

Your Light Has Come
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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First Lesson: Isaiah 60:1-6

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

² For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.

³ Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

⁴ Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

⁶ A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

Second Lesson: Matthew 2:1-12

¹ In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel." '

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

The time of preparing is done! We have talked for weeks about the coming of the light of Christ. Our call to worship has ended with “Let us walk in the light of the Lord.” Now Christ has come. Now the light shines in the darkness. Our call to worship today? “We have seen the rising star; the mystery of ages is revealed. The nations will come in wonder to sing the praise of the Lord.” Now we sing the praise of the Lord.

Both of our readings this morning guide us in **our** response to this light. While the reading from Isaiah is paired with our reading from Matthew for this day when we celebrate Epiphany, the light Isaiah pointed to was not specifically Christ but God. In the 66 chapters of the book, if Isaiah isn’t prodding the Israelites to get it right, the prophet is encouraging them to hold onto hope. Today’s reading is of the latter variety. Having been released from exile, the people are seeking to rebuild their lives in a place that once was home but where they no longer belong. The glimmer of hope that came with release has been overshadowed by the reality of the work ahead of them.

Might you have had a boost in spirit with the coming of Christmas that seems to have been packed up with the decorations, that left before the holiday car sale ads did? Perhaps pushed aside with the reality of work or a messy house left in the wake of festivities or the seemingly constant shoveling and shivering? It’s definitely not the same as exile but fading hope can happen in a variety of circumstances, in a variety of ways. Isaiah proclaims “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” The glory of the Lord. The might and power of God are upon you. And because of that people will look to you, come to you, the prophet says. Because God has come, you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice.

For those who first heard these words, they could not imagine the future of which Isaiah spoke, could not envision going from exiled to admired, especially with a new and threatening empire on the rise, far greater than their tiny Israel. But that wasn’t literally what Isaiah was foretelling. Remember back to God’s promise to Abram that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”¹ Isaiah restates that promise – nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. What do they have to do? Allow me to first come back to the promise to Abram. God says, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”² Isaiah says, “the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.” What do they have to do? Arise, shine. God is providing the light; they need to stand and reflect it. From there nations will come to them. From there they will be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

¹ Genesis 12:3

² Genesis 12:2

We have inherited that promise made to Abram, that prophecy spoken by Isaiah: God is doing great things. In even the most overwhelming, discouraging, seemingly hopeless situations, God is at work. In even the most unexpected, unlikely, illogical ways, God is at work. What do we have to do? We respond with affirmation that such a promised yet unimaginable future is possible through God, affirmation that through God such an absurdly vulnerable infant human leader is our savior. We rise and we shine the truth of God's amazing love for us out into the world, just like the children's song: Rise and shine and give God your glory, glory, children of the Lord! This is part of our response to God's light having come.

Professor Barbara Brown Taylor carries us from Isaiah to Matthew, saying, "Jesus comes to bring God's own light into the world, not to keep it for himself. He comes to set other people on fire, not to burn like a torch all on his own."³ The wise men saw the literal light of the star pointing to the light of God embodied in Christ. Unlike the Israelites who, presumably because of their circumstances, did not recognize God's light without being directed to it, the wise ones were watching, seeking, and looking. When they found the light and understood its portent, they pursued the light. Sometimes we are the Israelites, caught up in the largeness of the work ahead of us and needing to be redirected to the glory of the Lord. And sometimes we are the wise ones, watching for God's light and trusting where it will lead us.

How did the wise ones respond? We all know about the gold, frankincense, and myrrh but those came later. First, we read, "On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage." Imagine what a ridiculous sight that must have been. Grown men, ones from whom others sought their wise words, found an infant and bowed to him. Not only did they bow to him but they did so in a way that people reserved for those who were above them, a physical gesture of lowering oneself signifying the acknowledgement that one is lower than another in power, another deserving of respect. These wise people bowed before a baby who had yet to speak in sentences, much less teach of the love of God, heal people, or restore people to community. The sight is so familiar to us in our nativity scenes at home and at the church but I invite you to imagine that same sight today.

A woman sits in a humble room with her young baby, maybe she rocks him to sleep in a rocking chair. There's a knock at the door. She lays him in a playpen and goes to answer it. Through the peephole she sees Stephen Hawking, Warren Buffett, Martin Scorsese, Maya Angelou and other brilliant luminaries – after all, the scripture doesn't actually say there were three wise men, just that they offered three gifts. She lets them in and, when they spot the baby in the playpen, they crowd near and bow their

³ *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 1*, p. 199.

heads in humility and awe. All that power in our world, even non-believers, humbling themselves in front of a boy whose greatest achievement so far is feeding himself Cheerios and blowing bubbles. Ponder that image.

In even the most unexpected, unlikely, illogical ways, God is at work. How do we respond? In faith and humility. Rise. Shine. The light has come. Even though we may not be able to imagine how it is that we might bless others, to know is not necessary. Like the Israelites, we need only rise and reflect the light of God. Like the wise ones, we need only bow humbly before God. God will take care of how we become blessings from there. Rise. Shine. In faith and humility.

Let us pray: Lord, let us walk in your light that we might be a blessing unto others. Amen.