



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

January 23, 2011

Epiphany 3

Sermon Text: [Isaiah 8:19-9:2](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Isaiah 8:19-9:2](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 27](#)

Second Lesson: [1 John 2:3-11](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 4:12-23](#)

### **Battle S.A.D.**

Inquire of Your Lord

Live in the Light

I'm sure you know people that have struggled with challenges in their life, like cancer or diabetes or other physical problems along those lines. My strong guess is that not a single one of you ever went to one of those people and said, "What's the matter with you? Have you lost your faith in God? Is that why you have this problem?" These challenges come into our lives ever since the fall into sin, because God didn't create a world that had cancer or diabetes or any of these other problems. There are other problems that have come into this world since the fall into sin. Sometimes people struggle with the things that often are physical, things like depression, and have to endure well-meaning Christians coming up to them and saying, "What's wrong with you? Have you lost your faith?" Especially at this time of the year.

When the light isn't as long and the sun doesn't shine as long, it seems like this time every year you hear about Seasonal Affective Disorder, a cyclical kind of depression that seems to come at the same time every year. It brings about depression, hopelessness, anxiety, loss of energy, social withdrawal, oversleeping, loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed, appetite changes, especially craving for foods high in carbohydrates, weight gain, difficulty concentrating and processing information. This is what they have diagnosed and call Seasonal Affective Disorder. The signs and symptoms come back and go away about the same time every year. Sometimes as Christians go through this, which like I said quite often is something physical, they are asked, "Well, have you lost your faith? Don't you trust in God? Is that why you are feeling so blue?"

I'm not a mental health expert, and I've just about exhausted my knowledge of Seasonal Affective Disorder, but I think it's interesting that one of the treatments they prescribe for it is getting a light that mimics sunlight and spending 30 minutes or more a day in front of one of these lights since what the sun does naturally for us seems to be gone this time of the year, this light can help to elevate certain levels of things in our system so that we don't feel so blue.

I find it interesting that when you read Isaiah and he talks about doom and gloom and people walking around in darkness and not living in the light, to me there is kind of a parallel. It isn't Seasonal Affective Disorder that God is writing to us about through Isaiah. It's Spiritual Affective Disorder. It comes from not spending enough time in the

light that is Jesus Christ. It comes from trying to find our answers in other places besides from God, besides from the true light that came into the world. Sometimes we go and look for our answers in the wrong places. We have to battle Spiritual Affective Disorder...the gloom and the doom that we have to walk around with like a cloud over us because at times we don't look in the right direction for our answers. That's not the same thing as Seasonal Affective Disorder. This one I know how we can treat well. He simply says inquire of the Lord and then live in the light.

I think it's kind of interesting when you look at what he is talking about that already some 2,700 years ago it appears, although they didn't call it horoscopes or some of the things we have on late night television commercials, these psychics that are going to give you a reading and solve all your problems, it seems like they had the same thing. It might not have been the billion dollar industry that it is today, but it certainly was a problem because God has to have the prophet tell the people, "You dummies. Why are you going and talking to the dead on behalf of the living? Why do you want to go talk to someone that's dead as though they are going to tell you something about what is going on in life? Don't go to mediums and spiritists. All they do is whisper and mutter. They don't want to be heard clearly because they are either making this stuff up or it's coming from Satan directly. God tells you it isn't coming from God." He's already said, "Don't consult these people." That was pretty clear in the Law. When he says "Do not," he's usually serious. He's always serious.

Yet they struggled with "What should we do? What should happen?" And they go to these kinds of people. Then when they would go to them and they got their answers, it says that because they have put this cloud between them and God and separated them from the light that is the true God, they go around and eventually they whisper and mutter and complain and they get enraged because things aren't going as they want. Then they curse their king and their God. If you go to the wrong places for the answers, you are going to get the wrong answer and it is going to eventually lead you to blame God. Then he says because of that they go around in darkness and fearful gloom and they'll be thrust into utter darkness.

There are a lot of people that live that way. They live chasing after answers. They say "You can interpret the Bible anyway you want, so I'm not even going to look at that." So instead I'm going to go talk to Madam Wacko on television at night? We're goofy! God's giving us the answer. It's right there. We push it aside and say "I'm going to go find my answer somewhere else." We aren't the brightest bulb on the tree and, in fact, we have no current coming through us when we are thinking that the answer isn't in God or in Christ.

Think about this...do you know people that are going around in this kind of gloom and doom as they live their life? Do you know people that aren't living in the light of Jesus Christ? Can you see how it affects them? Can you see that the answer for them would be to be closer to God and know him better and know that Christ lived and died to take away their sins? You can see that this would give them a purpose and a confidence and it would help them to face the challenges of living in this world. It wouldn't take

away all the challenges of living in a sinful world. You and I know that. As Christians we ought to have figured out by now that being a Christian does not mean that all the problems disappear. It just means that we have someone bigger than us to help us through them and sustain us and equip us to face them.

But do you know people like that...that don't know that and are struggling? Have you ever thought to yourself, maybe the reason why they don't know it is because they don't see that it makes a difference in you?

If they are in your work place with you, do they hear you whining and complaining about other people just as much as they are? Do they hear you joining in and doing the same things, expressing the same frustrations and not expressing confidence that "It's not going well now but it's in God's hands, and I know my God is going to take care of me. I'm not worried about that." Or do they not see the difference that faith makes in our lives so there is no reason for them to try to figure out what this light is that we Christians talk about that we are living in, and they are off in some darkness. When they look at us, they don't see any difference.

Honestly, you and I have failed our God. We have sinned because we haven't been the light reflectors that he has designed us to be. We are his mouth. We are his arms. We are his hands. We are the ones that are supposed to be there to hug these people when they are broken and knocked down, not just complain about them. Too often, we don't reflect the light. We reflect the darkness of our sinful nature that still lives in us. Unfortunately, we contribute to people living in doom and gloom and shaking their fists at God because sometimes we still do it. We forget that being a Christian doesn't mean our problems are taken away. When those problems still keep coming into our lives, maybe we get shaking our fists at God and we're just like Job saying "God, come down here and answer me and I'll show you why you shouldn't be doing this to me." We forget that our God is seeing a whole bigger picture than we are. Most importantly, we forget the basic truth that living in the light of God means that we know he loves us no matter what our eyes tell us because we focus on the truth that he was willing to live and die in our place. He was willing to be crucified. He was willing to be forsaken by himself so that you and I could be drawn close to him. When we take our eyes off that light, it's pretty hard for us to reflect it. When it's pretty hard for us to reflect it, it's going to be even harder for the Spirit to work through the words that we speak to bring others out of this doom and gloom and battle their Spiritual Affective Disorder and bring them Jesus Christ.

Now if God would have stopped right there, I suppose we would be a little worried and a little down. But notice how he said that in the land that had all this doom and gloom, in the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, "I'm going to change things. I'm going to change things around completely and absolutely. I'm going to change what was darkness into light."

When you look at the map of the twelve tribes of Israel, I'm certain you can picture Zebulun and Naphtali to the north. They were up north by the Sea of Galilee. Why

they were called Galilee of the nations is that when the kingdom that was in power to the north, Assyria, Babylon, whoever it might have been, wanted to battle the kingdom that was in power to the south, Egypt, they would often meet up there, and occupying armies for the people that are living there...not real good, right? It wasn't a pleasant place to live as Assyrians or Babylonians moved in and took over. Quite often many of them stayed behind...Galilee of the Gentiles, Galilee of the nations. Because of that, there were all these influences of worshiping other gods, and worship of God was sometimes really clouded over and the light of the promise of the Savior didn't always shine through. That's why he talks about them living in doom and gloom and how they had been humbled.

But notice he says, "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." Then when we read Matthew today, we heard the Holy Spirit through Matthew tell us "Here's the fulfillment. Jesus went and ministered in Galilee. He was that light that had shone. And when he had shone, he made a difference." He worked even among the Gentiles that were there. He shared the message of the Gospel with the people that he encountered. And God used it to work faith in their hearts. And this light dawned where once had only been gloom and doom and destruction.

For you and I who know to inquire of the Lord and look to his Gospel and find in his Gospel our strength, we know that no matter how many times we have failed our God in the past, our God can use that spark of faith that remains in our heart to fan it into flame and produce the glorious light of the Gospel as we share our faith and as we live our faith. There are many times in our lives when you and I have been like Zebulun and Naphtali. We haven't been faithful to our God and we haven't served our God well. But in Christ we stand forgiven. In our baptismal waters, we were covered with his perfection and in this Sacrament, we receive his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. Our God looks us in the eyes and says "Go in peace. Your sins are forgiven." When we know that our sins are forgiven, we can become this upheaval of changing darkness and gloom to light as we share the Gospel, as we go forward.

As we live this and share it with others, living it so they can see what it looks like, and then backing it up not just with "I hope they go someplace and hear it from someone else" but putting ourselves on the line and opening our mouths and sharing, not complaining and whining and bickering, then the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that he loves you, that he died for you, he did it for me and he did it for you...then these people that were in doom and gloom just like those people in Zebulun and Naphtali will join us in singing because the Lord is our light.