

THESE ARE THE READINGS FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

GOD'S WORD FOR THIS WEEK

JESUS APPEARS AS LIGHT SHINING IN DARKNESS

Jesus appears as the light that shines in the darkness. Dark places remain covered in the shadow of sin and unbelief. However, now there are bright places, too, and there you find God's children. Jesus shines his light by preaching repentance and the good news of the nearing kingdom, and he invites us to follow him to a life illumined by him. Following him means living in the joy of freedom (First Lesson) and walking in the light of love for God and brother (Second Lesson).

TRADITIONAL FIRST LESSON – ISAIAH 9:1-4

9¹ Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. ³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. ⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

Q 1) What kind of "darkness" were the people walking in?

These people were walking in the spiritual darkness of sin and death. St. Paul says that we were "dead in our transgressions and sins" and "objects of God's wrath" ([Ephesians 2:1, 3](#)).

Q 2) What "great light" did they suddenly see?

Jesus is the light of the world ([John 8:12](#)) that brings spiritual peace and joy.

The story of Zebulun and Naphtali was one of suffering. These northern tribes bore the brunt of foreign attacks, most notably by Assyria. Adding insult to injury, the land had become Galilee of the Gentiles—a melting pot of resettled peoples and a hotbed of crass syncretism. It was a land covered by the darkness of gloom and unbelief. Though the people's punishment was well deserved, it was not an end to itself, but a means to God's end. God's plan broke upon them as suddenly as light shining into the darkness when Jesus appeared and began to preach and teach.

SUPPLEMENTAL FIRST LESSON – ISAIAH 8:19–9:2

*8¹⁹ When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. ²¹ Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. ²² Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness. **9** Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*

Q 1 a) What does Isaiah have to say to those people who try to find answers and guidance by talking to psychics, astrologers, or mediums?

Man cannot find his way through the darkness of the world except by the inquiring of God. No spirit, no man, no other message brings light to those living in darkness.

b) What is the only place to find answers, guidance, and light?

To the law and the testimony! There you find the Word, the great light for those living in darkness.

TRADITIONAL SECOND LESSON – 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17

1¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹ My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹² What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Q 1) What difficulty was Paul dealing with in the Corinthian congregation? (See 1:10-11.)

There were divisions and quarrels within the congregation.

Q 2) How does Paul address this problem? (See 1:13.)

He asks the Corinthians to consider whether Christ is divided. Either you're a Christian or you're not. The members of Christ can't be divided.

Q 3) What specific job had Paul been sent to do?

Paul had been sent specially to preach the gospel. Apparently, he often left the job of baptizing to others.

SUPPLEMENTAL SECOND LESSON – 1 JOHN 2:3-11

2³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. ⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. ¹¹ But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

Q 1) How can we be certain that we know God? How do John's words apply to people today who think they know God?

John says, "Obey his commands." The gnostic heretics that John combatted had little regard for laws, sin, and the commands of God. They felt they knew God well enough without worrying about acts of obedience. How similar to modern unbelievers and even too many Christians today! They think they know God, but they have little time for talk of sin, guilt, and obedience. John tells us that contrary to their opinion, they do not know God. Jesus—our Morning Star—has already come, and the light of his dawn is beginning to break over the world and the time for deeds of darkness is fading fast. There are still places of deep darkness but that is not the place to find God's children. They will be found walking in the light and shedding their own light on the darkness around them by living in love for God and brother.

GOSPEL – MATTHEW 4:12-23

4¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— ¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶ the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." ¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ¹⁸ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. ²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Q 1) What did Jesus do when he heard that John the Baptist had been arrested?

He returned to Galilee to preach the gospel, fulfilling the words of Isaiah in the First Lesson.

Q 2) What did Jesus do to help him in his job of preaching the good news of the kingdom?

He began to call his disciples. What faith they showed by dropping everything and following Jesus!

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Almighty God, You sent Your Son to proclaim Your kingdom and to teach with authority. Anoint us with the power of Your Spirit that we too may bring good news to the afflicted, bind up the brokenhearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captive; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

(All Scripture Readings are from NIV 2011)