

## Title: “Arise, Shine, for Your Light has Come”

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Is. 60:1

1/08/2023

**Service Readings:** Is 60:1-6, Eph 3:1-12, Matt 2:1-12

*Arise, shine, for your light has come. This is what Isaiah writes. Jesus would later say that he is the light of the world and that whoever follows will not walk in darkness but in light. He calls us into his light; do we follow?*

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Many years after the people of Israel were released from slavery and delivered into the promised land, they found themselves walking in darkness. The prophet Isaiah writes about this in the early parts of his book and the portion that we read this morning immediately follows that description. They had been freed from exile and were returning to Jerusalem but their temple had been destroyed and their welcome rescinded by those who now resided in that land. Isaiah writes of the promise of a brighter future but for now all they see is darkness and it's a darkness they called *rejection* for they had rejected and had turned away from God.

Many years later there were Magi that were also walking in darkness. Our Gospel passage states that:

2 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

Walking in darkness. Searching for a light. They were told that it would arrive one day and that a star would point the way. But while they waited, they were walking in a darkness they called *hopelessness*. For how can one have hope if one does not personally know the “*he*” who gives that hope?

Two different people. Both walking in darkness. Both seeking something that seems just out of reach, just beyond their grasp. They desire it; they yearn for it; but it seems that what they seek seems to escapes them. And they are left only with the feelings that drove them out in the first place: rejection and hopelessness.

You see, our Old Testament and our Gospel readings may be separated by a thousand years but they are united by a sameness that we call the consequences of sin. For Israel, they covered *themselves* with this darkness; they invited it into *their* lives as they actively turned their back on God, actively rejected him and his blessings. They had no need for him for they had an identity, they had a name. And it was a name that they claimed for themselves. They had their own king, their own ruler, their own nation, and so they had no need for God any longer. And so they built for an

altar called pride and upon that altar they sacrificed their reliance on God, their rightful master and king. And God took notice. And God sent enemies to conquer his chosen people, but not to destroy them. He wanted them back.

For the Magi, the separation was not intentional but a consequence of culture. For they had not been raised as God's chosen people but as people not chosen, not selected by God. How hopeless the understanding that you were not a people favored by the creator. How hopeless it must have seemed for them to think that God had no plan, maybe even no desire for you. Had he placed your people on this earth for no other reason than as a witness to the mercy that he poured out on his favored people?

It is interesting for us, in this current age, to look upon both of these groups from this outside perspective. On the one hand we have a people, favored by God, but who reject him. And on the other we have a people who have never been counted among God's favored, but yet yearn for him. Two peoples. Opposite situations. But similar outcomes – walking in darkness.

Israel would turn back to God, repent and seek his forgiveness. His mercy would be poured upon them and they would be freed from the Babylonian exile. They would return to their homeland that darkness would seem not to have yet been lifted. Where was the light of their God? Had he abandoned them, even though they sought him out? And the Magi. They had seen the star and had followed it. Their hope was to gaze upon the newborn king. But they were not his chosen people; how would they be received? Would they be rejected and turned away?

Walking in darkness. Seeking the light. And wondering if the light would welcome them in.

Israel, the Magi. There are many other illustrations of this darkness that can be found in Scripture but I would like to inject only one more.

There was a man, crucified, hanging on a cross. He had been beaten close to death, had been ridiculed and shamed. On his shoulders was placed the sins of the world, and upon him was poured out the full wrath of God. He was walking in darkness, but this was *different* for it was not *his* darkness to overcome. He had obediently entered into that darkness on the world's behalf; he had willingly invited that darkness to cover him. This was a darkness far beyond anything Israel or the Magi had experienced. And this darkness also had a name. It was called redemption. And it was a darkness that was necessary, for out of that darkness would come a light that would destroy the darkness that covered Israel. For out of that darkness would come a light that would destroy the darkness that covered the Magi. It would be a light that would not be overcome by *any* darkness. It would be a light that would destroy *every* darkness for all eternity. And he would be a light that would call us into it. "I am the light of the world," he would teach. "Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

This is the light that the Magi were searching for when they followed the star. They were being called by that very same God, and they would lay eyes upon him as he lay in the manger. There, right there, would lay their light of hope, their light of purpose. It would be the light that called to them, beckoned them near. It would be a light that would later die, not just for Israel, but for the Magi as well. "Come. Follow me." Would be an invitation for all mankind.

And that invitation was recorded by Isaiah, long before the Magi, and long before the birth of Jesus. But the invitation would be extended, also, to the Magi:

Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.  
<sup>2</sup>For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will be seen upon you.  
<sup>3</sup>And nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your rising.

This is what Isaiah wrote for his people, but its brightness shown on the Magi. "Your Lord has arisen. His glory is on display. Come! See his light and worship before him."

And that invitation is extended to us as well. What darkness are you walking in? What darkness are you being called out of? And will you heed this call? The light is shining and is calling you to it. Will you walk into the light of Jesus Christ?

Arise, shine, for your light has come. It has come, indeed!

Let us pray.

For with you is the fountain of life;  
in your light do we see light.

<sup>10</sup>Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you,  
and your righteousness to the upright of heart!

In your name we pray.