

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD  
Isaiah 60:1-6  
*“Arise, shine, for your light has come”*

The other day, when the parking lot lights were off, I commented to Tricia that this is the darkest place I’ve ever been. Growing up with street lights and business signs everywhere, and going to schools where the campus was lit up at night, the vast open darkness of our property at night can be imposing. But even that isn’t real darkness—the stars and the moon lend their light. I doubt I’ve ever really experienced real darkness, total darkness, darkness you can feel. But that is the kind of darkness Isaiah is talking about in our text: *“For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness t he peoples.”*

From little on, most of us have an innate fear of darkness. It makes us uncomfortable, causes a panicked feeling, especially when we’re in unfamiliar territory. This is especially true in our day and age. When the lights go out, we don’t know what to do with ourselves. Life stops when the light goes away.

Did you know why daylight savings time started? Like so many innovative ideas, it sprang from the mind of Benjamin Franklin, and it wasn’t just to give us more time to play in the evening. The name of one pamphlet by a Brit advocating Franklin’s proposal is telling: *“Waste of Daylight.”* People’s workdays were defined by daylight. They got up with the sun and worked until it went down again. In the wintertime, it was harder to be as productive, hence the idea of bumping everything back an hour. Nothing good could be done in the darkness.

The picture of darkness appears throughout the Scriptures. What covered the earth before creation? *Darkness*. And what was the first thing God said? *“Let there be light.”* When Pharaoh continued to harden his heart, the LORD told Moses, *“Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.”* When Jesus died, *“there was darkness over the whole land”* for three hours. St. Paul urges the Romans to *“cast off the deeds of darkness,”* and warns the Corinthians, *“He will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.”* And you know what he’s talking about. How many of your best decisions in life were preceded by the words, *“Let’s turn off the lights”*? When up to no good, how often have you said, *“Make sure the lights are on so everyone sees what a schmuck I am”*?

Jesus compares darkness to unbelief when He says, *“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness,”* and laments, *“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”*

The most unfortunate thing about the darkness Isaiah speaks about in this text is that those in it often think they are surrounded by light. What is false religion and atheism but calling light dark and dark light, good evil and evil good? The vast majority of

unbelievers think their bulbs are burning brightest precisely when they are the most dimwitted. And we don't get off the hook easily either. We by nature fight the same temptation. We also like to think ourselves a little brighter than the Light of the World, daily sticking these little lights of ours up our noses as we thumb them at God's revealed way and will in His Word.

All of us are conceived in darkness, and it only gets darker when we leave the darkness of the womb. Open lies and twisted truth blows from every direction, even from our own mouths, to snuff out the candles of God's Word. What is sin but turning down the lights, but extinguishing God's promise to fan into flames the sparks of sinful passion? We are surrounded by darkness, thick darkness, real darkness, and often we don't have the slightest clue. We grab the tale of the elephant and call it a snake, the trunk and call it a tree, never really interested enough to investigate and see the big picture. Enough Bible for this Sunday. Enough Bible for this week. Enough Bible for this month. Enough Bible for this year. Enough Bible for this decade. Enough Bible for this life. And confirmation becomes graduation, and Bible class becomes what other people go to, and personal study becomes a dusty book on the counter, and the sermon becomes a great chance for a nap, an opportunity to think about all the other things that really matter, our worries and our plans and our wants. Forget daylight savings. We have little use for the light. We get more done in the darkness. But nothing good gets done in the darkness.

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.”* This is Epiphany, years before Epiphany. Isaiah is in Bethlehem. Isaiah is at the manger. Isaiah is standing under the star. *“And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.”*

Epiphany is the darkness' worst enemy. Epiphany is the beginning of a procession that will only end when Jesus meets it in the clouds. Epiphany is the birthday of the Church as we know it, as Jew and Gentile alike meet to worship their King, the Son of God and Son of Man. And how did they find Him? Sure, there were angels and stars and whatnot, but what really told them where to find Him? Think back a week or two. The Word told them. The scribes told the Magi precisely where to look, and they did so by reading what had been written long before in the Book of Micah: *“[You will find Him] in Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”* And shepherds came to the Shepherd, and kings came to the King, and wise men came to Wisdom Himself, because God had spoken, and He had spoken through His Word.

Today is daylight saving's time. Today is our time in the light. Don't waste the daylight. Each word, each verse of God's Word is a candle, adding its glow to reveal the marvelous mystery of God's love, the grand scheme of His grace. Don't snuff those candles out. Use them, because they bring you to the Light of the World, to Jesus. Leave

the lights on in your life, because nothing good gets done in the darkness, because life stops when the light goes away.

*“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 bring good news, the praises of the LORD.”* And they did come, and they did bring gold and frankincense. And they brought even more: they brought myrrh, burial perfume for Him who would die to kill the darkness and its deeds, for Him who would rise to bring life and immortality to light through the gospel. Add your praises to theirs. Let your *“heart thrill and exult.”* The Magi bring us good news today, good news resting in a manger. May we in turn bring it to others. Amen.