

**Meadowbrook Congregational Church**

**“Your Light”**

**January 10, 2010**

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***Isaiah 60:1-7***

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

*2* 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.

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

*4* 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.

*5* 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.

*6* 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.

*7* All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you,  
the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;  
they shall be acceptable on my altar,  
and I will glorify my glorious house.

Back in November of 2005, the Associated Press reported on the tiny Austrian town of Rattenburg. In the matter of a couple decades, the town had lost 20 percent of its population and at the time had only 440 residents. The reason was darkness. Rattenburg is nestled behind Rat Mountain, a 3,000 foot peak that blocks out the sun from November through February. At the time, an Austrian glass company had developed what they thought to be a solution. They planned to install 30 heliostat mirrors on the mountainside, to grab light from reflectors on the sunny side of the range and direct it back into dark Rattenburg. The light would not illuminate the entire village

but would provide sunlight in enough spots that people could congregate in the brightness to catch a break from the darkness. The cost of the project was to be \$2.4 billion with the European Union set to cover half the bill. The glass company was committed to pay the other half as a test project for brightening up some 60 other villages. A company spokesperson said, "I am sure we will soon help other villages see the light." It was hoped that the mirrors would bring enough light to draw more tourists but also to convince younger people to live in Rattenburg year round.

This week I searched the internet to see how the Rattenburg project was going. I was hoping for a happy ending. But I was disappointed. While there was no large follow-up article or current investigative report, apparently the reflective mirrors have not been installed. The glass company has not followed through on their financial commitment. Sadly, the leaders of Rattenburg have come to believe that the plan will never come to be and that the darkness must simply be accepted.

Today we observe the Sunday after Epiphany. Epiphany is the day in which we remember and reflect upon the visit of the three magi to the Christ Child in the manger in Bethlehem. Epiphany is the date in which the Christmas story moves from an innocent tale about a cute little baby being born in a magical setting into the meaning of that birth as a revelation of God that will challenge the powers and the darkness of the world.

Epiphany is a Greek word meaning "manifestation," or something that is suddenly made clear or obvious to the mind or eye. An epiphany comes during those "a-ha" moment when the light bulb above our heads suddenly clicks on. I receive Epiphanies occasionally when helping children with homework. I receive Epiphanies when my spouse points out what was wrong about the clothes I picked out to wear to worship on Sunday. Epiphanies add meaning to our faith. Without epiphanies, the Bible is just another storybook and Christmas is just the birth of another baby. But epiphanies bring to light the significance of what has happened and they reveal the truth about what it means.

Indeed, light is the focus of Epiphany. The star which the magi followed to Bethlehem is often used as the symbol of the season. The passage from the prophet Isaiah speaks of the light, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen up on you...Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." This passage was written to a people who lived in a place not unlike the darkness of Rattenburg, Austria. The people of God were in exile, away from their homes, away from their traditions, away from their hopes. All they could see was darkness and ruin and despair. It was like being stuck in this bleak January winter time that sometimes seems to never end. But God promised something different. God was rising up in glory to bring light to those who lived in darkness. God was providing illumination for leaders who needed light to rule with mercy and justice. God was providing the brightness of hope to a world that could not save itself from war and greed and selfishness. The people of Isaiah's time needed to be able to see the light before they could be the light. The words remind us of what God's light needs to be for us today, a source of hope and power when we are without purpose and strength.

The prophet's words tell us something else about the light of God. When light comes into our world and into our lives, the light isn't always the reassuring, peaceful thing we wish for. It disturbs and challenges, and moves us. The light of the star was

the epiphany that guided the magi and directed them to the baby Jesus. Then they saw something in Mary's baby that others in the world did not see. This revelation was not so good to the Herod's of the world. When light comes into the darkness, it is not good for the darkness. Light discovers what is hidden in the shadows. Light disturbs the comfort of the status quo. Light threatens those whose power is based upon anything but peace and goodwill. Light changes things, shakes things up, and proclaims a new way through lasting truth.

In the T.S. Eliot classic poem, *The Journey of the Magi*, the wise men describe their difficult journey to Bethlehem. At the end of the poem the writer says, "We return to our places, these Kingdoms. But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, with an alien people clutching their gods." That is the thing about epiphanies- God's light bursting forth into our world changes the way we see and what we see.

I remember from my childhood the early morning phrase my mother would use to wake me up. "Daylight in the swamp!" Oh, how I hated hearing those words! I guess it was an old logger's call to breakfast. That makes sense because my mother always wanted to be a lumberjack. I knew what she meant. She meant it was going to be light and no longer time to lie in bed and do nothing. It was time to get up and do something.

Epiphany Sunday is the same reminder for us a people of faith. The gift of God is present with us. The light of God is shining upon us. Arise and shine. Today is the day to ask ourselves, "Where is the glory of the Lord in our world and in our lives?" Today is the day to ask, "What does it mean to shine?"