

FOCUS: The Good News is Jesus was made known to the Gentiles through the Magi

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”¹ I don’t know about you, but I can’t hear those words without also hearing the words and music of Handel’s magnificent oratorio, *Messiah*. The wonderful aria for alto, later joined by the chorus, brings these words of Isaiah to life. Out of a time of darkness—the time of the exile into Babylon—the Hebrew people have been led back into their own land and granted permission from the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, to rebuilt their temple in Jerusalem.

Both the Old Testament lesson and the Gospel text we heard this evening are the same lessons appointed for use when Martin Luther was preaching and teaching. In his commentary on the sixtieth chapter of Isaiah, Luther begins by writing:

“As we have often said, also in the introduction,² the prophet’s task was to correct at any time the people then living and to rebuke them for current sins. A second task was to prophesy concerning Christ. Thus in the preceding chapters the prophet has rebuked. In this chapter he begins to prophesy concerning Christ’s kingdom. This text is well enough known in congregations and churches. It is easy for us too. Well-known and plain texts call for the greatest attention. The subject matter treated here is very important.”³

So here we have more of the prophesy concerning Christ. This is an especially appropriate text for the feast of the Epiphany, because we hear Isaiah proclaim the coming of the light of the people, and the shining of the glory of the Lord around them. Indeed, *your* Light has come into the world, just as Isaiah foretold. Christ Jesus is that light, and his coming has been promised to the Chosen People since the time of

¹ Isaiah 60:1 (NRSV)

² Cf. *Luther’s Works* 16, p. 3

³ Luther, Martin. Vol. 17, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 17 : Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*. Edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann. *Luther’s Works*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, ©1972.

Abraham and Sarah. As Luther writes in his commentary, “This is the gospel which sets you free from death and sin.”⁴

Today is the feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord. As such, it is the day when the church gathers together to celebrate not just the Word made flesh, but more importantly, that the Word of God made flesh, that is, Jesus Christ, is made known to the Gentiles—all of those in the world who are not members of the Hebrew people—through the visit of the Magi—the wise men, three kings, astrologers, astronomers, however you wish to identify them. These strangers from a strange land follow an astronomical event—the appearance of a new star in the night sky—to the place where the Holy Family is found. These men—whose names and occupations and even number are actually unknown—believed that the appearance of any new heavenly body was a sign of a great person—usually a king—being born. That is why they went to the place the star marked, and why they brought gifts with them.

Just as the prophet foretold, the light of the world—the glory of the Lord—has risen, and darkness has been displaced forever by the coming of the one who was foretold by the prophets. Nations—not just the Hebrew people, but *all nations*—will come to know the Light of the world, Jesus Christ, after the visit of the Magi, traveling on their camels, and bringing with them gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

God has given the world the greatest gift on this Epiphany day—the Savior of the world. We, then, should receive this gift with joy and with a heart that rejoices, and then go into the world, just as the Magi did, by a different route, forever changed by our encounter with Immanuel—God with us—and proclaim the Lord’s greatness to all who have not yet heard it.

Arise, dear sisters and brothers, as we close our service of light and prayer, to go out into the world to proclaim God’s love for all people.

⁴ *Ibid.*