

“The Church at the Epiphany: Shining”—Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
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.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

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.
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.
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.

On a Sunday morning in June, 1969, my parents put my sister and me on a plane in San Diego, California. We were flying to Baltimore, Maryland, where my mother's sister and her husband would meet us and carry us to our grandparents' house in Portsmouth, Virginia, where we would stay with Nanny and Granddaddy while our parents closed up the house and made the cross-country move. It was pitch-dark when we arrived, and I went to sleep that night in a strange bed. I woke up the next morning in that same strange bed, a little disoriented—it took me a few minutes to figure out where I was. But there was bright, beautiful, wonderful sunlight streaming through the blinds that morning, and something in that sunlight said to my ten-year-old brain that this was the start of something new, something different, and that everything would be all right—and it was.

Into the darkness of our lives, whether the darkness is deep and forbidding or gray like just before dawn, comes the light of God's love. Into the darkness of the world, whether we're living in the places of deep despair or in those places where life is not so bad, shines the light of God's giving of himself in the Word

made flesh. The light speaks to our hearts and says that the darkness of our lives, however deep, doesn't have the last word. The light speaks to the darkness of the world and says that the darkness can't overcome the light. Sometimes the light arrives in great and glorious and wonderful bursts, like that first morning at my grandparents' house; and sometimes all we can see of the light are tiny specks, little glimmers. But the light calls to us—it speaks to us—and invites us to walk toward it, to walk *in* it: for the light is the light of God's love for us, the love that wants to forgive us and reconcile us and renew us and transform us. The light calls to us—it speaks to us—and invites us to walk toward it and in it, for when we walk in the light of God's love for us, it will lead us where God wants us to go.

But, as the People of God and the Church of the Lord Jesus, we are called not just to walk in the light, but to *shine* the light—to shine the light of God's love into the darkness of people's lives and into the darkness of the world. *Shine*, mind you, not *reflect*. We're not called to be mirrors that simply reflect the light—we're not called to be like the moon, which, no matter how bright and beautiful it might shine in the night sky, simply reflects the light of the sun. We are called to be like a light bulb, through which the power flows and heats up the filament or the gas so that the bulb shines out the light and dispels the darkness around it. When the love of God made real in Jesus flows in our lives, we shine his light—we shine it into the lives of those who are in darkness, not because we're more special or better than others, but simply because we've seen the light and want to share it with others. We can shine and share the light of God's love made real in Jesus as we tell others what Jesus has done for us—for what story can we tell better than our own? We can shine and share the light of God's love made real in Jesus as we reach out to them in loving, caring, helpful ways. The light doesn't bounce off us like a mirror—the light of God's love shines *through* us to bring his light into the world.

As we share this morning in our family meal—the bread and the cup, the Body and Blood of Jesus broken and shed for us—we rejoice in the light of God that has broken into our lives in Jesus. We open ourselves to the grace—to the unearned, undeserved love and favor of God—that we need to live and walk in the light of God's love. But we're also reminded, as we pray in The Great Thanksgiving that “we may be for the world the body of Christ,” that the light is not ours to keep—the light shines in us, and the light shines *through* us, so that the light of God's love shines in the world. And even though it seems sometimes that the darkness of the world will overwhelm us, it cannot—because the light of God's love is greater than the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.

As the Church of the Lord Jesus at the Epiphany, we're invited to see and experience the light of God's love in Jesus. We're invited live in it and allow it to dispel the darkness in our own lives. But we're invited—no, we're *commanded*—to shine that light into the world of darkness, so that everyone will see and know

the light and love of God made real in Jesus. The Church at the Epiphany is shining—shining the light of God’s love for the world. Thanks be to God!