

# Isaiah Says it All (Isaiah 60:1-6)

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*Epiphany Sunday – 5<sup>th</sup> January 2025*

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew (2:1-12)

**Glory to you O Lord**

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

This is the gospel of the Lord

**Praise to you O Christ**

## **Isaiah 60:1-6**

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.

Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look around;  
they all gather together, they come to you;  
your sons shall come from far away,  
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.

Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,  
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,  
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

A multitude of camels shall cover you,  
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;  
all those from Sheba shall come.

They shall bring gold and frankincense,  
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

Back on 21<sup>st</sup> December we quietly passed across what is perhaps the most underwhelming of all calendar dates – the shortest day of the year. We in the northern hemisphere tend not to notice it because it may seem to be just the same as the days which surround it: probably cold, probably damp, and probably taken up by all the preparations for Christmas. That short dark day fell on a Saturday, so perhaps like me you were either working a shopping list or staging a family present exchange-run. **I never fail to be happy to see that gloomiest of days arrive and pass because, just as we are today, we now live on the best side of seasons - if the eventual hope of more light and more warmth is what you need.** My prophecy might seem a bit long-range, but it still feels good to know it's coming.

It's impossible to come near to Christmas and the New Year, without some prophecy from Isaiah. In the words of old seer, we hear some of the most beautiful language of what God intends, in his most graceful, loving and caring way. As God's servant speaks, he wraps his language beautifully: ***'Let me tell you of the good things to come, and for which you can realise the good gifts even now.'***

You may have noticed that our first reading this morning comes from Isaiah chapter 60. In history, those words were first said somewhere around 750BC. So, from where we are in time today, Isaiah addresses a situation some 2,775 years ago in a culture so different from our own that we can hardly begin to imagine. His whole book of prophecy is very long and contains many warnings and judgements towards God's people. Isaiah foresees what would eventually be a calamitous invasion from the north, from the region of Assyria. **Their identity as God's people is at risk. 'Do not follow the paths of unfaithfulness, which lead to destruction',** says Isaiah so many times.

These are loaded words of predictable disaster. Such dark warnings of judgement and consequence are well-due if the people continue to reject God and chase after every other whim and fancy of desire. Chapter after chapter of Isaiah gives fair warning, with the call to realign to God's purposes and put His name above every other name.

Even though we live in a very different age, yet we share the same traits of brittle humanity. This is why the prophets will always seem familiar and relevant. We may all be God's people, but we are also heirs of Adam and Eve. **When we are tempted towards bad ways, God knows that it's better to set before us something even more compelling.** No one can improve if they live always in the fear of darkness, so God provides promises of light, which we shall want, and indeed we need. God guarantees us blessings as he constantly tries to draw his people into a better place of *good light*.

Recall those wonderful words we had on the approach to Christmas, in this case from Isaiah 9: [The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them a light has shined. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.](#)

Do you remember them? We had them at the carol service and on Christmas Day morning. **The good intentions of God are personified into a hope for the arrival of one who would come to lead the faithful towards a better place – one worthy of them (and us) to follow.** Two chapters later in Isaiah 11, also read at the carol service, there is a similar character whose bloodline would be from the stock of Jesse (which just means from the line of King David):

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow from his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

**Across countless generations, from so many centuries ago, until the time of Christ, until now, and into the future, these words have not been forgotten.** Their power to console and bring hope remain, and many others like them. Prophecy almost always builds on common experience, which is why even with such great distances of time and culture, we still find such words strangely familiar as an overlay onto our own times. They seem to catch us continuously, because God speaks to our time, just as He did so long ago.

The seasons are like the generations of life. **Round and round we go in the years, with history, with experience piling-up in the background as a weight of evidence into the things we do now, and how they will work out into the future - for good and for bad.** Faithfulness to God is only one consequential aspect of life we get wrong and need to be led out of. How about public health, or the ways we teach our children, or the environment. All have predictable consequences of light and dark that we have always known.

On Epiphany Sunday, let us say something of those wise men who travelled from afar. Better known as the Magi, we know so little about them. What seems important is that they had read and reacted too, travelling with hope, into the unknown, led by a light. But did you know that Isaiah had prophesied that such as they would come to place themselves at the feet of the one true king of the universe?

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and they shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.

From the deep dark fears of any one individual, all the way to the collective national fears we all face, and our own kings, queens or leaders, there is the need for a light to draw us into a better place. **Warnings alone will never be enough, but let the prophets speak to us again. God will show us better things, and that is the message of Epiphany.**

Those wise men went back to their lands knowing that there was indeed a greater King that God had promised from afar, in both time and distance. They found that they could draw a line from the prophet Isaiah and follow it like the track of a star all the way to Bethlehem. But the line does not end there. **It continues in our age, and in the ages to come, unto the end of all things.** Theologians down the ages agree that such prophecies are said at one time yet remain active until the end of all things. Isaiah's history still captures us here today and foretells of a time which has not yet come, *at the end of all time* as it were.

**Teach your children and your grandchildren that they live in a consequential world, which they will often find impossible to address. Sometimes it only ever seems dark. But through all the tangle of humanity there is an unbroken and unbreakable line which can be followed like a beam of light. We are still in the stories of Isaiah, the words, the very words of God, are still promises to us now.**

Amen