

God knew you would be here today.

God knew you would show up. He knew you would bring your kids with you. He knew you would smile and sing to him. He knew you would pray to him. He knew you would bring your offerings to him.

God knew you would be here today.

God was so sure that you would show up that he prophesied it. Almost 2800 years ago, through his prophet Isaiah, God predicted that you would be here today doing the things we do every weekend here at St. Paul's.

Did you know that? Were you aware of that when you got up and got ready for church this morning? Did you realize you were fulfilling a prophecy?

It's a prophecy you heard Pastor Adam's read just a minute ago, a prophecy from Isaiah 60.

God promised his people almost 2800 years ago that he was going to bring a brilliant light to a land covered in darkness. He predicted that nations and kings would be drawn to this light, that the hearts of God's people would swell with joy when they saw all the different people coming together, that they would bring with them wealth and riches as offerings for this light, that they would come proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

God told his people 2800 years ago to get ready, **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. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn... the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come... [they will come] bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.**

God knew you would be here today.

God knew you would show up bringing your offerings and praise.

He prophesied it.

God knew you would be here because to people who are aware of the darkness around us, the light is an attractive thing, isn't it?

You can sense the darkness, can't you?

It's the reason you lock your doors at night. It's why you make sure your kids have their seatbelts on when you pull out of the driveway.

It's the anxieties that keep you from falling asleep at night, or the depression that drives you to your bed in the middle of the day.

It's the news stories that break your heart. It's the personal crosses that break your back.

It's the frustrating tedium of your daily grind at work. It's the everyday slog of raising sinful children in a scary, messed up world.

The darkness is thick, it's suffocating, it's all encompassing.

You know that some of the darkness is because of sin out there.

You know that a great deal of the darkness is because of sin in here (my heart).

The darkness is so suffocating, as Isaiah reminded people in the chapter right before this, because **your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.**

God is good. God is so good that all he has to do is look at something with love to make it better. Everything and everyone in the presence of God gets to experience just how good he is. To be sure, there are remnants of that goodness all around us. God created this world to be a good place, and there are still moments every day when we get the briefest little inklings of just how good it was when he first created this world.

But those good moments are so fleeting, so very temporary because sin has separated us from the goodness of our God. Even the good we experience isn't as good as God created it to be, and all the good we experience will ultimately end because of that other effect of sin and separation from God, that epitome of darkness – death.

350 years ago the great English philosopher Thomas Hobbes described the life of man as solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. He thought that if we could just get the right forms of strong, centralized governments in place, we could fix all that. But 350 years later, alas, I can tell you from personal experience just how solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short life still is.

I'm a natural optimist, friends, so this kind of dwelling on the darkness doesn't come naturally to me. But I'm also convinced that it's good to dwell on the darkness a bit. Why?

First of all because wishing away the darkness doesn't make it go away. You may be able to ignore it for a season of life, but the darkness is still there.

But the second and better reason for opening our eyes this morning to the darkness is because then the light shines that much more brilliantly. To the degree that you feel and understand the suffocating darkness of sin, you will feel your heart throb and swell (to borrow a phrase from Isaiah) with the rising light.

God knew you would be here today because you know the darkness and you have seen the light.

Isaiah reminds us in this post-Christmas haze that the *glory of the LORD* has risen upon us.

The Glory of the LORD: That is a really cool phrase. Can I tell you why?

That phrase, *glory of the LORD* (קְבוֹד יְהוָה in Hebrew) is a special phrase in Isaiah, and it's an important theme in God's Bible. Isaiah talks about the glory of the LORD four times and every time it is this screaming in a megaphone moment where Isaiah says to people suffocating in darkness, "Pay attention, your God is about to do something awesome. Just wait, it will be like a brilliant sun rising on a dark world. Your God is about to do something that will make your jaws drop, your hearts throb and swell with joy, you are about to see the glorious goodness of your God."

And if you read the rest of Isaiah's sermon in the chapters that surround Isaiah 60, it will become pretty clear just what gloriously awesome thing the LORD was about to do. You'll read about a God who saw how sins had separated us from him, that we couldn't help ourselves so he resolved that **his own arm will work salvation** – because our arms can't. He promised that **a Redeemer would come to** [his people]. He promised that he would send someone **to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, to comfort all who mourn.**

God knew you would be here today because you know the darkness and because you know your Savior.

This is what Epiphany is all about – that festival that means *revealed, appeared, or made known*.

You are here today, because like those wise men in Matthew 2, God has revealed to you Jesus.

Jesus, the קְבוֹד יְהוָה, that gloriously amazing light that God promised 2800 years ago.

Jesus, the one born to give you all of those amazing things we've been talking about this whole Christmas season – to give you hope, and peace, and love, and joy.

Hope that the darkness and death of sin do not have the last say, that there is an epically wonderful light at the end of this life that often feels like an endlessly long, suffocatingly dark tunnel.

Peace that even though you suffer the wages of sin this side of eternity, there is the other side of eternity waiting for you, where the wages of sin will be no more.

Love, the promise of a God who has every right to cut you off and hide his face from you, instead continues to love you.

And **joy**, the joy of Christmas, the joy that comes from finding a wonderful, warm, inviting, calming light in this dark world.

You are here today because God has shown you Jesus, the one born to bring light into the darkness, to draw nations and kings to the brightness of his dawn.

God knew you would be here today celebrating Jesus, the one born to forgive your sins, to bring you close to the goodness of your God again.

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Bask in the light of the glory of your LORD today friends. And then, take your marching orders from Isaiah: Arise and shine to the world around you. Don't keep this light to yourself – there are other people stuck in darkness who desperately need to see the light. Don't forget this glorious light the moment you walk out of this building. Don't forget how this light changes everything in your life for the better bringing its never-failing warmth and joy to every corner of your life.

Your God wants you to see and feel and share the light of his glory now and forever.

That's the message of Epiphany.

That's the beautiful promise and prophecy of God that is our reality today, tomorrow, and forever.