

Epiphany  
**Isaiah 60:1-6**  
Isaiah's Wake-Up Call to the Church Of Christ

Did you know that there's another danger besides terrorism that we Americans face? It's not as great as terrorism, but it's a danger nonetheless. It's called falling asleep behind the wheel. A recent article about long-haul truckers stated that although those eighteen wheelers make up only 3% of all vehicles on the road, they are responsible for 13% of all traffic fatalities. The reason? Fatigue. Case in point: A few years back a tired trucker, with his cruise-control set at 68mph, rammed his 74,000 pound rig into a toll booth on the Kansas turnpike, shearing it off at its foundation and blasting it 50 feet down the highway. The worker in that toll booth, a grandmother of 19, was killed instantly. A few years ago an airplane flying from New York to Los Angeles went right past the airport at 20,000 feet and then 100 miles out over the Pacific Ocean before air-traffic controllers were able to roust the crew who were all fast asleep in the cockpit. Fortunately no harm was done.

All kinds of solutions have been proposed for this problem—more government regulations, better safety equipment, stricter enforcement of present laws. 5 hour energy drinks are popular keeping pilots and soldiers wide-eyed and bushy-tailed when they have to work in the wee hours. There's a little gadget out on the market today called "Driver Alert." It weighs about an ounce, and it promises to keep you awake behind the wheel of your car. You fasten this little gadget to your ear like a hearing aid, and then when your head starts to bob, this irritating buzzer will go off to jolt you out of oncoming sleep. We all know the best safety measure is to pull off the road and catch a few winks before you enter that twilight zone. But the trouble with sleep is whether you're a pilot, truck driver, or motorist; it has a way of creeping up on you unawares.

That's the way it is for us Christians, too. We're on our way to a very special destination. You and I are going to heaven because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. But we haven't arrived there yet. For most of us, it takes a while to get there. Sometimes it's easy to become drowsy along the way—by drowsy I mean we forget what our Savior has done for us and what he wants us to do for him before we reach our destination. That kind of spiritual sleepiness is far more dangerous to us and to those around us than dozing off in a cockpit or behind a steering wheel. That's why this morning there's a message from God's Word which all of us need to hear. We're going to call it: Isaiah's wake up call to the Church of Christ.

I. Appreciate the Savior that you have.

Our entire text is a vision of the future which God the Holy Spirit gave to the prophet Isaiah. In this vision Isaiah sees a world covered with darkness. Suddenly this darkness gives way to a glorious SON-RISE. Thousands upon thousands of people from every corner of the world are drawn to this great Light. As they step out of this awful darkness, they begin to shine as they glow from the rays of this beautiful SON-RISE. What is this vision all about? The terrible darkness Isaiah sees is sin. It covers the world and is a part of every person in it. This beautiful SON-RISE? Why it's a SON-RISE where the first word isn't spelled S-U-N, but S-O-N. That's because the Light Isaiah sees driving away the darkness is Jesus Christ. All those people who are now shining from the rays of his Light, why we know who they are too: Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna are catching this Son's rays. So are some Galilean

fishermen named Peter, James, John, and Andrew, two sisters named Mary and Martha, a Pharisee named Nicodemus and another Pharisee who had his name changed from Saul to Paul. But it's not just these Jews alone who are enjoying this beautiful SON-RISE. Isaiah says here: *"Nations will walk to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn"* (3). When old Simeon held little Jesus in his arms, remember what he called him? He said Jesus would be the glory of God's people Israel, but he also said this little baby would be a Light to lighten the Gentiles. Standing in this beautiful Light are also the Magi from the East, the Roman centurion, the eunuch from Ethiopia, the jailer of Philippi and his family, and you and me!

The prophet Isaiah has been called the evangelist of the Old Testament. An evangelist is someone who brings the Good News of Jesus to people. That's what Isaiah was doing 700 years before Jesus was ever born. That, my friends, is what Isaiah is doing again today. *"Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord is dawning upon you. Look, the darkness covers the earth, and deep darkness covers the peoples, but the Lord will dawn upon you, and his glory will be seen over you"* (1-2). That's a wake-up call in which Isaiah says to you and to me personally: "Christian of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, appreciate the great Savior you have!" A Savior lying in a manger as a little baby in order to forever break the powers of hell; a Savior living a perfect life in every way for all sinners and then giving up that perfect life on a cross to forever pay for all sins; a Savior triumphantly coming to life again so that Christians could forever say, *"O death, where is your sting? O grave where is your victory?"* We hear that Sunday after Sunday after Sunday. How easy it is to nod off, to take for granted, yes, even to forget how important this Savior is for each of us. But, oh, how dangerous that kind of spiritual drowsiness is! You see, without this SON—RISE, you and I not only would be born in sin, we would grow in sin, live in sin, die in sin, and finally go to hell in sin. Sin's darkness—there just isn't anything blacker than that. And this is not a terrible darkness which is out there somewhere. This is a darkness which lives within each of us. But Isaiah tells us today *"Your light has come"*—Jesus, the guiding light which takes a sinner from damnation to salvation; Jesus, the healing light that cures the sickness of sin, Jesus, the life-giving light which repairs and rebuilds a sinner's life.

Christians, Arise and shine! Appreciate the great Savior you have! How will we apply Isaiah's wake-up call to our lives? Will it rouse us out of spiritual drowsiness and strengthen us for another tough week? Or will we forget about it, maybe even before this service is over? I don't know what troubles, what burdens, what sins you might be carrying on your heart this morning. But this I do know. The Savior in Isaiah's vision promises you today: *"I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Fellow sinners, don't ever take that Savior for granted. As long as we live in this world, we're going to have moments of darkness, moments when we fail miserably and fall into sin, scary moments of darkness moments when we lack the courage and the strength to go on, yes, days when it seems like there is nothing but dark clouds on the horizon, moments of darkness when our troubles multiply and our hopes grow dim because there seems to be no way out of that sickness or sorrow or pain. Do not despair. The Lord Jesus promises that he will be your shining Light in all those dark moments. Is your conscience beating you up with reminders of your many sins and failures of the past year? Friends, look at the Light. Jesus has died for you. Rejoice in the sunshine of his forgiveness! Do you have problems keeping it together? Do you struggle with having a positive outlook on your life? Friends, look at the Light. Your life doesn't have to be some nightmare where you stumble and bumble in the dark from one sin into another till you fall apart. You see, Jesus didn't put any of us here to get used to the dark. That's why all of us must get closer to our Jesus in 2020. Here in our Bibles is where that's

going to happen. That's how we are going to walk in his Light. No matter what it is we're up against, his Word will be a Lamp to our feet and a Light to our path. Arise and shine. Your light has come. Christians, appreciate the great Savior you have. That's part one of Isaiah's wake-up call.

## II. Share this Savior with as many people as you can.

But what about the millions of souls out there right now who are still stumbling through life in the darkness of sin and unbelief, that man, woman, and child who hasn't seen this saving SON-RISE? Isaiah has another wake-up call for us. He would remind each of us again of what our dear Savior wants us to do for him until this world comes to an end. "*Arise, shine,*" says Isaiah. Christians, share your Savior with as many people as you can.

Sometimes Christians try to excuse themselves from doing what Jesus put them on this earth to do by saying, "What's the use? It's not going to do any good anyway. Most of the unbelievers I know just keep on loving the devil's darkness rather than Jesus' Light." A great deal could be said about this, but we're running out of time this morning. One thing we can say. Not everyone who is told about Jesus is going to accept him. But that sad fact never makes personal mission work a waste of time. Isaiah also knew that sad fact, but Isaiah wasn't a pessimist. When it comes to mission work this text is one of the most encouraging in all of Scripture. Will you let me read part of it to you again? "*Look, darkness covers the earth, and deep darkness covers the peoples, but the Lord will dawn upon you, and his glory will be seen over you. Nations will walk to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Look up. Look all around and see! All of them are gathered. They come to you. Your sons will come from far away, and your daughters will be carried on the hip. Then you will look and be radiant. Your heart will race with excitement and burst with joy*" (2-5). 2700 years ago, Isaiah knew that the Gospel of Jesus wouldn't be preached in vain. From all over the world he saw people coming to the Light, and not only his people, but Gentiles as well. Sinners saved, not by race, but by grace, as God gave them the joy and salvation of Jesus just like he gave it to us.

You know, so often we have this sinful tendency to look down and see only the cracks in the sidewalk of this world. We see all the evil things going on around us and we wonder: Is darkness winning? Then we look down again and see all the trash strewn around Christ's church. False teachings everywhere. Even among us, so many seem to be losing their desire to follow Jesus. We look at how many don't come to church and communion or who deliberately ignore the Ten Commandments and we wring our hands and say: What's happening to Christ's Kingdom? But Isaiah says: "*Look up. Look all around and see! All of them are gathered. They come to you. Your sons will come from far away, and your daughters will be carried on the hip.*" See what's happening! Our children are still being carried into this building. As we pray for our different WELS missionaries, we are reminded of all those open doors for Jesus throughout this world. And the Word is working on the hearts of people right around us, more than we even realize. Look around and see all the souls that the Lord has brought into St. John's Lutheran Church.

And so you and I whose hearts have been cheered and inspired by this love of Jesus are to give ourselves to this great task, confident that our labor will never be in vain. One very special way to do that is by supporting those who carry Jesus to places where we can't go ourselves with our prayers and offerings. Someone once said that a person who is all wrapped up in himself makes for a pretty small package. Just what kind of package are we when it comes to the

offerings we bring for missions and the prayers we speak each day for our church-workers and missionaries? Offerings and prayers—but that's not where Isaiah says it ends. You and I live in a mission field right here in this little corner of the world. Yes, there are a lot of dark places around here for us to let our light shine. There are people we all know who need someone to love them enough to take the time and the effort to reach out to them with Jesus. Many times it's those whom we like the least who need our Christian witness and our Christian love the most. How often does our lack of courage and love keep us away from such a person? The solution to that problem is this: the closer we get ourselves to Jesus the more courageous we'll become, and the closer we get to our Jesus the closer we will be able to get to others. And let's not forget about a Christian's life that shines brightly for Christ each day. A godly life at work or school, a few kind words, a sympathetic ear, some loving concern goes a long way when it comes to drawing someone to him. Jesus put it this way: *"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* A Christian life will never convert anyone and yet, you never know when the Holy Spirit may use such a life to give us an opportunity to share the Savior with someone who desperately needs him. Be sure of this. If our light is shining for Jesus, he will put it somewhere where it can be seen.

My friends, there is a personal question now that I believe needs to be asked. If I believe that a soul without the Light of Jesus will go to hell, what won't I do to bring Jesus to every soul? If you want the right answer to that question then ask yourself this: What is it that Jesus wouldn't do to save me?

There is indeed darkness on this earth—deep darkness. But there is also Light. You and I have the call to carry that Light to as many people as we can before time runs out—and it is running out. And so my fellow Christians let us all ARISE and SHINE. Amen.