

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 6, 2019
Epiphany Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Ephesians 3:2-12; Matthew 2:1-12
Hymns: 128; 127; 129; 97 (105:1,2,8)

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

Sermon Text: Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; For your light has come!
And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.
2 For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
And deep darkness the people;
But the LORD will arise over you,
And His glory will be seen upon you.
3 The Gentiles shall come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your rising.
4 "Lift up your eyes all around, and see:
They all gather together, they come to you;
Your sons shall come from afar,
And your daughters shall be nursed at your side.
5 Then you shall see and become radiant,
And your heart shall swell with joy;
Because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.
6 The multitude of camels shall cover your land,
The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah;
All those from Sheba shall come;
They shall bring gold and incense,
And they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, the Savior of the world, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Today is the twelfth day of Christmas!

If you were under the impression that Christmas was over several days ago I can't really blame you. The world promotes that impression; even the after Christmas sales are over and Valentines candy fills the store shelves. Most people have moved on. Most Christmas decorations are packed away. We have had our fill of Christmas treats, and we grew tired of Christmas music days ago. Children are back at school, there is work to be done. But traditionally **this** is the last day of Christmas. January 6th is the twelfth day of Christmas just like in the Christmas carol. For some churches with a more eastern European tradition, today is the day they celebrate Christmas. While I wouldn't suggest that we should move away from our traditional observance of December 25th, I would like us to consider how significant the observance of the twelfth day is, for this is Epiphany! We are reminded that Christmas isn't over! Today it's still Christmas! We have reason to celebrate! Let's --

THEME: Celebrate Christmas for the Gentiles.

I. A Brilliant Christmas Light Shines on a Very Dark World!

Our text begins with this vivid contrast which is a recurring theme in Isaiah:

Isaiah 60: 1-2 Arise, shine; For your light has come!
And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.
2 For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
And deep darkness the people;
But the LORD will arise over you,
And His glory will be seen upon you.

Already a couple of times during this Advent and Christmas season we have spoken of the contrast between darkness and light. We have seen that darkness prevails in the world. We have learned that spiritual darkness is the inevitable outcome from sin entering into the world, as well as sin taking control of one's life. When sin is in control the heart will be plunged into darkness, a darkness that refuses to acknowledge the sin, sin's evil, sin's defiance of God, and sin's final outcome. In that darkness the heart of man clings to denial, the denial of God's authority over all of us, over our hearts and lives. Also the denial that there is anything seriously wrong with continuing in sin, especially if we judge that it isn't hurting anyone, or it simply serves our life choices.

Jesus warns that this darkness leads mankind to the judgment of outer darkness, eternal darkness, and this can happen even for some who have known but then turned away from the gospel. Jesus said "*But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" (Matthew 8:12) In God there is no darkness at all. Apart from God there is only darkness. Ultimately an eternity apart from God is utter darkness of hopelessness and eternal despair.

That is bleak. By nature that is where all mankind resides. That is where we were apart from the grace and love of God appearing. That grace and love of God appeared on this earth when Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. This is the event the Prophet Isaiah was writing about with the opening call of our text: "**Arise! Shine! For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.**" Isaiah was directing these words to the people of the Jews who had some very bleak times coming upon them in the coming centuries. However, that would all change when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. He is that Light of salvation! He is the glory of the Lord!

The glory of the Lord is revealed to the people of this world in many ways, but none of them are as spectacular as when God sent His Son into the world as Savior of the world. That was the kind of glory that would fill the night skies when the angels announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds in the Bethlehem hills. But that dazzling glory of the Lord was not to be seen by Jews alone.

It was intended by the Lord for the people of all nations. God would not limit the revelation of His glory to a few and those of one nation. This is where we find the significance of the wise men who came from the East in search of that One who was to be born King of the Jews. That was only the beginning of the fulfillment of the Isaiah's words here in our text.

Isaiah 60:3-4 The Gentiles shall come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your rising.
4 "Lift up your eyes all around, and see:
They all gather together, they come to you;
Your sons shall come from afar,
And your daughters shall be nursed at your side.

This is the big picture. When we think of the coming of the wise men we think a small group. In Old Testament times this was the rule, only a few people of the gentile nations came to faith in the one true God. Isaiah is prophesying of something much greater. Isaiah wants the people of the Jews to recognize the wonder of what was coming, that people from all over the world would be making the journey to see the light of the glory of Christ. No, most would never come to Judea physically, but they would come spiritually.

This is what Paul was describing in our epistle lesson, speaking of the calling the Lord gave to Paul that he should be a special messenger to proclaim this good news of salvation to the Gentiles. There is a great gathering together of the people of the all nations of the world, a gathering together of all these different peoples into one

people, the people of God, what we today call the Holy Christian Church. And yes, this gathering is still going on among us today, drawing us into God's chosen people, His holy nation.

This is where it gets good, for what God has done within us, within our hearts, well Isaiah describes it as --

II. Hearts that Swell with Christmas Joy!

Isaiah's first audience for these words that predict the coming of this great joy is the people of Judah, people who had been told repeatedly by Isaiah that days of judgment were going to befall their country because of their sin and impenitence. However, in these verses the Lord through Isaiah is presenting them with a promise of joy that would follow later, joy found in the fulfillment of the promises of God to bring a Savior into the world.

Isaiah 60:5-6 Then you shall see and become radiant,
And your heart shall swell with joy;
Because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,
The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.
6 The multitude of camels shall cover your land,
The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah;
All those from Sheba shall come;
They shall bring gold and incense,
And they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD

In these verses God is describing the world's response to the gospel. There is to be a massive response to the good news of Jesus' coming into the world. A multitude of camels, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah. Think caravans. Long strings of camels loaded down with treasures, loaded down with the offerings to be presented to the Lord. This was inserted here precisely for the "WOW!" factor. Instead of multitudes invading Judah to strip the people of God of anything and everything of value, there were days coming when multitudes would

come to adore their newborn King, and present gifts to Him. Did this begin with the Wise men and their precious gifts of gold and frankincense, and myrrh? Yes, that was a beginning, but remember that these men sacrificed much more than the gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. They left their homes, and traveled a great distance and endured certain discomfort, and sacrifice, all for the opportunity to bow before Jesus and for a short time perhaps only a few minutes, worship Jesus as their Savior King. Were Mary and Joseph's hearts filled with joy? Certainly, joy and wonder and amazement. But so were the hearts of the wise men!

It is from them we draw the lesson for ourselves. Instead of treasures by the camel caravan, may we bring treasures to our King by the truckload? Instead of a caravan of camels, can you picture offerings to Jesus coming in a convoy of semis? So great is the wealth which God has bestowed upon His people so that we may serve the Lord. Especially at this time of the year, especially right now on the twelfth day of Christmas our hearts swell with Christmas joy for the glory of the Lord has been revealed to us in Jesus' birth. Now we have the opportunity to come before Him and bow before the Lord our Maker as He presents Himself in deep humility that we might be eternally blessed.

Do our gifts and offerings reflect the joy that fills our hearts? Are we ready not only to endure some hardship and sacrifice, but to do so with joy in our hearts to the Lord? Are our hearts swelling with joy because we have the opportunity to come bow before our Savior and King?

You see our offerings and our praises aren't to be out of obligation. That is not what Isaiah says. It is out of adoration! All these people whether they be of the land of Judah, or coming out of the gentile nations, all whose hearts are swelling with Christmas joy are eager to *"show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light."*

Are your hearts filled with joy? Then come before His presence, Offer the Lord the best of all the blessings He has poured out into your life. Praise the Lord, not only with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, but also in sharing the joy of the twelfth day of Christmas with people around you, and even to the far corners of the earth. This message still goes out to the world. This message still changes hearts, driving out the darkness and gloom of sin, and shining into people's hearts the joy and peace of God's forgiving grace in Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem.

Conclusion: So here we are on the twelfth day of Christmas, the traditional end of the Christmas. It's time for us to take down and pack away the decorations, even here in church. It's time, and we all probably feel we have had enough Christmas celebrating. What we have not had enough of, what we could never have too much of is the Christmas gospel. Throughout the year we continue to live in a sin darkened world where the light of the Christmas gospel needs to shine. And yes, how blessed we, people of the gentile nations, are to have that gospel shining in our hearts. It is indeed the good news of "Joy to the world! The Lord is come!"

AMEN.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen. (Romans15:13)