

# “Your Light Has Come”

Isaiah 60:1-6, Epiphany of our Lord, January 1, 2017

*“Arise! Shine! For, the light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you!*

*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 will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your glory” (Isaiah 60:1-3)!*

These words of our Old Testament lesson this morning were first spoken by the Prophet Isaiah, who was being empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, to speak some much-needed **words of hope and encouragement to a very dispirited people!** The people Isaiah is addressing are most likely that **third generation of Jewish people**, whose parents and grandparents was carted off against their will as political refugees into the **foreign land of Babylon, some 70 years** before this under the rule and edict of the **Babylonian Emperor, King Nebuchadnezzar** who had captured Judah.

Nevertheless, the **LORD God Almighty had not forgotten his people**, even as the Bible makes plain to us that the LORD God was working behind the world scene to empower **King Cyrus of Persia** to capture **Babylon in 539 BC**. In the **first year of King Cyrus’ reign**, he was prompted by the LORD God of Israel to declare that the **Temple in Jerusalem should be rebuilt** and that any of the Jewish people living in Babylon at that time, who **were willing to return** to their parents’ homeland to help with than **enormous undertaking were now free to do so!**

King Cyrus showed his own personal interest in this great undertaking too, by sending back along with those Jewish people **the sacred vessels that had been stolen from the First Temple** and carted off to Babylon with the people they captured. King Cyrus also gave these Jewish people a **considerable sum of money with which to buy building materials**. Cyrus is so favorably looked upon by the Jewish people that his **name is mentioned 23 times** in the Old Testament in a positive way! Everything was **looking bright and glorious on the horizon for these courageous, pioneering Jewish people** who had accepted the challenge King Cyrus set before them! However, upon their arriving in Jerusalem their **hopes and courage were greatly dashed** when they saw that the temple had not only suffered some serious damage but that it was destroyed, even as the walls surrounding the city had been torn down too!

**Their spirits were deflated. Their hopes were dashed. Their sense of adventure was now gone.** It was as if they had now become surrounded, by a **massive blanket of spiritual darkness and that mentally too, no doubt, they were suffering from a profound sense of depression!**

Here the Prophet Isaiah has been commissioned by God to speak to these very broken-hearted people by telling them that all was not lost! As a matter of fact, the day was coming when a **GREAT TRANSFORMATIVE LIGHT WOULD COME BURSTING OVER THE EASTERN HORIZON--- A LIGHT SO MAGNIFICENTLY ILLUMINATING THAT THE WHOLE CITY WOULD THEN BECOME RADIANT WITH THE GLORY OF GOD!**

Some years later the temple was rebuilt. Some years later the walls surrounding the city were reconstructed, but we Christians believe that this great prophecy is ultimately fulfilled in God’s sending of

his only-begotten Son into the world, true God conceived by the Holy Spirit and true Man born of the Virgin Mary. And we certainly have a good reason for believing this, because this is the **very interpretation that St. Matthew puts upon Jesus' life and ministry in his Gospel account**, once our Lord had stepped forward to be baptized by John the Baptist, and was then immediately driven out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit of God, where he would be tempted by Satan in all such ways as we are for 40 days and night, while fasting, **though most astoundingly Jesus never sinned!**

**Darkness and light are two powerful metaphors** that the Bible often uses repeatedly in speaking to us about the **natural state of humankind versus the powerful transformation** that then comes over human beings, once they become the **recipients of God's eternal salvation!**

Do you remember those words from **Isaiah 9 we heard read to us on Christmas Eve?** *"The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined" (v. 2)?* St. Matthew in the writing of his Gospel account quotes these very words of Isaiah verbatim to us in **Matthew 4:16**, seeing the words of this ancient prophecy fulfilled in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ! **Then Matthew adds, "From that time on, Jesus began to preach: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17)!**

It is not hard for us, therefore, to see a **great correlation between the words of our Old Testament lesson today and the Gospel lesson today.**

- (1) Isaiah says: *"Your sons shall come from afar"* and Matthew instructs us that *'Wise Men have come from the far East,'* probably from that region where the nation of Iran is located together!
- (2) Isaiah said: **"The wealth of the nations shall come to you!"** And Matthew tells us that: *"When the Wise Men entered the house where the Christ Child was with Mary his Mother, they rejoiced exceedingly and fell down and worshipped him! Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2:10-11)!*
- (3) Isaiah tells us: *"A multitude of camels shall cover you!"* and the Wise Men, no doubt must have traveled that long distance on **camels**, since the **automobile was not yet invented** and it would be **20 more centuries before the startup of a new traveling enterprise would become a reality; popularly known as UBER;** and not only here in the United States, but also in many other places throughout the world!

Brothers and sisters when the Prophet Isaiah tells these dispirited people to **"Arise"** and **"Shine,"** he wasn't suggesting even for a moment, that **these people had the strength and the power for doing this already within themselves somehow!**

**God is the One always who must awaken us out of our spiritual sleep of complacency—so that we might arise!** God is the One always who **furnishes us with the Light of the world in the gift of his Son Jesus Christ,** that we might become the **reflectors of Christ's own light in the world** that he brings to us with the faith and hope he gives us **that through his perfect life, death and resurrection,** he has conquered all the spiritual forces that

would otherwise separate us from him; **not only here in time but also in eternity and rob us from so much of the joy, our God would long for us to possess in this life!**

Light is a powerful thing and yet we probably never realize how powerful it is until we find ourselves, at times in our own lives, **surrounded by sheer darkness and the total absence of light!**

So right now, I would like to ask you to please participate with me in a **little spiritual exercise, by asking you to imagine with me somehow that you suddenly find yourself in one of those greatly enclosed structures** like the **GEORGIA DOME in Atlanta**, or the **SUPERDOME** in New Orleans; maybe even the AT&T Stadium in **Arlington, Texas**, or the **Center of the America's Stadium** in St. Louis, Missouri each of which seat somewhere between **65,000 to 80,000 people!**

I have been in **the GEORGIA DOME several times** in my life and the **SUPERDOME in New Orleans** two times; once when **Lisa and I accompanied 12 young people** from our congregation to attend the **National Youth Gathering** in New Orleans in 2001, and then for a second time, we accompanied four of our young people to attend this same event there for a second time!

**Whenever I have entered those stadiums, I have found myself completely astounded by the size of those places and the massive volume of space and air that they envelope.** Someone has suggested that if you walked into one of those massive stadiums and sat in one of the **bleachers at midfield**, only to have someone completely shut out all the lights in that stadium that you would **most definitely find yourselves in complete and under darkness!** It would be the same experience as if you had **descended by an elevator into a tunnel, or cave, 100 feet below the surface of the ground**, and someone immediately turned out all the lights on your there! **You would not even be able to see you own hand when positioned two inches in front of your face.**

But let's suppose then that someone is down there in the middle of the playing field of that stadium and **strikes one single-solitary match!** If that person striking that match was **stationed high enough** that every person seated in the stadium could then see the light of that match! Imagine experiencing that immense volume of darkness now being conquered by the striking of one single solitary match!

Spiritually speaking, this was the **condition of our lost world on the night that our Savior was born in Bethlehem of Judea!** But as Christ grew in stature with both the favor of God and man, as St. Luke relays this great truth to us (Luke 2:52) that the **power and the radiance of God's light resident in Jesus continued to grow and grow itself!**

You know how St. John puts it in the opening words of his Gospel account: *"He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN. THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS AND THE DARKNESS HAS NOT OVERCOME IT. THE TRUE LIGHT THAT ENLIGHTENS EVERY MAN WAS COMING INTO THE WORLD"* (John 1:2-9)

**Certainly, all the powers of spiritual darkness did their best to overcome our Lord when he was so wrongly accused of so many crimes of both a political and a theological nature!** When the religious authorities in Jerusalem grew increasingly jealous of him because of his **immense popularity** with the Jewish people, they **plotted to have him arrested; trumped up on false charges!** They declared him **guilty of crimes he never committed and nailed him to a cross!** But all of this was a **gigantic part of the Heavenly Father's plan to redeem us from our sins**, who three days later raised his Son gloriously and victoriously alive from the dead, that we might indeed receive the forgiveness of all our sins and the blessed assurance that the Heavenly Father has accepted the sacrifice that Jesus Christ—the Light of the World (John 8:12)—had made for us!

**Yes, the light can awaken us out of our spiritual sleep and complacency! Yes, the light can provide guidance and direction for us in a way that could never be granted to us in the darkness. The darkness is immobilizing! The darkness is terrifying and paralyzing! The darkness is discouraging and depressing!**

We need the light of Christ and his redeeming love to guide us safely through this world on our way to the next. **The light of God alone can provide us with the guidance and direction we need!**

While preparing for this message, I came across an interesting article about the very powerful role that so **many lighthouses have played when placed around ports and harbors to help get ships out at sea, along with their crew and cargo safely to the shore for over a hundred years or more.** In this article the author said that **of all the five Great Lakes stationed in the Midwest between the USA and Canada** that the most treacherous to navigate was **Lake Superior**, by far, especially along the northern shore of Minnesota that was especially inhospitable to freighters that came close to **the Duluth Harbor.** I read that a single storm there on **November 28, 1905, damaged 29 ships** resulting in the loss of so many lives of people aboard those ships! Out of this great tragedy, however, the Congress of the United States, five years later, appropriated the immense sum of **\$75,000 for the construction of the SPLIT ROCK LIGHTHOUSE in 1910.** According to some very accurate data, the **SPLIT ROCK LIGHTHOUSE has been called the most visited lighthouse in the United States and that it is still open for tours,** though it hasn't been in operation as a lighthouse since 1969, succumbing to far more advanced forms of navigational equipment! During its **first thirty years in operation the LIGHT inside of that lighthouse was merely a kerosene lamp!** But for the last 30 years of its operation, the light was a **1000 wat lightbulb—just 1000 watts, but shining through a special lens** that allowed the light to be seen from ship as far as 22 miles away!

Jesus is our lighthouse, in the middle of the great storms and treacherous conditions we experience in our lives! That's why we sing at times: "Jesus Savior, pilot me, over life's tempestuous sea! Unknown waves before me roll, hiding rock and treacherous shoal! Chart and compass of the sea, Jesus Savior, pilot me!"

On a closing note, the **Chicago Triathlon is the largest triathlon in the world. Every August, 4000 athletes gather on the shores of Lake Michigan to swim one mile, bike 25 miles and then run for 6.2 miles.**

**What's most amazing about this triathlon is not the distance covered, but the logistics of getting 4000 bikes organized within one-half mile of the beach so the athletes can switch from swimming to biking as quickly as possible.** It is a true mental and physical challenge to jog light-headed with a wetsuit on, while trying to locate your bike in a sea of 4,000 other two-wheeled machines! One of the tricks that the triathletes use to help with this logistical problem is to **tie big helium balloons with their names**

**printed on them to their bike saddles** so that they can spot their bicycles as soon as they enter the transition area. **The balloons guide them right where they need to go, just as that very special EPIPHANY STAR guided the Wise Men.**

In a very powerful way, these Wise Men could say that in **the gift of that special star that the light of God's love for them in Jesus Christ had shone also upon them in a very powerful way!** But it wasn't really the star that ultimately led them to the actual place where the Christ Child was to be found—it was the **Holy Bible** itself. When they came to Herod's palace, Herod who was not religiously astute by any stretch of our imagination—at least had enough sense to send them to the temple scribes and priests—far more versed in the teachings of the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures! Where was the Promised Messiah to be born? These religious scholars pointed the Wise Men directly to **Micah 5:2**, *“And you, O Bethlehem, Ephrathah who are the least among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me One who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from the ancient of days!”*

Isn't this why God has given his Holy Word to us that he has preserved for us in the Holy Scriptures? St. John writes in **John 20:31-32**, *“Now Jesus did many other signs that are not written down in this book, but these are written that you too may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life in his name!”* *What better prayer could we pray on this Festival Day of our Lord's Epiphany – than this one?*

*“Grant us grace to see Thee, Lord, present in Thy Holy Word. Grace to imitate Thee now and be pure as pure as Thou! That we might become light Thee, at Thy great Epiphany! And may bless Thee, ever-blessed, God in man, made manifest! (LSB 394:5)! Amen*