

# The Epiphany of Our Lord Will Light Up Your Life

## Isaiah 60:1-6

<sup>1</sup> **“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. <sup>2</sup>See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you, and his glory appears over you.**

<sup>3</sup>**Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. <sup>4</sup>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.**

<sup>5</sup>**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. <sup>6</sup>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.”**

In the name of our God who called us out of the darkness and into his wonderful light, dear fellow redeemed:

## What is Epiphany?

Epiphany is a Greek word for light shining on something. The image of light is universally appreciated. Light is good. Darkness is bad. For example, in the 1700s, people started using the scientific method to research, discover, and describe things that they couldn't understand before. It's like a light went on in their head, and so they called that period “The Enlightenment.”

Maybe half of you care about the Enlightenment, so here's an illustration for the other half. About 300 after The Enlightenment, the Disney Princess Rapunzel sang a song about lights, "At last I see the light!" Her epiphany didn't come from science. It happened when she found true love. And true love affected her, "It's warm and real and bright, and the world has somehow shifted. All at once, everything looks different now that I see you." That's an epiphany. It's like a light went on and shifted the way she saw the world.

That's what Isaiah 60 is about. It's not about tangled. It's about Epiphany. This illumination isn't only for scientists or princesses; it's for you. In fact, the Epiphany of our Lord will light up your world.

## God Shines in Israel's Darkness

Isaiah says, **“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.” (Isaiah 60:1-2)**

Isaiah's days were dark days. Much of Isaiah's prophecy is about how Israel is failing to do what God wants, and what's worse, they think they are perfect! Isaiah calls them hypocrites. If they are going to be God's people, they are in big trouble, and they cannot help themselves. That's the darkness. But look what Isaiah says about that. Your light has come! And it's not a light you can produce on your own. No, the Glory of the Lord rises upon you!

The Glory of the Lord is the technical term for God's glaring presence among his people. In Hebrew, it is called *Cavod Adonai*. When the Israelites were coming out of Egypt, the Egyptian army was attacking them, and the *Cavod Adonai* protected them—it was a pillar of fire. When the Israelites dedicated their new worship space, the *Cavod Adonai* moved in. It was a brilliant glowing cloud. When the Israelites disobeyed God and got kicked out of their temple, they saw a vision of the *Cavod Adonai* moving out of the temple. And here the *Cavod Adonai* shows up again. Israel, you are in a wretched, miserable state—worse than that, you have no way to help yourself—but rise and shine! Look! The Glory of the Lord is shining on you! You can't help yourself, but God is here to help!

## God Shines in the Wise Men's Darkness

Isn't that precisely what the wise men experienced? The wise men or Magi traveled from the east to meet Jesus when he was a toddler. Sure, their darkness was different. They weren't Israelites, so they didn't have all the instructions on how to be God's people, but ignorance is its own kind of darkness. How would they learn to please God, or how to be saved? So God gave them a light. Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus is the *Cavod Adonai*, the Glory of the Lord. That's why John 1:14 says, **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."**

But do you ever wonder if the wise men were surprised by that? They were looking for the king of the Jews. You know it was going to be the glory of the Lord. What would it be? A pillar of fire? A gleaming cloud? A superhuman ruler? They knock on the door in Bethlehem, and they see... a toddler. Did Jesus sit still while they worshiped him, or was he running around? Could he say "Thank You" for their gift of gold and incense, or did he try to eat it? These men in royal robes bow down to a person in a diaper. Really? *This* is the answer to ignorance and self-righteousness? *This* is the Glory of the Lord? It didn't get much better when Jesus grew up. A homeless man is the *Cavod Adonai*? But then one day, Jesus said, **"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."** (John 12:23) Aha! Now here's what we've been waiting for! He'll do that thing where his clothes shine like lightning, or maybe he'll transform into a fiery cloud! But he doesn't. He dies. Really? I didn't even think the *Cavod Adonai* COULD die, much less on a cross, like a criminal.

## God Shines in Your Darkness

I don't know if the wise men were surprised to find that the light shining in the darkness was a kid. The Bible doesn't tell us. But are you ever surprised by how the Lord of light chooses to shine in your darkness? Sure, your darkness might be different. Perhaps you know the gloomy frustration of helplessness. You want to be a good spouse. You want to do right by your kids. You want to honor your parents or shake off the sin that haunts your past and, if you dare to admit it, might terrorize your future too. You want to, but you're helpless. Or perhaps the black midnight of your soul is despair. Does God love you? After all you've been through, suffered, and struggled, does God love you?

Our clouds are different, but darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples. So are you surprised to see how God shines into your gloom? How will the Glory of the Lord scatter your darkness? Some process of improvement to enlighten you? An overwhelming emotional experience? It should be a life-changing event, right? Are you surprised, perhaps like the wise men, to find that God shines into your darkness through... a book, through words on a page? The dim glow of the Bible app on your phone — this is the brilliant glory of the Lord? Yeah. Those words of God tell you that someone else has loved your family perfectly to make up for all your failures. Glorious love! A splash of water from baptismal font onto the head of a baby, *THIS* is how God shines in your life? Yeah, because that water connected with God's word transferred that child from being a spiritual orphan headed for hell into the eternal family in the care of God himself. God is now the father of this child. Glorious love! Half a bite of bread and a sip of wine, this is how your God comes to you? Yeah, because by Jesus' words that bread is the very body he gave up for you on the cross. That wine is the blood he poured out to save your life. Do you doubt his love for you? Jesus says, Look what I gave up for you! It's me, sacrificed so you can be spared!"

Could a toddler, a homeless man, a crucified man be the Glory of the Lord sent to shine in our darkness? The wise men thought so. And so they worshiped him. And when you see in Jesus what they saw in Jesus, your world will light up like a Christmas tree. That's an epiphany!

## Others See Your Light

There is a fabulous result when others see how God shines on you. They want to know more! Isaiah says, **"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."** (Isaiah 60:3-4)

Isaiah said that when other people see how God shines on you, they come to you. And if we use our eyes to look around us, we will see people coming out of the dark world to see the glorious light of God's love. That's what happened. God sent Jesus, the light of the world, and kings from foreign nations showed up to worship him.

That's still true today, although I think sometimes Christians get mixed up what the Bible says about "letting your light shine." When I was a little kid, my mom would send us off to school or

baseball practice, and she'd say, "Let your light shine!" And I always thought that meant, "Be on your best behavior so that other people think highly of you and your God." And that's biblical! Jesus said, **"let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."** (Matthew 5:16) That's in the Bible, but that's not what the Bible says in *this* passage. In Isaiah 60, the light that shines from Israel and attracts the attention of others isn't good behavior, it's the glorious love of God! So just this very week, I realized that for all those years, my mother might not have meant, "be on your best behavior." She may have been saying, "Let your light shine Isaiah-style. Be honest about your failures and your struggles, and IN SPITE OF THAT DARKNESS rise and shine because Jesus loves you." Smile, not because you are good, but because Jesus is. Let your light shine. You know someone who is having a dark time. Show them that God loves you-- yes, even you. Let your light shine. Perhaps they will be attracted to the light of the world. **"Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy."** (Isaiah 60:5) That's an epiphany.

## Rise and Shine

Rapunzel says, "And at last I see the light." Wise men bow down and worship the light of the world. Isaiah says, **"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."** (Isaiah 60:1) That's Epiphany, and it will light up your world.

Arise, shine, for your light has come. Amen.