

*Come, Light of the world, reveal yourself to us, we pray.*

The season of Epiphany begins with the story of a star – which those seekers saw only as a pinpoint of light, but was a giant ball of energy at its source. It ends with this strange story of a moment in which a living man, Jesus the Christ, is revealed for an instant as pure light, as energized and brilliant as a star. For one moment, his God identity is revealed right alongside his human identity, and Peter, James and John get to see who he truly is. The light of the world.

What happens next stuns them into silence: they become enveloped in a bright, light-filled cloud and hear a voice saying that Jesus is the Son of God. If you've been in an airplane, you know what it feels like to be inside a cloud. But clouds that talk? That's another matter.

They all hear the same voice, which is what makes it even more terrifying. But that may be exactly why Jesus brings three with him – in Jewish law, valid testimony required three witnesses.

These disciples were brought to that experience so they could know that Jesus was who he said he was, and who his miracles revealed him to be. And they were shown this so that they could bear witness when things got even weirder and more awesome with his resurrection.

I love the way he says, "Don't tell anyone until after I'm raised from the dead," like that's something that just happens all the time.

But when they saw that action of God, they would have this one to fill in the picture, and they would be able to help the community understand.

Jesus' followers would need to hear from these three leaders what they had experienced on that mountain. They would be able to witness, and to inspire the others to witness to the truth of who Jesus is.

their story was believed by the early Christian community.

This odd tale appears in three of our gospels and is supported by Peter's testimony in the second letter attributed to him:

*We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying,*

*"This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.*

Eyewitnesses who saw and heard. Personal experience.

They were brought up that mountain to see Jesus, shining in the light of his glory. And then to return to regular life and bear witness. Witness to the light.

We live in a time when we badly need people to witness to the light of Christ, wherever we see light in dark or dim circumstances.

People need to hear our stories of hope, of healing, of light.

Once upon a time, people sought assurance of the truth – the Good News about Jesus was communicated as truth claims, propositions that you were either persuaded by or not. Evangelism was sharing what you believe.

We don't live in that age. We live in an age of experience.

"Tell me your story, don't tell me what I should believe.

Tell me about the encounters that make YOU believe."

That's all bearing witness is: speaking the truth about your experience.

It's telling the stories of the encounters, the feelings of connection, the Holy Spirit nudges, the "God-incidences"

Just as Jesus brought Peter, James and John on that hike up the mountain, Jesus invites us here every week. And we come. We come for community, yes, but I think we also come in hopes of a divine encounter, some glimpse, even momentary, of transcendent love beyond what we can see and touch.

On a good Sunday, we receive more than a glimpse, more than a moment.

That's why I do this ministry – in hopes of facilitating our having an experience of God, of transcendence, of holy power and love.

I can't make it happen, any more than a midwife can give birth for her patient – I can only help try to position us and facilitate new life – to hope that here, in this place, we see Christ as he truly is.

Symbolically, this is our weekly trip up the Mount of Transfiguration.

We're brought here so we can bear witness to resurrection life when we see

Christ out there, so we can say, "Look, there's Jesus! In that person who is homeless, or that guy in prison, or that woman who is hungry, in that child who has no clothes." Those are some of the ways he said we'd encounter him.

We don't always get a light show – we are offered quieter glimpses of his reality,  
when something we hear registers in our spirits;  
when we feel a surge of feeling during a song or hymn;  
when our hearts are touched during prayer  
or we experience a holy presence in bread and wine.

What we feed the world is our relationship with God. That's our gift to offer.  
That bread is our stories of encounter, stories of relationship.

We can say, "I saw him on Sunday – he was hanging out in La Plata/Wayside.  
Let me tell you about it..."

If there was a moment when you were touched during your time here on Sunday,  
tell someone about it – "We sang this beautiful song at church..." or "I had  
a conversation after church that changed the way I looked at something,"  
or "We have this amazing ministry with kids in foster care/feeding ministry."  
or "I had a tough day, and then I reconnected with my church family  
at Night Prayers, and I felt like myself again."

Our stories of transformation have the power to open other people up to the  
light. Every time we speak of a spiritual experience, no matter how little,  
someone else's faith is fed, someone else is encouraged to tell their story,  
someone else's story is confirmed – "I'm not the only crazy one!"

someone else is affirmed to step out in prayer or to draw nearer to God.  
And it's not always telling a story – sometimes it's modeling the behavior.

This week a very active member of the congregation said that she'd been at  
a non-church meeting, at which a lot of needs for prayer emerged; and so she  
said, "Well, let's pray about that," and she did! This life-long Episcopalian would  
never have felt comfortable praying aloud, but she's a regular at Night Prayers  
and she said that has equipped her. Witnessing to your experience.

As we hear each other's stories, it strengthens our faith for the next thing  
God wants to do through us and among us.

Your name might not be Peter, James or John, and this might not be a mountain.  
But we are here to experience the Light of the World.

That's what this season of Epiphany has been about – gathering light.

As we begin our annual pilgrimage to the Cross and Empty Tomb,  
we carry this light as in a lamp shining in a dark place,  
until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

*Amen.*

## Matthew 17:1-9

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them **up a high mountain by themselves.**

*There he was transfigured before them.*

His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish,

I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them,

and a voice from the cloud said,

**"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"**

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.

But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid."

When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

## 2 Peter 1:16-21

**W**e did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been **eyewitnesses of his majesty**. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this **as to a lamp shining in a dark place**, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.