

## Rise and Shine!

In the Name of Jesus our shining Epiphany Light, dear friends delivered from darkness:

In his classic devotional, *My Hand in His*<sup>1</sup>, Herman Gockel tells the story of a young woman who went to her pastor with a perplexing problem. She had been faithful in her church attendance, earnest in her prayers and personal devotions at home. She came regularly and often to Lord's Supper. But she could not shake her haunting sense of sin. "Why do my girlfriends not feel this?" she asked. "They care nothing about religion, yet don't seem to feel guilt at all." Her pastor helped. "If I set 100 pounds of steel on a corpse, would it feel pain?" "No, it's dead." "Exactly! The spiritually dead cannot feel the weight of sin. But you are alive in Christ. So your sense of sin is healthy – and relieved in Christ alone."

Isn't that the way it has always been? The sense of sin and guilt is very real even in the darkness of sin and unbelief. But you cannot see how soiled your clothes, face and hands are until you come into the light. That's why today I wish we had time to read Isaiah 59, the chapter before our text. Talking to all people, "***Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.***" (59:1f NIV84) Imagine the *cobwebs* of useless clothing, the feet that *rush into sin* by folks who are quick with bloodshed and short on everything but evil thoughts. "***So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight; among the strong, we are like the dead.***" (59:9f NIV84) Talk about a sense of guilt! We must all confess, "***Our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: rebellion and treachery against the LORD, turning our backs on our God, fomenting oppression and revolt, uttering lies our hearts have conceived.***" (59:12f NIV84) By nature we lie like corpses under sin we cannot feel or heal.

Every time I hear another terrorist report and talking heads asking, "Why?" I wonder how people think it's always someone else doing terrible crimes. Conceited human hearts always blame suffering on God or religious radicals, but ignore the violence of their own tongues, the sin of their hearts. We're all in this together, sadly, even sometimes "Christians" persecuting "Christians." Such darkness! Such evil!

***The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. See how angry God gets at sin? But then what does He do? He comes like a pent-up flood...."The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the LORD. For all who see the light of Christ, "My covenant is on them," says the LORD. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the LORD.*** (Isaiah 59:15–21 NIV84)

You **Rise** from the dead when God's grace is shining in the face of the Babe of Bethlehem. "***Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD is dawning upon you. Look, the darkness covers the earth, and deep darkness covers the peoples, but the LORD will dawn upon you, and his glory will be seen over you. Nations will walk to your light, and kings to the brightness of your***

---

<sup>1</sup> Gockel, Herman W. *My Hand in His*. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, 1961.

*dawn.*” (EHV)<sup>2</sup> The weight of sin comes off your chest; that guilt is gone, washed away in the flood of mercy, the blood of God’s own Son. Open your eyes and see the light of Christ drawing you out of the darkness. Come, no longer afraid your deeds will be exposed. Remember the fiery seraph saying to Isaiah with a live coal from the altar in heaven touching Isaiah’s lips? “*See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.*” (6:7 NIV84) **Rise and Shine** in splendor!

“But, Pastor, you don’t know what’s going on in my life right now. Christmas was great, but now credit card bills. My Dad’s been so sick; Mom isn’t better. Family left in anger; we don’t know if we’ll see them again. My job is downsizing; I don’t know what I’m going to do. How can I **Rise and Shine**?”

If you’re Pastor Philipp Nicolai, you look out the window at the cemetery where parishioners and neighbors are being buried every day. 1300 in six months! The plague threatens darkness on your soul. How do you encourage yourself to reassure God’s people depending on you? In the pastors words:

“There seemed to me no thing more sweet, delightful and agreeable, than the contemplation of the noble, sublime doctrine of Eternal Life obtained through the Blood of Christ. This I allowed to dwell in my heart, day and night, and searched the Scripture as to what it revealed on this matter; read also the sweet treatise of the ancient doctor St. Augustine. (*The City of God*)...Then day by day I wrote out my meditations, found myself, thank God! wonderfully well, comforted in heart, joyful in spirit, and truly content; gave to my manuscript the name and title of a ‘Mirror of Joy’ and composed this to leave behind me (if God should call me from this world) as the token of my peaceful, joyful, Christian departure, or (if God should spare me to health) to comfort other sufferers whom He should also visit with the pestilence... Now has the gracious, holy God most mercifully preserved me amid the dying from the dreadful pestilence, and wonderfully spared me beyond all my thoughts and hopes: so that with the prophet David I can say to Him, “O how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee.”<sup>3</sup>

Where but in the light of Christ could one **Rise and Shine** in words like these? “How lovely shines the Morning Star!...Great and glorious, O victorious Prince of graces, Filling all the heav’nly places.” (CW 79) The darker the night, the brighter the light of Christ shines in Word and sacrament.

Often when I read sermons by Martin Luther, I am reminded how I need to pay better attention. Luther noted how distressed the Magi must have been when the star disappeared. Was all their travel for nothing? And now cruel King Herod was upset along with the city of Jerusalem which had seen the violence of his jealousy and paranoia for power. “*Then the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them, until it stood still over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with overwhelming joy.*” They fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that “*The wealth of the nations will come to you. Caravans of camels will cover you land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. All of them from Sheba will come. They will carry gold and incense, and they will announce the good news of the LORD’s praises.*” The richest gifts we can bring are praise on our lips – all while we **Rise and Shine!**

So how are your lips? Your tongue? A Christian baker in the Netherlands, Hans Bret, was kept from using his. The Catholic Inquisition captured and tortured him to no avail. He would not give up his faith. Sentenced to burn, the authorities made sure he could not preach from the flames as so many martyrs have in the past. They forced him to stick out his tongue, clamped on an iron tongue screw, and seared the tip of his tongue with a red-hot iron to make it swell. A friend found the tongue screw in his ashes. His family kept it for generations as a keepsake symbol of faithfulness.<sup>4</sup> “Vainly we bring him the finest of off’rings, Vainly with gifts would his favor secure. Richer by far is the praise that the heart brings; Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.” (CW 92:4) Wherever Christ’s light finds you in the darkness today, cast fear aside and keep coming toward the light. Soon dawns the eternal day! Amen.

---

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the Scriptures are from *Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV)* © 2016, Wartburg Project.

<sup>3</sup> Philipp Nicolai, Preface (8/10/1598) to his *Freuden-Spiegel*. <http://www.stempublishing.com/hymns/biographies/nicolai.html>

<sup>4</sup> Morgan, Robert J. *On This Day* – 1/4, “The Tongue Screw.” © 1997. [www.laridian.com](http://www.laridian.com).

For the study behind this sermon or for copies email [m.cordes@comast.net](mailto:m.cordes@comast.net).

You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at [www.wels.us/newlife](http://www.wels.us/newlife).

New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church  
180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126