

Sermon on **Isaiah 6:1-6** for Epiphany 1.5.20
St. Paul's Lutheran, New Ulm, MN - Pastor N. Scharf

What aroma pulls you out of bed in the morning? For many it's the pot of coffee programmed the night before to kick on first thing – the filtering fragrance finds the follicles of your nostrils – and you wake up. This is better than the smell of smoke or a dirty diaper, or even maple bacon being cooked by a loved one, since many of us are trying to lose weight this time of year. The aroma hits your nostrils and your senses perk up. What a great way to wake up!

The Babylonians had turned Jerusalem into rubble and ashes. This was God's judgment on the idolatry of his people. His people were tempted to despair and doubt God's plan and his mercy. Outside the city, a world asleep in the darkness of unbelief slumbered with no one to wake it. But the aroma of good news, the news of a light that illumines those in darkness, who gives life, restoration, forgiveness and salvation spread. God spread this aroma through Isaiah 700 years before Jesus' birth and like a fan continues to spread it today by his Word.

Today we celebrate this revealing, this aroma - The Epiphany of Our Lord. In Greek this word "epiphany" means – "appearing." Old Testament believers yearned for the appearing of this light, the Messiah. They rejoiced at the thought of it, they put their trust in this light. Today we celebrate that **Jesus Christ is the Light of the World**. We rejoice in what it means for us, what he's done for us, and what he has made us for the world.

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you." God restored his people and Jerusalem after 70 years in Babylon, but the greater gift, the light, appeared on Christmas 500 years later – this is the light Isaiah spoke of and the angel heralded – *"a Savior has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord."* The shepherds heard the angel and *the glory of the Lord shone around them*. They said to one another, *"Let's go to Bethlehem, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."* Simeon held this newborn baby in his arms at the temple and praised God, *"Sovereign Lord, ...my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel"* (Luke 2:29-32). Isaiah pointed all to this light. He still does. *Your light has come.*

"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." 7:54 am. That is sunrise for January 5th, 2020 in New Ulm. For many, your day has been going for a couple hours already. You are 2 cups of coffee in. In a world without electric light, dawn means everything – you can see – you can live and work and interact with others. Light means safety and security. You won't be fooled by the darkness. Our world is dark. I'm not talking about physical darkness, and neither was Isaiah. Christians are persecuted throughout the world. Bibles are confiscated and burned. There are many who think the Bible and trust in Jesus is just one of many roads to prosperity and peace, old-fashioned, an "if we have time" or "if we feel the need for it" proposition. Some say, "I'm spiritual, but I'm not religious." Actually believing that God's Word is true in all its parts and applies to our life today, tomorrow and eternally may have coworkers and classmates looking at you as if you are out of touch with reality, illogical, a bigot or maybe even an enemy. The sinful world in which we live is filled with the roads on which Cain walked that lead away from the Lord to *darkness, thick darkness*.

But the darkness isn't just out there, is it? Sometimes the darkness covers us, and we can't see the light. We go into autopilot in this life – going through the motions, going along with the flow, not just living in the world, but looking more and more like the world. Fake it until you make it. Might makes right. Work harder. Keep your chin up. Pull yourselves up by your bootstraps. The one

with the most toys, or the most in the bank, or the most experiences, or the most freedom wins or at least survives. We see it in the mirror. Then crosses come. Conscience convicts but offers no hope. Instead we slip a bit more into the darkness. The worry comes. The guilt and the shame from our own sins, from the sins of others push us to the darkness we see inside. Does God care? Does he exist? Does he know how I feel or what I am going through? Does it matter? Will I be lost?

Wake up! Look up! We were launching each other into the deep part of the lake. One of my friends must have hit his head hard on the water when he went in because when he popped up to the surface of the water, he started swimming with his head down in a tight circle, disoriented. We had to swim to him and stop him and make him lift up his head so he could see. He needed to see the reality. He wasn't drowning, though he had felt like it. He was safe. Isaiah does the same for us. Our sins, our guilt, the darkness has disoriented us. Isaiah points us to the Light that saves us.

"See, darkness...But the LORD rises upon you," "Lift up your eyes and look about you." That's Epiphany – see who is revealed. See your Savior Jesus and what he has done for you and for all. Your sins are forgiven fully and freely in his name, by his perfect life and sacrifice on the cross in your place, you are at peace with God. Your sins are atoned for by his blood alone – not by others and not by your own. He alone has freed you. His resurrection proves it. This is yours. And it is for others too. *"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 hip."*

Look around. This prophecy has been fulfilled and it keeps on being fulfilled. We, gentiles of far off lands, come to our Lord, to the Light, into the true Christian Church. God's people returned from captivity – sons and daughters carried back, and the Gentiles came along. The disciples went out after Jesus' ascension as Jesus commanded. Missionaries brought the Gospel to this land centuries later. We share our faith. See the stream and rejoice.

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. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD." Our hearts throb and swell with joy and happiness as we see a baby or an adult baptized and come into the kingdom of God right here among us. We rejoice as we see the WELS Connection Video and realize we have brothers and sisters in Christ in Africa, China and even Vietnam where we are building a seminary. And we realize, not only has God brought his light, our Savior Jesus into the world to win our forgiveness. He has made us lights – to our neighbors, our co-workers, our classmates, our families. Yes, there is darkness and it is combative and scary, but God shines his light and we see it. He uses us to shine that light of his Word to others. And we bring our prayers and offerings, our time and our talents to this work. We do this through our congregation, our schools, our classes, our conversations at the lunch table. We are the *wealth of the seas and the riches of the nations*, and we bring all that God has given us and hearts turned by him in faith to serve him. We bring our offerings in thanks like the wisemen of old.

The Lord gave this vision to Isaiah the prophet, and he saw Jesus coming to save us. He saw the wise men; he saw you bringing your praise and your gifts. Now you see the light. You smell the sweet aroma of the good news of Jesus. What a great way to wake up! Lift your heads and see the light shining brightly. It shines for you, to you and through you! **Jesus Christ is the light of the world.** Amen.