

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Epiphany of Our Lord (20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Congregation)  
Sunday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019

**Sermon: Arise and Shine!**

**Text: Isaiah 60:1-6**

Focus: The light of Christ brings salvation for all people.

Function: That they would let the light of Christ shine in their lives and neighborhood.

Structure: Four Pages (Law-then-Gospel)

Locus: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith” (SC, 3<sup>rd</sup> Article of Apostles’ Creed).

### **Trouble in the Text**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen. “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you”

(Isa. 60:1, ESV).<sup>1</sup> This rousing rally is the first verse of our Old Testament lesson today—and the theme verse for our congregation’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. “Arise, shine, for your light has come!” These wonderful words come after several chapters (57-59) in which Yahweh, the LORD God of Israel, calls Israel and Judah to repentance because of their idolatry, oppression of the poor, religious hypocrisy, and perverted “justice.” He reprimands them for fasting and then complaining their prayers are not answered while they let the poor go hungry and naked in the streets. He accuses them of lies, perjury, violence, and oppression. He chides them for failure to turn from their sin and return to him for mercy.

Speaking on Yahweh’s behalf, Isaiah describes his people like blind men stumbling in the dark:

“We hope for light; and behold darkness,  
and for brightness, but we walk in gloom.  
We grope for the wall like the blind;

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

we grope like those who have no eyes;  
 we stumble at noon as in the twilight,  
 among those in full vigor we are like dead men” (Isa. 59:9-10).

Things do not look good for God’s people. Normally, these kinds of accusations are prelude to doom and gloom, judgment and destruction, such as the fall and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

### **Grace in the Text**

But towards the end of chapter 59, Yahweh decides to handle things differently. Rather than smiting Israel, he rescues them. God “wondered that there was no man to intercede” for his people (Isa. 59:16). And so he decides to do something about it. He girds himself as a warrior and comes to mete out justice to the oppressed and to redeem those who repent (vv. 17-21).

Suddenly, Yahweh bursts onto the scene with dazzling brightness and declares:

“Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
 and the glory of the LORD has arisen upon you.  
 For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,  
 and thick darkness the peoples;  
 but the LORD will arise upon you,  
 and his glory will be seen upon you.  
 And nations shall come to your light,  
 and kings to the brightness of your rising” (Isa. 60:1-3).

At last, Jerusalem finds favor in the Lord’s sight! At last Zion is a place of righteousness and beauty once again. She shines with the brilliance of light once again—not because the spiritually blind people stumbling in the dark have suddenly found a way to switch on the lights, but because Yahweh himself shines on them with blessing and favor (cf. Num. 6:24-27). They have no inner light that suddenly shines forth. Rather, it is the glory of God—and his salvation—that shines on them and through them, drawing the nations to come near. As Isaiah says in another place, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined” (Isa. 9:2).

## Trouble in the World

Living in 21<sup>st</sup> century America today, we too are a people walking in darkness, stumbling about in our sin, and groping for support to stand. The religious foundations of our nation have eroded. People no longer trust that the Bible is absolute truth or that pastors preach the very Word of God. The Church no longer enjoys a privileged position in our society. And, according to numerous studies, the fastest growing “religious” group in America is the so-called “nones.” No, not Catholic nuns wearing habits! These “nones” are those who do not identify with any particular religious group or tradition. When polled on their religious affiliation, they reply, “None.”

Even here in conservative Castle Rock, Douglas County, Colorado, most of our neighbors do not say that their personal faith has a very big impact on their daily life. A little over a year ago our congregation commissioned a demographic study by the Lutheran Church Extension Fund (LCEF). Only about a quarter of our neighbors identify as Evangelical Christians, and only a third consider themselves to be “spiritual.” Only 13%-17% say that attending church is important to them. And only 10% say that their faith is important to them. In other words, our community is basically *pagan*! So even though we live in one of the wealthiest counties in America, we are surrounded by *spiritual* poverty. Even though we live in one of the fastest growing counties in Colorado, many churches here—including ours—continue to struggle with flat or declining attendance.

And we, the people of God, do not look that much different than the unbelievers next door. Most of us do not put priority on daily Bible reading or weekly worship attendance. We watch the same movies and TV shows and listen to the exact same music as other Americans. And with the exception of our stellar Orphan Grain Train ministry and annual food drive, we do

not go very much out of our way to help the poor. You see, we have a tendency to be just as selfish and stubborn and boastful as the rest of the world. We are sinners too.

I know this is our congregation's birthday celebration, and I'm not trying to rain on our parade. But before we toot our own horn and treat this Sunday like a pep rally, we need to pause and consider that maybe we have not taken to heart Jesus' instruction: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

### **Grace in the World**

But into the darkness of our sins, our complacency and hypocrisy, our laziness and selfishness, comes Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. His grace dawns upon us as he declares, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you!" (Isa. 60:1). For Christ came into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be *saved* through him (John 3:17). Our Redeemer girds himself as a holy hero, a warrior of light, and he puts the darkness to flight! He calls us to repentance and forgives our sins. He rescues us from deep darkness and brings us into his marvelous light. From the manger and the cross, Jesus' face beams with love and radiates mercy. In his light, we *see* light (Ps. 36:9). In his light, we become children of the light (John 12:36). "For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8).

Now his love burns within us, and his light shines forth from within us. "Arise, shine, for your light has come!"

Today we celebrate 20 years of ministry in Castle Rock by this congregation and her pastors. When Pastor Bob and Carol Tasler hatched a plan to found this church on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1999, it is no accident that they chose the name Epiphany. For not only was their founders

meeting on the Feast of the Epiphany, but the very word *epiphany* means to shine light on something (Greek: *epi* + *phainō*). The name evokes not only the Christmas star that led the magi to the infant Christ. It calls to mind the star on top of the Castle Rock—a powerful symbol of our community, reminding us that we exist not just for ourselves but for those people who aren't here yet. But above all, the name Epiphany calls to mind the light of Christ that burns brightly in our midst. At Epiphany Lutheran Church, God's mission for us is to shine the love of Jesus upon the *entire* Castle Rock community, not just our church. "Arise, shine, for your light has come.... And nations shall come to your light..." (Isa. 60:1a, 3a).

For just as the so-called "wise" men (magi) were drawn to Jesus by the light of the star, so also our friends and neighbors will be drawn to Jesus by the light of his love. As the people of our congregation reach out to our neighborhood with the Good News of God's grace and new life in Christ, as we feed the hungry and clothe the naked, as we serve the lowest and least among us, our light will shine. Again, it is not a light of our own making. As Billy Joel once sang, "We didn't start the fire/It was always burning since the world was turning." [*Pause for laughter.*] Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, has always shone in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome him (John 1:5). And the darkness will not overcome us if we believe and obey the Lord Jesus—and reflect his light. So, dear people of Epiphany: "Arise, shine, for your light has come!" God has blessed us abundantly and allowed us to shine for 20 years so far. Let us give thanks and pray that he will let us shine for at least twenty years more. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.