

## The Light of Christ

Isaiah 60:1-6 (ESV)

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Word of God for today, as we celebrate the feast of Epiphany is from our Old Testament text, chapter 60 of the prophet Isaiah, especially this verse: “**Arise, shine, for your light has come!**”

Let us pray,  
May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Dear Christians,

One of my favorite depictions of the Christmas and Epiphany story is when artists place the Christ child as a shining light in the midst of darkness. Whether it's the adoration of the shepherds or the adoration of Magi, everyone is flocking to see this “nightlight Jesus”, this glowing baby, this true light of the world. I think this artist's choice beautifully communicates who this Jesus is and who we are. He is the Sun of righteousness, he is the brightness of the Father's face. We sit in darkness. We sit in shame and guilt. We sit in darkness and death. Yet the profound mystery of Christmas, the mystery of Epiphany, as we learn of this Christ child, is that this Christ has come to be our light. He has come to shine upon us. And through his shining, we also shine. As the light of Christ shines over all the earth, all the earth draws near to our light. So, we hear the exhortation of the prophet Isaiah, that we too shall shine the light of Christ. We hear: Rise! Shine the light of the Gospel!

**“Rise! Shine! For your light has come!”** Rise, shine you Christian people! Let your light emanate and scatter the darkness around you. How fitting it is that in our season of coldness and darkness, the Lord has given us the perpetual shining Sun with its rays of warmth and gladness. There are two great mysteries in our text from Isaiah: one, what is your light, and two, how you should shine.

Your light has dawned, your sun has arisen. What is this light, this brightness all around you? It is the appearance of the Lord. While the nations sit in darkness, while those outside God's testament and covenant cannot see, you have seen the glory of the Lord. This is your light: the glory of the Lord, the appearance of the true God. Greater than any celestial light, any star shining under the dome of the stars, is the shining star of Jesus Christ. This star was prophesied from of old: the star of Jacob that should arise.

The wicked prophet Balaam blessed the Israelites during their journey to the promised land with this message, **“I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.”** This star is equated with the mighty one of God who will destroy the enemies of the Israelites, to secure them safety and peace. He will be the one who will yield the scepter of power and might. He will crush Moab and the sons of Sheth. This Moab and Sheth were the relatives of Jacob and his sons, who opposed Israel as he approached the promised land. They could not stand to see God fulfill his promises. This star of Jacob has not only defeated Moab and Sheth, has not only guaranteed the entrance into the promised land, but he has defeated your Moab and Sheth; he has defeated death and hell; he has guaranteed for you an eternal dwelling. He has arisen to shine on the darkness of death. His rays reach out to the corners of the earth. There is no place where the light of Christ does not extinguish the darkness. This star is an everlasting star, this star which shines over you.

The amazing thing about this star of Jacob is that he does not shine alone. No, his shining causes you yourself to shine. Dear Christian, you have the light of Christ within you. This is what the prophet Isaiah means when he calls you to arise and shine. You are sons of light, sons of the one shining Sun. This is the other mystery which I mentioned from this text, the dignity and honor God has given his people that they should share in his light-shining. When Christ ascended to his Father, he could have ordained his Gospel to spread in a multitude of ways. He could have given his Gospel to be spread by angels. He could have had creation itself proclaim his wonders; the very stones could cry out. But instead of all these, he chose to place his Gospel into the mouths of men. Those who shared his flesh and blood shall be the ones who shine their lights into the darkness. That the salvation of souls is entrusted into the care of the church means it should be treated with great respect and awe.

Rise! Shine! For the world lies in darkness. A thick darkness has enveloped all the nations and the nations who do not have the light of Christ. They are under a darkness of blindness, a darkness of death, and a darkness of despair. The nations grope around in darkness, ignorant of God. Maybe they could explain something of a higher power, a force behind everything. They might speak as if “life” has done this to me, or the “universe” has caused this to be. They recognize that they are powerless a lot of times over what they can control. Yet, they don’t really understand who they themselves are supposed to be. They can kinda see that life is a big puzzle, but the puzzle is millions of pieces, all the pieces are black, and the edges are a circle; it’s impossible to crack the code. That is life for those who do not have the light of Christ.

The nations are also under a darkness of death. They are under death, but not just a death of human life. They are under a death which slithers its way, seeping into every crack and corner of man's experience. The earth itself withers and cracks, gasping for water. Buildings are dilapidated, full of moss and overgrowth. Harvests and reaping produce little. Violence and strife leads to the destruction of relationships and murder. Sadness and grief fills the land. Worry and anxiety fill the air because of lack. Justice and righteousness are vanquished, evil and perverseness rule the day. This is all from the darkness of death.

And where there is death, there is despair. Because even if the nations did have life, even if they had abundance, riches, growth, joy, and goodness, there is always an end. No one can escape the end; no one can escape loss. What is the point of all this life if I can't enjoy it forever? Who will I pass it onto? Will my family and friends even get to enjoy this abundance, or will they just squander it? What am I working towards? Where is there meaning? Is life even fair? Why does the fool and the wise suffer the same fate? Is there no justice? These are the questions posed by despair. This is the darkness that clouds the mind, that destroys hope.

The problem for the nations is that man can adjust to living in the darkness. After a while your eyes will make use of the dimness. It might even seem normal. Unfortunately for the nations, most of the time, they don't question the darkness. "This is just the way things go. That's life for you." They accept it as normal. Dear Christian, don't accept that as normal.

Yet, the light has arisen not just for you, dear sons of light. No, this light of Christ has arisen for the whole world and it shines upon the whole world. Isaiah prophesies that the nations will be drawn to your light; they will be drawn to Christ. He says, "**And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising**". The preaching of Christ will draw those in the darkness. This prophecy is true for the time of the church. The nations have been drawn, they are being drawn, and they will be drawn until Christ the true light returns to judge the living and the dead. Experience shows these words of Isaiah to come true. Not many of us are from the bloodline of Jesus Christ. No, we mostly come from the Gentiles. But we have been grafted into God's people. Our very gathering here testifies to these words having been fulfilled. And in our day this work continues. Whether it's in our congregation or in our sister congregations, the nations are drawn to the light of Christ. Those who were under the darkness of blindness, now have been illumined by the Holy Spirit and know of the true God. Those who were under the darkness of death, now have tasted eternal life in Christ. Those who were under the darkness of despair, now have the hope of the resurrection. And this work must and will continue. Through the mouths of preachers, through the

mouths of parents, through the mouths of neighbors, through the mouths of teachers, the light of Christ will scatter the darkness of unbelief.

So, when you see the nations gathering to you, the church, the light of Christ, rejoice and exult in the majesty of God. For Isaiah says, **“Lift up your eyes all around and see, they all gather together, they come to you...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 nations shall come to you.”** Like the angelic choirs in heaven over the repentance of a sinner, the church’s heart throbs and yearns for the gathering of God’s people from the nations. Joy and excitement abounds when God rescues one of his lost sheep. The face of the church shall shine with the brightness of an amazing feat. It is not a pride over any meager human accomplishment. No, this is a radiant joy for what God has wrought. The spectacular thing about this ingathering, this drawing of the nations is the more it occurs, the more brightness of light abounds. This is not as if the church is sharing a little piece of Christ’s light, and every new Christian diminishes my cut of the loot. No, the more of mankind is illumined, the more the light shines bright, the more warmth and radiancy there is for everyone. Rejoice then in this feast of light. Sing praises to your God who shines over all. Make merry upon what God delights in giving: the light of his grace. Exult in each and every soul in which Christ has arisen, for his spectacular work continues, his work of shining his love and mercy on all who sit in darkness.

As you meditate on this season of Epiphany, the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, do not lose sight on the effect of this revealing. As our Lord Jesus shines, the darkness is scattered. As our Lord Jesus shines, men receive the light of the world. As our Lord Jesus shines, new believers come into Jesus’ church. And when the nations come and see the Lord’s brightness within the walls of this congregation, rejoice and exult over this wonderful work of salvation. For this is the experience you yourself had, when you received the light of Christ, when your family received the light. As you are scattered this evening to return to your homes in the midst of winter darkness, let the light of Christ shine boldly into the night of human sin. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.