



Life Guide applying God's Word to life

Epiphany Will Light Up Your World January 5, 2020

(Isaiah 60:1-6)

¹“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. ²See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you, and his glory appears over you.

³Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ⁴Lift 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.

⁵Then 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. ⁶Herds 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.”

1. What kinds of things in your life have made you “look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy” (v.5)?

Answers will vary. In preparation for this sermon PW asked a few people this question. Common answer answers included weddings, birth of children, birthdays, and getting great news.

2. Read Isaiah 59:1-15a. What is the darkness that is over the people? *Isaiah 59:1-15a Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. ²But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. ³For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken falsely, and your tongue mutters wicked things. ⁴No one calls for justice; no one pleads a case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments, they utter lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil. ⁵They hatch the eggs of vipers and spin a spider's web. Whoever eats their eggs will die, and when one is broken, an adder is hatched. ⁶Their cobwebs are useless for clothing; they cannot*

cover themselves with what they make. Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. ⁷Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. They pursue evil schemes; acts of violence mark their ways. ⁸The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks along them will know peace. ⁹So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. ¹⁰Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like people without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead. ¹¹We all growl like bears; we moan mournfully like doves. We look for justice, but find none; for deliverance, but it is far away. ¹²For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: ¹³rebellion and treachery against the Lord, turning our backs on our God, inciting revolt and oppression, uttering lies our hearts have conceived. ¹⁴So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. ¹⁵Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.

The darkness over Israel was their sins, and their inability to help themselves. It's pictured like a spider web, like evil deeds, and like rebellion.

3. List some ways the darkness of our world in the 21st century similar to the darkness Isaiah described in ancient Israel.

We too are lost in sin. We too are helpless to do anything about our sin. Like ancient Israel, we could complain about the darkness that covers this sinful world. We see it in the greed, injustice and deception in the world around us. We see darkness in the murder rate and the growing number of abortions. We see darkness in our own lives as we fail to live up to our standards, and definitely fall short of God's expectations.

4. Read Isaiah 59:15b-21. What is God's solution to darkness?

Isaiah 59:15b-21 The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. ¹⁶He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm achieved salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. ¹⁷He put on righteousness

as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. ¹⁸ According to what they have done, so will he repay wrath to his enemies and retribution to his foes; he will repay the islands their due. ¹⁹ From the west, people will fear the name of the Lord, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory. For he will come like a pent-up flood that the breath of the Lord drives along. ²⁰ “The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,” declares the Lord. ²¹ “As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord. “My Spirit, who is on you, will not depart from you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants—from this time on and forever,” says the Lord. While Israel could do nothing to enlighten themselves in the darkness, God could do it! “If you want something done right you’ve got to do it yourself.” God himself worked salvation (v. 16). He did it by putting on righteousness and salvation (v. 17). He did it by sending a Redeemer, Jesus (v. 20). He delivers that salvation to us through his Spirit (v. 21).

5. Re-read Isaiah 60:1-2. If you were directing or animating a movie with this as the opening scene, how would you portray the scene? What spiritual realities is this visual description representing? There are endless ways you might do this. When someone offers an answer, ask them to describe more details about the thing they mention. In precisely what manner would you represent the darkness? Exactly how would you represent the light? Where is it coming from? What happens when the light meets the darkness? How will you communicate that this is the LORD rising upon you? What is the soundtrack like? Are there people? What are they doing? The goal is to engage the visual part of your brain rather than just the verbal part. How does Isaiah 60:1-2 look?

6. The Glory of the Lord is a technical term in the Old Testament. Next to each of the following references, write what you learn about the Glory of the Lord:

a. Exodus 40:34-38 *Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.* ³⁵ *Moses could not enter the tent of meeting*

because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

³⁶ *In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; ³⁷ but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. ³⁸ So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.*

The Glory of the Lord resided in the temple and led the Israelites around in the wilderness.

b. 1 Kings 8:11 *And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple.*

The glory of the Lord was in the temple and it was so intense people couldn’t work near it.

c. Luke 2:8-11 ⁸ *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

The glory of the Lord appeared when Jesus was born, and it terrified shepherds.

d. John 1:5, 9-14 ⁵ *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.*

¹⁴ *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Jesus is the glory of the Lord in human form.*

7. In v. 3, it is YOU who is shining. It is God who scatters darkness.

Describe what happens when *God's* action makes *you* a light.

God's actions toward you are that he loves you, he sent Jesus to save you, he forgives you, he is with you, he encourages you. When you live with those truths in mind, other people notice. Perhaps they'll be curious how you handle stress the way you do. Maybe they'll ask why you go to church. Maybe they'll just see you in contrast to the ugly caricatures of Christians that we often see in popular culture today. Not everyone will notice what God's doing in you, but some may be attracted to God's goodness as it shines in you.

8. The wise men and Jesus fulfil this prophecy. Can you find three references to the Epiphany story in these verses?

v. 3 "*Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*" This verse is why many people think the wise men were kings.

v. 6 "*Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come.*" Those nations are in the East, the same direction the wise men came from.

v. 5 and 6 "*the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come*" and "*bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.*" The wise men brought wealth, gold, and praise to Jesus.

9. Foreign nations were generally hostile toward Israel. If you were an Israelite, how would you feel about foreign nations carrying your daughters? (Deuteronomy 28:15, 32-34) If you were an Israelite, what would the camels of Midian call to mind? (Judges 6:1-6)

Deuteronomy 28:15, 32-34¹⁵ However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: ...³² Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will wear out your eyes watching for them day after day, powerless to lift a hand. ³³ A people that you do not know will eat what your land and labor produce, and you will have nothing but cruel oppression all your days. ³⁴ The sights you see will drive you mad.

Foreigners carrying their children was a sign that they had disobeyed God and he was punishing them through kidnapping. They would feel shame, regret, helplessness, and sadness.

Judges 6:1-6 The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. ² Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. ³ Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. ⁴ They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. ⁵ They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. ⁶ Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help.

In the past camels from Midian meant that Israel's crops would be destroyed and they would live in poverty.

10. Yet what happens when Israel sees the foreigners coming in Isaiah 60? (See v. 5) Why do they react that way?

Israel will be radiant and her heart will throb and swell with joy. This time when foreigners pick up their children, they are carrying them home. This time when the camels of Midian come, they are bringing riches and gold and incense. People no longer come to TAKE from Israel, they come to GIVE to Israel. Why? Because they have seen what God can do for his people.

11. Who in you do you view like the Israelites viewed foreign nations and Midianites? What might change their action toward you? What might change your attitude toward them?

Answers will vary. Perhaps this is how we feel about criminals or terrorists. Depending on your group some people may think there is no hope for republicans or no hope for democrats. Careful with that one! If you read the rest of Isaiah's prophecy it will be obvious that he doesn't condone the bad things foreigners did. But he loves them still.. That's the point of Epiphany. God loved the WORLD enough to send a Savior not just for people like us, but for all people. When people

different from you see God's love in your life, they may be attracted to Jesus!

12. How does the Epiphany of our Lord shed light on your world?

The effect of God's light in your life will depend on how you feel the darkness of this world.

If your darkness is a stubborn sinful habit,

God's light is forgiveness.

If your darkness is loneliness or fear,

God's light is his promise to be with you always.

If your darkness is doubt,

God's light is his perfect record of promises.

If your darkness is oppression,

God's light is his promise that the last shall be.

If you are tired of this world,

God's light is the promise of a perfect world to come.

No matter what your darkness is, God's light comes to us through his word and sacraments. All of God's promises about Jesus come through the Bible, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. With those things God makes daily inroads against the gloom in which we live!