

Sunday 26th Jan. 2020 Seeing the Great Light
Isaiah 9:1-4 Matthew 4:12-23

Thanks to choir

I would like you to imagine a scene that I am sure you have all experienced at some point... where you are somewhere dark and then suddenly a bright light gets turned on!

Ooooh! Bright!

You wake up. It's dark in your room until you turn on the light...

Or what about when you are setting off in the car in the early hours of the morning to go to the airport or something. Everywhere is dark until you turn on the headlights of the car

That sense of SHARP contrast

This morning I came down and sat at my desk.. it was dark outside. I could see the faint impression of the houses opposite. The windows and doors and gutters were easier to pick out because of their white paint. Then something triggered the security light and the scene before me was very different. I could see the bushes and the car and all the bits of twig on the driveway

You can imagine, I am sure, what I am talking about.

Those times when everywhere is dark and then suddenly a light is turned on and the contrast is huge. What we can see is totally different.

Please keep that idea in your mind as we think about these passages of scripture this morning.

'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light' Is 9:2 (Slide 1)

Isaiah is writing these words to the people of Israel who are living under the oppressive rule of the occupying force of Assyria... They are living in dark times

They have turned to all sorts of behaviour that is in conflict with Yahwah's way of living. They are living sinful and dark lives.

The verse that comes just before where we start our reading today says

'They will look towards the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust in to utter gloom.' Isaiah 8:22

The people Isaiah is speaking to are in a dark dark place when he gives these great words of comfort and hope

'There will be no more gloom for those who were in distress...

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light' Isaiah 9:1&2

I know that along with many of you, and many of the people I chat to early in the morning when I am out walking Dibley, we are so grateful that the daylight is lasting longer in the afternoon and there is even a slight difference in the morning light... it is getting lighter slightly earlier

In fact, according to the BBC weather app, in a weeks time the sun will rise 10 minutes earlier and set 12 minutes later in the afternoon

And what a difference these extra 22 minutes of daylight will make. We notice the longer hours of light, the animals notice it and the plants notice it And all of these things combine to give us a hope and a lift to our spirits as we move from the dark of winter into the light of spring.

How much more Isaiah is promising to the people of Israel when he says to them 'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light'

He mentions specifically the people from the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali (Slide 2)
He was not talking of just lighting up the street scene.
He was not talking about a few minutes of extra light here and there.
He was talking of the promised Messiah, the one promised to come to bring GREAT light.
A new hope and a joy. An increase in their nation. Great rejoicing like after a victory in battle
He promises that the yoke of their burden, the heavy bar across their shoulders, would be broken
- as on the day of Midian

Let's sidetrack for a moment to understand that reference to Midian.
Gideon - had been a military leader, a judge and a prophet for the people of Israel (Judges 6-8)
Gideon and his army, against all the odds, had defeated the powerful & oppressive Midianites
hence the words - the rod of their oppressor you have broken as on the day of Midian

God was promising an even greater defeat - not just the defeat of their resent oppressor but the
defeat of darkness, the defeat of evil, the defeat of the power of death

Who can complete the words that we hear every Christmas
For unto us a child is given.....?
unto us a son is given
and the government will be upon His shoulders
He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace
These well know words come immediately after our reading today in verse 6

Isaiah is promising the people of the nation of Israel the hope of the promised Messiah, the
GREAT light that would bring joy and growth and freedom, the one who is mighty and
everlasting.

Then if we move to the Gospel reading from Matthew we read that Jesus left his home in Nazareth
and went to Capernaum, to the place of Zebulun and Naphtali, to fulfil the prophecy given by
Isaiah (Slide 3)

God's plan all along had been one of redemption and salvation and here in these passages we see
the start of the fulfilment of that

In the writing of Isaiah we read that God's contempt had been on the land of Zebulun and Naphtali
and yet it is in this very land that Jesus started his ministry. From a place called the Galilee of the
nations / Gentiles, a place that was a cross roads for major trade routes Jesus' ministry started
and spread.

It was from this land that Jesus chose His first disciples who would be used by God to spread His
Kingdom to many nations.

The people's of these lands who had rebelled against God and had got into a dark place came to
see the great light.

They saw Jesus at work as he went throughout Galilee
teaching in the places of worship
proclaiming the good news of the kingdom
curing every disease and every sickness

He called people to repent of their dark and sinful way of living

And he called others to follow him and become participants in his ministry of redemption and salvation- to be fishers of people.

Last week Jon was talking about the Messiah and the Lamb of God

Today we hear about Jesus in a different metaphor - as the great light who came to dispel the darkness so that the people who were living in darkness saw the great light (Slide 4)

If you were here in church on Christmas Eve you may remember that we were thinking about Jesus as the Light of the World then.

I reminded us all that darkness is dark because of the absence of light.

A light always overcomes, always replaces darkness

And this mornings passages reinforce that

Through the prophet Isaiah, God promised that the people who were walking in darkness would see a great light, that a light would shine on those who were living in a land of deep darkness Jesus purposefully started his ministry in the place that Isaiah spoke of so that people could join up the dots and see that he came as the Light of the world, a light to nations to bring the ultimate joy and freedom

Paul in letter to Corinthians writes the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor 1:18).....

We all shared in the response to the Psalm with the words The Lord is my light and my salvation (Slide 5)

The contrast between the dark of our room before and after we turn on a bright light is significant But that is nothing in contrast the the light that Jesus brings to a nation in darkness.

How our nation needs the Great light to shine again

How nations across our wold need to see the light to shine in the darkness

the burden of oppression needs breaking

We need to pray that Jesus, Light of the World will shine greatly in our land and across the nations of our world so that we and many others may be able to proclaim that The Lord is my light and my salvation.