

## **"Enlightened By the Light"**

**Isaiah 9:1-4; I Corinthians 1:10-17; Matthew 4:12-25**

**Epiphany 3-A, Jan 26, 2014**

**Have you ever noticed that the Epiphany season, just like the Christmas season, is constantly bathed and powerfully pervaded with the theme of light?** At Christmastime we sing, "Yet in the dark streets shineth the everlasting light; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight!" We sing: "Silent night, holy night, Son of God loves pure light!" We sing: "Break forth, O beauteous heavenly light and usher in the morning!" We sing: "Highest most holy, light of light eternal, born of a virgin a mortal he comes!" We sing: **"Light and life to all he brings; Risen with healing in his wings!"**

**And now in the Epiphany season we continue to sing, "The people that in darkness sat, a glorious light have seen.** The light has shined on them who long, in shades of death have been!" There's also another **Epiphany hymn** that many people really enjoy, "I want to walk as a child of the light. I want to follow Jesus. God set the stars to give light to the world. The star of my life is Jesus! In him there is no darkness at all. The night and the day are both alike. The Lamb is the light in the city of God! Shine in my heart, Lord Jesus!"

Friends, born-again believers love to sing these beautiful Christmas carols and Epiphany hymns because we are among those countless throngs of people, who by the grace of God, have become enlightened by the light of Christ ourselves. In John 1:9, we read, ***"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world! He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God!"*** (John 1:9-13)

**We, sisters and brothers, have become enlightened by the light of God made flesh in Jesus Christ, so that we too, now might also reflect God's own light into a darkened world.**

### **I. WE ARE CALLED UPON TO REFLECT GOD'S OWN LIGHT INTO A DARKENED WORLD.**

**Let me point out to you that there is a rich correlation between the words of our Old Testament lesson this morning and the words of our Gospel lesson that St. Matthew quotes verbatim.** These words are not unfamiliar to us, for we read them as the Old Testament lesson here on Christmas Eve every year. ***"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!"*** (Matthew 4:16)

**But today when Matthew quotes these words from the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah, he has chosen to back up one more verse in the ancient text of Isaiah, giving us a little bit more of a history lesson behind these words.** You see it was in 732 BC, that the Assyrian Empire invaded the farthest, northwest region of the nation of Israel, taking conquest of those ancient cities of "Zebulun and Naphtali;" now converting them into a newly formed Assyrian Province. This is something that happened about ten years before the Assyrians would then launch a full scale assault on the whole nation of Israel. But Isaiah prophesies that the day of God's salvation will one day fall upon that northwest region of Israel, once more, also known as Galilee, when the Messiah appears. This was a region also northwest of the Sea of Galilee that would have included the ancient city of Capernaum.

**Matthew sees these words of the Prophet Isaiah now being fulfilled in the public ministry of Jesus, who Matthew also tells us, has now chosen to move the headquarters for his work away from his hometown of Nazareth, to the city of Capernaum, which Matthew goes on to tell us in Matthew 9:1, that our Lord and**

Savior Jesus Christ has now come to regard also as his new home. Listen to Matthew 9:1, “*After Jesus got into the boat he crossed the sea and came to his own town!*”

This land would be made glorious when the Promised Messiah would one day, at long last, arrive there, “*teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. The people walking in darkness would see, indeed, a great light, when Jesus’ fame would spread all throughout Syria, and when people would bring before him those who were sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and our Lord would heal them!*” (Matthew 4:23-24)

**But let’s be certain that Isaiah is not only speaking to us here about a massive amount of physical darkness, but about a massive amount of spiritual darkness too! People live in a massive amount of spiritual darkness whenever they become trapped in the misery of their past sins.**

**Some of you may remember that Tallulah Bankhead was an actress who appeared on the stage and in movies in the late 1920s and 1930s. She was well-known for her deep voice and flamboyant personality. As truly a troubled actress, she once commented: “I am as pure as the driven slush!”** She was admitting that she, like all of us, are by nature in bondage to sin and unable to free ourselves. Left to ourselves we may also live in a slush-filled room of gloom that is too often of our own making!

With all the winter weather going on up north, I saw a special segment on Cleveland, Ohio. Even though the snowplows had been there and cleared the streets, the snow was falling so quickly that intersections were filled with the winter slush of snow and ice. But it was not the white snow that had fallen down from heaven. It was a dark and dirty grey, almost black in some places. And then I thought of the words of the Prophet Isaiah in chapter 1. “Come let us reason together, though your sins are like scarlet they shall become as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become as wool!” (Isaiah 1:18)

Here’s the good news: “The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses us from all our sins!” (I John 1:7)

We are called upon by God not only to reflect the light in a darkened world, but to first of all receive the light of God’s salvation ourselves. This is the God whom St. Paul tells the Colossians has “*rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins!*” (Colossians 1:13-14)

Friends we are called upon by God not only to reflect the light of our Savior’s love into a darkened world, we are also called upon by God to reflect the light of our Savior’s love to one another right here in the church.

## **II. WE ARE CALLED UPON TO REFLECT GOD’S LOVE TO OTHERS IN THE CHURCH.**

**In our epistle lesson this morning, St. Paul was writing to very conflicted church; a church in which there was a great deal of quarreling and dissension that developed over too much attention being devoted to human personalities.** It’s easy enough to understand how this situation may have developed in Corinth. **There was more than one apostle who served this church in this brawling seaport of Corinth.** Paul, it seems, had served them as their pastor for some eighteen months. And Apollos also had served this parish for a while too; the same thing is apparently true with respect to the Apostle Peter. The book of Acts makes plain that all of these men were friends with each other; colleagues in the common cause always of preaching the Gospel! But there must have been certain facets of each man’s personality that some of the members of the church in Corinth found more personally appealing to them than others.

Paul became very upset when some members of the church exclaimed, “**I belong to Paul,**” or “**I belong to Cephas (Peter),**” though some were bold enough to exclaim, “**I belong to Christ!**” The really big problem, as

Paul saw it, is that **all of this quarreling that was going on among the members now made the church very unattractive to any would-be converts who might be invited to come among them and hear the Gospel.** But don't we still need to hear St. Paul's directive still today? *"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!" (I Corinthians 1:10)*

**There is a little story about a collection of tools in a Carpenter's shop that helps to illustrate St. Paul's teaching here. It seems that the carpenter's tools had a conference.** Brother Hammer was in the chair when the conference informed him that he must leave the shop because he was just too noisy. But he said, "If I am to leave, Brother Gimlet must go too, for he is so insignificant that he makes only a little impression." Little Brother Gimlet rose up and said, "All right, but then Brother Screw must go also, for he has to be turned around and around again and again to get him anywhere!" Brother Screw said, "If you wish, I will go, but Brother Plane must leave also, for all the work he does is only on the surface! There is no depth in him at all. So Brother Plane replied, "Brother Rule will have to withdraw from the shop, for he is always measuring things, as though he is the only one who is right!" Brother Rule then complained against Brother Sandpaper and said, "I just don't care, but it must be said, that he is rougher than he ought to be and is always rubbing others the wrong way! He must leave too!"

In the midst of these quarreling tools the Carpenter of Nazareth walked in. He came to perform his day's work. He put on his apron and went to work at his bench to make a pulpit from which to preach the Gospel to the poor. He used the hammer, the gimlet, the screw, the plane, the sandpaper, the rule and all the other tools. After the day's work was done and the pulpit was finished, Brother Saw arose and said, "I see that all of us are laborers together with him!"

Friends, there is nothing about who I am or who you are that such ever take a precedence over the great and challenging work God has given us to do together; to proclaim his life-saving Gospel to the world. You heard what St. Paul said, *"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!" (I Corinthians 1:18)*

Friends, you and I have become enlightened by the light of Christ to reflect the light of our Savior's love into a darkened world, and at times into a darkened church. But the Gospel lesson this morning reminds us that we are also called upon by God to reflect the light of God's love to our closest family members and friends!

### III. WE ARE CALLED TO REFLECT THE LIGHT OF GOD'S LOVE TO OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

Most commentators believe that Matthew is not talking about the first time that Jesus called Andrew, Peter, James and John to become his disciples (John 1:29ff) here. Yet even after Jesus had called them, they went back to fishing for fish for a while. **But then, he meets them down there on the seashore one day and calls them to a more permanent position in his entourage of those first twelve disciples, destined by God's grace to eventually become the twelve apostles.**

**Due to unexpected circumstances, Lisa and I left our decorated Christmas tree standing up in our living room for a longer period of time than had ever done before.** We didn't take it down until January 17<sup>th</sup>. Actually I put the Christmas tree up and Lisa took the Christmas tree down this year.

But there was one of our family members who enjoyed our Christmas tree more this year, by far, it seems than anyone else and this is our little two-year-old grandson Philip. He loved to look at our Christmas tree; maybe in part because Grandpa jazzed up a little bit more this year, by adding two strings of colored lights to a pre-lit tree that was dominated by white lights. Philip loved to look at the various ornaments hanging on the tree that Lisa has collected over the years! He is a smart little fellow. He stands there very respectfully pointing to this this

ornament or that ornament, telling us what it was if he could identify it. “Star,” he’d say. “Snowflake,” he’d say. “Drum,” he’d say. But his favorite ornament by far was that of a miniature coo-coo clock!” “Coo-coo clock!” he’d say. He was especially fascinated with the coo-coo clock because his paternal grandfather has a really coo-coo clock hanging on the wall of his home that Philip just absolutely adores.

But last Sunday when he came into our house, following Sunday school and the morning worship service, this usually very happy, constantly smiling little boy, turned his lip down and expressed some profound and repeated disappointment: “**Ristmas tree down! Ristmas tree down!**” That’s kind of how he says it, not “Christmas tree down,” but “Ristmas tree down!” And on Monday when his mom brought him to our house again, because Johanna was attending preschool here at Mount Olive, he said it again, “**Ristmas tree down!**”

I think Philip was hoping that our Christmas tree so gloriously decorated was going to become a permanent fixture in our home. He certainly was disappointed that we had taken it down.

**Yes, most of the Christmas trees that were scattered everywhere are now down. And I couldn’t help but notice that the special lights that the city of Irmo affixes to our telephone poles and electric poles up and down St. Andrews Road and Lake Murray Blvd stayed up much longer than usual due to the great onslaught of freezing cold weather brought to us by the polar vortex that invaded our nation during the week of January 5 through 12, but now they are down too!**

Yes, our Christmas trees are down, but you and are called upon by God in Jesus Christ to be living Christmas trees, constantly reflecting the light of God’s love in Jesus Christ to everyone we can. We ourselves are now called upon, so-to-speak, to become Christmas trees that are lit up for God all throughout the year! Let’s remember friends that we have become enlightened by the light of Christ, that we too might constantly be reflecting the light of God’s salvation into a darkened world; sometimes even into a darkened church, but especially also to our closest family members and friends! Let’s not only pray to be forgiven, but pray also to be forgiving. Let’s not only desire to be loved, but also to become loving; loving others and forgiving others, as God in Christ has loved and forgiven every one of us! Amen