

The Epiphany of Our Lord (Observed), Sunday, January 9, 2022

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminster, Massachusetts

For Your Light Has Come

Isaiah 60:1–6

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

The prophet Isaiah announces a spectacular event: **“Arise, shine, for your Light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 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”** (vv 1–2).

“Let there be light” (Gen 1:3). God spoke, and it happened. That’s how it was in the beginning; that’s how it is still. Darkness may cover the earth, but God doesn’t leave the world in the dark. In the beginning, He gave the light of sun, moon, and stars. By their light, we still live each day. Yet their power is limited. The light of sun, moon, and stars can’t stop the darkness of sin and death. For that, God gave us the Greatest Light, His own Son—*God of God* and *Light of Light*, as we confess in the Creed. **In Him was life, and the life was the light of men** (Jn 1:4). The Light became flesh and shone among us, first in Mary’s womb, then in the manger, later to Magi from the East.

The Lord our God announces this Light through Isaiah the prophet. Like a blazing match lighting a candle, God enlightens us by this message and He causes us to shine with His glory, for the prophet says:

ARISE, SHINE, FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME (v 1).

I.

This cry goes out in full strength to the Church of all times and places. This cry comes to us. But why does the prophet call *us* to arise and shine? What’s the condition of our lives—of our bodies and souls—that he speaks to us like this?

This is our condition: Instead of being fully awake, alert, and alive in faith, the prophet speaks as though we are sluggish, sleepy, or even worse—dead. We need to be roused from our slumber. We need to be woken again—not with the wokeness of the world but by the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life. How have we fallen asleep? Do we pay lip service to our God while our hearts are far from Him? Do our eyes flutter open for this

hour each Sunday only to close the rest of the week? Have our ears become dull and unresponsive to His word? Have we nestled into sin or compromised for the sake of comfort? Because even a little disobedience, even a little anger, a little lust, a little taking what belongs to our neighbor, a little gossip and nursing of grudges, a little envy will begin to put us to sleep. And it never stays little, does it? Sin always grows—it grows until it chokes off our love. It grows until it darkens the truth. It grows until it deadens us to God.

Arise! Get up! Like the widow of Nain’s son, like Jairus’s daughter, like Lazarus, the beloved friend, hear the voice of your God and live. See the light, sit up, put off the grave clothes of sin, and come out of the tomb.

And our condition is also this: Instead of shining as a light in the world, so that others see our good works and glorify our heavenly Father, the prophet speaks as though we have hidden the light. We have put it under a basket, yes. We have concealed its flame. We need to be lit with the divine fire of God’s love. How have we hidden the light? Do we live to please ourselves rather than to serve our neighbor and please God? Have we let God’s word have its way with us and bring forth good fruit from our hands, our lips, and our minds? Have we been bold to share our faith, or have we hidden it out of shame and embarrassment? A concealed flame smolders and finally is snuffed out.

Shine! Be kindled and glow! Like Moses, who looked on the face of God, like St. Stephen, the first martyr, like the star that led the Magi to Jesus, reflect the warmth and love of God’s light.

ARISE, SHINE, FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME (v 1).

II.

The world in darkness lies. We in darkness lie. In the darkness of ignorance, sin, and unbelief. But now **your light has come**, Isaiah says. **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it** (Jn 1:5). Jesus is the light promised to Adam and Eve. He is the light descended from Abraham. He is the light of the tribe of Judah. He is the light born in Bethlehem. He is the light who sits on King David’s throne forever. He is the Great Light who shines on those in darkness (Is 9:2). As Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father said, He is “**the sunrise [who] visits us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death**” (Lk 1:78–79). He is the reason the sky of Bethlehem filled with the light of angels **and the glory of the Lord shone around** the shepherds, filling them with great fear (Lk 2:9). He is, as St. Simeon proclaimed in the temple, “**a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to [God’s] people Israel**” (Lk 2:32).

Dear friends, your Light has indeed come and He is shining still. The Magi were drawn to the light. They saw Him. And, in deep communion with Him, they knelt down to worship the Child. They presented Him with their gifts. St. Paul was struck by the light on the road to Damascus, when—in his words—“**the mystery was made known to me by revelation**” (Eph 3:3). The scales fell from His eyes. He was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. In all that Jesus said and did, the light was shining. The heavens opened at His baptism. He revealed His glory at the wedding of Cana. He performed miracles. He spoke with divine authority. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world.

He is the light no darkness can overcome. And, believe me, the darkness tried. The darkness of unbelief and betrayal surrounded Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Darkness hid the light of the sun when He died. Darkness enclosed Him in the tomb. But none of it—not sin, not death, not the grave—none of it could overcome Him. And neither can your darkness, whatever it might be. Your darkness is no match for our Lord. He is risen. It couldn’t keep Him in the tomb, and it won’t keep you down either, not now, not even when death comes. **Arise!** He shines. It wasn’t strong enough to put out His light, and it won’t stop you from being a light in the darkness of this world. **Shine! For your light has come. The Lord will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you**—by His holy word and Sacraments.

So let the demons flee before Him like cockroaches. Let death retreat like a defeated foe. Let lies and sin be exposed to the ultraviolet rays of His truth and forgiveness.

But as for you, **ARISE, SHINE, FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME** (v 1).

III.

We have nothing to fear from the darkness. Listen to what God promises: **Nations 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 daughter shall be carried on the hip. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the seas shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. 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** (vv 3–6). His kingdom is great and will be glorious. His power and reign are universal. He’s not just light of the Church but the light of the world, and the Church is the lighthouse in which He shines.

We may think that the Church is small and weak, but even now Christ is gathering people to Himself from all nations. Our mission is to bear witness to the light. We carry out this mission right here as the light of Christ comes to us through His holy gifts and shines through us in our lives. We also carry out this mission by our prayers and financial support for the work of the Church in other places. New sons are born through the power of the Gospel. New daughters are gained and nourished by the study of the word. The Magi were the first, but they are certainly not the last. St. Paul proclaimed the mystery: **that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel** (Eph 3:6).

You and I are the sons come from afar and the daughters carried on the hip into Christ's Church. So let us be bold to shine with ever greater brightness. Whether in ones and twos or tens and twenties, the light of Christ does scatter the darkness and the glory of His kingdom increases, while the reign of sin and death diminish.

Do not be drawn back into the darkness by your sin. And do not simply curse the darkness or lament it. What, exactly, does that accomplish? We can bemoan our lives and the world. We can languish in self-pity and sorrow. But why would we? Why would we do that when the light has come?

We aren't like Herod. He sat in darkness. He didn't know the Messiah. He didn't even know where the Messiah would be born. And he certainly had no love for the Messiah. Fear and hatred led him to murder. Darkness took him from the inside out.

Not so with the Magi. After seeing the light, they didn't go back to Herod. They returned home by a different way. So come, kneel here before the light, worship the Child who scatters the darkness, bring Him your gifts. And, when you leave, don't return by the same path, but **arise, shine**, and walk in His light. For you have a new home, which is above, in the city of our God. And that city **has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it** (Rev 21:23, 24).

There we, and all who believe, will do forever what we have, by God's grace, already begun to do here:

ARISE and SHINE, FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME (v 1).

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ
Jesus.

Phil 4:7
