

## **Your Light Has Come – Isaiah 60:1-6 – January 7, 2018**

**Rev. Rachel A. Wann**

Last weekend, my brother and nephews drove here from Indiana. While here they wanted to go visit our cabin up north. It had been almost 30 years since my brother lived there and the boys (well, really, men) had never been at the cabin in the winter. I went along with them, though I had had the experience of walking on the frozen lake a couple years before.

As you well know, the temperature has been rather brisk for the past couple of weeks, and we knew our walk out on the lake would be a cold one. Sure enough, in the open space out on the ice, the slight breeze was piercing despite heavy, layered clothing. We walked along the shoreline in the shadow of the trees, but when we rounded the point, we were in full sunlight. We knew it would be warmer than walking in shadow. But what I didn't know is that I would feel actual warmth, especially on my legs as I was only wearing jeans. I expected to feel less cold. I did not expect to feel the warmth penetrate the cloth.

Perhaps it was only my brain registering a definite change in temperature from walking in the shadows and turning the corner into the full light of the sun, but on that bitter cold lake, I felt the warmth.

Now, for some reason this experience keeps popping up in my mind as I have been contemplating this Epiphany Sunday message. Epiphany is the season of the church year that concludes the 12 days of the shortest season, Christmas. Epiphany falls on January 6, and is generally recognized on the Sunday nearest that date. During the Season of Epiphany, the church focuses on the understanding that Christ came not only for the chosen people, the Jews, but for the entire world. Often, we hear the story of the Magi who came from outside of Israel to worship and bring gifts to a newborn king.

The passage that I read from Isaiah is also closely associated with Epiphany. This part of Isaiah was written after the Babylonian Exile in the history of Israel. When Babylon conquered Jerusalem, the victors took the skilled laborers and the learned scholars to Babylon for their expertise. When the exile ended and the next generation of Israelites returned to Jerusalem, the city was in ruins. So this passage from Isaiah envisions a time when Jerusalem will be at the highest point ever.

The writer of Isaiah speaks poetically of a world languishing in darkness, but the glory of the Lord will be upon Jerusalem. God's presence there will make it a magnificent light amidst the darkness of the other nations around it. People from all over the world will be drawn to its

splendor, and they will come bearing gifts to worship Israel's God. The light of its glory does not come from the city itself but it is in fact a reflection of God's glory to rest of the world.

Now what exactly is God's glory. It's one of those churchy words that everybody uses, but then has trouble trying to explain what it means. Simply, glory of the Lord refers to God's presence. God's presence in Jerusalem is reflected outward, and there is this metaphor of light is so piercing it dispels all darkness and radiates outward, drawing the world to it. Israel is not the source of the light, it is merely reflecting God's light. And we God's light most fully in Christ Jesus, he is the Light of the World.

So I think that's why I keep thinking about that experience I had on the lake last weekend. I suppose it was a kind of epiphany.....

When we turned the corner out on the ice-covered lake and stood in the unobstructed light of the sun and I could feel actual warmth as the sun's light reflected off my jeans, it made me appreciate the power of the sun's radiant light to give warmth even in the midst of below zero temperatures.

Now as much as the passage from Isaiah envisions of time of Israel's prosperity and strength and leadership among all peoples of the world, something that has not come to fruition, at least in the sense of Israel's expectation. But what this passage did for the Israelites coming out of the Babylonian exile is give them hope. This was a vision of what could be, and maybe not in a material sense, but it was something tangible that the people could understand. It gave them hope to rebuild and to reinstate their worship practices.

When we think of Epiphany, this season of God's light shining in the darkness as a beacon for all nations, inherent in that understanding is the expectation that we have to do something. We have been given the responsibility, as followers of Christ, to be the bearers of God's light to the world. Isaiah calls to us, Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. It is not a light that comes from our own selves, from our own making, it is the light of Christ that we have been given that reflects outward. The source of the light is God. The vision of Isaiah is that the world is swallowed up in darkness, and this light of God is meant for all people.

As we enter into this new year and this season of epiphany, may we reflect the light Christ in all our words and deeds.