

Text: Isaiah 60:1-6 Epiphany. **January 4, 2015.**

Arise, Shine for your Light, Jesus, has come! Amen.

January is such a drag. Christmas is over. Presents are broken. Decorations packed away. You get up and it's dark. You drive home and it's dark. Even during the day, it's cloudy and dark. And yet, in a better and deeper way, we have light, the light of God's love that doesn't diminish with the season. In your heart there is light, the light of knowing, "I'm God's child. My sins are forgiven. No one can ever take that light away." It's the season of Epiphany. This is the season of light, the light that shines in our hearts even when there is physical darkness outside. That light is Jesus. Jesus is the true light. Jesus is the lasting light. Jesus is the Light!

Notice all the lights in this part of God's Word. Arise, shine, for your light has come. The glory of the LORD, that often meant light! LORD rises upon you. His glory, again light, appears over you. God and light are connected in an unbreakable way. The first thing God's voice boomed on earth, in the very first chapter of the Bible was, "Let there be light." In the very last chapter of the Bible, we are given a picture of heaven and there is no sun, moon or stars, because God is there. God himself is the light. God and light go together. That makes sense. We associate light with good things: warmth, ability to see, a happy mood. We associate Jesus with good things: love, forgiveness, eternal life. Jesus is the Light!

In contrast to Jesus and his light, there is us and our darkness. Darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples. We associate darkness with bad things: fear, crime, danger. This darkness is so thick, so deep, so dark it covers up the light. Why would anyone take darkness and cover up the light?

Maybe an illustration would help. I had the chance to be in Mexico over Epiphany a few years ago. In Mexico, Epiphany is the celebration like our Christmas. Epiphany is when people exchange gifts. The day before Epiphany, people were walking around, selling black trash bags. Lots of people, selling black trash bags. I had to ask someone, in Spanish, "Why are all these people selling black trash bags?" The answer? "People use them to put their children's presents in, so the children can't see them." Cover up a beautiful present with a black trash bag? Later on, it hit me. I am the black trash bag! God has given me this most beautiful present, Jesus. But the darkness of my sin covers up Jesus, like a trash bag. It's easy to ask my neighbor about how Florida State is doing. I see him wearing FSU stuff all the time. But the darkness of my sin makes it really hard to talk to him about Jesus. That's because sin isn't just a few bad things I do, or a few poor choices that you can correct. Sin is a big, bad condition, a dark, black trash bag, that covers our souls. Sin is not what we do. Sin is who we are.

But Jesus broke through that darkness of sin. Jesus is the light. The waters of baptism washed away the trash bag from my soul. Jesus' light threw my sin in that trash bag. Jesus threw that trash bag of my sin out with the trash when he died on the cross. Our sin is forgiven! Our soul is washed clean. Jesus is the Light! Jesus takes us out of the darkness of our sin and brings us into a new light, the light of his forgiveness, light that burst from the grave on his resurrection. You know, whenever you turn on a light in a dark room, it's not dark anymore. When light and darkness meet, light wins. When Jesus and sin meet, Jesus wins. Jesus is the light.

That light attracts people. Did you catch that? All assemble and come to you. Nations will come to your light. Can I tell you about Amber? A couple of months ago, on September 11 of all days, a young lady walks into our church here on a Thursday night. I should tell you that for weeks we have been promoting our Bible 101 class to start on September 11, inviting people to come, encouraging people to bring their friends. Amber walks in and says, "I've been in Japan serving in the military. I got connected with a WELS mission church there and started going to church. Usually we watched the service on a video screen because the missionary was with another group of people in another place. But I really like the WELS church and the WELS teaching. Now that I'm back in the states, I was hoping to find a WELS church where I could take Bible classes." Really? Really? My response, "Amber, if I'm not being too forward, we are starting those classes tonight in about one hour. Would you like to come?" Amber even convinced her cousin to stick around with her. Amber was confirmed as a member a couple of weeks ago. The Lord brought someone who had been living in Japan, to our church in Verona, WI, someone who was looking

to study the Bible, the very night we were planning to start Bible 101! The nations are coming. God is bringing people to us. The Light, Jesus, is attracting people.

Use your light to attract people. Let it shine. Not much seems sure in our world. But your eternal life is sure. Not much seems very secure. But we have our hope of heaven as an anchor for the soul. People feel unsure, unsafe in the darkness. People feel safe and secure in the light. Look at how God pictures that safety and security of the Light and remember, Jesus is the Light. Your daughters are carried on the hip. Think of a mother carrying her child on her hip. You can picture that, can't you? That's a safe place to be. That's where a child wants to be. No matter how many government regulations require how many points to a car seat harness, no child will ever feel more safe than in mother's arms. Children don't cry to be put in the car seat. Children cry for mom to pick them up. As children of God, we cry for God to pick us up. That's where we are safe. Jesus' arms is where we are secure. Think of whom you might attract with that security you have, knowing that your sins are forgiven, certain that heaven is your personal possession. Maybe when you are talking with your neighbor about Florida State, you can say, "You can't be sure who's going to win, but I'm sure I'm going to be with Jesus." Think that might attract? Think that attitude might raise some questions?

It's our attitude that can't help but be affected by the Light! You will be radiant. Your heart will throb and swell with joy. Makes me think of the Grinch. In Whoville they say, the Grinch's heart grew three sizes that day. When you have seen the Light, I'm forgiven, your attitude changes from darkness to light. When you have seen the light, "I'm loved!" your heart just grows. The Bible is using every word, in every way, to try to describe what is really undescrivable, the attitude in the heart of a Christian when he sees the light. I have seen eyes light up in ways I can't describe, images of those eyes seared on my mind, twenty years later. I have felt my own heart throb and swell and be radiant and burn with joy. I pray you've had that experience. I'm sorry I can't describe it. You have to have it for yourself. If I have to explain it to you, you won't get it. But that attitude, that throbbing, swelling, radiant, burning, it's a joy, a gift from Jesus that's out of this world.

Now notice what this attitude leads to: wealth being brought, riches pouring in, herds of camels, young camels, the first born and best at carrying. Camels were the semi trucks of the day. Picture rows and rows of semis lined up for miles and waiting to pull into the parking lot here to unload riches and wealth. Now, please don't think that pastor is drifting off into some fantasy where the church gets rich and his salary gets bigger. That's not God's picture. The riches and wealth are coming to Jesus. The light, Jesus, has attracted this wealth. The gifts that are mentioned are gold and incense, exactly what the Wise Men brought to Jesus. How could this prophecy be so specific unless it was given by God himself? These gifts from these Wise Men were not brought to church. They were brought to Jesus. They were not given to a pastor. They were given to the Savior. Those hearts that were changed, they just couldn't help it. Their throbbing, swelling, radiant hearts were moved to bring riches, wealth, gold and incense to Jesus. That's what throbbing, swelling, radiant hearts do.

Don't worry. You aren't going to get some guilt trip now about giving more. Jesus doesn't use guilt. Jesus uses joy. We aren't going to talk about the church budget, as though the church needs your money. Your throbbing, swelling, radiant heart won't be limited by a budget. The only need is for your heart to show love to Jesus. Wise Men gave priceless gifts thousands of years ago. Wise men still give priceless gifts today, the most priceless of which is a throbbing, swelling radiant heart, given fully to Jesus.

That heart proclaims the praise of the LORD. The word for proclaims always has the idea of proclaiming good news, bringing glad tidings, sharing a good message. Throbbing, swelling, radiant hearts touched by the light, they keep on sharing that good news of great joy that will be for all the people. When Christmas is "over," that's when you might have the best chance. When the world seems dark, share the Light. A simple smile in January could open the door to say, "Doesn't matter the season, I've got Jesus." When the news seems bad, share the good news. I still have a Savior, even in January. I don't need a tree and presents to get that good feeling. I have the Light! Jesus! Amen.