Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Jesus went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali” (Matt 4:13).

*1 John 3:22--4:6; Matt 4:12-17, 23-25*

The first line of today’s Gospel tells us that Jesus hears that John the Baptist has been arrested. Jesus takes this as a signal that John’s ministry is now complete, and his ministry must begin.  He goes from Judea back to Nazareth in Galilee, and soon

after that, to Capernaum.  Why does he go there? Matthew is telling us that Jesus knew his ministry had to begin there in order to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy that a light would appear there.  He is obeying the Scriptures and the Spirit he received at his baptism.  And so, it all begins.  A people sitting in darkness see in Jesus a great light.

The Bible presents God's creative and sustaining power as a light that suffuses everything.: "Let there be light," are the first words God speaks over the void—non-existence. Light is the essence of creation, manifested not simply as physical reality but also as meaningful reality because it is intelligible to the human mind, which meets the divine mind in created things.  St. Thomas Aquinas says that reality is intelligible to us because the rational mind has been enabled to see the divine light in things.

One of the effects of sin is separation from the Source of light. Sin casts a shadow over our understanding of reality and distorts our grasp of the relationships within creation, causing suffering, conflict and, ultimately, death. Cut off from God we become disoriented, unreal, lost and blind to our basic identity and purpose. We live in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Because he is the Incarnation, Jesus restores the light that makes everything intelligible and therefore meaningful. We were blind, but now we see. Wherever Jesus goes, people see creation restored to original right relationships. The sick and possessed are cured, signaling release from underlying distortions and disturbances in their created nature. "The reign of God is at hand," Jesus proclaims, as inner light floods into lives that had been overshadowed by sin, disease and depression.

Christmas is meant to open our eyes to the light of life.  If we put this message away with the trappings of the holiday, we have not yet unwrapped the greatest gift of Christmas to us. What shepherds and kings saw is meant for us. What Mary pondered as she held Jesus, what Joseph protected from the violence of Herod, was the light of life. The child would grow to maturity sheltered by a hidden life until it was time to begin his public ministry.

Discipleship calls us to human maturity so we also can share that ministry of light.  We are meant to experience life as God intended it to be. When we encounter Jesus in the sacraments, in prayer and in the faith community, he restores our fallen human nature to its divine source. We can know God because we have come from God and are returning to God, who is our source and destination.

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