

Epiphany – Year B
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Isaiah 60:1-6
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Stand up! Shine! Your light has come!

“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.

There you are, nice and warm under your covers, sound asleep... when suddenly, without warning (and without permission) the window shades are yanked up, the light switch is flipped, and a voice says, “Get up! Time for school!” You remember those days, right? You excitedly jump up out of bed with a bright smile on your face and exclaim, “Yes, I’m ready!” No... who dares to allow that nasty sunlight to penetrate the comfy confines of my bedroom! You want to crawl under the covers and bury your face in the pillow.

This morning the Holy Spirit through his prophet Isaiah calls out, “Arise! Shine! Your light has come!”

Who is he talking to? Israel, specifically, Judah (also called Judea), the southern kingdom of Israel. Remember that Israel was split into two kingdoms after Solomon’s reign. Isaiah predicted what would happen to Judah if they did not repent.

In the previous chapter (59) Isaiah addressed the sins of the nation. Their offenses had separated them from the LORD. Their sins had hidden his face from them so that he would not hear their prayers. Among their offenses: they had turned away from God worshiped themselves and false gods. They spoke lies from their lips. Their thoughts were of iniquity. Iniquities are sins which we know are sinful against God, yet we commit them anyway (the fist raised in defiance to God’s face). Judah also looked to heathen nations for protection against their enemies, not the LORD who had led them out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

150 years after Isaiah warned Judah, the nation of Babylon completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem, burned the temple and deported the people far away from their homes. Imagine if a foreign nation invaded our country, destroyed our nation’s capital and dragged you away from your home to live in a foreign country. You might begin to understand why Isaiah said in vs2 **“See, darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness is over the peoples.”**

Our nation's capital has not been destroyed, nor have we been dragged out of our homes and deported to a far away country. But our nation was brutally attacked by foreign peoples 7 years ago. In the days following that destruction we could say that those were dark times in our nation's history.

Perhaps you have had periods of darkness in your own lives... maybe like the people of Judah some of us have at one time turned away from God. A death or grave illness struck the family and we were quick to point the finger at God. Then we quickly turned our backs on him and said, "I'm done with God. No more church. I don't need Bible study or prayer." We only plunged ourselves into deep spiritual darkness. Maybe like Judah some of you are in trouble; struggles in a relationship, financial difficulties. But you try to dig yourself out of that pit and refuse to seek help from the Omnipotent God who tells us to ask him for help and promises to help us. We only fall into the darkness of despair. Like Judah we are guilty of speaking lies, guilty of thoughts of iniquity, sins of the heart: lust, hatred, jealousy, greed, selfish pride. These are sins we've fallen into before. We continue to fight against them, but we only feel the gross darkness overwhelm us. Kind of like being in a cave. You ever been in a cave when they turn off the lights? You can almost feel darkness because you can't even see your hand in front of your face. There we are lost in a cave with no light – when we take God out of our lives. We stagger around in the darkness, bonking our heads on the cave walls and worse yet, trip and fall into a deep pit, and there we sit...

There sat the people of Judah, in exile, hundreds of miles away from home. In a deep pit of despair. But they repented. Isaiah records their confession in 59:12, **"Our offenses are many in your sight, our sins testify against us, our offenses are ever with us, we acknowledge our iniquities."** That's when the next words of Isaiah shone through like sun that peaks its rays through the clouds. **Vs1, Arise, shine, your light has come, for the glory of the LORD rises upon you!**

Stand up! Put a cheerful look on your face! Isaiah was looking into the future of the people of Judah. The prisoners in exile when home after 70 years in captivity. They eventually rebuilt the city walls, they reconstructed the temple. But Isaiah was looking farther ahead in Israel's history – 700 years to be exact.

Thick darkness not only covered the people of Judah. The darkness of sin covered the earth from the time of Adam's sin. Until Christ came to earth and took on human flesh, to be like one of us, did the Light finally shine on the earth. You see, Jesus never once turned his back on his Father, he always went to his Heavenly Father for guidance and strength. Jesus never once had a thought of lust or greed in his heart – only pure, holy and righteous thoughts. And thank goodness! Jesus' perfect, sinless life shines over our sinful lives and dispels the darkness of our sin.

But the Light's life was soon snuffed out. On a day of darkness that literally covered the earth, the Light of the world suffered the darkness and gloom of hell that you and I deserve for our sins. For turning our backs on God, the Father turned his back on his Son – for us. For trying to help ourselves instead of turning to him for help, God helped us by

punishing his Son for us. For our sins of improper thoughts, of lying and hateful tongues, the Father lashed out on his Son. Although the Light of Life was snuffed out, his death shattered the darkness of our sins. The Light returned to live, and cast aside death's dark dungeon for us forever. The brightness of Easter Sunday morning, the picture of our Risen Savior standing next to his empty tomb reassures us that we will not live in the darkness of death forever, but live in light of heaven for all eternity.

This is why, like the people of Judah, we repent. We turn away from our deeds of darkness and turn instead to our God, who is Light and Life. It is through Baptism that God reminds us, this was when the Light of Christ first entered your heart and washed away all the darkness of sin. It is through the Lord's Supper that Jesus reminds us, "Through this body and blood I give you my life, death and resurrection. Through this holy supper, I continue to live in you." We have every reason to stand up and shine. For our light has come.

Isaiah reminds us that the Light of Christ is not just for us alone. In vs3,4 he writes, **Nations will come to your light. All assemble and come to you, your sons come from afar, your daughters are carried on the arm.** Have you heard of the Moth affect? This affects some people – when they are driving their car at night, their eyes are drawn to light, even lights of oncoming traffic, and their vehicle starts to drift, even into oncoming traffic! Just like a moth who is attracted to your neighbor's bug zapper or your headlamps as you drive down the highway. People from all nations will be drawn to the Light, not out of curiosity, not because of some natural instinct like a moth, but because that Light who is Christ is Life, and the Light brings them out of the darkness of their sins.

There are many people walking in darkness right here in Radcliff, or where you live, and you know them. There are like you and I were at one time. People who have been living in darkness all their lives, not knowing the true Light or that He gives life. There are other people whom you know, who once knew the Light of Life. But they have turned their backs on the Light. They have no time for the Light and instead have turned to their own human reason and human virtue. Isaiah gives us good news. Not all who sit in darkness are doomed past all help. Isaiah sees multitudes upon multitudes from the lands that still lie in darkness who still have a chance. People from all nations will be drawn to the Light.

Here's how.... In Matthew 8 Jesus calls himself the light of the world. Later on in Matthew, he says that you are the light of the world. Christ is Light. Christ lives in you through Baptism. The Light lives in you and through you. Let that light of Christ shine through your words – no longer with lies, but speaking the truth in love. Let the light of Christ shine through your acts – no longer turning away from God but turning to him in times of trouble. Live that light. You love singing, "This little light of mine...I'm gonna' let it shine!" This little light of yours isn't little. It's Christ, the light of the world, more powerful than a lighthouse on an ocean coast, more brilliant than an airport beacon, more dazzling than the sun as it rises in the east.

Let Light of Christ shine in you and people will see that Light in you, and they will be drawn to the Light, and when they ask you can say, “Come and see the Light. Come to church with me. Come to Bible class. Come to Bible Information Class!” Or if you are bold enough to approach them, say, “Let me share the Light with you. “ Then they will know the Light and join us at last with all the saints. Jesus talks about this day in Luke 21:28, **At that time (Last Day) they (all people) 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.”**

Fainlly, Isaiah tries to describe the feeling that you will experience on that Last Day in vs5, “Then you will look... (you will look at all of this, the numbers of people joining you in heaven, some of whom you shared the Light with) and you will ponder it and your face will glow. Your heart will tremble, literally, be in awe, and your heart will throb, it will swell with joy, burn, overflow – because these people, from all nations, will live with you, in the Light, and with the Light.

Airse! And shine this week, for your light has come! Amen.