

Third Sunday after Epiphany
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
25 January 2026

Matthew 4: 12-23

Whether you are watching at home or braved the elements to come to church this morning, I welcome you. It is good to be at the altar of the Lord on a day like this. When things become extreme, like our weather is all over the country today, it is good to be reminded of tradition, the common patterns and rituals that give our lives structure and meaning. Christians have a history of showing up at worship regardless of circumstances. We do it because we need to be reminded that God is constant, that God can be relied upon, that there is no circumstance that would ever cause God not to show up in our lives. In fact, when things are at their worse, we can expect God to become known in our lives the most clearly. The scriptures for today show this pattern. Even in the darkest of nights, God shows up. Even in the most dangerous of circumstances, God shows up.

I have been saying for the last several weeks that the season of Epiphany pulls the blanket a bit more every week on who this Jesus of Nazareth is, showing us a different element of his identity and mission. Last week the Gospel of John gave us four titles by which the Messiah was called. Today, the Gospel of Matthew will use the prophet Isaiah's writings to show us that Jesus of Nazareth is the light of the world, announced for centuries. This is part of his identity. At the darkest of times, Jesus became human to illumine the darkness of the human heart.

This is how the prophet Isaiah puts it today in Chapter 9:1-4, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness-- on them light has shined." The instrument God uses to bring this light to the world is no other than a child, "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The arrival of this Son that has been given to us will mark the beginning of a time of peace among nations. In fact, "all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire." War will end for ever as a result of the birth of this child. The weapons and instruments of war will be nothing but fuel for the fire and there will be endless peace among the nations. There will be justice and righteousness for ever because the birth of this child marks an end of all darkness, all greed, all violence, all inhumanity, all conflict, and all oppression.

Verses 1 and 7 of Psalm 27 (Our Psalm for today) capture this image of light quite well, when it says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall

I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?... For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe in his shelter; he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling and set me high upon a rock.” God is our light, and in this light there is no possibility of darkness. Light makes the road visible and it provides protection for those on their journey. We have nothing to fear as long as God’s light is with us and among us. It is a source of great comfort to be reminded that we are not orphans on this world. God walks alongside us. There is no darkness that can ever diminish God’s light. There are times when the darkness in the human heart appears so threatening to life that we doubt whether God is with us at all. But we must believe that God’s light is shining ever so brightly in the person of his Son. As John 1:9 tells us, In Jesus “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”

Darkness and evil are temporary, only God lives forever. I know that while we are under the yoke of darkness, its effects don’t feel transitory. We groan under the weight of darkness in the form of those who practice injustice and oppression. But their power is limited. They are like the metaphor for life in Macbeth, “a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. (Their power) is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” We are not alone in the world and injustice will end in due time for no darkness can ever last forever. God is a light from whom we cannot hide, a light that will reveal the darkness in the human heart and will judge those who benefit from darkness. Be patient, our vindication is near. God’s light will be made apparently clear soon enough. Until then, please know that God is our protection and our refuge. Evil is here for a season, but only God lives forever.

The Gospel of Matthew today applies this image of light in Isaiah and Psalm 27 to Jesus of Nazareth. It tells us that after John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” This passage takes place right after the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness and it marks the very beginning of his ministry. The child promised by Isaiah has grown up and is ready to begin his mission. He is the light that shines in the darkness, the light that uncovers the secret and evil inclinations of our hearts, the light that exposes the corruption of all human systems, the light that makes known what those who benefit from chaos and injustice want to keep secret.

Jesus is willing to accept this part of his identity. In John 8:12, he uses the divine name I AM to affirm that he is light. He says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” But

we also must remember that in the beatitudes of Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus says to the crowds, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” In the same way that Jesus’ works give glory to God the father, our own good works lead others to see the glory of God in the world.

We, the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth are called to be the light that shines in the path of those who are in darkness. What this means is that we cannot be accomplices of the darkness. We cannot willingly give darkness a megaphone and amplify the cries and claims darkness makes. As ambassadors of light, we must stand up and be on the side of light. We must learn to decry injustice and to stand on the side of those who suffer. Our apathy advances the darkness of the world, while our Christian action in love shows the world the greatness of our God. As ambassadors of light, we must be good news to the world. The Church is God’s love letter to the world, especially those who suffer under the yoke of oppression.

The time has come for Christians to be reminded of our vocation to be light. Our witness and mission have been coopted by darkness for too long. Our apathy has amplified darkness’s message of hatred. Our complacency has allowed darkness to advance unchecked. We have become little less than darkness ourselves through our apathy and the self-centeredness that tells us things are fine as long as we are okay. We must repent because we have forgotten that we are called by God to be our neighbors’ keepers.

May today be the day we reclaim our vocation to be light, because our light gives honor and glory to the God who sent Jesus into the world to be the true light of the world. May our light so shine that others may be drawn to God and realize how much God loves them.

May our Lord continue to bless you. Amen!