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Arise, Shine, for Your Light has Come

Isaiah 60: 1-6

January is sort of a rough month, isn't it? Family and friends have left. Your college kids are heading back to school. Perhaps you gained a few pounds from all the extra eating. You will start getting the bills for all the stuff you bought last month. You're back at work. Kids are back in school. The daily grind is in full effect. It's cold, rainy and for the most part all of our football teams are done for the year. January is a rough month. Today our prayer is that we don't let the devil use those things to lull us to sleep. Instead, let us take to heart verse 1 of our lesson. "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you."

Arise and shine! It is the last phrase that people of all ages want to hear after a long Christmas vacation. Some of you probably heard that phrase this morning. The meaning hasn't changed over the years. Rise and shine or Get up and get out of bed or else. The reaction hasn't changed either. There may be a couple of you that jump out of bed when someone wakes you up ready to start the day all chipper. For most of you when someone tells you to rise and shine, your first reaction is probably to pull your covers over your head. Then maybe pretend that you are still sleeping. Then when they come in again maybe you let out a couple of groans. Today, I along with the prophet Isaiah want to encourage you to rise and shine. As we study this lesson, I promise you that you will not be annoyed, because the Lord's rise and shine wakeup call is wonderful. God's command to rise and shine is purely good news!

As we look at this book of Isaiah, it is important to understand what is going on at this time. Some of you probably know that this book was written about 700 years before the birth of Christ. What most of you probably didn't know is that these rise and shine words of encouragement were written to people who were living under the dark storm clouds of war. They were written to people who were living in dark dungeons of captivity in Babylon. So in chapter 60, Isaiah gives these people sunny good news of encouragement. The most excellent encouragement that they needed is the reminder that the Messiah, your Savior, will come! In spite of dark gloomy clouds of war and captivity that surrounds you, the Messiah, your Savior, is coming! When he comes, it will be the happiest day in the history of the Lord's people. So, rise and shine and worship him!

As we study these words from about 2700 years ago, I know that this is a different day and age. But I also know that I don't have to describe the storms and shadows, the gloom and doom that those people were going through. Because you and I encounter it on a daily basis. War and persecution of Christians are on the headlines on a daily basis. Hostility to the Christian faith is rising and rising. Ignorance of God's simple truth is at an all time high. We need these words of encouragement just as desperately as the people in Isaiah's day.

Let's take a closer look at the prophecy of the first Epiphany. "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." (Isaiah 60:1-3) The Son of God certainly shone bright for all to see on that first Epiphany, just like Isaiah prophesied. The Son of God shone so bright that it caused the wise men, hundreds of miles away, to rise and shine. It caused them to get up and get out of bed and go and see the Christ child. The only thing that mattered to them was seeing the Son of God their Savior.

Some times when the Bible doesn't give us a lot of details about a story, people tend to spend time speculating on things that they don't know. For example, how many were there, tradition says there were three, but there could have been 6 or 20 or even more. The Bible doesn't say, although that would cause a lot of the manger scenes prices to go up for all the extra pieces. People speculate on how old Jesus was when they got there. The Bible simply doesn't say. People wonder how they got there? Camels, donkeys, or

horses? People speculate on the star they saw. Was it a special comet, or something miraculous? The Bible simply doesn't tell us any of this. Don't let the unknowns put you in the dark of what you do know.

We do know that the Son of God, the Wise Men's Savior, was shining upon them and in them. This love for their Savior moved them to bring them their first and their best gifts. They didn't present their Savior with the Christmas leftovers. They didn't reach into their pocket for the left-over change from the marketplace. This was their Savior! They were willing to use their wealth, lots of it, to make a long journey just to see and worship him. They brought treasures of gold, incense and myrrh to present to their newborn King! They also used their gifts of talent that God gave them. These men knew the heavens and when they saw the star, they knew it was a special sign and they acted on that knowledge. These wise men, were wise because they also gave Jesus their gift of time. They put their careers on hold to make a several month journey to worship the babe in Bethlehem. They were wise because they listened to the Old Testament prophecies and went to Bethlehem to worship. They treasured God's Truth and responded accordingly.

The Son of God is still shining today! The Son shines upon every one of you! Take comfort in verse 1, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you." (Isaiah 60:1) These words are for you. Why was Jesus born into this world? He was born for you, to be your Light in the Darkness. Why did he receive the name Jesus? He came to save you from your sins. Jesus came to shine and set up a kingdom in your heart. He came to rule in your heart by the Holy Spirit. This celebration of Epiphany, the appearing of Jesus, is for you.

Darkness is all around you. Listen to verse 2, "See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples" (Isaiah 60:2) Isaiah says that world is covered with a blanket of sin. Sin swarms the earth like a swarm of locusts covering the ground. Sin blocks out the sun. Sin covers and consumes everything in its path. Sin destroys. This blanket of sin threatens to block out the light of Christ, leaving us in eternal darkness.

Sin doesn't just work outside these walls. Sin works on people like us. We are encouraged to schedule time this year to see the Light of Christ on a daily basis and often times our spiritual response is a lot like our physical response. Hit the snooze and you can do it later. Rise and shine to see the good news of rescue from sin and often times we choose to pull the covers over our heads. After all sometimes darkness seems to be so much better than light. Rise and shine, come to the manger, and we often let out big spiritual groans. Again, feels like I was just there.

There is a part of us that enjoys the darkness. Sin works in all of us. The devil is smart enough to know that if he just quickly shuts the light off, you might get scared and alarmed so he uses things to get you to slowly dim the lights. He gets you with a seemingly innocent sin so as not to disturb you too much, then he slowly ramps it up. His goal for you and me is to bring us into darkness with him. He wants you to view the light of Christ as something you can take or leave, so that eventually you will leave.

Into this sin filled dark world, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Light of the World, has come. The LORD has given us much more than gold, incense and myrrh. To the world who was dead in sin, he gave up his Son. To sinners who prefer darkness over light like you and me, he gives us unconditional forgiveness. To people hurting in a world of having to say goodbye to loved ones in a graveyard, he sends us the promise of heaven. Jesus with the light warms our hearts. The Light of Christ came to drive the darkness out of your hearts and replaces it with the light of his grace. Epiphany is the appearing of Jesus as the worlds Savior and Lord.

You are fulfillments of this prophecy. Listen to verses 4 and 5, "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." (Isaiah 60:4-5) We are part of the nations that have come from afar to worship him. We all have completely different ethnic backgrounds, but we have Christ in common. We all have different occupations, engineers, military, retirees, teachers, students, but we have one thing in common, Christ. We are from different generations, infants to teens to 30's to 50s to 80s and yet we have one thing in common, we are bonded by the blood of Christ! We have come from afar to worship him. We have been made alive through the power of the gospel. We have become wise unto salvation. We have been taught that the cross was the necessary payment for my sins and it is paid in full. We have seen his glory

not just in the manger but the empty tomb which is my proof of heaven. We celebrate one Lord. We worship one Savior from sin. We have one goal to bring others into this wonderful light.

As we begin a New Year together, make the Light of Christ the number one priority in your life! As we grow together in Christ think about the blessings we can be to others as we share the Light of Christ with them. It's okay to dream big. According to God's will dream big dreams for this church. Dream of running out of chairs, not just on Christmas Eve but any other Sunday, because the light of the power of the gospel is attracting so many people. Dream of Bible Classes that are overflowing so we need more of them. Dream of everyone working together with a smile as we see people from all nations drawn to the light. Dream of people carrying children on their arms from afar to the comforting message of the gospel preached and taught through you and I. Dream of playing a part in God's Great commission. Dream of everyone bringing their newborn king their very best gifts of time, talent, temple and treasures so the Light can shine bright in Southern Maryland!

Now it's time to stop dreaming and let's go and do it! You have something that is attractive to the world around you. Let the light of the gospel shine in everything you do. By ourselves those dreams are impossible. As Luke says, with God nothing is impossible. The Gospel is not too small. The Holy Spirit is not powerless. The Word of God is not weak. Rise and shine and go be the light that you were called to be. Amen.