

Alien Invaders
Matthew 4:12-25

The lands of Zebulun and Naphtali were dark for two main reasons. One was aliens. They had been invaded on numerous occasions. These particular aliens did not travel in space ships. They got from one place to another on foot. To get to Jerusalem from Assyrian or Babylon they tramped right through Zebulun and Naphtali. Being the northern most regions of the land of Israel they were the ones attacked first as the armies made their way south. Then they got hit again as the armies returned home. Geography was against them. They were in a dark place.

But the alien invaders didn't make it a dark place. It was already dark when they got there. They simply made it a darker place. The source of the original darkness was home grown.

God had led His people out of Egypt into a new land flowing with milk and honey. As they entered this new land God gave them a promise and a warning. If they remained faithful in serving Him as their God, the land would be bountiful and they would live in peace and security. If they turned away from Him He would remove His hand of blessing and protection.

You probably know what happened. They slipped away from remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy. They gradually gave up calling of the name of the Lord their God. They began to worship other gods – giving to idols the place Yahweh alone should hold.

With their relationship with God askew they also began to ignore His other commands. They no longer lived in love and service toward their neighbor. It became a dark place.

When God removed His hand of blessing and protection it became even darker as again and again aliens from the north invaded bringing death and destruction.

When [Jesus] 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."

Isaiah proclaims that there is going to be a great reversal. God intends to make this "land of contempt" glorious. But how? ... The change has to come from outside of them. Alien. God will send another alien invader.

This time it won't be a great horde of armed men. This time it will be just one man. And He doesn't come to them from the north like all the other alien invaders. This man comes from heaven itself. This man is God's Son, Jesus Christ.

This is a different kind of alien invasion. Jesus takes no hostages, He plunders no grain, He exacts no taxes, and He sheds no blood except His own. Instead, Jesus teaches, and he preaches, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

It is this man—and the message He proclaims—who is a great light upon this land of darkness. The more Jesus preaches, the more Jesus teaches, the more Jesus serves, the brighter the light shines. Matthew writes, *So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and 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.* People are flowing

into Zebulun and Naphtali, not to conquer them but to be healed and saved by Jesus.

As the light of Jesus Christ increases, the true source of darkness is exposed. The greatest threat to the people of Zebulun and Naphtali was never alien invaders from the north. Their greatest threat isn't alien to them at all. Their greatest threat is their own sin, the fear of death, and the schemes of the devil. These are the things that held Zebulun and Naphtali in perpetual darkness. From these things Jesus will set them free.

Jesus, like any alien invader, makes a claim upon this people. He's claiming to be their Lord, and He's directing them to acknowledge His Father as King. But His kingdom is not one of oppression, but of freedom. He does not issue threats; rather He gives grace.

And it is God's love that will break the yoke of their burden. It is God's love that will break the rod of their oppressor. It is God's love that will drive Jesus south out of Zebulun and Naphtali to the city of Jerusalem in order to die on the cross. And when Jesus dies on the cross, Zebulun and Naphtali will experience darkness once more, as it covers the whole land when Jesus dies for them.

But the darkness doesn't linger. It dissipates. And in three days' time, it will give way forever to the resurrected Son of God. So now the light that first shone in Galilee among the people of Zebulun and Naphtali is invading the world.

That all happened a long way from here—nearly half way around the globe. But our darkness is the same. It is not caused by alien invaders. It is local and home grown. Our darkness is our own sinful flesh.

To dispel our darkness, Matthew directs us to Zebulun and Naphtali, and from there to a hill outside Jerusalem where Jesus

hung on a cross. Jesus didn't die just for the people over there. Jesus died on the cross to earn for you the forgiveness of your sins – to dispel your darkness.

Jesus' light is for you. It invades your life. The salvation first seen in Galilee is now coming for you. It's already here. Jesus Christ is here, for you. He dispels the darkness. He forgives your sins, He casts out the devil, and He promises to raise you from the dead to life everlasting.

These promises made are promises delivered in His Word and Sacraments. You were baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Through water and word you were given the gifts Jesus earned for you on His cross. Jesus' light began to shine on you and in you. It is our practice to light a candle during a baptism and give it to the new child of God as a reminder of Jesus' light.

Many of you have confirmed your belief in the gifts you received in baptism on your confirmation day, as Molly and Jamie will do in a few moments.

Jesus' light shines anew on you and in you each time you come to His table for His meal. Delivered into your mouth in bread and wine is the body and blood of your Lord. From outside of you enters the gifts of forgiveness and strengthening of faith.

Jesus Christ is the alien invader we all need. And He comes to us in the very earthly means of word and sacrament. It's a glorious invasion of grace. The light of the world has come to us – has come to you – in the person of Jesus Christ. To him be praise now and forever. Amen.