**Isaiah 60:1-6** January 6, 2019

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Epiphany Sunday

*Isaiah 60:1Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. 2See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. 3Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 4Lift 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. 5Then 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. 6Herds 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.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**The Reason for the Sparkle in a Christian’s Eyes**

**I. “Rise and Shine” – What It Means**

“Rise and Shine!” – You hear it sometimes in our house. I’ll tell you one thing, our kids would sure rather hear it from mom than dad. I am likely to bang on the door and loudly say (they tell me I shout, but I don’t think I do,) “Rise and Shine!” On the other hand Mom, more likely than not, will quietly open the door, maybe even sit softly on the edge of the bed and sweetly say, “Rise and shine.” Two different approaches. But however you package it, “Rise and Shine” tells us that we need to get to the day. Enough with sleep.

You might be surprised to find that the origin of this phrase, “Rise and Shine!” is today’s Bible reading, Isaiah chapter 60. Go ahead, look it up online—after church. This phrase is another of the many stock phrases of our English language taken directly from the Bible. In the old days, in church, they repeated the same set of Sunday readings every year. It is called the Historic Lectionary. Every year, same readings. These days, we have a three year rotation. Anyway, in the Historic Lectionary the first reading every Epiphany, every January 6th, is Isaiah 60 which begins, ***“Arise, Shine, for your light comes!”***

Well, somewhere along the line, some godly church-going farmer surveyed a house full of sleepy heads as dawn was approaching. He was a farmer who knew that the cows needed to be milked and the oats weeded and food cooked and fences mended and livestock fed, and he remembered this reading he had heard every January 6th for all of his life and thought, “Yep, Isaiah had it right,” and that farmer let it fly, ***“Rise and Shine!”***

That is *not* what it originally meant. Isaiah 60, verse 1, is not a call to wake up and get off your duff. It is something very, very different. The key to understanding this verse is the second word, “Shine.” This is the same word “shine” that you hear at the end of every single worship service. *“The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you…”* Same word in English and Hebrew, in that blessing and in Isaiah 60. You ever wonder what that means: *“The Lord make his face shine on you?”*

Think of an airport. Think of getting off a plane and finally getting through the last security check point. As you pass through doors out to the world, behind the cordon are dozens, maybe hundreds of people who briefly look you in the face, wondering if you are their loved one. They look away. You search the crowd. Finally your eyes meet familiar eyes, and you see the shine, the brightness of eye, the happy face, joy over one long-expected and missed. That look on the face, that’s what it means when it says, *“The Lord make his face shine on you.”* It is to say: May God look with loving, tender favor on you! And that is what our reading means when it says, ***“Arise, shine, for your light has come.”*** It is saying, be glad, something wonderful has happened. Let the concern, the anxiety, the sadness, let it all melt away, at least for this moment. Let your face shine with that shine that makes every face beautiful!

As the Holy Spirit opened Isaiah’s prophetic eyes to see the coming Savior, Isaiah told God’s people, ***“Arise, Shine.”*** Isaiah told Israel to have the same look in their eyes that I saw in people’s eyes when we worshiped together 12 days ago on Christmas Eve. In Christ-oriented people, there is a sparkle in the eye on Christmas Eve that you see at no other time of the year, not even Easter. Christ has come! It is similar to what you see when you walk in your parents’ house after a long absence; at the airport, when the serviceman returns; in the nursing home, at a long-expected visit; on a mother’s face when she first holds a newborn. Your Savior has come. Don’t just be happy. ***“Shine!”***

**II. “Rise and Shine” – We Need to Be Reminded**

We need to be told this. Or if *you* don’t, I know that *I* need to be told this. It is not always easy to let your face shine with the joy of Christ Jesus.

Maybe it has happened to you. You went to a get-together and you *pasted* a smile on your face. A smile on the lips, maybe, but not a twinkle in the eyes. Even true Christians don’t always feel the joy of the Lord in their hearts. We too are people who get disheartened, who get downright depressed. The truth of life in this world is in the second verse, ***“See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples…”*** We live in a sin-darkened world. We try, but don’t always succeed. We help, but get taken advantage of. We advise, but get ignored. We love, but love is not returned. We nurture, but our care is rejected. We do what we are supposed to, but the unforeseeable happens. We feel the effects of living in a sin-stained world. And beyond all this, regardless of how well or not so well things go, all stories have the same end: death; the futility and separation of death.

Worse than all this is an even deeper darkness. That deeper darkness is our sin. Most people ignore this deeper darkness. When people feel the disappointments of life: disease, poverty and loss, people realize something is wrong. They try to change. They ask for help. They pray. But sin—I’ll worry about that later. I’ll just try to do a little better next time.

We have gotten away from realizing how significant sin is. All the world decries injustice, poverty, crime. And while we might want to add sin to that list, the world doesn’t want to. So we decide that since we can’t agree on sin, we at least can on injustice, poverty, crime. And so we talk about injustice, poverty and crime. And that is the lead story on the religious newsfeed or newspaper. We forget that the real problem is within each and every single one of us, that by birth we are lost and sinful. We do not realize that the real problem, the enduring problem, is not injustice, poverty and crime, but the sin within us filthy, disgusting people. All are people who act, speak and think offensively before the all-seeing God; people fit only for the fires of hell. And when we fail to mention our sin as the reason Jesus had to be born in Bethlehem, we reduce Jesus Christ to a cute, chubby little baby that everybody loves. We shortchange the real message: In this little child born in Bethlehem has come the Savior for sinful, awful people.

**III. “Rise and Shine” – Why We Can**

This message of ***“Arise, shine, for your light has come”*** presupposes that we feel the darkness of living in a fallen world. It presupposes people who know and feel their shortcomings, who sit in sackcloth and ashes, daily aware that they fall short of God’s righteous demands. Isaiah’s call, ***“Arise, shine, for your light has come”*** is not for people who feel they are doing pretty well, who feel like if they showed up before God at his judgment throne with nothing but their own efforts, that God would be mostly happy with them. Christ will not accept such people. Christ came for the weary and burdened, for the sin-sick, for sinners, for people who know that they desperately need a Savior. That is faith!

He came for them, to be born, to live among them, to serve them, to suffer and die for them. He came to shine through the deep darkness that covers us from our birth. He came to remove the guilt of sin that weighs us down, and the feeling of futility in being mortals who will return dust to dust and ashes to ashes. Christ came to give us hope and life eternal.

So Isaiah says, ***“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.”*** This message of restoration of fallen people is the encouraging theme of this entire book of Isaiah.

But what makes this reading appropriate for Epiphany is spoken in verse three: ***“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”***

In Isaiah’s day seven hundred years before Jesus walked the earth, the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites, were God’s specially chosen people. The Savior promised was to be born to the people of Israel, of the house and line of David. Jesus was announced to Jewish shepherds. At forty days of age he was presented in the Jewish temple in the Jewish capital city, Jerusalem? But on Epiphany, at the visit of the Wise Men, we remember that not only Jews heard of the birth of Jesus. Strangers came from the East unbidden by any within Israel. This Savior was not for one nation, one tribe. He was for all the world. He came not only for the biological descendants of Abraham, but also Abraham’s spiritual descendants. You and I, outsiders, were brought into the house of Abraham, by God’s undeserved love.

This was to be Israel’s joy. ***“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”*** (4-5). These new faces streaming to Israel are not Israelites from captivity or scattered among the nations. There is nothing implying restoration or return. But it is an enlargement of the nation. With the coming of Christ, the people of God would no longer be one little tribal group, they would be from all nations. It is the glory of the Jewish people that they are the source point for salvation through the human ancestry of Jesus. But they were only the beginning of the harvest. Soon after Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary, faith spread and multiplied through all nations on earth! Would it not be their joy to see, not just fellow Jews, but to see the nations streaming to the Savior born of them? Isaiah speaks to Israel, ***“Lift up your eyes and look about you… you will be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy.”*** It should bring a sparkle to our eyes to see the Gospel of Jesus spread and believed in other lands: Mexico, Africa, China, Vietnam.

Sadly Israel largely rejected this for themselves. Shortly after Jesus’ ascension in the book of Acts, when the apostles began to bring outsider Gentiles into the Jewish community as brothers and sisters in the faith, there was intense jealousy and rejection. This Jewish rejection of God’s express plan, as laid out in Isaiah 60, a rejection of God’s desire to bring all nations into heaven through the Savior, this rejection grew in the following generations. Even more sadly, so many Christian Gentiles repaid the Jews’ rejection with persecution. How sadly jealousy and revenge have marred what should have been joy over the Savior of all nations.

May it ever be our great joy to look around and rejoice in the new faces surrounding us. In the past year we have welcomed 15 new members and 2 youth confirmands. If you ever look around and have this vague feeling that there are many people you don’t know, don’t let it make you feel a stranger in your own house. Don’t let it make you feel like you have lost your church. May that bring a twinkle to your eye and a smile to your face. May you rejoice in them who are newcomers, and who are sharing the same undeserved love of God in Christ’s salvation.

And let that joy inspire you to share the message. Speak to your friends, invite them to hear the Gospel. Help our Outreach and Evangelism efforts. Support the mission work of our church body.

And whenever you hear someone say “Rise and Shine!”, think not of how much you would rather roll over and hit the snooze button. Let ***“Rise and shine”*** remind your of the great joy Christians have, the sparkle that we have in our eyes knowing that Christ has come for us, for all of us. Amen.