

Matthew 4:12-23

¹²When Jesus heard that John was put in prison, he withdrew into Galilee.

¹³He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴He did this to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
along the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles,

¹⁶the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light,
and on those dwelling in the region and the shadow of death a light
has dawned.

¹⁷From that time, Jesus began to preach: “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near.”

¹⁸As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea, since they were fishermen. ¹⁹He said to them, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

²⁰They immediately left their nets and followed him. ²¹Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. Jesus called them. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people.

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Isaiah 8:19-9:2

Epiphany 3, Supplement Series A, January 22, 2017

INJ “The people dwelling in darkness.” I think we can recognize that we are a people who dwell in a dark world. Look at the wickedness that happens! Look at the twisted ways people hurt one another and take advantage! Those people have no light in them!

The light, of course, is Jesus. He shines with a bright message of rescue from thick darkness. The sin that condemns – he paid for it by his blood. Evil forces that seek to devour – he has defeated them. The darkness of death is no longer to be feared as an unknown end because Jesus has risen from the dead. His light shines on us through the message of forgiveness. The power of the gospel fills us and moves us and frees us.

Yet we are not untouched by the darkness around us, because the darkness still exists within us. The acts of the sinful nature are produced in our hearts, and we drift into them, slipping into increasing darkness. Sometimes it is so slight we barely notice the lack of lumens. If we squint, we can still see. But then we are trapped, unsure of which way to go. How will we ever return to the light?

The answer is easy to say, but hard to keep on doing. Go back to the Scriptures. Search them and find Jesus. Bask in the glorious light of his perfect life and his innocent death and his exaltation. Our weekly worship is a bright spot in our life for the reason that we get to see Jesus in the word and sacrament. Our daily devotions are cause for joy because the light of Christ shines on us.

But confusing and conflicting messages pound away at us from every direction. The entertainment we choose is often filled with Bible-contradicting messages. The spirit of our society is persistently anti-Jesus. Even when we are encouraged by a positive sounding post or meme, a shadow emerges that departs from what is truly light. Always, the darkness encroaches. Look at the hopelessness and despair that many experience! Look at how clueless so many are, and how angry they are at a God they don't even know.

We fall into the same anger. When things don't go easily, we blame God for it. We get confused. The path God leads us on by his word is difficult and dangerous. It is not popular. But it is the only one that is light and truth and salvation. Everything else leads off into the gloom.

Jesus is the Light. We cannot help him be light. His brightness does not depend on our feeling or our following. Jesus is light even when we are lost in the dark! He penetrates the shroud that covers us and opens our eyes. He proclaims peace. You are my dear child in Holy Baptism. My words are the power of God for salvation. Come to me when you are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Watch out for the prowling lion who lies and deceives. I am your refuge and strength. I forgive you. The light shines! There is no more gloom. No more fear. No more guilt.

None of us have escaped the darkness completely. We still hear those confusing and conflicting messages on every side. Sometimes it seems the darkness is winning, that we are slipping deeper into gloom. It is harder to see clearly! It was dark in the days of Isaiah, when he spoke this prophecy – just as dark as it is today.

People were interested in demons and supernatural happenings apart from God's Word. They were self-centered and sought only what they wanted for themselves. They mocked and ridiculed people who confessed Bible truth. They continually wanted to find meaning and relevance and purpose and value for their lives, but they would not listen to God's Word.

How do we escape from darkness? Where does the light shine? You know the answer. Isaiah says: "Turn to the Law and to the Testimony!" Go back to God's Word when contradictory and confusing messages target you. Jesus is the Light who lifts away the gloom. We need to see him clearly, again and again. You don't have to remain in the darkness. Turn to God's Word. Come close. Listen. Rejoice! There is no more gloom, for the light of Christ has dawned.

A reading from Isaiah:

When they tell you, "Consult the mediums and the spiritists, who whisper and mutter," shouldn't a people seek their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? Turn to the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, there will be no dawn for them. They will pass through the land, distressed and starving, but when this happens and they are starving, they will be frustrated, and they will curse their king and their God. They will turn their faces upward, and they will look down to the ground, but listen: They will see only distress, darkness, and the gloom that brings anguish. They will be banished into thick darkness.

On the other hand, there will be no more gloom for the one who was in anguish. In the former time, he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will cause it to be glorious, along the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, the light has dawned.

This is the word of the Lord! SDG Amen.