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Matthew 4:12-23
JESUS, IMMANUEL, BRINGS LIGHT TO GALILEE

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We all have certain pictures in our minds of Jesus. Perhaps they came from stained glass windows, Sunday school leaflets or Bible History books. We see the baby Jesus in the manger with Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds. We see Jesus standing in the Jordan River, baptized by John with the Holy Spirit descending upon him in the form of a dove. We see Jesus, the Good Shepherd, carrying that lost and straying sheep on his shoulders. We see the suffering Savior, nailed to the cross, suffering for your sins and mine. We see the risen Jesus, with the stone rolled away, showing the wounds of love in his hands and feet. Today we see him as the preacher and teacher who came to bring the very words of life to his people. JESUS, IMMANUEL, BRINGS LIGHT TO GALILEE.

Much has happened since last week's text where we saw John pointing his disciples to Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus was sent out into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan and triumphed. He would perform his first miracle by changing water into wine at the wedding of Cana. He would then go to Jerusalem. He would throw the moneychangers out of the temple. He would meet with Nicodemus at night and talk to the Samaritan woman at the well. He would return to his hometown of Nazareth and tell the people there that he was the Messiah. They would try to kill him by throwing him off a cliff.

A whole year had passed. John had been thrown into prison by King Herod for pointing out Herod's adultery with his brother's wife. After Jesus was rejected in his hometown, he would change his base of operations to Capernaum, a town located on the Sea of Galilee. There were a number of reasons for this. Capernaum was a thriving center of commerce, situated on a major trade route. His preaching and teaching could reach many and the good news could spread very quickly as those people went on their way and talked to others. All of Palestine would hear of this Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus' move to Capernaum served another purpose. Just as his being born in Bethlehem and growing up in Nazareth fulfilled prophecy, so his move here. You heard our Old Testament reading from Isaiah this morning. Isaiah said, "In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan."

Isaiah's prophecy comes from his Immanuel section. We heard at Christmas God's sign of deliverance that a virgin would conceive and bear a Son who would be called Immanuel, which means "God with us." That is the true miracle that the eternal God would come down from heaven and become one of us. He would take on human flesh in order to be our Savior. He was the Word made flesh who pitched his tent among us.

The words would be a double edged sword. On the one hand there would be judgement upon all who had been unfaithful and had forsaken the Lord. They would experience horrible things as the Assyrian army would come and conquer the Northern Kingdom, deporting most of its prominent citizens. They would then import people from other lands to live there. There would be many Gentiles mixed with Jews. They adopted a religion that many Americans would approve of, a "Cafeteria style," where people were free to pick and choose what they wanted to accept and what they wanted to reject. They might accept some parts of the Law of Moses, while rejecting others. They might be very receptive to what other people's gods advocated, especially in the realm of sexual freedom.

Truly the people were living in spiritual darkness. There may have been some semblance of religious worship, but it was merely routine. The people did not see their greatest enemies as sin, death, and the power of Satan. Rather they saw their greatest enemies as the armies of Rome and the interference of the Herod dynasty. They hoped for a Messiah, but not the one that the Scriptures foretold. They looked to a political and military Savior who would restore the kingdom of David and Solomon. They thought that they could get right with God by their own deeds. Truly they were living in spiritual darkness.

That northern territory of Naphtali and Zebulun was ravaged over and over again: the Syrians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans, just to name a few. It was an invasion corridor. And now where God had let his judgment strike first, there he would first let his grace be manifested; there he would let his light shine.

It was not because the people of Galilee had now somehow earned this privilege. No, they deserved the judgments that God had sent upon them. They rejected the words of the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, and Elisha. There would always be a faithful remnant who believed God's promises. Those promises would find fulfillment by God's grace, his undeserved love, the very opposite of what we deserve.

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Those are exactly the words that John spoke as he preached. These are the very first public words of Jesus recorded in St. Matthew's Gospel. Jesus would preach the same message as John, but whereas John would point his hearers to Jesus, Jesus would rightly point people to himself. He was both the subject and the author of his message.

Although both the message of John and Jesus was the same in word, it was not the same in thought. It might seem at first glance that Jesus now simply took over the ministry of John who was imprisoned. But there is a great difference. John came to point people to Jesus and away from himself. Jesus was the Greater One that John had spoken of.

Jesus would draw people to himself through preaching, teaching, and healing. John's ministry would be in the wilderness at the Jordan River. People came to John. Jesus would come to the people. He would spend the next two and a half years going from town to town, village to village, preaching, teaching and healing.

He taught in the synagogues. He spoke with wisdom and authority. He was not like the other teachers of the Law that the people were used to. He was not a rabbi who studied in Jerusalem with one of the master rabbis. This man was a carpenter from the despised town of Nazareth. He had no formal training. Yet he spoke with authority, the authority of God himself. He masterfully told parables to communicate the truths of the kingdom of heaven. He answered all questions, and he never dodged a question. He came to bring the light of the Gospel to those living in the darkness of sin and unbelief.

He preached the good news of the kingdom. He preached the Law, pointing out people's sins. He had many run-ins with the Pharisees who saw themselves as better than everybody else. He exposed their hearts, revealing their lusts, their greed, their covetousness, their hatred, their unbelief. They might be able to fool others, but they couldn't fool Jesus.

He dealt gently with the bruised reeds and smoldering wicks, those who knew their sins: the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the outcasts of society. He gently proclaimed the forgiveness of sins that God gave them through him. He would send them home filled with joy, knowing that their sins had been wiped away.

He healed every disease and sickness among the people. We know that Jesus came to restore the fallen creation. Jesus' ministry was a ministry of word and deed. He came not only to forgive sin, but to save his people from their sins. We know that effects of sin. We see the horrible ravages of cancer, the effects of disabilities that the blind,

the deaf, the mute and the lame will face. We know the tragedy of death. Christ came to heal every disease. That was foretold by Isaiah. He would even raise the dead. He would raise the daughter of Jairus, the widow's son and Lazarus before he would raise himself on Easter Sunday.

These things would all point to the Last Day when God's original perfect creation would be restored. Then there will be no more suffering or pain or crying or death. The old order of things will have passed away. The healings of Jesus here were preliminary in scope. Jesus healed only those the people brought to him, not everyone in the land of Palestine. Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose that all of the people that Jesus healed from all of their various diseases later died, many from illness or disease of some other natural cause. It is also reasonable to assume that those whom Jesus raised from the dead would die again at a later day and would await the final resurrection on the Last Day. All his healing miracles would point to that final restoration.

Jesus, our Immanuel, came to bring light to Galilee. He would call and train others to preach and teach that message after he had suffered, died, rose again, and ascended into heaven. We met Peter, Andrew, and John last week. The Baptist had pointed them to Christ. They came and listened and followed. At that point they were with Jesus some of the time and worked at fishing the rest of the time.

Now Jesus calls them to full-time discipleship. Their lives are going to be changed and transformed forever. They are going to spend the next two and a half years with Jesus. They will be with him in the synagogues as he taught the people. They would be with him on the mountains and the plains and by the sea as he preached his life-giving word. And they will see every miracle. They will see him give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, cleansing to the lepers, the ability to walk to the lame and life to the dead, both physically and spiritually. He would later call them to be apostles who would make disciples by baptizing and teaching, promising that the risen Christ would be present through that same Means of Grace. They would be changed from fishermen to fishers of men.

God came to his people. Jesus of Nazareth would bring light to Galilee to save people from sin and death. May we always gladly listen to him! AMEN.