

24 January 2026
St Edmundsbury Cathedral
Welcome and Enthronement
Joanne Grenfell
Matthew 4.12-23

“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” (Matt 4.16)

You might wonder who would have wanted to live in Galilee. The ancestral land of two of the twelve tribes of Israel, Zebulun and Naphtali, Galilee was a region that no one thought much of. Geographically on the edge, it was threatened by foreign forces, ethnically and culturally complex, and depopulated.

There, at the crossroads of everything, everything was contested.

Yet this is the place that Isaiah prophesied would be the first to see the light of the Messiah. This is the place that Jesus chose to be the heart of his ministry.

We can all think of places that others don't think very much of. If you're someone who travels regularly along the A12 (recently named Britain's worst road because of its potholes and road closures) or gets stuck at rush hour on the Orwell Bridge, you might appreciate a little of what it was like to live in Galilee. You could even be thinking of our county – also of two tribes, with a road by the sea, across a significant river: a place which doesn't always get the best press.

But Suffolk, as your new bishop, and someone who grew up further up the east coast – from the lovely, but unglamorous Stockton-on-Tees end of the northeast of England – Suffolk; I see you!

When I went to Lambeth Palace to be interviewed as a possible candidate to be your Bishop, one of your wonderful representatives on the panel asked me a question. A little hesitantly, but understandably given that I had most recently been a bishop in the Diocese of London, they asked: “You do know that this is . . . Suffolk, don't you? Not a place with loads of money or resources, not a fancy capital city, just an ordinary place, that needs a bishop to love us.”

And the answer, of course, was yes. Suffolk, I see you. Suffolk, I will love you.

We are Suffolk. And we see God's light shining brightly here.

Jesus chose Galilee to be the place where God's great light would be seen by those who had long sat in the darkness of division, inequality, and threat. He chose Galilee to be the place from which he would teach about the salvation of the world. He chose Galilee because it was *not* the obvious place of power and would therefore signal to the world that his was a message of hope for a broken and divided world. He chose Galilee because his was a message for all tribes and all nations.

Close to home, as on the world stage, we live in times of division, inequality, and threat. Even with ever more and better means of communicating, divisive politics and destructive hate speech are dominating. Even with ever more ways to connect, many

are living lonelier lives. Even with more than enough resources to go round, greed, envy and war obstruct their fair distribution.

We need to hear the good news of the kingdom from Jesus as he walks on our own eastern shores, and to experience his healing presence among every people and in every nation.

We are called, as people who have seen God's great light, to follow Jesus here. We are called to be communities of the good news of the kingdom of God in Suffolk.

How shall we do this together?

Jesus starts in the simplest of ways, by inviting two brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, to be his disciples: "Follow me." And then two more brothers, also fishermen, James and John. "Follow me." And not just to follow him, but to invite others to follow him too.

And this is how we must go about it. Brothers, sisters, siblings, this starts with each of us being a follower of Jesus. Called to recognize, love, and walk with him. Called to notice, worship, and invite others to follow him too.

It should be clear from the light we carry whose people we are. Our light is the light of Christ, shining within us. There are countless other excellent ways of working for the community in Suffolk, and they are good and valuable, but as a church we are here because we are followers of Christ. Our light is the light of Christ.

And because our light is the light of Christ, we don't need to be afraid of or defeated by the division, inequality, and threat that we experience around us, even in beautiful Suffolk. We certainly don't need to be afraid of those who sow hatred and discord in our communities by making us feel we're being overlooked or that there isn't enough of God's provision to go round.

To those who have been campaigning recently for their own political ends under the banner of putting Christ back into Christmas, let me say this: well yes, but our bar is even higher.

As churches in Suffolk, we will continue to carry Christ's light within us, not just at Christmas but on every day of the year, in every single one of our 443 parishes. And in all our many chaplaincies and bishop's mission orders. That light, you will see, is compassionate, inclusive, and courageous. It is the light of a love which lifts people up and never knocks them down. It is the light of a love which draws people together and does not divide them. It is the light of a love which defends the weak as it banishes hate.

We have Christ at our heart. Christ, who is worth following. Christ, who is worth inviting others to follow too. Christ, the one true light.

A couple of years ago, an Ipswich woman uploaded images to social media of what she thought was a local northern lights-style phenomenon in the sky. As the BBC reported at the time, her pictures, showing a pink and red radiance, piqued the interest of hundreds of people, with many praising the impressive snaps. But all was not as it seemed. The beautiful early morning glow actually came from the greenhouses of Suffolk Sweet Tomatoes' LED lights.

Although I think it's a rather wonderful story and shows that the beauty of God's creation can be found in the ingenuity of our brilliant Suffolk farmers, I want to ask us as Suffolk churches to *not* be like the Great Blakenham aurora. Our job is to be real, to make sure that our light points to who we really are: followers of Jesus. Not an illusion in the sky; but the real – and compelling – light of Christ, the one who points us to God's everlasting presence and enduring promise.

And my job in all of this? Well, to love you, and to love Suffolk.

And beyond even that, my job is to name the light we see as Christ. To remind us that the light of Christ is here among us in ordinary acts of faith, love, and service in our churches and in the communities around them. Not a distant beacon on a hill, but a light at the heart of every village, town, and port: from countryside to coast. The light of Christ in communities of God's kingdom.

Suffolk, let's carry that light together.

"The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

Amen.

The Bible reading for the service, upon which the sermon is based

A reading from the Gospel of St Matthew.

Matthew 4.12-23

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Blessings at the end of the service – written by Bishop Joanne

The first is a blessing for the congregation, the second for the county and diocese and is given from the south doors of the Cathedral, looking out.

God our strength and encouragement,
show us how to be faithful followers,
as we invite others into friendship with you.

All Amen.

God our fierce defender,
give us courage to defend the vulnerable
as we proclaim your justice and truth.

All Amen.

God our eternal dwelling place,
hold us in your everlasting arms
as we abide in your promise of salvation.

All Amen.

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be among you and remain with you for ever.

All Amen.

May God who grows the wheat, the beet, and the barley,
who multiplies the fish and harvests the wine of celebration,
who welcomes strangers as friends
and brings every boat safe to shore,
gather, nurture, and protect us
in every village, town, and port,
building us up as communities of your kingdom
where all may carry your light.

And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you for ever. **Amen.**