

OUR LIGHT IN DARKNESS

Each state in the United States, no matter its size, is subdivided into smaller parcels called counties. For example, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania there are 67 counties. We are located in what is known as Montgomery County. This kind of subdivision is not new. In fact, it is very ancient. It was part of ancient Israel fully a thousand years before Jesus was born. What we know as the nation of Israel today is about the size of our own state of New Jersey. Geographically they are about the same size.

In ancient times Israel was divided into twelve areas or tribes. Each tribe was named after one of the sons of the patriarch Jacob, grandson of Abraham and son of Isaac. Jacob had twelve sons. As he was returning to the land God gave to his grandfather Abraham Jacob had a fierce encounter with an angel of God and at the end of the struggle the angel gave Jacob a new name—Israel. So the twelve sons of Jacob became known as the twelve sons of Israel. Each of those sons in turn was given a portion of the land to settle his family. The whole land itself became known as Israel.

We are familiar with one of Israel's sons, Joseph whom his brothers sold into slavery but who became the Chief Supply Officer for the Pharaoh in Egypt and eventually rescued all his brothers. And Judah who was given the land around Jerusalem, where Bethlehem is located and the place where Jesus was born. Two other lesser known sons of Israel were Zebulun and Naphtali. They were given the section up in the north and west part of the country in what came to be known as Galilee. From the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River over to the Mediterranean Sea. The town where Jesus grew up was located in Galilee. It was called Nazareth. He was known as Jesus of Nazareth. He was from the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Now listen to the first reading again: *First the Lord degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the end he has glorified the seaward road, the land west of the Jordan River, the District of the Gentiles...the people who walked in darkness, they have now seen a great light.*” What is the prophet talking about? What is the great light? Why were these people in darkness? The reference is that this part of Israel had been overrun by pagans, people of no religious faith. The light had gone out of this region of Israel. They did not see. They did not believe. They did not see the light that the people of Israel had been given.

What the prophet refers to in this prophecy is to that time when the Holy One of God will come. From our vantage point of 2000 years after Jesus we believe that He was the light that came. He lived and grew up in Galilee and he taught there and gathered his

first apostles there and performed his first miracles and healings there. For the prophet, the Messiah will be the light of the world and that light will scatter the darkness—everywhere. Beginning in Zebulun and Naphtali.

How does this apply to us today? Where do we see the light? Where does Jesus shine forth in our world? A light to the NATIONS? What is my light? Right now? What is my light? Well, it could be a variety of things.

Your faithfulness—in your marriage, your family, and your relationships—may be your light.

Your forgiveness—in your interactions, your responsibilities and your work environment—may be your light.

Your compassion—for those on the margins, the forgotten, the overlooked, the unborn, the innocent.

Your hope—to a friend, an old person, a young person—may be your light.

Your sacrifices—for your children, your relatives, your neighbors—may be your light.

Your selflessness—in doing without, in offering up, in praying for those hurting or in need.

Your willingness to listen to another pour out their heart or soul or worries or concerns—may be your light.

Why does the Lord want to make of us a light? Because love glows, love shines, love beams. Love attracts. Love sets us apart but love sets us apart for a purpose a reason. To attract, to gather, to draw others in. Not to us but to Our Lord. The Lord works in us and through us. It is the Lord who has this wonderful dream—that all are included and that none be lost, that all are forgiven and none left behind, that all are cared for and fed, and none do without. That is what shines. That is the light of the Lord and the Lord wants us to share in this. Others need this. Others need us. And so—WE PRAY. TO BE LIGHT!

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.