

## **God's Light and Love in our Lives for a New Year Psalm 8; Isaiah 60:1-7; Matthew 1:18-25; 28:16-20**

There is something wonderful, and yet, just a bit fearful, too, about a fresh new snowfall - It's wonderful, to see the land all around covered over with a fresh blanket of white. All the dull dirty brown and bare leaflessness of winter is blanketed with a fresh clean cover. It's like grace. A new beginning.

A wonderful way to move out of 2011 and all its unresolved issues of a War over, or maybe not, and another war continuing, uncertainty about the Economy, and foreclosures and joblessness haunting us still, and the Moral messes in public and private lives...

What a gift to have this new fresh year, and somehow, now, have a new chance to try to make sense of the world around us, and to live in uncertain times with a certainty, a faith, that gives us courage and comfort.

Let us pray...

Lord, may the words of our mouths, and the meditations of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable in your sight, and your good word to us this day in Christ.

Amen.

A little awhile ago I attended an open house for some of MPC College Students hosted by Juan and Cathy – it was neat time – and while there I invited them, anyone who was willing, to help lead in our worship this morning. One person, maybe a fool for his faith, raised his hand and he is here this morning.

I very grateful to Tyler Huntress, a recent graduate of Dow High School and a freshman at University of Michigan, for volunteering and he will now share some of his thoughts as he looks ahead into this new year and shares with us how the light of his faith shines on the future – lights a way into this new year with hope and promise.

Tyler – welcome.

Tyler's remarks

David Robertson's comments.

Nearly 2,500 years ago, in a very uncertain time for God's people, the Prophet Isaiah spoke timeless words of counsel and advice for living with confidence in the light of God's love. He put it simply – and straight. Here them from Isaiah 60:1-3.

You can sum up what Isaiah said with just 2 words. Arise. Shine.

Maybe he spoke too simply. But I think he spoke the truth. Arise. Shine. The truth is, unless we greet each new day, unless we decide to live in each new day as fully as we can, we waste the most precious gift we will ever receive... Life now.

Isaiah knew what we sometimes forget. With each new day, the glory of the Lord of Life has risen upon us. No matter how dark the circumstances of life can seem, and they can seem dark, to us in so many ways in our lives... Still – Isaiah says... "Lift up your

eyes and look around." See the wonder of the world God has given us in each new day, each new week, each new year. Lift up your eyes and see the light of God's love for you.

We've just celebrated it all again. The light of God's love for us – in Christmas. And Christmas is as good a proof of God's light in our world as anything I know.

For all that the world does to cover up the heart of it, the true light of it... The truth of it shines through. All the good of the season, all the giving, the caring, the toys for tots, food for the

hungry, donations to worthy charities – All of this reveals a deep abiding human hunger for God... for a goodness in life that is greater than all the human race has yet achieved.

Christmas reflects this hope every year. But it's a hope and a hunger that is very much alive in human hearts all the time. The new spirituality of our day is a clear sign. But long ago Augustine identified this truth about all human beings – he said “our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God.”

No – this is no longing for the old time religion we knew so well. But there is a religious revival rising in our society and across the world. Much of it is unguided and misdirected. It's sloppy and selfish, too often. And it has led to tragic battles of people of one faith against those of another.

It can be selfish - I want a God experience that's good for me and makes me feel good.

Séance, Sexologist, Scientologist, what ever. And much of the religious feeling is thoughtless and hate filled. Fundamentalism focused on a God so small, so narrow, a God who cannot be the God of all creation Isaiah calls us to see.

But the religious sense is there – and it is real, and it is true. We human beings long for a light in life, a light of truth for living.

Isaiah says to us across the centuries.... Arise. Shine. Lift up your eyes, and look around. And see. See life as it is. And John says, see the light as it is. See the light of life, shining in life, in Jesus. “The true light which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world. Yet the world did not know him.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.”

Light and love...for life... in Jesus. Just gaze upon Jesus. Just look at Jesus. Just fix your focus on his life and his teaching. And you will know – You will know God's light and God's love in your life.

A writer wrote - I don't know anyone who has taken serious time to read one of the Gospels, who has not been stunned by the power of Jesus' words and the good news of his message, and the challenging almost threatening power of his goodness and love.

Jesus embodied it – when he fed the hungry, and healed the sick, and promised God's renewing grace to all who sought it, and when he gave his life that we might have the promise of life eternal. Jesus described it – when ever you see the least of my brothers and sisters, See them sick or hungry or naked or in prison...and minister to them.... You minister to me.

We can experience it – God's light and love in our lives – whenever we let this light and love live through us. Some children shared the truth of all this when they were asked to describe love in their lives....

Love is when my grandfather paints my grandmother's toe nails because she can't reach them.

Love is when I was scared at my piano recital and I saw my Dad waving and smiling at me. He was the only one doing it. And I wasn't scared anymore.

Love is giving someone most of your French fries and not asking them for any of theirs.

Love is when Mommy sees Daddy all sweaty and still says he's handsomer than Robert Redford.

Love is a 4 year old boy who saw his neighbor crying, an old man who had just lost his wife. The little boy went into his neighbor's yard and climbed up into his lap. Later his mother asked what he said to the man. Nothing, I just helped him cry.

So wise – a youngster said. Love is what is in the room at Christmas if you stop unwrapping presents and just listen.

Did you? Because – if you did... then you know what another child knows. There is 2 kinds of love, Jerry said. Our love. God's love. But God makes both kinds of them.

You knew that didn't you? We know this don't we. Every new day, every snow whitened, or sun brightened, or even cloud covered new day, we know this.

Because we know this, we know, don't we know, even as we taste the bread and drink the cup of this feast of remembrance of God's love in Christ, we know – in the wonder of Christmas all over again, and in the gift of each new day, we know God's light and love in our lives.

We can Lift up our eyes and look around, and see the wonder of life. And because we can, we can arise and we can let that light and that love of God shine into our world through the work and words of our lives. Let it be so ... for us this new year. Amen.

David Robertson, Pastor