Isaiah 9:2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, the light has dawned.

I am just a bit curious. As you listened to the readings for today, did you pay attention to the fact that our Old Testament reading was a prophecy that is quoted in the New Testament Gospel reading? I am hoping you heard that, looked at that, and then just maybe a question arose in your mind. That question would have been: “Wait a minute. The Old Testament reading is quoted in the New Testament but there are some differences. Why?” That would be a great question to ask.

It is a great question because there would be those who would tell you that the Bible is not as accurate, not as precise as some would have you believe. That those in the New Testament took passages of the Old and altered them to make them fit what they wanted to believe. But let me share with you why that is not true.

First, look at the whole quote as found in our EHV today, a great translation. It says this: **“In the former time, he humbled the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will cause it to be glorious along the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.”**

Here is what our EHV New Testament says: **“Land of Zebulon and land of Naphtali, along the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.”** You can actually see that the verses are very similar. Here is the first thing to note. In the New Testament whenever the Old Testament is quoted it is almost always a quote from the Septuagint, the 200 B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament. It is for that reason that word order or word phrasing might be a little bit different, as is apt to happen going from one language to another. (Now, I see our EHV worked to keep the quote the same, good for them.) But if you understand how things work in translating, you then understand that in actuality the two passages do say the same thing in the words they are duplicating.

Please don’t miss this lesson. I want you to think of the implications of the Holy Spirit inspiring the writers of the New Testament to use a translation. The implication is important, especially for us who use a translation. That’s right, a faithful translation is still the Word of God and still the truth and wonder of God. That’s important for us to grasp.

Now back to our words. The real difference that we find is that the part about the land being humbled and the part about the land being honored is the part that is missing. That isn’t a big deal. It isn’t because the Jewish people that Matthew was writing to knew and understood the prophecy before them. It is true, at the time of the rebellion of Jeroboam, against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, the kingdom of the Jews split. That northern kingdom called Israel, became godless, even setting up two temples of false worship, one of them being in Dan of Naphtali. So shameful was their godlessness that eventually the northern kingdom got conquered and carried away never to be heard of or its people seen again. The ten tribes of Israel gone. That is certainly a disgrace. Yet this prophecy spoke of the fact that later on, in the future, these lands will be honored again, honored in a special way.

That special way is found in connection to the Messiah, the promised Savior of the Lord. Everyone knew this prophecy was about the Messiah. Even you know this prophecy is connected to the Messiah of God. How? Do you know what Isaiah 9:6 says? You might not know it by heart but as soon as you hear it you will go, “Oh yeah, that verse, that verse concerning the Savior!” Isaiah 9:6 says, **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. The authority to rule will rest on his shoulders. He will be named: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”**

You see, everyone knew this promise of God for the child to be born. In connection with this child there was this obscure part that said Naphtali and Zebulon were going to be honored in the time of this Messiah. That happened, as Matthew so rightly points out, when Jesus moves his ministry, his hometown to this part of the land of Israel. By referencing just a part of the whole prophecy, Matthew’s point is made, that even small portions of God’s Word come true.

The sad part is that Jesus had to move because of opposition from the religious leaders of the day. He moved to this part, conducted a good part of his ministry in this part because while lots of Jewish people lived there, it was not a part under the control or influence of the Jewish religious leadership. So in this way, this honor to a land once dishonored is brought about by Jesus. No trickery going on here, just a highlighting of important facts.

The most important fact, and the result of the honor brought to this area by Jesus, is found in the verse highlighted and that is what we will focus on. Our theme will be: **THE LIGHT HAS DAWNED**.

With the information you now have, you can already begin to see how the truth of this prophecy is indeed coming true in Jesus. This land of Naphtali and Zebulon for a long time had been “gentile” territory, gentile because even the original Jews who inhabited the land had turned away from and despised the only and true God. No wonder Isaiah would say of the land, **“There will be no more gloom for the one who was in anguish.”** The history of this land was one of gloom and anguish. They had turned away from the true light, the Lord our God and they had paid the consequences of that choice. And now, here was God’s promised Savior among them, among the people living here, to bring them the Light of truth.

I hope you understand why this place was spoken of in the way that it was. There was gloom. The people walked in darkness. The people lived in the land of the shadow of death. Why? Because of unbelief! Again recall how from the beginning of Scripture there has always been a play on the words: light and dark. What was of God was light. What was of evil and Satan was of darkness. For instance, the words of the Psalm that we used today should help here. Did you know that the refrain is actually a part of Psalm 27? Yep, **“The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, of whom shall I be afraid?”** Psalm 23 reminds us that this sinful world is: **“The valley of the shadow of death.”** And then just one simple and yet true scientific fact. Light is something, but dark is really nothing. Light has wavelength and particle but darkness is really only the measure of the absence of light. Every time you use a flashlight you should think of the wonder and truth of God. Light is something and pierces the dark, just as God is something and overcomes the dark too.

For the people of Jesus’ day, the Light had come. That light was Jesus. He came to give us the truth of God. What a truth it is. The truth of God’s love and care for us. The truth of sin and death. The truth of salvation for all who believe. As Jesus himself told us, he is, **“The Light of the world.”**

What does this light of Jesus help us see? It helps us see the love, compassion and grace of God. It helps us see the truth of God in every way. A God who cares for us and desires to save us. A God who would abandon his place of power and prestige to be a humble baby and live among a people who by and large don’t care about him. A God who reveals that his plan has been in place right from the beginning of man’s choice to sin. God planned to send the Savior. The Savior would reveal completely the grace and simplicity of God’s plan. The Savior revealed and fulfilled how God would accomplish the gift of eternal life for us, all own his own. Yes, in Jesus, God’s love and truth shines forth.

What else does this Light help us see? I’ll call it, the truth of sin and salvation. God’s sending of Jesus does reveal the truth of sin. Things go bad in this world and things can be horrid in this world and it is all because of sin. I know, the world is convinced that on its own, it will be able to overcome evil and fix all the wrongs of this world and eventually develop a world filled with peace and joy. But what has history shown in this regard? That man is inclined to evil. That there are bullies in the world, those who want it their way and only their way and they don’t care who gets hurt. Those bullies exist at every level: among the young and old, among governments and business, sometimes even in our households. History is a great place to see the inclination of man to evil.

God sent his Son to deal with the problem of sin. Jesus does that by dying on the cross to atone for us and make it possible for every believer in Him to have the gift of eternal life and salvation. Let this wonder of God sink in. God grants us forgiveness and eternal life just because of what Jesus has done. It is true, this is all on a spiritual level for now. By the way, that is one of the problems that Jesus’ own disciples wrestled with, that the salvation of Jesus was going to be first on a spiritual level. They wanted an earthly kingdom and power. Jesus made it clear that for now, yes, even into our time, his kingdom was not going to be of this world. It is a spiritual kingdom built on his Light and the love it reveals.

Now if you don’t believe that is the reason for Jesus, then what is? Is Jesus just one of hundreds of “good men” who have shown up in history to show us we can do make a paradise on earth? Men like Confucious, Ghandi, Mohammed, Joseph Smith and others. Then why did Jesus die. Why the record of his resurrection? Why the revelation of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation? And seriously, what would we even know about God were it not for the Bible and what it says? Look at what the world thinks and says that “gods” are and realize how gloomy and horrid their teaching! How is it that what Jesus has done has survived centuries of people trying to get rid of the truth? Jesus is the Light to this dark world and its sin. He is more than just a “guy”. He is God’s Son sent to save by his atoning sacrifice.

Now, God does promise to end all the stains of sin in this world when Jesus returns again in glory and honor to renew and restore this world to perfection forever. That will be at the second coming of Jesus. Again grasp that Jesus is the truth and the epitome of that truth. We know of the wonder of God because of Jesus. We know how the world came to be and how it came to be filled with problems. We know how God has acted and moved in this world for the eternal good of souls. We know of our salvation through the very life and wonder of Jesus. And we know that God in Jesus reveals that eternal life and salvation is ours because of what Jesus has done. There is a heaven. There is an eternal life where we will live and dwell forever with God. All of this is a part and parcel of what is revealed and sealed in Jesus, the Light of the world. More than that, the Way, The Truth, The Good Shepherd, The True Vine, The Firstborn from the Dead. Jesus is our Savior.

What is the end result for us? Verse 3 says, **“you have multiplied the nation. You have increased it’s joy.”** Here is what Jesus has done. Salvation is not just for those born of earthly Jewish descent. Now, because of Jesus salvation is for everyone who believes, for by faith we become the children of Abraham and heirs of eternal life. In that sense, absolutely the nation is multiplied to the glory of God. And Jesus has increased our joy.

There is a good thing to ask you. Do you really have a sense of joy in Jesus? As you were coming to church this morning did you do so anticipating the marvel of hearing the wonder of Jesus, of that sense of peace that would be yours because you were once again reminded that Jesus forgives your sins and grants eternal life just for you! Or did you come “just because I had to.” Do you stay away because “it’s just the same old stuff all the time…” Because there is nothing at that church that I need? Then you may still be like Naphtali and Zebulon of old, still in gloom and anguish, still in darkness, yes, still living in the land of the shadow of death.

Jesus brings joy into our lives. Jesus brings a sense of peace and wonder. I believe the Apostle John captured that joy when he gave us these words in 1 John 3:1 “**See the kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called the children of God, and that is what we are!”** That is what we are, children of God, filled with the love of God. Touched by his joy and wonder and that joy and wonder is found in our life. Yes, Jesus brings joy into our lives. I hope you have that joy.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of Jesus. We thank you for revealing through Him all the more the wonder of your love and grace in our lives. And there is joy! Amen.