

Lighthouses on the Way

Sermon for Epiphany Sunday

Sermon Text: Isaiah 60:1-6



¹ Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you. ³ And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ⁴ Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on the hip. ⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned 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 bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord.

I love lighthouses! I love them because they can be relied upon. They are usually high on a hill and can be seen far and wide. They shine their light continuously and tirelessly. Their light is both a warning of danger and a signal of hope. They warn ships of possible dangers and, at the same time, they send the message that a safe haven is nearby. It is important the ships believe the signals of the lighthouses. If they don't, they are in danger of sinking or of not finding their destination in the dark.

We humans resemble ships that must travel in the dark. If we travel in the dark and don't have a lighthouse to warn us and show us the way, we will very quickly get lost or even fall to our doom. Whoever believes that he doesn't need light or even believes that he himself is the light will go astray or perish miserably. But whoever can see the light at the top of the hill and believes in it knows about the dangers and also knows about the safe haven that is nearby. Dear ones! We humans can now illuminate the whole world with our electric lights. Furthermore, we have very clever technical means to communicate with one another. Through Google, Google maps, Wikipedia, and other media, we can very quickly orient and inform ourselves about our world. What's ironic about this abundance of information and this abundance of light is that we really know less and less how to distinguish between truth and lies. Even recently it is unbelievable how much false and incorrect information is spread on the internet. It is even more unbelievable that people still believe this false information! We are in truth, lost and in danger of being shipwrecked.

The lighthouses teach us an important lesson. They unmistakably show us what's going on. The ship's captain knows that he must neither orient himself according to the lights of his own ship nor according

to the lights of other ships. He must absolutely believe in the light of the lighthouse alone and not deviate from it. Because only its light remains steady and sure in one place and will lead him safely to his destination. Dear ones! We are not the light. God alone is the light! And He alone may speak on the first day of creation: "Let there be light!" In the whole history of mankind, God has repeatedly let His light shine. He spoke His Word through the prophets. These words were lights in the darkness. In our sermon text today, it was Isaiah who spoke God's words. At that time, Israel had no longer recognized the light of God. The Jerusalem Temple was reduced to rubble. There was nothing to see there. And then these wonderful words: "Arise, shine!" In these words of Isaiah, a miraculous turning point already happens. God, who alone is light, says to His people: "Shine!" And why? Because the true light is coming! God didn't lie. Everything that He said came true. Israel was brought back to their homeland by King Cyrus. The beautiful temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem. And people from all over the world made pilgrimages there. Only much later would it become clear what God meant when He said: "Your Light has come." That happened when Jesus came. When Jesus came, a light went on in Israel. He preached in such a way that the people sensed God's immediate presence. He overcame the border between life and death as He healed the sick and raised the dead. Through this the people could experience God among them. Because Jesus didn't just speak about the light. He Himself was the light. Something amazing happened. The people couldn't just understand some things better! They could also understand themselves better. And that remains so today. Whoever gets to know Jesus is confronted with two very simple facts. The first fact is that this person himself is not the light. And the second fact is that Jesus is the light. The amazing thing is that despite this knowledge, people prefer darkness. Unlike the ship's captain who knows very well that he can't direct his course using his own lantern but must concentrate on the lighthouse, we prefer to follow our own lantern. John describes it like this: *"And this is the judgement: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their words were evil"* (John 3:19).

Jesus challenges us to believe in the light so that we become children of the light. Believing in Jesus doesn't come out of ourselves. Because we can't even see Jesus. Whoever believes, doesn't see! The ship's captain can also neither see the safe harbor behind the lighthouse nor the way to it. He also can't see the fatal rocks to the left and right. He solely follows the light. And believes that the lighthouse doesn't lie. And therefore, he finds his harbor. We can't see Jesus. But we believe in Him. We've been doing this for many generations. And we do it in such a way that a little of His light shines in us. That means that a little of Jesus and His love is visible in our dark lives as we love other people and are guides for them. Back when you decided to travel to Germany, you must have prepared yourselves for Germany. You may have inquired what clothes are worn there, which language is spoken, and how one actually lives there in Germany. You then prepared yourselves accordingly. Some even then attempted to get a German passport or visa. It is the same for us Christians. We are on the way to God. Our passport is baptism: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" we are baptized. With this, the very being of the Triune God was united with our names. God is nothing but truth, faithfulness, and love. And that is the language we now learn because we know that it so with God. It is not yet light by us. Instead, we still experience much uncertainty and fear. But one thing is certain. And that is that God places His lighthouses along the way for us. The lighthouses are His words. These are always dependable and never change. And that's why it's the same for us as for the ship's captain who sees the lighthouse and already lives in the certainty that he is almost at his destination! The smell of home is already in the air! God's light shines towards us. Amen.