

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday after Epiphany, January 11, 2009

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Hymns: 126, 283, 129,127, 134:1.

Lessons: Isaiah 59: 1-23, Ephesians 3:2-12, Mathew 2:1-12

Sermon Text: Isaiah 60:1-6

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Are we living in an age of enlightenment or an age of darkness? Most people would probably say that mankind is more enlightened today than they ever have been. Mankind has reached a pinnacle of knowledge and accomplishment. Look at all the amazing things men have done and learned. There are many things that we are on the verge of discovering or accomplishing or doing. I'm not going to list them because the child of God – the new man within you – would recognize that even today *“darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples.*

The very reason mankind thinks it is at the peak of its wisdom is one of the reasons it is really in a state of darkness. Humans are depending on themselves for everything. Many, many people, including an astounding number who think of themselves as Christians, have no use for an invisible supreme being, a god. There was a time in history when many people had some belief in a god and were convinced that a god was guiding all things. Many of those people believed in the God of the Bible. But with the age historians call “the Renaissance” that changed. Instead of God being the measure of all things, man became the measure of all things. Humanism grew during the Renaissance period of history and can be defined as “a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason.” And today, a majority of mankind, with all its “wisdom” and “enlightenment” rejects Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Son of Mary and rejects him as the only Savior from sin. Mankind thinks it has wisdom. But it is that ignorance and unbelief in the disguise of wisdom which damns one eternally to hell – which many think of only as a myth or fable anyway. But God himself tells us in Proverbs 9:10 *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* Yes, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples.

But I'm not only thinking of mankind's ignorance and disbelief of the one thing that can make the future bright. I'm also thinking about the cause of that ignorance and unbelief. Mankind is in an age of darkness – thick darkness – and can't see and believe the truth of God and God's Word because of sin. Sin causes separation from God. Unrepented sin damns. And “sin” is an unpopular word. It means that you recognize all humans as sinners and in need of a Savior from Sin.

But there is hope for the darkness many people live in. There is hope for you, and you need to be reminded of it every day. It is

THE GLORY OF THE LORD THAT APPEARS!

- 1. The magi – “wise men” – came and worshipped the one who is the very “glory of the Lord”.**
- 2. Sin and lack of belief of God is why the world today is still in a state of “thick darkness”**
- 3. God has the only solution for that sin and unbelief – he sent his Son to save mankind!**

In the familiar history of the “wise men”, “magi”, you see people who are not Jews coming to worship Jesus, son of Mary. We know that his father is God, thus he is true God and true man. They came looking for the one they called “King of the Jews”. But when they found him, scripture says “they worshipped him!” So to them he was not merely a human king, for wise men would not “worship” a human king unless they thought him to be some kind of god. I wish we knew more about the wise men, and how they learned to know about Jesus Christ. But we won’t know until we get to heaven. Oh, sure, many people throughout history have “worshipped” kings, but only when they thought the kings were some kind of gods. These men with wisdom were worshipping the true God,

Our sermon text is one of those many places in the Old Testament scriptures – the scriptures of the Jews – that plainly states that Gentiles – those who are not Jews by birth – will also come to the Savior from Sin who will be a descendant of David, a true Jew. Those who were not Jews could only by some kind of work of God come to believe in the God of the Jews living in Old Testament times.

At the time in the history of the Jews when Isaiah wrote these words by inspiration of God, thick darkness and gloom covered all the people of the earth, including God’s own people, but deliverance had been promised and was on the way. The Lord himself brought the deliverance. Isaiah writes that “*the glory of the LORD*” – the deliverance through Christ – rises upon “*you*” and it becomes “*your light*”. Even though since the time of Abraham the Jews had been God’s chosen people, they did everything they could to get out of that role as God’s chosen people. They thought they knew better than God and disobeyed him at every turn. They didn’t do what God told them to do. They did what God told them not to do. Can there be any greater darkness in a person’s life if he or she doesn’t want to learn from someone else? Can there be any greater darkness if a person doesn’t want to learn from God, who created all things, who guides all things, who knows all things, who has all power? Every one of us has experienced some pain or trouble or suffering because we didn’t obey someone – even another human. We did not and don’t obey our parents. We didn’t and don’t obey the laws that our God-ordained government has put in front of us to protect all of us. We didn’t and don’t obey God’s moral laws as summarized in the Ten Commandments. Can there be any greater darkness than going our own way and doing our own thing?

Our text and this chapter begins with two commands: “*Arise, shine*”. Get up and share the light you have been given! Your light has come, and it has been expected for a long time, since long before the birth of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation.

The Old Testament generally means something special when we find the phrase “*the glory of the LORD*”. It usually refers to the Lord’s wonderful brilliance in Christ. “*The glory of the LORD*” visibly displays the presence of the Savior-God of the covenant, Jehovah, and announces some significant aspect of his salvation. “*And the glory of the LORD rises upon you*”.

Here’s one instance of the term referring to God in a general way, suggesting the father: “*When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud.*” Exodus 24:15-16. That was when God presented his holy law to mankind.

And here is an instance of it referring directly to Jesus Christ. “*And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*” Isaiah 40:5. That was pointing plainly to the ultimate revelation of the Gospel!

God sent deliverance to the Jews in the person of his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The Jews by and large ultimately rejected him as Savior and have suffered for it since that time. But God offered deliverance to them. And God offers that deliverance to all men. It is a free gift, it is theirs and yours only by believing in it.

God the Holy Ghost works that faith and as we learn from Romans 10:17: ***“faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*** Or, as you may have memorized it from the KJV: ***“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”***

God sent his Son, ***“the glory of the Lord”*** to deliver mankind from sin. And this deliverance belongs to all who are truly God’s people. That should not surprise us at all. Jesus himself reminded the Samaritan woman that ***“salvation is from the Jews”***. John 4:22. God had long promised that the Messiah would come from the descendants of Abraham, from the tribe of Judah, that he would be born in Bethlehem and be a descendant of King David. Isaiah includes all the Old Testament prophecies to God’s people when he says the light rises upon ***“you”*** and is ***“your light.”***

Although Jesus was a Jew, yet God intends the wonder of this deliverance for all people of the world. The Messiah did indeed come, and he lived in Palestine among the Jews. The Messiah was born a Jew, but the light of God’s grace attracts the attention of all nations. Even kings will come to the brightness of God’s grace in the Messiah. This entire chapter really draws a picture of the New Testament church. Before Christ ascended into heaven, he told his disciples to proclaim the good news to all the world. From Jerusalem the gospel spread out into the Gentile world of Greece and Rome through the apostle Paul. No doubt it also spread in other directions as the believers fled persecution, carrying the gospel with them. For example we read in Acts 8:4: ***“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went”***. This is speaking of Jews who believed in Jesus Christ who had been persecuted and left Jerusalem, their physical homeland.

That was only the beginning. The brilliance of God’s grace shines brightly for us too. We trust in Jesus today because God has claimed us through the gospel.

“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. 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. 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.”

Zion – at the time of Isaiah this meant the physical people of Israel – should look around and see that so many come to her because the glory of the Lord has risen upon her. This is a gathering of believers. Sons and daughters have been recalled from their sins and rebellion and become believers. They come to Zion – now it means the invisible gathering of all believers – in faith and repentance. These include some among the Jews, the Israelites who have been scattered to the far corners of the earth. But more come. It also includes Gentiles – us! The Lord Jesus, the Light of the world, came as God promised. God never intended the gospel only for those with Jewish blood in their veins.

The wise men with their gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh were only the first of the Gentiles recorded in scripture after the birth of Jesus to do so. No doubt this gold helped support the little family of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus when they had to flee to Egypt from King Herod who wanted to kill Jesus. In the same way that we offer our riches for the work of the Gospel, so too many through the centuries have done so.

We rejoice because God has permitted us to come out of the darkness and see his marvelous light. It is you to whom God has also said: ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*** 1 Peter 2:9.

What a blessing that the Glory of the Lord appeared to bring us out of darkness! Amen.