

Rev Shawn Arndt
Sunday, January 8, 2023
Look at That!

Praise be to the Lord, for He is our Light and our Salvation. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The dark night sky explodes in light and color, the fireworks raining down showers of sparks. The little child points and shouts: **Look at that!**

The snow peaked mountains appear on the horizon and dad calls to his children in the back seat: **Look at that!**

In our lesson from Isaiah 60, God through His prophet essentially says: **Look at that!** 700 years before the Wise Men worshipped the Christ child, the Lord painted a stunning picture of what would happen when Jesus came into the world and then tells His people: **Look... Look up... Look all around and see!**

Now the first thing we see is not so pleasant. **Look, darkness covers the earth, and deep darkness covers the peoples.**

This is the kind of **deep darkness** that can be felt. This is the **darkness** of a cave when the lights go out, where you cannot see your hand in front of your face. This is the threatening darkness when boiling storm clouds block the sun and tornado sirens wail. This is utter darkness like when the Ninth Plague of God's judgment fell on Egypt so that people dare not even move (Exodus 10). This is the **deep darkness** of death itself.

And this **darkness** fills the world and the people of this world. Since the Bible says **God is light** (1 John 1:5) this darkness is as far as you can get from God. It is the darkness of sin and unbelief.

It is the darkness of our natural spiritual condition. It is the darkness that lurks within our hearts in shameful thoughts we don't want anyone else to know. It is also darkness of doubt, worry, selfishness, greed and pride that comes so naturally to our old hearts that cause strife, pain and disappointments to others around us, including those closest to us. It includes that dark deed from the past that still haunts your memory.

But it's more than that. Compared to the bright light of God's shining holiness, even our best days and best efforts are sinful darkness that falls short of God's requirement of absolute beaming perfection, deserving only the **shadow of death** and the eternal punishment that Jesus describes as: **the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**' (Mt 25:30)

Such inescapable darkness is all that our sin deserves and all we could ever attain by our own abilities or power. Such eternal darkness is where finally every human made endeavor or solution ends. No amount of money, pleasure, accomplishment or effort can stop this **deep darkness** of grave and judgment.

But **Look at that!** See the darkness scatter before the **Light of Life: ...your light has come, and the glory of the LORD is dawning upon you. The LORD will dawn upon you, and his glory will be seen over you.**

You know what this light is, *Who* this **Light** is. This **Light** is both **the glory of the LORD** and **the LORD** himself **dawning upon** His people to sweep away the clouds of judgment and save them from sin's darkness.

This **Light** is the Son of God who *Epiphany-ed*, that is, appeared as the Savior of the world, God from God born to rescue us from death's shadow.

In the Christmas day Gospel we heard Jesus described as God's glory and the true light. John 1 says of Jesus: **In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. The real light that shines on everyone was coming into the world... the Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen His glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth** (John 1).

And so in the hymn, *Silent Night* we sing that Jesus is **Love's pure Light**. In the Nicene Creed, we confess He is **Light from Light, true God from true God**. The Wise Men acknowledged this truth as **they bowed down and worshipped Him**.

And in this God-man, the Christ child there was no darkness at all! He was holy and blameless, conceived and born without sin to be the sinless one who lived in our place a life of brilliant, bright perfection. Though tempted just like us, Jesus never sinned. Indeed, the Bible testifies about Him: **The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it** (John 1).

And though this picture of gleaming light shining through the clouds is all about Jesus **look** again and see how you are in this picture too: **Arise, shine, for your light has come**.

Did you catch that!? **Shine... your light**. Now God's people shine brightly too! How brightly? As brightly as Jesus! Because Jesus is **your light**. His life of perfection He makes to be your life of perfection, covering over every dark misdeed! Jesus' death on the cross has paid for all the darkness of your sin and mine.

Indeed, remember what happened while Jesus was on the cross? The sun itself stopped shining. It grew dark because He was taking all our sin and punishment, all our **darkness and deep darkness**, all the darkness of the world was upon Him instead of us!

And then once more on Easter morning Jesus proved **The light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it** for Jesus the **Light of the world** (John 8:12) conquered the valley of the shadow of death when He rose at the dawning day!

Look at what that means for you! In the eyes of God you are radiant, shiningly, beamingly perfect and holy. Our countless sins and imperfections that are dark as midnight next to God's perfection are no more, covered by the brilliant glory of Jesus' holy life of obedience. See, even those darkest shameful thoughts and deeds that haunt you, they completely fade away in the blazing sun of Jesus' forgiveness!

Though we were born dead in sin and unbelief we were once like an unlit candle in a darkened room, now through the good news of Jesus' saving work the Holy Spirit has brought us to faith in Jesus, drawn us to the Light of Christ so that we now shine with Jesus' own holiness.

But **Look at that...** you are not the only ones the Holy Spirit gathers into the Christian Church that shines with Jesus' own sinless light:

Nations will walk to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn... Look up. Look all around and see! All of them have been gathered. They are coming to you. Your sons will come from far away, and people will carry your daughters on their side.

The same word translated **Nations** can also be translated as “Gentiles.” These verses were first spoken to the Old Testament Church, when the vast majority of those who believed in the Savior were only from the Jewish people descended from Abraham. But here the prophet Isaiah foretells a time when the other nations would come streaming to the saving light of the promised Christ!

In the past enemy Gentile nations like Assyria and Babylon and others had robbed the Jews of their children as they came with war and took the children as captives. But now instead of tearing down God’s church of believers, these Gentiles become one fellow family with the Israelites of old!

The Gentile Wise Men who came to worship Jesus were just the start, soon there would be others from East and West, Greeks who wanted to see Jesus (John 12), Samaritans and Syrians, Ethiopians and Romans, and then Germans and Norwegians, English and Irish, Spanish, Indian and Chinese and people in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, a place that the ancient Hebrews like Isaiah would have labeled as the “distant coastlands” and yet here we are, trusting in worshipping the same Jesus, the same Light of the world! And all this has happened just as the Lord’s prophet foretold thousands of years ago!

Since the vast majority of us are from other nations than Israel, praise God for this blessed message of Epiphany, the Gentile Christmas!

And then see how God’s people rescued from darkness to light cannot help but let their faith shine as they honor the Savior with all they are and have: **Caravans of camels will cover your land, young camels from Midian and Ephah. All those from Sheba will come. They will carry gold and incense, and they will announce the good news of the praise of the LORD.**

Yes, here we can see the Wise Men coming with their **gold, frankincense and myrrh**. But again, they are just part of the picture. Using Old Testament language, the prophet is picturing people from east and west, south and north streaming to Jesus through His Church with their time, talents and treasures.

So **Look at that...** you are in this picture too, as you come to worship Jesus with your life as one brought from darkness to light.

With your prayers and offerings and giving of your time and abilities you work to **announce the good news of the praise of the Lord** on this campus in the work of our church and classrooms, and also at Lakeside and at our synod schools training pastors, teachers and missionaries and in mission fields around the world supported by the offerings we give to the Lord week after week.

At church, at home, at work and out and about, let us reflect the love of Christ that has **dawned on us** with our words and actions. **Arise, Shine** as the people of God Jesus has made you!

And then don’t forget to **look** ahead as well, to what one old hymn describes: *But then there breaks a yet more glorious day.* That far more glorious day when Jesus comes again to raise our bodies up to endless life and light where there will be no more darkness, grief or pain.

Then as we sang in the last hymn, in that *heavenly country bright, where they need no created light...* then when the dark night of this world’s sorrows are past, then when we see not only those loved ones in Christ who have gone before us, but a whole vast family of believers gathered from every nation, tribe, language and

people, *then* will these words of our lesson reach their highest fulfillment: **Then you will look and be radiant. Your heart will race with excitement and burst with joy.**

Yes, **Look at that** and know that no matter how dark things may seem today, that is what you will see and enjoy for all eternity because Jesus, **your light has come!** Amen.

You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. Amen.