

Sermon ~ January 9, 2022

This morning we are celebrating the Epiphany. We are celebrating the star that shown at Jesus birth. We are celebrating the arrival of the Wise Men. We are returning to Matthew's account of the coming of Christ. If you remember, Matthew and Luke and John all have different ways that they share the same story, the story of God fulfilling God's promise to save God's people; to bring them the hope and the light and life that they were promised.

Most often pastors will use this Sunday to preach about the Wise Men and the nations that come to Jesus. That it's not just to God's own people that God was born into the world, but God came into the world so that all people would know of God and God's love. That promise was foretold by Isaiah.

So, this morning I want to focus a little bit more on Isaiah, because a few things caught me this year that I hadn't connected before. If you look at the passage from Isaiah, from Isaiah chapter 60 those first six verses. It begins with the words, "Arise, shine; for your light has come,". Arise, shine. Now you could hear that in two different ways. You can hear that like a parent telling you what you need to do, an imperative: 'get up,' 'do this;' of being told to take an action. Or we can hear it as an invitation. 'Here is an opportunity, people, to arise, to shine, to let your light be there.' I tend to lean more towards the second. I tend to believe that God does not force God's self upon us, that God invites us to respond to what God gives. God chose to give salvation, to give redemption.

In the call to worship that we have this morning, which also comes to us from Isaiah but from Chapter 43, God said, "Because you are precious in my sight and honored, *and I love you*, I give people in return for you." God loves us. God's love wasn't just to the chosen people that he brought out of Egypt, the Israelites. God's love was for all, for the nations. That's what Isaiah and Matthew help us realize, that we don't have any special claim. We don't have any different access to God than anybody else, and just because somebody else has access does not diminish the access and the love and the light that we already have.

Think of it this way. We appreciate our Christmas Eve candlelight service, don't we? One of the things that makes it so special is the sharing of the light that we get in a candle. The last few years we've done it a bit differently than what some churches have done traditionally. We've had a single light, what we refer to as the Christ candle, lit, and from that one candle two other candles are lit. Now when those two candles are lit the Christ candle doesn't diminish any, does it? That light still shines just as brightly and is accessible to just as many people as it was before the two candles were lit. Those two candles then have their light. As they go into the congregation and they share that light, their light doesn't diminish. Nothing is taken away from the light of those candles, but others are able to take that light and then share that light. That's how it is with God's love.

It's like the sun, that light. But it's not like what we understand. When we hear this image of light in the darkness we come to it with a 21st century mentality. How do we turn lights on in our house? Either with the flick of a switch and, boom, there is light. Or, those of us who have Echos and things like that can simply say, "Light on." Or you've got the clapper (clapping sound), you know, "Clap on, clap off." Right? It's instantaneous. It can go from darkness to light in a moment. The type of light that the people who heard the prophecy would experience isn't necessarily that instantaneous. It's more like a sun rise. It's more like the coming of the dawn, where it gradually comes up and it illuminates more and more and more and more. It's almost as

if experiencing the light is a journey in itself. That's the light of God's love within us. That light is there and it keeps growing bright and brighter and brighter, the more that we nurture it, the more that we allow God to open it up within us. Just because God is doing that within us doesn't mean that God isn't doing that within someone else. It's not that we need to hoard the light, it's that the light isn't necessarily us. We are reflecting that light. We are sharing that light. It's like the candle. We come to God with our candle ready to be lit just like every single person. It's not like we have to fight to get our candle lit because somebody else got theirs lit first. Or there's not going to be enough light for everybody to have some, 'I have to get mine lit.' God's light shines. That flame is available to all.

But again, it's an invitation. The sun shines and the sun is there to give us light and to give us warmth, but if we don't want to experience that we can go into a cave, we can go into our house, we can hide from the sun. We can hide from the light. We can choose not to use our candles and have them lit, but the sun is always there. That light of love is always there; and it's ready and inviting, "Arise, shine..." Let the light cover you.

When we allow our candles to be lit we can then share that light within us. There's a Moravian hymn that we claim that, and we say, "light reflecting him, our Sun..." You know the interesting thing about the sun is unless it's on the horizon what do you have to do to see it? You have to look up. Isaiah encourages God's people to look up to see the light. The Wise Men had to look up to see the star that arose. If we keep looking within ourselves, if we keep looking just at those around us, we're not going to see the magnitude of the light. The light that we need comes from the God above us, the one to whom we can look up and see the hope in the midst of the darkness. To feel that hope in the midst of the challenges of life.

Epiphany celebrates the arrival of those who didn't know the prophecy, those that weren't already in the know about what God was going to do, and how God was going to do it. But they weren't turned away. That light that was there for God's people expanded. It went from a spot light to cover the entire stage. We don't need to worry about somebody else taking our part of God's love, because God's love is wide enough. God's light is bright enough. That sun can sustain any and all who would like to stand in its warmth.

This morning we get to decide how we respond. Because that light of love that we celebrate, in the birth of the Messiah and the arrival of the Wise Men, we get to celebrate in Holy Communion today. The love of God, his redemption, his salvation, his grace, his mercy is available and we get to come to share that with God and with one another. But we are also then encouraged to go out and share it more. To be that reflection, to take it with us into the world.

We get two opportunities during communion to pray silently. To lift up to God that which is holding us back, to ask God to strengthen us, and to give us courage to do God's will, and then we are challenged at the end of our sacrament to proclaim. When we do this, we proclaim here with one another. But we are asked to proclaim it even as we enter into the mission field beyond our doors. The light shines in the darkness. The darkness has not overcome, and we are invited to reflect it, to continue that shining light into our lives and into our world.

Let us pray. Holy Lord and God, we thank you for the light of your love that warms us from the inside out. A light that shines in the darkness. A light that reveals what is wrong and helps to bring healing. A light that strengthens our love for you and in strengthening that love, encourages us to share it. As we come to you, Lord God, we come in response to your invitation. We pray that as we give to you all that we have that you will fill us with even more. That you will over fill us that we may share it with your world. May we indeed reflect the light of your love in to your world, for we pray this in your holy and loving name, amen.