

6pm HC Sunday 4 January 2026

Isaiah 60:1-9, John 2:1-11 – Epiphany - Let the light of Christ guide you to God

Much of the book of Isaiah is prophecies of judgement, not only upon both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, but also on all the other nations that defied God. Isaiah saw that the Israelites' failure to follow God would lead to Israelites' dispersal under the Assyrian Empire, the destruction of Jerusalem and the heartache of their young people becoming exiles in Babylon.

But Isaiah also prophesied a Messiah who would bring salvation, not just for the Israelites but to the Gentiles – the non-Jewish people - too.

Now the Israelites, believing themselves to be God's chosen people, heard Isaiah's prophecies as the promise of Israel's restoration to its heyday, to the time chronicled in 1 Kings when the kingdom established by the great King David was at the height of its power. A time when the ships of Tarshish on the Mediterranean coast came every three years to bring silver and gold to David's son, King Solomon; a time when the Bedouins of the Arabian Desert brought their best flocks to Israel; a time when the Queen of Sheba came from southern Arabia with gold, spices and hard questions, to test the wisdom of Solomon.

But from our perspective, this side of the cross and Jesus' resurrection, we see things differently. When we hear Isaiah say ***Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you***, we hear in Isaiah's words a foretaste of God's promise to Jesus in John's Gospel. We go back to John 12:28 when Jesus asked his Father "glorify your name", and ***a voice came from heaven "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again"***. We remember Jesus' promise to the crowd, "***when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself*** ... and John's own aside to us, that ***he said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die***.

When we hear Isaiah's prophecy, we have the benefit of the famous Christmas reading from John's Gospel and especially verses 4 to 5 - ***What has come into being in [Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.***

Interestingly, Isaiah's prophecy seems almost to suggest that Jesus, in his humanity, would need to hear the confirmation that he is the promised

Messiah, in the instruction to *lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you*. Encouraging Jesus, in his humanity, that *then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice*.

At the festival of Epiphany, we are encouraged to think of Jesus as the light of the world. We might recall Holman Hunt's ***The Light of the World***, his famous picture of Jesus which he painted four times. In Holman Hunt's picture, Jesus is carrying a lamp and he is knocking on a door which we can tell has clearly not been open for some time because it is so overgrown by brambles and thistles. Holman Hunt shows us Jesus seeking us out and bringing his light to us.

But in Isaiah's vision the movement is all *towards* Jesus. Nations, kings, sons and daughters.... all are coming to the light of Jesus. All are coming to Jesus, and bringing all that they have to Jesus: ***the abundance of the sea... the wealth of the nations ... gold and frankincense... flocks and rams ... ships [with] silver and gold.***

They fly ***like doves to their windows***; Isaiah's image of doves returning to the dovecote shows us that this is a picture of homecoming.

Believers like us are called to come into God's light; to bring what they can, and then ***[to] proclaim the praise of the Lord.***

Isaiah's image is not one of the kindly wise man taking his lamp and seeking out the spiritually almost-dead. Isaiah's picture is more like a lighthouse, that will lead people to safety. A beacon in the darkness, shining the light that gives glory to God and that leads people to God.

As believers we are called to come into God's light. God's glory shines on Christ so that he might light your way to God. We are called to come, to bring, to proclaim.

It was George Bernard Shaw who said "*I can think of no other edifice constructed by man as altruistic as a lighthouse. They were built only to serve.*"

We come to Jesus drawn by Jesus himself. To live in the light of Jesus is to live in peace, confident of our salvation and with joy in our hearts.