

The Epiphany of Our Lord: January 6, 2023
“Arise and Shine!”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text this evening is the Old Testament reading, Isaiah 60, “*Arise and shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*”

This proclamation is every bit as relevant in 2023, as it was for the Israelites under Isaiah’s pastoral care; even though this text is filled with future-tense verbs and prophecies, many of which refer to that very specific event of the Magi coming on their camels to the side of the infant Christ with their kingly gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. These words of Isaiah were first spoken some 700 years before the birth of Christ, and many today basically chalk them up to “been there, done that. This was prophecy that has already been fulfilled. This prophecy and its fulfillment is ancient history to us. It’s past-tense.”

The past-tense isn’t exactly a bad thing, is it? Look again at the words. God Himself speaks part of this first verse in the past tense—“the Light *has* come, and the glory of the Lord *has* risen.” Why does God do this for those Old Testament Israelites? The past-tense makes sense to us just under three millennia later, but why speak in such a way to the Israelites? It is because they were just like you. They often were short-sighted and when it came to matters of faith, like a character from Days of Our Lives, as the sand slipped through the hourglass, they had constant amnesia. They often failed to remember and recognize how the Light and Life of God had continually tabernacled and dwelt with and guided and protected them in all their ways in the past.

It’s often said that past behaviors are good indicators of future behaviors. The book of Isaiah is filled with past-tense references to God’s mighty works against Pharaoh and the Egyptians and the Israelites’ deliverance through the Red Sea and the pillars of fire and cloud that led them and guided them and the manna from heaven and water from rocks. God repeatedly reminds His people in the Old Testament how His glory; which for a long time He reveled in a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, He would let them know exactly where He wanted them to stop their wandering and set up His tabernacle.

When the tabernacle was set, that cloud of glory—God Himself—would enter into the tabernacle and dwell with His people in grace and mercy and love. When the cloud left, it was time to go. Follow the Leader. Trust in the Leader. Israel never seemed to understand that with God. God is constantly having to remind His people how He has already triumphed over sin, death, and the devil many and various ways throughout their history, and provided for them, and cared for them, and loved and protected them again and again and again.

This portion of Scripture is no different. God is telling His people that dark times lay ahead. That whole Babylonian captivity thing, which would come about because of Israel's own hard heart and refusal to repent, wasn't going to be a vacation. Dark and uncertain times lay ahead, but God doesn't just leave them alone. He doesn't just leave His people wallowing in the darkness of despair. He doesn't tell them, "Now you've done it. You're going into bondage and darkness...good luck."

No! For the sake of the faithful remnant; for the sake of the very few who still trusted in the Lord and didn't bow their knees to Baal or clamor after the worldly trappings and glories of their heathen neighbors, God speaks Gospel. He doesn't speak a new Gospel. He doesn't speak something they've never heard before; rather, He takes them back to what He's always been saying. He takes them back to the life-giving, life-saving Gospel reality that's always been in their midst, working and leading and protecting and loving and delivering them.

As we celebrate Epiphany, the coming of the Light into the world for even the Gentiles, it causes to reflect on many things. Are we living in a world that is dark with sin and unbelief and impenitence? From the perspective of faith, it's terrifying, but we're not experiencing anything Old Testament Israel didn't experience in their lives.

Do you struggle with sin, not just the sin of others, but your sin; the sin of the one who stares back at you from the mirror? Many a faithful Christian, if they're honest, will be bold to confess that there are many times in life that we find ourselves trapped and clamoring about in the darkness of our own sin and doubt and fear and unbelief. "I believe. Help me in my unbelief!" There are many times when life doesn't go according to our plans—job loss, sickness, martial strife,

children struggles, school friction, workplace conflict—and we look around and all we see is darkness. We cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

God has not forsaken you; not now, and not ever. We know that, but how often we forget. In fact, the only one who could rightly pray this prayer is the One who was utterly and completely forsaken in your place so that you would never have to experience a single moment of it in your lives, both now and in eternity.

Because of Christ Jesus; because of the glory of God Himself made flesh and hung on a cross to die for you; because of Him who victoriously proclaimed “It is finished” as He laid down His life for full and complete payment for each and every sin for all time, you are completely forgiven and redeemed. You are justified; that is, declared innocent by Almighty God Himself.

Brothers and sisters, look around. Nothing has changed! Your Lord’s Old Testament epiphany command still rings out to you tonight. You have been justified and resurrected unto new life in Christ. Act like it! Rise and shine! Be resurrected and see how that Light of Christ shines through you in all that you say and do.

That’s what the word “epiphany” means. It’s a Greek word that means, “to make known, to reveal, to manifest.” What do you make known in your daily life? When people behold you—good times or bad, better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health—do they behold the glory of Christ? Do they behold one who gets it; one who understands and believes and rejoices in their present and eternal justification, or do they behold a lip-service Christian who remains in the dark? In other words, you confess being a Christian. Could you be accused of it?

We live in a dark and sinful world, and it’s easy to get down, and the devil rejoices when we do. In that darkness the light has come, and it could not be defeated. That Light is given to you. Fellow redeemed, “***Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.***” Behold, the glory of God Himself—His Word, His Body, His Blood—for you to behold and receive and have His gift of abundant life.

Rise and shine, for your Light has come and He continues to come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you and tabernacles with you now even as we speak, kneeling down from Heaven to feed you with His life-giving Body and Blood for the forgiveness of all your sins.

Rise and shine, for your Lord has worked great and wonderful things for His people in the past, and He continues to work these great and wonderful things for you now in your presence, and He has promised to continue to remain with you and work His wonderful, glorious works of Divine mercy, grace, and forgiveness until the end of the ages. You have no reason to fear or doubt or despair, for the ever-present and eternal "I Am" is with you. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**Prayer of the Church
The Epiphany of Our Lord
6 January 2023**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

O God, You have made Yourself known to all nations in the person of Your Son. Grant us a right knowledge of Him, that we would abandon the darkness of this world and embrace the joy of His heavenly light. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Giver of all wisdom, You guided the Wise Men from the East to Your holy Son, that they might worship their King. Preserve us in the faith, that we would not be led astray by cultural trends or man-made philosophies. By Your Holy Word, strengthen us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, Your Son and our Savior, and grant that we may make use of Your gifts according Your will and with thanksgiving. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You prepared a place for Your Son, Jesus, in the womb of the Virgin Mary and in the home of Mary and Joseph. Bless our homes and all who dwell in them, that Your Word would be heard and Your mercy be shown therein. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

May Your light shine in the world for the correction of error and the promotion of virtue. Bless Joseph, our president; Kim, our governor; and all elected and appointed civil servants. Guide them in the pursuit of justice and peace for all the people. Guard those who protect and defend us against all enemies. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

From distant lands and far off places, You gather a people to bear Your name and live in the light of Your Word. Bless the Church, that she may be united in doctrine, live in harmony and peace, and labor to bring the light of Christ to those still dwelling in darkness and death. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give to all people the comfort of Your presence, healing according to Your will, relief of suffering, and an end to the terrors of mind and heart. Sustain the weary with Your Word, the wounded with hope and the dying with peace. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, eternal Light, in the Sacrament of the Altar Your Son hides His glory beneath bread and wine in order to reveal Your goodness. Bring us to Your table with hearts that are well prepared and that yearn for Your forgiveness and life. Shine the light of Christ into our lives, and enable us to arise and shine Your love to others. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

May Your light shine on us and bring forth the fruits of repentance in our daily lives. Give us confidence in Your Word, that we would embrace Your holy will without fear. Hear and answer us, we pray, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**