

“Arise, Shine, For Your Light Has Come!”

It’s time to wake up! It’s time to wake up! It’s not easy on a dark and dreary morning, before the sun has even peeked above the horizon, to drag ourselves out of bed, and to get started with our day.

What a difference on those mornings when after a full night’s sleep, we open our eyes to the warm sun streaming in through the crack in the blinds, and nearly jump out of bed, ready for whatever comes our way.

Today the prophet Isaiah encourages us, encourages the church, as he did the Israelites long ago: “It’s time to wake up!” Only Isaiah’s message is much more spiritual than the average wake up call, his incentive is much more inviting and enticing than the Tucson sunshine, and his words are presented with Spirit filled grace and poetry. Listen as he calls: “**Arise, shine, for your light has come.**”

The prophet calls us out of the thick gloom of darkness to see the light of the glory of the Lord. He pictures us, along with the Old Testament Israelites, living in a world filled with darkness and gloom. He finds us lying motionless in the dark. Thick clouds are all around us, and we are content to remain there in the shadows. It’s a disturbing picture of our natural condition. We cringe to think that we entered into this world satisfied to live in darkness, ignorant of God or of anything to do with God.

But now we say, “we know God, we have been baptized, and we attend church.” We have put aside the darkness of unbelief, we have seen the light. We may even think that this wakeup call must be for someone else, not for us. But let us remember this morning that the words of Isaiah’s prophecy were given first to the Old Testament Israelites, to God’s very own chosen people. They had the promises of God; they had the covenant and circumcision. But they, like us, also had sinful natures. They, like us, would gladly wander back into darkness on so many occasions rather than live in the light. They, like us, needed to hear the call to wake up. “**Arise, shine, for your light has come!**”

We live in a world so full of darkness that we sometimes become accustomed to it. We may not even notice as the world bombards us with messages that contradict the will and the Word of God. We would be hard pressed to even count the number of temptations we face from the television or movie screen, from the billboard on our way to church, from the internet sites we visit, or from our peers, our friends and our co-workers. “**See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples.**”

It is time to wake up. Arise, shine, for your light has come. See the glory of the Lord, the light that has risen upon you. Like the sun rising over the city, our Lord has cast out gloom and darkness.

Throughout Scripture, we find examples the “Glory of the Lord” appearing to people. It is found in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that leads the Israelites out of Egypt. It is found in the dark cloud full of thunder that settles on the Mountain when Moses is given the Law. It fills the tabernacle and later the temple. The glory of the Lord is the very presence of God made visible for his people. The glory of the Lord appears to carry out the Lord’s promises and to clearly portray the working of God in the lives of his people. The Glory of the Lord is present to initiate new and wonderful revelations of God carrying out his purposes and carrying out his plan to save his people.

And the Glory of the Lord shines most brightly in the life of Jesus Christ. The Glory of the Lord, the visible presence of God himself, was there in the Christmas manger, there at the house for the visit of the Magi, there in the Judean countryside preaching and teaching, and it was there at the cross, putting the final nail in the coffin of sin and death. The Glory of the Lord rose victoriously three days later to prove that salvation had been accomplished for a world of darkness and sin.

And God has allowed us to see the light. He has given us faith to trust in Jesus. He chose us, called us out of darkness, and he gives us the privilege to live as children of light. Today as we enter into the Epiphany season of the church year, we are reminded of that light. We see that light shining forth in various ways throughout this season. Again and again we see clearly that Jesus is the Savior of the world. And this message is no different than the church’s message throughout history. Isaiah’s prophecy spoke of the light as already rising over the people. It was theirs. It was as sure as the promises of God. The birth and life and death of Jesus were never in doubt because God stood behind them from eternity. Today we hear again the glorious message of our Savior and his wonderful light.

Isaiah 60:1-6: Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.

Arise, shine. See the light. And having seen the light, now see what the light does. What started as a promise to a few people, grew into an ancient nation, and now its boundaries are unlimited. The bright light of the Glory of the Lord not only shines *into* the lives of believers, it also shines *from* their lives.

And people take notice. The Lord promised that his faithful people would be a beacon for foreign nations, and that through them his glory would be shared. It is not difficult to see the connection between this prophecy and our Gospel for Epiphany. The Magi, foreigners, Gentiles, important men with much wealth, followed the light to the land of the Jews. They brought their rich gifts and they worshipped. They saw not only the brightness of a physical star, but they also

saw the brightness of the Glory of the Lord in the infant King. It was the message of deliverance and peace and joy that brought them to worship Jesus. The light of the gospel was shining forth, and people came to see its brightness.

And each individual, when called to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior from sin, joins the ranks of the people of God. They are the sons and daughters assembling and coming, and they bring with them their rich gifts. And they in turn display the light of the Glory of God for others to see.

That is the life story of every believer assembled here today. Whether as a baby or a young child, or as an adult, you saw the light when someone shared the gospel with you. When your parents brought you to the font to be baptized. When your friend told you the good news. Whenever it was, you have now come by God's grace to bathe in the light of the gospel. You have come with your rich gifts, whatever they may be. Gifts of time and effort, gifts of money and property, gifts of worship and praise. And you get to rejoice and be amazed at what God accomplishes through you. He allows you to be a beacon in a dark and sinful world. He gives you opportunities to share with others the message of Jesus.

It's time to wake up. As others are taking down the Christmas lights, heading back to life as usual, and unfortunately in many cases saying goodbye to Jesus for another year, you know that Christmas and Epiphany shine in your life all year. You have seen the light, and you can share the light. Arise, shine, for your light has come!