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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw
Last Sunday after the Epiphany
February 19, 2023

Lectionary Year A: Matthew 17:1-9

We close the Epiphany season on a festive note and with a big word -- Transfiguration. Given those realities before us, it might be helpful to hit the highlights of today's Gospel reading once again; please allow me to do precisely that...

Transfiguration is the word used to describe Jesus' bedazzling change of appearance, as witnessed by our text. In the Transfiguration, Jesus is put right up there next to the greats -- Moses and Elijah -- and God acknowledges Jesus' special status once again in the same words God used at Jesus' baptism: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased..." (Matthew 17:5b). Therefore, one may conclude that the observances of the Baptism of Our Lord (January 8 this year) and the Transfiguration of Our Lord are bookends to the Epiphany season.

As for the meaning of Epiphany, that has everything to do with light, recalling particularly the light of the star that the Magi followed to the Christ child at Bethlehem. That "epiphany" -- traditionally celebrated on January 6 -- is the manifestation of the light of Christ to the world. But note it is not merely the star that shines; it is Christ himself who shines...as today's text says, "And he was transfigured before [Peter, James, and John], and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white" (Matthew 17:2).

The concept of Jesus as light seems apt for Jesus' role in the history of salvation. Light wakes us up. Light allows us to see. Light brightens our path. It isn't much of a stretch to see ourselves as the people who have been awakened to

our sinfulness and shown a better way in Christ. That's what the Light is there to do.

But the Light isn't there for us to keep to ourselves. Sure, it may have been the case some two millennia ago that Jesus revealed his light to a select few disciples, but ever since Jesus rose from the dead, his Light is for all to see. Just as we learned many years ago to sing, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine," we have the Light to shine before all people.

So if the Transfiguration is an image of the glory of God in us, we might want to look at the ways in which it can be apparent in each other. And if you don't see the light of Christ shining in you or your neighbor, take a moment to think about the ways it can. Now we're talking about "light" in terms of the gifts and talents you and others can bring into the church...and, no, we don't forget about these things once our September Ministry Fair is over!

As long as we're here, we will gather to do the very thing that has sustained us for nearly seventy-five years -- hear the Gospel proclaimed and receive the Sacraments. What that requires is actually very basic: the Scriptures, the waters of Holy Baptism, and the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Therein is revealed the light of Christ for us to receive. Knowing that, I can't think of a better reason to gather here, because you can let your light shine in the praises we sing and through the opportunities to worship, to serve, and to witness to others.

And even when it feels as if the "light" has "burned out," know that Christ is continually present when you call on him in worship and prayer. That's a big reason why we have faith -- to give us comfort and strength when things look bleak. Thus, I encourage you to make it a point to worship so that you may ex-

perience an alternative to the dreadful storms the world dishes out. Get a little light here to scatter the darkness and offer hope to an often hopeless world.

Back in my seminary years, I was on a trip to Atlanta with several of my fellow students, and, as is typical for me whenever I go south in January, I always freeze! The weather was particularly raw and miserable, and our week in Atlanta concluded with an ice storm that knocked out electricity to some 500,000 households throughout the South. Power outages, and especially those of that magnitude, remind us of how dependent we are on electricity, and, more fundamentally, light. When it's dark and you're stumbling around in a hotel room and you can't see where you're going or what you're doing, you're frustrated and impatient, to say the least.

And, if you're anything like me, you'll flip the light switch automatically even when you know there's a power outage...it's just that instinctual!

But something you take for granted is now gone. Needless to say, it becomes a transfiguring experience in itself for us, if it is possible to be transfigured from content to frustrated. Think of what it's like, then, to be without the Light of Christ...

So if the absence of light can be a transfiguring experience for us, the presence of light can be a transfiguring experience for us, too. Here, I'm speaking of the dazzling white light of the transfigured Christ, who revealed God's glory to the disciples so they might one day share that Light with others. Although it may sometimes seem as if the Light of Christ isn't shining quite that brightly, be assured that it still is...through the ministries of our congregation and wider Church and through ordinary people like you and me.

Remember this, though: The disciples themselves were terrified at the sight of the dazzling white Christ at first. Thus, as the people of God, we need to remember that there will always be signs, visions, prophecies, and callings that may stir up fear in us. At such times, we'll likely become cautious, hesitant, and skeptical. So, as I continue to put forth opportunities for growth for you to consider, I realize that you might not always want to plunge in wholeheartedly. Thankfully, you have given me -- along with several others working to revitalize St. Anne's -- a fair hearing. And lest we resemble a business too much, we know deep down that our mission depends not on statistics and measurable results but on faith. The only way to continue in faith is to listen to the words of Jesus to the disciples: "Get up and do not be afraid" (Matthew 17:7b).

And fear will kill the Church. If we simply fall to the ground at things that astound and confuse us, we won't be the lively and fruitful witness to the Light of Christ that we are called to be. Let's hear those words of Jesus -- "Get up and do not be afraid" -- and carry out our callings with boldness and vigor. Courage and faith carry the Church into the future just as effectively as talent and money, if not more so. But in order to have courage and faith in yourself, you'll need courage and faith in God.

May the Light of Christ shine in you as brightly as it shone in Christ on the mountaintop with the disciples. This is, after all, the glory of God manifested in you just as it has in Christ. With something as great as that, there can be little else for you to do than to offer yourselves to God...in service to him and to his people. Today is the day for you to "get up and not be afraid." Be not afraid...rather, be bold. Be bold in Christ and let your light shine. If you have something to share -- in worship, in service, or in witness -- share it in the confidence of Christ's presence with you, for he is your Light!

There is a Transfiguration before us, not only in Jesus but also in us, in the transformation of hearts and minds...transformation from doubt to faith, from fear to courage, and from darkness to light. That is what Christ came here to do! May we see that dazzling white light of the transfigured Christ and hear him say, "Get up and do not be afraid."

Amen.