

Epiphany 3 1/26/20
Matthew 4:12-25 A

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.

When do you need a flashlight? Or better, maybe I should phrase the question: When do you use a flashlight? The answer is pretty simple: when it's dark. When you want to see where you are going in the dark or something that's in the darkness.

The Evangelist writes, quoting the Prophet Isaiah by the way, "those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned (v. 16)." In this season of Epiphany, the light of Jesus Christ has dawned into the darkness of this present age.

"Light" and "darkness" – exact opposites – are used throughout the Scripture. To help us understand what Matthew is teaching us this Sunday, let me begin by talking about light and darkness in the Bible.

"Light" is a good thing, a great thing. It represents goodness, holiness. For example, when God created the world, the very first thing He does is separate light from darkness. When God wanted to show His presence with Israel, He was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire – **light** – by night. When Moses met with God on the mountain and then came down the mountain, his face shown with light, reflecting the glory of the Almighty God. When Jesus was on the mount of Transfiguration with the disciples, His face and clothes shown like the sun, as though the source of light was within Him, which of course it was. Jesus Himself said, "I am the light of the world (Jn 8:12)." And in heaven, we are told that there will be no sun nor moon, and there will be a need for any lamp, because the glory of the Lord God Himself will give it light, simply by His presence!

In sharp contrast to “light,” darkness is bad, evil; symbolizing sin and its curse, especially its wages of death.

All I need to do is give you one little example: What happens when you are stumbling around in the dark and stub your little toe? It hurts! The whole body hurts! It does no good to say, “Well, it’s just my little toe; this should not bother me at all.” The truth is it does bother you – a whole lot. It’s just your little toe, but your whole body hurts.

Living in the darkness of sin, the sin and curse of the valley of the shadow of death, the whole body hurts.

This past week marked the 47th anniversary of Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in our land. Since that time, over 60 million – you heard me correctly, **60 million** – children in America have been murdered in abortion. And you wonder why our church pews are empty.

Look at our homes and families. We attack, berate, and belittle one another. We let something that is really not an issue become a huge issue, and we snap at one another.

We abuse substances in the attempt to find some relief but they only make our lives worse. That secret affair that brought so much joy is now nothing but a source of embarrassment. That online porn was so exciting, but is now nothing but a garment of shame. That little word of gossip we spoke to make ourselves look so good, has now come back to cause only hurt and division, because that’s what sin does – it divides us from God and from one another.

And of course, it’s never our fault, it’s that Neanderthal we married; that wife that won’t get off my back; that fool of a boss; my parents who

made me do chores and wouldn't buy me new Nikes. We point the blame at everyone else.

Today, Jesus speaks the same words as John the Baptist, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (v. 17)." Repentance is a call to examine ourselves. Repentance only happens when we learn to look within and without and examine ourselves in the mirror of God's holy Commandments. Seeing our sin, we sorrow over it. But, repentance is not just sorrow over sin, it is **faith** that God **forgives** us for the sake of Christ Jesus.

Matthew proclaims Good News for us: "Those dwelling in the region and shadow of death on them a light has dawned." And that light shines in some very unexpected places. It doesn't dawn in Rome or Jerusalem, but tiny, insignificant Bethlehem. It doesn't dawn in the temple in Jerusalem, but in a common manger and animal shelter. It does not dawn in a king, but in a tiny newborn Jesus. John the Baptist didn't expect to see Him come to the baptism of repentance but He did come, "to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15)."

And nowhere in this region and shadow of death do we see that light dawn more brightly than from the cross. Jesus took upon Himself all the darkness of our sharp words, our anger, our sin and suffered its wages of death, so that we would be forgiven. He was crucified, died, and buried, but He rose the 3rd day. By His resurrection, He abolished "death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tm 1). He lives to shine His light of forgiveness, life, and salvation upon the whole world.

It's really as simple as a flashlight. A flashlight lights your way in the darkness so that you can see what you're doing, find what you're looking for, so that you don't stub your toe.

The Light of Christ dawns upon us as we read and learn His Word; at the font of Baptism; when we come to His table to eat and drink His true Body and Blood. When Christ's Light dawns upon us through these means, His forgiveness and grace shine upon me, I am relieved:

- From the guilt and burden of my sins, because God forgives me for Jesus' sake;
- From doubt, especially regarding my eternal life;
- From my despair, over yet another failure in my life;
- I can start today all over again because every new day is a new day in Christ, "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus," is how Paul says it (Ph 3:13-14).
- I am assured that God will be with in whatever endeavor or challenge He calls me to this very hour.

So that the light of the Gospel may dawn on others, Jesus calls the disciples and makes them fishers of men. In that same way, He {BANNER} reflects His light through you and in you onto those He brings into our lives. Jesus wants His light to shine on all those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, so He shines His light through you.

You reflect the wonderful light of Christ in your daily vocations as a baptized saint of God. And, that begins at home, in your house. It begins with you shining the light of Christ to your family -- your spouse, your children, your grandchildren – by the way you speak, the way you act, by the life you live. Then, it continues to this House of God, this family we call Concordia {Zion}, when the Light of Christ shines through you as you serve as Christ as served you. Then, the Light of Epiphany extends beyond the walls of our homes and this Home, and goes to the ends of the earth, 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 (1 Co 1:18)".

Yes, Dear Saints of God, we are a people living in darkness and in the land of the shadow of death. But, the Light of the world, Jesus, has dawned upon us. Now, we live in the light of Christ and we shine that Light wherever and whenever God gives us have opportunity.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.