

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
January 3 & 6, 2008 Epiphany
Isaiah 60:1-6



“Arise, shine, for your light has come; and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.”

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Did you hear about the guy named Larry Green? Larry was walking across the highway when he was hit by a car! Larry was declared dead by somebody – *declared dead* – and put into one of those big black bags with the huge zipper – and sent to the morgue. About 2 ½ hours later – *about 2 ½ hours later* somebody noticed – somebody realized that the late Larry Green was in fact still alive! The medical examiner is quick to say it wasn't his fault! It's not my job to determine if people are alive or not. It's my job – after somebody dies – to investigate the cause and manner of that dead. It's not my job to pronounce people dead! You might think it's easy to tell if people are alive or not. Isn't! I have held the hand of people – where their hand is ice cold. I have sat beside people and they don't take a breath for far longer than I could hold my breath. You can call their name – and they don't open their eyes. You can say, “If you can hear me – squeeze my hand!” And they don't! People are not like your Cable Box or your DVD player – with that little green light that lights up when it's on. People are not like your car – where that little oil can lights up – when you have the key turned on – to play the radio – while you wait for someone! Alive would be a lot easier if you could *turn on your love light* – and people could see the warm glow! This Epiphany Sunday – God's Word talks about the light of the Gospel – the light of Jesus' forgiving love. Today God's Word says:

Shine, Jesus, Shine!

1. Shine on me

2. Shine through me

The Scriptures we are concentrating on – are again from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Do you make New Year's Resolutions? Some people start each new year planning to lose weight – to get in shape – to make the outside as flawless as humanly possible. That's ok, I guess. The trouble is – usually before January 15th – that plan has gone pretty hay wire. People get discouraged – and they give up – until the middle of spring – when they start to have commercials about wearing a bikini – come this summer – and they try all over again. Perhaps a better new year's resolution would be to grow in your faith. You could do that for sure – if you would simply read the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. It's 66 chapters – so it's no small thing. But it will make your faith stronger and stronger. Read about Jesus – as our young people told us Christmas – the **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!** Think about the Savior Pastor Gartner preached about this past Advent – **the stump** from which grew that tiny Sprout – Christ the Lord! Instead of worrying about Hezbollah firing Katyusha

rockets from Lebanon into Israel – read about the promise of the **New Jerusalem** – where Jesus will wipe away the tears from the faces of his faithful people. Read through Isaiah – and you will want to read Jeremiah, too. Your faith will be stronger. Your marriage will be stronger. Your children will be motivated by law and gospel to respect you and obey you. You will get along better with your boss, your co-workers, your customers – because Jesus will make **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control** to increase in your life. Would that not make 2008 a better year than dropping 5 or 10 pounds on the outside?

The problem we constantly face is sin – the *dark side* – the darkness of wicked hurtful thoughts and actions that spring from attitudes of cold dead unbelief. **See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples...** You can see that darkness – thick darkness when you watch a professional football game. Football – played by professionals is a hard sport. People get crashed into and people get knocked down. I understand that. But what is really sad to watch – is when people talk trash. When they get up and grab hold of the other guy and scream at them words that are sinful and wrong. And then – like the other night – people that get yelled at get angry – and lose their temper – and then take their finger – and poke it through a person's face guard – by their eye! You can say all kinds of clever things – to try and excuse it. But the simple fact is – it is a sin – to poke your finger into somebody's face in anger! It's wrong! When we become frustrated – angry and upset and lash out in hurtful violence it's wrong. If we are in positions of responsibility – if small children are watching – it's especially important for us to pray that Jesus would make us strong this new year to do better – not to slam doors – or throw things – or curse and swear – but to have the calm and self-control that drives out the darkness!

See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples... We do sins all the time! I heard about a guy named Ari. Ari was bothered by all the trash he made – the garbage that he generated – the jars and cans and boxes and bottles from all the stuff he ate and used. Ari wondered what would happen if for one year – 365 days – he would save all his trash! Oh, he cleaned his trash – washed all the empty cans – rinsed all the empty bottles – neatly bundled all the papers and cardboard. He piled it all up very carefully. Ari didn't end up with mice or bugs but he did end up with 96 cubic feet of trash from just one person! Imagine if our sins piled up – our immoral mistakes piled up like a room full of neatly stacked garbage and recyclables! It would be a mound that would surely bury us forever! That darkness of sin that threatened to bury us forever was taken away – by the teacher from Nazareth – our Redeemer and rescuer – Christ Jesus. This Epiphany time – we will see him shine forth with the power and glory and authority that alone belong to the Son of God – our Messiah and our Savior!

See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples... How nasty is this darkness? I looked up the new words in the *Oxford Dictionary of the English Language*. And they said – there are words and phrases bubbling under the surface. The phrase *happy slapping* sounded intriguing. It's this increasingly popular deal – where young men in small groups pick a person – a victim – a “Norman” who seems unsuspecting. Then one member of the group simply walks over – and clocks them. It might be as simply as whacking them upside the head with a rolled up newspaper – or magazine – or they might punch them – kick them – hurt them – knock them down. This is all caught on a cell phone video – so you can share it with your friends! How nice is that? Oh, the dictionary is adding the work *plank* – as meaning a stupid person. It's adding the word *twonk*. That's another name for a person who isn't as smart as I think I am. There is also the word *radge*. That's a person who is wild, crazy or violent – not a complement either! How is it that we feel the need to invent new ways – new words to insult people? How long before people realize we don't lift our self up – by tearing someone else

down? How long before the light of the Gospel shines so brightly that it pushes back the darkness?

But the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn. People everywhere – need to know about Jesus’ unconditional forgiving love. What we need is someone to tell them! That would be you! Our family went out for supper Sunday night at Culvers’! I like Culvers! I like a cheese burger with little strips of bacon on top – and a sweet onion on there, too. I like caramel cashew sundae with a little cherry that you eat around till the very last – when it’s all covered with melted custard and caramel! We were just sitting down in the corner – when the man in the booth next to us said, “Excuse me! I just wanted to tell you – be very careful if you use the salt shaker. It comes out really fast. It’s like popcorn salt – it really pours out!” I thought – wow! That was really thoughtful – for this person that we didn’t even know – should be concerned that we don’t get a ton of salt on our food! If we are careful about our neighbor’s butter burger – what about our neighbor’s immortal soul? What about eternity? This new year we have lots and lots of opportunities – to share Jesus’ love with all our friends and relatives – our fellow members – people we love! We need to encourage them. Not nag them – but encourage them and build them up at every opportunity Jesus gives!

Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.” Camels can carry large loads through the desert. Imagine herds of camels – young strong camels everywhere – carrying gifts to the LORD. How can you show your love for someone? How can you show them what is deep inside your heart? By giving them something with your hands. This past Christmas time – didn’t we spend time and thought and effort – to pick out just the perfect gift for people we love? So we bring our gifts – our treasures to the LORD. What can you give him? Give the LORD thanks and praise – when you wake up in the morning. Before you even climb out of bed – thank Jesus for keeping you safe through the night! Thank him for keeping you safe in the cold in the dark in the night – from robbers and thieves, from those who do unspeakable harm – safe from terrible storms and disasters. Thank Jesus by a good attitude in the morning. Not grumbling and complaining – pulling the covers over your head whining and complaining – “I don’t want to get up. I don’t want to go to work. I don’t want to go to school!” Not whining and complaining about how cold it is – or how windy it is – or how warm and rainy it is. Give to Jesus your thanks for your breakfast – for your toast and scrambled eggs – your pancakes or toaster waffles – your fresh squeezed orange juice or your raspberry, apple, grape, pomegranate juice! Thank Jesus for cars and trucks that start no matter how cold it is outside. Thank Jesus for schools where Jesus’ love colors every single hour! Thank Jesus for teachers with shepherds’ hearts – taking very careful care of the sheep that belong to the Good Shepherd! Help in every way possible in your home!

Proclaim the praise of the LORD! I have a poster somewhere – that has that Robert Fulgham list – *All I really need to know I learned in Kindergarten*. Do you know that list? It begins with *share everything!* How basic is that? *Share everything!* Sometimes people who get married – have trouble with this most basic concept – *share everything!* Two people made one in Christ – by the power of the Gospel! That means everything is ours! Oh, that’s ok when it comes to groceries and parking places in the garage or driveway. Share everything – except money! That’s your money. This is my money. I will spend my money on myself or my needs – my wants. And the next thing you know – I am spending my money on my toys – that’s mine. Don’t break it. Don’t use it up. Don’t be using it when I want to use it! Suddenly we aren’t sharing everything! *Don’t hit people!* That sounds pretty simple – pretty basic, too, don’t you think? And yet you see it all the time – children lined up at school – and some little boy is kicking – kicking some other little boy or stomping on their foot! That’s a sin! You see it in homes – daddies making a fist – threatening to sock the mommy. Or the mommy slapping the

daddy. That's a sin, too! When people say things that hurt—calling them fat or calling them a stupid head. Or maybe just giving them that look—that for just a moment says—I can't believe you are so dense! That's wrong. And people past Kindergarten ought to know that. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. That's pretty basic, too, don't you think? Admit your sins and mistakes. Admit your sins and mistakes to your Savior—to your fellow believers. Say I'm sorry. Then you can hear those priceless words, "I forgive you! We shall never speak of this again!" How sweet is that?

All I really need to know I learned in Kindergarten. There are two more very profound truths. Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup—they all die. So do we! Do you think about your own mortality? Living between a cemetery and the hospital—by doctors offices and law offices—I am reminded all the time—the wages of sin is death and people are very breakable! My phone has rung countless times. Someone on the other end says—someone I love is in the hospital or the emergency room—sick or dying or dead! This new year—we need to live like there might not be a tomorrow. And so—when you go out in the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together. As Christians—as Lutherans—we know that the danger is more spiritual than physical. We need to hold hands for Jesus' sake. We need to look out for each other for Jesus' sake! Encourage and build each other up—for Jesus' sake. Like the sergeant used to say on Hill Street Blues, "Hey, hey, hey—let's be careful out there"—for Jesus' sake. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schultz