

Epiphany Observed / January 5, 2025

Isaiah 60:1

*“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”*

The Glory of the Lord has Risen upon you

Isaiah chapter 60 celebrates the glory of the Lord rising upon the children of Israel. Isaiah sings *“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”* The day of Epiphany traditionally commemorates the visit of the magi to the child Jesus. The magi or wisemen, were led in part by a star. We might assume that the coming light of Isaiah is a reference to the star that the magi followed that led them to the house in which Mary and the child Jesus resided. Actually, the star wasn't the light, but a witness to the Light. The true that enlightens all people is Jesus. He is the glory of the Lord. He has risen upon us that we would know God in love as our Father and Him as our God and Saviour.

Jesus is the light that rose upon the Old Testament Church at the dawn of the New Testament era. At Jesus' birth the church was composed mainly of Hebrew DNA, people who were the physical offspring of Jacob. Mostly those who were descended through his son Judah, from which comes the name Jews. Nevertheless, God always incorporated people from the nations within physical Israel as part of His spiritual Israel. Ruth the great-great grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Jesus, was a Gentile from the land of Moab. Jesus is the Light of the New Testament Church, which incorporates both Jew and Gentile, people from every nation under heaven. All who believe in their hearts, and confess with their lips Jesus as their God and Saviour are members of God's spiritual Israel, the Holy Christian Church. In Him the glory of the Lord has arisen for the salvation of all people, especially of those who believe.

The first thing God called into being at creation was light. Light has the properties of both making things visible and invisible. We see by the light of the sun, but if we look directly at its glory, we will be blinded by its light. In the letter to the Romans, Paul says that God dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. Darkness is symbolic of chaos, confusion, sin and death. Thieves work under the cover of darkness. In the darkness people do things that would make them blush with shame in the light of day. In Ephesians Paul writes, *“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness...for it is shameful even to speak of the things they do*

*in secret.*” The deepest darkness is of the human spirit, oblivious to the knowledge the God. It is from this first darkness of the human spirit that unfruitful works of darkness have their origin.

Christ is the light of the world. He is the true light, for He is the very image of God in the nature of His being. He is the light that enlightens believers with the knowledge of God’s love. He has brought us out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of light, through the sacrifice of His body on the cross, by which He atoned for the sin of the world. In Christ we are children of the Light. Paul calls us to walk as children of the Light, saying, *“At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”* The great Light that has come is Jesus Christ. The greatest enlightenment is to see our need for His salvation and to see and receive Him as our God and Saviour.

Christ is the Light of the world, not as a glowing object like the sun. He is the Light of the world as the one who makes God known in the nature of His being as love. Jesus made God known as love through word and wonder. He makes God most fully known by His sacrificial death which atoned for human sin. The first people were naturally illuminated as to the nature of God. God was their loving Father. He was the Creator who sustained them and all things living out of the bounty of His loving heart. They didn’t need to be told that God was love. They knew God as their Creator. They were the crown of His creation, created in His image to shine His love in the world He created.

Spiritual darkness came upon them and their descendants when they betrayed His love, mistrusted His word and brought sin into the world. They and their descendants lost the natural knowledge of God as love. Their first response after their sin was fear. They tried to hide when they heard Him approach in the garden. Things went from bad to worse among their descendants. In place of their perfect knowledge of God their descendants imagined all kinds of things that are not God and not love. The gods people imagined in their darkness demanded things that no human could provide, perfection. They demanded things no human should be compelled to give, the sacrifice of their children. Through Israel, beginning with Abraham and Sarah, God began to make Himself known to the nations. In Jesus, born of a woman of Israel, a descendant of Abraham and Sarah, He makes Himself known and shows Himself to be our loving God and Saviour.

The visit of the Magi inaugurates the season of Epiphany. God led them to the child Jesus through a variety of means, including the Christmas Star. Epiphany

means to realize something, either by intellectual or physical means. It can mean to see something in a different manner. The disciples Peter, James and John saw Jesus in a different light when His appearance was altered and He radiated divine light on the mount of Transfiguration. The disciples as a group were challenged to look deeper when Jesus calmed a storm and walked upon the sea. The epiphany for the magi was that the child born of Mary was the king of the Jews. The epiphany of the visit of the magi for the Jewish people was that salvation is for all people and Jesus is the Saviour of all who believe, regardless of their ancestry and DNA. The only DNA that matters to God is the DNA of faith in Jesus as God and Saviour!

Israel was God's chosen people. Have you ever been chosen? It feels nice to be chosen, at least for a good purpose. When I was in elementary school, one day a teacher came into the class and chose some of us to play baseball against kids from another school. It felt good to get out of school to play baseball. It felt good to be chosen. I have no idea why we were chosen, maybe they just wanted to get rid of us for the afternoon, but it felt good. Israel was chosen for a purpose. They were chosen to make God known in the world. They were to be a light to the nations, Gentiles as they called them. It feels nice to be chosen, but sometimes it can go to our heads so that we think that not only are we special because of the call, but are also superior to others and better than them.

None of us who were chosen to play baseball were superior athletes. Maybe the teachers felt sorry for us and that's why they chose us. Israel was not a superior nation. They were not even a nation. God didn't choose them because they were the best and most gifted people. God chose them because He works through things that are weak, inconsequential and nonexistent so that everyone sees that the power comes from Him. Israel was chosen to make God known. The Jewish people didn't truly realize this until after Jesus had returned to heaven. When the Holy Spirit brought Gentiles to faith, then they saw that salvation was not only for the Jews, but for all people. They saw that Jesus was not just the Saviour of the Jewish people. He is the Saviour of Israel, all those who receive Him through faith and believe in Him as their God and Saviour.

Our observation of Epiphany begins with the magi led to Jesus by the light of a star. The point of Epiphany is that Jesus is the God and Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe. He calls us to believe. Epiphany is the shining of light. Jesus shines the light of the knowledge of God upon us by the illumination of the Holy Spirit through the words of Moses, the prophets, the psalmists, apostles and evangelists. The psalmist sang, *"Your word O Lord is a lamp to my feet and a*

*light to my path.*" The word leads us to Jesus. He is the true light who enlightens all who believe.

The prophets such as Isaiah, foretold the promise of His coming. The apostles and evangelists declared His appearing. He is the Light of the glory of the Lord. We see His glory in the scriptures. He speaks to us through the prophets and evangelists. The angel in Revelation cried out, "*Testimony to Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*" Prophecy is not so much predicting the future as it is testifying to Jesus as our God and Saviour. False prophecy hides Jesus in darkness. True prophecy enlightens us by making Jesus known as our God and Saviour. True prophecy calls people to faith in Jesus as their God and Saviour. He is the Saviour of all people. He is especially the Saviour of those who believe, for it is through faith that the Spirit blesses us with the gifts He gives; forgiveness in time, life and light in eternity.

*"Arise and shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."* God bless us always with eyes to see and hearts to believe in Jesus, our God and Saviour. In His Name. Amen