

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Epiphany of our Lord
January 6, 2018
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran
Rise and Shine

—Isaiah 60:1-6

Dear Friends in Christ, rise and shine! Mom walks into the bedroom and rouses her little girl from her sleep, “Rise and shine!” She rubs the sleep out of her eyes, yawns, and stretches. Dad watches the clock and as it gets closer to noon, he finally goes into his teenage son’s room, throws open the blinds. The bright sun pierces the dark room and Dad says, “Rise and shine! It’s time to start the day!” This morning, maybe you needed a nudge to get out of your warm bed and comfy jammies, whether it was a gentle voice or the obnoxious buzz of your alarm clock. Rise and shine! The sun has risen. The darkness of night is gone for now. It’s a new day.

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.” That was Isaiah’s message for God’s people about 700 years before Christ. Some dark days had fallen upon God’s people. In Isaiah’s time, the nation of Israel had been destroyed by Assyria. About a hundred years after Isaiah prophesied, the Babylonians carried off God’s people into exile, and finally, Jerusalem and the temple were decimated—leveled to the ground. Can you imagine an Old Testament believer coming across one of Isaiah’s scrolls just after the fall of Jerusalem? They find the scroll that contains this prophecy of brighter days and the glory of Zion, God’s holy city—Rise and shine! Nations will come to see your light! But meanwhile, the city lay in ruins. Eventually God’s people would return and rebuild the Holy City and the Lord’s temple. But history kept repeating itself. The Greeks, the Romans, the Turks, they all had their way with the Sacred City. In fact if you go to Jerusalem today, you know what you will find where the glorious temple once stood? It’s something called the wailing wall where to this day Jews go to wail and lament the former glory of the holy city. Rise and Shine? Where’s the light at the end of the tunnel?

Do you ever ask yourself that question, “Where’s the light at the end of the tunnel? Rise and shine? Why? What’s the point? Sadly we face the darkness of sins consequences—pain, sorrow, sickness, and ultimately death. Where’s the light at the end of the tunnel? We see the darkness rolling in as more people, even people we love are turning away from God and are hostile to his truth. Where is the light at the end of the tunnel? We face the darkness of our own sin—the things we don’t want to think and do yet we think them and we do them. Where’s the light at the end of the tunnel? In the darkness of sin, we find ourselves groping around for even a glimmer of hope to brighten our gloomy days. And maybe we find something that brings temporary relief. A new toy provides a moment of diversion from the darkness. A new adventure takes our mind off the daily grind. A new accomplishment gives us a sense of pride. But still the sun sets; the glory fades.

The thick darkness that Isaiah describes is far gloomier than the absence of light on a dark day. The darkness Isaiah describes is really the absence of God. God himself is light; in him there is no darkness at all. Darkness is separation from God. In the previous chapter, Isaiah said, **“But your iniquities have separated you from your God.”** Can you imagine what life would be like completely separated God? Not even an unbeliever knows what that’s like. Even now though an unbeliever does not know or acknowledge the true God, he still receives blessings from God. Jesus said, **“[The Father] causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”** Yet the sun will soon set and those temporal blessings will dry up. A life lived apart from God in this world results in an eternity of utter darkness, eternal separation from God.

There is only one remedy to the darkness of sin, **“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.”** Where is the light? The answer is so simple. So simple we even forget it at times. The light is Jesus Christ. Like the sun breaks the darkness of night, the Son of God himself dispels the darkness of sin from our hearts. Jesus is the very glory of the Lord that Isaiah foretold. Jesus Christ is the Glory of the Lord, which people in the Old Testament only caught a glimpse of, now made known to us. Jesus is the radiance of God come down heaven to rescue us from the dreadful darkness of sin and the evil one. Jesus is more than just a light at the end of the tunnel. He is the light of the world. He is the Light no darkness can overcome. He doesn’t just give a glimmer of hope or a ray of comfort. He gave us himself as the atoning sacrifice for all our sins. He gave himself to undo sin and death by his death and by glorious rising from the dead. And he revealed this glorious message of peace and forgiveness to you.

Isaiah’s prophecy finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Isaiah’s prophecy find fulfillment in you. As we meditate on Isaiah’s words, do you also see yourself? **“See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the**

peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” Nations will come to the brightness of Christ and his light. Have any of you ever taken one of those DNA tests to discover what ethnicity you are? Can you imagine if each one of us were to take one of those tests, just how many nations of the world would be represented right here—nations gathered here to see and hear the light of the gospel; people from all different backgrounds and different places, coming to the same light for comfort and hope. And all because somewhere along the line of history, someone crossed a border or a cultural/linguistic barrier and shared the gospel with one of your ancestors, or with you. The point is the gospel of Jesus Christ is a message that transcends time and culture and social class. And God in his grace caused the light of Jesus Christ and his forgiveness to shine in our hearts and lives.

“Rise and shine!” It’s a new day in God’s grace. Rise and shine! Shake off the darkness and gloom of sin, and see that the Savior of the nations is your Savior. Rise and shine! See that the Savior of the nations is your neighbor’s Savior too. The work God has given us to do on this new day of his grace and as children of his light is to rise and let the light of Christ shine in our lives. Somewhere, sometime, someone shared the gospel with you or with one of your ancestors. Somewhere, at some point, someone in your life is sitting in the darkness of sin and unbelief and you know where the light switch is. In fact you are a light.

Rise and shine! We know that the glory that Isaiah foretold wasn’t the physical city of Jerusalem. It’s Christ and it his church. Christ continues to work and to shine through Christians who remain in this dark world. Isaiah’s prophecy pictures Zion, the city on a hill shining like beacon to all people. Jesus used the same picture to describe you. **“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”**

Skeptics in our world love to ask the question, “Where is God?” Usually they ask it in times of tragedy or when they consider all the terrible things that are happening in the world. Where is Jesus when people covered in darkness need him the most? He is there in the gentle touch of Christian who reaches out to someone with compassion. He is there in the listening ear of a Christian who takes to time hear the struggles and pain. He is there in the good deed of the Christian done to the glory of God.

I don’t know all of the opportunities you have to let your light shine, but rise and shine. Let’s rub the sleep out of our eyes and be attentive to the opportunities God places before us. It could even start right here in a pew or in a courtyard. I know that on a regular basis we have people in our community who actually seek Emmanuel. They’ve gotten a dozen postcards from us over the years. They’ve driven by our church a hundred times. Finally something in their life happens and they are looking for light. They muster up the courage to walk past those gates and through these doors and here they are. Let the light of Christ shine as you pause and maybe even step out of your comfort zone to meet that person and let them know that you’re glad they’re here. Outside those doors and beyond those gates, rise and shine. Let it be known in the way you talk and act that you bear the light of Christ. That may be the first step in crossing some sort of barrier to proclaim the praise your Lord, the Savior of the nations.

Rise and Shine. Amen.