

The Light of God: A Sermon for Last Epiphany

Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36

9:00 a.m., February 14, 2010

Trinity Episcopal Church

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please be seated.

Good morning! Happy Valentine's Day! May it be a bright, sparkly day for everyone!

This morning I'd like to talk about light.

In the beginning there was darkness over the chaos of creation. The formless void and the faces of the deep, neither good nor evil, simply the builder's materials lying at hand, are covered in darkness. The Spirit moved over it, and then a voice, the original voice, the first voice, spoke its first command – "Let there be light." And so it was. The original Amen; so be it. Light – all shades, all colors, cool and warm, muted and bright, dazzled and danced, let free and shining abundantly. God's aloft and the light is loosed on the Cosmos. So begins the holy writ. God's first recorded Word illuminates the Cosmos. Where God is, light shines.

And so God's Holy Writ is shot through with light, shining in the darkness and the darkness did NOT overcome it. God's Holy Light dances and colors the story of his steadfast love [*'Hesed'* in Hebrew] for us. In God's first covenant with humanity, the promises he made to Noah, are painted in prism of light we call the rainbow.

In the reading from Exodus, we just heard part of the story of how God's glory so irradiates Moses, that he – the one who sits in God's presence and does not die – has to wear a veil so as not to frighten his fellow Israelites with his luminescence. Moses has come so close to perfection, as the great mystic Gregory of Nyssa points out, that he shone with the light of God's glory. But even before this, God first revealed himself to Moses in the bright bush blazing on the mountainside, burning brightly but that was not consumed. In this light, God proclaimed his love and made his promise of deliverance for his people. Later, after God's wrath is visited on the Egyptians for the injustices done to the children of promise, "When Pharaoh [finally] let the people go, . . . The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night."¹ God's light led the way to freedom.

The light shone on the Israelites as they built a nation in the promised land. The light danced with David as he reunited the 12 tribes of Israel, and it glowed in the wisdom of his son Solomon.

The light animated the prophets who shouted God's word to unwilling audiences of a people gone astray. The light attempted to bring the people back to faithfulness, but to little avail.

After numerous occupations of the promised land -- after repeatedly being conquered, slaughtered, exiled, after witnessing the very destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem itself, the greatest of the signs of the people's attempts to be faithful, after all this, some began to feel that the light had grown dim. There was a homecoming of a faithful remnant, certainly. The

¹ Exodus 13: 17, 21. *Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version.*

Temple was rebuilt, and stood for some time. But the people of the promise were fractured. Many believed that God stopped speaking to them. The age of the prophets ended.

For those of us who believe – for those of us who are asking for faith through the Church – God did **not** stop speaking. No, instead God’s light exploded back on the scene, like a series of fireworks building to its climax. First one single creature of light appeared to a young girl named Mary. Then the same angel appeared to her betrothed Joseph. Then a third time to her cousin’s husband, Zechariah. Then a new light appeared in the heavens, a very star bursts forth, drawing wise men from the east to a backwater town in this beat-up people of the promise, the star finally settling on the couple and their newborn son. The very same angel, soon joined by a throng of heavenly creatures, bedazzles a group of shepherds, alerting them to the new light that has entered the world.

This morning we hear of how that newborn child, now grown to be a man, after having been baptized by John and infused with the Holy Spirit, he’d become a leader of the people of God, a teacher, a prophet, a man of miracles, this morning we hear of how his divinity is first unmistakably revealed to his closest friends. [In the Story of Jesus, whether it’s news of his birth; his ministry to the world; the revelation of his divine identity; or news of resurrection – the light always begins shining locally. It always starts small, with one particular person or group. And then it spreads hand to hand, person to person. A spark becomes a wildfire, tearing up the landscape, until it engulfs the whole earth. This process of the local becoming global, reverses and completes the light of the original creation.]

The transfiguration is a pivotal moment in the story. Affirming Peter’s Confession that Jesus is the Messiah, which took place a week earlier, this event reveals who Jesus is to a small group of witnesses (a subgroup of disciples, 3 of 12). We have come to be accustomed to hearing the story in these words:

And while he was praying, the appearance of his face was changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.

Sometimes, hearing familiar passages in the words of different translations can open up our ears, our mind’s eye, our hearts to the text in fresh new ways. Hear how others have depicted this familiar passage from the Greek:

And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening.²

And it happened that, as he was praying, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became sparkling white.³

While he was in prayer, the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became blinding white.⁴

As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.⁵

² Luke 9:29 The Holy Bible, King James Version.

³ Luke 9:29 The Holy Bible, Catholic Online.

⁴ Luke 9:29 The Message.

⁵ Luke 9:29 The Holy Bible, New International Version.

Dazzling white. White and glistening. Sparkling white. Blinding white. Bright as a flash of lightening.

Can you hear the struggle to convey this divine light?

What had been suggested; what had been hinted at; what had been hoped and wished for – has come to be. God is made manifest in Jesus of Nazareth. He walks among us, as one of us. For a moment, among his most trusted friends, he pulled back the veil, so they might know him for the heavenly creature of light that he truly was (as well as being fully human). The light – dazzling, sparkling, glistening, blinding – is carried into the world in this one person.

Then he dies. The world goes dark for a while. The sun is blotted out from the sky. But then he is resurrected. And the light is reborn in each and every member of the community of the Baptized. Taking a spark from the oversize sign of resurrection, the Pascal candle, each of the newly baptized receives a burning candle, with the words, “Receive the Light of Christ.” And so we are invited to become those whom John the Evangelist called the “children of light.” And so we sing about wanting to walk as a child of the light, remembering that in Jesus “there is no darkness at all.”

We are the body of Christ, and individually members of it. As the community of resurrection, the newest People of God, the Children of the Light, we are invited to shine a light – at times perhaps even dazzling, glistening, sparkling, or blinding – in a world so desperately in need of light.

We hear in the Gospel of Matthew, "You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop—SHINE!"⁶

On this day, Valentine's Day, a day of devoted to love, may we find a little extra love to share with someone who may need it more than we need to give it. And may God grant us grace to shine, as children of the light in our own day. Amen.

⁶ Matthew 5:14. The Message.