

The Epiphany.

Text: Isa 60:1-5

Suggested Hymns:

46, 40, 42, 330, 45

- 1) Jesus Has Influenced All Areas Of Life
- 2) Jesus Gives Moral Uplift
- 3) Jesus Is Our Spiritual Light
- 4) People Come To Jesus One By One

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Isaiah 60:1-5, ¹ *Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.* ² *For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you.* ³ *The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.*

⁴ *“Lift up your eyes all around, and see: They all gather together, they come to you; Your sons shall come from afar, And your daughters shall be nursed at your side.* ⁵ *Then you shall see and become radiant, And your heart shall swell with joy; Because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The prophet Isaiah, more than 600 years before Christ's coming, sees in vision a great multitude coming from the Gentile world through the call of the Gospel into the Christian church.

Some 700 years later John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, sees on Patmos, also in a vision, the great multitude before the throne of heaven, worshipping Christ, who was slain for our redemption.

We read in Revelation 7:9-10, ⁹ *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,* ¹⁰ *and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

All these people, coming out of all sorts of situations of life, had their robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb. Only such people were there. Nobody else was there. Thus was fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that "*The Gentiles shall come to your light.*" That Light was Jesus, the Saviour of all mankind.

In the calendar of the Christian church, January 6 is known as the Day of Epiphany, also called the Gentile Christmas.

Epiphany means "showing forth, shining forth." Jesus has come also to shine into the hearts of the Gentiles, bringing forgiveness, peace, hope, and salvation to all mankind.

The Gentile world began this trek to Christ with the coming of the Wise Men from the East to Jerusalem in search of the Christ Child, the new-born King. Finding Him at Bethlehem, they worshipped the young child and presented their gifts - gold, frankincense, and myrrh as an offering of gratitude. For centuries the Gentiles have been coming into the fold and been finding in this Jesus peace, hope and heaven.

Let us consider this wonderful Epiphany. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Jesus Has Influenced All Areas Of Life

The two visions reveal a Saviour who is for all people. His Messiah-ship, His kingship, His redemption, is not limited to one race, or to one country, or to one period in history. Jesus is the world's Saviour, the Light of all mankind. Isaiah stresses that the Messiah-Christ is to come as the Light to the Gentiles. "*Your light has come!*" "*The Gentiles shall come to your light.*"

Firstly, we consider what influence Jesus, as the Light of the world has had in the cultural areas of man. This may seem of lesser importance and rather foreign to Isaiah's prophecy, yet it should not escape our attention.

In the ancient Gentile world Greek culture overshadowed all other cultures. Yet its music, its poetry, its architecture, lacked the warmth and inspiration which Christianity touched off when it came into its own. The world is full of music, beautiful, inspiring, and pleasing. True, there are discordant and hard notes, sensual and passion-provoking tones.

Yet the most glorious music ever written glorifies Jesus Christ in the great masterpieces of Bach and others. Many operas and symphonies have reached beautiful heights, but is there anything more moving than Handel's "The Messiah," in which one uplifting melody follows the other?

Much poetry has been written, masterpieces which have thrilled the hearts of mankind. Yet these do not express a sublime, child-like faith so well as does, for instance, "Rock of Ages," with its two immortal lines,

Nothing in my hand I bring,

Simply to Thy cross I cling.

In these few words is embodied a hope and a certainty which drives away every despair out of the heart and lets us look up with confidence and courage.

The Gentile world has built the Pyramids of Egypt, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, and the Temple on the Acropolis at Athens. They have evoked the admiration of the world.

Yet dare we not say that architecture reached its heights of beauty in the glory of the Gothic, which was created to express the glory of Christ, the eternal God? We stand in awe and worship God as we see, for example, the cathedrals in Cologne and other parts of Europe.

The world has an endless number of beautiful paintings. Our museums are filled with them. Artists vie with one another in portraying the glories of the sunset, the beauty of the Alps, the grandeur of the human body; yet by common consent the most perfect painting of the ages is Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper."

No matter into which field we move, be it music, poetry, architecture, or art, we find the most beautiful touched by the spirit of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Jesus' influence has made music, poetry, art, and architecture more sublime.

2. Jesus Gives Moral Uplift

However, far more important to the Gentile world was the moral uplift which came to the nations through the Gospel of Jesus. A moral darkness covered the earth, says the prophet. The age in which Jesus lived was corrupt to the core.

The Roman Empire sank into a moral decay of which even many of the pagan writers were ashamed. Human life had no value, political corruption was

the order of the day, vice and crime openly lifted their faces everywhere. Read the histories of the emperors and the Herods, and even the most callused are shocked. Into that world came the Gospel of Jesus and brought about many wholesome changes. Life no longer is dirt cheap. The individual has dignity.

The Gentile world showed no sympathy and consideration as the needs of the millions cried out for bread. Charity and Red Cross organisations were unknown. The rich grew richer and the poor poorer. Christ and His Gospel has made mankind more humane, thoughtful, and helpful.

If a community is struck by a flood or a storm, at once doctors, nurses, ambulances, food, and clothing are rushed to the scene to help the stricken area. Even though we are ashamed of many of the crimes and vices still prevalent among us, nevertheless the light of the Gospel has alleviated the sorrows and troubles of mankind and created a better moral world in which we live.

3. Jesus Is Our Spiritual Light

Foremost and above all, Jesus is the spiritual Light in this world of sin. *“For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people.”* Even though the Gentile world could boast rightly of its philosophies and learning and culture and advancement in many fields of science, nevertheless it remained ignorant of God. The wisdom of man cannot find God.

By the time that Jesus came into the world the Gentiles had lost all hope and satisfaction in their gods. They no longer believed in their pagan cults. In keeping with the temple worship the grossest immoral acts were condoned. For the individual soul there was no peace. Fortune-tellers and superstitions were the order of the day.

Christ came and brought forgiveness and cleansing to the conscience. His cross proclaimed to mankind that God’s justice had been satisfied through the sacrifice of His Son on Calvary. Jesus had died even for the ungodly; in fact, for all. Thus men and women who had sinned, and that greatly, and saw no way out by their own achievements found new hope in this Jesus, whose blood made the foulest clean.

Jesus still is the only Light and Hope for mankind today. Again and again the world reverts to a moral and spiritual darkness. Millions have rejected this Jesus and lost the way to peace. *“No one comes to the Father except through*

Me,” says Jesus.¹ If we want peace with God, hope for eternity, assurance of salvation, we must come to Jesus. At His cross we find rest for our souls.

To this day Jesus’ influence lifts mankind out of the darkness of sin, teaching us to be kindlier, more unselfish, and more thoughtful of others. Conditions are better in a community and a nation where the Gospel prevails. Jesus still is the Light of the world, the Saviour from sin. His Cross leads us home to life eternal. Only through Jesus we live in grace and can die without the fear of the judgement to come.

4. People Come To Jesus One By One

However, this coming to the Light is not a mass movement. We come one by one and are brought to faith and are transformed and made children of God’s grace. The world as a whole might be influenced by the Gospel of Jesus, yet the individuals remain in spiritual darkness. Jesus is the Light of the world by shining into the heart of the individual man and woman and converting them into creatures who love Him and serve Him.

Scripture stresses this truth. Zacchaeus, a tax collector, had lived a life of dishonesty and selfishness. He hears of Jesus. He climbs into a sycamore tree to get a good glimpse at the Prophet of Galilee. Jesus is interested in the individual and pauses to speak to Zacchaeus. Jesus invites Himself to the tax collector’s home. As he comes to faith in Jesus, his whole life changes. He no longer finds pleasure in taxing the people unjustly and robbing the poor. He is reborn, and his life shows it.

On Calvary a thief is dying. He watches and witnesses the crucifixion of Jesus. He hears Jesus pray, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”*² The thief had been a heartless individual. Yet at the cross of Jesus he is completely changed at heart and is given the promise *“Today you will be with Me in Paradise.”*³

Paul is breathing out hatred against the church. He thinks he is doing God a favour. These Christians, in his opinion are a menace to Judaism and the Law of Moses. They must be crushed. Then all of a sudden he is preaching “Christ Crucified.” He is completely reversed. What changed this man? Only one answer can be given: Christ shone into his heart.

This holds true also of men and women who did not see Christ in the flesh, but found Him in the Gospel. Augustine grew up a wicked son of the family. Finding Northern Africa too tame for his pleasures and sins, he went to Rome to drink the cup of iniquity to the last drop.

Then he hears Chrysostom preach Christ, the Saviour of the world. Augustine becomes a changed man. He no longer lives to sin and worldly pleasures. What has happened? Christ's Gospel shone into his heart, and he is converted.

Martin Luther, who had not given himself over to the wild outbursts of sin, but is filled with the despondency of realising that he cannot sufficiently atone for his sins, reads in the Epistle to the Romans that a man is justified before God without the deeds of the Law. He finds peace through Calvary, where Jesus gave His life for our redemption.

You and I must personally believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour from sin to find reconciliation with God. By our own achievements we will never be able to stand in the judgements of God. Jesus and His Gospel must shine into our hearts and cleanse our souls, one by one, from sin. Only as we believe that Christ Jesus redeemed us with His blood can we know for certain that there is no condemnation for us.

Arise, shine; For your light has come! says the prophet. Jesus has come into the world and given His life for our redemption. As we come to the Cross, we are cleansed, and we go forth into the world in which we live to confess Him and serve Him. Our lives are to shine with Christian love.

Because Christ is in our hearts, He, the Light of the world, reflects Himself in us. We give Him day by day the first place in our thinking. We go forth to do His will, loving our neighbour by being kind, thoughtful, and sympathetic.

With Christ in our hearts we will share our earthly possessions, our time, and our abilities with others in spreading the Gospel. The simplest gift of service will shine forth to glorify our Christ, who has called us out of darkness into His kingdom. We love Him who first loved us.

Isaiah saw a great multitude coming to Christ, the Light of the world. Today let us dedicate our entire life to our Saviour, walk as it is fitting for Christian people, and work while it is day to save souls for eternity.

Then the simplest service we have rendered in love for Christ shall be a part of that great program of the Christian church by which the church shall reach the ends of the earth to bring men and women to Mount Zion.

When we look to the *“uplifted Christ of Calvary,”* we will find peace and hope and salvation. And when life’s day is over we shall stand before the throne of the Lamb of God, praising Jesus who has washed our robes and made them white that we might be acceptable to God forever and ever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 14:6

² Luke 23:34

³ Luke 23:43