**“Light”**

Isaiah 9:1-4

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-25

Epiphany 3

“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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

There may not be times where we’d experience much (or, maybe just, admit to) a veil of “**darkness**” over or inflicting-upon our lives. The “**shadow of death**” certainly speaks of **one place of it**, but seriously strained relationships and extreme frustrations, hostilities and downright evil oppressions are, themselves, **dark enough grays** to **feel like blackness**.

And war-torn areas (Ukrainians on the front lines) know their beds not so secure from missile strikes hitting civilian apartment complexes, and surgeries and hospitalizations of our children make parents know helplessness, wishing to substitute themselves (taking-on their experience) so that they’d not have to.

And that “**shadow of death**” **/ death itself** is a lonely and naturally-dark experience. The darkest of places for death to occur might be the invited-by-her invasion of one’s own mom’s womb in the dismemberment of an abortion. Churches this country over today are remembering **life’s** **sanctity** and the aged in often dim nursing homes or babies designed to be protected inside of mom made victims of their destruction would seem to be of the **darkest places**. And meeting evil in “**dark**” **alleys** gets that name by the fear that idea gives from the “**fact of the matter**” of “**what can always happen in dark alleys**”.

I **view our bulletin cover’s photo expression** graphically in the **abortion abomination**. Without the Light of Christ Jesus that we’re remembering today, this bulletin cover and life itself **would be completely dark in cosmic fact**. Without the Light that we’re remembering today, all struggles and sufferings and death and pains and dissatisfactions and frustrations and (I could go on naming for quite some time) would be the **total blackness of a bulletin cover WITHOUT the middle strip of hope attached to Promises**.

**Text**

“**The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, (the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles”)**, that was war-torn almost always. Nazareth and Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee were territories **located for** **attack**, **strategic** for invasions and regularly the battleground for wars. What we call the Golan Heights is still (to this day) war-torn and UN patrolled to try and prevent that (Syria to the north always threatening, the Valley of Jezreel below Nazareth’s hillside and Megiddo’ as a battlefield where even Elijah fought with principalities and many the battle raged).

Disciples were taken mostly **from that region (Galilee)**. Judea a bit safer war-wise, yet not always so (just buffered more), Peter and Andrew and James and John were among the entire Galilean population that had to **make the best of their challenges, fishing the waters of the sea (making a living by an often-frustrating bit of hard night work)** and **Jesus grew up in the heart of it (Nazareth)**, and **formal** **“darkness” was heavy there** and then grew even **darker yet north of it beyond in the heathen Gentile areas where brute force ruled and survival of just those “fittest” were daily lifestyles**. Gentile meant **Barbarian**, and all claims for trade routes through the Middle East came “**through**” the northern regions of the Promised Land so passage-fights and land-control battles waged.

And **death from cruelty and sickness was more regular and known-close then than with us now**. The “**Decapolis**” was the Roman’s approach to **controlling that region** (cities **of their own dominance** forced-in and spotting the Galilean countryside) but **that brought and encouraged conflicts of many kinds**. They were militant and barbaric cities … and they were meant to **inflict control upon any around them** using fear and deadly force to contain what they wished to. And **diseases** (that don’t hurt us as bad these days as then) killed or maimed, and conditions were **conditions lived that way with**, “**afflictions**” … and many (lots) **graphically** had them.

Jesus arrived back **into the** **midst of all of that** from Judea, moving then from Nazareth to Capernaum, and begin then to bring what was **His now baptismally-anointed Light (His formal ministry and preparation to serve as sacrifice defeating “darkness”)**. That **formal ministry that He was to put into full swing** wasn’t only **activities** but **Him** **(of the divine Godhead yet made man to, through His birth and then baptism into us, take on all the darkness of a fallen world and not only face it head-on on a cross but do that weighed-down by its weight washed onto His own flesh)**. The fact that He could **walk with that BURDEN was an affliction nothing short of darkness that just He could bare so did, emanating the Light that He was from well before earth’s even creation but assumed in a human body to DO WHAT HE WOULD DO**.

And what He was doing was **PUSHING BACK “DARKNESS” of all kinds, especially its source in sin**. From around His body and work and cross that He began carrying to Golgotha **BRIGHTNESS grew**. **HE** “**preached** **repentance of our sins (and a different / FORGIVEN perspective and capacity gifted to us) with His kingdom of Heaven being at hand in Him**, and He **pushed aside** **even unforgiveable sin without His bloodshed** “every **disease** and **affliction** and **demonic oppressions** and **epilepsies** and **paralysis**”. And He was **noticed** **as** **bringing Gospel (“Good News”)** into roadsides and synagogues / **Himself** to cities of Zebulun and Naphtali, and to a seashore with boats coming in from a hard **night’s work** and, there, “gathering disciples” and “followers” who would, one day, **pass-on all of this “Good News” to us after the Lord’s sacrificial work on earth got done**.

**Application**

That work was for only a time: between His baptism into **our “darkness”** and **His crucifixion with it**. That **accomplished**, it was **ours who “follow”** to **enjoy (and rejoice in / celebrate and follow in the divine footsteps of)**.

Just the simple **Promise of it** gave King David **Light from where there’d, otherwise, be only “darkness”**. My Confirmation verse (from Psalm 27) announces that (for me) “The Lord **IS** **my Light** and **my Salvation**, so whom shall I fear? **Him** the Stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” **He**, both, **Savior** **and** **Lord** **as Strength and Maintenance for my every day stance** is expressed by David also in his 23rd Psalm: “The Lord **IS** **my Shepherd**” **(my Leader whom I can follow)**, and because of that “I shall **not have want**”, gaining from Him all that I need, “**Him** making me lie down in green and, therefore, “**Good**” (the meaning there is **really “Good”**) “pasture, by still” (baptismal) “waters, **restoring my soul**” (which is **forgiveness / absolution / freedom from guilt by the sacrifice of His bloodshed for me**), “**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death**, I will **fear no evil, for the Lord / the Christ is with me; His rod and staff (His cross of also wood) comforting me**, preparing, then, a **table of that** before me **in the presence of my enemies**” (and **that** **table** He sets with Himself is being prepared before you today so as to gain Him), and, so, “**my cup overflows**” which we can recognize **thankfully** … as opposed to **not recognizing it … so** **not appreciating it**.

“I want to **walk as a child of the Light**. I want to **follow Jesus**.” And we can make that commitment for **all the right and correct and gloriously-cosmic reasons**: “**In Him there is no darkness at all. The night and the day are both alike**. **The Lamb is** the Light of the City of God. **SHINE** in **my heart**, Lord Jesus.” May **WE (you and I)** always (into eternity) “**PRAISE** **the One breaking the darkness with a liberating Light**” **(The Gospel of God in Jesus / His sacrificial death for our sin and victorious resurrection as the First of us to rise … and His forgiveness of us by divine mercy and grace)**. In **Jesus’** name. Amen.