**Epiphany – Year A – January 6, 2013 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Isaiah 60:1-6 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**Stand up and Shine This Year**

**I. Your light has come... (vs1-2)**

**II. ...and nations will come to your light (vs3-6)**

*"Arise,* *shine, for your light* *has come, and the glory* *of the LORD rises upon you. 2 See, darkness* *covers the earth and thick darkness* *is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. 3 Nations* *will come to your light,* *and kings* *to the brightness of your dawn. 4 "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.* *5 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. 6 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.*

What a year… two militants from Chechnya bomb the finish line of the Boston Marathon… the government’s budget cuts result in a two-month sequestration affecting many of the people in our community… over one thousand Syrian civilians die in a poison gas attack… 61 civilians are slaughtered in a deadly shopping mall shooting in Kenya… our Supreme Court strikes down the Defense of Marriage Act… a typhoon ravages the Philippines… and tornados destroy towns in Illinois.

If we were to look ahead to January 5, 2015, what will the headlines of the year read? Will they be filled with more godlessness, violence and natural disasters? Will our country, state, city, your name be there?

New Year’s is a time to reflect on the past year. And we have to say that we were certainly blessed by our gracious Father in heaven. He provided you with everything you needed. But, like last year’s world events, you may have had your share of disasters. Perhaps you have lost a loved one, suffered a ruined relationship, part of you is lost because of what you experienced downrange during deployment. Perhaps you had your share of personal disasters regarding the way you handled events that transpired in your life. How well did you deal with change, adversity, persecution to your faith? Did you always deal with family and friends in a way that was filled with patience and love, forgiveness and apologies?

As you reflect on your personal life and these world events, you might wonder, “Is 2014 going to be any better?” Perhaps you could make a New Year’s resolution, but… you’ve done that in the past. And every year you fail to consistently keep those resolutions. It can get downright depressing. I cannot keep my life together, much less keep myself together when life comes unraveled. The world is in shambles. It seems to tumble more and more into the darkness of unbelief, violence, sickness and disease, and finally death! Reflecting on the past can be downright depressing!

That’s why the Holy Spirit gave these words to the prophet Isaiah. You see, the people of Israel, those living in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, well, it was like a perpetual dark cloud had settled over their homeland. The failures of the past were clearly right in front of their faces. They had very consistently and deliberately disobeyed God. They followed the ways of the sinful world, with its godlessness and violence. They bowed down to false gods of their heathen neighbors. God brought the painful consequences: evil men burned their homes, knocked down their city walls, and burned down the temple. How would you feel if today evil men marched into town, set fire to your home, burned this church to ground and you were helpless to do anything about it? The only thing you could do is hang your head in shame because you knew you brought this on yourself. That’s why Isaiah wrote, **“Darkness covers the earth, thick darkness over the peoples…”** As they reflected on the past and looked ahead to the future, there was nothing but the darkness of their failures. We can relate… too often we feel like we’re sitting in this perpetual darkness, because we’re suffering gloom and depression, sadness and grief, and finally a walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Like sitting in a cave… Have you ever been on a cave tour? At one point the tour guide will say, “Now we are going to show you all of the cave in its natural state,” and he flips the switch, and the darkness is so thick you can feel it. You cannot even see your hand in front of your face. Imagine if you were left there, with no flashlight. It would be a frightening experience to try and find your way back. You would be afraid to walk anywhere, lest you trip and fall, hit your head, and be left to die. But eventually, the guide turns the lights back on, and you feel better. The floods of light scatter the darkness from around you.

That’s the message your God has for you this morning, “This New Year, stand up and shine! Your light has come!”

Your light has come already, hasn’t it? Remember when you were in this same room, not too long ago, and the lights were all out, and you were all holding your little candle and those little lights illuminated the darkened space. There we pondered the Light of World, the Savior’s birth. There you saw the glory of God, the miracle of the Word become flesh, God and man in one person, in Jesus. You see that light today on Epiphany, in a star. A star appeared when Christ was born. That light led Magi, highly educated astrologers to journey many miles and many months, to see the child. Perhaps by now he was two years old in his home in Bethlehem. That bright star is your light because it fulfilled a promise God had made.

But then darkness quickly descended over this little child and followed him the rest of his life. King Herod tried to extinguish this child who was to bring light into the world. During his ministry he was surrounded by the darkness of Satan and his demons as they tried to tempt Jesus to sin. A gloomy cloud hovered over him in the form of his religious leaders who tried to trick him and plotted to murder him.

And then the deepest darkness which his soul and body experienced, came upon him in the garden, when he has betrayed abandoned, there in the Roman Soldier’s courtyard, where he was mocked and beaten, and on the cross… there the darkness of our failures descended upon him and filled his very soul. The consequence of our failures came upon him as he passed through the valley of the shadow of death. But there at the cross we see light shining, because he did this for you, and for me. There on the cross he hid your past failures to be patient and loving, your present failures to be kind and forgiving, and he hid them there in himself in his death. He hid your hell and your death in himself on the cross, to take away the darkness of your past and present failures.

And as for the future, he has already scattered the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death, because on Easter Sunday he escaped from death’s dark dungeon. He destroyed death’s power over you and me! That’s why Isaiah wrote, “Your light has come! The glory of the LORD rises upon you!” It’s as if you were lost in a cave, and the park ranger came and found you with his flashlight, and led you by the hand out into the sunlight! In the same way, Jesus promises that you will never live in the darkness of sin, in the darkness of death or hell, not ever. Jesus said, Lk 21:28 **At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.  28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”** Stand up and shine this year! Your light has come!

Yes, stand up and shine this year, for your light has come. Yes, your light, and your light and your light. What I find very comforting in these verses is that in the Hebrew the pronouns are singular. Which means that God is speaking to me as an individual. He is speaking to you as an individual. Didn’t he make that same personal promise to you at your Baptism, when he flooded the darkness of your sinful heart with the light of life? And doesn’t he make the same personal individual promise to you as you receive his body and blood? “This is for the forgiveness of your sins.” You will always know that he means you, that you have a reason to stand up, that you will shine this year because your light has come.

But all of these things I have been talking about are things that happen here at church. But you will take that light with you today when you go home. Vicar Zuberbier and I have been able to make several Every Member Visits since October, and what a joy they have been! Each and every one of the members we have sat down with have expressed that one of the great strengths of our church is the worship service. They leave feeling better, feel enriched and strengthened through Word and Sacrament. I would like you to build on that this year… I know this is cliché, but I’d like you to make a New Year’s resolution. On Sundays when you go home think about this sermon, talk about it with the family. Take home the bulletin and reread the lessons, think about the hymns we sang, watch the sermon again on the website, read it again in your email. Try that this year, because you do not know what this year will bring: big changes, or more of the same; times of darkness or times of light. As sinners we know that there will be times of darkness. That’s life on this side of heaven. But God promises that his light always shines on you, and envelopes you, even when you don’t feel it. You will see it, in his Word and Sacraments. There God’s light will shine on you in your home, it will shine in your heart...

And when that light shines in your heart, it will be evident to people around you! If you ever get to Las Vegas, check out the Luxor Hotel. You can’t miss it. It’s shaped like an Egyptian pyramid. But what the hotel is most known for is its light. From the very tip of the pyramid emits a giant beam of light that shoots up into the sky. Pilots flying airplanes can see it from Los Angeles airport over 200 miles away. Every year, hundreds of thousands of tourists are drawn to that light.

Isaiah says that a brighter light will emanate from the Church because people from all nations will see it and be drawn to it. This light doesn’t come from a building, because the Church is the people. We see the fulfillment in the Magi. These men were foreigners, who traveled many miles just to worship the newborn king, because they saw the light, not just in the star, but in the Scriptures that foretold the birth of the king. In Jesus’ ministry he shone the light of life not just to his countrymen, but he reached out to Gentiles, non-Jewish people. His apostles, like Philip, shared the words of this book of Isaiah with an Ethiopian. The apostle Paul was sent specifically to Gentiles. He stood before kings and princes and shone the light of Christ to them. Yes, nations and kings will be drawn in by the light of Christ.

Nations will come to your light. God has promised it. It will happen. It happens when you invite your friends from your FRG, the Soldiers and their families from your unit, when you hand a church postcard to your coworkers, your neighbors and classmates at school, and when they come to come to church or to Bible study and hear about the light of Christ, they will know that this light is for them, too!

When the light of Christ shines in your heart, and people hear and come to know that this light is for them, too, Isaiah says in vs.5, **“Your heart will burn, your face will glow.”** Isaiah is describing how exciting it is to be a part of this ministry of sharing the light of Christ. And so this year, it is good to reevaluate, “How will I support that outreach ministry of light this year? How can I with the money and possessions God has blessed me with, the time, the talents and skills and abilities, let light shine from this building, from its people?”

Think about this past year when that light shone in your life: when you opened your Bible at home, when you sat here in this church, as you stood at the altar. Consider what the light of Christ has done for other people this year: this past year an average of 110 people every Sunday saw the light of Christ shine. There were 2 adult baptisms, 11 confirmations, 11 child baptisms and 1,024 guests came to worship. The light of Christ came to a lot of people last year and I can’t wait to see how many lights will shine this year.

Yes, you will stand up and shine this year, for your light has come, and nations will come to that light, and God will be glorified. Amen.