

INI - SDG

3rd Sunday a. Epiphany

January 23, 2011

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Text: Isaiah 9:1-4 ***Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, As when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For You have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.***

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ISAIAH

Theme: The Great Joy of the Son-Shine

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

69 days. What have you done and gotten accomplished over the past 69 days? If my math is correct, 69 days before today would have been Tuesday, November 16. A lot has happened since November 16. Babies have been born and people have died. We've celebrated Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's, and a two day blizzard! Christmas decorations have gone up and come down in the span of those 69 days. But can you imagine having gone those 69 days without seeing even one beam of sunlight? The only light having come from a dimly lit light bulb? Many of you may remember the account of those trapped Chilean miners this past summer and fall. For 69 days they were trapped 2,300 feet below the earth's surface. For 69 days the only light they saw was the light that came from their light bulbs. How amazing the sun shine must have felt for those miners when they were finally rescued 69 days after being trapped!

But worse than spending 69 days without seeing the light of day, imagine spending a lifetime in darkness. No light to see where you are going. No light to brighten your day and fill it with joy and warmth. What a horrible existence that would be! What a hopeless condition to live one's life in! Yet that is exactly the condition of every man, woman, and child born into this world. Scripture describes our natural existence as "darkness" and being spiritually blind. And if no one steps in to change that, it gets worse. Imagine spending an eternity in the outer darkness. Darkness that is

blinding!

But when God brings someone to faith, when God brought you to faith in Jesus, He brought you out of the darkness and into His marvelous light. The Apostle Paul writes of this in his second letter to the Corinthians, ***“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*** (2 Cor 4:6) The source of light for the Christian believer is Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus declares in John 8, ***“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”*** (Jn 8:12) Jesus is the light of the world. He is the light that entered this dark world of sin and death. He gives light to all who follow Him. As we conclude our series on “The Gospel According to Isaiah” we read of the promise of this light shining on the gloomy darkness of Galilee. Let us therefore consider the great joy of the Son-shine!

As our text begins there are some geographical names that are used which we may not be familiar with. First of all in verse one we hear of Zebulun and Naphtali. These are the names that were given to two sons of Jacob. The descendants of these two sons would go on to make-up two of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. When the Children of Israel entered the promised land of Canaan, each of the tribes of Israel were given a portion of land for their people to live in. The land that was their portion was their families’ inheritance. For instance the sons of Judah were given the area around Jerusalem. The portion of land for the tribe of Zebulun was just west of the Sea of Galilee. The portion of land for the tribe of Naphtali was on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee and also to the north.

Because of the location of the land which was their portion, they were very often on the front lines when an enemy attacked Israel. Any enemy attacking Israel from the North, would first have to go through the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali bringing death and destruction with them. This was never more true than when the Assyrian army attacked Israel. Led by King Tiglath-Pileser, the Assyrians defeated the northern Kingdom of Israel and carried the people away in captivity to Assyria. Zebulun and Naphtali was a land of gloom and oppression. It was a land of darkness and without hope. Most of it was self-imposed by the people’s idolatry and rejection of the one true God. There was not a glimmer of hope in the land. They dwelt, as Isaiah writes, ***“in the land of the shadow of death.”***

But Isaiah writes that all of that was going to change. A great light was going to shine upon them. A light that would bring great joy to the land and a reason to rejoice. What was that light that was going to shine on them? It was none other than the Light of the World. The SON was going to shine upon them. We heard in our Gospel lesson (Matthew 4) the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. ***“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...”*** The great light that was

going to shine on them was Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the promised Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords, living and focusing His ministry on this area. First of all He was raised in Nazareth, and then He made Capernaum His home base for His ministry in Galilee.

This would be a cause of great joy for the people. The One they and all their forefathers had so eagerly awaited had arrived and was living in their midst! They have seen a great light! The light Jesus would bring would be the light of the Gospel and salvation. Jesus would bring the good news of sins forgiven. He would give them life and light. They could rejoice in this harvest of righteousness and salvation, as at the joy of harvest. Jesus would defeat an enemy greater than an invading army or Tiglath-Pileser. He would break the rod of their oppressor. He would overcome their enemy of the devil by never once giving into His temptations. He would overcome their enemy of death by rising to life on the third day after His crucifixion. And He would break the yoke of their burden by taking their sin on Himself and suffering the consequences of it on the cross. They would then rejoice as men rejoice when they divide the spoil of victory. Jesus would give them a victory greater than the victory Gideon and his tiny band of men gained when they defeated the mighty Midianites.

What great joy that Son-shine must have brought to their lives! Greater joy than those Chilean miners who went 69 days without seeing the sun in the sky. Jesus, the light of the world brought light and life and healing. Jesus brought them the light of life! And yet how did the people of the region receive the Light of the World? While He did have some loyal followers, what happened when Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth and proclaimed in their synagogue that He was the Servant of the LORD of whom Isaiah prophesied? They tried to throw Him off of a cliff! And remember what dreadful words Jesus had to say to Capernaum? ***"And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."*** (Mt 11:23-24) Capernaum was exalted to the heavens because the Son of God was dwelling in their midst! Yet they ignored and rejected Jesus as their Savior.

Indeed, what John writes in the opening chapter of his Gospel is so true of Jesus: ***"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."*** (Jn 1:5) And then later on Jesus says in John 3, ***"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*** (Jn 3:19-21) Jesus gets right at the heart of the problem. So many reject Him as the light of the world because He shines light on their hearts and shows just how dark and sinful it is. The Son-shine

also sheds and crushes man's pride by showing that man cannot save himself, only Jesus can. Many would much rather stay in the dark and keep their evil deeds hidden, rather than having them exposed by the Son-shine.

If Jesus had grown up in this area and decided to make Aberdeen or Oakes His home base for His ministry, how would you react? Would you take every opportunity to hear Him speak? Would you travel, even on bitterly cold days, a great distance to have the Son-shine upon you? Would you invite Him to your home to be your guest? Would you bring your children to Jesus to be blessed by Him? Of course we would! Can we imagine it being any other way?! Oh, that the Son were shining on us today! Our days would be less gloomy and we would rejoice in His presence! "Oh, that we were there" as the Christmas hymn goes.

But the Son is shining! He is shining right now! Listen again to what the Apostle Paul writes, ***"For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*** (2 Cor 4:6) God rescued us from the darkness of unbelief and hell when He brought us to faith in Jesus. He caused the Son to shine in our hearts. The Son of righteousness has arisen upon us. We who would otherwise be walking in darkness, not seeing that the path we were on was headed straight for hell. The Son of God has shined upon us who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death.

Therefore we can have that same great joy, because the Son is shining. We can rejoice as with the joy at harvest time, because in Christ we have harvested righteousness and eternal life. We can rejoice as men rejoice when they divide the spoils of war, because in Christ we are victorious. Death and the devil no longer has power over us. The Son has arisen in our hearts. Following Jesus we no longer walk in darkness, because we have the light of life.

While Jesus did not choose Oakes or Aberdeen as His home base, He chose your heart. He came to you in Water and the Word, and set up His throne in your heart. And there He shines. He shines in you and shines through you. But more than that, through His Word He continues to shine in our lives. You can invite Him over to your home to be your guest by opening the Scriptures at home and hearing His word. You can bring your children to Him to bless them. Both at Church where the light of His word shines on us, and at home with family devotions. This is the great joy of the Son-shine!

Lord willing, none of us will ever have to know what those Chilean miners had to go through. We will never have to experience going 69 days without sun light. But we have a greater joy than they had when they were finally brought to the surface, for we have been brought into the light of the Son of God. What a glorious light is this Son-shine. It warms our days and brings us hope and joy in the knowledge of sins forgiven and the promise of eternal life! Amen!