

Streetsville United Church

Sunday, January 6, 2019

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## “OUR LIGHT HAS COME”

Isaiah 60:1,2

It would seem odd today if I wished you a “Merry Christmas.” We celebrated it nearly two weeks ago. But tomorrow millions of Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas. So we can wish them a Merry Christmas. And maybe it’s good that there are two different days for celebrating Christmas. That at least keeps the witness to Christ’s birth going a little while longer.

Today I can wish you a “Happy Epiphany.” The day of Epiphany always falls on January 6, and so this year Epiphany falls on the Sabbath. Now you might wonder what Epiphany means? Well, just imagine you were reading some novel where the word appeared. “The truth came to Tom as an epiphany.” You would understand an epiphany as a new insight being revealed, often quickly, the switching on of light in the darkness, the sudden emergence of a truth previously hidden. And that’s what Epiphany is all about in the church. It means the unveiling of Christ as Saviour for all peoples, both Jews and Gentiles. It means the revelation of Christ as the light of the world.

The key story of Epiphany is that of the wise men making the long journey to Bethlehem, finding the child, worshipping him and offering him gifts fit for a king.

I read the story of how one old saint in a church jumped up and stomped out of the annual Christmas play. The minister hurried after him. He caught up with him in the parking lot and asked him what was wrong. The man said to him, “Preacher, I’ve gone along with a lot of changes through the years, but this went just too far. I mean who ever heard of the Three Wise Men walking up to the baby Jesus in the manger and presenting him with...gift certificates?”

No, the gifts they offered were gold, frankincense and myrrh, gifts fit for a King. And it really was God who made their long trip possible by placing the star in the sky. It was God who arranged to put prophecy in Scripture regarding the Saviour’s birth in Bethlehem. It was God who led the wise men to Jesus and opened their minds to who he is.

But my text for this Epiphany does not come from the story of the wise men. It comes from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 60, verse 1. This too is an Epiphany text, a prophecy of the one who would be the light of the world. “Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” Yes, on Epiphany Sunday we declare that our light has come. His name is Jesus Christ. In Jesus the very glory of God has risen upon us. And as Epiphany makes clear, Jesus Christ is not just our light; he is the light of the world. So we are commanded to rise and shine with the light of Christ. “Arise, shine, for your light has come.” Let’s think of the implications of this verse.

*Because our light, the light of the world has come, we are even more aware of the darkness.*

Strange isn't it. Light illuminates the darkness, but the light also reveals the dark places very obvious. In verse 2, Isaiah writes, "For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples..."

It's sad to say but even with all our advancements there is still a great deal of darkness in the world. I hardly need to remind you of the racism and injustice; the crime and the murders and the wrongdoing, the wars and the terrorism, the unexplained evil and suffering. There is the darkness of doubt; the darkness of despair; the darkness of death. And Jesus Christ, the light of the world, makes the darkness even more obvious. His sinless life reveals human sin. His humility makes us quite aware of our pride and arrogance. His selflessness shows up our selfishness and greed. His faithfulness sheds light on our unfaithfulness. His love makes our lack of love more obvious. His truth uncovers the world's falsehoods. His righteousness lights up the world's unrighteousness. No corner of the world or the human heart is hidden from him. Just read the story of his arrest, trial and crucifixion. If that doesn't reveal the darkness that gets into people's hearts, then nothing will.

Yes, a thick darkness often covers the earth and its peoples. We're not talking here of the darkness of night, but of a moral and spiritual darkness. And it gets into every human heart to some degree. Even the best of us have a little crack somewhere where the darkness gets in. And we can't help but being affected by it, even if we don't consciously participate in it. So yes, our light has come and he even more clearly uncovers the world's darkness.

*But secondly, because our light has come we now have a light that shines in every darkness.*

No matter how thick the darkness, the light of Christ shines. The darkness cannot extinguish him. Oh, it tried, diligently. The light of Christ exposed religious hypocrisy and political corruption. His Kingdom threatened the kingdoms of this world. This threat must be done away with, said the powerful, and they conspired to do so. They nailed him to a cross on a dark Friday afternoon and buried him in a cold, dark tomb. But on the third day the Father raised him from the dead. Jesus Christ burst the bonds of sin and evil and death to be the ever-living, life-giving Lord. As John tells us, Jesus Christ is the light that shines in the darkness, the light that can never be overcome. No matter how thick the darkness, Christ shines for us with light and hope. Into every dark corner of sin, he shines with divine love and mercy and forgiveness. Where evil seems so strong he shines with righteousness and justice, and the promise of God's new heaven and new earth. In the time and place of death he shines with the promise of eternal life.

It is said that even the darkest, largest caves can be lit up by a single match, and that match gives enough light to lead people out of the cave to safety. So Jesus Christ is the light who leads us through the darkness of the world, even through the darkness of death to resurrection and eternal life. He leads us home. He says, "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Many churches have placed a vigil candle, usually an electric candle, in their sanctuary. The light burns 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all year long. On a quiet night, a man named Sam walked into his darkened church. He found his way down the aisle easily. Over the years, he had come to know the building well. In many times and ways, he had worshipped and heard and shared the Word of God there. But this night Sam came alone. Fired from his job after thirty years with the company, he had become very discouraged. His prospects were few, and he felt he was letting his family down. He was angry about his circumstances. His self-confidence was gone.

In the darkness, only one light shone, the glow of the vigil candle. But drawn by that light he walked forward, comforted by the familiar feel of the sanctuary. Near the front he lowered himself and his cares into a pew. There, in the darkness he sat and wept. The steady glow of that light reminded him of Paul's word, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." That light spoke to him of God's presence that has shone in the lives of faithful believers over the centuries. The light reminded him that Christ would always be with him. And he rose up knowing he would be able to persevere and move forward in the strength of Christ. Because our light has come we have a light that shines for us in every darkness.

*Finally, because our light has come, we are instructed to move into action. "Arise, shine, for your light has come."*

We may feel somewhat weary after the Christmas season, but still we are to "Get up and shine with the light of Christ." Let the light of Christ drive away the darkness in your own life. Receive his love and mercy. Let your words and actions reflect his precious Name and the hope we have in him. Be an ambassador for Christ and a servant of the living Lord. Let the light and life of Christ shine through you. Let this church be a place where the light of Christ shines forth. Take heart. Take courage. Put away your fear. For Christ, our light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen upon us. Arise and shine with the light of Christ. For he is the light of the world. And peoples shall see and nations shall come to the brightness of God's dawning.

Sometimes at night you notice a car driving without headlights on. Now it's annoying to other drivers and it is not a wise thing to do, but such a car can actually drive quite safely. Why? It's because of the street lights and because of the lights of the other cars. Those lights are actually providing light for that darkened car. And hopefully, the driver will eventually get it and switch on his own lights.

In a sense, we who walk in the light of Christ are like the cars with their lights on. We are providing light for those who walk in darkness. Jesus said to his disciples, "you are the salt and light of the world." And that's not because we are light and salt in ourselves, but because we shine with the light of Christ, and season the world with the salt of Christ.

"Arise, shine, for your light has come." Thankfully we do not have to move into action on our own. We can arise and shine because Christ lives in us. We arise and shine because we are renewed and strengthened in Christ at this table. We arise and shine because he draws near and walks with us even as we walk with him by faith. We arise and shine because our light has come and the glory of the Risen Lord has risen upon us. So with the help of God's Holy Spirit may we

see and be radiant; may our hearts thrill and rejoice. For our light has come, and not just for ourselves but for the whole world. And the name of that light is Jesus Christ.