

“Arise ~ Shine”

“For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples.” Who are these “people” in thick darkness that Isaiah speaks of? Are they God’s people Israel in days of old – or us who live in these days? To look at Israel of old, is to see ourselves.

Leading up to our text this morning, Isaiah describes the horrendous state of Israel – the unfaithfulness of God’s people who despised His “justice” and were anything but “righteous” in His eyes. Despicable leadership and gross idolatry plagued the people. Darkness, depravity, and death abounded.

So the Lord hid His face from His people – leaving them in the darkness and despair of their sin – so that His judgment upon them would bring them to repentance. For those who confessed their sins and cried out for help – the Lord’s promise to fight for, and rescue His faithful people, was indeed “good news.”

The Lord promises to send the Suffering Servant – One to Redeem them – One to deliver them from the darkness forevermore. The Lord declares, “my salvation is near in coming” – and now, His promise breaks forth in the darkness. “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”

“An angel of the Lord appeared” to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem “and the glory of the Lord shone around them ... For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

After 40 days, Simeon sings of the “glory of the Lord” as he holds the infant Jesus in his arms – confessing Him to be “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” And as we heard this morning, the Gentile Magi marvel – “For we saw His star when it arose and have come to worship Him.”

The “glory of the Lord” arises upon US, but it’s not a glory that emanates from man. Israel of old sought to glorify itself through wealth, possessions, and honor – but the nation’s glory amounted to nothing.

So also our attempts at glory – putting on a good show, shining a great light on our good deeds and accomplishments. We use our mouths to darken the reputation of others so that we might shine in comparison – we scrap and claw for status, and status symbols, to make us glow – but they all amount to nothing.

As it was “in the beginning” so it is now. When darkness was over the face of the deep – GOD spoke a Word, “let there be light” – and there was light. Divine light cannot be humanly generated. God’s glory cannot be manufactured by man. God’s glory comes from God alone – and is freely given – through a Word that does what it says.

When the Lord says – “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has arisen upon you” – He’s not admonishing you to get busy “arising and shining.” Rather, His Word creates what it commands – it does what He says.

The Lord commanded Ezekiel to preach resurrection to a valley of dead, dry bones – and they arose and came to life! Jesus commands the wind and the waves of the Sea of Galilee to “be quiet” – and the great tempest is replaced by great calm. Jesus tells a paralytic to “rise, pick up your bed and go home” – and he does! Jesus preaches to a dead man – “Lazarus, come out” – and “the man who had died came out” of the tomb.

What a great reversal! From chaos to calm – from paralysis to health – from death to life. The glory of the Lord comes to “the people that in darkness sat.” Into their darkness the Light shines – and God’s people arise and shine.

So, why do we shut our eyes to the glory of the Lord? “This is the verdict: light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness instead of the light because their works were evil.” There’s a reason why most crime happens at night – darkness serves to hide out wicked deeds.

Our sinful nature loves to hang out in the darkness. We prefer the shadows of lies and half-truths – we hide in the darkness to feed the desires of our flesh. In the darkness of our self-centered narcissism – we live as if the whole world revolves around me. All the while the prince of darkness preys on our feeble faith, our failed relationships, our fatal attractions.

Our Lutheran Confessions affirm that Christ “offers His grace ... in the Word and holy sacraments ... But if such a person despises the instruments of the Holy Spirit ... the Holy Spirit does not illuminate him but lets him remain in the darkness of his unbelief.” (FC SD II 57-58)

Dearly beloved, do not despair – for the Light of Christ cannot be eclipsed. Your dark deeds cannot snuff out the Light of Christ. The Lord is faithful. His promises endure! “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.”

The Light of Christ pierces your darkness this day – shining the light of your salvation – through the preaching of God’s Word and the bestowal of His Sacraments. By these means, these instruments – God the Holy Spirit enlightens sinners – uncovering our sin, and shining the light of the Gospel upon your Savior, Jesus Christ.

The glory of the Lord, the Light of the world, Jesus Christ – shines on you. “Arise, shine,” the Lord says – and His Word does what it says. You are resurrected from death to life – from darkness to light. Your dark deeds that have been exposed are driven away by the light of Christ’s forgiveness. Your sin is removed, and the death that comes with it. All that is left in the wake – is life, and light.

So live! Live in the light of Jesus Christ – in the freedom of His forgiveness. Jesus Christ IS the Light of the world – the Light no darkness can overcome. In Him is light, and life. In Him, you are forgiven – and where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation --- for Israel of old, for you, and for all the nations.

Arise, shine, for your Light has come! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.