

Sermon Text: Isaiah 60:1  
“Got a Light?”  
Epiphany, January 6, 2010

### *The opposite of light*

It is cold and it is dark outside. The winter darkness can *really* start to wear on me. When I used to ride the “El” train in Chicago in the wintertime, I would warm up on the station platform in the dark early mornings on my way to work while I waited for my train by standing under a heat lamp that the Chicago Transit Authority provided. The way it works is this: you push a button inside a Plexiglas-walled structure and an extremely bright heat lamp turns on above your head. As I would stand there, the bright light pouring over me like warm butter, I could feel not only my physical state start to improve, but also my mental state - my mood would get lifted right up off those train tracks and start to soar towards the skyscrapers above. I started to crave that light in the mornings. Even if it was only for half a minute before the Green-line train arrived, I would soak up that light like a pale kid from northern Illinois sunbathing in Florida on Spring Break. That’s how hard the winter darkness seems to hit me sometimes. I just need a light.

### *Darkness in Israel*

Our sermon text for Epiphany is from Isaiah 60:1 - “**Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh has risen upon you.**” Isaiah chapter 60 was written to a people who knew what darkness was like. The exiled Israelites had returned from Babylon but were now living in Persian Yehud. They had no king, no freedom, no future, and no hope (R. Lessing, Concordia Seminary). They needed a light. They were fighting the darkness which had crept into their hearts - hope being eclipsed by their reality. God’s people longed for a king to set them free, but they were stuck somewhere between midnight and the dawning day.

### ***Darkness in the New Testament***

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he came to a people who were familiar with darkness, a people who needed a light. They were a people oppressed, who longed to be free of foreign rule. It wasn't that long ago that their temple had been desecrated by Antiochus IV, who ordered pigs to be sacrificed to Olympian Zeus at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The taste of blackness from that burnt bacon would not soon be forgotten. The Jewish Maccabees successfully retook Jerusalem and purified their temple in 164 BC, thus establishing the Hanukkah celebration, but stability was to be short lived. Many people were expecting the Messiah to re-establish an earthly kingdom when he came. He would save them from their darkness, from the oppression of foreign rule. But if Jesus was the Messiah, why was there still darkness in the land?

### ***Darkness in our lives***

We are all trying to find our way out of the darkness, running from the shadows in the dark basements of our lives - fumbling around in the dark grasping for the light switch. How many times do we hustle down dark alleys and cold sidewalks, keeping our heads down, not noticing the passersby around us and hoping they don't notice us? We choose to isolate ourselves, rejecting the community that God has placed around us.

Some of us feel like a black hole of hopelessness has formed in our hearts. Sorrow and death have taken away our joy. Any remnant of joy that remained has been slowly shoved into a dark corner of our cluttered lives.

And our secret sins? They remain secret, or so we think, for we try to keep them in our darkrooms, away from any exposure to the light, hoping they will stay neatly tucked away in their containers, never really becoming fully developed we hope, but in our control, always

staying right where we think we want them. We curse the darkness, refusing to light a candle – refusing to repent.

When we live in this darkness and hopelessness, we begin to doubt God's promise of light. We begin to wonder if God's promises have failed. And that's when we turn to other lights. Got a light? Sure, the world might say, we've got a light in our lives, alright. We have plenty of lights, in fact. As a Cubs fan, I remember when the lights came to Wrigley Field – but daylight or nightlight – it doesn't seem to make a difference for my home team. It's not about the limelight or the spotlight, the flashing lights, black lights, neon lights or red lights. It's not about Christmas tree lights or the icicle lights, mood lights or feeling light headed. It's not about eating lite. And no, it's not about Bud Lite!

### *Light in the New Testament*

Jesus is the light. It was precisely the darkness of Good Friday through which Jesus would show us just how bright his light is. In Matthew chapter 27 we read, **“...from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying ...My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:45-46).** The darkness over the land was a mere shadow compared to the darkness that fell upon Christ on the cross – abandoned by God the Father, Jesus now descended into hell, as we confess in the Apostles Creed. But it's always darkest right before the dawn, and it was this greatest darkness of all that brought the greatest light of all. In Christ's ultimate humiliation he was exalted. Christ drove to the scene of the accident, so to speak, and was right where he wanted to be. He is the light of righteousness that overcame the darkness and defeated the enemies of the people – our sin and unrighteousness. As prophesied by Zechariah in Luke chapter 1, **“...the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”**

### *Light in our lives*

Jesus is the light who continues to shine through the darkness in our lives. John tells us in the first chapter of his Gospel, **“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5)**. Christ is that light, the same light that Isaiah had prophesied about, and Christ has come to shine his forgiveness in our own darkness. The light of Christ brings order out of chaos. Out of moral chaos the Light brings order and justice. **Psalm 139:12 says, “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,’ even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you”**.

Christ shines his light on us, and gives us hope when we have no hope at all. He gives us everlasting life in the face of death. **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...” (Psalm 23:4)**.

Christ shines his light on us, that we may reflect his love in our community. Because of his sacrifice for us, we can be brothers and sisters to those in need. As Isaiah told the children of Israel to arise and shine, he tells us, too, to arise and shine.

### *Light in Israel*

Again, the words of Isaiah 60:1 - **“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh has risen upon you.”** These words brought a dawning hope to the children of Israel. These words called to the children of Israel to arise and shine – to reflect a life empowered by the Spirit of God. As one commentator states, “Like a city gleaming in the light of the newly risen sun, they shine with a beauty that is not their own.” Their hope from the beginning was for the One who would come to set them free. And now, Isaiah was telling the people, He is here – “like a moment of sunrise after a long and anxious night” (Oswalt, pg 536).

Christ has come and will come again. Our Light has come and will come again, like the dawning of a new day.

***Got a Light?***

So, have you got a light? Forget about the highlights and the lowlights of 2009, and focus on the light of Christ in 2010. Turn off your Friday Night Lights and Saturday Night Live for a moment, and remember that He's alive from Bethlehem! It's all about the Guiding Light, the Gospel, and it is shining brightly. Star light, star bright, may His star be the first star we see each night. Hide it under a bushel? No! We're gonna let it shine! **“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh has risen upon you!”** Amen.

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