



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092  
(262)241-3121 [www.stjohnsmequon.org](http://www.stjohnsmequon.org)  
Email: [office@stjohnsmequon.org](mailto:office@stjohnsmequon.org)  
Pastor James Tiefel  
(262) 853-9723 (cell#)  
Email: [pastortiefel@gmail.com](mailto:pastortiefel@gmail.com)

---

## The Third Sunday after Epiphany January 22, 2023

### Jesus is the Light that Shines in Darkness

Jesus came to our world as a light to chase away the dimness and darkness of sin and unbelief. It was a darkness that no one could penetrate or escape. When Jesus came to teach and preach and heal, he lit up the world and chased the darkness away. Now we are able to see the brilliance of his grace and feel the warmth of his forgiveness.

### Sermon Isaiah 8:19-9:4

**When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.**

**Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.**

Introduction – Galilee is kind of in the spotlight this morning. Isaiah mentions Galilee in the First Reading this morning and Matthew mentions Galilee in the Gospel. Most of you have ideas about where Galilee was. There were three provinces in the land of Israel: Judea was in the south, Samaria was in the middle, and Galilee was in the north. We hear a lot about Galilee in the Bible. Mary was living in Galilee when the angel came and told her about the son she would bear. The Christmas story reminds us that Joseph went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee on his way to Bethlehem. Jesus lived in Galilee his entire time on earth, first in Nazareth and then in Capernaum. And there's the truth that Jesus carried out 85% of his ministry on earth in Galilee. As far as we're concerned there's nothing negative about Galilee.

But there's another side to Galilee we don't talk about. King Solomon paid the bill of a friendly king by giving him 20 towns in Galilee, but the king didn't want them; they were good for nothing. Galilee sat on land Jacob had bequeathed to his sons Zebulun and Naphtali and the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali were among the ten tribes of Israel that rebelled against God and broke away from his kingdom. Rulers like wicked King Ahab and more wicked Queen Jezebel ruled in the north country for its entire history. When the Lord had enough, he sent the army of Assyria to destroy Israel and drag its citizens into captivity, never to be heard from again. The people

who moved into the land were mostly half-believing half-breeds, half Jew and half something else, and many were full-blooded Gentiles. By the time Jesus arrived, Galilee had a bad reputation. Galileans were mostly uneducated; they had their own language dialect. There were plenty of people who were convinced that nothing good could come out of Galilee.

But here's what's fascinating. Galilee is the place where God sent his Son; Galilee is precisely the place where Jesus began his ministry. Jesus was born in Bethlehem but he didn't stay. Jesus spent time in Egypt but he didn't stay. Jesus visited Jerusalem but he never stayed for long. Jesus did his preaching and teaching and healing in Galilee: the good for nothing place, the unfaithful place, the conquered place, the impure place, the uneducated place. Jesus **fulfilled what was said through the prophet Isaiah: Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light.** There is more than a travelogue here, more than even a fulfilled prophecy. There is grace here, grace for the people of Galilee and grace to the people here. Isaiah will lead us to see:

### **Darkness and Light in Galilee**

Isaiah lived during some bad times in the story of God's people. Political, military, and economic threats were everywhere every day. God was more than willing to take care of his people, but most of them weren't interested. A lot of them were more ready to rely on things like crystal balls and fortune tellers. Isaiah appealed to the people of Judea: **When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning.** Well, of course. But then Isaiah laid down a principal that was true for all people and all time: **If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.** Back then and right now, when people refuse to listen to God's Word, they end up living in darkness.

The Bible isn't the only expert in town and it's not the place where people today look for information and guidance. People may not consult fortune tellers anymore, although some people do. More often people in our world—and we know some of them—are more ready to follow what deep thinkers are saying or what the popular pundits are predicting. Some people are certain that science is more reliable than Scripture. Some people look for truth in Islam or Buddhism. And more and more people, especially younger people, simply make up their own truth. Truth is what is true to them. This all seems silly or sad to us, but we play this game, too, sometimes. We treat the Bible like a cafeteria line: I'll have some of this, but I'd rather have none of that. I'll listen to God's Word about this sin, but I'll do it my way with that sin. I'll believe that Jesus can do this, but I doubt that Jesus can do that. No matter where they are or when they lived, people who refuse to listen to God's Word **have no light of dawn and walk in utter darkness.** They try to get rid of their guilt but they can't find the switch that turns the guilt off. They long for meaning in life, but they can't see a purpose for living. They want to know if there is life after death but they can't see any light at the end of the tunnel. They want to find God, but without God's Word, God is dark and dreary and depressing for all of them—and for any of us—who refuse to listen to God's Word.

That was darkness that existed in Galilee. The Galileans had rejected God's Word long before Isaiah came on the scene. Their darkness was deeper than the darkness in Judea. Galilee was up north and was the first to face the Assyrian army, the first to feel Assyria's sword. The Galileans were the first to be dragged into captivity and the first to die on the road to Damascus. Isaiah knew that the darkness in Galilee was as black as ink and as thick as mud.

And this is what Isaiah wrote: **Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan.** Would the future be better for Galilee? Would God bring the northern kingdom back from captivity? That's not what Isaiah was seeing. Isaiah was changing his vision from nearsighted to farsighted. The honor the God would give to Galilee was that he would send Messiah there. Matthew told us Jesus' story: **When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”** With the eyes of prophecy Isaiah could see that Jesus would be the light that chased the darkness away in Galilee. Isaiah could see that Jesus would be the light that destroyed the darkness in the world. And now we can see that Jesus is the light who overcame the darkness for us.

We could spend time this morning talking about Jesus' work in Galilee. We could remember how he preached about the kingdom of God, how he taught in the Sermon on the Mount, how he cured the paralyzed and the demon-possessed, how he brought a little girl back to life from death. Isaiah knew what was coming, but he described it in a different way. He saw the coming Savior **enlarging the nation and increasing their joy** as he shined his light on people beyond Galilee and brought light to you and me. Isaiah saw the Savior's light bringing clarity to our confusion and therapy to our troubled hearts. Even when we're sad and disappointed we can **rejoice before the [Lord] as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.** Isaiah remembered how the Lord defeated the forces of Midian with an army of 300 men. Isaiah saw the same Lord hang and die on a cross to undo our darkness. On that cross Jesus shattered the **yoke** of sin that burdened us and the **bar** of death that weighed down on us and the **rod** of Satan that oppressed us. And he could see the Savior saying to each of us: **Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**

When we see darkness and light in Galilee, we are seeing darkness and light in Mequon and we are seeing darkness and light in our own lives. You and I are the Galilee who walked in darkness. We are the Galilee that Jesus enlightened despite the depth of our darkness. You and I are the Galilee that Jesus preaches to and Jesus teaches. We are the Galileans where Jesus heals our hurts and cures our fears. And Jesus is the Savior who says to us: **I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.** Amen.