

**+ Isaiah 60:1-6 + Your Light Has Come + The Epiphany of Our Lord + 5 January 2014 +**

What a week of winter weather it's been! Snow piling up all over the Northeast and the Midwest. Temperatures plummeting to near record lows and wind chills diving so far below zero that meteorologists warned that the salt brine used by the local plows wouldn't be effective. Few people went out to do more than the basics—shoveling/clearing driveways, basic shopping, and getting between Point A and Point B. The kids got out of a couple days of school, but there wasn't much playing outside because of the bitter winter cold. To top it off, the cold, winter days still get dark early.

...But yesterday the snow stopped flying and the sun came out. The temperatures even climbed up into the 30s. Compared to below zero wind chills, it was positively warm. The sun brought light to the darkness and warmth to the cold. Not surprisingly, people were out in force. The stores were hopping and parking lots full as people caught up with what they had hoped to do earlier in the week or perhaps to get ready for more winter. Either way, it was neat to see how happy people were to see the warm sun.

As welcome as the sun is, no matter how bright and warm it might be, you and I still live in a world covered with thick darkness. Not the darkness of night or the deepest darkness of winter, but thick spiritual darkness—darkness much more dangerous and terrifying, darkness that blinds the eyes and poisons the heart, but this morning Isaiah tells us to not be afraid because **YOUR LIGHT HAS COME!**

The people of Isaiah's day feared the darkness of night. Imagine for a moment a world without electricity, with only small oil lamps and torches for light. Cities did not light up the night sky. When the sun set, darkness really did cover the earth, so people kept some kind of light burning to ward off total darkness and the dangers of the night. How appropriate, then, for Isaiah to describe his world and ours with that same kind of total darkness.

**“See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples...”** The Lord allowed Isaiah to see how dark the days ahead would be. His people were falling deeper into the spiritual darkness of unbelief and judgment was coming. Isaiah saw very dark days for the kingdom of Judah when the Lord would allow the armies of Babylon to destroy Jerusalem and haul its citizens into exile. They had rejected the Lord for too long and dark days were ahead for God's people, but light would come.

As the winter weather drags on, I want you to take a look at the body language of others. Dismal weather is depressing. Shoulders slump. People lack energy. Without enough sunlight on short days filled with snow and cold, it's very hard on people mentally and physically.

Now imagine that darkness amplified infinite times. That's what spiritual darkness does to us. Without Christ—the Light of the world—we're walking dead. The thick darkness of lovelessness or materialism or pride or lust or fear blinds your eyes and makes you stumble around. Without Christ all you can do is gratify the cravings of your sinful nature and blindly follow its desires. We all disobey the holy will of our holy God. We deserve his punishment. Every time we disobey God the dark terror of death threatens to plunge us into the total darkness of separation from God's love in hell.

Without the light of Christ, we live in total darkness and we're headed for eternal darkness. That fact crushes our souls with guilt and despair, but your Light has come to shatter the thick darkness around you. **“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.”**

Jesus scatters the darkness and things change. His good news lifts our hearts and heads as **“the glory of the LORD”** appears to us with grace and mercy. Because of our sin, his appearance brings great fear at first, but here the Holy One, clothed in undeserved, unconditional love, draws near to bless and help and save us.

You see, whenever that phrase—**“the glory of the Lord”**—appears in the Old Testament, it always describes how Christ, the Light, makes his holy presence known to deliver his people. That **“glory”** of the Lord of free and faithful grace appeared first when he delivered his people from slavery in Egypt. He revealed it as he brought them to the Promised Land. The Lord revealed that glory in the deliverance of his people from exile in Babylon. Most importantly, that glory appeared in human flesh to deliver us and all people 700 years after Isaiah.

At that time, **“the glory of the LORD”** appeared as angels revealed the glorious good news of the Savior's birth to lowly shepherds. That glory was revealed to the Magi with the appearance of the star. That glory was revealed when Christ was baptized. Later Jesus revealed his glory as he performed miracles among the

people and as he lived a perfect life without the blindness of our materialism or pride or lust or fear. Jesus also revealed his glory to his disciples shortly before his death.

Ultimately, you and I are no longer lost in the thick darkness of sin because Jesus revealed **“the glory of the LORD”** to us through the shame of the cross. On the cross he unveiled his holy grace for all mankind. By his bloody payment for sin, Jesus shattered sin’s dark power over us. He, then, shattered the dark terror of Death with his glorious resurrection from the dead to bring us into his wonderful light of life.

Now that’s good news for you and me who trust in Jesus as our Savior! That good news lifts our crushed spirits, gives sight to our blind eyes, and life to our dead hearts! The Light of the world has shattered the thick darkness of sin and death around us, but how sad for those who remain without Christ! How dark and cold it is for those who remain in unbelief headed for hell.

We see so much darkness around us! Our world, our nation, our communities, our neighborhoods remain covered in thick, spiritual darkness. Only through Jesus Christ can they have freedom from that darkness. How remarkable, then, that your Light has come to bring light to the hearts of all!

**“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.”** When Christ revealed his glory to us, he declared us righteous, not guilty. Through the waters of Holy Baptism and the good news of our Savior, the Holy Spirit worked faith in our hearts and made us members of Christ’s family. We who are different members of the human family are now one in Christ through faith. When God looks at you and me, he doesn’t see gender or race or social status or family line, but he sees beloved members of his family as Paul once wrote, **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”** (Galatians 3:26-28)

How often, though, don’t you and I fail to rejoice in that unity? How often do you find yourself impatient with the perspectives of a brother or sister in Christ or insensitive to those around you? How often do you think, speak, or act out of ignorance and think yourself superior to those not like you? How often doesn’t sin’s thick darkness blind you to souls for whom Christ died?

Thank God that we have a Savior who wasn’t like that, but who cared for every sinful soul including yours and mine, a Savior about whom David sang, **“...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”** (Psalm 103:12) Jesus cares for every soul, even yours and mine, so you and I won’t be alone in heaven. Instead, there we will see **“a great multitude that no one can count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.”** (Revelation 7:9)

Isaiah describes how we will feel when we see all those people come to the glory of Christ’s light. **“Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy...”** That joy is ours because Jesus fills our hearts with his light, a light which overflows from our hearts and lips to every soul.

Have you ever considered how many opportunities we have to do world mission work right here at home? We live in a world getting smaller every day because of technology. We live in communities growing more culturally diverse every day. God is bringing the world to us right here in America and making it possible for the Gospel to go to places it hasn’t been. Mission work to people of every culture is happening everywhere, even here. The Lord has blessed our work to people from other nations here and elsewhere.

Today we encounter more people from more nations and cultures than ever before as our neighborhoods and communities change, but should that scare us? Should you hesitate to welcome your new neighbor from Eastern Europe or the Middle East or Asia or Latin America or the city? Should you hesitate to share the light of Christ with your neighbors still living in darkness? People may look different, have different customs, foods, background, or social status, but all of them are souls for whom the Light of the world has come, souls like yours and mine who desperately need his glorious, life-giving Light. God in his grace shared his Light with us. Now he gives us the opportunity to share his Light with the world here at home and by supporting mission efforts across our country and around the world.

What a glorious day that will be when the Son of Righteousness breaks through the dark clouds of this sinful world and scatters the darkness forever! In the meantime, he has work for us to do, even when it’s cold outside. Souls are dying in darkness and they need the Light, which we have to share. May God bless you as you let his Light shine for all people! Amen.