

THE 3RD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY AD 2026
 TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
 KURTZVILLE, ONTARIO
 REV. KURT E. REINHARDT

Isaiah 9:1-4

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

[2] The people who walked in darkness
 have seen a great light;
 those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
 on them has light shined.

[3] You have multiplied the nation;
 you have increased its joy;
 they rejoice before you
 as with joy at the harvest,
 as they are glad when they divide the spoil.

[4] For the yoke of his burden,
 and the staff for his shoulder,
 the rod of his oppressor,
 you have broken as on the day of Midian.

1 Cor. 1:10-18

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. [11] For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. [12] What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." [13] Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? [14] I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, [15] so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. [16] (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) [17] For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

[18] For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Matthew 4:12-25

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. [13] And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, [14] so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

[15] "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
 the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
 [16] the people dwelling in darkness

have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned."

[17] From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

[18] While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. [19] And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." [20] Immediately they left their nets and followed him. [21] And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. [22] Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

[23] And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. [24] So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. [25] And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

The darkness is good for sleeping. The darkness is good for hiding. The darkness is good for getting lost. The darkness isn't so good for waking. The darkness isn't so good for seeing. The darkness isn't so good for following. To wake, find and follow you really need the light. The smallest of lights will do, but the brighter the light the better. A cellphone light can help you along your way but the sun makes it all the clearer.

As we look toward the land of Zebulun and Naphtali we see just such a great light coming to shine on a people trapped in darkness. Matthew tells us that the reason that the Lord Jesus moved from Nazareth to Capernaum was to fulfill the words of the prophet Isaiah, *"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."*

The people of Zebulun and Naphtali dwelt in gloom and darkness, not because the sun was hidden by the clouds. like it has been for us so many of the days this January, but because the Lord had brought them into contempt for turning from Him. They ran after the gods of other nations so He handed them over to those nations. They turned away from Him and so He turned away from them. They shunned His light and life so He gave them over to the darkness and the shadow of death. But His mercy still yearned for them and His love was still jealous for them.

And so Jesus left His childhood home to go and shine on the people in Capernaum, to wake them up, to reveal God's love to them, to lead them out of the darkness into His marvellous light. Without the light they would remain lost in sin, they would stay hidden in shame and they would continue to slip into the sleep of death. Without the light there was no hope for them to wake, no hope for them to see, no hope for them to follow. Without the light there was no hope, no hope at all. All was hopeless.

But to fulfill the words of the prophet the Lord Jesus comes and He shines and He calls, "Repent! Turn away from the darkness. Turn to me!" And the people sitting in the darkness see the light shining upon them - a light as they had never seen before. The people in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali are like a people who have lived their whole lives in total darkness, without ever seeing any light, and suddenly a light appears. Such a people couldn't help but be turned by such a marvel. Such a people couldn't help but be drawn to such a wonder. Such a people couldn't help but follow such a light.

What we see today is that Light travelling through the dark land of Zebulun and Naphtali and gathering as He goes all those lost in the darkness. He calls out to Peter and Andrew. He calls out to James and John. "Follow me. Come and wake up. Come and see. Come and follow and I will shine through you. I will make you Fishers of men. You too will travel through the darkness and draw others after you as you follow after me." And so we see the crowds coming out of the shadows, flocking to Jesus, coming out of the night, shielding their eyes, adjusting to the light. We see the crowds bringing others out of the darkness that they too might see and be set free.

Today we see the incredible grace of God at work in the Land of Zebulun and Naphtali. The people there had sought out the darkness, chased after the darkness, chosen the darkness and the darkness was deep. There was no light at all, not even a sliver under a closed door, not even a nightlight dimly shining or even the ghostly glow of a dying moon. It was dark as death. But the Son of God entered into this darkness to shine His light to save these poor people, even though it meant that He would have to endure the darkness of the cross and the darkness of the tomb. He went to Capernaum, even though He knew it was another step toward Calvary, because His heart was moved with such pity for all those lost in the darkness.

Yes, as the Lord Jesus walks into the darkness of Zebulun and Naphtali today, He is starting His journey into the night that will swallow Him up as He hangs on the cross on Calvary. He is stepping into the gloom of sin and its shame so that He can be weighed down and crushed by it to earn forgiveness for sin and freedom from guilt and shame. He is heading into the darkness that will extinguish Him in death on the cross so that after three days He can rise up and be the light of the world that no darkness can overcome. He is striding into death's den so that its stone can be rolled away and its shadows be put to flight by His light.

You too beloved were born into darkness, unable to see, unable to follow and unable to find your way. You were born into the darkness, lost in sin, hidden in shame and slowly slipping into the sleep of death. But a light came to you in your darkness, the light that moved on to shine in Capernaum, so that He could enter the darkness of Calvary to save you. Christ came to shine on you through His Word in the waters of Holy Baptism and He said, "Repent! Turn to me. Come to me. Come follow me and I will lead you out of the darkness into My marvellous, life-giving, eternal light."

By God's rich grace you are in this place, beloved, following the Lord Jesus, receiving His forgiveness, being refreshed in His light and being led out the darkness of this world to your Father's house. Like the people of Zebulun and Naphtali, you do not always choose the right path. You do not always follow your Lord as well as you should. You often wander back into the darkness through your sin and then in guilt and shame you tend to want to remain there. But the Light of the World that the darkness could not overcome still seeks you out in that great pity that overflows from His heart. He seeks you out and draws you here to Himself, that you might see, that you might believe and that you might follow Him.

The darkness is not so good for waking, for seeing or for following but thanks be to God our Lord Jesus Christ moved from Nazareth to Capernaum so that His great light could dawn on those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, so that His great light could dawn on you, that you might repent and follow Him. And so hear Him as He calls out to you from the altar today, "Repent! Turn to me, my dear ones, and I will show you the way. I will lead you home." Amen.