

Your Light Has Come
Isaiah 60:1-3
Epiphany Sunday

Have you noticed? Our nights are long and our days are very short. A few days ago, I drove down to Sioux City to pick up Diane. As I was driving east, I noticed that the sun didn't reveal itself until it was nearly 8:30. And by 5:00 P.M., it starts to go back into hiding. If you work 9 to 5, you've only got thirty minutes of daylight to yourself! One of the great challenges of winter around here is not only the bitter cold, but also the lack of sunlight. No wonder I seem to have this great urge to take a hot bath and go to bed when I get home after work.

We need light in order to live. Science tells us that even blind people need light because it affects the way our brain functions, our heart rate, and our mood. For the vast majority of us, we need light to find our way – to avoid the stubbed toe and even greater dangers.

In the Scriptures, light and darkness are powerful symbols. Light refers to biblical truth while darkness is error or falsehood. The psalmist confesses, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105) Darkness and light also have a moral meaning. Darkness refers to sin or wrong doing while light is holiness. “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you,” the Apostle John writes, “that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” (I John 1:5-6)

We know these meanings of darkness and light. We speak especially of the increasing darkness in our country and our world as we observe more and more problems and the secular crusade against anything that has to do with biblical truth. From the promotion of same-sex marriage to the satanic display in the Florida capital during the Christmas season, our culture is embracing more and more darkness and disdaining the light.

Darkness and light can have an emotional meaning as well. People who wrestle with depression tell of a darkness of mood that settles in over their soul. The prescription for depression is a “ray of hope” – an expression that clearly refers to light – to lead them forward out of their darkness.

God's people in the Old Testament knew all of these experiences of darkness. They ignored God's word and actively rebelled against him. Whole generations of Israel did not know God's law. They walked in darkness – willful ignorance of God's word. They rebelled against him, setting up pagan idols on the hilltops and even sacrificed their children to the demon gods. They embraced the moral darkness of sin. The prophets would warn them again and again. Sometimes, they would repent. But the whole trajectory of Jewish history in the Old Testament was rebellion towards God. They would not listen and so they were eventually destroyed and carried off to faraway lands. There, they would experience the emotional darkness of despair. They wrote in Psalm 137:

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down and wept
When we remembered Zion.

The ancient Jews knew the full spectrum of darkness. But God's covenant and his love is forever. He did not leave them in their darkness and exile. Since the beginning of Advent, we have spent a lot of time in the book of Isaiah. The prophet had a lot to say about the coming Messiah. Today, as we conclude the Christmas season, we are near the end of the book, in chapter 60. Isaiah prophesied nearly 150 years before Judah was carried off to Babylon. He lays out his warnings and his predictions – which all came true just as he said. But the prophet also saw far beyond Judah's judgment to their eventual full restoration. The final chapters of the book are jubilant and full of hope. Chapter 60 breaks forth like the sunrise on a glorious morning:

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.

And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isa. 60:1-3)

Prayer

Epiphany for the Whole World

Epiphany, in the Christian calendar, is January 6. That's where we get the twelve days of Christmas – from December 25 to January 5. Because today is the closest Sunday to Epiphany, we call it Epiphany Sunday. I never grew up celebrating or observing Epiphany and I suspect many or most of you share that same experience. “Epiphany” refers to a manifestation of God to people. Jesus, of course, is the ultimate epiphany because he is God, revealed in a human body. On this Sunday, we celebrate the revelation of Christ to the world – often in the retelling of the magi's story, Christ's dedication at the Temple or his baptism. Our text today from the book of Isaiah is not so specific to a particular New Testament story, but rather speaks in breathtaking brilliant scope of the blessing that the Messiah's coming will bring.

For the Jewish nation, Isaiah 60 speaks of a wonderful promise to be fulfilled yet in the future. When the nation was in deep darkness in exile, it would have brought a ray of hope to their troubled soul. Today, Jerusalem is a divided city. The prophecy is not yet fulfilled. But it will not always be that way. Someday, it will be a beacon to all the nations. And the New Testament tells us that the New Jerusalem will draw all nations to itself when Jesus – the Jewish Messiah and Savior of the World – reigns as King in the city. The description of the city in the Book of Revelation is striking in its fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Isaiah foresaw in the city:

The sun shall be no more
your light by day,
nor for brightness shall the moon
give you light;
but the Lord will be your everlasting light,
and your God will be your glory

Isa. 60:19

And the Apostle John records in his vision in Revelation 21:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the 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, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. (vs. 22-26)

The end of Revelation is the fulfillment of Isaiah 60. Read the full chapter and compare it with John's vision. It is striking. In this, our text this morning is not just a Jewish promise, but a promise for all of us – for the whole world. It's what the world is eventually coming to.

The Light of the World is Jesus – John 1:4-5

What is this light? Or, more to the point, *who* is this light? John's gospel tells us clearly: "In him [that is, Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:4-5) John tells us that it is Jesus' life that is the light of men. This is the light of which the prophet Isaiah spoke. It is Jesus' life that dispels the darkness of our ignorance, our sin, and our despair.

Today, it may be just a flickering candle. But the darkness cannot overcome the light of the life that Jesus brings. (Turn out house lights.) We sometimes look around and despair that things are not going so well. We see darkness all around us. But the darkness cannot extinguish the light that Jesus brings. But one day the light of Jesus will drive out all the darkness. On that day, the Scriptures tell us, there be no need of even the sun or the moon for Jesus himself will illumine all things.

Overcoming Our Personal Darkness

Wow! That's a great vision. That's a hope that can sustain us. But what about the darkness that you wrestle with today? What about the endless cycles of failure? Your relationship problems,

or a struggle with addiction? How do you make sense of all of this? Where does it all end? We all need light to find our way in the darkness.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:9-13

The light has come into the world. The tragedy is that not everyone has received the light. The Jews did not receive Jesus as their Messiah – as their light. Consequently, they still walk in darkness. But to those who do receive Jesus as their Savior, they are born again. You see, it is Jesus' life that gives light. And when we receive him by placing our faith and trust in him, he gives us new life – his life – to light our way. If you've never received Christ, we'll help you do that through prayer in just a moment.

Some folks have misunderstood, however, what it means to have the life of Jesus as their light. They've prayed a prayer to receive Jesus but they go on living just the same. That's not what the Bible teaches. "... at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light..." (Ephesians 5:8) To receive Jesus is to share his life. It means that you will live like Jesus and follow him as his disciple. That's our mission as a church. To help people find and follow Jesus. It's not enough just to pray a prayer to go to heaven. We follow Jesus in every aspect of our life. That's how we walk in the light – the light that dispels our ignorance, our sin, and our gloominess about life.

I don't know what you are experiencing this morning as the first Sunday of a new year. This is the time of the year when we evaluate our life and make resolutions to change. It might be to lose weight or change some aspect of our lifestyle. Maybe, after spending so much at Christmas, we resolve to save more money this coming year. Perhaps we've been positively influenced by one of our favorite sons, Josh Becker, and we plan on simplifying our life in 2015. This Sunday

is a good time to evaluate our life and look forward. But don't miss the point of today's word. It is the great announcement that is full of promise:

Arise! Shine, for you light has come!

The light of the world is Jesus. I can't think of a better thing to do on this first Sunday of the year than to receive Jesus as your Savior or to recommit to following him in all things so that you will walk in his light.

Prayer – Sinner's Prayer and Prayer of Dedication

The Lord's Table