

Rise and Shine!

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ISAIAH 60:1-6 1 "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. 2 See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. 3 Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 4 "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. 5 Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. 6 Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD. (NIV)

Rise and Shine! Those words are usually addressed to people who are sleeping and are in no mood to hear them! They are spoken to people who need to be jostled and awakened. I used to have to say those words to my girls to get them up for school, and one girl in particular! If you have ever heard them, it has probably been when you were sleeping peacefully and they were a disturbance. They were not welcome. You didn't want to hear them. You were snug and comfortable in your bed, yet someone called out RISE AND SHINE. Most people respond grumpily, or with a groan. You pull the covers up over your head and hope you didn't really hear what you heard. Even though you may not like to hear those words, you know you should do what they say. If you don't get out of bed, you will waste the day and not get anything accomplished. All of you have responsibilities and things to do each day. You understand that you need to RISE AND SHINE!

In our text, Isaiah is telling the people of God to RISE AND SHINE. They were not literally sleeping, but had drifted into a kind of spiritual sleep mode. Sin can lull you into a relaxed and seemingly comfortable kind of sleep, but that is outside of God's plan. God does not want you to just coast through life. Instead you are told to rise and shine with the light of Jesus Christ that has dawned upon you. You are to be a Light to the nations. That is what Isaiah was saying: It's time to wake up and SHINE for the LORD.

That is the overall theme of the Lessons for today: being a light to the Nations, or a Light to the **Gentiles!** To the Jewish people, anyone who was not a Jew was a Gentile, and that was not a complimentary term. The Jews spoke of Gentiles with contempt, much like people today people speak of "foreigners" with that little edge in our voice. It was hard for the Jewish people to accept that the promised salvation of God would also be for the Gentiles. The Old Testament people could not truly understand this -- they were the **chosen ones**. They knew the Messiah would come through them, but after a while they began to think that He would come only for

them. The Jews had as much trouble accepting that the Gentiles could be saved as you and I have believing that Jesus died even for Iraqi suicide bombers. The Jews distorted God's promise so that it applied only to them and no one else.

But not all the Jews had this faulty understanding. Isaiah's message was heard and understood by many, that God would be the Savior of all men, Jews and Gentiles. In next Sunday's Old Testament lesson, you will hear God say through Isaiah *I...will make you...a light for the Gentiles* (Isaiah 42). Those are the words you heard Simeon echo in last Sunday's Gospel lesson, when he saw the baby Jesus: *a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel* (Luke 2:32). There were those among God's chosen people who understood that God's salvation is for all men.

Paul spoke of this in the epistle lesson for today, talking about the mystery of God's grace that had been revealed to him -- *This mystery is that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus* (Eph. 3:6) It was not just the Jews who were to be saved. And, of course, the Gospel for today shows that the Gentiles are included. **The Magi**, or Wise Men, were from the East. They were not Jews. Yet they are the first ones in the Scripture of whom it is said that they worshiped (proskuneo) Jesus. Not Jews, but Gentiles were the first to worship the Christ child. The shepherds may have gone to see Him when He was born, but it does not say that they worshiped Him.

Salvation for the Gentiles is what Epiphany is all about. Jesus showed Himself to be God to those outside of the descendants of Abraham. And that is what you are called to do as well: RISE AND SHINE--show Jesus to be the Savior to those outside of God's grace. When Isaiah told the people to rise and shine, Darkness and despair were realities for them. In this section, he was prophesying to those who would be captives in Babylon. In the midst of their darkness, their captivity and slavery in Babylon, light would shine. They would receive the light of God's deliverance from their captors that would be but a glimmer of the deliverance to come in Christ Jesus.

It is in Christ that we see the theme of darkness and light played out most graphically. In order to overcome the darkness of sin, your sin, Jesus left the glory of heaven to come and live

among us in this darkness. As part of His battle, he allowed the world to be plunged into even deeper darkness. That happened when he died bearing your sins. *Darkness came over the whole land* (Mark 15:33). However, He did not leave us in that darkness. He restored light to the world by conquering death through His resurrection. He burst forth from the tomb with radiance. That's really what it means to RISE AND SHINE. The angel that rolled the stone away reflected that light: *His appearance was like lightning and his clothes were as white as snow*. Jesus endured the darkness of your sins so that we might have light.

There is still darkness and despair in our world today. It comes to each of us at different times and in different ways. It is to you, when you find yourself in trying circumstances that Isaiah's message declares *Your light has come and the glory of the Lord rises upon you...the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you*. This is the confidence that you have through faith. You know that the salvation God accomplished through Jesus Christ was for you. You trust in His deliverance.

It is because of this faith that you have been called to RISE AND SHINE. How do you let your light shine? The text says that *nations (or gentiles) will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn*. Are you **shining for the Lord** in a way that others will see Him and be drawn to Him? What should you be doing?

One thing you should do is exactly what you are doing this morning. You have come here to **WORSHIP**. This is a way in which you show your faith to others. And by that, I do not mean just your fellow worshipers. Just think for a minute about what you are saying to your neighbors by being here. When you RISE AND SHINE on Sunday mornings to come to worship God, you are telling the world that this is something that is important to you. You are letting the light of Christ Shine.

Another way to RISE AND SHINE is the way you conduct your **LIFE** from day to day. You live in a world of darkness. The greed, corruption, sloth, and dishonesty all around you are evidence that you live in darkness. And this darkness shows itself in the world's hostility to and rejection of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is more than just "too bad" if someone rejects Christ. It is devastating for them. It means eternal damnation for them, something that God desires for no

one. That is why you must let your light shine in your deeds. Let the light of Christ be seen in the way you respond to situations.

The light of Christ is to illumine the entire world--that happens through his followers. That is why you have been called to **RISE AND SHINE**.