Matthew 5:13-16
13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

When putting together a description of yourself, whether for a job resume or some sort of online profile, you will mention different things. You may describe your history and background. You may list your skills and abilities. You may describe your personality. You may list your interests and hobbies. It will all depend on your audience. Your future employer is going to be looking for different things than a future date. Of the many adjectives you could use to describe yourself, no matter what purpose you had, two words you probably wouldn't use would be "salty" and "shining." It would leave your audience wondering what you really thought about yourself. And yet that is how Jesus described us in our text for this morning. Looking at these verses from Matthew 5, we will examine **Our Epiphany Self-Description**. **We are the salt of the earth** and **we are the light of the world**.

Beginning in chapter 5, Matthew records Jesus' Sermon on the Mount which continues through chapter 7. These verses today immediately follow after the Beatitudes where Jesus described those who are blessed by the Lord because of everything he has done for them. Verse 13: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." Salt had two main uses at this time, the flavoring of food and also the preservation of food. Flavoring we understand very well as salt is sprinkled on many of our foods. Preservation was more of a need without modern refrigeration. Salt would be used to dry out food and keep away mold.

How can Christians be the salt of the world? In talking about preservation, we cannot preserve this physical world. Because of sin it is decaying and will be destroyed on the Last Day. But we can preserve the people of this world and save them from hell. That happens through God's Word as it is preached. Preaching the law, telling others about their sins, may leave an unbearably salty taste in the mouths of others. But it is only when people see their sin that they see their need for the Savior. The gospel message of the forgiveness of sins brings good flavoring to their lives as they are preserved for an eternal life in heaven.

Jesus mentioned that salt could lose its saltiness and need to be thrown out. One explanation would be that the salt of that day was more impure so that when it became wet, the salt would be washed away, leaving behind sand and grit only good for building roads to be trampled on. Whatever the process was, Jesus' point was that once salt lost its ability to flavor or preserve it was useless.

How could we lose our saltiness? If God's Word is the tool we use as the salt of the earth, it could come down to a couple of things. Perhaps we let our knowledge of his Word grow stale over time. We studied it when we were younger or in our confirmation classes, but our use of it today in bible classes or personal devotions has dwindled away. It's hard to share his Word

if we don't know it. Or perhaps we let the message be spoiled as we ignore certain parts or add other parts so that the flavor is more agreeable to this world, whether to make others feel better or make ourselves feel better. Either way we can lose our saltiness and become useless.

The solution to staying salty is using that message on ourselves. We look at the law and confess that we are sinners and have failed to be the salt of this world. But the gospel announces that those sins are forgiven and we will be preserved for heaven. The ability to be salt does not come from ourselves but from the power of God's Word. We are the salt of the earth as we continue to share that word with others.

Jesus continued in verses 14 & 15: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house." There are two illustrations here. In a time when candles and lamps were the only source of light, when it was dark you wouldn't cover up those lights or no one else could see. We don't turn on a lamp at home and throw a blanket over it. We don't use a flashlight but then cover it up with our hand. It defeats the purpose. The same is true for a city on a hill. It is visible to all around. A city in a valley may remain hidden until you go into the valley. A city on ground level may have other things blocking the view. But a city on a hill can be seen over great distances by those who are traveling by.

How can Christians be the light of the world? In the season of Epiphany we focus on how Jesus revealed himself to be the Son of God and Savior of the world, from his baptism in the Jordan River to his transfiguration on the mountain. And so in a world of darkness we are the light as we reveal who Jesus is to those around us. As Christians we carry Christ's name and are his representatives. He loved us and so we reflect that love to others through our words and actions. This isn't a light that we just show on Sunday mornings and is hidden the rest of the week. We reveal Christ's love in every part of our lives.

But like losing our saltiness, we do not always shine our light and sometimes we cover it up or hide it. We get angry and upset and lose our temper when someone wrongs us or we don't get our way, rather than showing love to others even when things aren't going as planned. We join in with gossip or slander or lies, rather than standing up and showing love for those whose reputation may be harmed. We compromise on God's standards for living, rather than speaking the truth in love to point out sin and warn of danger. We selfishly focus on ourselves and our needs, rather in love looking out for the needs of others.

And the list could go on. But God has forgiven these sins as well. We turn to him in repentance and live as the light of the world. We remind ourselves that we are not showing a love that comes from ourselves, but as a mirror reflects light, we are reflecting the love that Christ has shown us. This love is not just for fellow believers, but unbelievers as well. Verse 16 reminds us of that goal: "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." In a world darkened by sin we don't let our light shine just to be nice to others or just so that there can be peace in this world. We do it so that we have the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus and the Holy Spirit can work faith in their hearts which will result in praise to our Father in heaven.

Describe yourself as “salty” or “shining” and people may give you strange looks. But nevertheless we are salt of the earth and the light of the world. As Jesus revealed himself, so also in this season of Epiphany and throughout the year we help to reveal him to others. As we share God’s Word, the message of law and gospel, it preserves people for an eternal life in heaven. We shine with Christ’s love as we show that love in our words and actions so that our Father in heaven may be praised. We will not be perfect, but we continue to live as salt and light because it is who we are as Peter wrote in our second lesson: “a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pe 2:9). Amen.