

## Rise and Shine

Isaiah 60:1-6

Epiphany Sunday, January 3, 2021

Pastor Dave Schultz

### Old Testament Lesson, Isaiah 60:1-6 by Pastor Dave

<sup>1</sup> “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. <sup>2</sup> See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. <sup>3</sup> Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

<sup>4</sup> “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 hip. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.

### Sermon by Pastor Dave, “Rise and Shine”

Every New Year holds promise; perhaps this one more than any New Year I can recall in my lifetime. This past Thursday evening, rather than gathering in a New Year’s Eve party as we may have done in years past, we sat alone in our living rooms, watching television—again—and waiting for the stroke of midnight when we could finally say, “Good Riddance!” to 2020.

And today we begin this New Year with Epiphany. Now that’s an interesting word: an epiphany is “an illuminating discovery.” It’s a disclosure. It’s when the light dawns on you: a light bulb goes off in your head and you realize something profound; at least it’s profound to you.

In the Church, Epiphany celebrates the arrival of stargazers from the East who came to Jerusalem because they had followed a star. Somehow the magi from the East saw a Light shining in the West and they were drawn to that Light—which of course, was not just a star, but the Light of Christ. And because they were drawn to that Light they were able to “rise and shine” in response to the glory of God which had appeared to them.



It’s been interesting to follow what the pundits have been saying about 2020. Their universal assessment is that if 2020 were a fish, we would’ve collectively thrown it back. We wanted none of this pandemic. We wanted none of sheltering in place. We wanted none of social distancing. Instead, we wanted to be able to attend ball games at Wrigley Field; we wanted to go to crowded concert halls and movie theaters and restaurants. We wanted to be able to visit our loved ones in hospitals and nursing homes and at Brookstone. And we wanted to pack the pews as we worshipped God together. But by mid-March, those things were but a memory.

And now today we begin this New Year with Epiphany. Isn’t it ironic that with all the difficulties we faced last year that we ended the year with the best appearance of the so-called Christmas Star in four hundred years?

I love the opening words of Isaiah 60: “Arise! Shine!” Indeed, the Revised Common Lectionary suggests those words every year for Epiphany. I’ve preached a “Rise and Shine” sermon at the beginning of a New Year before, and as I prayed about this year’s “Rise and Shine” message, I reflected on the impact of those words at the beginning of last year, 2020: little did we realize then what it would take for us to “rise and shine” this past year. Think of it:

- A whole new industry was born around the latest fashion accessories: face masks. Don't leave home without one.
- We learned new ways of caring for neighbor through new social protocols and food ministries and so much more.
- And in our homes, our businesses, our schools, and in the church, we had no choice but to learn and utilize new technologies in order to connect with one another. Here at Aledo, we've leaned hard on WRMJ, and John Hoscheidt has been so gracious to us by making it possible for us to broadcast our Christmas Eve service on the radio. And last Sunday, not only did he air our Sunday morning service at 10:30, but he also re-broadcast our service that evening at 5:10. Kathy Jenkins sponsored that morning broadcast and got double the value for her investment. Thank you, Kathy, and thank you, John.

We've also been leaning hard on Facebook Live by going live four times a week. And through that technology, we've been able to touch lives across the state of Illinois and beyond as we've continued to "connect people to Jesus Christ." We've learned that the "virtual church" is an important part of our ministry. "Virtual" sounds like it's not real, but we've learned that our virtual church is a real congregation made up of real people who have written to us and told us how much our services have impacted their lives.



Almost ten months ago, Governor Pritzker effectively shut down the state of Illinois on March 15 because of the pandemic. I didn't leave Orion that entire week. And I remember a phone conversation I had with Karl, our church organist that Saturday. Karl lives in the Quad Cities and we decided he should stay home that Sunday because we didn't know if the sheriff's deputies would stop him for leaving his home and driving to Orion. We didn't yet know how to live in a pandemic. So that Sunday, I sat alone in the sanctuary, and conducted what felt like a very strange worship service.

Back then, I thought that if we all sheltered in place for two or three weeks, we'd be done with the coronavirus. Obviously, that didn't happen, and we're stuck in the middle of a spike once again. But somewhere along the line, we realized that life goes on and we would have to somehow "rise and shine" even in the midst of a pandemic. So we adapted. We learned to mask up when we went to Mercer Market and Walmart. We learned to accept help from neighbors. Some of us even moved to a new community during this pandemic.

We learned to Zoom with our families or visit with loved one through windows. We adapted to smaller weddings and funerals. And we adjusted to virtual church. We learned that even when we think we're all alone, God is right there with us. And as much as we hated what the pandemic did to us in 2020, we learned to rise and shine. And that, of course, brings us to today. How will we "rise and shine" in 2021?

One year ago today, we had no idea what challenges 2020 would bring. And today, we likely have no idea what challenges 2021 will bring. Some of those challenges may have broad social implications: they may be national or even international challenges. Some of those challenges may only affect our families. But in every case, I believe that we can "rise and shine." Do you believe that? I hope you do.



One of the television shows I look forward to every year is *The Amazing Race*. Each season, it starts out with eleven couples, or teams, who, over the course of their race around the world, must complete a number of challenges. Many times those challenges cause teams to either "get down and dirty" or "rise and shine." Typically, there are a couple of teams that stand out as "the team to beat." But instead of rising and shining, they lowered themselves by turning on each other and blaming each other and were eliminated.

On the other hand, in more than one season I've watched a team begin a race and I've thought, "They'll never make it; this race will tear them apart." Instead, they learned to work together, make the most of their experiences, and rose to the challenges before them and they shined.

How are we going to rise and shine in 2021? Isaiah 60 gives us an important clue: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you." We don't generate our own light; rather, our light comes to us as a gift. And the gift is found in the glory—which is the presence—of the Lord. We rise and shine as we cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit which is present in our lives. And many times, the Spirit reveals herself to us through the encouragement of another.

Some time back I read the testimony<sup>1</sup> of Natalie Hanson in *The Upper Room* where she described her experience as a college student spending two summers leading work teams at a cooperative parish in West Virginia. She writes, "I first visited the parish as a high school volunteer and then as a young adult counselor.

"On the second visit, the director of the parish looked me up and down, took me aside, handed me a toolbox and a pencil drawing and said, 'I want you to take these kids over to that trailer and build Mrs. Love a new set of steps.'

"I protested that I had no idea how to build steps. He looked at me again and finally said, 'It's high time you began to see in yourself what others see in you. I see something of a carpenter, something of a leader. You'd best get out there and see for yourself.'"

Natalie goes on to say, "Riding his confidence, I figured out how to read his pencil sketch and build those steps I learned how to work concrete and to organize a team. I learned how to sit down and appreciate the folks for whom and with whom I was working. Because he called me out, something in me began to rise and shine."

I wonder: have you ever had that experience? Has anyone ever seen something in you that you didn't see in you? Has someone ever believed in you—perhaps when you didn't even believe in yourself? If you've achieved anything in life, it may very well be because someone believed in you: a parent, an uncle, a teacher, a mentor.

Or let's put the shoe on the other foot: have you ever seen something in someone else that he or she didn't see in himself? Have you ever motivated anyone to step beyond themselves to become all that God intended them to be?

Yesterday in my devotions, I read the profound words of Jacob in Genesis 28:16, "Surely the Lord is in this place and I was not aware of it." Likewise, the Lord was present in 2020; although we may not have been aware of it. So let us like Jacob look back on 2020 and identify the times and places where the Spirit of God worked in our lives to help us rise and shine. And as we look ahead to 2021, let us discern how the Spirit of God is equipping us to meet the challenges of the coming year.

You can rise to the challenges of life and shine for Jesus because Someone believes in you. God believes in you. If God didn't believe in you, God would've never bothered sending Jesus Christ to be born in Bethlehem.

But God does believe in you. That's why God gave us Jesus. Even when you don't believe in yourself, God's faith in you does not waver. God knows that we can rise and shine in 2021, just as we did in 2020, despite the pandemic. God believes in you even more than the director of that parish believed in Natalie Hanson. And because God believes in you, God equips you to rise and shine to the glory of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Jan-Feb. 2012 Edition (© 2011 by Upper Room Books), pg. 13.

Let us pray.

**Prayer**

We rejoice in the mystery made plain through the good news of the babe of Bethlehem. May this Good News transform us and guide us as we seek to rise and shine as the Light of Christ shines upon us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.