Arise and Shine

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Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. 2 For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. 3 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 4 Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. 5 Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD. (Isaiah 60:1-6)

1. A Happy New Year

When a new year starts, people say "happy new year!" What makes us happy? There are many things that make us happy. What about an unexpected gift?

Danielle Franzoni, a woman who served in a restaurant in Alpena, Michigan received an unexpected gift. On New Year's Eve at Thunder Bay River Restaurant, a couple left her a $2,020 tip on a $23.33 tab. On the receipt, the patrons left a handwritten message that read "Happy New Year. 2020 Tip Challenge."

She thought the tip was a joke. Her manager assured her that it was real. Franzoni is a 31-year old single mother who was homeless a year ago. She is currently trying to regain custody of her three children after overcoming an opioid addiction and two years of sobriety. The unexpected gift has helped her move into her own home on New Year's Eve. She said, "she'll also use the money to obtain a driver's license, a privilege she hasn't held for 10 years." She said, "they've changed my life completely." She has been struggling for a long time, but a couple's unexpected gift changed her year and perhaps her life.

2. Isaiah 60

The Bible tells us that the people of Israel received an even greater, unexpected gift from God. Before we talk about the gift, we need to understand the situation of the Book of Isaiah. Isaiah 40-66 is written to Zion, the city of Jerusalem. The living conditions of Jerusalem were extremely difficult. In Jerusalem, there was a major conflict between those who remained and those who returned from exile. The people were now divided again, not against outside threats, but among themselves. The remnants were a small group and were on the margins of power.

Isaiah 59:9 & 10 gives us some symbolism of the situation, "***We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead***."

The people in Jerusalem felt that they were in darkness. Darkness is a symbol of gloom, oppression, and sin. The people felt blind walking in deep shadows. They looked for hope but could not find hope anywhere.

At the time, the prophet Isaiah writes, "***Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you***. ***For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you***" (Isaiah 60:1-2).

The people were mourning on the ground. Yet Isaiah proclaims that the Lord will transform the darkness into light. The people hear that the glory of the Lord has risen upon them. Isaiah tells the people that they will see God's manifest presence in the world.

3. The Visit of Magi

For centuries, today's texts, Isaiah 60 and Matthew 2, have been read on the Epiphany. Epiphany is known as "Three Kings' Day" or "the Feast of Epiphany." "Epiphany" means "manifestation" or "showing forth." On Epiphany, we celebrate the manifestation of Christ as the light of the world.

As you know, Matthew 2 recalls the visit of the Magi, the wise men from afar. The magi followed a star in search of the newborn Messiah. The light of the star drew them to the baby Jesus. The magi brought three gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, the riches of their lands.

Tomorrow is Three Kings' Day. This day is celebrated to honor the three wise men who visited the baby Jesus and gave gifts to him. Did you notice that Isaiah 60:3 predicts the visit of the magi? ***"Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn****."*

The term nations means the gentiles. The light refers to the Messiah. John 1:4-5 says, "***In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*** [5] ***The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it***." Here, John chapter 1 talks about the identity of the Messiah. Jesus is God becoming human. He brings light to humankind. In his light, we see ourselves as sinners in need of a Savior. Jesus removes the darkness of sin from us. He also lights the path ahead of us so we can see how to live our lives.

4. Our Future is Unpredictable

People often try to predict the newest and most interesting trend. In technology, things like artificial intelligence, self-driving cars, and 5G network are some of the things people think that will be the next important technical

advances. Yet when it comes to people, no one really can predict what will happen to an individual person. What will be the impact of Iran or North Korea on our lives? What about the upcoming election?

We are looking forward to seeing what the outcome of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church will be this May. However, no one knows for sure what will happen. The future is in many ways unpredictable for any of us. We do not know where we are going. However, the journey of the magi reminds us that God leads us. In the same way God led the magi to the baby, Jesus is the light that guides us through each day of our lives.

5. Conclusion

As I said at the beginning, we greet each other, "Happy New Year!" Do we know what really makes us happy? Today's scripture tells us that when we realize the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives and follow after God's calling, we can find real happiness. Our situation would make us feel like we are in darkness. But the Bible tells us that God has come to us in Jesus as the light. The light of Jesus is always shining upon us. And everyone needs the light. So the Lord tells us to shine in the world.

Shining God's light to the gentiles was God's purpose for choosing Israel. Isaiah 42:6 says, "***I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles***."

Jesus says to his disciples and us in Matthew 5:14 & 16, "***You are the light of the world. … Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven***." We are called to manifest God's presence to the world.

6. Application

How do we manifest God's presence to the world? On Christmas Eve, Erin and Jen sang an offering song, "Gesu Bambino" during our candlelight service. A video of the service was posted to Facebook and over 1,200 people have listened and enjoyed the song. Erin and Jen made many people happy.

Last Saturday, Christine and I went down to Virginia to visit some our old church members. Two of them are 93 years old this year. We wanted to see how they are doing. They didn't expect us to visit them, but they were touched by our visit. One of them said our visit was God's new year gift to them.

Whether big or small, the things we do, the things we say, and the time we spend with others can all be used by God to shine the light of Jesus to the world and make people happy. Our Lord calls us this morning. "***Arise, Shine. For your light has come***" in Jesus Christ. I pray that we share the many blessings from the Lord and of Jesus Christ with those around us throughout 2020. Amen.