

Sermon on Isaiah 60 – Rise and Shine!

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

“Rise and shine!” Do I have to? It’s so hard to get out of bed in the morning, especially this time of year. Cold and dark mornings. Warm and cozy beds. It’s a recipe for sleeping in if only we didn’t have so much to do. Benjamin Franklin once said, “Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.” Easy for him to say. He must have been a morning person! It’s easy to rise and shine if you have reason to. It’s easy to rise and shine if you’ve got something to look forward to. In our text for today, God himself greets us with the words, ***“Rise and Shine.”*** He gives us the reason and motivation to do so. ***I. Rise – your light has come! II. Shine – your light to the world!***

The fact that God encourages us to rise and shine is truly amazing when we think of what we were by nature because of sin. The Apostle Paul writes, *“we were dead in our transgressions and sins...we were by nature objects of wrath.”* The fact that God encourages us to rise and shine is truly amazing when we think about the fact that we aren’t part of God’s chosen people known as the Jews. Concerning them, the Apostle Paul writes, *“theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!”*

Jesus was a Jew, born of a Jewish mother. Jesus was a Jew, sent first for the lost sheep of Israel. But one of the great truths of Epiphany is that Jesus is for all people, both Jews and Gentiles alike. Paul told us that in our second lesson for today, *“through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”* By nature, we were on the outside of the party looking in. By the grace of God, we’re in the party, here on earth and for all eternity in heaven. When it comes to that party, God could have said to us, “Who are you? What are you doing here? You don’t belong here. You’re out of place. Just look at you and the

way you’re dressed! Just look at yourself in the mirror of my law! You think you’re someone who can make it into the party on your own? Can you honestly say that you’ve made every effort to live at peace with those around you? Can you honestly say that you’ve always been kind and charitable in your thoughts, words, and actions? Can you honestly say that you’ve always gone out of your way to make others feel welcomed, appreciated, loved? Can you honestly say that you’ve never looked down on others because they didn’t share your opinions? If you can, come right into the party, but you can’t. I know that, I can see right through you down to the thoughts and attitude of your hearts.” The words of his parable are the words Jesus could speak to us, *“how did you get in here without wedding clothes?” The King told the attendants, “tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

Whether you’re a Jew or Gentile, there is no difference for *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* Concerning the darkness of sin, John writes, *“whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded him.”* In our text, Isaiah tells us *“darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples.”* The darkness of sin is a helpless, hopeless situation that would have found us stumbling and bumbling, doomed to spend an eternity in hell, left out of the party, left out in the cold, left out in the dark forever. All the more reason why we can be thankful that the coldest and darkest time of the year also brings the warmest and brightest light!

Whether you’re a Jew or Gentile, there is no difference for *“all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”* Through the prophet Isaiah, God tells us, *“arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you...the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.”* When we come across the phrase, *“the glory of the Lord”* in Scripture, it’s really something special. In the Hebrew language it’s pronounced “cavod adonai.” It’s the covenant glory of God. In it we see a preaching of both law and gospel. The law that shows our sins. The gospel that shows our Savior. On the one hand, the glory of the Lord brings fear and terror reminding us of our unworthiness to stand in the presence of a holy God. On the other hand, the glory of the Lord brings us to our knees in repentance focusing on the One who kept the law perfectly for us and died for our

sins against it. The One who lived, died, and rose again to forgive our sins and give us the gift of eternal life in heaven. The One who has clothed us in the wedding garments of his righteousness. The One who assures us that when it comes to the party, we're invited, we're welcome, we're dressed, we're expected! Our names are on the guest list. They've been written in God's book of life with the blood of the Lamb.

There's nothing like a wedding reception. Good food, good fun, good fellowship, singing and dancing. You never want it to end! When it comes to the wedding reception of heaven, it won't end! One of the more difficult things about planning and hosting wedding receptions here on earth is that you have so many people you want to invite, but only so much room and so many resources. It's hard to pick and choose. Regretfully people are left out and feelings are hurt. That's what makes the wedding reception of heaven so amazing. Everyone is invited! Everyone is welcome! Space is infinite and resources are unlimited. The celebration promises to be out of this world! God's Word tells us there's only one way to get in. That's through faith in Jesus who alone is the way, the truth, and the life. God's Word also tells us that if you're coming, you better come dressed for the occasion. Here too God has you covered. By the grace of God through faith in Jesus, you're dressed to impress with the robe of righteousness that is yours in Christ. The robe that became yours on the day of your baptism as you became God's own dear child.

All this is yours through Jesus, the Light of the World. During the season of Epiphany, we're reminded that this light shines brightly for all to see. Through the prophet Isaiah, God tells us, *"Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 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; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. 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."* In our gospel lesson for today, Matthew told us about some Gentiles who came from the east to worship the King. They dropped everything and made a journey that could have taken months to worship the King. They brought the first

and finest of offerings to worship the King. They returned home to tell others about the King. I know we don't have that recorded for us in Scripture, but we know that it happened, because that's what believers do. Those who have been filled with the light of Jesus can't help but reflect that light to others.

Jesus tells us, *"You are the light of the world...Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven."* Peter tells us, *"you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who brought you out of darkness into his wonderful light."* Rise and shine! Rise - your light has come. Shine - your light to the world. The Hindu, the Muslim, the Mormon, the Jehovah's witness, the neighbor who doesn't go to church but feels pretty good where he stands with God based on all the good things he does. These are all people who need to see the light. How will you shine it into their hearts and lives? This past Christmas season you were encouraged to pass along invitations for people to come and worship with us. Don't feel bad if you missed that opportunity. Use this New Year of God's grace to pass along personal invitations to "come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ the newborn King." Use this New Year of God's grace to fill up on the light of God's glory. In the Old Testament, Moses would have to wear a veil over his face after meeting with God because the reflection of God's glory was so bright. The more you're in God's house, in God's Word, the more opportunities to soak up the light and reflect that light as you go about your days. During these dark days of winter, we need that light all the more and so do countless others. Look for opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus as you help a neighbor in need. Look for opportunities to be the voice of Jesus as you invite people to church or encourage people you haven't seen around for awhile to come back to church. There are countless ways to let the light of Jesus shine in our lives. May God not only open our eyes to see them but also to seize them, sharing the good news of the Savior just like the Shepherds and Magi of old. The Apostle Paul writes, *"Shine like the stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life."* Rise and shine! It's time to grow in the Word! It's time to go with the Word to the world! God himself gives us the reason and motivation to do so in Jesus our Savior!

Amen.

