

## **From Darkness to Light** Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2:1-12

Disclaimer: Material for this message was adapted in part from sermons found on the Sermon Central website.

One of the many miracles of the Internet is that Betty and I get to video chat with our son Forrester in Anchorage Alaska fairly regularly. But with the 4 hour time difference, these days when we call at our lunchtime, he's just then driving into work – still in the dark – at 8 am because at this time of year Anchorage gets less than five hours of daylight.

If you think that's bad, pity the people living in the little town of Barrow, Alaska, located 360 miles north of the Arctic Circle on the farthest northern tip of the state. At this time of year, during what they call "dark winter," due to the tilt of the earth away from the sun, it never shows itself there for over two months; so when the sun sets in Barrow Alaska on the afternoon on November 18<sup>th</sup>, it doesn't rise again until January 24<sup>th</sup>. Each winter they live through 65 days of total darkness. 65 days when the sun doesn't shine. And when the sun does rise – even for just a moment -- on January 24<sup>th</sup>, the whole town comes out to celebrate, because finally, there is light again.

But the prophet Isaiah probably wasn't thinking of the people in Barrow, when he wrote, "**Arise, shine, for your light has come.**" What God's Word is talking about here is a different kind of light and a different kind of darkness. And when this special light that comes from God begins to shine through that ugly darkness, the results are much more spectacular and joyful than any sunrise you could experience in northern Alaska.

According to the Christian calendar, this past Friday was the last day of the Christmas season, the "twelfth day of Christmas." So today we celebrate **Epiphany** Sunday, the beginning of the Epiphany season, symbolized by the arrival of the Magi.

What does the word "**epiphany**" mean? An "epiphany" is when something reveals itself, or shows itself (usually for the first time and in a spectacular way).

For example, in Barrow, Alaska, when after 65 days of darkness, the sun finally reveals its glory for everyone to see. That's an epiphany. When the Magi finally found the baby Jesus, for them that was an epiphany. In the church year, the 2-month Epiphany season is when The Son of God reveals his glory for everyone to see. God says to you,

**"Arise, Shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you "**

Isaiah 6:1

So, for these next two months, the Scripture readings, the hymns, the sermons – everything that you see, hear, sing and pray in our worship service will serve one purpose, which is to reveal to you, to show you, the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ.

You can sum up the season of Epiphany with one phrase, which is also the theme of this morning's message: **FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT.**

You see, the Bible draws a picture of our entire world as a people who have lived in continual darkness, a people who have been waiting and waiting and waiting for the sun to rise. As Isaiah said,

**"For darkness covers the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples."**

Isaiah 6:2

God views our world as a very dark place. Spiritually dark. Every day, you can see evidence of spiritual darkness in the evening news. Just this last week police captured a man suspected of fatally knifing four college students to death - for no other apparent reason than to see if he could get away with murder. And it seems that Putin, unable to make headway with ground forces, apparently has chosen to exhaust the Ukrainians with continual bombings: spiritual darkness.

Also look around you, watch people, listen to them talk, see what they do, and it will become very clear to you that our world is a very dark place spiritually. But the most frightening place to look, my friends, is within yourself.

Daytime TV celebrities will tell you that there is an incredible amount of good, and an incredible amount of strength inside yourself: "*If you would only reach deep within yourself, you would see how good you really are!*" But this has not proven to be the case. Over and over again, people look within themselves for strength to bear up under trying circumstances and that strength is not there.

People look within themselves for something good and while you can find some, you find co-resident within: selfishness and materialism, hatred and prejudice. We are all like Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde, our soul is a dark & tangled place.

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Yes, "*thick darkness covers the people,*" God says, "...

**"but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you."**

Isaiah 6:3

Our Bible describes the birth of Jesus Christ as the rising of the sun on a very dark place. The Apostle John wrote that Jesus *was the true light coming into the world to enlighten everyone, and his light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it"* (John 1:9,5)

Did you know that you can naturally purify water for drinking just by letting it sit in a clear jar out in the sun? Just as sunlight is a powerful disinfectant, so is the light of God's Son. When we live in His light, Jesus shines His forgiveness and grace into our life, and the darkness in our soul, our sin and guilt fade away.

If you feel guilt in your life, guilt from repeating sins, guilt from trying to make things right with God, even though you know you can never do enough, then you are someone who is still trapped in darkness. But then you learn that Jesus Christ was born into our world for the sole purpose of doing what you cannot do – making everything right between you and God. Because Jesus has died for all of your sins on the cross, your sins have been freely forgiven and you can feel your guilt melt away. Because of Christ, everything is good between you and God. You have gone from darkness to light.

**You have followed a star and found the king.** This is what happened with those Magi so long ago who came looking for Jesus. Thus, these Gentiles from a far off land have become the symbol of the Epiphany season.

They came from a place where no one knew about the Christ. No one knew about the true God who was sending a Savior into the world. But somehow, they knew and when they saw His star, they knew that the Messiah had come. So these ancient astronomers left their land of spiritual darkness to find and worship the true king who was coming into their world.

Having made the long trip to Jerusalem, they were probably surprised to see that this city was just as spiritually dark as the land they had come from. But finally, they did find the Messiah and they worshiped Him. Isaiah wrote about the coming of these men:

**"Nations will come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn."  
all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and  
incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord."**

(Isaiah 60:1,6,7)

There, in the form of a little child, the Magi saw the light of the world. There they saw the glory of God, and this filled them with a spirit of awe and worship. They had gone from darkness to light, and they rejoiced, and gave this child who was their God their gifts from afar.

Some people also call Epiphany the "**Gentile Christmas**," because one of the main themes of the Epiphany season is that Christ is the light, not just for a select group of people like the Jews, but for all people, over all the world.

Just as the sun rises on every nation, on every kind of people, no matter who they are or what their background is, just as the sun, every morning, rises on you, so it is with Christ. His grace, His forgiveness, His salvation, rises and shines on the Jews in Bethlehem, but also on the Magi from the east. His grace and forgiveness rises and shines on every person on this earth – every person is invited to believe in this child, to worship Him, to find their salvation in Him. No matter who you are, you too, can go from darkness to light.

And no matter how dark the world becomes, the light of Jesus Christ will never stop shining for you. I recently heard a wise saying that has wandered around in my thinking for the last few weeks. And, for the one who lives their lives in the light of Christ, I think this is especially true,

When you think you are walking in darkness, remember that you are providing light for those who walk beside you.
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In closing, don't feel too sorry for Forrester up in Anchorage or the people of Barrow, Alaska. While it is true that right now they live in darkness, during the summer, six months from now, the earth will tilt the other way, and then, in Barrow, Alaska, from May 10 until August 2, for almost three months, the sun will never set and Forrester will also enjoy some 19 hours of sunlight every day! That is why Alaska is called "the land of the midnight sun."

The same can be with your soul. Once the grace and mercy and forgiveness of Jesus Christ rises in your life, it will never stop shining. No matter how dark the world gets around you, Christ's love will always shine in your life. Spiritually, right now, you live in the "land of the midnight sun."

May this Epiphany season be for you a time when you see ever more clearly the glory of your Savior, Jesus Christ. "***Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.***" Amen.

Let us pray.