

TEXT: Isaiah 60:1-6

THEME: YOUR LIGHT HAS COME!

1. Shine
2. Proclaim the Praise of the Lord

Dear Wise People who recognize the true King:

I was cleaning out a drawer a while back when I found a flashlight I hadn't used in a long time. I flipped the switch but wasn't surprised when it gave no light. I unscrewed it and shook it to get the batteries out, but they wouldn't budge.

Finally, after some effort, they came loose. What a mess! Battery acid had corroded the entire inside of the flashlight. The batteries had been new when I put them in, and I had stored the flashlight in a safe, warm place. But there was one problem. Those batteries were not made to be warm and comfortable. They were designed to be turned on and used.

It is the same with us. We weren't created by God and redeemed by Jesus Christ to be warm, safe, and comfortable. You and I were made to be "turned on"—to put our love to work, to apply our patience in difficult and trying situations—and to let our light shine.

That is what the prophet Isaiah is directing and urging us to do in our Old Testament reading for today. We are to reflect the light of our God, which has been shown to us in Jesus Christ. In Jesus we see a reflection of the glory of our God. He is a perfect God who hates sin. Jesus is his perfect Son. The Father is pleased with him. Jesus is the only person who has ever lived in this world without sin. All his words were loving and kind; each one of his deeds was just and caring. When he was being unjustly nailed to the cross, he asked his Father, "**Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing**" (Luke 22:34). I wonder how many times our Savior Jesus has prayed that same prayer for me...for you.

Today may be a dark and overwhelming day for you. Perhaps a past sin is gnawing at your conscience. Perhaps a difficult disease or death is knocking at your door. Remember the good news and find joy in it. Jesus not only loves you, but the message of his forgiveness is there for you and cannot be shaken. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world. He is shining in your darkness. He has come with his message of salvation that sheds the light of God's love on your life and your eternity.

Our Father wants you to reflect his Son. We are to shine like stars on a dark night. Let your life reflect the love of Christ. Put aside selfishness and pride. Don't necessarily take the easy route. Don't just go with the flow. Don't make decisions based on what is most comfortable. Follow Jesus! We are God's children, new

creations, with new batteries, that need to be used to SHINE the light of God's grace for all to see.

But don't wait to SHINE or your faith batteries may corrode and become worthless. Yet we are so prone to waiting, to putting off living our faith until a more "convenient" time, aren't we?

An ancient story recalls how Satan once summoned his top three aides to plan to stop a group of dedicated Christians from doing effective missionary work.

One of the lieutenants, Rancor, said to Satan, "We should convince them that there is no God." Satan sneered at Rancor and replied, "That would never work. They know there is a God."

Another of Satan's aides, Bitterness, spoke up. "We'll convince them that God does not really care about right and wrong." Satan toyed with the notion for a few minutes but rejected it because he knew that too many Christians know that God does care.

Malice, the third satanic helper, came up with this idea: "We'll let them go on believing that there is a God and that he cares about right and wrong. But we will keep whispering that there is no hurry; there is no hurry."

Satan howled with glee. He advanced Malice high in his evil empire. Satan knew that he would find this strategy successful in scores of Christians.

The desire of every believer is that more and more people come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. We know that the message needs to be proclaimed continually. Through Jesus' suffering and death our sins have been forgiven. By his resurrection from the dead we are assured that Jesus' sacrifice was accepted by God the Father. Eternal life is ours as a free gift through the merits of Jesus Christ.

Sadly, many of us think there is no hurry. Tomorrow will be another day. Yet all the while people go on dying without the hope or comfort of the gospel.

Today is the day of salvation. For thousands, this day will be the last day they will see the rays of the sun or hold conversations with their friends and loved ones. So seize the day! *Carpe diem!* Devote it to praising your Lord with your words and actions. Devote your time and use whatever gifts God has given you to become part of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. God's elect will be found! Satan will not succeed. People from all nations will come to Israel in spirit to learn about their Savior. It has been happening for 2,000 years and will continue to happen until the end. Don't stay in your warm, comfortable drawer and corrode. Be a part of the action, be a part of God's fulfillment, and SHINE this Epiphany season and always! Amen.

**EPIPHANY C—Children’s Message with Gizmo**

TEXT: Matthew 2:1-12

Gizmo: That’s a different story!

Pastor: How so, Gizmo?

Gizmo: Well, I just don’t think you hear that sort of thing every day.

Pastor: What sort of thing?

Gizmo: I just don’t think many kings would do that...you know...bow down before a baby.

Pastor: Oh! I see. You’re probably right.

Gizmo: I mean, I would guess that a king would normally expect other people to bow down before HIM. Not the other way around.

Pastor: And certainly not a baby.

Gizmo: Right! Unless...

Pastor: Unless what?

Gizmo: Unless...well, do you suppose there are different levels of kings?

Pastor: What do you mean?

Gizmo: And some kings more powerful than others?

Pastor: I suppose so.

Gizmo: Because I would guess that if, say, Rhode Island had a king...

Pastor: Which it doesn’t. Rhode Island has a governor.

Gizmo: Right. But if Rhode Island had a king, I suppose that king wouldn’t be quite as powerful as the king of, say, New York.

Pastor: New York is a lot bigger.

Gizmo: And New York has a lot more people than Rhode Island. Rhode Island is the smallest state in the Union.

Pastor: Yes, I suppose the king of Rhode Island might bow down before the king of New York.

Gizmo: Might even give him a gift, I suppose.

Pastor: So what’s your point, Gizmo?

Gizmo: Well, if the king of a small state would bow down before the king of a larger state...then I suppose the kings in today’s Gospel understood who Jesus was better than most of the other people—better than King Herod, that’s for sure.

Pastor: How so?

Gizmo: Well, those kings—those wise men from the East—were probably pretty rich and powerful.

Pastor: They did bring expensive gifts! Few things are more expensive and kingly than gold—even today.

Gizmo: Yet they knew when they were in the presence of someone even more powerful than they.

Pastor: Who? Herod?

Gizmo: No! Jesus.

Pastor: Oh, Jesus.

Gizmo: Even though he didn't seem like much—a little baby born to a poor couple—he was more than what he seemed.

Pastor: He's the Son of God, after all—the ruler of the entire earth...the King of the universe.

Gizmo: Exactly! Herod didn't understand that. Herod thought he was more important than Jesus. He thought he, Herod, was the greatest King.

Pastor: He even called himself "Herod the Great."

Gizmo: But those other kings knew the truth. They knew that they were bowing before the real King—the most powerful King there is. So they worshipped him. And they gave him kingly gifts.

Pastor: I guess you could say that they truly were WISE MEN.

Gizmo: I hope we can all be that wise.

Pastor: Me too, Gizmo, me too. Amen.