

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park and Faith Family

Title: Happy Your Year

Lesson: Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12 NRSV

- ¹ 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,^[a]
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.

Happy New Year! Today is the first Sunday of 2021. Did you welcome and greet the New Year well? December 31st and January 1st are only a day apart, but the feeling is very different for us. We start this new year with a new mindset. Koreans say a New Year's greeting like this: "Saehae Bok Manhi Bad-euseyo. (새해 복 많이 받으세요.)" Saehae means 'new year', Bok 'good luck', Manhi 'a lot', Bad-euseyo 'take please'. So, if I list the sentence in English grammar, it is "Please take good luck a lot in new year." I know you're not used to it but that is the Korean expression for a happy new year. Koreans follow the New Year's Day according to the lunar calendar so we call it Lunar New Year. For your information, it is

February 12th 2021. The day before New Year's Day, most people who live in cities go to their hometowns to spend time with their families. So, they enjoy their holiday with delicious food, their parents, and their relatives.

Today is Epiphany of the Lord Sunday. In God's calendar, there are seven festivals, including Easter and Christmas. And Epiphany is one of them. The date of Epiphany is every January 6th. Epiphany is a Christian feast day that celebrates the revelation of God incarnate as Jesus Christ. Epiphany means that what was hidden is revealed. So, it is also called the day of light. Ancient people didn't know that the Lord came to them. They couldn't believe it.

Because the Lord stayed a lot closer to them; Because God lived His daily life with them, they couldn't even imagine the truth that the Lord came to them. Rather, the more they found out, the more they denied it. According to 1 John 2:8, however, the Bible says, "the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining." Like this, the darkness can never mask the true light.

So, in the Eastern Church, they understand that Epiphany is a real Christmas day because they realized that God came to humanity in the darkness through the light. So, they observe January 7th, the day after Epiphany, as Christmas Day. Epiphany starts every January 6th and lasts until the day before Ash Wednesday, when Lent begins.

During Epiphany, I wish that you will take this opportunity to learn more and to realize more about the Lord, who has come to this world. God wants to reveal His love in us. I hope that our faith and wisdom will grow daily, from our weakest parts to our abundant wisdom that knows God.

People usually say that "New year of hope has dawned." Like this, the symbol of the new year is light. Darkness is lifted by light, and the world is bright. Light is hope and life. Prophet Isaiah proclaims God's comfort in the dark time. It was the news of light. At that time, Jerusalem was in the darkness and it was still poor and a land of pain in uncertainty. Under these situations, the prophet proclaims comfort to them, saying "Arise! Shine! Your light has come; the LORD's glory has shone upon you." (1)

Verse 4 shows how specific his message is: "Lift up your eyes and look all around: they are all gathered; they have come to you. Your sons will come from far away, and your daughters on caregivers' hips." It was the news that destroyed Jerusalem would recover. According to the prophet's prophecy, he tells, "the sea's abundance will be turned over to you; the nations' wealth will come to you." (5b) They will

gather in Jerusalem with numerous sacrifices, all for the worship of God and for the temple of Jerusalem. It means God's salvation to the Gentiles as well as the Israelites.

Hope is directed at the whole people. The light and the glory of God is now on those who lived in lamentation, misery, and despair. The news of hope is upon those: who live in fear without knowing God, who are oppressed, who are bound by sin, who lose their joy and are filled with anger, who are marginalized, and who cannot stand on their own. Hope is like an unexpected gift for them, who have always been a dark shadow life.

Jerusalem is no longer an old town that was driven out after its former destruction. Their lives will be changed and peace and praise will be there. Prophet Isaiah promises a new situation that the glory of God is coming. The Bible speaks that the light of God is with Jerusalem and with the Gentiles, and with us today.

Although the prophet declares that the glory of God is upon us, many are familiar with the darkness. So we sometimes forget how precious we are. But he awakens this darkness and reminds us that the light of God is on you.

Traditionally, we greet each other during January, saying "Happy New Year," but I suggest you say "Happy Your Year." This is because the new and shining sun is your year, and the New Year lights on our inner darkness and reminds us of our calling. Human nature is used to darkness rather than light, but our God changes us to new beings through our darkness, our chaos, and our emptiness. This is faith and a new life.

The gospel is the news that those who lived in the darkness and shade will be free from deep frustration and sin. The message of Christmas was that those who accepted the true light would be the children of God. So don't be afraid of the dark. John 1:9, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" proves Jesus who came by light. Jesus Christ tells people that you are the light of the world. Yes, you are light. So don't lose hope in the dark. Our identity is light. The new year has come, and Covid-19 is still going on. There is even news about the mutated virus. But don't worry. The Lord is with you. We, as the children of God, as the tools of God, as his servants, as the light of the earth, can light up the darkness of the earth. We are still in the difficult time, but this year is yours God gave. So, let's greet each other, saying "Happy Your Year!" Amen.