

Sermon for Last Epiphany Year A
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
February 23, 2020
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Exodus 24:12-18 2 Peter 1:16-21 Matthew 17:1-9

Epiphany began with this collect: O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face.

The magi, led by a star to the infant Jesus, reveal Jesus as “the king of the Jews,” the Messiah for the whole world. Now, on a mountaintop, three of Jesus’ closest friends see God’s glory in the face of Jesus. Moses and Elijah are there, and then, from a bright cloud a voice says: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him!” It is no wonder that Peter, James and John fell to the ground in fear.

We heard those same words at Jesus’ baptism “when a voice from heaven said: ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’” The Jesus who John baptized in the Jordan River is the same Jesus who is on this mountaintop, both times claimed as God’s son. At the baptism the Spirit of God descends like a dove, and on the mountaintop, like a bright cloud. We remember Moses ascending the mountain into a cloud, where he heard the voice of God and received God’s word on stone tablets. Now we hear the voice of God and receive God’s word in Jesus. Moses and Elijah vanish, and the disciples are alone with Jesus.

We have a unique vantage point from this mountain. We know about the journey that brought us to this place: the Exile, the years in the desert, Moses giving us the law and Elijah speaking as a prophet, the law and the prophets fulfilled in Jesus. We know what is ahead of us: our descent from the mystery of the mountain into the remainder of Jesus’ ministry, his trial and crucifixion. Even though we know “the end of the story,” which is really a beginning – new life in Christ, we know this time of waiting for resurrection.

From Jesus’ birth to his death, it is outsiders who first recognize who he is. The magi found him. A centurion identified him: “truly this man was God’s son.” We are not outsiders, but Jesus’ inner circle. Lent is a time for us to show up on the mountain: to look back at ourselves and see where we have been, and to look forward to ever-new life with Jesus, for ourselves and in community. Where have you seen God’s mystery? When might you have heard God’s voice, felt the breath

of the Holy Spirit, experienced the light of Christ? In Lent we take the time to see the light of Christ in our lives and to discover where God feels absent. Discover a space and time to listen for this voice of God. Sense the presence of the Holy Spirit. Move beyond recognition of Christ and into a strengthened relationship with him. Let that relationship with Christ be personal and individual, corporate, and a priority.

The next few days is our preparation time for the season of Lent. I will extend an invitation to you on Ash Wednesday to remember your mortality and to enter into a holy, penitential, and life-giving time. We remember that Lent is a time of humility, not sorrow. In these coming hours think about what practices might strengthen your faith and your relationship with Jesus. I will intentionally make room for some quiet time each day, to pray, talk to, and listen for, God. I will fast and pray on certain days in order to be fed by spiritual food and by the word of God.

Walk with me, in community, in prayer, in quiet time together, in whatever is meaningful in finding joy in humility and in submission to God's will. Jesus, light of the world, who descended from heaven for the whole world, is the one with whom we are walking. Walk with him, and for him, confident that Jesus is our companion. When we fall, it is Jesus who touches us and says, "get up and do not be afraid." And that voice, the voice of God found in bright clouds and dark ones, in fire and on mountains, speaks to us: "This is my child, my beloved. With you God is well-pleased."