

January 6, 2016
Isaiah 60:1-6

Epiphany C
Epiphany – From Darkness to Light

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Epiphany King. Amen.

Many people complain about how dark it is this time of year. I'd be the first one...I am not a fan of darkness, cold, snow, or winter. Imagine for a moment living up in Barrow, AK. It's located on the farthest northern tip of the state of Alaska. It's actually above the Arctic Circle. It's a coastal community. It may be dark in NW Minnesota this time of year. I've even had family members visiting this time of year comment how early it gets dark and how late in the morning it gets light. We can't complain about darkness here, compared to them...for on the afternoon on November 18, the sun sets, it doesn't rise again until January 24. 65 days of darkness. 65 days when the sun doesn't shine. The earth is tilted in such a way that the sun never shows itself for two months out of the year. But when the sun does rise for a moment on January 24, the whole town of about 4000 comes out to celebrate, because finally there is light again.

Is the prophet Isaiah speaking to the people of Barrow, AK, when he writes in the first verse of our text: "Arise, shine for your light has come!"? What God's Word talks about here is a different kind of light, and a different kind of darkness. And when this special light that God speaks about begins to shine through that ugly darkness, the results are much more spectacular and joyful than anything you could experience in northern Alaska.

Today, Epiphany marks a transition in the church...from Christmas to Epiphany. The word Epiphany means when something reveals itself, or shows itself. For example, in Barrow, AK, after 65 days of complete darkness, the sun finally reveals its glory for everyone to see. That's an epiphany. In the church year, the Epiphany season is when the Son of God reveals His glory for everyone to see. For the next month (Lent begins on Feb. 10 this year), we will be in the Epiphany season. The Scripture readings, the hymns, the sermons will serve a purpose, that is to reveal to you, to show you, the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You can sum up the feast of Epiphany with one phrase, and that one phrase is the title of my message: "From Darkness to Light." "Arise," God says to you and me, "Shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." The Bible pictures you and me and the rest of the world as a group of people living in darkness, people who have been waiting and waiting and waiting for the sun to rise: "For Behold," God says, "Darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the people."

God pictures our world as a very dark place. Spiritually dark. Four years ago on this very day I was in a dark place. My family and I spent several days of vigil at my Grandmother's bedside as she was nearing her final days and hours. On Epiphany 2012, the Lord called her to be by His side. It was a dark day, a sad day. For many, death of a loved one can cause spiritual darkness. We've all been in a spiritually dark

time. There's evidence of Spiritual darkness all around – you see it on the news with Muslim extremists targeting Christians across the globe. Some Islamic extremists will say that it's to "Cleanse their religion." Spiritual Darkness. Our children in schools are writing Muslim statements of faith or even incorporating Islam into their Holiday programs. Not here in Fisher...but in other places of our state and country. The world is spiritually dark. You don't have to go far to see spiritual darkness. Look around, watch people, listen to their speech, see what they do, and it will become very clear to you that we live in a spiritually dark world.

But the most frightening place to look is within yourself. Many people tell us to look within ourselves for achieving our own good, to bear our burden. However, when you look at yourselves, I'm guessing you find a very selfish person. God sees your soul as a dark place, a place that is full of sin.

Yes, Isaiah writes that "thick darkness is over the peoples, but..." He continues, "The Lord will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you." The Birth of Jesus Christ is described in the Bible as the sun rising on a very dark place. The sun rises, and the darkness disappears. When Jesus revealed Himself in your life, your sin is forgiven. The light of Christ shines into your lives and the darkness of your soul disappears.

Jesus Christ, the majesty arrived in the midst of the mundane. Jesus Christ, the divine arrived in the depths of darkness and despair. The Most Holy God appeared in the flesh in the presence of cattle manure. Divinity entered the world on the floor of a stable, through the womb of a teenage virgin and in the presence of a lowly carpenter.

Jesus Christ arrived at a time when it was dark, the light was born at a dark time in history. It's still spiritually dark, but the light continues to invade the darkness. Christ came for the sole purpose of making things right with God. He did that for you on the cross and the empty tomb. Because of Christ, everything is right between you and God. It's like the sun rising in your life, as it will rise in Barrow, AK in 18 days. You have gone from darkness to light, when Christ is revealed to you and in you.

Dear Redeemed, this is Epiphany – when someone trapped in the darkness of sin sees and believes in the glory of Jesus Christ. Epiphany is also the day that we remember when the Wise Men showed up to meet the toddler Jesus in a house. They were not there on the first Christmas with the Shepherds as our Nativity scenes display and our Christmas pageants show. The Wise Men, these Magi, came from a place where no one knew about Christ. No one knew that God was sending a Savior. These men, were probably astrologers of some form, after all they noticed the star. Part of me also thinks these men, possibly learned men had some knowledge of the Scripture. No matter how it was revealed to them, it was an Epiphany when they saw the star. They knew that the Messiah had come. And so these men left their own land of Spiritual Darkness because they wanted to see and worship the Christ. They made the long trip to Jerusalem and were probably surprised to see that this city was as spiritual dark as their own land.

But finally, they made it to Bethlehem and found the Messiah. Isaiah talks about the Magi in verse 3: “Nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising.” Later on Isaiah writes:⁶ “A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord.”¹ There in the form of a little child, the magi saw the light of the world. There they saw the glory of God, and this is what filled with a spirit of awe and worship. They had gone from darkness to light, and they rejoiced, and gave this child who was their God gifts fit for a king.

Many people from around the world call Epiphany the Gentile Christmas, because one of the main themes of the Epiphany season is that Christ is a light, not just for a select group of people like the Jews, but for all people, all over the world. Epiphany is a time when God reveals His glory. It’s no wonder that the Epiphany season starts when He revealed His glory to the Gentile people and ends on the Mount of Transfiguration when His divine glory is revealed to Peter, James, and John. Epiphany is a season of light and revelation of the Divine Son of God. Epiphany is a day and season for those living in the darkness, because the glory of the light of the Messiah is revealed.

Just as the sun rises on every nation, on every kind of people, no matter who you are or what your background is, just as the sun, every morning rises on you, so you it is with Christ. His grace, his forgiveness, his salvation, rises and shines on the Jews in Bethlehem, but also on the Magi from the East. His grace and forgiveness rises on shines on every person on earth. It doesn’t matter who you are...you can go from darkness to light.

And no matter how dark the world become...it’s going to get darker, the light of Christ will never stop shining on you.

Don’t feel too sorry for the people in Barrow, AK. While it is true right now that they are still 18 days from seeing the sun again. It’s quite opposite in the summer. Six months from now the earth’s tilt will be different, and then in Barrow, AK, the sun will never set. From May 10 to August 2, for almost three months, the sun will not stop shining in Barrow. People call that place, “The land of the midnight sun.”

So it is with you, once the Son of God is shining in your light, it won’t go out. It won’t just shine for three months...but for all of time. No matter how dark the world gets around you, Christ’s love will always be shining. You may at points feel that you live spiritually in Barrow, AK in the winter...but know that the Son, the Son who was born in the mundane is shining for you.

My prayer for you this Epiphany season is that you may see ever more clearly the glory of your Savior, Jesus Christ. As Isaiah writes, “Arise, shine, for your light has come. And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Is 60:6). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

In Jesus Name. Amen

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.