

The Epiphany of our Lord
1/06/2013
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Isaiah 60:1-6
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I bring you grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Old Testament book of Isaiah the 60th chapter.

Reading first from Genesis: *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep...And God said, “Let there be Light,” and there was Light. And God saw that the Light was good.”* Jesus says later, *“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness.”* God through Isaiah says to you, *“Arise, shine, for your Light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”* Thus far the Word of God.

There was God and there was nothing else. God began His work of creation and where there was a void, nothingness, no light. God introduces the Light. He doesn't create it. He makes it known. There is no sun to shine or moon to reflect light, there is nothing but God, the Light.

John in his Gospel says that Jesus is the Life and this Life is the Light of men. Later he records Jesus saying He came into the world as the Light. Indeed Genesis, as I've read to you, says that in the beginning there is nothing but God and the Light. We can't comprehend any of this of course. What does it mean that there was nothing, just void? There was no time, no space, no matter, just

God. From that God set out to create. He set out to create mankind so that He might shower him with His Love, His Light.

As He creates God introduces Light to the void and He pierces it. There was nothing and then God shows His Light, uncreated and powered by nothing created just Him. Just the 2nd person of the Trinity, just the Son of God, just the Light who was coming into the world. God pushed the void aside. There was Light and there was nothing else. And God saw that It was good.

God continued creation until the 6th Day when He created man and announced on that day, on the day when He breathed life into the pinnacle of creation that it was all very good! It was just as He wanted it. Perfect. But man, given perfect free will, that is: an ability to make a real choice between good and evil, delighted in evil more than good. Eve and her husband, who was with her, chose the lesser part. They chose to step into the darkness.

The darkness is good after all, right? It's good to have darkness to hide one's deeds that are shameful. Most people have enough pride, enough vanity that they don't want the world to know the evil they do, so they do the deeds they do in the darkness. We do them when we're alone. We do them when it seems no one is watching. We do them with others who enjoy the comforts of the darkness too. The darkness is good when you're doing evil things.

But the problem with darkness is that it's an envious thing. The darkness doesn't like to share time with the Light. Eve and her husband, who was with her, ran and hid from the Light. They were ashamed of themselves. They were

exposed in the Light so they needed cover and off to the darkness they ran. But the Light pierces the darkness and their cover was flimsy at best.

God, knowing their predicament, where they put themselves, removed them from paradise but promised to restore it through the seed of the woman. He promised once again to bring the good Light upon creation. But for now there's no doubt that darkness has descended upon the world. We're conceived as children of the darkness. We don't have to be taught how to be bad, rather we must be taught goodness and mercy and love. Hatred and vengeance and evil are always on the tip of our tongue and in the grasp of our hand. We murder and kill and steal and fornicate and we blame our environment and the tools we use to carry out our deeds. But the problem isn't our environment. The problem isn't our tools or technology. The problem is us. We're conceived as children of darkness and so we do what we are. You said it already today, "I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto you all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You..." Remember that just a little while back this morning?

We're in and of the darkness at our conception. Make no mistake about it. But we're not without Hope. Isaiah says, "*Arise, shine, for your Light has come, and the Glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you.*" Isaiah immediately says these words to Israel as he is called out of exile in Babylon. Things hadn't been good for Israel as he lay captive in another land. But God was leading him out of that place. More than that God promised He was going to destroy the darkness permanently. He

was going to undo the sin that Eve and her husband, who was with her, did. He was going to cover the sins of Israel. And He was going to undo the penalty of my sins and your sins.

God originally unleashed the Light upon the world and it was good. Later God set out to do it again but this time the Light would be unleashed in the form of a man, the Man Jesus Christ. But let me remind you that the darkness is an envious darkness and it doesn't like to share time with the Light. King Herod was a tool of the darkness. A jealous man in his own right he thought that the promised Messiah was a rival for his pitiful earthly throne. So he sought to destroy the Light before it had a chance to shine. Those first born babes in Bethlehem paid the price for Herod's jealousy. But Herod failed to extinguish the Light. Jesus was revealed to those Gentile, wise men and they kept His whereabouts secret so that Herod wouldn't succeed in his dark plot.

The Light has risen upon the world. God sent Christ into the world to undo the darkness. The Light came to live in the darkness of our making so that He might pull us out of it. Christmas is about salvation not a birthday and Epiphany is about God making His salvation known and that salvation is the Light, Jesus Christ our Lord. The Living One came into the darkness to die our death so that we might always live in the Light.

Jesus did exactly that. He died our death. Not at Herod's chosen time, but in the Father's good time. Jesus' crucifixion didn't extinguish the Light. No, instead it made the Light available to everyone. Jesus didn't come only to save the Jews. He came for Jew and Gentile alike. He came for Israel and He came

for you. Jesus overcame the darkness for you. “...*the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.*” For the sake of Christ you are forgiven. You are freed from the darkness.

Isaiah goes onto say, “*And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising...*” Again God through Isaiah is immediately saying this to Israel. But it’s never really fulfilled in him. There were no great numbers of nations who came to Israel after he returned to his homeland. In fact this coming of nations to ‘your light’ didn’t happen until after Jesus rose from the dead. As He hung on the cross the Church of Jesus amounted to all of 1 individual, our Lord Himself. Everyone else shortly ran and hid. They didn’t publicly count themselves as members of Christ’s Church, but rather denied it.

But boy did that change in a hurry. First it was the women and the 11. Then it was to the 500. Then at Pentecost it was the 3000. Then it was to Asia and Europe and today Christians here and in heaven number in the millions if not the billions of people. The Light of God rose upon His Church and the nations have indeed flocked to her. Thanks be to God. But what drew them? What is the Beacon that draws people to the Church? How does God get them here.

Is it the Church members’ charisma? Is it Her programs and charities? Is it Her evidenced love (you know like, “they will know we are Christians by our love”)? No. None of that. At best those things are just reflections of the Beacon that draws people to the Church. What is it that we have that identifies us as the Church and that draws other people to join us in the Church? Are you ready?

Word and Sacrament. “Come on Pastor, you’ve got to be kidding.” No, no I’m not.

Christ came to you, He enlightened you the first time through His Word. That you keep (that is: hear and guard) His Word is what marks you as a Christian. That you are baptized in Word and water and that you are fed on the Word in body and blood marks you and the Church as belonging to Jesus Christ. In the Word God created and sustains the faith that is in you. Those things, Word and Sacrament, drew you to the Church and they are what draws the nations to the Church still. Nothing else will do.

The Church has grown from 1 to millions because the devil is powerless to stop the Word from being proclaimed and the sacraments from being administered. If he could Satan would abolish them both today. But they will not go away because Christ promises His Word will remain and He causes it to stand.

And so you’ll remain too. You’ll remain in the light of Christ forever. That’s not just picture language from me by the way. That’s what God says. *“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His servants will worship Him. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will*

need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their Light, and they will reign forever and ever.” Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.