

**The Third Sunday after the Epiphany, January 26, 2020**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminster, Massachusetts

## **The Kingdom Dawns**

Matthew 4:12–25

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

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**So that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: . . . “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.” From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (vv 14, 16–17).**

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To be in the dark is truly terrifying.

Darkness was the ninth plague God sent to Egypt,

**a darkness to be felt**, thick, cold, and heavy.

We’re told that **they didn’t see one another**,

**nor did anyone rise from his place for three days** (Exod 10:21–23).

Darkness is isolating. It paralyzes.

Isaiah describes death as a **covering cast over all peoples**,

as a **veil spread over all nations** (Isa 25:7).

Death is like a cloud smothering and stifling the entire earth,

blocking out the source of light and life.

Scripture connects sin with darkness. Evil happens in the dark.

Darkness causes people to stumble.

The devil’s reign is known as **the domain of darkness** (Col 1:13).

And hell itself is called **the outer darkness**

where **there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth** (Mt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

To be in the dark means to have no clue about what’s happening,

to be powerless, to be subject to the plans and will of others,

to be without direction or guidance, to have no idea what step to take next.

It can describe our minds and our emotions—darkness inside.

It’s why eclipses and storms are so eerie.

Children are rightly afraid of the dark, but they're not the only ones.

Where's the darkest place you've ever been?

For me, it was the Mammoth Caves in Kentucky.

After going through tunnels and down staircases,  
the tour guide sat us on a bench in a large cavern.

Then—“Click!”—they turned out the lights.

It was the deepest black I've ever seen.

Not a pinprick of the faintest light.

No shadows.

No shades of black or gray.

No emergency exit signs or smoke detector lights.

Just pure black nothingness.

You couldn't see your hand in front of your face or the stone beneath your feet  
or the neighbor next to you.

It's as if the sense of sight were entirely gone. Blind.

My eyes blinked, but I saw nothing.

And I felt alone, isolated, paralyzed, in deep dread.

What if they left us there? Left me there? In darkness.

What is darkness?

Darkness is the absence of light.

It's the void that remains when all light is extinguished,  
when the electricity goes out and the power lights on our gadgets fade  
and the numbers disappear from our digital clocks,  
and the sun, moon, and stars are snuffed out.

Into the darkness is where Jesus goes.

**When He heard that John the Baptist had been arrested,**

**He withdrew into Galilee,** the darkest region (v 12).

**He went and lived in Capernaum by the sea,**

**in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali** (v 13).

Galilee was the first stop for invading armies from the north.

The Assyrians and the Babylonians marched down the road that came from Damascus  
and skirted the west side of the Sea of Galilee.

This was **the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali** (v 15),

the first to feel the wrath,

the first to feel the sharp edge of iron weapons,

the first to have their sons and daughters dragged away to foreign lands as slaves.

It was no accident that Jesus began His ministry there,  
 among **the people dwelling in darkness, in the region and shadow of death** (v 16).  
 He withdraws in order to shine.

Where does the light shine brightest but where it's darkest?  
 All it takes is a single candle, a small lamp, a little flashlight to send the night scurrying.

But this is no small light.

Isaiah calls Him **a great light** (v 16).

**A light has dawned** (v 16)—

the beginning of a new day, the rising sun scattering the darkness.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world, and no one puts a light under a basket.

The first to see the light are the people of Galilee, lowly, dark, backwards Galilee.

There the basket is lifted, the fire blazes, the sun shines.

God incarnate! Man divine!

**In Him**—in His humanity—**the fullness of God was pleased to dwell** (Col 1:19).

Our season of Epiphany celebrates His shining forth.

Jesus is revealed as God's beloved Son at His baptism.

Jesus does the works of God:

He turns water into wine, heals the sick, rules nature.

Jesus teaches as God:

He opens His mouth and speaks, "**Truly, truly, I say to you . . .**"

Look at Him! **Listen to Him** (Matt 17:5)!

**From that time Jesus began to preach, saying,**

**"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"** (v 17).

When the light shines, it calls us to repentance.

To renounce and turn from our sin and to believe in Him.

Of what do you need to repent?

What have you been keeping in the dark,

hiding, squirreling away, harboring, nursing inside yourself?

What thoughts? What words? What deeds?

What has been isolating you? Paralyzing you?

**There should be no divisions among you,**

**but instead there's quarreling among you** (1 Cor 1:10, 11), rudeness, fighting.

We each chase our own agendas and ideas; too often we follow ourselves, not Him.

But now the light has come.

It shines on you: **Repent!**

It's good for these things to be exposed and brought out into the light.  
The preaching of the Law is a light that shows our sin.  
By it, we see ourselves accurately and truly.  
To deny our sin is to live in darkness,  
but to confess our sin is to live in the light.

**For the kingdom of heaven is at hand** (v 17). It's near.  
The kingdom is found wherever the King is.  
Where He rules, the kingdom comes. It's at hand.  
Now the kingdom of heaven isn't simply His kingdom of power,  
but His kingdom of grace.  
Where the favor of God shines on His people in Christ.  
Where He rules with steadfast mercy and forgiveness.  
Wherever the light of Christ is, there is the kingdom of heaven.

It was there in Galilee, even though they said,  
"**Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee**" (Jn 7:52)  
No prophet, perhaps, but God arises from Galilee!

The kingdom of heaven was **by the Sea of Galilee**,  
Jesus saw **two brothers, Simon (called Peter) and Andrew his brother**.  
The light shone on them while they were **casting a net into the sea** (v 18).  
"**Follow Me,**" it said, "**and I will make you fishers of men**" (v 19).  
And James and John, too, were called.  
**Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him** (v 22).

Whatever the darkness in your life,  
whether of sin or suffering or sorrow,  
stay close to the light.  
Follow Him.  
He will illuminate your path.  
He will lead you and guide you,  
even through the ups and downs of daily life,  
through change and challenge, through joy and loss.  
He is there for you day by day. He is here for you.

The light was there in Galilee,  
**teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom  
and healing every disease and every affliction among the people** (v 23).  
Like divine radiation.

The kingdom of heaven met **all the sick,**  
**those afflicted with various diseases and pains,**  
**those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics,**  
**and He healed them** (v 24).

Those were signs of the kingdom.  
They were evidence that God was there,  
there in the flesh of Jesus.

But make no mistake:

He is the light of the world  
whether or not He heals your particular illnesses or mine.

He didn't say, "Follow the healings," but "Follow Me."

What He does promise is this:

**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**

**Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age** (Mt 28:20).

He promises the kingdom of heaven in Himself.

You are given the same light that Galilee was given.

Though we feel the same darkness in ourselves and in our world,  
we, too **have seen a great light** (v 16).

The light that no darkness can overcome,  
not even the darkness of sin, death, or the devil.

Not even when **there was darkness over all the land**

**from noon to 3:00 pm** on a Friday outside Jerusalem (Mt 27:45).

Not even when the King hung on a cross,

and He cried out, "**My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?**" (Mt 27:46).

Oh, it was dark alright there on the cross, and dark in the tomb,

but we don't need to rage against the dying of the light.

For in that dark cavern,

in the isolation and paralysis of that darkness,

He stood up.

On the third day He rose from the dead,

the light blazed forth,

and He calls us out of the darkness,

"Come with Me!"

At times you may feel the darkness, you may see the darkness,  
but you don't belong to the darkness.

You are of the light.

You have been **transferred to the kingdom of the beloved Son** (Col 1:13).

You may have no clue about what's happening,  
but the One who died and rose again knows.

You may be powerless, but He is powerful.

You may feel subject to the plans and will of others,  
but you pray with Him, "Thy will be done."

You may have no idea what step to take next,  
but He's strong enough to carry you like a little lamb on His shoulders.

**A great light** still shines in the darkness. The light of Christ.

Not just in Galilee, but right here in Westminster.

God still rules—He still rules with grace and mercy.

Because Jesus died and rose again, your sins are forgiven,

the kingdom of heaven belongs to you,

from the dark night of His betrayal,

He gives you light and life in His own body and blood.

**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** (1 Cor 1:18).

So cast off the works of darkness, and walk in the light, small step by small step.

He removes the paralysis.

And by the light, look up and see your neighbor, and follow Jesus in love.

He removes our isolation.

Be **united in the same mind and the same judgment** (1 Cor 1:10).

There is much darkness,

but Jesus Christ is and ever shall be the light of the world.

And **the city that is above has no need of sun or moon to shine on it,**

**for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb** (Rev. 21:23).

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ  
Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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