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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
January 10, 2021  
Epiphany Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Ephesians 3:2-12, Matthew 2:1-12  
Hymns: 127; 126; 128; 127:4,5

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.

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>The Gentiles shall come to your light,

And kings to the brightness of your rising.

<sup>4</sup>"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.

<sup>5</sup>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.

<sup>6</sup>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, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Epiphany, - The Christmas Finale

At least that's the way I like to think about it. For many people Christmas is over halfway through December 25<sup>th</sup>. For centuries that was regarded as only the first of the twelve days of Christmas! There is so much for us celebrate with the birth of our Savior that we can't do it all in a day or two! It isn't that we have church services every one of the twelve days of Christmas. It is really more that we as Gentile Christ believers look forward to the twelfth day of Christmas on January 6<sup>th</sup>, Epiphany! We look forward to Epiphany as the grand finale, our Christmas observance coming to its end with a crescendo of gospel truth and spiritual joy!

That is where our gospel lesson leads us as we read of the wise men from the East coming to search out the Child Jesus to worship Him. Our epistle lesson explains for us how the significance of that event was carried on by the mission endeavors of the Church. Our Old Testament lesson, our text for this morning, lays out so well how this message of Epiphany was part of God's plan of salvation from days of old. So let us consider these words and see how they convey to us the message of --

**THEME: Epiphany: The Lord's "Merry Christmas" to YOU!**

Our text begins y prophesying --

**I. Christmas Light Shines on the Gentiles.**

**Isaiah 60:1-3** Arise, shine; For your light has come!

And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>The Gentiles shall come to your light,

And kings to the brightness of your rising.

The exhortation to arise and shine is directed to gentiles who are the ones who are ensnared in the deep spiritual darkness that has covered the entire world. We have addressed this darkness in a number of our advent and Christmas meditations. It is a consistent theme brought to our attention to remind us that what the world claims is light with their false religions is in fact darkness.

It is so easy, even for the child of God, to be drawn back into the darkness of this world because it is wrapped in such pretty wrapping paper as if it were the gift we should be treasuring for our souls. It may come in the wrapping of meditation or yoga which can quickly go past the stretching exercises to the proper alignment of the chakra that leads one to inner peace and advancements toward Nirvana. Many people are enticed by the ideas that the departed souls of loved ones are watching over them, and even offering guidance or at least approval of the things they are doing. Some speak causally of knowing someone in another life, or advancing to a higher life in their next incarnation. All these elements of eastern mysticism have snuck into our culture and even infect teaching in some Christian denominations.

Add to this the syncretism (the mixing of idol worship with Christianity) in the practice of some churches where indigenous people are striving to restore their culture, but at the expense of the truth.

What are we most susceptible to? Perhaps it is the false promises of work righteousness; that something we did in our lives, be it good church attendance, or charitable deeds, or serving our country in times of war has somehow contributed to our salvation.

All this darkness surrounds us in this world. At one time this darkness possessed us by nature. We were born in the darkness of unbelief, and that is where we would have remained except for the grace of God.

And that is what Epiphany is all about. God is saying, "Merry Christmas!" by shining the light of this gospel of Jesus, the Babe born in Bethlehem, on and in our hearts. He is calling us to arise and shine, with the beams of faith enlightening our hearts. The

Lord, the God of our salvation has risen over us. and we, the people of the Gentile nations, have been drawn to Bethlehem to see the child Jesus.

Each Epiphany we look forward to hearing once again of the coming of the wise men and how they were led by the guiding star to the house where the young Jesus was living with Mary and Joseph. We love to hear that Scripture because we identify with them, the first of the Gentiles to come and worship their newborn King!

From that precious beginning we --

## **II. Observe the Wondrous Spread of the Gospel throughout the World.**

**Isaiah 60:4-5a** “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*. <sup>5</sup>Then you shall see and become radiant, And your heart shall swell with joy.

Do you understand the message here? The prophet is talking about the spread of the gospel in the gentile world. Yes, this started with the Wise Men who came to worship Jesus, and certainly they took the message of the Christ-child back home with them. There has always been that person to person witnessing to the precious gospel.

After Jesus’ ascension the Apostles went out as they were commissioned by Jesus, a commission that encompasses us all, and encompasses the globe! Then thousands upon thousands came to know Jesus as their Redeemer Lord. In spirit they came together from the ends of the earth. In spirit they went back to Bethlehem that they also might worship the Child of Mary. More and more people were fed the life-giving milk of the gospel of Christ, and the sons and daughters of the Church grew in number.

This is how we were brought into the church. The gospel came to us, for most of us at our baptisms, because our parents already knew and believed the gospel. And so we were called to faith. and that was a joyous day for those who witnessed our baptism. And so

we also rejoiced in the grace of God and our Savior Jesus Christ when we in turn brought our children to the baptismal font. That is seeing the power of gospel and the grace of salvation up close and personal. And it fills our hearts with joy!

Now let's look at the bigger picture that our text is drawing out for us. Let's look again at how the people of this world, people who were under that dark shroud of the curse of the law continue to be drawn by the Holy Spirit to Jesus. Last Sunday we watched a short clip of a Christmas Eve program with children from so many different countries reciting Christmas Scriptures, worshiping Jesus as their Savior and rejoicing in His birth. We saw children from India and Nepal and Bangladesh and Myanmar and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Kenya, and Tanzania, and Russia, and Canada and our own United States, all praising the Lord. And the words of our text are called to mind; *"Your sons shall come from afar, And your daughters shall be nursed at your side. <sup>5</sup> Then you shall see and become radiant, And your heart shall swell with joy."* (v. 4-5a) Didn't your heart swell with joy? Didn't seeing this wondrous spread of the gospel and the joy of believing that these children possessed cause your face also to become radiant?

With all the evil and negative stories we see on the news that brings us distress and aggravation, seeing the fruits of the victory of Christ dispels all this gloom and sadness, and brings joy to our hearts as we all together praise the Savior and know that He brings joy and hope to the world, to **all** the world. You have seen it with your own eyes! The wonders God has done in bringing life and salvation to people living in countries that are doing their utmost to silence the gospel, and yet the Word of the Lord grows!

"He rules the world with truth and grace  
And makes the nations prove The glories of His righteousness  
And wonders of His love, And wonders of His love!" (TLH 87:4)

In the closing words of our text the Lord calls upon believers to --

### **III. Respond from Grateful Hearts.**

**Isaiah 60:5b-6** "The abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,  
The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.

<sup>6</sup>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.”

Again our thoughts turn first to how these words found fulfillment in the wise men from the east. We have heard this account so often that we may forget just how amazing it was that these great and important men searched out the house where Jesus was living with Joseph and Mary, the simple house of a tradesman. These great men were filled with joy and entered this house and they prostrated themselves before the Lord Jesus, a young child in simple surroundings, and they worshiped Him. And then from hearts filled with love and faith they offered their gifts the gold and incense, and myrrh.

They didn't ask to see a budget and if budgetary needs were to be met. They didn't ask what purpose these gifts would be used for. They simply gave them as fruits of faith, as their response to the gospel. And so they fulfilled these words of prophesy. And before long they went on their way, and one may be sure they were still rejoicing with exceedingly great joy! Their pilgrimage, very likely months in duration, was a complete success. They had seen and worshiped their Redeemer King! And they went on their way rejoicing, and as our text directs, “Proclaiming the praises of the Lord!” (v.6)

These words of our God still talk to us. They give us direction in how we ought to respond to the wonder of salvation, to the Christmas blessing that the Lord has sent our way. With eyes of faith we have seen the Lord as we have been guided by the Holy Spirit to see the child Jesus as our Redeemer King. With our hearts filled with joy and rejoicing how shall we respond?

The Lord has blessed us richly, both spiritually and materially. This wealth of the Gentiles that comes to the Lord, well in **our** day it is **our** wealth. And why exactly should we give? How much should we offer to the Lord? Too often we look at budgets and start thinking of “fair shares” of the budget. Too often we look at our own wants and desires and think of fulfilling these worldly desires before we even think of giving back to the Lord.

It's time to start fresh. Look in the manger and see the Infant Jesus, the Lord of glory in the flesh, humbling Himself because of the greatness of His love for us. Go with the Wise Men and see the young Child they found and see there your Redeemer King. See there the only begotten Son of God who came to save the world, including Gentiles, also you and me. See and believe the wonder of grace and the power of this gospel to save multitudes. Rejoice with exceedingly great joy and give as that joy leads you to give a gift that honors your Savior.

And then we remember to come and gather with our fellow believers here that we might proclaim the praise of the Lord. This is the place where we do it best, isn't it? Here at church in the hour of worship we sing the praises of Him who "*called us out of darkness into His marvelous light!*" (1 Peter 2:9) And it is with joy in our hearts to the Lord! When something prevents us from gathering with our fellow believers, or worse yet when we neglect the gathering of ourselves together we miss that exercise of our faith, and the expression of our joy, and our joy is diminished! And the joy of other members is impaired. Remember that is what Isaiah talked about earlier in our text. **Seeing with our eyes** the family of God that has been called from darkness to light brings joy to the believer's heart. And that is what we see every time we gather together. And yes, I do see joy that is ignited by our coming together to praise the Lord. and you do also, and you feel that joy in your heart.

And so this Epiphany the Lord says "Merry Christmas" to YOU, that the joy of the Christ Child, the joy of salvation might fill your heart today and throughout the New Year!

**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)