

**MATTHEW 4:12-17**  
**THE LIGHT --- THIS WAY!**

*Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:*

*The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
 By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,  
 Galilee of the Gentiles—  
 The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,  
 And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death,  
 Light has dawned!*

*From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven <sup>[e]</sup>is at hand."*

If there's a bad storm this afternoon, and at 6 pm. the power goes out; what is your immediate concern? Is it heat? No. the house will hold heat for a while. Is it the refrigerator and the freezer? No, they will hold cold for a while. It's light! At 6:00 there's darkness everywhere—without power not even yard lights or street lights. Get out the flashlights, the candles, and maybe you still have a kerosene lamp around. Life is complicated, ultimately impossible, without light.

Light--that's the picture in our text for today, and it's very fitting today. Epiphany is the Festival of Light, making things manifest, shining out. Jesus is about to go to Galilee. What is the setting? Jesus was born in Bethlehem to Mary and His adoptive father Joseph. He grew up in Nazareth. He also learned the carpentry trade (Mark 6:3). At age thirty, the age when one was considered an adult back then, Jesus began his ministry. He went to the Jordan River in the wilderness of Judea to be baptized by John the Baptist not for His own sins, but as our perfect substitute. Baptized with water and the Word, the Holy Spirit came down from heaven upon Him in the form of a dove. God the Father spoke from heaven, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!" (A striking demonstration of the Trinity!) Jesus was clearly marked the promised, appointed Savior and Rescuer from sin, the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. After His baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for a confrontation with the devil. The devil tested Him and tried Him sorely three times, trying to break His holiness and His bond to the Father, but Jesus used Old Testament Scripture to direct His heart and actions and so foiled Satan.

Jesus thereafter began His preaching and teaching, making initial contact with some of the men who would later become His twelve full-time disciples. In the meantime John the Baptist was still preaching and baptizing. But John made it very clear when questioned, that he himself was not the Christ. John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 4:30). Nevertheless, John the Baptist was a strong prophet. He did not flinch to tell King Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great who killed the baby boys at Bethlehem, that his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, was a sin against God. John was thrown into prison for that. (And later beheaded.)

*When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.* Jesus had still been in Judea, preaching in the vicinity where He had been baptized by John. Judea was the southern region of Israel, where Jerusalem the capital city was located, the same city where the Temple of God was, the city where all the high Jewish officials lived. Jesus learned that John had been thrown into prison. He withdrew from Judea and went to Galilee in the north. He knew it was not yet time for things to start getting out of hand.

His hometown of Nazareth was located in Galilee. The Sea of Galilee was also there. We know from Luke's Gospel that Jesus had been "un-welcomed" from Nazareth. When He had returned there and rightly pointed out that the people were not interested in His message but in His ability to make Nazareth great, they ushered Jesus out of town and wanted to throw Him off a cliff. In our text, Matthew simply says, *Leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea.* Capernaum itself is on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus would spend much time there. He would make Capernaum his home and "headquarters." Peter, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen working from Capernaum. Jesus healed many people there. The Sea of Galilee? Jesus granted Peter a great catch of fish on the Sea of Galilee, calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee, walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee.

Do you suppose it's just an accident or luck that the name "Capernaum" means "village of comfort"? A very comforting message from Christ would ring out loud and clear there, as it still rings out among us today. The message? Acceptance before God is not based on family tree, or an impressive personal resume', or a clean police record, or good performance at work or school. Rather, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God---being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus!" (Romans 3:23-24). People—you and I—are accepted before God because of His kindness and mercy in Jesus who did the time for our crime. Forget about this idea, "Sure I'll go to heaven. I've been ok. God owes it to me." Forget about that. and be honest. "What" really are you? Do you come to the Lord's Supper today just to show a commitment to Him, just to check-off another thing you're doing to make Him happy? Come to the Lord's Supper today, because you are a sad mess in need of forgiveness. And at His Supper He says, "Yes, I gave My body and blood for you; you are clean." Then leave with joy in your heart, that in Jesus you are accepted—in Jesus!

The Lord went to Capernaum, to the "village of comfort", to preach mercy and forgiveness, for sinners. This was very significant for these people. Capernaum by the sea was *in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali*. Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the twelve sons of Jacob. The most famous son was Joseph who became ruler of Egypt. The reason Joseph ended up in Egypt was that his ten older brothers hated him, wanted to kill him, finally agreeing to sell him into slavery. Zebulun and Naphtali were part of the ten. Later, when Moses led the huge nation of Israel out of Egypt, between the walled up waters of the Red Sea, to Mt. Sinai where God gave the Ten Commandments, and then to the borders of the promised land of Canaan, God told him to send in twelve spies, one from each tribe. The twelve spies returned, and only the two spies, those from Judah and Ephraim, said God would help them capture the land. The ten said, "No way! We can't do it!" Those spies from Zebulun and Naphtali were among the ten. Years later after Kings Saul, David, and Solomon had reigned, ten of the twelve tribes revolted from the kings of David's line, which would eventually bring forth Jesus, and picked another king. Soon this nation turned to idol worship, despising God. The tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were part of those ten. This is quite a lackluster bunch, isn't it? Their land was on the northern border of Israel, later called Galilee. When God in anger sent the King of Assyria to capture and deport the people of the ten tribes, the territories of Zebulun and Naphtali were among those first to go. Soon all ten of those tribes were taken away. The poorest and most worthless were left in the land. The captives never came back. This was a land of anguish, gloom and darkness—physical distress, but spiritual distress as well. Faith in the Lord's promise of the Savior had been badly despised and rejected.

When Matthew tells us that Jesus went up from Judea to Galilee, He went to the territories of Zebulun and Naphtali! What a marvelous action and gift of God this was! Matthew quotes the great Old Testament prophecy from Isaiah, and points out that it was here being fulfilled:

*The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—  
The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death—  
LIGHT HAS DAWNED!*

The region that had known so much anguish and so much gloom, so much death and so much spiritual darkness, because of the people's wayward sinful hearts, would now be blessed with LIGHT! Jesus the Light of the World was bringing light, life, and salvation. Forgiveness and righteousness in His name for such a wayward, lost people. What a Shining-Out Jesus brings! What an Epiphany!

The same is true for you and your family tree, and your life resume', and your record not just with the sheriff, but with the Lord? Hmmm. Have you been guilty of thievery? Have your ancestors? Have you been guilty of adultery? Have your ancestors? Have you run to avoid getting caught? Have your ancestors? Maybe that's why they came to America? Have the idols of this world seemed so much more important to you than your Creator, Savior, and Counselor, that you stepped away? How about your ancestors? I know if we all go far enough back, we find that our ancestors, European or otherwise, were not Christians. They were Gentiles, who worshiped idols and false gods. How much reason do you have to hold your head high? None.

Then the beauty of today's passage. You and I, sinners in anguish and in the land of the shadow of death, have sure hope. *The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death, Light has dawned!* The Epiphany Lord of Light and LIFE has come to you. Crucified and risen for you, you are safe and saved. Merciful pardon is yours! Rejoice that the open doors of heaven! God loves you.

This house of God is a little Capernaum and village of comfort for you. Your Bible is a little village of comfort for you. Jesus is at your side. He says. *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* Re-think your life, your actions, your situation. The power is OFF in your life. You need light. Stop going the wrong way, where there is no help there. Your Epiphany LIGHT and LIFE has come, bringing the dawn of the new day of salvation!

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach---