



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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

January 22, 2023

Pastor Randy Ott

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

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

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 27

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

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

### Jesus Appears as the Light that Shines in Darkness

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

When I was growing up back in Hemlock, Michigan, the one thing I could count on every summer is that we would go on an extended trip, two weeks, three weeks, four weeks sometimes it would be, and we would travel all over the country. I think I hit every state in the continental United States except for Utah. I don't know how we missed Utah. Maybe we took a left turn instead of a right. But I've never been there. I enjoyed traveling. I enjoyed going to historic places, battlefields and things like that.

One place I remember going to (I don't remember the name of it) is one of the caverns, I think it was in Kentucky. I don't know if that's Mammoth or one of those caverns like that. I remember being down in there and it was kind of neat to see all the stuff but then the guide turned off the lights and you were in absolute pitch blackness. I don't know if you've ever been in a place like that or experienced that but it's really strange. You can't see anything at all. There is complete absence of any light at all.

So whenever I read these passages during Epiphany and we talk about Jesus revealed as Light, a Light that shines in the darkness that Isaiah said was going to come (***The people walking in darkness have seen a great light...***), I can't picture walking in that kind of darkness. Yet the darkness that many people walk in is just as certain as that pitch blackness in that cavern. It's just that they don't know it. I suppose if you spent your entire life in the darkness of that cave, light would be pretty strange to you.

You and I, many of us have known the Light of who Jesus is our whole life. The idea of living in the darkness where you don't know Jesus is kind of foreign to us. So it's hard for us to put ourselves in the shoes of someone who didn't know this incredible love that God has for each and every person that ever has lived. We kind of take it for granted like we sometimes take light for granted. We're only shocked when there is the complete absence of light.

But this morning as we look at these words from Isaiah, we see first of all there are people that maybe have some kind of innate knowledge that they are in some sort of darkness and they are looking for answers to some of life's eternal questions, like what happens when we die, or things like that. So it says: Why go to **mediums and spiritists... Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?** Why not just go to God, the one who has the answers? But there are plenty of people that don't know that God is the Light, so they go to all kinds of strange, different places looking for answers and these are some of the things that eventually are going to happen, if you are honest with yourself.

One of the things I find fascinating about the book that we are reading Sunday night, Prepared to Answer, is that the author is addressing a lot of the questions that people have who don't live in the Light, who have never known Jesus, or who reject Jesus, or even those who are violently opposed to God and His message. You can read Isaiah this morning and you can kind of see why they are that way.

Did you notice what it talks about here? You go to these mediums and spiritists. You don't get an answer that really fulfills. Then you go on with your life and you are walking through life, and life on this side of heaven is hard, even for us as Christians who know the Light. But think of what it's like for those who don't have this comfort or this peace of knowing there is a God who loves you at your side through all of it. A God who loved you so much that He left heaven and lived in your place and died in your place; a God that loves you more perfectly than ANY person EVER will love you on the face of this earth. This is the God and His Light that shines into the world. He comes to live and die for us and they are going around without that knowledge when they look at things.

You and I can look at what is going on at times and we can wring our hands and say "What's going on? Why is this happening? Why is that happening, and how come God isn't doing something about it?" "Maybe God is the problem" is the conclusion that we hear people without the Light come to. It says they look up in their doom and their distress and their gloom and they curse God and curse the King because that's the only thing they know—that kind of darkness of not knowing a God of love.

Again, if I was God, I wouldn't have been such a loving god. I would have destroyed you all and started over with people that would be a little bit better than what we all are. But

God didn't do that. There is one word in there that I find fascinating. After going through how all these people have rejected God, they went to other places looking for light and only found darkness and the darkness left them nothing but gloom and despair and muttering and cursing and all these other things, do you see how that next paragraph started? **Nevertheless**—Nevertheless, God is going to come as Light and reveal Himself to a world so that it removes the gloom of living in a fallen, sinful world. Nevertheless, Galilee of the Gentiles, the Way of the Sea, Zebulun, and Naphtali, there is going to be a Light that is going to come and shine in you.

We heard today how Jesus came as fulfillment of that Light. He comes and He wants people to see the Light so He began to preach and proclaim ***"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*** This was Jesus Himself. He was the promised Messiah. He was revealing Himself that way through His powerful teaching as He went from town to town and taught as one who had authority (not as the teachers of the Law) as He went from place to place and did these powerful actions, these miracles, to reveal Him as the one who is the Light that chases away the gloom of darkness. This is who our God is.

Then our God, did you hear Him? He was so desperate for people to live in the Light, to be in the Light, to have this joy and this peace and this comfort that He yanked a couple people out of boats and said "Hey, I'm going to make you fishers of men. I want people to know who I am and what I have come here to do. I don't want them to wander around in darkness and mutter and complain and live in this gloom and despair. I want them to know just how much I love them, that I left heaven for them, that I was perfect in their place, and that I died and rose again so that they know that they, even though they die, will rise again." This is the Light that we live in that brings us comfort.

It doesn't take away all the effects of living in a sinful world. There is still pain. There is still sorrow. There are still challenges that are incredibly difficult. But you and I don't have to face any of them alone. When we live in the Light, the Light of God's love is there for us. When we look to it, it is there to comfort and sustain us. He is so desperate for us to know it. He gives it to us in Baptism. He gives it to us in the Lord's Supper. He gives it to us in the Word.

And then He says, "I want that message to get out," so just like He called His first disciples, He has sent us to be His Light bearers, to share the good news of Jesus with people that are living in darkness, because they are out there. They are still muttering and complaining and living in a gloom and a despair of what is going on and why and how things are so bad around us. We have the answer. "Yes they are, but we're just here for a while because our eternal home is a place of perfection, a place of perfect, absolute love. They aren't anything we can begin to imagine now. And that same perfect, absolute love that we can't even begin to imagine is with us every day of our lives and sustains us and strengthens us to get through all the things that we need to get through." He equips us to reach out to the people that are still living in that

darkness. We can bring them the joy that is the Light because God works through people like you and me to share the Light of Jesus Christ. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.