

Isaiah 60:1-6

Epiphany, January 8, 2023
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ² 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. ³ And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ⁴ Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. ⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. ⁶ 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 bring good news, the praises of the LORD.

Dynamic duos. There have been countless dynamic duos throughout history, but some stand out prominently in our minds. Batman and Robin. Han Solo and Chewbacca. Yoda and Wicket. Peanut butter and jelly. There's a dynamic duo here in our text as well, although I'm guessing you don't think of them in that way. But that is exactly what they are. And although these other dynamic duos are more famous, they do not carry with them the same power and the same significance as this one: **"Rise and Shine."**

Of course, you've heard that phrase before. When mom woke you up for school, walked into your room and drew back the curtains with a "rise and shine!" And when you heard those words, you probably didn't feel much like rising and you certainly didn't feel like shining. Rather, that all-too-cheerful wakeup call usually receives groans in response, a tug of the blanket up tighter around your shoulders.

Well, *God* is waking *us* up this morning with a **"Rise and Shine"** of His own. ***"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you."*** "Rise and shine!" And *this* is a welcome message! *This* is a beautiful wakeup call! Because God is speaking through the prophet about a great reversal of fortunes. He's speaking to a people walking in darkness, delivering the promise that He has not forgotten them. That He will shine the light of His glory upon *them*.

Isaiah first wrote these words to the remnant believers of Israel who found themselves in captivity in Babylon together with *all* the people of Israel. You see, in August of 587 BC, Israel's entire world had caved in around them. The Temple had collapsed, their monarchy which they had once been so proud to establish was now defunct. Their homeland, once a land flowing with milk and honey, was now a wasteland. And all their hope was destroyed along with it all. They had been defeated by the new world power of Babylon and carried 700 miles away to be imprisoned *in* Babylon. A people that had once been called "the people of God," were now the state slaves of Babylon, just cogs in their ever-growing political machine.

The people were even given new names. Whereas many *had* been named after Jehovah God, such as Hannaniah—meaning "Jehovah is gracious"—or Mishael—meaning "who is like God?"—or Azariah—meaning "Jehovah has helped"—or Daniel—meaning "God is my judge"—now they were given Babylonian names like Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Belteshazzar. All the evidence pointed to Babylon really being in charge, and God having forgotten His people, or worse, not existing at all.

So, what welcome words these are. **“Rise and Shine.”** Without getting too much into the individual details, God is speaking of a great reversal of fortunes for His people. Rather than continuing in the dark dungeon of Babylon, God promises that He has not forgotten them, **“The Lord will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you.”** Rather than a wail of sorrow for what had been lost, God promises them that **“you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult.”** Rather than continuing to serve as worthless pack animals for their captors, God promises that **“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 bring good news, the praises of the LORD.”**

Imagine yourself in Israel’s shoes as one of those few believers still trusting that the Lord would be faithful to the promises He’d given to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. All the evidence of your life tells you that you’ve messed up for the last time; that you’ve gone too far from the Lord and so the Lord has departed from you as well. And then God speaks, **“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.”** This is a joyful wakeup call! This is good news! God had not forgotten His people, and better dawns would soon be rising!

But Isaiah was not *just* speaking to those believers trapped in Babylon. Around Jesus’ day, the people were wrapped in deep darkness once more. Yes, they were in their own land, but our Gospel reading from Matthew contains a context clue that reveals their own new form of dark captivity. In the first verse of that text, we read, **“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King...”** (Matthew 2:1) In the Days of Herod the King, there *were* a lot of political and economic successes all around the land of Judea. The temple in Jerusalem, for instance, had been destroyed once and ransacked multiple times over the centuries, but King Herod understood how important it was to his people so in about 20 BC he rebuilt and renovated and expanded the Temple to the Lord. He had largescale improvement projects all around the capital of Jerusalem. He built great cities and fortresses around the country. The nation was generally at peace during his 35-year reign, and it seemed like everything he touched politically turned to gold. So, in some respects, he had a very successful reign as king in Judea.

But there was another side to King Herod, a paranoid side which sowed fear among the people. He had been married to ten different women, having sons with many of them, and in fear that they were plotting against him for the throne, Herod executed three of his own sons to preserve his power. There was *one* wife whom he favored over all the rest, Mariamne, and he killed her also, along with her mother. On one occasion, he invited the high priest for a swim in Jericho, and he drowned him. He killed several uncles and a number of his cousins too. And though he wasn’t successful in this, as he was dying, he plotted to arrest all the leaders of Judea, round them all up in in an amphitheater and kill them all to ensure that when he died, the people would have something to mourn about. A popular joke was told at the time, “I would rather be Herod’s hus than his huios,”—which is to say, “I’d rather be his pig than his son.” His was a rule of darkness and fear and sinful self-preservation.

And in those days of Herod the king, God sent to His people a message, **“Rise and shine.”** It came from a most unlikely place, which is hinted at in our text, **“Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you. . . They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the**

LORD.” Wise men came from the east, from a pagan land, with good news, wanting to worship the one **“born king of the Jews.”** According to these foreigners, that time of fulfillment was at hand, when, as Isaiah prophesied, **“The LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.”** Once again, God had not forgotten His people in their darkness, but the day had come when all the promises to His people were about to find their ultimate realization.

And how did they respond? Did *they* **“Rise and Shine”**? Far from it, actually. We know Herod’s reaction: **“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled.”** (Matthew 2:3) Which we can understand, since he was king, after all, and the wise men were speaking about a new King of the Jews. Except, Herod knew that this wasn’t just some political leader. He knew that this meant the promised *Messiah* had come, since he went to the priests and scribes and **“inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.”** He knew. He knew that God’s promises were finally being fulfilled, and he was troubled. And sadly, he wasn’t alone. Matthew tells us, **“He was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”** These people, trapped in their own darkness, did not rejoice at this great reversal of fortunes. No, instead, as John writes, **“The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”** (John 3:19)

Well, what about you? What’s your response to God’s **“Rise and Shine”**? Make no mistake, Isaiah’s message is to you too, since even today we are still a people walking in darkness. And you can see the evidence of this darkness if you just take some time to look around. Visit any hospital in this city and look around, and you’ll see lots of faces. Faces tired and worn. Faces filled with fear and uncertainty. Faces which almost seem to ask, “How did I get here?” “How did my child get here?” “What am I doing here?” “What is my child doing here, and how do we get out?”

But that face, that face is not confined to the floors of a hospital. We’ve all seen that face before. You have worn that face. I have worn that face. And sometimes, that face is a familiar companion. A face of fear, uncertainty, doubt, shame, guilt. A face that almost seems to speak, “I’m stuck, I can’t get out.” A face that just looks overwhelmed by this world, by sin. You’ve worn it, I’ve worn it. Yes, our sin-sick world is rightly described as **“the valley of the shadow of death.”** (Psalm 23:4) We are surrounded by death and by reminders of death, the consequences of our own sin which we cannot seem to shake. And we feel it, and we know it, and our faces sometimes show it. We are enveloped by the darkness of our own guilt, doubts over whether or not God will keep His promises to *us*, after all, why would He want to? It would make too much sense for God to give up on me. . . But He has not forgotten you. Instead, He says to you, **“Rise and Shine! Your light has come.”**

He has not forgotten you, and He will never forget you. No matter how dark your life may seem to get, daily He comes with the message, **“Arise, shine, for your light has come.”** Because Jesus has come. And **“Rise and Shine”** has always been His message. Remember when He said it to a little girl who had died: **“He put them all outside and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, ‘Talitha cumi,’ which means, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise.’”** (Mark 5:40-41) **“Rise and Shine!”** Death and darkness torn away from this little girl and her family and from their life. **“Rise and Shine!”**

And that is not the last time those words would come from our Savior's lips. He would say them again—to a cripple, to a paralytic, to a leper, to a man with a withered hand—again and again and again until we find Him in a garden outside the walls of Jerusalem: ***“And he came the third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.’***

(Mark 14:41-42)

And then would come the cross, that place where He most certainly would draw all people to Himself, including you and including me. And that would be the place where He *carries* those things that make your faces tired and worn. That would be the day when finally, ***“[The Lord's] glory [would] be seen upon you.”*** And then, on the third day, ***“Rise and Shine.”*** He would rise, and you will rise and shine, for your Light has come.

And this is the beautiful lesson of Epiphany: this is really yours. This is your light. This is your glory. God includes you. Just as God chose the most unlikely Jewish candidates to be the first ones to hear the message of the Savior's birth, namely the shepherds, so He chose the most unlikely candidates among the Gentiles to come and worship the Savior. He chose the wise men, likely some kind of sorcerers or soothsayers from the court of some unbelieving king. Yet, God called them, and they came, and they saw the Savior, and they fell down and worshipped Him. This is the lesson for today: God came for the whole world, and God makes saints for Himself out of the most unlikely people.

And so, you are included. In the deep darkness of your sin, still God comes for you. So, **Rise and Shine!** Rise and shine every day of your life. Rise and shine every morning of your life, for He has put His name on you. Rise and shine every morning in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Rise every morning and shine in that baptism into which you've been baptized, that covenant of grace which God gave to you. And one day, at the sound of the last trumpet, God will again draw all people to Himself, and He will gather you to Himself. All the dead will be raised, and so you too will rise and shine together with your Light, your Savior, forever. Thanks be to God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.