

Matthew 4:12-23 When 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.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Lights. They’re everywhere. In our homes, on our cars, now even on our phones! And some of them are so bright! Back in the late 90s I worked for mosquito control on the night shift and needed a flashlight. I bought one of those mag lights that took the 4 D size batteries. It was huge and bright. Now they make the little LED flash lights that are even brighter and fit in your pocket. But lights are everywhere. So much so that we don’t even really think about them. We walk into a room and turn them on and go about our business. Rarely are we ever “in the dark” unless the power goes out. Even when we’re camping, campgrounds are lit up with all the lights people bring for when the sun goes down.

All this makes it easy to overlook the main point of our text this morning. **The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.** And we think, ok, great light. Got it. But during the Old Testament when Isaiah first

wrote these words, and in the New Testament, when Jesus fulfilled them, they didn’t have many lights. Of course they had the sun, but other than that all they had were torches and little oil lamps, neither of which would ever be described as great lights.

So when Isaiah talked about a great light dawning, his point was this: It was a big deal. It meant something new, something wonderful, something never seen or imagined before was coming. Something that would draw people in, cause them to drop everything and follow him.

And then, as our text points out, that light, dawned. Jesus returned to the land of Galilee, the region from where Mary and Joseph were from, not as a baby in Mary’s womb, but as the one declared to be the Son of God, the Savior, at his baptism not long before — a few weeks.

What made this light so great? Not only had Jesus’ baptism proved him to be the Son of God, but the way he spoke, the way he preached, the way he taught, people took notice — “He speaks not like the other teachers,” they would say. “He has authority, he articulates the promises of God and applies them like we have never heard before.” And then his miracles! **“Healing every disease and every sickness among the people.”** It was asked in Bible Class Wednesday, by the end of Jesus’ three year ministry, was anyone left who was sick or diseased? Probably not many! Jesus was well known. How could they not take him up on his power, the power as the Son of God.

And all this put together fulfilled the words of Isaiah, as Matthew points out. He is a great light, *the* great light, indeed. But how great? Peter and Andrew, James and John, left their families, their livelihoods, their lives as they had known them to follow Jesus. And these men weren’t amateur fishermen either. They weren’t just struggling to get by, so... might as well follow Jesus. No, they had a lucrative business — they owned their own boats and gear. They were good at it, making a living on it as the family business.

They left it all behind! What that must have took — A great light indeed! Did they dream about this after first meeting Jesus? Did they think and hope and wonder how they could see him more, wanting to know this man, work with him, follow him. To be as close to him as possible? But after that first meeting which we heard about last Sunday — recall they spent a whole day with him — it was back to their boats and nets. Back to the work. Back to their families. Until Jesus came to them.

They were ready. Something about Jesus — they had a pretty good idea who he was, already calling him the Messiah — led them to drop everything and follow him. The Holy Spirit and worked in their hearts after that first meeting the desire to hear more, to learn more, to see more, to do more. We don't talk about it much, how these disciples just dropped everything and followed Jesus, but Isaiah reveals why — A great light had dawned. They couldn't look away. They were drawn to him. They put their faith in him.

Again, we hear of a great light and think, big deal. We have lights everywhere. But don't miss Isaiah's point — Jesus is greater, and still his light shines today.

What would it take for *you* to walk away from your former way of life? Well, technically that already happened. Each of us was born in this world a sinner, a child of the devil, and enemy of God and a servant of Satan. But at your baptism, the Holy Spirit shined the bright light of Jesus into your heart, and you left it all behind. There you were washed clean, no longer sinful in God's eyes. You were made a child of God, connected to Jesus, washed clean in his blood, perfect and holy.

That former way of life — you left it all behind. Really? Perhaps on some days, like me, you hear the devil trying to convince you that it's all a lie. When we see the way we act — or react — towards those around us, the way we talk, the thoughts we think, have you really left it all behind and followed Jesus?

It's so hard isn't it? To turn our backs on our sin, to put our foot down on those sins we grow so comfortable in and say, "No, I'm not falling for it this time, today." It's hard because our sinful natures give us so many options when it comes to sin. So many excuses why it's ok this time, or for me in my life. And so many opportunities to get me to turn back just when I think I've overcome it.

What would it take for you to turn your back on your sinful nature, to leave your sins behind? Something pretty great right? Something pretty powerful? What would it take to turn our hearts, our souls, our minds from the darkness of sin at the drop of a hat and follow Jesus?

The 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.

A great light had dawned then, and a great light still shines today. How great is his light? He came to our sin darkened world. Dwelled with sinful human beings. Befriended them, lived with them, worked with them. *Lived* for them. *Died* for them. And rose again. All to carry out God's supreme plan of salvation — to bid the darkness be gone, and to restore us to the light of God's grace. To make sure that the darkness of sin is not our fate, the fires of hell are not our destiny, and to secure for us, for all who believe, the great and glorious light of heaven as our eternal home. That's how great a light Jesus is —

So great that all our sins have been forgiven. So great that his perfect life counts for us, and his death in our place paid what would have cost us an eternity in hell. So great that we have perfection before God right now — in Christ and thanks to Christ the life you are living is brand new, perfect and holy in God's sight. And when we die, death is not our end, eternal death is not our fate. Instead, eternal salvation awaits.

So, as we live our lives, as we are confronted with sin and every temptation, Christ's light is greater. As we face every every doubt and uncertainty — Christ's light is greater. Sickness, pain, disease and their dreaded symptoms and consequences... Christ's light is greater. Earthly relationships and all that the world would say we are missing out on, all the set backs and things that make this life hard, and complicated, sorrowful, and frustrating — Christ's light is greater.

Forgiveness of sins, a new life, eternal salvation and the faith to believe it, as well as the peace, comfort, security and confidence that goes with it, a great light *has* dawned, and still it shines in our hearts and in our lives today.

Don't underestimate it and certainly don't deny its power. Like Andrew and Peter, James and John, be drawn to it. Be drawn to it and leave your life of sin behind you, following Christ, serving your neighbor. And on those days, in those moments, when you have not followed or have not served, be drawn to his light even more. For there in the darkness of sin, Christ's light shines the brightest. There in Christ we find God's grace even to you and even to me, for all our sins, every single time.

Yes we have all kinds of lights in our day, but none shines brighter than this one: Jesus, God's one and only Son, our Savior. His great light had

dawned, and still it shines today, and will shine throughout this life and into the eternity that awaits us. Amen.