

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church

Shobonier, Illinois

Epiphany 3A

January 25, 2026

Matthew 4:12-25

A Light Has Dawned

"... 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." 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:16-17 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Who doubts that we dwell in darkness? Our age is not progressing, becoming better and better. It is regressing. Our world is becoming more and more like the ancient world by the day. We live in a culture fixated on death: abortion, murder, suicide – assisted by a physician or not. Our state is vying to be *the* destination to kill your baby. Morals seem to be going from bad to worse headed to non-existent. Those with money and power exercise it against others. Our society is becoming more and more tribal – attacking, destroying, or eliminating all who are not one of one's group. Christianity is under increasing attack. The sacred is no longer so – people worshiping gods of their own imagination doing whatever they want. We dwell in a region and shadow of death. Lord, have mercy!

And He does! In spite of what we see around us, we have hope, even as there was for those in Galilee. Because Christ has come to us, and we have seen a great light. On us a light has dawned.

And that's good news, indeed. For the darkness isn't just out there. It's in here, too. In us. Inside you and me. Too often we go along with the darkness and the death. Too often we live like the people who lack the light of Christ. Oh, sure, maybe you wouldn't go along with abortion, but in other ways have you gone along with things that are popular in our culture but go against God's word? Same-sex marriage? Premarital sex? Divorce for less than biblical reasons? Greed? Drunkenness? Not going to church when you are able to do so? See, there's plenty of darkness to go around, sin out there and sin inside of us. And where sin is, death will surely follow. The death rate is still 100%, one per person. Your name is on that list, whenever that day comes calling.

But, as our text says, "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." That's for us! We have seen a great light! On us a light has dawned! For here comes Jesus, doing His thing, all for us and for our salvation. "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people." Preaching, teaching, and healing. Jesus brings His light to us.

First, then, He preaches, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus is bringing the kingdom of heaven into our midst. And because He is, it's time for us to repent. We all have sins to repent of. And it goes even deeper than that. It's our whole sinful self that we have to repent of. As self-serving sinners, we turn away from God and choose our own way to live. To repent means to acknowledge your sinfulness, get sick of it, confess it to God, and seek His forgiveness and help. He will give it to you; you have His promise on it.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus brings the kingdom to us. It is the active reign of God, His gracious rule coming into our midst. The kingdom of heaven is the driving out of darkness and death and the entrance of light and life in their place. Jesus comes bringing the kingdom of heaven here on earth. He manifests the blessings of that kingdom in His ministry.

Next, is His teaching. And He calls to Himself people whom He will teach. He calls disciples. The first bunch are some Galilean fishermen: Peter, Andrew, James, and John. "Follow me," he says, "and I will make you fishers of men." Jesus is going to train these guys, so that they

can in turn bring more people into the net of the church, so that they too can learn from Jesus and follow him.

And guess what? That's you! You and I have been caught in the net and called to follow Jesus and learn from him. The purpose of Jesus' teaching ministry is to unfold for you the true meaning of God's Word, so that you can believe and live aright, according to God's design. And that means living in faith toward God and in fervent love toward one another. Jesus teaches us not to trust in our own righteousness, which doesn't amount to a hill of beans. Instead, we trust in the merits of Christ, who went to the hill called Calvary to obtain for you the only righteousness that does work. Christ crucified is true wisdom for you, God's wisdom and power, but which look like foolishness and weakness in the eyes of the world.

Following Jesus in faith, learning from Him as His disciple, is an ongoing discipleship, lasting your whole life long. Oh, your salvation is already won. Jesus took care of that by His death on the cross and mighty resurrection. You have been joined to Jesus in your baptism and given the Holy Spirit. Your hope in Christ for eternal life is secure, because it rests outside of you and on God's promise. But your life as Christ's disciple is always growing. The Lord will continue to teach you, as you continue in His Word.

The third part of Jesus' ministry was healing. "And they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them." What does that have to do with us? Where is that today?

For those suffering those afflictions, Jesus provided healing and relief. Yet, they all ended up dying at some point. Jesus' healings were effective, but their real purpose was to confirm His message, show that He was truly the Messiah of prophecy, and prove that in a sense the kingdom had even now arrived. They also show what's in store for all of us, because of what Jesus has done by His death and resurrection. Those healings are a "sneak preview" of the ultimate healing of body and soul we will receive when Christ comes again on the last day. The point being, God is committed to healing our bodies as well as our souls. He will restore this whole broken creation. That day is coming, the day when Christ returns. Resurrection. Glorified bodies. Paradise restored, better than ever. New heavens and a new earth. Everlasting life, with our Lord and all His saints.

And this is where the sacraments come in. The sacraments that Christ instituted show that God is committed to healing your body as well as your soul. The very acts of the sacraments – Holy Baptism and Holy Communion – are applied to your body. God has redeemed you in both body and soul.

Luther makes this point in the Large Catechism. About Baptism, he writes: “I am baptized. And if I am baptized, it is promised to me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body. For that is the reason why these two things are done in Baptism: the body—which can grasp nothing but the water—is sprinkled and, in addition, the Word is spoken for the soul to grasp. Now, since both, the water and the Word, make one Baptism, therefore, body and soul must be saved and live forever.” Likewise, in regard to the Sacrament of the Altar, Luther writes: “It will cure you and give you life both in soul and in body. For where the soul has recovered, the body also is relieved.”

Jesus is still preaching, teaching, and healing. And you are the beneficiary of His ongoing ministry. Christ is still coming to us, into our midst, bringing with Him the kingdom of heaven. “The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them”—on us!—“a light has dawned!” To God be the glory now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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