Then without apology, let Christ shine through your life and speech. As Paul says: "**We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled...putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet** (I Thessalonians 5:5-6).

I am sure that everyone here this morning knows someone, perhaps someone very dear, who is even now in spiritual darkness, without faith in Jesus. My friends, it is not enough for us to say, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

- Certainly your own heart should jump for joy in Jesus, Your light and life.
- But don't stop there. You have heard that it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.
- Jesus, your Light has come, and He wants you to shine with His light.
- When all God's people join in shining together, we will be that city that is set on a hill and cannot be hidden.

Christians, fellow people of God: **Arise! Shine! Let Your Light Shine! Amen.**