

+ In Nomine Jesu +

Matthew 4:12-25

Date: January 22, 2023

Liturgical Date: Epiphany 3, A

Title: Jesus saves all nations from death

*In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit*

“All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.” The Lord appears as a light for all of the nations. God shines his light of salvation for all people, even to the land of the Gentiles. This light, this salvation, this Jesus shines where the absence of light is so great that the darkness is called the shadow of death. Where there is no light, no life, no salvation, the Lord comes proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The darkness that is cast over the land is a deep darkness. Death has cast a long shadow over the land. Ever since Adam disobeyed God’s command, death has been the darkness that covers all nations. Nobody could escape it. Death has many forms. Violence, murder, wars. Kings and nations rise against each other, putting to death their enemies, until even the kings have their breath depart and their plans perish. Disasters, famines, or pestilence claim many lives. Mass disease can be so fearsome that death must be avoided at all costs. Or, men who see their lives span a great length of days still consider whether they are fortunate or not to see so many days, even though those days are still numbered.

Yet death is not the cause of the darkness. Death is but the symptom of the darkness. Death comes about because Adam disobeyed God’s word. God’s word said, “You may eat of any tree, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. The day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” When God’s word is not heard, not listened to, not obeyed, then only death is the result. Apart from God’s word, there is only death.

In the days of Isaiah the prophet, the darkness had been in full effect on the people. The people were afraid of the nearby kings coming and slaughtering them. as if death would be surrounding them on all sides. The people are so distressed at their hopeless situation, they are desperate to find help. What would be the obvious help for the people? The obvious help is God’s word. Yet the people do not run there for help. The word of life, the word that is a lamp to the feet and a light to the path - the people do not seek out this light. The darkness is so enveloping that the light doesn’t shine through.

The people walk around with fear - fear of anything that would bring destruction, like the king of Assyria who would come and sweep away the nation. The people needed comfort. But instead the people asking God for help, they asked for someone to communicate with the dead. The people were in such darkness and gloom, they inquired of the dead on the behalf of the living. What about God and his word? The darkness was so thick, the people couldn’t even find a glimmer of God’s word to save them. On the contrary, the darkness made the people hungry

and enraged. The more hungry and enraged the people were, the more that they spoke against God. They spoke against God because they had no dawn, no hope, only darkness and gloom.

The people cannot even find one spark of light. So God shines his glorious light upon his own people. But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. The people cannot see in the darkness, so the Lord appears to his people. The darkness is done. The dawn is coming. The light has come. No longer do men need to seek out the dead for aid and comfort. God seeks out men with the light that dawns in the darkness.

“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.” God does not leave his people in contempt, humbled because of their darkened hearts. The people did not seek God, and so they were conquered. Now that the light has dawned, God shines the light of his word on his people. God’s word shines life and salvation on his people.

This light comes through preaching. From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Those things that you were doing in the darkness that nobody could see that were awful - turn away from those things. The old way of doing things in the darkness is over. Turn away from fearing kings and their wrath, for they can only harm the body but not the soul. Turn away from death, for the Lord of Life has come. Turn away from speaking against God. Turn away from consulting the dead. Turn away from fear and despair.

Now that this light shines on men, they must turn from their sin. Do not continue in sin and darkness, hiding from God, as if God could not punish the wickedness that he doesn’t know about. The light has come. The deeds of men are exposed. God continually sends that message of repentance through his prophets. Isaiah’s words to Israel so many years ago are also well-considered as we remember Life Sunday and what God obligates us to do on behalf of the unborn. Isaiah calls out, “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.”

In Isaiah’s day, the prophet called the people to repentance. The call to repent came with a threat to the people and their nation. The people would be broken. Consumed. Burn together. The foreign kings would spoil their land. But the people did not listen to the call to repentance. They followed the gods of their own belly and lived by fear. So the kings overthrew them.

Now the true king who reigns in heaven appears preaching repentance. His kingdom is drawing near. His kingdom is an eternal kingdom, and his preaching for repentance does come with a threat. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. That time is soon. Fear the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell. The call to repentance is urgent. The end is near. Turn from your ways and live.

But this king comes with healing and life and salvation. This king comes so that all nations would turn to the Lord and be saved. This king comes to shine light in the darkness. This king comes to destroy death and the one who holds the power of death, the devil. King

Jesus comes to deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. The fear of death extends to all nations. King Jesus comes as king to rule over all of the nations, to deliver them from the shadow of death.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. The call to repentance is urgent. But the day of salvation has also drawn near. Jesus saves from death. Jesus shines the light to obliterate the shadow of death. Whatever death has done to the body will be undone by King Jesus. What is there to fear from death when the new king will put even death under his feet?

This king comes through the northern territories of Zebulun and Naphtali. Those were two of the tribes who were living in the far north of Israel, whose people bore the brunt of the conquest of foreign kings. This new king comes through that same region, not for destruction, but for salvation. This new king comes not because the sins of the people must be punished, but because the king's mercy brings him to save all nations.

This good news must be sent to all nations. The king must send men as ambassadors to draw all men into this kingdom. The king starts with two brothers. Simon - Peter - and Andrew his brother. They are used to their day job - they are fishermen. They throw the nets into the sea. Their goal is to make a living by doing this honest work. There's nothing wrong with fishing in that way. But now Jesus calls them for something different. Jesus calls them to "Follow me."

Simon Peter and Andrew follow after Jesus. Whatever Jesus teaches, they are observant students. The call to repentance they follow, as the entire life of a believer is to be one of repentance. The promises of the kingdom - salvation and life - Simon Peter and Andrew trust in. Everything that God speaks in his word - whether law or gospel - these two take to heart in following Jesus. Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

The word from the king must go out. The king will send out these men as ambassadors. The word that these apostles speak in the name of the king would be as if the king himself speaks the word. God sends out apostles to drive men away from their fear of death and shine the light of Jesus' salvation for all people. Through this word, God will drag men into his kingdom. Jesus bids them to "Follow me", as salvation is in no one else except for this Jesus.

James the son of Zebedee and John his brother are in the boat with their father. Again, Jesus calls to them as he did with Simon Peter and Andrew. The Lord seeks out men to drag into his kingdom. Darkness had prevented men from finding God on their own, so much so that the men spoke against God and sought counsel from the dead. But now that the light shines, Jesus seeks out men to follow him.

Nobody can come into the kingdom on his own, but the king drags these men into the kingdom by calling them with his word. God seeking out men for his kingdom is so unbelievable. God's merciful seeking is a stumbling block, and many would still reject that call to follow Jesus. Many would still follow false gods of their own making, created out of their own desires or fears. They can't stand that God would seek them and save them. They can't even fathom that they need saving. Yet Jesus still sends out his call to bring men into his kingdom. God continues to send men out to preach repentance and the salvation that Jesus

brings.

Jesus began to preach repentance and the kingdom of heaven drawing near. The end times salvation is coming when the trumpets sound and the Son of Man comes on the cloud with great glory. The light shines over all things, completely eradicating the shadow of death forever. For Jesus must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Jesus by his own death destroys death. Jesus takes on the most fearsome death by a cross. Death did all it could to Jesus. But three days later, Jesus rose from the dead to bring life and immortality to light.

Jesus reveals the salvation that comes when he returns. Death is destroyed. Why fear anything that can harm the body? The kings of the earth can only harm the body, and even if they kill the body - as John who is arrested would soon find out - Jesus will raise the body on the last day to life everlasting. In the valley of the shadow of death, fear no evil, for Jesus is with you. Death is the veil that is spread over all nations. Jesus will swallow up death forever. All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD. All nations shall remember and see the resurrection of all flesh.

Jesus reveals the salvation to come as he goes throughout all Galilee proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease. Jesus preaches repentance and the salvation that he brings. And Jesus' word does the thing that he preaches. The word brings healing to bodies and pushes death away, at least for a bit.

They brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. These sicknesses and diseases are a reminder that death is on its way. But death does not have the final say. Whatever brings pain to the body would be undone on the last day. The various torments that demons bring upon men, whether obvious or hidden, are ended by the king who speaks and the demons obey. The illnesses that affect the mind would be healed. Even the most broken of bodies are made new on the last day.

Even now, we pray that the Lord will bring healing to us now for any of these diseases. We bring our pains before the Lord in prayer. We pray that the Lord will deliver us from attacks from the demons. We pray that the Lord would provide relief from mental illnesses. We pray for ourselves and for all people, trusting that the Lord would bring healing in his good time according to his will.

And we pray that the kingdom of God would come soon to bring this healing to the people of all nations.

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

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