

PUT ON YOUR CHRISTMAS SHINE!

 **To chase the darkness (vv.1,2)**

 **To bless the nations (v.3)**

 **To thrill your family (vv.4-6)**

In the name of Jesus, our newborn Savior, dear worshipers of the Christ-Light:

In these northern climates we know from experience how far to the south the sun can be this time of year. But imagine living in the Alps with mountains all around. Months would go by when we would never see the sun right above our heads. It would always seem gloomy even on sunny days unless you could ski uphill, far up into the mountains where the sun would top the trees and the tundra. And if you were living in such an Alpine villages, the annual festival of spring sunshine when the sun first bathed your streets and homes in light would warm your heart like nothing else.

That's what God wants to do for us this Christmas. But first He has to help us see the darkness that surrounds as it did in Isaiah's day. People worshipped false gods. They no longer knew who the true God is or how He had promised to save them. Lost in the darkness of ignorance and unbelief, they had no hope here or hereafter. And if God did not send them the message of Christ to come, they would have been lost forever in hell. So would we, except for Christmas when God's glorious light shone from above. Not on kings and emperors, not on the rich with sparkling jewels, not on the intellectuals or craftsmen hired and hailed by the people. God's glory shone in angelic light upon the lowly shepherds. We must go out to them to hear the angels' song, and there you can **Put On Your Christmas Shine!**

 **To chase the darkness (vv.1,2)**

Those were men who could barely make ends meet because all they ever saw were the ends of sheep. If you've ever walked behind such an animal, you know it's not a pretty sight or smell. How do you keep your spirits up day after day watching someone else's animals. Start to think of one as a pet, and some Jewish temple worker will come along and take it for sacrifice in Jerusalem a few miles away. What kind of future do you see with so little education and even less respect? People in town are worried about "validation"; you just wish you knew what it means. Life seems to hold so little light for you.

Isn't that how the holidays sometimes crowd in on us – not with light, but with the darkness of doubt and unbelief? You may know the Christmas story from childhood and be convinced that Jesus was born to be the Savior of the world. The problem is that you start to wonder if all this is meant for you. Is it just everyone else who is healthy enough to party and have fun? It is only the others with enough money to buy whatever their children want. Is it only everyone else's home where everyone gets along and seems to love each other so? The sun may be shining outside, but deep in your soul the darkness of doubt and unbelief is encroaching like the creeping cold of winter. And you feel powerless to stop it.

This is why God shines His light from above. He comes in His Word and says, "***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.***" It's our sin that gets us down; God's grace lifts us up. Spiritually, we're like dead bodies in a field. But God shines the light of love and truth in the face of His own dear Son. And the angel says, "***A Savior has been for you. He is Christ the Lord.***" And when we get up to look, we see God's glory all wrapped up in the greatest Gift of a Savior from sin, death and hell. Since God gave the Big Gift, how can He not also give the wrapping and bows you need for your life as well? Christ is the Light **To chase the darkness** and gloom of sin and unbelief away. God shines from above in Christ to **Put On Your Christmas Shine!**

🔔 **To bless the nations (v.3)**

Now that you know Christ is your Light, do you realize who God invited over? ***“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”*** To ancient Jews who thought no one else would be saved, this must have been quite a shock. “You mean all those גוים (“Goim”) are invited too?” To some this would be as welcome as hearing a husband and wife team of convicted terrorists were moving in next door. But God has always been far more generous than the religious people. The fact that we have come on this holy night to worship our newborn Savior is evidence that God included us non-Jews, us Gentiles in His plan of salvation. He said He would through the ancient Jewish prophets. Luke’s Gospel helps us **Put On our Christmas Shine** by showing how Christ came **To bless the nations.**

But does God really mean ***“kings [will come] to the brightness of your dawn”***? Any kings at your house? God says we are kings in His sight, but what about ***“We Three Kings of Orient Are”***? Three or more, we don’t know, but they came from distant places to the home where mother Mary and stepfather Joseph moved Baby Jesus in Bethlehem. And kings keep coming today. The King of Thailand whose personal physician is a Christian is interested in our work. Though they no longer have kings in China, during the SARS epidemic, China’s Minister of Education came to congratulate our Friends of China teachers for staying. On public television one teacher gave a clear witness about trusting in the Lord for safety. And now they have the Minister’s picture for anyone who questions the validity of their work. **Put On Your Christmas Shine** because Christ’s Light continues **To bless the nations.**

🔔 **To thrill your family (vv.4-6)**

But can you really ever expect it **To thrill your family**? You may feel as far from family today as gentle Mary having a baby when there was no room for them in the inn. Few things may be as frustrating to you as family, especially if you’re at the age when you’d really like to be on your own. And if you are the only Christian in your family, you may be tired of trying to get the innkeepers to find some room for Jesus at your house or in your schedule. Maybe you’d just be happy to have your family stop fighting.

But **Put On Your Christmas Shine** because one of God’s stocking stuffers along with the Christ Child is a second family. If you’ve been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God has adopted you into His family by faith in Jesus as your personal Savior. That’s why it’s so important that you cling to the fact that Jesus was born for you, that Jesus lived for you, that Jesus died for you and rose for you, and soon will come again for you to spend eternity with Him and our Father in heaven. Your new **family** of God is always thrilled at your success in faith and patience in suffering.

So think about your other **family**, the whole Church of Jesus Christ that celebrates Him as Savior. Speaking to us as His **family** God says, ***“Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.”*** Maybe it will take a while for your earthly family, but ***Midian and Ephah*** were family who fought and killed Israelites, yet finally came around to Jesus. In fact, since God got through to us, He can get through to them as well. Your earthly family may be poor emotionally and spiritually, but **Put On Your Christmas Shine** because your glowing faith in Jesus will always **thrill your family** in heaven.

The mind of the ancient Hebrew seems to have pictured *light* as something *flowing like a stream*. It’s in our Christmas image of the shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem, *radiant faces aglow* with God’s holy light *streaming* down upon them as they listened to the angelic choirs announcing our Savior’s birth. This Christmas let God **Put On Your Christmas Shine**, because ***“Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.”*** (Psalm 34:5 NIV) And that’s not just pasted on smiles of relatives trying to look happy. And it’s not just a light for a few months out of the year. This is forever, because this Light, is God’s Light, the Christ of Christmas. Glory to God in the highest! Amen.

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