

“The Light Shines in the Darkness”

St. Matthew tells us that Jesus “withdrew into Galilee” – not because His relative John the Baptist had been arrested – not because He fears that they’ll throw Him in prison too – not because He’s scared, or timid, or seeking the path of least resistance. This “withdrawal” is not a panicked reaction to an unexpected adversity.

Jesus “withdraws” because He lives by faith – because He lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord – including this prophesy from Isaiah 9 in our Old Testament reading. He IS the Savior of the nations – and those dwelling in the “Galilee of the Gentiles” – need the “great light” of His salvation.

Jesus “withdraws” because His Father is carrying out His plan of salvation. “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in a land of deep darkness, on them a light has dawned.”

Unlike John the Baptist, the Word of the Lord cannot be locked up and overcome by darkness. The Word of the Lord that endures forever – comes to Gentiles – as Jesus begins to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The salvation of God is for all – for “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” What Jesus BEGINS to preach in Capernaum, He brings to fulfillment at Calvary. Darkness covers the whole land as He hangs on the cross – but His death chases away the darkness – because His suffering and death have taken away the sin of the world!

As the sun rises on the resurrected Jesus – we see that sin and death have been defeated. The Savior, once dead and now alive – shines forth the TRUTH – that God’s salvation for ALL, is found in Jesus Christ alone.

The Savior’s rule and reign over sin and death CONTINUES today. People still dwell in darkness. Sin still seeks to snuff out Christ’s death and resurrection “for you.”

In the Gospel reading you saw how Jesus ruled and reigned over “every disease and every affliction among the people.” At Calvary, and on Easter morning, you see His rule and reign over sin, death and the devil. But how does God rule and reign over you today?

Well, Jesus teaches you to pray – “Thy kingdom come.” What does this mean? “The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.” When you pray for His kingdom to come – you are praying that God would rule and reign over your life.

How does God’s kingdom come? “God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.”

God rules and reigns over your life when the Holy Spirit is at work in you – and the Holy Spirit is at work when God’s Word comes to you. His Word is His truth – it is His light that shines in the darkness.

Let me give you a simple example – one from your childhood. And children, listen up! You know how this goes.

A child is horsing around in the house (even though Mom has said multiple times to “take it outside”) – and a lamp gets broken. What to do? Confess? Tell the truth, or, try to hide it? Live in the light, or in darkness?

“I don’t know how that happened?” Or, you throw your brother under the bus – “he must have broken it.” Telling LIES. That’s living in the darkness, hiding the truth. But you know how that goes for you.

Your life is now consumed with what you have done, and said. “Have I fooled Mom? Did I get away with it?” But when supper comes, you can hardly eat because you don’t feel good. When it’s time for bed, you lay there tossing and turning – worried that you will be found out – that the truth will come to light.

Whether Mom or Dad confront you, or you finally come forward and tell the truth – a light has dawned. The LIE is chased away by the TRUTH. Sure, there are consequences – but Mom and Dad still love you.

But things have changed for you. Your stomach settles and you can eat. You go to bed, and you fall asleep. There's a great relief. A burden has been lifted. You are no longer living in the darkness – but in the light – the light of truth.

The devil, the world, and your own sinful nature preach LIES to you all the time – hiding the TRUTH – and leaving you to live in anxiety and fear. That's why Jesus, your Savior, comes to you this day, preaching – “Repent,” for I am here to rule and reign over your sin.

Just as Jesus healed “every disease and every affliction among the people” – so He comes to heal you today. Not just a salvation from sickness – but from sin and death – from living in the LIE, in the darkness.

Jesus shines His truth into your dark places – onto those things you have kept hidden. He delivers you from a life of fear – and rules over you with His grace. In Holy Baptism He calls you to follow Him in faith – in daily contrition and repentance – so that you might live with Him in His kingdom – a kingdom of relief, and peace, and life.

His blood shed for all is given “for you” in the Supper – to rescue you from all that burdens and darkens your days. His blood banishes your sin, your death, and the devil. Where Jesus is, they must flee – like darkness chased away by the light.

Dearly beloved, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Jesus rules and reigns over you with His forgiveness, life and salvation. God grant you His Holy Spirit – that you may walk in His light – following Jesus all the days, even unto life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.