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## He'll Light Up Your Life

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TEXT: Matthew 4:12-16 (ESV)

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—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."

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I would like to begin today's message with a poem that I've always liked by Shel Silverstein, entitled *Afraid of the Dark*.

I'm Reginald Clark. I'm afraid of the dark. So I always insist on the light on and my teddy to hug and my blanket to rub and my thumb to suck or to bite on. And three bedtime stories. Two trips to the toilet, two prayers and five hugs from my mommy. I'm Reginald Clark. I'm afraid of the dark, so please do not close this book on me.

Living in the dark is not a pleasant experience most of the time, except when you're trying to sleep, I suppose. It can be depressing, scary and even dangerous. For instance, as I have been writing this Midwinter message, there has been no sunshine for several days. It's quite gloomy. The days seem even shorter than they are. I found that living without the sun's light can really take it out of a person, making us depressed, lethargic. Darkness can also be scary for us. Children seek light at night like Reginald. They want night lights plugged in or closet lights left on, and they yearn for a crack of light to slip across the floor to comfort them and demystify the darkness. And living in the dark can also be dangerous. For instance, driving at night is difficult enough for many of us, but try driving without headlights on or even when they are when they're covered with

mud, it's hard to see the upcoming curves and obstacles in the road or warning signs, and that can lead to some deadly crashes. Or try walking across a dark room filled with objects on the floor just waiting to be stepped on or tripped over. Legos laying out on the carpet can be quite painful to step on in the dark. Darkness can conceal things from us, besides, that need attention like strep throat or cavities, dirty rooms. And unexposed, they only get worse. So, living in darkness definitely has its drawbacks, doesn't it?

Now, today's passage talks of people who are living in darkness. But it's not talking so much about physical darkness as we have been. Oftentimes, the Bible uses darkness as a metaphor to refer to two different things: evil and ignorance. It describes the world sometimes as a dark place full of evil, wickedness, and suffering. And we can attest to that. We see it all around us. Just turn on the news and observe the darkness in war-torn Ukraine or starvation and sickness all around the globe and violence and senseless deaths, cruelty, abuse, and injustice. And the list can go on. And we sometimes can even see it in ourselves, can't we? The darkness of our self-centeredness, our lusts, and pride. Our sins, always tending to look out for, number one, our dark side. And this darkness can make us afraid and cause us to despair as we look around us and look inside ourselves.

Darkness is also a metaphor for ignorance, as I said. We're ignorant of how to fix a cure these things. Try as we may, we're hopelessly in the dark about these things. We look to all kinds of ways to fix them and get ourselves out of the darkness. But we always fall short. That's because we're sinners in need of God's help. We need his life-giving light.

In today's passage, we read that God has provided the light that we need. Jesus here is described as God's great light that has dawned upon a world of people living in darkness. The context is right after his baptism and 40 days in the wilderness being tested by Satan, Jesus set up his ministry headquarters in Galilee, living in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. And Matthew, inspired by the Holy Spirit, tells us that this was no accident. The move to this location was actually a fulfillment of God's Word, spoken through the Prophet Isaiah hundreds of years earlier. They were spoken to people who were living in a dark, hopeless time due to their own sinfulness. But God had promised that the territory called Galilee would one day be the first to see a great light to rescue them. A light would dawn on these people living in darkness, in the shadow of death. God's light. God would come to rescue them and rule over them through His anointed

Messiah. A king. Matthew's pointing out to us that Jesus is that long-awaited light. It's quite an announcement. He is God's light for people living in the spiritual darkness of sin and death and evil.

We actually sing about that truth in our Christmas carols, don't we? For instance, there's *Silent Night*. "Silent night, Holy night, Son of God, love's pure light." Or in *O Little Town of Bethlehem*: we sing "Yet in thy dark street shineth the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." Or *Oh, Come All Ye Faithful* calls Jesus the highest, most holy light of light eternal. And how about the line from *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*: "Hail the Heaven-born Prince of Peace. Hail the Son of Righteousness, Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in his wings. And that sun of righteousness is spelled "s-u-n." He's a bright light.

And John testifies of this truth in his opening of his gospel. "In the beginning was the word," John says, "and the word was with God, and the word was God. And He was in the beginning with God and all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." Now we know who John is talking about here. He's talking about Jesus. And then he goes on to say,

In him was life. And the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man named John the Baptist sent to bear witness to the light that all might believe through him. But he was not. The light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

And Jesus himself attested to this truth when he announced, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

So, the light has come, the great light, into our dark world, sent from God. Jesus has come to light up your life and mine. First of all, he's the light of God's salvation for all people. Jesus entered this world to rescue you and me from the darkness of sin and death and the devil, and bring us into the light of God's eternal kingdom. We could not have this salvation on our own. It could come only through him. Here's what he did for you and me: He did battle with the dark powers of sin and death and the devil that were holding humanity captive in their dark dungeon. Things were hopeless. Remember, though, that everything got so dark when Jesus was hanging on the cross at his crucifixion. What's going on there? We see him entering our darkness in order to get us out of the darkness. He was paying the debt for our sinfulness at the cross. Then he

rose again from the dark tomb to give us forgiveness and a restored relationship with God. He was victorious over death, and the shadow of death no longer has the last word over those of us who trust in Christ, the light of the world. Because he rose from the grave, I too, will be raised from death to live eternally with him. The darkness of the shadow of death is not our permanent residency. We're not stuck in that dark in the shadow of death. There's a place that has been prepared for you and me. The light of the world, Jesus Christ, has given me this confident hope that I am in good hands with Him for the rest of my days and into the life to come. And even though I might walk through the valley of the shadow of death sometimes, when things look so dark, I can do so without fear or despair. For I know now I'm walking in the light of Christ, and I know He's with me, reassuring me along the way with the light of his loving presence. He lights my path for me.

Jesus came not only to be a light of salvation in our lives, He stepped into this dark world to be a light that guides you in me with the light of his truth. A beacon guides home an airplane in foggy conditions. A lighthouse steers a ship away from danger. The reflectors on the highway and the median will guide a driver away from dangerous conditions. Well, Jesus came as a light to guide us and to give our lives direction. That take us down the right paths. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, prophesied in Luke 1 that the coming Messiah would be like, "The sunrise to give light to those living in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the path of peace." He guides us into the path of peace.

Now, before Jesus ascended, he said to his disciples, "I will not leave you without a guide. I will send the Holy Spirit and He will guide you into all the truth," – truth about God and His Holiness and love and truth about ourselves created in God's image, about sinners in need of a Savior and Lord and truth about life and what makes life work best. And what is life in the kingdom and what is God's plans for me? Think of it: when you face a major decision in your life, you don't have to make the decision alone when you have Christ in your life. He is there to shine his light and guide you in this. He will guide you, for instance, through his words in the Bible, which we call lamp unto our feet and a light and to our path. He'll meet us there and be our wonderful counselor about life. So I encourage you to set up a daily appointment with your counselor today and keep that appointment every day of your life. He wants to guide you through life.

Friends, it is so true, I know, there is a lot of darkness in this world. Some days can seem especially dark, but you don't have to be paralyzed or destroyed by it, or afraid of it. That's our good news, because God has provided the light that you and I need in the darkness. The light shines in the darkness. And the darkness has never and will never overcome it. Isn't that great news? Come and bask in his light. Walk in it, grow in it, rejoice in it, be encouraged by it. The light of the world, Jesus Christ, has come to shine in your life. Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

I heard this story a long time ago that I think applies here. A painter painted a bleak picture of a winter scene. It depicted a storm sweeping across the countryside. Over in the corner of this picture, there was a cabin, but it looked dead and hopeless, just as cold as the rest of the picture. But with one small stroke, that painter dramatically transformed that picture. He took the tip of his brush, dipped it in gold paint, touched one window of the cabin, and the golden glow from the cabin window transformed that picture from coldness to an invitation to come in; from a picture of death to life. From a picture of gloom to gladness, inviting us. Jesus said, "I have come into the world as a light so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness." Let's pray. Gracious God and Father. Thanks for the great light of the world, Jesus Christ, your only begotten Son. God from God. Light from light, true God from true God. What a gift he is. Help us, oh, Lord, to keep our focus on him, on this light the rest of our days in this dark world. Amen.