

Isaiah 9:1-4January 27, 2008 – 3rd SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY**Honor from God** **Follows humbling (v.1)** **Shines the Light (v.2)** **Increases our joy (vv.3-4)**

In the name of Jesus, our shining Epiphany Light, dear reflectors of God's glory:

If you were a conscientious student, you probably still have bad dreams about papers due and professors mean. Maybe your best sports memories were being chosen for a special team, or the flipside, nightmares about never being chosen at all. As the saying goes, "No man is an island." Like it or not, we human beings are not independent of each other and always feel the need for acceptance. Moms are still asking their children, "You mean if everyone else jumped off a cliff, you would too?" Sad to say in our society, many do follow the crowd to their own destruction.

But this is surely nothing new. Jesus' disciple John wrote how their Jewish religious leaders "**loved praise from men more than praise from God.**" (John 12:43 NIV) If the worldly righteous Pharisees felt that way, we too need to examine our hearts to see if we love people more than we love God. Are you more concerned what friends think or what God thinks? Watch the Hollywood obituaries for the natural end of fame and fortune. Come into the light of Epiphany and you will see the joyful eternity in store for all who seek **Honor from God**. This is not easy because it only...

 **Follows humbling (v.1)**

Imagine if you helped your neighbor put an addition on his house. With your own tools and even some personal expense you moved the project along so that in a few years he had the nicest house in the neighborhood. "Great job," he smiles. "Couldn't have done it without you. And even though I paid you as we agreed, I've got something else for you." Then he hands you a set of car keys.

"Great! That's cool!" Everybody in your family is so excited. But when you go to pick up the car, the only one there is a rusted out bomb with four flat tires. "No way! You've got to be kidding!" But that's your "new" car. The key works in the locks, but the engine won't turn over.

You just got "Solomoned" like King Hiram of Tyre by King Solomon of Jerusalem. After years of helping Solomon build the LORD's temple, a special gift came to Hiram. But when he went to check it out, it was a batch of backward villages in Galilee with all the glitz and glamour of a pigsty. "**What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?**" he asked. **[Hiram] called them the Land of Cabul [good-for-nothing].... [Yet] Hiram had sent [Solomon] 120 talents [4 ½ tons] of gold.**" (1 Kings 9:10-14 NIV)

With that incident still in Israelite memory everyone knew what the LORD meant through Isaiah about "**Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan.**" "**In the past [the LORD] humbled [this] land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,**" home to river rats and hillbillies as far as many were concerned. "**Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress...[for] in the future [God] will honor**" this dark corner of ignorance and depression with **Honor from God**.

Have the pathways of your life taken you to your own "Galilee"? Why do computers crash at tax time? Why does a star athlete break his leg in opening practice? Why do you lose out on a scholarship, a relationship, a job or a good career move? It's not enough to say, "Into every life a little rain must fall." Better this: "**[The LORD] does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.**" (Lamentations 3:31-33 NIV) "**The LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.**" (Proverbs 3:12 NIV) We need God's firm hand to say, "Thanks, Lord, I needed that." And there's so much love when He...

☆ **Shines the Light** (v.2)

Who are these “*people walking in darkness*”? It’s every blind man who thinks he can find his own way to heaven even though he can’t even see God. It’s every blind woman who knows she made a mistake, but can’t admit it to herself or her husband. It’s every blind student copying answers, but not seeing he’s still ignorant of the lesson. It’s every blind professor who thinks his knowledge surpasses all, and every blind worker who thinks his experience is even better than that. We’re all born spiritually blind and cannot escape our false and foolish pride in ourselves. For humility is the most elusive of Christian virtues; as soon as you think you have it, you’ve lost it. Stumbling in the natural born darkness of our ignorance and unbelief, we need the one God who **Shines the Light** of truth and understanding.

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” But wait a minute. Isn’t that in the past tense as if it already happened? If Isaiah wrote this 700 years before Christ, how can Matthew tell us in today’s Gospel (4:12-23) that Isaiah was fulfilled when Jesus came to Galilee preaching, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near”* (Matthew 4:17)? Remember “Prophetic Perspective”? God’s promises are so sure and certain, they’re as good as done. So the prophets were inspired to speak their prophecies as if they had already happened because that’s God’s eternal view of His own faithfulness.

Looking back today makes even more sense: *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”* We were lost in the darkness of *“mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter.”* We naturally rely on doctors and drugs instead of God’s help. One man even insisted it’s better to read the paper each day before the Bible. *“Distressed and hungry, [we would] roam through the land..., famished, ...enraged and, looking upward, [we would] curse [our] king and [our] God. Then [we would] look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, [until we would] be thrust into utter darkness.* (Isaiah 8:19-22 NIV) All that doom and gloom – except God **Shines the Light** of Christ and....

👤 **Increases our joy** (vv.3-4)

Championship teams know how great it feels to win especially if everyone wrote you off at the beginning of the season. American history ripples with stories of westward expansion, human ingenuity in the “iron horse” riding iron rails across this great land. We drive that ribbon of highway from sunrise to sunset in magnificent models of human engineering. We shop bumper crop stores, then buy equipment to exercise our “girlish figure.” But where is the joy for those who lost their lands in broken treaties or the “right of imminent domain”? Newspapers, magazines, TV, movies sell a love affair with depression.

Watch the Emmys or the Golden Globes and look past the jeweled gowns and sharp tuxedos into sad eyes. “People watching” at the airport often reveals the “darkness” of depression, the stress of not knowing who you are, why you’re here or where you’re going? Where is true joy in the lie of “self-esteem”? What do you do about your weaknesses and failures to be a good friend? How do you face a long illness or the loss of a loved one? How can you think God is out there somewhere, but not know how to meet Him?

Now look into the eyes of our Sunday School children. Watch their faces when they sing. I wish you could see their expressions change as our Children’s Lesson shifts from the bad news of our sins to the Good News of our Savior. I wish you could see the peaceful joy in people’s eyes after a twenty-minute hospital devotion or Lord’s Supper at home. *“LORD, you have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest....You have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.”* Oppressive guilt is gone. Darkness dies in Christ’s Epiphany **Light**. **Joy increases** on our way home to heavenly bliss. All because God chose to shine His Word of grace on you and me. Unasked, unearned, we receive **Honor from God** in Christ alone. It’s worth the **humbling** to live in the **Light** of his increasing **joy**. *“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.”* (Isaiah 60:1 NIV) Amen.