

**THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD – January 2, 5 & 6, 2008
St. Mark’s Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI**

THE LIGHT GOES ON! - ISAIAH 9:1-5

This is a dreary time of the year. We have just observed the shortest day of the year, December 22nd. That is the day when we have the least amount of sunlight. Most of us know what the lack of sunshine does for us and for our mood and outlook on life. When you get up at five or six in the morning it’s dark. When you come home around 4:30 in the afternoon it’s dark again. That can be rather depressing. That is why some people leave this part of the country in winter and return again in spring and summer when there is more light and the weather is more tolerable.

For the people in Isaiah’s day, about 740 to 680 BC, this was not a bright time. The people had turned away from the Lord and his Word and the Lord had allowed the Assyrians to invade and take the northern ten tribes, known as the nation of Israel, away into captivity. This happened in 722 BC. After Isaiah’s day in 586 BC the southern 2 tribes, known as the nation of Judah, were also taken away into captivity into Babylon and the city of Jerusalem and the temple of God were destroyed. This was a time of darkness and despair.

As Isaiah’s begins this portion of his prophecy he refers to the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali. He writes, “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.” (Is 9:1) This area way in the north of Israel was a place where armies rolled through continually as they attacked people in the south. The people who lived in this area experienced almost constant unrest and war just as you see in the Middle East today. But the Lord says that one day a light will rise in Galilee of the Gentiles. Where did Jesus begin his ministry? Where was his headquarters as he began proclaiming the good news of peace and forgiveness? It was in Capernaum in Galilee. As Matthew writes in his Gospel, “Leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah, Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, 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.” (Matthew 4:13-16)

As we consider Isaiah’s prophecy we want to focus on this great truth – **THE LIGHT GOES ON!** Isaiah records **I) For Whom This Light Has Been Turned On** and he reveals **II) The Response of Those On Whom the Light Is Shining.**

FOR WHOM HAS THE LIGHT BEEN TURNED ON

At Christmas time you may see and hear children fighting over some specific toy. One screams it’s mine and the other hits his brother or sister and grabs the toy and runs. By nature we are basically selfish. We think only of ourselves and not of someone else and their needs and feelings. When God chose Abram he promised him that he would make him a great nation and that someone would come from him who would be a blessing for all the people of the earth. As time went on the children of Abraham began to look on this person who would be a blessing as someone who would be a blessing for them and no one else. This promised blessing who would deliver all people was not just for the children of Abraham, the Jews. He was to be a blessing for all the people of this world.

Isaiah makes that very clear in his words to us today. He begins by saying he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles. Jesus’ ministry was not just to the Jewish people but also to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish world. Shortly after Jesus was born that truth was made clear when the Magi came from the East to worship the Christ-child. Now Isaiah writes, “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.” (Is 9:2) For whom has this light been turned on? It is shining on those walking

in darkness. Who are they? You and I walk in darkness. We walked in the darkness of calamity; the darkness of death and the darkness of sin.

Every one of us faces calamities. We encounter misfortunes, tragedies and troubles. We may be told that we have lost our job. We may be informed by the doctor that we have cancer, heart disease or some other illness. These are the dark calamities that we may suddenly and unexpectedly face. However, since the light, Jesus Christ, has come and is shining on our lives, we have a different perspective and take on these calamities. We know that the Lord has either sent or allowed this to happen for a good reason in our lives and in the end it will work out for our eternal good. We may not see that right now and we may never see that good in our lives, but we know that it will work for good, because the Lord says so and he never breaks a promise. So the light is shining on us who walk in the darkness of calamity.

That light, Jesus, also shines on us as we walk in the darkness of death. Death is all around us. Everyday when you turn on the news you hear about death. People murdered on the streets of our country. People are being killed by insurgents and rioters throughout the world. Then we face the truth that we also are in the process of dying. We have just ended another year and all of us are one year closer to the day of our death. But as we walk in the darkness of death, the light, Jesus, has shone into our lives and given us understanding and peace as we face death. The light has destroyed the power of death. Jesus has conquered death for every one of us. Death no longer has a hold on us. We understand that death is still the consequence of the fact that we are sinful, but death's sting has been taken away by Jesus. Now death is the door we pass through to enter into the presence of our Savior Jesus in heaven.

The darkness of sin has also been overcome by the light of salvation. Sin has lost its grip on us. Sin's grip is guilt and shame, the fear of punishment and eternal separation from our God. The true light, Jesus, has taken our guilt and shame and suffered our punishment. He has secured for each of us the verdict of not guilty and the assurance of forgiveness and eternal life in glory.

When the light shines in our lives, suddenly we are able to see more clearly and we understand better what is happening in our lives and in this world. We rest securely in the warmth of the light, our Savior Jesus.

THE RESPONSE OF THOSE ON WHOM THE LIGHT IS SHINING

When the light shines on you there is a definite response and reaction from those who have been freed from the darkness. Listen to what Isaiah writes, "You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder." (Is 9:3)

As the light of Jesus Christ shines in the world more and more people are added to the people of God. The Holy Christian Church continues to expand and grow. And we rejoice just as the angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner repents, so we also praise and thank the Lord for his amazing work through his almighty and life changing word. Isaiah compares our joy as to the harvesters who celebrate when they have gathered in the grapes and grain from the spring and fall harvest. The harvesters have done nothing to cause the harvest. It was the Lord God who caused the seeds to sprout and grow. It was the Lord who sent the rain at its proper time and the needed sunshine for the crops to grow and reach maturity. The harvesters just have the joy of bringing the harvest in after God has done his work. The second comparison that Isaiah uses is that of soldiers who have won a battle and now are dividing the spoils of their victory. They are celebrating and rejoicing that they have won the war and the victory is theirs. So when the light of the truth shines on us and overcomes the darkness we rejoice and celebrate. For we have been set free. We have been released from the darkness of calamity; the darkness of death and the darkness of sin.

The other response is one of joy that we now have peace. Listen to Isaiah's words, "For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning,

will be fuel for the fire.” (Is 9:4-5) Here Isaiah reminds us of an event in the history of the Children of Israel during the days of the Judges. The Midianites and the Amalekites had come against Israel. Gideon brought his army of 32,000 men to fight against them. Their enemy was as numerous as locusts the Bible says and there were so many camels that they could not be counted just as you cannot count the sands of the seashore. God whittled Gideon’s army down to 300 men. It was to remind the people of Israel that it was the Lord who would give them this victory and not their mighty army. God then delivered his people from this great enemy army with the 300 soldiers that Gideon had. The Lord freed his people from the rod of their oppressor. All the accoutrements for war, the shoes of the warriors and their blood stained cloaks are now burned as fuel for the fire. The war is over. Now this is not referring to wars in this world. You can destroy all the weapons of wars and we still will have wars because of the very nature of people. The war that is over is the hostility between God and the human race. We now have peace with our Creator. The Light that shines into our lives assures you and me that we have peace with our God. Isn’t it comforting to know that we are at peace with our God? God is no longer lurking around waiting to punish us and make us pay eternally for our sins. His anger has been satisfied. We have true and lasting peace through Jesus the Light of the world.

The Light has gone on and by the grace of God the Light has shone on us. May this Light fill you with peace and the warmth of his love.

Amen.

THE LIGHT GOES ON!

- I) For Whom This Light Has Been Turned On**
 - A. Those walking in darkness
 - 1. The darkness of calamity/tragedy
 - 2. The darkness of death
 - 3. The darkness of sin
- II) The Response of Those On Whom the Light Is Shining.**
 - A. Joy because the church is growing
 - 1. the joy of the harvesters
 - 2. The joy of the warriors
 - B. We have peace
 - 1. Peace won for us by the Lord – cf Midian

Leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, 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.”