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Epiphany • Isaiah 60:1–6 • January 5, 2014

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Our text proclaims the manifestation of the Lord’s “light” and “glory” upon his people (v. 1), and through Israel to the “peoples” of the earth who dwell in “thick darkness” (v. 2a). Isaiah uses the contrast between light and darkness to offer us an image of salvation: The light of the Lord “will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you” (v. 2b), so that the “nations shall come to your light” (v. 3a). The glory of the Lord shines so brightly upon his people that it cannot be ignored. It is like a magnet that draws the nations to the church, so that “they all gather together, they come to you” (v. 4a).

The preacher may ask: What are the dark areas that cover our lives today? Where do sin, death, and the devil work hard all around us to cover and darken our hearts, to prevent us from seeing the saving light of the Lord upon us? What darkness does the Lord’s light need to reveal and dispel from our lives so that “the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you” (v. 2b)?

The preacher can also invite God’s people to come and see that the light of the Lord shines brightly upon all whom he draws to himself. In the text, salvation is both to “come to” the light and brightness of the Lord (v. 3a), and to “see” what the Lord is doing to “gather together” all who “come from afar” to see his salvation (v. 4). Come and see the light! Salvation has come! Isaiah extends the salvation of Israel to the nations (v. 3), so that the glory of the Lord will also be revealed to the Gentiles (v. 5: “the nations shall come to you”; v. 6: “all those from Sheba shall come”). In this grand story of salvation, the magi (v. 3: “kings”)—or “wise men” in Matthew’s account (2:1, 7)—are portrayed as our Gentile forerunners in the faith, the first Gentiles from the “nations” who are blessed to come to Israel and see with their own eyes the salvation of our Lord.

In the West, Epiphany celebrates the journey of the “wise men” to come and see the Christ child, who in Matthew’s narrative (Mt 2:1–12) is the true embodiment of Israel, the true light and glory that saves us from the darkness. Because of her sins, the light of Israel does not always shine so brightly. The same is true for us. But Jesus, the new Israel, always shines and draws the Gentiles to himself.

The text offers preachers an opportunity to teach about worship, since the wise men followed the star and came to Bethlehem for no other reason than to “worship” the Lord (vv. 2, 11). With Isaiah, we picture these “kings” (v. 3) coming to the Lord with their “wealth” and on “camels,” bringing to him their offerings of “gold and frankincense” (60:5–6; and also “myrrh,” in Mt 2:11). These are all acts of worship. One recalls the confessional definition of “spiritual worship” as “the righteousness of faith and the fruits of faith” (Apology XXIV, 26–27). We see in the wise men’s worship of Jesus a picture of faith and love.

Reflecting on the example of the magi, the preacher may ask: What does a grateful heart offer to the Lord for all his gracious benefits to us? (Mt 2:11: “... and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts...”). Say, how do we use our “wealth” (Is 60:5) and possessions, our “treasures” and “gifts,” like the Gentile kings, to honor Jesus? In some Spanish-speaking countries, gifts are not

received on Christmas day, but on Epiphany (Kings Day). Having received the gift of salvation from Jesus, the kings now bring gifts to others. The light of Jesus shines unto others through his people's faith and love.

There is a missionary dimension to the text. The Gentiles are made sons and daughters of God, becoming spiritual Israel, through faith in Christ (cf. Eph 3:6). They proclaim "the praises of the Lord" (Is 60:6b). The life of Jesus shines unto others through the church's proclamation of the gospel.

The preacher may ask: Who are those in our neighborhood who have yet to be drafted into Jesus, the new Israel, brought into the light of the Lord, so that they too may be saved and worship him? Who are those in our circles upon whom the light and glory of Christ is yet to shine? To whom shall we, Gentiles who have seen the light, "bring good news, the praises of the Lord" (Is 60:6b)?