

Arise! Shine!¹—Isaiah 60: 1-6 & Matthew 2: 1-12
(January 2, 2022—2nd Christmas/Epiphany)

In his book *The Darkest Dark*, astronaut Chris Hadfield writes about himself when he was a child, a child who tries everything he can to stay awake at night because he is afraid of what he imagines might be lurking in the dark. Later in the book, he goes to watch TV at his neighbour's house—the only TV in his neighbourhood! Can you imagine? And his idea of what the dark is like changes because he sees real, live astronauts on the moon. He discovers that the dark is where dreams can come true, that both the shadows and the stars are beautiful, each in their own way.² The dark allows him to see his own light and inspires him to decide that someday he will become a real astronaut, too. The dark causes Chris to see light in a new way—a way that would change his life by enabling him to see his own gifts.

This light is what Isaiah was asking his people to see. Isaiah's people were afraid of the world around them. They were held down by empire, struggling to remember that they were God's people. They felt enveloped in a darkness that was overwhelming; somehow, they had to learn to see their inner light again. So, Isaiah called them to Arise! and Shine! because in spite of all that was going on around them, God's light was, indeed, deep inside of all of them. It wasn't a call to be perfect, but a call to be authentic in living out who God was calling them to be—to follow their inner light that mirrors God's light. This light is what causes us to shine so that we might also help to mirror the light of others, joining us and all of our gifts together. Isaiah's people needed a new way to see themselves. They needed hope for the future and who they would eventually become. It would be a journey, an uncovering, of who they would be as God's people—those who would live lives of compassion and generosity toward themselves, each other, and the world around them.

In many ways, we encounter a similar journey as we join the Magi in their search for the Light. They knew that this light was important for them to follow, even into the empire of Rome and King Herod, an empire that played with people's fears (for people are easier to control if they are afraid).

When the Magi find Jesus, they bring out their best gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They then realize that this light is changing the ways in which they see themselves in the world and they know that they can't go back to Herod, for the light that they have seen would challenge his power. So, they go home by a different road—a way that transforms

¹ Adapted--Catherine Stuart, Ian March-MacCuish, Evan Smith, Matthew Fillier. *Discover Your Gifts—Share Your Gifts: Five Sundays in Epiphany*. https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/2021-10/ctb-2022_discover-gifts-share-gifts.docx

²Chris Hadfield and Kate Fillion, *The Darkest Dark* (Toronto: Tundra Books, 2016).

them and the people who would hear their story. They could see the power, mystery, and beauty of how this light called them to give the very best parts of themselves.

Both of these stories call us to rise above our fears, to see the beauty in what we offer and how what we offer shapes us as disciples. Just like Isaiah's people, we are not called to be perfect, but to arise and shine in all of our imperfect glory, for that's what God asks, not perfection, but courage to live into our truth, to be our authentic selves, to allow ourselves to be transformed in the rising—to go a different way because of the gifts that we share.

When we rise and shine, we invite others to do the same. Whether we share our gifts unintentionally, or better yet with purpose and desire, our light joins with the light in others.

As disciples of Jesus, it is for us to know that this light, and our best gifts, are within us, and only need to come out to be seen. This journey of discipleship is following the call to have the courage to share those gifts, to kneel like the Magi, to hear the call of Isaiah, not in spite of the world around us, but that the world might be transformed.

As Chris Hadfield learned, we are never alone; in both the dark and the light, we are able to hear the call of God and know that offering our gifts transforms us and the way we think about relationships with God and others. May it be so. Amen.