**Third Sunday after the Epiphany – Jesus appears as the light that shines in the darkness!**

**Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY January 26, 2014**

**Based on Isaiah 8:19-9:2 written by Vicar Ben Zuberbier**

**A light has dawned!**

1. **Through the testimony of the Word**
2. **Revealing the power of prayer**

*19 When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. 21 Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. 22 Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness. 9:1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan – 2 “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”*

A man once told me a story of how he got lost on his own property. He lived out in the forest, and claimed about 160 acres of those woods for himself. After work, he’d usually come home and begin walking through the woods, usually down one of the trails he had cleared. One day, he decided to walk off the trail a little bit, but before he was able to turn around and find his way back on to a trail, the sun set and darkness settled on the woods. Soon, the trees and different clearings he had learned to know well, changed their character completely, night made it seem like he was in an entirely different woods. He walked around through the night but could never quite figure out where he was. So he leaned back against a tree, fell asleep, and when he woke up at dawn to the sun rising, he realized he was only 400 feet from his house.

It’s definitely not easy to find your way around when darkness sets in. If the streetlights go out when you’re walking home in a slightly unfamiliar neighborhood, it’s more difficult to find the right street to walk back home on. If the power goes out in your house, it’s not hard to stub you’re toe on a chair leg or bedpost when you’re looking for some candles to light. Life is just a little bit easier now that we have flashlights and cell phones with assistive lights to give us ample light for just about any situation when we find ourselves in the dark at nighttime. But take these away, and you’d just have to wait for the sun to rise and light to dawn on the earth. The prophet Isaiah this morning tells the story about a **great light that has dawned, which shines through the testimony of the Word and reveals the power of prayer.**

# Through the testimony of the Word

Isaiah’s message about a great light was one the people of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali within the land of Israel needed to hear—especially considering what Isaiah had just told them. Because of their idol worship, their rebellion against God, their persistent sin of unbelief throughout many generations, God would punish them. The king of Assyria would send his armies into Israel to plunder their towns and carry off their wealth. Many Israelites would fall by the sword, and those left alive would have barely enough to survive. And what would make it even worse for those living in the land allotted to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, is that they would be the first tribes to be overrun by the Assyrians, and their land would be trampled the hardest.

And so to prepare them for these dark times, he gave them some advice that God had given him to share. He said, **“When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?” (v 19)**. You see, back then when the unbelieving people of the world wanted to know more about the future they would inquire of these mediums or spiritists. They thought these people would be able to communicate with their dead ancestors, or great rulers of the past. They thought the spirits of the dead held special insight into the future and would be able to give them advice to avoid ruin, danger, and dark patches in their future. But Isaiah knew the tents of mediums and spiritists were not the place to go when in need of advice. He knew the dead were exactly that—dead. They had nothing to offer. So he points the people of Zebulun and Naphtali back to where the best advice comes from—**“To the law and to the testimony!” (v 20)**. He reminded the people to go back to the testimony of the Word and he said, **“If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.”** His advice to prepare the people of Zebulun and Naphtali for the dark times was—**Go where the light dawns—the testimony of the Word.**

Maybe sometimes you can almost sense that dark times lie ahead. Maybe your future even seems a little uncertain. “Where will I be in ten years from now? Will I be starter on the basketball team in high school? Will I graduate and settle down into a career? Will I have the same career and same house? Will my marriage stay strong? Will I settle into a happy retirement? Have I made the right choices in life to set me up for a good future? Will I continue to make the right choices?” To answer some of these questions, maybe you have banked on solutions for the future that the world has tried to give us. Reading your horoscope every morning and waiting for it to come true. Thinking that because you’re a certain Zodiac you’ll meet the same kind of success as a celebrity who shares your Zodiac. Popping out the Ouija board to get some quick answers spelled out for you. Or maybe you just spend way too much time relying on “fixing” yourself by burying your head in countless pages of self-help books. If you bank on these things, I’ll just rephrase what Isaiah said, “If they do not speak according to the testimony of the Word, they have no light of dawn.” Because they come from a world that is spiritually dark and from the ruler of this spiritually dark world—Satan, the Prince of Darkness.

Now Isaiah follows up with a message of the great light that scatters all the darkness of your lives and mine. He proclaims **the testimony of the Word** to the people of Zebulun and Naphtali. He shows them a

glimmer of light in the distant future: **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (9:2).** He’s talking about Jesus—the great light! And this light would first appear in Galilee, the very land which Zebulun and Naphtali would become. Jesus would reveal a message that casts everlasting light for all generations. The Gospel of the Day tells us, **“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23).** Through Jesus’ testimony, through the speaking of the Word—the good news that he came to suffer and die for them on the cross—Jesus brought light and hope to the earth. And so in Jesus Isaiah’s words were fulfilled, **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” (9:2).**

And the **light of the testimony** of Isaiah and Jesus himself shine through to you in the dark patches of your life through the written and spoken Word. **The Holy Spirit worked through this Word** to scatter the darkness of unbelief and reveal the light of faith. **The light of the Word shines** in your life through the message of the cross and the forgiveness of sins. And when the darkness moves in and you are tempted to turn to the instruments of darkness, superstition and witchcraft, the bright shining light of the Word overpowers their dark manipulation and influence. You see, **through the testimony of the Word a light has dawned**!

# Revealing the power of prayer

When it comes to planning for the future. When it comes to answering those questions about where you and I will be in our lives, **the light that shines through the Word reveals a certain power** that God has given to his believers. **The light of the Word reveals the power of prayer.**

Unfortunately, the prophet Isaiah reveals that the people of Zebulun and Naphtali would not make use of this power. In fact, when they would need it most as the Assyrians would come through and destroy their land and their lives, they would do as Isaiah describes, he says, **“Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their God” (v 21).** Instead of turning to God for help and deliverance, they would look up to him and curse him for allowing this to happen. It was a time for them to turn to God in prayer—not curse him.

You see, the Bible tells us a story about a similar situation that King Jehoshaphat and the people of Jerusalem were in. The kings of Ammon and Moab were pressing in on the city with their troops. The foreign armies were massive and it seemed the people of Jerusalem would not stand a chance. So, what did the king of the city do? The only thing he could. He gathered the people around him in the courtyard of the temple and looked up to heaven. He prayed, **“O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. . . we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you” (2 Chronicles 20:6, 12).** And do you know what happened when the LORD received the prayer of King Jehoshaphat that day? He caused the soldiers of the armies of Moab and Ammon to be greatly confused and they started turning on each other with the sword thinking their own men were the enemy soldiers. By the time King Jehoshaphat and his army arrived at the battlefield, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground. In this war story**, prayer was so powerful** the soldiers of Jerusalem didn’t even have to draw their swords to fight.

If God wiped out an entire army in response to the prayer of a believer, why put limits on what prayer can do? After all, when you’ve started planning for the future, or worry’s started to creep in, have you considered how powerful prayer is? In fact God’s given us access to this very power and he encourages us to pray confidently, the Apostle John wrote, **“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 3:14)**. And think about *who* is hearing us. It’s God. The all powerful, Almighty God who hears all the prayers of his believers. He’s given us the access through his Son Jesus to request that he put his power on display in our lives. **He’s revealed to us the power of prayer.**

So, brothers and sisters, I do not want to put this lightly—pray! If you’re family’s preparing for another deployment, pray for God’s protection. If you’re getting nervous about starting high school—pray! If you’re uncertain about anything in your future, pray that God will make things work out! If dark times are moving in on your life, in fact, if you’re in a dark patch right now, pray! Pray knowing **“that in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28).** Prayer is a ***powerful* weapon that God’s Word reveals to his believers.**

When darkness enters your life, its’ hard to navigate if you don’t have a source of light. **A light has dawned! It shines through the testimony of the Word, revealing the power of prayer.** May this light continue to shine in your life! Amen.