

3rd Sunday after Epiphany – Year A – January 30, 2011
Based on Matthew 4:12-23, written by Pastor Paul Horn – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY

“Jesus Brings Light”

Thanks be to our God and Father for sending Him who came to proclaim to us, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) May Jesus now shine in our hearts as we listen to the spoken Word. Amen.

It was two years ago this month that the lights went out, the heat pump stopped running, along with the refrigerator and freezer, the hot water heater, telephone, and cable and internet. The great ice storm of 2009 brought fear and frustration. We needed light, because we knew that when the light came on, we had heat, and a stove to cook our food and hot water. Light shows the way. It brings an end to frustration and fear.

The darkness of our sins and the darkness of death lead to frustration and fear. But the light of forgiveness and comfort is found in the Light of the world, Christ Jesus. He causes sin to flee, the darkness of death to scatter. The light of Christ brings hope and comfort and pardon. This the good news the Gospel writer Matthew shows us this morning: Jesus brings light.

Jesus’ ministry was in full swing. It had been one year since his baptism and he had been preaching in the southern region of Judea. In our lesson Matthew tells us that Jesus returned to Galilee, and made Capernaum his headquarters, by the lake of Galilee. Matthew tells us it was the area of Zebulun and Naphtali. Everybody living in Israel who read this account by Matthew caught the significance of that statement. Did you? To understand what Matthew was getting at, you have to know that fourteen centuries before Jesus came on the scene, when the twelve tribes of Israel first occupied the Promised Land, each tribe got its own designated piece of real estate. The tribe of Judah got prime real estate down south. The tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali got the pine-cone backwoods territory up north. The prophet Isaiah had foretold that the Savior would do most of his preaching not in high and mighty Judah but in lowly *Zebulun and Naphtali*.

Now why did the prophet describe them as living in darkness? The darkness of sin is everywhere, Jerusalem, Caesarea, or Galilee. However, the situation in Galilee was not as favorable as elsewhere...

When the Israelites had first marched into the Promised Land 1400 years earlier, the Canaanites had neither been exterminated nor eradicated from the region completely. Instead, peoples of this region were reduced to a state of serfdom; they were day laborers, working and living among the Jews. In the days of King Solomon, the wise ruler gave King Hiram a gift of 20 cities in recognition for of his invaluable assistance in the building of the temple. More Gentiles came into this region. The Galileans were the first to be taken into exile in 722 BC when Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, and then settled Assyrians in with the Jews. When the Greeks came and ruled, many Gentiles also settled in this region, bringing with them Greek vices and Greek worldviews. The situation became even more deplorable. Pagan practices and customs were so deeply engulfed in spiritual desolation. No light of the knowledge of the true God. They thought they could generate enough spiritual light on their own, not come to grips with the fact that they desperately needed spiritual light. They needed light.

And what they needed, God supplied. **The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.** Those people deserved to be wiped out. Instead, Jesus, the Light of the world, made his home in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. They had the Savior in their midst. The people who were lost in the darkness of sin could listen to him proclaim the light of heaven. In their towns he changed water into wine, healed a centurion’s servant, healed a paralyzed man, raised Jairus’

daughter from the dead, fed over five thousand people, and preached about the Bread of life. He was right in their midst offering the light of forgiveness to those who needed it most.

Have you ever been driving in your car at night, and found yourself fumbling around for the directions you had printed off of Google Maps and the dome light goes out. It's a dark part of town and you wonder, "Where am I? This doesn't look right. Maybe I should lock the doors!" Darkness can be scary. It can lead to frustration and fear. How much more so for us in this world of spiritual darkness!

When I was describing the areas of Naphtali and Zebulun and how they were influenced by the unbelieving world, did you make the connection to the country you live in today? Maybe not... because oftentimes we barely notice. We've become so accustomed to the darkness in this world that we don't recognize it anymore. We absorb more of our culture than we realize. The devil sticks this darkness into us with the skill of a good nurse inserting a needle.

For example: pay careful attention to the next television show you watch or the radio station you listen to. In it you may find one or more or all of the following: the promotion or acceptance of gay relationships, drunkenness, children disrespecting their parents, parents failing to be parents and instead being their child's buddy or friend, single folks foot loose and fancy free with their sexuality, "justified" revenge, greed, humanism, evolutionism, universalism (the idea that just about everyone will be going to heaven if they're remotely a good person), and post modernism, (the idea that truth and belief are not based on fact, but are what I make them), folks aren't accountable to anyone but themselves, and God is removed from our culture, he is reduced to a small corner of our lives known as Sunday morning for one hour. And while watching these programs on television, are we shocked or offended? Knowing that these sins and worldviews are being spoon fed into the brains of our children motivate us to monitor what our children and teenagers are watching and listening to?

Do you see how closely our culture resembles the spiritual condition of the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali? Do you see how easy it is for the sinfulness of our culture to creep its way into our hearts? Do you see how the darkness of sin can drain the light of Christ from us? We don't recognize darkness as darkness anymore because we are surrounded by it. We live in it. We are entertained by people who live in darkness. We associate with friends and family who live in darkness. And if we don't recognize how dangerous the darkness of this sinful world is to us as individuals, to our families and children, to our church and to the Holy Scriptures, if we claim that we don't really need the light of Christ, if we claim that we can handle the sinfulness of the world all by ourselves, if we say that it's really not that bad, that it doesn't affect me all that much, then the darkness will overcome us, and we will be living in the land of the shadow of death. That's a scary place to be!

Jesus' message to the people living in Galilee, living in darkness is the same message to us! Repent! Turn from the darkness, turn to the light! Now is the time to repent for stumbling and falling down in the darkness of this world, now is the time to repent for not recognizing the darkness, now is the time to repent for loving darkness more than the light. And now is the time, in faith, to turn away from the darkness of this sinful world, and to turn to the light of Christ, for forgiveness and strength.

When we, in humble and repentant faith turn to Christ Jesus, he turns to us through his Word and in his Sacraments and there the gospel acts as a stage hand in a Broadway theater, shining the spotlight on the star performer. The Gospel shines the spotlight on Christ's life, and begs us to look and see! Living in the land of the shadow of death Jesus did not allow the darkness of that culture to be any part of his life. Instead, he chose to shine the light of the gospel, proclaiming the good news of salvation by faith alone in Christ Jesus. Instead of letting the world tell him who he should be, he always submitted to what his Father willed. The gospel shines its light on Christ's life and shows us that by his life, he provided a way out of the darkness for all

of us. The gospel turns its spotlight and shines on the cross, with all of its nails, splinters and blood-stained wood. The gospel begs us to look at the cross for there our Savior allowed the darkness of our sins and gloom of hell to come over him. There on the cross, because of our sins, he walked through the valley of the shadow of death for you and for me. The gospel then directs its spotlight to the empty tomb to see that victory over our graves has been won for us! The light of the gospel cuts through the darkness of our sins, the darkness of hell and grave, and directs us to Christ, whose light gives forgiveness and life eternal, and salvation from the devil, from the world and our sinful flesh.

The gospel now turns its spotlight and directs its beam on the baptismal font. There, by his grace, Christ Jesus came and sought you. Through baptism, the light of the gospel scattered the darkness of unbelief from your heart. Through holy baptism the Holy Spirit first shone the light of life into your heart. Then, by faith, your eyes were opened and you were able to see the light of Christ's life and death and resurrection. Now, by faith, you know and believe that Christ has released you from the power of the darkness of your sin forever. By faith, you know that he has scattered the darkness of your sins by forgiving them. You know that he has forever dispelled the dark cloud of your grave, and of hell itself. By faith, you know and believe that the eternal lights of heaven are yours, that the light of Christ now lives in you.

Do you remember when you were lost, it was dark outside, and you were fumbling with your map? The dome light suddenly flickers back on. You see down the road that you are driving up on an intersection were the lights of a gas station and the golden arches brightly shine. You see a squad car parked across the street and you feel safe and secure.

When you feel attacked by the darkness of this world, surrounded by the darkness of your sins, engulfed by the sinister cloud of death, and you feel like a fading flashlight with dying batteries, that's when you will turn to the light. You will turn to the gospel in Word and Sacrament and allow it to shine its spotlight on Christ and his cross and empty tomb, and you will not be afraid. You will be comforted. You will be strengthened, and reminded that the light of Christ lives in you, and that he still loves you.

Some say that the tragic shooting in Tucson has led people in Congress to treat each other with more civility and brought a little light into dark political discussions. But you and I don't need a tragedy to produce light amid darkness. I'm looking at shining faces right now, and I know why. It's not because you washed up and put on your Sunday best. It's because Jesus proclaimed light from heaven which brightens your every day and forms a part of your daily lives. You know that believe that Jesus brings light. Jesus, shine in our hearts through your Word and Sacraments, that we may shine for you in the darkness of this sinful world, until we behold the light of your face forever in heaven! Amen!