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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)?

Editor’s Note: The following homiletical help is adapted from Concordia Journal, October 2003.

Baptism of Our Lord • Isaiah 42:1–7 • January 12, 2014

It can be exciting to meet a famous personality. In this Scripture text, God, by
the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, introduces someone whom he wants his people to
meet. Behold! Look! He calls out in the original Hebrew. See the one portrayed here!
Isaiah’s hearers could only see him afar off through prophecy. But there would be peo-
ple of a later time who could rejoice in knowing him intimately. Do you count yourself
among them?

Suggested outline

Look Who Has Come!

I. Here is the Servant of God, in whom he delights (v. 1).

This is the great envoy and official minister of God, approved and upheld by
God in all the work he is sent to do. Isaiah says that this Servant will bear the iniquities
of sinners and justify them (Is 53:5, 6, 11). He will bring and establish justice (mishpat,
vv. 1, 4), the total redemptive order of God’s rule. “He shall make the right and good
and holy will of God everywhere prevail, so that all nations find their sure ground of
confidence in Him.” He will bring reconciliation with God, renewal, and deliverance
from the moral, physical, and social evils of a fallen world (v. 7; Is 61:1; 35:7)—at first
in part and in hope, and then with total victory in the grand consummation. Matthew
12:15–21 quotes the words of Isaiah 42 and declares that they are fulfilled in the mes-
sianic work of Jesus.

God is heartily delighted (v. 1) with him who does this, for the Maker of heaven
and earth (v. 5) longs and plans for the restoration of the ruined world and its inhabitants.
He wants sinners to be saved, receive his mercies, and glorify him forever (Ez 18:23;