

Epiphany Festival

January 3, 2010

Hymns: 577 - 81 - 79 - 82 v1,5 (Offering: 92, v4,5)

ISAIAH 60:1-6
LET CHRIST BE YOUR LIGHT!

***For A Puzzled Mind.**

***For a Troubled Heart.**

***For A Defeated Spirit.**

Each day is a day the Lord has made – be it bright or cloudy. Let us rejoice and be glad in the Light of our life – Jesus! Amen!

Dear Worshipers,

We are here today to celebrate the beginning of the season of Epiphany. Epiphany is not a familiar term to everybody. A secular definition might read like this: *(slide 1)* “**An epiphany is a comprehension or perception of reality by means of a sudden intuitive realization.**” Used in a sentence, Epiphany might go something like: *(slide 2)* “**I experienced an epiphany, a spiritual flash that would change the way I viewed myself.**” That’s the way most people use this word. For Christendom, however, Epiphany is a season of the church year that begins with the wise men following a distant light “.....until it stopped over the place where the child was.”

The symbol of light for Christmas and the weeks after is an appropriate one as we begin to come out of the darkest month of the year. Light is a favorite symbol throughout the Scriptures. Christ said about our witness that we do not light a candle and put it under a bushel. Christ Himself is seen as the Light of the world. When Isaiah sought to proclaim the coming of the Anointed One of God, he declared *(slide 3)* “**Arise, shine, for your Light has come!**” *(60:1)*.

That is great good news! Our Light has come! Jesus is our light and in Him is no darkness at all. *(slide 4)* **His light shines, first of all, into our puzzled minds.** Jesus is our epiphany. There is so much about life we do not understand apart from Christ. There was a cartoon in the *New Yorker* some years back. It shows a middle-class man, in his living room, watching television. On the screen is a large pot, and a voice behind the pot says, “How much would you pay for all the secrets of the universe? Wait, don’t answer yet. You also get this six-quart covered combination spaghetti pot and clam steamer. Now, how much would you pay?”

Well, how much would you pay for all the secrets of the universe? We need to acknowledge as Paul does in Ephesians that life is a mystery. But in the midst of that mystery, in the midst of that darkness, there is a light shining. It is the light of Jesus Christ. A philosopher might stroke his goatee and question whether any of us is alive, really. But an even more troubling question is whether life has any meaning?

For many people today life does not. To the godless and the hard core evolutionist, life is random. It is one long roll of the dice in which we may either be winners or losers. According to this line of thinking, ultimately we are all losers because eventually we all find ourselves in the grave – forever! You are exposed to such thinking. It is becoming more and more a part of our American culture. The devil tempts you – “What if there really is no god? What if you are wasting your time on being a church person? What if there is no heaven, no life after death?”

Our faith in Jesus Christ, however, makes an entirely different statement to the world. Life is not random. We are not victims. Life has meaning. It has purpose. We may see through a glass darkly, as St. Paul once wrote, but there is a divine plan to it all, and that divine plan is somehow wrapped up in that mysterious, yet magnetic man from Nazareth. He is light for our puzzled minds. Yes, life has great purpose, meaning, and worth!

A loving God created this world thousands of years ago. Life did not evolve over millions or even billions of years. Each of us can say, "I know where evil originated: It started with Satan and his fellow angels rebelling against God and leading our first parents, Adam and Eve, into sin. But God loved me from eternity. And from eternity He planned to send His Son to be my Savior. God the Holy Spirit has called me to faith in Christ. I have seen the Light of Salvation! And I will live in fellowship with God all of this life and on into eternal life to follow." Wow! That is seeing the Light! Seeing and knowing the most important reality of all existence!

(slide 5) He is also light for us, when our hearts are troubled. An emotionally disturbed man went to see a noted psychiatrist. He confessed he was frustrated, depressed and desperate. The psychiatrist probed. Finally, after a lengthy consultation, the psychiatrist remembered there was a circus in town. He recommended that the troubled man go see the circus. "Particularly make note of the clown," the psychiatrist said to the depressed man, "He will make you laugh, and you will feel better." The disturbed man blurted out, "but doctor, I am the clown!" Even a clown can know what it is to have a troubled heart.

In the famed motion picture, *The Wizard of Oz*, a young Judy Garland sang and popularized a song which deeply touched the hearts of millions of movie-goers: **(slide 6) "Somewhere over the rainbow dreams come true . . ."** The song expresses a longing to escape to some faraway place where problems "melt like lemon drops." It tells of a distant Shangri-la where blue birds fly over the rainbow, and Garland asks, "Why, oh why, can't I?" Did Judy Garland ever find what the heart yearns for--rest and spiritual satisfaction? Seemingly not. The Minnesota native from Grand Rapids later took her own life!

Just because we are Christians, does that mean we will have no troubles in the world? No – not even Minnesotans live trouble free lives! There are times when all of us know what it is to dream of a happiness somewhere over the rainbow because our own lives are filled with darkness and dread. How we need to see a light shining in the darkness! When we turn to Christ, we find One Who can light the way through life for us. He says to your heart and mine: **(slide 7) In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world! (John 16:33b).**

Jesus took upon Himself all this world could dish out to Him: He took on the hatred of evil men. He took on the assaults of Satan throughout His life and most notably in the Garden and as He hung on the cross. There on the cross Jesus even took on the curse of heaven against sin – yours and mine! He endured. He overcame this world, Satan, the curse of the cross, and death. Now He lives and rules – especially for the good of His bride the Church. You and I have the Lord Jesus by our side through all our troubles. In Him you and I are more than conquerors! Yes, trouble will come to you, fellow Christian. But do not let your heart remain troubled!

Finally, **(slide 8) Jesus is our Light even when our spirits taste defeat.** Some of you will remember a great quarterback of the Green Bay Packers named Bart Starr. Starr once told about a little incentive scheme he had going with his oldest son, Bart, Jr. For every perfect paper Bart Jr. brought home from school, his dad gave him ten cents. Of course, a dime went a lot farther back then than it does today. After a particularly rough game against St. Louis, in which football legend Bart Starr felt he performed poorly, he returned home on a

long plane ride, weary and battered. But he couldn't help feeling better when he got to his house and bedroom. There, attached to his pillow, was a note: "Dear Dad, I thought you played a great game. Love, Bart." Taped to the note were two dimes.

We all need a little encouragement at times, don't we? Even if we are a professional quarterback. Maybe this past year has been a rough one for you. Perhaps you need somebody to put his hand on your shoulder and help you restore positive feelings about yourself. You need that because you feel your weaknesses. You feel your sins. Friends, if you are feeling that way this very day. If you can reflect on days in the year past, when you surely could have used something or someone to pick you up.... Know that there will be more such days in the year ahead! Christ seeks to offer the encouragement you need. "Arise! Shine! Your light has come!" says the prophet Isaiah.

An impoverished widow was awaiting eviction. She was far behind in her rent. Other bills had accumulated. Her utilities had been turned off and her eviction notice received. Then came a knock on her door. She cowered inside in absolute silence. Her doors were locked and her drapes drawn. In terror she heard again the knock on the door. Breathlessly, she trembled at the sound. She assumed it was the officials who had come to repossess her properties and put her out on the street. Finally the knocking ceased. She gained a sense of relief. Had she the courage to answer the knock, she would have found to her delight quite a different situation than she imagined. The knock was by her pastor. Through the grace of friends he had accumulated enough money to pay her utilities, rent and other bills. He had come to share the good news and offer her the relief she needed.

Dear fellow believer, **(slide 9)** there is a Friend knocking at the door of your life. There is a Light shining in the darkness. It is shining for you. This is your Epiphany. It shines into your mind, it shines into your heart, it shines into your defeated spirit. **Arise, shine, your Light has come!** Amen!

May the Lord our God be with us as He was with our fathers. May He never leave us nor forsake us. May He turn our hearts to Him, to walk in all His ways. Amen.