A little over sixteen years ago my wife Tara and I found out we were expecting our first child. I remember it quite well as a time of excitement, anxiety, fear, hope, busyness, preparation and anticipation. We went to our doctor appointments, did our breathing classes, we gathered things, all sorts of things that we definitely needed or that we were told we definitely needed. We were the typical young couple expecting their first child. Our lives were about to change forever but we didn’t quite know how or to what extent fully, so we tried to put it out of our heads; the thought of it was too overwhelming and scary. Nevertheless, we had the date marked on the calendar and emblazoned in our heads while we prepared and waited.

Then as we were about to make the final push toward finishing our preparations, it was time, suddenly, unexpectedly and almost three weeks early. Our bags weren’t packed, our plan wasn’t put together, the room wasn’t done and nothing was ready…including us. Many long hours later our waiting was over, our son was born and our lives changed forever “from that time on…”

Most, if not all of us, have had an experience like this when something happened in our lives that made us realize that things were going to be fundamentally different “from that time on”. This is the context of our readings today: The fulfillment of God’s plan lies in Jesus Christ and His presence will change everything “from that time on”. With John the Baptist imprisoned, the time of heralding the coming of the Christ ended and gave way to the public ministry OF Jesus the Christ who begins to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” “from that time on.” Andrew, Peter, James and John were all called from their professional livelihood as fishermen and compelled to follow Jesus as his disciples and “fishers of men” “from that time on.” Even many of the people of Israel began to realize that they were “the people who sit in darkness [who]
have seen a great light” “from that time on”, as foretold by the great prophet Isaiah. Today’s readings are showing us that an experience with Jesus is unpredictable, transformative, powerful and something which fundamentally affects us “from that time on.”

These are not passive experiences however. Jesus was not saying, “relax, I’ll take care of things.” Nor did He say, “I’ll wait until you’re ready.” No, Jesus’ message to us is an imperative, “Repent” NOW! “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,” NOW! The fulfillment of God’s eternal plan IS underway; this is why we hear the reading from Isaiah that we heard on Christmas night. The promise of God to the ancients is fulfilled in the incarnation but doesn’t end there. The light of Christmas night was never meant to be confined to one place and one time but rather diffused and spread in order to dispel the darkness in our lives and in the world forever. The reference to Zebulun and Naphtali who were the sons of Jacob and whose descendants were the first to be overrun and cast into slavery by the Assyrians are meant to show that the darkness of captivity, literally and figuratively in terms of sin, can and will be overcome by the light of God’s grace in the coming of Emmanuel. When God intervenes, nothing will be the same “from that time on.”

This is an incredibly powerful and incredibly important message to us today. Jesus is speaking to us today. “Repent” NOW! “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” NOW! God in Jesus Christ has and continues to intervene in our lives here on earth and we must continue to prepare ourselves for this encounter. He is calling out to us as he did the disciples to go out to be a light in the world that dispels darkness wherever and whenever we come across it in order to be transformed “from that time on”. We are faced with great challenges in our world today, whether it’s at home or at work or in the marketplace or in our streets or on or across our shores, we are constantly coming upon dark places in need of the light of Christ. However, we can’t shed light that we, ourselves, don’t have; but even a little flame can give light and grow. Therefore, we must constantly care for our flame of faith and nurture it and protect it from the currents that attempt to extinguish our light “from [this] time on”. Conversely, there are also many situations and people we come in contact with who feel the light of Christ seem too bright for them to deal with. There seems to be a growing population who, for whatever reason, believe that the light of faith is blinding and overwhelming. This is where the dimmer
mood lighting of apathy and relativism are turning faith in God and religious practice into a vague spirituality that lacks clarity or any real definition. Jesus came to usher in and announce the Kingdom of Heaven to all humanity “from that time on” with a sense of urgency, immediacy and boldness that is meant to move us to action and that’s what these readings are all about. We, like the first disciples, are compelled to follow Christ as his light in the world. We must assist in this mission here on earth whether it is through active evangelization: going out and proclaiming the Word of God; or by living our lives in a way that puts into action the discipleship of Christ for all to see. But we must be smart and patient and be sensitive about how we use that light lest we further alienate others “from that time on”.

Brothers and Sisters, today the ministry of Christ begins: in our hearing and in our living. Jesus is calling each of us today to cast aside the tangled nets of sin and distraction in our lives and join him with a renewed sense of purpose, faith and urgency in his mission to light up the world so that the Kingdom of Heaven can be seen clearly throughout the earth “from [this] time on”.