



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Wilton, WI
Last Sunday after Epiphany
February 14, 2021
Inviting People to
Journey with Christ's Family
in Spreading God's Love and Mercy

The Sundays after Epiphany began with Jesus' baptism and end with three disciples' vision of his transfiguration. In Mark's story of Jesus' baptism, apparently only Jesus sees the Spirit descending and hears the words from heaven. But now Jesus' three closest friends hear the same words naming him God's Beloved. As believers, Paul writes, we are enabled to see the God-light in Jesus' face, because the same God who created light in the first place has shone in our hearts to give us that vision. The light of God's glory in Jesus has enlightened us through baptism and shines in us also for others to see.

Beautiful Savior

1 Beau - ti - ful Sav - ior, King of cre - a - tion,
 2 Fair are the mead - ows, fair are the wood - lands,
 3 Fair is the sun - shine, fair is the moon - light,
 4 Beau - ti - ful Sav - ior, Lord of the na - tions,

Son of God and Son of Man!
 robed in flow'rs of bloom - ing spring;
 bright the spar - kling stars on high;
 Son of God and Son of Man!

Tru - ly I'd love thee, tru - ly I'd serve thee,
 Je - sus is fair - er, Je - sus is pur - er,
 Je - sus shines bright - er, Je - sus shines pur - er
 Glo - ry and hon - or, praise, ad - o - ra - tion,

light of my soul, my joy, my crown.
 he makes our sor - - rowing spir - it sing.
 than all the an - - gels in the sky.
 now and for - cv - er - more bc thine!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, the resplendent light of your truth shines from the mountaintop into our hearts. Transfigure us by your beloved Son, and illumine the world with your image, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING

Today's reading centers on the transfer of power and authority from the prophet Elijah to Elisha. Their travels, which retrace the path of Joshua back to Moab (the place where Moses died) and the parting of the waters, demonstrate that Elisha and Elijah are legitimate successors of the great prophet Moses.

2 Kings 2:1-12

¹Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ²Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

⁴Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. ⁵The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."

⁶Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. ⁷Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

⁹When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." ¹⁰He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." ¹¹As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. ¹²Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Psalm 50:1-6

¹The mighty one, God the LORD, has spoken;
calling the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

²Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty,
God shines forth in glory.

³Our God will come and will not keep silence;
with a consuming flame before, and round about a raging storm.

⁴God calls the heavens and the earth from above
to witness the judgment of the people.

⁵"Gather before me my loyal followers,
those who have made a covenant with me and sealed it with sacrifice."

⁶The heavens declare the rightness of God's cause,
for it is God who is judge.

SECOND READING

The spotlight of Christian ministry is not on the people who carry out ministry but on the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as God made light shine at creation, God makes the light of Jesus Christ shine in our lives through Christian ministry.

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

³Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

HOLY GOSPEL

Mark's gospel presents the transfiguration as a preview of what would become apparent to Jesus' followers after he rose from the dead. Confused disciples are given a vision of God's glory manifest in the beloved Son.

Mark 9:2-9

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

SERMON

During the Christmas season, my aunt received an Amaryllis bulb from a neighbor. As she took it out of the box, I saw something brown, bumpy and gnarly. Yet, the name Amaryllis, is from the Greek word, *amarysso*, which means "to sparkle" (*Wikipedia*). How could this bumpy, gnarly thing have such a beautiful, "sparkling" name?

My aunt planted the bulb in some dirt and waited for a week or more until green blades started popping up from the soil. The plant was to be watered sparingly. As it grew, there seemed to be little change at first, with the exception of the blades of green getting a little taller. Day after day, the plant looked much the same as it did before.

After a few weeks, I recall looking at the plant and noticing that two pods had appeared at the end of two of the blades. The pods, along with the blades, were getting bigger. Eventually, it became obvious that the pods contained something inside them. As they continued to grow, the sides of the pods began to split, and slowly the Amaryllis blossoms revealed themselves. They were lovely! The red blossoms soon became 6 blossoms. Now, one could say that they lived up to their name; they were figuratively able "to sparkle."

The Amaryllis plant continued to provide beauty and vivid red color for two weeks. But one day, the red color started to turn to brown. The beauty began to leave it, and what remained showed signs of decay. We moved the plant to another place to live out its last days there. How sad to see the beauty fade from its glorious expression; from red and vibrant colors, to black, muted hues, to a wilted flower.

The Amaryllis which began as a brown, gnarly bulb was transformed into a beautiful plant! Like a caterpillar shedding its cocoon and emerging as a butterfly, what began as one thing became something else. This is what it means to be transformed: the old passes away, and the new begins.

Our gospel passage for today includes a story of transformation; an internal transformation that occurs in the disciples when they see Jesus' garments become dazzling white. The disciples see the same Jesus that they know, yet he is literally transfigured. Rather than being transformed or changed inwardly, Jesus remains the same person, fully human and fully divine. Jesus appears to the disciples in the same human image as before, but his clothes become dazzling white. Jesus and his clothes have a spiritual glow! Jesus' transfiguration is an external display of his divinity and power. An internal transformation occurs in his disciples. Jesus is transfigured, and his disciples are transformed.

Before this time, the disciples had a limited understanding of Jesus' divinity. Jesus' clothes and appearance were like those of any other male human being at the time. But on this day, Jesus' clothes are dazzling white. A human being could not appear like this, nor could a human being appear in the company of Moses and Elijah. Jesus' divinity, Jesus' power, and Jesus' authority are evident! Moses died more than 1,200 years before Jesus came to earth. Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind almost 900 years before Jesus came to earth! Yet, here they are talking with Jesus. Moses and Elijah are present in human form at Jesus' transfiguration. To this we say: what is impossible for human beings, is possible for God.

Moses and Elijah are Jesus' ancestors and fellow prophets. These two former human beings, who are now heavenly beings, demonstrate a continuity between the past and Jesus' time. Like Moses and Elijah, Jesus is a prophet proclaiming God's word. Moses' presence at the transfiguration, reminds us of his speaking with God on Mt. Sinai. It reminds us of God's presence with Moses, and God's light; God's radiance shining on Moses which caused Moses' human face to shine. This too was a "Theophany"; an encounter with God, whereby God spoke directly to Moses and Moses saw the glory of God.

In our Old Testament reading, Elijah is transported from earth by God, in a chariot of fire. He is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind! God has done these things through God's amazing power. Elisha witnesses Elijah's departure, and he too is transformed by the experience. This amazing event demonstrates God's power, too. For God's power is beyond anything that we as humans can imagine.

The season of Epiphany is framed with Jesus' baptism at the beginning and Jesus' transfiguration at the ending. We recall at Jesus' baptism in the Gospel of Mark, that Jesus alone hears the voice from heaven proclaiming, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11, NRSV). In our pericope today, all who are present hear God's words, "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him (Mark 9:7, NRSV)." While the words, "Son," and "Beloved," appear in both messages, the second message includes the words, "listen to him." The transfiguration of Jesus announces Jesus' divinity to the disciples, his rightful place among (yet above) the prophets of old, and the importance of listening to Jesus' words.

In our gospel passage, the disciples: Peter, James, and John, are not aware of what will transpire on that day as they travel with Jesus up the mountain. Are they going for a walk to see the beauty of the mountains and

enjoy God's creation? Are they going to gaze from afar at the fields and/or villages below? They do not know what the day will bring, but certainly, they do not expect to see Jesus transfigured and united with the prophets, Elijah and Moses. They do not expect to hear God's voice from a cloud. They do not expect anything that happened that day, for it is beyond human comprehension.

The Gospel of St. Luke does not use the word, "transfiguration," but the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, do. Jesus was transfigured that day, and Peter, James, and John, were internally transformed by the experience. Jesus' transfiguration experience was a means by which he was preparing to begin his journey, "setting his face to go to Jerusalem," and acknowledging his soon to come earthly death on the cross. It was a time of preparation for him, as he spoke with Moses and Elijah. It was a time of preparation for the disciples too, as they witnessed Jesus divinity. It was their preparation too: to witness, to proclaim, and to carry on Jesus' ministry after his death.

Jesus' transfiguration is a glimpse of Christ in his glory; a radiance emanating from him, demonstrating his divinity in a way that the three disciples have never seen before. If we had been there on that day, how might our lives be different as a result? Would we simply admire Jesus, because of his appearance on that day? Would we listen to his words intently as God told us to do, and seek to obey them? What would it mean to us to see Jesus as we had never seen him before? To see Jesus acknowledged by God as God's beloved Son. To see Jesus with Elijah and Moses. To see Jesus as the gift that he is to the world. To see Jesus in all his divinity.

Yet, the reality for us is, that after hearing this story of Jesus' transfiguration, the season of Epiphany ends, and we move into the season of Lent. Lent is a time of preparation for us. It is a time when we will walk alongside Jesus for 40-days. What will Jesus' words mean for us, as we walk with him from Ash Wednesday to Easter? Will his words lead us to repentance and renewal? Will his words encourage us to deny ourselves and take up our own crosses? Will we be transformed? Will we listen to him, follow him, and do so even more faithfully?

Per C. Clifton Black,

It is one thing to admire the Messiah; to obey him is something else. "Follow me" (Mark 1:17; 2:14). "Pay Attention to what you hear" (4:24). "Do not be afraid, only believe" (5:36, 6:50). "You give them something to eat." (6:37). "It is what comes out of a person that defiles" (7:20). "Deny [yourself] and take up [your cross] and follow me" (8:34). "But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." (10:31). "Whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (10:44). "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone" (11:25). (*Working Preacher*. All verses from the Gospel of Mark.)

God has told us to listen to his words. Will we do so and be transformed like the disciples? Will we "sparkle" as God's word overflows from our hearts? Will we recognize that as children of God, we must daily die to sin and rise to new life in Christ? Will we seek to walk as children of the light, filled with God's grace, love and peace? The path is not an easy one, but if we use our eyes to see the wonders of Jesus' ministry, our ears to listen to his message, and our mouths to proclaim Christ's love, we, like the disciples that day, can be transformed and made new. Thanks be to God. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Guided by Christ made known to the nations, let us offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all people in need.

For the gospel proclaimed in word and deed, for communities of faith far and near, and for all who show the face of Christ throughout the world, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For creation: sun, moon and stars; life forming in the dark earth and ocean deep; mountains, clouds and storms, and creatures seen and unseen, and for the Holy Spirit's guidance in our stewardship of God's creation, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For those responsible for safety and protection: for those responsible for safety and protection; EMT's, nurses, doctors, scientists, medical researchers, and all who are involved in creating or administering the COVID vaccines; for emergency responders and security guards, attorneys and advocates, civil servants and leaders of governments, that they witness to mercy and justice throughout the world, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For all who suffer this day especially, Katie, Judy, Darlene, Paul, Pam, Alrita, Frank, Jeff, Tessa, Lisa, Bud, Gary, Jim, Jerry, Patty, Harvey, and those we name aloud and in our hearts, that Christ our healer transform sickness into health, loneliness into companionship, bereavement into consolation, and suffering into peace, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

For companions on life's journey in this worshiping community, for loved ones who cannot be with us this day, and for guidance during struggles we face, that God's glory is revealed around and among us, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

In thanksgiving for the faithful departed, who were called by name and now rest from their labors, that their lives serve as witnesses to the goodness of God, let us pray.

Have mercy, O God.

Merciful God, hear the prayers of your people, spoken or silent, for the sake of the one who dwells among us, your Son, Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

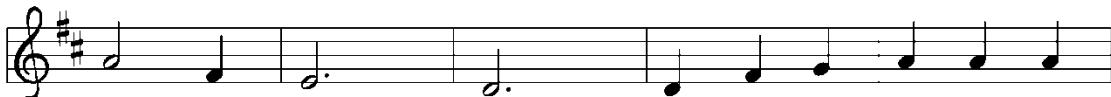
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light



1 I want to walk as a child of the light. I want to
2 I want to see . . . the bright-ness of God. I want to
3 I'm look - ing for . . . the com - ing of Christ. I want to



fol - low Je - sus. God set the stars to give
look at Je - sus. Clear Sun of righ - teous-ness,
be with Jc - sus. When we have run . . . with



light to the world. The star of my life is Je - sus.
shine on my path, and show me the way to the Fa - ther.
pa - tience the race, we shall know the joy of Je - sus.

Refrain



In him there is no dark-ness at all. The night and the



day are both a - like. The Lamb is the light of the



cit - y of God. Shine in my heart, Lord Je - sus.

Text: Kathleen Thomerson, b. 1934

Music: HOUSTON, Kathleen Thomerson

Text and music © 1970, 1975 Celebration

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Wednesday, February 17, is Ash Wednesday! A service of worship, complete with a sermon and bulletin, will be provided for your use. Interim Bishop Chris Boerger of the La Crosse Area Synod, has prepared a video of the gospel reading, and a video of his sermon (2 separate videos). They can be accessed through the La Crosse Area Synod Facebook page or YouTube. (I have transcribed the sermon into written form, for those who do not have internet access.) The Ash Wednesday service bulletin will be emailed or delivered to you.

If you would like to receive ashes (from last year's palm fronds), please call Nalani, or send her a message through the church email. We will deliver the ashes to anyone who is interested in placing them on their forehead while making the sign of the cross. (Note: the ash mixture works best when a little olive oil is added to them.)

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of our Lenten journey to the cross, walking with Christ for 40-days. The Lenten Season can be described as one that focuses on "reflection, repentance and renewal" (*2021 Lenten Journey*, Wartburg Theological Seminary website).

From Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, you will have the opportunity to read a daily devotional. Wartburg Theological Seminary has announced that they will be proving devotionals created by members of the seminary community. Seminary President Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnston-Largen states, "It is our hope that these devotions will deepen the meaning of this liturgical season, enhance your walk with Christ, and strengthen you for the work of building up the kingdom of God."

There are two ways to receive the daily devotionals. If you have internet access, you can go to wartburgseminary.edu/lent/ and click on, "Sign Up for Lenten Journey Daily Emails." After providing your email address and checking a few boxes, the daily devotionals will begin arriving in your email this Wednesday. If you prefer, you can access the devotionals at the end of each week, by going to wartburgseminary.edu/lent/ and looking at the "Devotion Archive."

For those of you who do not have internet access, Nalani will be sending your devotions via regular mail after they are posted on the Wartburg Seminary website. They will be sent each week, along with my letters and sermon.

Beyond the daily devotionals, you will also have the opportunity to participate in the Lenten 2021 Study, "What Will It Take to End Hunger?" This study is from ELCA World Hunger. Each week for 5-weeks, a short reading followed by "Reflection Questions" will be made available to you via email, or in booklet form. Scripture passages are listed in each week's reading. Please use your Bible to read the scripture passage(s) in context, before, during, or after each reading. If you are in need of a Bible, please contact Nalani.

To allow for discussion related to your answers to the "Reflection Questions," you are encouraged to work with a partner! Your partner can be any family member in your home, or someone you can call or Skype with each week. For example, you could have your son, daughter, or another relative who lives elsewhere be your partner. You could have a friend from church be your partner. You could have a co-worker be your partner. It is your

choice as to whom you will select. After reading the study each week, complete your "Reflection Questions," and discuss them with your partner!

In addition to the daily devotionals and *Lenten 2021 Study*, I would like to remind you that the W-ELCA ladies are collecting items for Personal Care Kits. The kits are sent overseas to refugees, those displaced from their homes due to disasters, and others for whom a clean towel, soap, and other personal care items will send a message of Christ's love!

As you hear Interim Bishop Boerger's sermon, read the devotions, and reflect on the stories in the Lenten study, you will become even more aware of the challenges that many persons face in the world today. By providing items for the Personal Care Kits, you can do something right now, to help others in need. You can do this, and/or other things, silently and without fanfare. For as our Ash Wednesday gospel passage suggests, there is no need for public display or human praise, "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6:6, NRSV). Thanks be to God.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy