

Epiphany: January 6, 2019
“Present Past and Perfect Pasting Present”

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 2020, 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. 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 2020**

Your light has dawned upon us, and we are drawn to Your light as a people of faith who trust Your mercy to answer the prayers of Your people with grace sufficient for all our needs. From distant lands and far-off places, You have gathered to Yourself a people to wear Your name and live in the light of Your Word. Bless Your Church, where she struggles to survive and where she labors to keep up with all the growth, that we may be united in doctrine, live in harmony and peace, and work together that those still in darkness and death may be brought into the light of Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Kings and governments rise and fall, but Your Word endures forever. Give to all our elected and appointed leaders grace and wisdom sufficient for their task, that they may keep the sacred trust placed in them and serve the common good. Bless especially those who protect us at home and the servicemen and women who defend us throughout the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Through Your Word, You have made known the mystery of Christ and granted redemption to all people through Baptism and faith. Guide those who preach and teach Your Word to us, and give them a loving heart to shepherd Your people faithfully. Bless all church workers and those now preparing for Your service. Especially bless the seminaries and colleges of our Church and those we support throughout the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

By Your mercy, we are preserved in time of trouble and sustained in illness, even to death. Bless the sick, the shut-in, and those troubled in mind and heart, and grant them healing according to Your will. Encourage the grieving with hope, and comfort the dying in their last hours. *[Especially do we pray for Carmen, Susan, Larry, Zoey, and those we name in our hearts.]* Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As the Holy Innocents suffered in the wake of Herod's rage, we pray You to comfort the families of the martyrs and strengthen all who suffer for the sake of the Gospel. We especially cry to You on behalf of the unborn, that their lives may be preserved with the full protection of the law and their care supported by the full resources of the medical arts. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gathered before the mystery of Christ's presence in this bread and cup, we pray You to prepare us with repentance to receive in faith His body and blood. By this communion, equip us with every gift and grace, that we may fulfill our baptismal vocation as Your people and be kept to the day when at last we join You in the heavenly banquet that has no end. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, mighty God, You have shown to us the face of Your mercy in Your Son, through whom those of all nations may find unity and life. Hear the prayers of Your people, and grant all that is needful to us and to those for whom we have prayed, that trusting in Your mercy our hearts may find perfect peace and rest in Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**