



A LIGHT *to the* NATIONS



Sermon Series Guide
January 4 - February 15, 2026

A Light To The Nations

January 4 -February 15, 2026

The time after Epiphany is a liturgical season starting on January 6th, with The Festival of Epiphany, celebrating the magi's visit, and lasting until the beginning of Lent, the day before Ash Wednesday. "Epiphany" means "to be visible" or "a showing forth," revealing Jesus's divinity and calling believers to share that light with the world. There is focus on Jesus's ministry, the calling of disciples, and a growing understanding of who He is. It's a time for us to recognize Jesus as the divine light and grow in that understanding as we move toward Easter.

January 4, 2026	Epiphany of Our Lord
January 11, 2026	The Baptism of Our Lord
January 18, 2026	Savior of the Nations
January 25, 2026	Disciples for the Nations
February 1, 2026	Blessings for the Nations
February 8, 2026	Light of the Nations
February 15, 2026	The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Resource:

ELCA Lectionary Year A

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January 4, 2026

Epiphany of Our Lord

The feast of Epiphany (“manifestation”) concludes the Christmas season with a celebration of God’s glory revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. In Isaiah and Ephesians, that glory is proclaimed for all nations and people. Like the light of the star that guided the magi to Jesus, the light of Christ reveals who we are: children of God who are claimed and washed in the waters of baptism. We are sent out to be beacons of the light of Christ, sharing the good news of God’s love to all people.

Opening Prayer:

O God, on this day you revealed your Son to the nations by the leading of a star. Lead us now by faith to know your presence in our lives, and bring us at last to the full vision of your glory, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Personal Reflection: Where have you felt God's presence most strongly this week?

Sermon Reflection:

As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Readings and Psalms:

Isaiah 60:1-6 Nations come to the light

Jerusalem is assured that nations will make a pilgrimage to her because the light of God’s presence is in her midst. The bountiful food of the sea and the profits of international trade will come streaming to Jerusalem and thereby declare God’s praise.

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14 All kings shall bow down before him. (Ps. 72:11)

Ephesians 3:1-12 The gospel’s promise extends to all

What had been hidden from previous generations is now made known through the gospel ministry of Paul and others. In Christ, both Jews and Gentiles participate in the richness of God’s promised salvation.

Matthew 2:1-12 Revelation of Christ to the nations of the earth

God’s promise shines bright in the night as magi follow a star to honor a new king. Strangers from a faraway land, they welcome the long-awaited messiah of Israel.



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

The Epiphany of Our Lord (A,B,C) – Ephesians 3:1-12

Focus: *The Mystery of Faith*

word of life

“...the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel.” Ephesians 3:6 (NRSV)

Read Ephesians 3:1-12

The theme of the letter to the church in Ephesus, a community in Asia Minor, centers on the mission to the Gentiles. The author (Paul or a companion or follower in the tradition of Paul) describes his mission as one of a “prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.” (Ephesians 3:1 NRSV) The word “prisoner” might best be translated “in bonds.” Paul’s physical imprisonment has purpose and meaning. He is imprisoned for the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles – a task to which he is commissioned by God and to which he is bound.

1. *How does Paul’s imprisonment serve a purpose?*
2. *To what mission are we as Christians bound and commissioned?*
3. *How do we understand our calling as followers of Christ?*

Note the use of the words “mystery” and “revelation” in the passage for today. (See Ephesians 3:3-5.) Paul’s commission to spread the gospel to the Gentiles is given to him through the revelation of the mystery of God. We see other places in the New Testament where the word “mystery” is used. Jesus, for example, used the word to explain to his disciples the meaning and purpose of the parable of the sower: “to you has been given the secret (mystery) of the kingdom of God.” (Mark 4:11 NRSV) Mystery implies an inner knowledge; it requires revelation in order to be understood.

4. *What are some examples of mysteries?*
5. *How important is the gift of revelation in order to understand mysteries?*

Paul’s calling to spread the gospel is grounded in the revelation given to him by the Spirit. He is given grace to understand the mystery that was hidden to previous generations. In verse 6 the author defines the central mystery of the gospel: “that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel.” Ephesians 3:6 (NRSV)

As 21st century readers, we might miss the radical nature of this revelation. The early church wrestled mightily with the inclusion of the Gentiles. It was a mystery that Gentiles and Jews would be gathered together as one body – the body of Christ. God’s grace makes the mystery known and revealed. It is part of God’s plan for humanity. Paul writes: “this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ.” (Ephesians 3:8 NRSV)

The church serves as the embodiment of this mystery: “through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 3:10 NRSV) This good news has cosmic implications. The insight that God’s plan of grace is to be inclusive of all, Jew and Gentile, impacts the whole world.

6. *How would we articulate this mystery today?*

word among us

Everyone loves a good mystery! The drama, the plot, the suspense, the unexpected resolution – all is designed to draw the reader into the story. A good mystery does just that; it invites, engages, and encourages the reader to turn the page to see what will happen next. The plot thickens with each new revelation, until the final outcome is revealed.

1. *What do you like or dislike about a mystery?*

We often think of a mystery as something unfathomable, something we can't explain, something beyond human comprehension. Even relationships are sometimes described as a mystery. Perhaps you've overheard someone say of a couple, "It's a mystery to me what they see in each other!"

The writer of the letter to the church in Ephesus was caught up in a mystery – a mystery that gave Paul his mission and purpose. The mystery was hidden to previous generations (Ephesians 3:5), but in Christ it is revealed and made known. For the apostle Paul, the great mystery of the faith is simply this: "...the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Jesus Christ through the gospel." (Ephesians 3:6 NRSV)

2. *Why do you think this is a mystery?*
3. *How was this so clear to Paul?*

One can almost hear someone describe the early church of Jewish and Gentile Christians with the words: "It's a mystery to me how they stay together." But that's what God has in mind. Diverse peoples with little in common, except a common baptism and a common Lord, being brought together as fellow heirs – brothers and sisters – members of the same body. It's a mystery that is still being revealed today as barriers are overcome, walls of division are torn down, hardness of heart melts into a generous spirit, alienation is transformed into inclusion, and strangers are made brothers and sisters "... so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known..." (Ephesians 3:10 NRSV) Thanks be to God for this mystery!

4. *What is still a mystery to you about God's ways?*

faith practice in daily life

Live among God's faithful people

Isn't the diversity among God's people amazing? People of different races and backgrounds come together as one body, brothers and sisters in Christ. It's a mystery how it can be; but by the grace of God, it is so. It is through the church that the mystery of God's all-encompassing inclusion is revealed, experienced, and lived out. As we live among God's faithful people, we grow in our understanding of God's grace that includes all as members of one body – the church, the body of Christ.

5. *In what ways does your congregation reflect the rich variety of God's people?*
6. *In what ways can your congregation live out the mystery of God's inclusion of all?*

Prayer

Gracious God, we give you thanks for your loving grace that includes us all. We thank you for the Church, the body of Christ. May our congregation and our lives reflect the rich diversity of your people, that we might proclaim the great mystery of your love for all; in Christ's name we pray. Amen

last word

Look for ways to invite and include others in the activities of your congregation this week.

Daily Faith Practices

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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Epiphany of our Lord (C) Faith Practices Page 2 of 2

January 11, 2026

The Baptism of Our Lord

In the waters of the Jordan, Jesus is revealed as the beloved Son of God. Through this great epiphany, Jesus fulfills all righteousness and becomes the servant of God who will bring forth justice and be a light to the nations. In the waters of baptism we too are washed by the Word, anointed by the Spirit, and named God's beloved children. Our baptismal mission is to proclaim good news to all who are oppressed or in need of God's healing.

Opening Prayer:

O God our Father, at the baptism of Jesus, you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized into Christ faithful to their calling to be your daughters and sons, and empower us all with your Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Personal Reflection: Where have you felt God's presence most strongly this week?

Sermon Reflection:

As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Readings and Psalms

Isaiah 42:1-9 The servant of the LORD brings justice

God's servant is endowed with God's spirit in order to bring justice to the nations. The servant will not exercise authority boisterously or with violence, nor will weariness ever prevent the fulfilling of the servant's task. God's old promises have been fulfilled; the servant's new assignment is to bring light to the nations.

Psalm 29 The voice of the LORD is upon the waters. (Ps. 29:3)

Acts 10:34-43 Jesus' ministry after his baptism

Peter crosses the sharp religious boundary separating Jews from Gentiles and proclaims the good news of God's inclusive forgiveness in Jesus' name to Cornelius, a Roman centurion. As a result of Peter's preaching, Cornelius and his family become the first Gentiles to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 3:13-17 Revelation of Christ as God's servant

Before Jesus begins his ministry, he is baptized by John, touched by the Spirit, and identified publicly as God's child.

Daily Discipleship

The Baptism of Our Lord (A) – Matthew 3:13-17

Discipleship: *Following God's Son*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to you to follow God's Son?*

word of life

“And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’” Matthew 3:17 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 3:13-17

The Gospel of Matthew uses its first three chapters to establish the identity of Jesus by 1) tracing the genealogy of Jesus back to Abraham, 2) describing the conversation of God's angel with Joseph, 3) naming the infant Emmanuel and Jesus, 4) recounting the wise men search as well as the finding of the King of the Jews, and 5) recalling the words of John the Baptist as he prepares the people for the Messiah. But the baptism of Jesus identifies Jesus most clearly and fully as God's own Son.

Despite John the Baptist being fully convinced of the coming of the Messiah and his efforts to prepare people for that event, John becomes hesitant in the presence of Jesus. John perceives himself unfit to baptize God's anointed one, but fervently desires Jesus to baptize him.

1. *What might be other reasons for John's hesitation to baptize Jesus?*
2. *If Jesus is without sin, why would he need to be baptized?*
3. *If Jesus is baptized by John, does that make John better than Jesus? Explain.*

The early church had problems sorting out the need for Jesus to be baptized as well as the role of John the Baptist. Jesus offers a short reply to John the Baptist's questions and explains his own understanding behind his baptism. Jesus simply states, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” (Matthew 3:15 NRSV) Yet there is no Old Testament reference to support the fulfillment of the promise of baptism. Being right with God and living a righteous life is a theme throughout the Gospel of Matthew. Out of obedience to God, Jesus is willing to be baptized because he believes God desires it.

4. *What does it mean to you that Jesus would be baptized?*

John the Baptist consents to baptizing Jesus. He does so in his own effort to be obedient to God and act in a righteous manner.

5. *In what ways did John the Baptist try to live a righteous life?*
6. *How easy or difficult was it for John the Baptist to live a righteous life?*

When Jesus rises out of the baptismal waters, the heavens open and Jesus sees the Spirit of God descend upon him. A voice from heaven proclaims Jesus as God's own Son. This voice is the voice of God declaring pleasure with Jesus. God even chooses to call Jesus “the Beloved”. This claim by God of Jesus as a Son is undeniable. Jesus is a special recipient of God's affections.

7. *How do you picture the baptism of Jesus? Describe.*
8. *What does it mean to be God's “beloved”?*
9. *What does it mean for Jesus to be called God's Son?*

The baptism of Jesus launches his ministry and mission with a public affirmation by God of his identity and connection to God. Jesus willingly chooses to stand with sinners in the waters of the Jordan River as he prepares to reach out to those very sinners with saving grace.

word among us

Billie loved baseball. He loved to hit the ball, catch it, run after it, and throw it. Rarely was Billie seen without a baseball. His parents signed him up for Pee Wee Baseball at the local park. Much to the surprise of the family, Billie wasn't very good at the sport. He simply wasn't athletically gifted, but he tried. His love for the game did not wane. No matter what, Billie had a grin on his face. No matter what!

Finally, at the last game of a very long season, Billie caught his first ball. When he saw the ball coming to him, he held up the glove high in the air. But because of the sun, Billie closed his eyes, tilting and twisting his head towards the ground. Despite it all, Billie somehow caught the ball. No one watching the catch could figure out how the ball stayed in his glove. His parents stood up and yelled, "That's my son. We love you. We are so proud."

1. *Recall a time in your own life when you heard someone cheer you on. Or recall a time when you were able to cheer someone else.*
2. *What does it feel like to be praised?*
3. *In today's society, who tends to be praised a lot?*
4. *In today's society, who tends to be ignored?*

When Jesus is baptized, the focus is not on John the Baptist, the Jordan River, weather, or the crowd. Jesus is the focal point of the attention of God as God lavishes praise and support. God is delighted! God's beloved is pleasing. It is as if God is smiling upon Jesus and blessing him. Yet, Jesus is not a stranger to God, but this is God's own Son.

5. *What difference does it make to you that Jesus is connected to God as a Son?*
6. *What attributes of the Father does the Son have?*
7. *How is Jesus different from his Father?*
8. *How much are you like your father?*
9. *What attributes would you hope a child might learn from you?*

The baptism of Jesus is a mountain-top experience for him. The heavens open up, the Spirit descends upon him and he hears God's own voice. God's presence is real. The blessing of God is tangible. Good thing. Not all days will be easy for Jesus. Not all people will be as accepting and pleased. Some will run him out of town. Others will plot for his death. Jesus will need to put this baptismal blessing by God deep in his memory and call upon it during the trials and tribulations of this life.

More than getting the approval of the people on earth, Jesus desires to continue to please God and to live a righteous life. Jesus is obedient only to God and invites his followers to do likewise.

10. *Whom do you try to please?*
11. *What would it mean for your life to try to please God at all times?*

Prayer

Gracious God, come and work in my life so I might bring you delight. Thank you for claiming me in baptism and helping me to grow in the image of Christ. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 42:1-9

last word

Prayerfully make a list of your traits
which might delight God.

Ask God to bless the list and expand those traits in your life.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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Baptism of Our Lord (A) Page 2 of 2



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Baptism of Our Lord (A) – Acts 10:34-43

Focus: *The Good News is For All!*

word of life

“...I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” Acts 10:34-35 (NRSV)

Read Acts 10:34-43

This Sunday is the celebration of the Baptism of Our Lord. The celebration falls in the church calendar in the season of the Epiphany. The themes of this season emphasize the ways in which the Good News of Jesus is revealed to all nations and all peoples.

This good news seems obvious today. The early church, however, wrestled with the inclusive scope of the Christian message. Up to this point in Acts, those who had been baptized and had received the gift of the Holy Spirit had been Jews or Samaritans. Gentiles were not included in the church. There were some who believed that those who converted to Christianity had to follow Jewish law before being accepted into the Christian community.

1. *What expectations are there today for those who convert and become Christian?*

It is in this struggle that we find Peter in the lesson for today. The context is critical for us to fully understand the importance of these verses. In Acts 10, Peter came to the astonishing realization that the good news of salvation through Jesus was for Gentiles as well. Cornelius—a centurion, a member of the Roman military, a Gentile—had a vision. An angel of the Lord instructed Cornelius in this vision to send messengers to invite Peter to come to his home. Before the messengers arrived at Peter’s home, Peter also had a vision of a sheet filled with animals—both clean and unclean. In the vision, Peter is commanded to eat, both the clean and unclean. When he protested eating that which was considered unclean, a voice in the vision said to Peter, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” (Acts 10:15 NRSV) Peter was perplexed about the meaning of the vision, and then the messengers from Cornelius arrived.

It all began to make sense to Peter—the vision, the animals, the voice. It was an Epiphany “aha” moment. Peter crossed the boundary of clean and unclean, of Jew and Gentile. He went to Cornelius’ home, even though it was unlawful for a Jew to associate with a Gentile, and spoke these profound words: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” (Acts 10:34-35 NRSV)

2. *What does it mean that God shows no partiality?*
3. *Describe an “aha” Epiphany moment in your life of faith.*

Peter then told the story of Jesus. He told of Jesus’ ministry and message. He recalled how Jesus was baptized by John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit. He proclaimed Jesus’ healing deeds and power. And, in a bold statement reflecting a new insight, Peter said that everyone who believes in Jesus – both Jew and Gentile, clean and unclean—is included and receives forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name.

4. *What do you guess the reaction to that news might have been?*
5. *Are there still walls which divide Christians? Explain. How do we move beyond the walls?*

The meaning of the visions of Cornelius and Peter became clear. Cornelius and on all those gathered in his house were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues and extol God. The Spirit moved Peter to announce, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (Acts 10:47 NRSV) The good news of Jesus is for all!

word among us

He drew a circle that shut me out - Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win: We drew a circle and took him in!
(From the poem "Outwitted" by Edwin Markham)

We too often gather in like-minded groups. We too often have lists of requirements that must be met before accepting others. We too often make prejudgments (note the word "prejudice") about others, especially those who differ from us.

1. *How does your congregation invite and include those who are different?*
2. *What extra steps have been taken at your church to provide hospitality for guests who come to worship and study with you?*

The good news—the Gospel message—is heard in the opening words of Peter’s sermon to those gathered in Cornelius’ home: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him.” (Acts 10:34-35 NRSV) The implications are clear: if God shows no partiality, then neither does God’s community. The dividing lines separating Jews and Gentiles have been washed away.

We can’t fully grasp the significance of Peter’s insight for the early church. Nor can we grasp its significance for the church today. The inclusive universality of the message of Jesus empowered the apostle Paul to go to Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, and even to Rome to share the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It empowered Peter to proclaim to the Gentiles assembled at Cornelius’ house, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (Acts 10:47 NRSV) And it empowered the saving message of Jesus to be proclaimed through our ancestors to each of us.

3. *Put into words the significance of Peter’s insight for the early church.*
4. *How did this insight help to open the door for non-Jews to become Christian?*
5. *How does this insight open doors for you to be included in the community of faith?*

faith practice in daily life

Serve all people, following the example of Jesus Christ

Today, on this celebration of the baptism of our Lord, we reflect on the inclusive nature of our baptism and our calling. Through word and water, we are united with Christ and with all who have been baptized. The Epiphany message rings loud and clear: Jesus is for all! Christ, given and shed—for you! Christ, crucified—for you! Christ, risen—for you!

We are called in baptism to announce this wondrous news to all the world, and to serve all people, for all are included!

6. *What are some examples of ways all are included in your congregation?*
7. *How does this good news impact how we relate to those who are different from us?*

Prayer

Gracious God, we give you thanks that you include all of us in your saving grace. Help us to be inclusive of others as we live out our faith. Amen

last word

Watch for opportunities in your congregation to include all.

Daily Faith Practices

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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The Baptism of Our Lord (A) Faith Practices Page 2 of 2

January 18, 2026

Savior of the Nations

Today's gospel opens with further reflection on Jesus' baptism. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and the one anointed by the Spirit. In the liturgy we come and see Christ revealed among us in word and meal. We go forth to invite others to come and worship the Holy One and to receive the gifts of grace and peace made known among us.

Opening Prayer:

Holy God, our strength and our redeemer, by your Spirit hold us forever, that through your grace we may worship you and faithfully serve you, follow you and joyfully find you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Personal Reflection: Where have you felt God's presence most strongly this week?

Sermon Reflection:

As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Reading and Psalms:

Isaiah 49:1-7 The servant brings light to the nations

Here the servant, identified as Israel, speaks for herself and describes her honored mission. Called before her birth like Jeremiah and John the Baptist, the servant is not only to restore Israel. The servant's ultimate assignment is to bring news of God's victory to the ends of the earth. God in faithfulness has chosen Israel for this task.

Psalm 40:1-11 I love to do your will, O my God. (Ps. 40:8)

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 Paul's greeting to the church at Corinth

Though God's church in Corinth is a fractious congregation beset with many conflicts, Paul opens this letter by spotlighting the multiple ways God has enriched and sustained its life as part of the divine call into the fellowship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

John 1:29-42 Revelation of Christ as the Lamb of God

John the Baptist's witness to Jesus initiates a chain of testimony as his disciples begin to share with others what they have found.

Daily Discipleship

Second Sunday after the Epiphany (A) – John 1:29-42

Discipleship: *Following the Lamb of God*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to follow an innocent man of God who was sacrificed for our sins?*

word of life

“The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” John 1:29 (NRSV)

Read John 1:29-42

The accounts of the baptism of Jesus described in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are quite similar in their details. The heavens open up, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove, and God’s voice proclaims Jesus to be God’s own Son, the Beloved. Each description takes place at the time of baptism. (See Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22.) In contrast, the Gospel of John describes the baptism through the eyes of John the Baptist as he gives testimony to the scene. Beginning with John 1:19, John the Baptist is established as a forerunner to Jesus and the one who repeatedly offers testimony. (See John 1:19-28.) The testimony in John 1:29-42 does not mention John actually baptizing Jesus.

1. *Compare and contrast the description of the baptism of Jesus found in John 1:29-34 with last week’s lesson, Matthew 3:13-17.*
2. *What can you learn from John’s testimony?*
3. *Does his testimony make you feel like you are at the scene? How so?*

When John sees Jesus he declares, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 NRSV) John repeats that name on the next day when he is with two of his disciples. (See John 1:36) No other Gospel writer uses such a phrase, but it can be found in the Book of Revelation. (See Revelation 5:6; 14:1; 15:3; 19:7.)

Scholars are not certain about the meaning of Lamb of God. Some believe this is a reference to the end of time when a conquering lamb will destroy all evil. This image is found in the literature written in between the Old and New Testaments (known as the Apocrypha) as well as the Book of Revelation. It fits with John the Baptist’s fiery preaching about final judgment.

Other scholars link the Lamb of God with the Passover Lamb. (See Exodus 12:5.) The first Passover involves the Jewish slaves marking their doors with lamb’s blood so the angel of death would “pass-over” their homes. Subsequently, Jews gather each year to celebrate the Passover and God freeing them from bondage. In the first century, there is a Preparation Day when a lamb was slaughtered for the Passover Festival. This Day of Preparation is also the day Jesus is crucified in John’s Gospel. (See John 19:14) Jesus becomes a new Lamb of God, innocent at the time of his death. This sacrificial image coincides with the image of the suffering servant found in Isaiah 53:7-12.

4. *What does the phrase “Lamb of God” mean to you?*
5. *How is describing Jesus as the Lamb of God meaningful for you?*

The next day after the baptism, John finds two of his own disciples and tells them about the Lamb of God. They meet Jesus, but want to know where he is staying. This odd question is met with a simple response by Jesus, “Come and see.” (John 1:39 NRSV) After being with Jesus, one of the men goes to his brother Simon to tell him about Jesus. A chain reaction is begun as people seek the Messiah and tells others about him.

word among us

The congregation had worked very hard on the costumes for their outdoor live nativity. Children, youth, and adults had signed up for a chance to be part of the event. Yet everyone was concerned whether they would have an audience. For weeks, the congregation found ways to invite people to come and see the Live Nativity. They hoped people not affiliated with a church might hear the story of God's love made known at Christmas in rich, meaningful new ways.

Thus, the congregation joined together on a creative publicity campaign. They used the radio, newspaper, Web sites, and posters; but mostly they personally invited people with a simple invitation, "Come and see!"

1. *What is happening at your church to which you would be willing to invite someone "to come and see"?*
2. *What (if anything) do you hope they do not see? (How might you change that?)*

Maya was heartbroken. She had lost all hope. Her good friend went to Maya's home to be with her, but the friend did not know what to say or do. Finally, she invited Maya to come with her to church that night. The friend simply said, "Come and see." Maya agreed, for she was finally ready to try something new. Clearly her current choices were not working in her life.

3. *When have you invited someone to learn more about Jesus Christ?*
4. *Why are those invitations important?*

One thing we know about John the Baptist is his willingness to testify about Jesus. Time after time, he tells the crowds to prepare for the coming of Christ. After the baptism, John tells his disciples about the Lamb of God. They in turn tell others about Jesus, calling him the Messiah. This chain reaction begun two thousand years ago has not stopped.

Disciples who are connected to Jesus tell others about him. They cannot hoard the good news. Instead, they want others to participate in that good news.

5. *Give examples of helping other disciples to grow in faith.*
6. *What is it like to help a new Christian learn about Jesus?*
7. *If you have not had that experience, why not?*
8. *What needs to happen in your life to free you to share with others about Jesus?*

The primary image of Jesus in this text is the Lamb of God. A lamb is considered an innocent animal which still needs protection. Yet, Jesus as God's lamb is freely given in the hands of the enemy to be sacrificed. Jesus dies in order to take away the sins of the world. Those sins include each of our sins.

9. *How is life different knowing Jesus had died for you?*
10. *How is life different knowing your sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ?*

Prayer

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world. Have mercy on us. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 49:1-7

last word

Take a walk
and ponder what it means to you
for Jesus to have taken away your sins.



Daily Discipleship

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Second Sunday after the Epiphany (C) – 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Focus: *To the Church of God*

word of life

“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours...” (1 Corinthians 1:2-3 NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

The Apostle Paul began his letter to the Corinthians, like so many of his other letters, with a salutation introducing himself to his intended audience. This was the typical way to begin a letter in the first century.

To understand Paul and his theology is to grasp the deep sense Paul understood himself to be called by God—especially to be called to be an apostle. Paul does not elaborate on the specifics of his calling, but the story of his conversion on the road to Damascus is well-known and radical. By the grace of God, he was transformed from one who vehemently persecuted Christians to one who passionately inspired followers of Christ. (To learn more about Paul’s conversion to Christianity, see Acts 9.)

1. *Summarize the story of God’s call to Paul as he traveled on the road to Damascus.*
2. *How helpful might it have been to Paul to have such a deep, clear sense of a call? Explain.*

Paul writes to the church of Corinth, not about frivolous matters, but as one who has a deep sense of being called by God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and only by the will of God. He is not alone. Although we do not know any details about Sosthenes, the companion of Paul, it is helpful to realize Paul did not live out his ministry in isolation. Paul often mentions and thanks those who accompany him on his missionary journeys. Paul refers to Sosthenes as a brother—not a biological kin, but one brought into a family relationship because of Christ.

3. *What is the importance of Paul not being alone in his work?*
4. *What might change in us if and when we view others in the church as our brothers or sisters?*

Once Paul has established his identity, he then clarifies to whom the letter is addressed. Again, this is a common formula used by the author and others in this time period.

First, the letter is addressed “to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...” (1 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) As the letter progresses, Paul will address the conflicts, misunderstandings and divisions within the church of Corinth. But at least in the salutation, Paul reminds his audience about the essence of their being. They are a unique church of God established in specific location (Corinth) and, most importantly they are called by God. Their calling is to be saints—holy people set apart by God for the sake of Jesus Christ.

5. *How might Paul’s words help to unify the divided church of Corinth?*

Paul’s words are addressed to more than just the church in Corinth. He writes to all “who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.” (1 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) This ecumenical tone invites Christians throughout the globe to learn from Paul as we give thanks to God who extends grace and peace. (Note: Since the lectionary also uses 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 on the First Sunday of Advent, Year B, see *Daily Faith Practices* for that reflections on that part of the text.)

Word among us

Take a moment to imagine that you are given an opportunity to write a letter to your congregation. You are not asked to write an email or text, but a full letter to the church of God where you regularly worship. But there is one more stipulation. Your letter is to follow the same formula used by Paul in his letters written in the first century. Here is a guideline:

Paul's Version: Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God
YOUR VERSION: Your Name, called to be an _____ of Christ Jesus, by the will of God

Paul's Version: To the church of God that is in Corinth...
YOUR VERSION: To the church of God that is in _____

Paul's Version: to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...
YOUR VERSION: to those who are _____
(Can you use the same formula? Why or why not?)

Paul's Version: together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours
YOUR VERSION: together with.....

Paul's Version: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
YOUR VERSION: Grace to you and peace....

Take a moment to reflect on what it would have been like for Paul to have the authority granted by God to write to a struggling congregation in Corinth and to all those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Share your reflections concerning what it might that have been like for Paul to write letters to the early churches.
2. What did you learn as you filled in the blanks and wrote the salutation to your congregation?

faith practice in daily life

Live among God's faithful people

God has called and gathered faithful people to be the church in diverse settings. Every congregation has a unique opportunity to pursue the mission of Jesus Christ in a specific place and time. Every congregation—no matter its context—has a mission to fully become the church of God.

3. How does your congregation boldly reflect its identity as "the church of God"?
4. What are the unique opportunities for your congregation to be the church of God in your specific locale? Take time to answer this question.

Prayer

God of grace, you have called and brought the church into being. Give us wisdom and courage to be the church. Amen

last word

Take time to daily pray for your congregation as it discerns ways to BE the church of God in its unique setting.

Daily Faith Practices

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January 25, 2026

Disciples for The Nations

Jesus begins his public ministry by calling fishers to leave their nets and follow him. In Jesus the kingdom of God has come near. We who have walked in darkness have seen a great light. We see this light most profoundly in the cross—as God suffers with us and all who are oppressed by sickness, sin, or evil. Light dawns for us as we gather around the word, the font, and the holy table. We are then sent to share the good news that others may be “caught” in the net of God’s grace and mercy.

Opening Prayer: Lord God, your lovingkindness always goes before us and follows after us. Summon us into your light, and direct our steps in the ways of goodness that come through the cross of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Personal Reflection: Where have you felt God's presence most strongly this week?

Sermon Reflection:

As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Reading and Psalms:

Isaiah 9:1-4 Light shines for those in darkness

The northern tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali experienced the gloom of defeat by Assyrian military forces, but they are assured that their condition will be reversed when God makes a light-filled appearance. The joy they will experience will resemble celebrations of great harvests, because God will deliver them from everything that diminishes or oppresses them.

Psalm 27:1, 4-9 The LORD is my light and my salvation. (Ps. 27:1)

1 Corinthians 1:10-18 Appeal for unity in the gospel

Paul calls on the Corinthians to end their dissensions and share the unified outlook of the gospel. Discord arises when we forget that we belong not to human leaders or institutions but to Christ. Indeed, the unifying word of the cross of Christ is the center of the gospel and the power of God’s salvation.

Matthew 4:12-23 Revelation of Christ as a prophet

Jesus begins his public ministry shortly after John the Baptist is imprisoned by Herod. He proclaims the nearness of God’s reign and calls four fishermen to be his first disciples.

Daily Discipleship

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (A) – Matthew 5:1-12

Discipleship: *Following the Master Teacher*

Focus Question: *What is Jesus trying to teach me today?*

word of life

“When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them . . .” Matthew 5:1-2 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 5: 1-12

The Gospel of Matthew is a teaching gospel with Jesus serving as the master teacher. His primarily Jewish audience is learning from Jesus what it means to follow him and become his disciple.

The Gospel of Matthew includes five lengthy discourses. Each discourse ends with the words, “when Jesus had finished . . .” (Matthew 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1 NRSV) Biblical scholars make comparisons between these discourses and the five books of the Torah.

The first of the five speeches of Jesus is found in Matthew 5:1-7:28. Since Jesus is teaching from the mountain (Matthew 5:1), it is often called the Sermon on the Mount. Included in this discourse is a series of tips on how to live life. The next five lessons of the lectionary are all found in the Sermon on the Mount. If you have time, read through the entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:28).

1. *Imagine listening to Jesus teach. What would that have been like?*
2. *When you think of the teachings of Jesus, what first comes to mind?*

Many associate Jesus with parables and his stories. But Jesus also taught practical tips of life, often adding a new perspective. Not all his teachings are predictable or easily grasped. This is true with the Beatitudes, a series of blessings.

Read through Matthew 5:1-12 again. This time pause after reading each blessing and name someone you personally know who fits that description. (Try to think of someone new for each of the beatitudes.) As you do this exercise, consider the following questions:

3. *How difficult or easy is it to think of someone who is described by each of the beatitudes?*
4. *What general observations might you make about all those individuals named?*

Except for the final blessing, all the beatitudes are right now – this day. The blessings are to be experienced on this side of the grave, not later in heaven.

5. *Which of the beatitudes have you personally experienced?*
6. *Which if any of the beatitudes do you find confusing? How so?*
7. *Which beatitudes would you like further explained by Jesus?*

The beatitudes encourage believers to turn to God for guidance on living in radical, new ways. Being meek, mournful, and hungry are not words usually used to describe people on the fast track of success. Nevertheless, God chooses to bless. God chooses to turn the world upside down, bringing joy from tears and hope from despair. God blesses the unexpected. That’s just the way God operates.

word among us

Andy was quite anxious about beginning kindergarten. His parents and grandparents had been trying to prepare him for the first day. They talked about new friends, learning new things, and recess. Andy was not interested in any aspect of the venture. Finally, he agreed to attend the opening day.

Once his first (and only) day at school was over, Andy announced he need not return. He already knew everything the teacher taught. Why bother? What more could he possibly learn?

1. *What would you say to Andy?*
2. *How did Andy's attitude block him from learning at kindergarten?*

We might find ourselves chuckling at the idea of knowing everything by kindergarten. Andy simply did not realize all that was before him.

Unfortunately, we as Christians sometimes sound just like Andy. We get in a rut and think we have learned everything there is to know about following Jesus. But even if we have grown up in the church and currently attend worship as well as Sunday School classes regularly, there is still much to learn.

3. *What attitudes block Christians from Jesus?*
4. *What attitudes do you recommend to someone who wants to learn from Jesus?*

Disciples of Jesus are intended to be life-long learners, allowing God to shape and reshape our lives. Each day becomes an opportunity to integrate the teachings of Jesus into daily life. God's Spirit nudges and invites us to see things from God's perspective. The beatitudes are an example of teachings by Jesus which have the potential of turning our world upside down.

The beatitudes are a vision of what happens when the ethic of love becomes the principle of living. It is a radical way to live. As we reflect on the beatitudes, it is easy to see how it might take a lifetime to understand the beatitudes, let alone live them.

5. *How does one strive in daily life for humility, meekness, and purity of heart?*
6. *What is so radical about the beatitudes?*

Some have dissected the word *beatitude* into the words: *be an attitude*. Our daily attitudes are to be humility, meekness, and purity of heart. We are to hunger for God and seek peace fervently.

7. *What does it mean for you to "be an attitude" of blessing?*
8. *Which beatitude do you hope to remember and embrace during the coming year?*

Prayer

Gracious God, help us to live the beatitudes in daily life. Give us courage to seek you and trust in your blessings. Amen

Dig Deeper

Micah 6:1-8

last word

Select a beatitude and adopt it as your personal New Year's resolution.



Daily Discipleship

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Third Sunday after the Epiphany (A) - 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Focus: *A divided Christ?*

word of life

“What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” Has Christ been divided?” (1 Corinthians 1:12 NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians with a brief salutation, but then launches into his deep concern about the conflicts within the church established in Corinth. At the time of the letter, these conflicts had not severed the congregation into separate entities. Thus, Paul writes a single letter to believers in Corinth to address his unease about the quarrels tearing at the fabric of the young church.

“Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” (1 Corinthians 1:10 NRSV) Paul’s appeal is to be understood as from more than him personally, but from Jesus Christ.

1. *What about this appeal might have caught the attention of the Corinthians?*
2. *How realistic is it to expect a congregation to be without conflicts?*
3. *Describe what it would feel like to be part of a church united in the same mind and purpose.*

It is interesting to note Paul heard the news about the conflicts in the Corinth church from Chloe’s people. We don’t know anything about this woman named Chloe, but she and those associated with her must have been considered a reliable source because Paul acts upon their information by writing a letter.

The primary conflict in Corinth stems from people claiming loyalty to Christian leaders other than Jesus Christ. Paul lists the factions—those who claimed to belong to Paul, Apollos, and Cephas—but concludes the list with those who belong to Jesus Christ. Paul raises an important and pain-filled question, “Has Christ been divided?”

4. *How would you answer the question, “Has Christ been divided?” How so?*
5. *Explain how all baptized believers belong to Jesus Christ.*

Paul asks several questions hoping to show the absurdity of those who claim allegiance to anyone but Christ. “Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:13 NRSV) Paul clearly knows it is Christ alone who was crucified. Christians are baptized solely in his name. One can almost picture Paul throwing up his hands in disgust as he writes, “I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name.” (1 Corinthians 1:14 NRSV)

It is not that Paul is opposed to baptizing people, but that is not his primary calling from God. Nor is Paul interested in developing a fan club for himself. Instead Paul is called to proclaim the gospel of a crucified Christ—a message understood as foolishness to many. Paul’s proclamation is not just for those when they first hear of Christ, but also for congregations struggling to be a unified, vibrant body of Christ. The image of a divided Christ is a painful one. Jesus has already suffered on the cross and rose from the dead. Need Christ also suffer from divisions in the body of Christ known as the church?

6. *What is Paul trying to get the Corinthians to understand?*

Word among us

Is Christ divided? This question posed by Paul to the Corinthians is a worthy question for our time as well. Just ask anyone seeking to learn more about Christianity—especially someone without an affiliation with any specific denomination. Non-Christians are confused by divisions among those who claim a loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Take a moment to reflect on different church denominations which you have visited for worship, weddings, or perhaps funeral services. Consider church buildings in your neighborhood and community—ones you might pass by on your way to your own home congregation.

1. List different denominations of churches who claim a connection to Christ.
2. Which of these are most similar to your congregation? How so?
3. Describe specific ways churches might differ in worship, music, theology, art, and architecture.

There is no denying the diversity among churches which gather on Sunday mornings to sing praises to God who brought Jesus Christ into the world to redeem our sins and give us eternal life. All claim loyalty to Jesus Christ. Yet, sometimes relationships between Christian groups can be hostile.

4. If a non-Christian would ask you to explain the diversity of churches, what would you say?

The annual *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* is an international ecumenical observance from January 18 (Confession of St. Peter) to January 25 (Conversion of St. Paul). Christians are reminded to pray for unity so that the body of Christ—the church—not be divided. During his last supper with the disciples, Jesus offered this prayer, “The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17: 22-23 NRSV)

5. How might the church become completely one?
6. What are ways your congregation might collaborate and cooperate with other nearby congregations?
7. What opportunities might be created to expand your horizons and fellowship with a church diverse from your own congregation?

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

Each of us has probably had pastors who blessed our lives through sermons, words of encouragement, and presence. We thank God for those preachers and teachers who have walked with us on our spiritual journey and helped to shape us as we matured in faith. But, we do not belong to these pastors—even the one who baptized us. No matter how charismatic or memorable our pastors might be, we belong to Christ alone. It is Christ who has claimed us in our baptism.

8. Which pastors have helped you to deepen your relationship with Jesus Christ?
9. What does it mean for you to belong to Jesus Christ?

Prayer

Gracious God, unite your church in the same mind and the same purpose of Jesus Christ. Amen

last word

Be intentional about learning something new about Christians who worship differently than you.

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February 1, 2026

Blessings for The Nations

Who are the blessed ones of God? For Micah, they are those who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. For Paul, they are the ones who find wisdom in the weakness of the cross. For Jesus, they are the poor, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who mourn, and those who hunger for righteousness. In baptism we find our blessed identity and calling in this countercultural way of living and serving.

Opening Prayer: Holy God, you confound the world's wisdom in giving your kingdom to the lowly and the pure in heart. Give us such a hunger and thirst for justice, and perseverance in striving for peace, that in our words and deeds the world may see the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Personal Reflection: Where have you felt God's presence most strongly this week?

Sermon Reflection:

As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Reading and Psalms:

Micah 6:1-8 The offering of justice, kindness, humility

With the mountains and the foundations of the earth as the jury, God brings a lawsuit against Israel. God has "wearied" Israel with a long history of saving acts. God does not want or expect lavish sacrifices to attempt to earn divine favor. Rather God empowers the people to do justice, to love loyalty to God, and to walk shrewdly in God's service.

Psalm 15 LORD, who may abide upon your holy hill? (Ps. 15:1)

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 Christ crucified, the wisdom and power of God

According to the world's standards of power and might, the message of the cross seems stupid and offensive. Yet this word reveals the paradoxical way God has chosen to work power and salvation through weakness, rejection, and suffering. Hence the message of the cross becomes true wisdom and power for believers.

Matthew 5:1-12 The teaching of Christ: Beatitudes

Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount by naming those who are blessed in the reign of God.

Daily Discipleship

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (A) – Matthew 5:1-12

Discipleship: *Following the Master Teacher*

Focus Question: *What is Jesus trying to teach me today?*

word of life

“When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them . . .” Matthew 5:1-2 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 5: 1-12

The Gospel of Matthew is a teaching gospel with Jesus serving as the master teacher. His primarily Jewish audience is learning from Jesus what it means to follow him and become his disciple.

The Gospel of Matthew includes five lengthy discourses. Each discourse ends with the words, “when Jesus had finished . . .” (Matthew 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1 NRSV) Biblical scholars make comparisons between these discourses and the five books of the Torah.

The first of the five speeches of Jesus is found in Matthew 5:1-7:28. Since Jesus is teaching from the mountain (Matthew 5:1), it is often called the Sermon on the Mount. Included in this discourse is a series of tips on how to live life. The next five lessons of the lectionary are all found in the Sermon on the Mount. If you have time, read through the entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:28).

1. *Imagine listening to Jesus teach. What would that have been like?*
2. *When you think of the teachings of Jesus, what first comes to mind?*

Many associate Jesus with parables and his stories. But Jesus also taught practical tips of life, often adding a new perspective. Not all his teachings are predictable or easily grasped. This is true with the Beatitudes, a series of blessings.

Read through Matthew 5:1-12 again. This time pause after reading each blessing and name someone you personally know who fits that description. (Try to think of someone new for each of the beatitudes.) As you do this exercise, consider the following questions:

3. *How difficult or easy is it to think of someone who is described by each of the beatitudes?*
4. *What general observations might you make about all those individuals named?*

Except for the final blessing, all the beatitudes are right now – this day. The blessings are to be experienced on this side of the grave, not later in heaven.

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6. *Which if any of the beatitudes do you find confusing? How so?*
7. *Which beatitudes would you like further explained by Jesus?*

The beatitudes encourage believers to turn to God for guidance on living in radical, new ways. Being meek, mournful, and hungry are not words usually used to describe people on the fast track of success. Nevertheless, God chooses to bless. God chooses to turn the world upside down, bringing joy from tears and hope from despair. God blesses the unexpected. That’s just the way God operates.

word among us

Andy was quite anxious about beginning kindergarten. His parents and grandparents had been trying to prepare him for the first day. They talked about new friends, learning new things, and recess. Andy was not interested in any aspect of the venture. Finally, he agreed to attend the opening day.

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Unfortunately, we as Christians sometimes sound just like Andy. We get in a rut and think we have learned everything there is to know about following Jesus. But even if we have grown up in the church and currently attend worship as well as Sunday School classes regularly, there is still much to learn.

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4. *What attitudes do you recommend to someone who wants to learn from Jesus?*

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5. *How does one strive in daily life for humility, meekness, and purity of heart?*
6. *What is so radical about the beatitudes?*

Some have dissected the word *beatitude* into the words: *be an attitude*. Our daily attitudes are to be humility, meekness, and purity of heart. We are to hunger for God and seek peace fervently.

7. *What does it mean for you to "be an attitude" of blessing?*
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Prayer

Gracious God, help us to live the beatitudes in daily life. Give us courage to seek you and trust in your blessings. Amen

Dig Deeper

Micah 6:1-8

last word

Select a beatitude and adopt it as your personal New Year's resolution.



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4 Epiphany (A) Page 2 of 2



Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (C) – 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Focus: *God's Foolishness*

word of life

“For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.” (1 Corinthians 1:25 NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Jesus Christ died on a cross, was buried, and rose again. That is the core of our Christian faith, but many people who hear this confession only shake their heads. It is too extreme, too absurd, and too foolish!

1. *Why do some people think the cross is foolish?*
2. *How do you respond to those who consider the death and resurrection of Jesus to be an idle tale?*

In his letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul directly responds to those who think of the cross as sheer folly. This congregation struggled with internal conflict and self-destructing behavior. Elsewhere in his letter, Paul addresses some of the foolish behavior of the Corinthians. But in this passage, Paul contrasts the foolishness of God and the wisdom of humans.

In doing so, Paul develops key elements in his theology of the cross (as opposed to a theology of glory). “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18 NRSV)

3. *How do you connect the message about the cross with the power of God?*
4. *What does the phrase “theology of the cross” mean?*

Who can equal God in wisdom? Who was there when the earth was formed? Who might debate God about the mysteries of this world? And a key question: Why did God create us with a limited ability for wisdom? It is a humbling (but essential) step in self-awareness to realize we are not God, nor will we ever have God’s fullness of wisdom. Any wisdom we might have is a gift of grace from God. “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.” (1 Corinthians 1:25 NRSV)

5. *Give an example of God’s foolishness being wiser than human wisdom.*
6. *Give an example of God’s weakness being stronger than human strength.*

It is not within our human capacity to make sense or explain God’s choice of using a cross as an instrument of salvation. It is reasonable for people to want detailed explanations about God’s actions in Jesus Christ. “For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24 NRSV)

7. *Why do people perceive the crucified Christ as a stumbling block?*
8. *How might Paul’s words help those who see the cross as a stumbling block?*

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong... so that no one might boast in the presence of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29 NRSV) Consequently, we are wise to boast in the Lord—the one crucified on a cross.

9. *Give an example of boasting in the Lord.*

Word among us

Some college students met regularly to play volleyball, followed by supper. Usually the conversation over the meal became as heated as the competitive volleyball game. No matter the topics covered in the conversation, the discussion inevitably turned to religion.

Some of the group had grown up in the church but had begun to doubt their belief in Jesus Christ. It was difficult to reconcile the teachings from Sunday school with their academic training at the university. A few wanted facts and proof about salvation through Jesus Christ.

1. *How would you respond to young adults who are seeking understanding about Jesus Christ?*
2. *What role does campus ministry have in helping young adults sort through their beliefs?*
3. *What is important to keep in mind when conversing with someone who has doubts about their faith?*

Faith is not something automatically passed down from one generation to the next generation. We can teach, model, and encourage faith, but each person has to claim his or her own belief. It can be frustrating and challenging to watch someone wrestle with spiritual issues—especially someone we deeply love.

There are times we entrust our loved ones and their questions to the wisdom of God, knowing the Holy Spirit is at work in each of us. There are times we openly admit we do not have the answers, but we trust in the wisdom of God to reveal those answers in good time—perhaps not until the other side of the grave. There are times we embrace the mystery of God’s love shown in the crucified Christ and simply respond, “Amen.”

4. *How difficult is it for you to respond when people question Christianity? Explain your answer.*
5. *How difficult is it for you to trust in God’s wisdom? Explain your answer.*

faith practice in daily life

Hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s Supper

Hear the word of God! “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18 NRSV)

Hear the word of God! “...but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:23-24 NRSV)

Hear the word of God! “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:31 NRSV)

Paul’s words written to the Corinthians in the first century are worthy of our attention today. Even at our best, we are limited in understanding the wisdom of God at work in our world.

6. *Summarize Paul’s message for us today.*

Prayer

Source of all Wisdom, give us words and courage to proclaim Christ crucified in all we do and say.
Amen

last word

This week, humbly hear the word of God with all of its wisdom.

Daily Faith Practices

Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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February 15, 2026

Light of The Nations

Light shines in the darkness for the upright, the psalmist sings. Isaiah declares that when we loose the bonds of injustice and share our bread with the hungry, the light breaks forth like the dawn. In another passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, the light of the world, calls his followers to let the light of their good works shine before others. Through baptism we are sent into the world to shine with the light of Christ.

Opening Prayer: Lord God, with endless mercy you receive the prayers of all who call upon you. By your Spirit show us the things we ought to do, and give us the grace and power to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Personal Reflection: Where have you felt God's presence most strongly this week?

Sermon Reflection:

As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Reading and Psalms:

Isaiah 58:1-9a [9b-12] The fast God chooses

Shortly after the return of Israel from exile in Babylon, the people were troubled by the ineffectiveness of their fasts. God reminds them that outward observance is no substitute for genuine fasting that results in acts of justice, such as feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and clothing the naked.

Psalm 112:1-9 [10] Light shines in the darkness for the upright. (Ps. 112:4)

1 Corinthians 2:1-12 [13-16] God's wisdom revealed through the Spirit

Though people such as the Corinthians are enamored with human philosophy and wisdom, Paul continuously presents God's hidden wisdom which is Jesus Christ crucified. True spiritual maturity involves judging ourselves and others in light of God's revelation in the cross.

Matthew 5:13-20 The teaching of Christ: salt and light

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encourages his followers to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, doing good works and keeping God's commandments.

Daily Discipleship

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (A) – Matthew 5:13-20

Discipleship: *Following the One Who Commissions*

Focus Question: *What does it mean for Jesus to commission you to be salt of the earth and light of the world?*

word of life

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 5:13-20

The Sermon of the Mount in Matthew 5 begins with Jesus offering a series of blessings followed by a commissioning. Jesus leaves no ambiguity for his followers. Jesus commissions them by stating, “You are the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world.”

1. *What does this commissioning mean to you?*
2. *Why was Jesus so direct with his words?*

As a master teacher, Jesus uses common elements of his day, salt and light, to illustrate his point.

In Biblical times, salt was used to preserve food which might otherwise rot and decay in the heat of the day. As a preservative, salt extended the length of time for food to be edible. Salt was a valuable commodity in part because of its quality of permanence. Pure salt does not lose its taste over time. Salt remains salt. It is a needed element for a human body to live.

God so loved the world that Christ was sent to live with impure humanity, to walk with those unworthy, to eat with sinners, and to bring life. Jesus commissions his followers to do the same. You are salt. Be present in a confused and dying world. Extend life in Christ. Make a difference.

3. *What does it mean to be salt of the earth?*

Jesus also proclaims his followers to be light of the world. There is no crash course for becoming light. There is no manual to read. It is by the grace of God a follower of Jesus shines. Jesus offers encouragement to his disciples, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16 NRSV) Let God’s light shine through you. Let God light your candle.

4. *What does it feel like when God’s light shines through you?*
5. *When or why might someone try to hide the light of Christ?*
6. *Do disciples seem to have a choice in being salt and light? Why or why not?*

It is by God’s grace a Christian community is lit like a city on a hill at night or flavored like salt in food. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in The Cost of Discipleship, “The followers are a visible community; their discipleship visible in action which lifts them out of the world—otherwise it would not be discipleship. And of course the following is as visible to the world as light in the darkness or a mountain rising from a plain.” (New York: The Macmillan Company, 6th printing, 1965, pg. 132)

7. *What does it mean to be part of the visible community of Christ?*
8. *What are examples of visible actions by disciples?*

The message and mission of Jesus is not to be lost. We are to tell his story again and again, from one generation to the next.

word among us

Imagine Jesus teaching the crowd on the mountainside. Imagine the crowd listening to his every word. It is one thing for Jesus to offer the blessing of the beatitudes, but he also commissions his followers as salt of the earth and light of the world. Imagine the crowd looking at each other with wonderment. Just who is Jesus commissioning? Could it be me or you?

1. *What does it mean for you to be commissioned by Jesus to be salt of the earth?*
2. *What does it mean for you to be commissioned by Jesus to be the light of the world?*

There is no doubt Jesus expects his words and teachings to impact people in such a way that there is a permanent transformation. If salt does not have the qualities of salt, then it is no longer salt. Likewise, light is no longer light if it does not illumine.

A Christian is connected directly to Christ. Otherwise he or she is not a Christian. It would be impossible. Dietrich Bonhoeffer refers to this as being part of the visible community.

3. *How do you feel about the directness of the words of Jesus?*
4. *What are the implications of the words of Jesus for daily life?*
5. *How do you respond to the expectation that you are a visible witness to Christ?*

Without a doubt Jesus expects his followers to impact others. As a master teacher, Jesus provides two different images for his audience to grasp. Although the examples given by Jesus are contrasting, he makes a consistent point. Jesus commissions his disciples to be a tangible extension of Christ in the world.

When salt is added to food, it typically disappears. That is until the salted food is tasted. Then, the salt is evident. There is no doubt salt is present. Some people prefer to be like salt, serving behind the scenes. These salty followers of Christ make an impact through their quiet means.

6. *Who has been salt in your own life?*
7. *We can be salt as individuals or as a community. What are the advantages and disadvantages of both opportunities?*

Other disciples of Jesus resonate with being light. Their impact is immediately detected. When the electricity goes off at night, people scramble for a candle or flashlight. What a relief and comfort when light is provided. The impact is immediate.

8. *Who has been light in your own life?*
9. *Do you relate more to being salt of the earth or light of the world? How so?*
10. *How might you be more effective at being salt or light?*
11. *Who in your life might be blessed from you being salt of the earth and light of the world?*

Prayer

Jesus, you call and commission us to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. We can be neither without you. Empower us to be your visible community in the world. Amen

Dig Deeper

Isaiah 58:5-9a

last word

This week
be the
salt of the earth and
light of the world.



Daily Discipleship

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Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (C) – 1 Corinthians 2:1-12[13-16]

Focus: *Proclaiming Christ*

word of life

“My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5 NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-16

Paul traveled on his missionary trips to proclaim Christ crucified. In his letter to the Corinthians, he briefly reflects on his understanding of his call to proclaim the gospel. He addresses his reflection to a congregation with whom he is well acquainted. Paul writes, “When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2 NRSV)

1. *What do you know about Paul and his preaching?*
2. *What does Paul mean when he writes “to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified”?*

There are many ways to try to persuade, but not all techniques are successful. Paul reminds the Corinthians of his own approach. He did not proclaim Christ using force or lofty words. Nor did he try to dazzle them with his eloquence. Instead Paul came with vulnerability and offered his words as a gift. Paul writes, “And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.” (1 Corinthians 2:3 NRSV)

Paul is often portrayed as a forceful presence, one who passionately persecuted the early Christians before his conversion, after which he even more fervently proclaimed the gospel message. It is worth pausing to ponder Paul’s approach with the Corinthians. Take a moment to picture Paul in weakness, fear, and much trembling.

3. *Describe Paul and his different approaches to the task of proclamation.*
4. *Why might Paul have used this approach with the Corinthians?*
5. *What might we learn from Paul about adjusting the message based on the intended audience?*

The Corinthians seemed to have been struggling with the concept of wisdom. Paul painstakingly weaves in themes of wisdom in his letter to Corinthians. True wisdom comes only from God. Paul is wise enough to not rely on his own ability and words to proclaim the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Instead, Paul can only hope to be an instrument through which God’s wisdom is proclaimed. “My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5 NRSV)

Paul’s deepest hope is to not block the Spirit, but instead to allow God’s Spirit to flow through him. It is through that Spirit Paul understands his calling—to proclaim the gospel message.

6. *How do you see God’s Spirit at work in Paul?*
7. *What (if anything) have you learned new about Paul?*

Word among us

A congregation was nearing the end of a lengthy call process. They gathered to vote on the candidate recommended by the call committee. As soon as the discussion was open to the floor, hands flew up in the air. The first to reach the microphone loudly proclaimed, “I am NOT in favor of a female preacher in our pulpit.” The next person said, “I know I will not be able to hear a female’s high-pitch voice.” And so it went.

Finally, a young man in middle school went to the microphone. It was the first time he had ever spoken at a congregational meeting, but the congregation knew him well. Not only had he been baptized and confirmed at the church, he was one of the few young people left at the church. He and his family worshipped at the church weekly. So, when he spoke, the congregation listened attentively. He quietly said, “I met this pastor at camp last summer. I really want her to be my pastor.” A hush filled the room.

Shortly afterwards, the congregation voted and approved a call to this female pastor. They were persuaded by this young man who spoke with a conviction borne out of relationship with the pastor. It was hard to vote against his conviction.

1. *How much should gender influence a congregation’s choice for pastor?*
2. *What are important characteristics for a pastor?*

The female pastor heard about the discussion at the congregational meeting—both the positive and negative comments. After prayerful consideration, she accepted the call. As this pastor prepared to begin her call, she prayed for the Spirit to guide her. She knew there was nothing she could say to persuade those who doubted her ability to serve because of her gender. She could only hope to live and serve faithfully, allowing the Spirit to be her guide.

With time, the congregation and the pastor formed a healthy union, serving Christ. Some apologized for their narrow-mindedness and words spoken at the congregational meeting. The young man who spoke at the meeting continued to attend worship regularly and grow in faith, realizing how the Spirit might have used his words to bring the pastor to his congregation. Thanks be to God!

3. *Give examples of when the Holy Spirit used you to proclaim the love of Christ.*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

We all may not have the opportunities to travel to distant cities as missionaries. We may not have the gift to preach and teach about Christ. But, each of us is called to be a proclaimer of the good news of God in Christ. Sometimes that proclamation happens through our words, but other times we proclaim through our deeds.

4. *As you look to the coming weeks, what opportunities might you have to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed?*

Prayer

Creator of all, open our mouths and lives so we might proclaim your wisdom revealed through Jesus Christ. Amen

last word

Take time to pray for God’s Spirit to fill your words and actions with wisdom.

Daily Faith Practices

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February 15, 2026

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Today's festival is a bridge between the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany cycle that comes to a close today and the Lent-Easter cycle that begins in several days. On a high mountain Jesus is revealed as God's beloved Son, echoing the words at his baptism. This vision of glory sustains us as Jesus faces his impending death in Jerusalem. We turn this week to Ash Wednesday and our yearly baptismal journey from Lent to Easter. Some churches put aside the alleluia at the conclusion of today's liturgy. This word of joy will be omitted during the penitential season of Lent and will be sung again at Easter.

Opening Prayer: O God, in the transfiguration of your Son you confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the witness of Moses and Elijah, and in the voice from the bright cloud declaring Jesus your beloved Son, you foreshadowed our adoption as your children. Make us heirs with Christ of your glory, and bring us to enjoy its fullness, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Personal Reflection: Where have you felt God's presence most strongly this week?

Sermon Reflection:

As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?

Reading and Psalms:

Exodus 24:12-18 Moses enters the cloud of God's glory on Mount Sinai

At Mount Sinai, Moses experienced the presence of God for forty days and forty nights. The "glory of the LORD" settled on the mountain, and on the seventh day God called out to Moses. On the mountain God gave Moses the stone tablets inscribed with the ten commandments.

Psalm 2 You are my son; this day have I begotten you. (Ps. 2:7)

Psalm 99 (alternate) Proclaim the greatness of the LORD; worship upon God's holy hill (Ps. 99:9)

2 Peter 1:16-21 The apostle's message confirmed on the mount of transfiguration

At the transfiguration, God's voice was heard, declaring Jesus to be the beloved Son. By the activity of the Holy Spirit, God's voice continues to be heard through the word of scripture.

Matthew 17:1-9 Revelation of Christ as God's beloved Son

Shortly before he enters Jerusalem, where he will be crucified, Jesus is revealed to Peter, James, and John in a mountaintop experience of divine glory called the transfiguration.

Daily Discipleship

Transfiguration of Our Lord (A) – Matthew 17:1-9

Discipleship: *Following God's Beloved*

Focus Question: *How can a person show love towards God's Beloved?*

word of life

“While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’”

Matthew 17:5 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 17:1-9

The text for Transfiguration Sunday describes the transformation of the human figure of Jesus while on the mountaintop. Jesus is not alone when this happens. He has taken the inner core of his disciples – Peter, James, and John.

Mountains in the Old Testament are the place where people encounter the presence of God. Perhaps the best known example is Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 24:12-18) Thus, for Peter, James, and John to be taken along with Jesus to the mountain is quite impressive. They witness Jesus being transfigured. His face shines like the sun and his clothing becomes white. But more than that, Moses and Elijah appear.

1. *Describe this scene in your own words.*
2. *What would it have been like to be with Peter, James, and John to witness this?*

Moses and Elijah are two of the most well-known persons from the Old Testament, representing the law and the prophets. Peter does not know what to do, so he speaks. It might have been a better option to be quiet and humbly witness this scene. But Peter is known for jumping into a situation and blurting out his first thoughts. He states how good it is for all of them to be there and proposes to make shelters for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. Peter thinks they will remain on the mountaintop for a while.

Instead, the situation builds to a greater climax as God's voice is heard. The words are similar to those spoken at the baptism of Jesus. (Matthew 3:13-17) Jesus affirms the identity of Jesus as God's own Son and the Beloved. God is still well-pleased with Jesus, but God adds something new. God instructs those disciples on the mountain and disciples of all times to listen to Jesus.

3. *How does repeating these words reinforce the words spoken at baptism?*
4. *What is the impact of adding new words?*

It is not surprising for the disciples to be overcome with fear, but Jesus attempts to calm them by offering these words, “Get up and do not be afraid.” (Matthew 17:7 NRSV) By the time they look around, they see only Jesus. It is unclear how much time the disciples spent prostrate on the ground.

5. *What might have gone through the minds and hearts of the disciples?*
6. *How did fear block their experience?*
7. *Is there anything the disciples could have done once they were filled with fear?*

When they came down from the mountain, Jesus instructs the disciples not to tell anyone about the events they witnessed until after the Son of Man has been resurrected. That is quite a request. Some people need to talk about their experiences to find meaning and a certain level of understanding, yet Jesus knows none of these events will make sense until after he has been crucified and raised from the dead.

word among us

Timmy never thought he would get married. He would date someone and find himself bored in the relationship. It made him quite sad, but Timmy realized it was his own problem. He knew these women were fantastic. At some point, he gave up searching for the perfect love of his life and devoted himself to his work. He knew his work would never fail to intrigue him.

Then one day he met Claire. She seemed to sparkle. They began to date and to build a relationship. This time Timmy made more of an effort, but one day he realized being with Claire took no effort. He waited for that awful feeling of boredom to descend, but it never came. Timmy knew he had found something very special and would not take their relationship for granted. He treated their relationship with tender care and acknowledged Claire as a rare gift in his life. In fact, he often referred to Claire as “my beloved” and continuously sought ways to share his love with her.

1. *What does it feel like to be the object of someone’s love?*
2. *Is it comfortable for you to be the object of someone’s love? How so?*

As long as Suzie could remember, she always wanted a Mustang convertible. Finally, she could afford to buy one. That car became “her beloved.” She hung pictures of the car in her office and spent most of Saturday keeping it cleaned and polished.

3. *What other objects can become the focus of love?*
4. *What would you want to say to Suzie?*

God makes it clear about the object of God’s love. God loves Jesus, regarding him as God’s Beloved. Simply put, God is well pleased with Jesus. God wants people to know Jesus and especially to listen to him. God is quite direct. “Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5 NRSV) Those direct words spoken by God become an important reminder about setting priorities. God desires people to know Jesus, the one whom God loves and with whom God is well-pleased. In a world filled with distractions, it is helpful to be reminded of this One worth listening to.

5. *How might we listen to Jesus through worship?*
6. *How might we listen to Jesus in our personal devotions and prayer?*
7. *How might we listen to Jesus through the conversations with others?*

It is not always easy for a parent to let go of a beloved child as the child encounters new experiences such as first grade, high school, or college. Hopefully the parent’s love grounds their beloved child and helps guide them in making wise decisions. As a loving parent, God sent Jesus into our world, knowing it would be a difficult journey. God supported Jesus as he lived among us, encountered rejection, and even as he faced death on the cross. God’s love for Jesus did not waver. Through God’s love for Jesus, we encounter God’s love for us.

8. *How do you show love towards God’s Beloved?*
9. *How else might you do so?*

Prayer

Christ, help me to listen to you. Continue to claim me and keep me close. Help me to show my love toward you in all that I do and am. Amen

Dig Deeper

Exodus 24:12-18

last word

Today, find a way to show your love towards God’s Beloved.



Daily Discipleship

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Transfiguration (A) Page 2 of 2



Transfiguration of Our Lord (A) – 2 Peter 1:16-21

Focus: *Eyewitness News*

word of life

“For 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.” 2 Peter 1:16 (NRSV)

Read 2 Peter 1:16-21

This Sunday is the celebration of the Transfiguration of our Lord. The celebration falls in the church calendar as the final Sunday in the season of the Epiphany—a season where the church reflects on the many ways God is revealed to the world. The transfiguration is the culmination of the season—a “mountaintop” experience of God’s revelation in Jesus, God’s Son, the Beloved.

1. *What are some ways God is revealed to the world? (Think of some stories you’ve heard the past few Sundays in Epiphany.)*
2. *Have you had a “mountaintop” experience in your faith life? Describe it.*

The author of Peter tells the story of the Transfiguration from the point of view of an eyewitness. The writer was present at the transfiguration and heard the heavenly voice of God. This experience is lifted up as evidence that Jesus will come again; and it speaks against those in the community of faith who deny the second coming of Christ and follow “cleverly devised myths.” (vs. 16)

Being present as an eyewitness at the transfiguration of Jesus gives the writer authority and credibility. The experience confirms and validates the prophetic message.

3. *Describe in your own words the story of Jesus being transfigured on the mountain-top.*
4. *What would that have been like to have been an eyewitness to that event?*
5. *Give some examples where the testimony of an eyewitness to an event gives credibility and validity.*

The theme of light—so prevalent in the season of Epiphany—is seen again: “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.” (2 Peter 1:19b NRSV) Just as Jesus shined on the mountain of the transfiguration, so the message of the coming of Jesus shines in the darkness of those who would follow myths rather than the testimony of an eyewitness to the transfiguration. Jesus is the “morning star”—the bearer of the light (in Greek, *phosphoros*)—evidence in the Old Testament of the coming Messiah. The glory and majesty of Christ’s transfiguration—seen, experienced, and heard by eyewitnesses present at the event—confirm the prophetic message and validate the teaching of the apostles.

The issues of authority, credibility, and validity arise in the interpretation of scripture. How is the faith community to approach and understand the sacred writings? Apparently there were some who were following “cleverly devised myths” and based their faith in their own interpretation. The author of 2 Peter argues against individual interpretation in isolation; rather, the true, valid understanding of scripture arises in community inspired by God. “...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.” (2 Peter 1:20b-21 NRSV)

6. *Can you give some examples of individual interpretation of scripture?*
7. *Can you give some examples of men and women moved by the Holy Spirit speaking from God?*
8. *How do you discern the difference?*

word among us

“I can’t believe what you are saying. That’s not what he would have wanted!” The students of a beloved professor who had died were meeting to develop a plan to carry on the professor’s research. Many of the students were personally recruited by the teacher. Emotions were running high as the conversation went on. There was disagreement among the students about the direction the project should go.

Mark sat quietly in the back of the room. He had been the first graduate student accepted and invited to participate in the project. He had been with the professor even before the research had been proposed. Mark had witnessed and participated in the initial work necessary for the project to be approved. He knew the professor better than any other student. Mark was silent at first as the others spoke; then he began, “I’ve been here since the beginning of this project. I was an eyewitness who saw and heard the challenges faced to get this research going. My opinion, for what it’s worth, is based on my experience of working with our mentor and professor.” The other students listened quietly as Mark shared his insights on the project and the direction it should go.

1. *Do you think Mark’s words were heard differently than others’? Why or why not?*

Mark’s word carried authority because of his eyewitness experience with the professor. His experience gave direction to the others in their discussion to interpret the desired will of the professor. Together, the students discerned the direction they were to go.

The author of 2 Peter lifts up the significance of eyewitnesses in discerning the mission and direction of the community of faith. The testimony of eyewitnesses gives credibility and veracity to what is discerned. “We had been eyewitnesses of his majesty.” (2 Peter 1:16b NRSV) All discernment and interpretation, however, is not to be based on one’s own interpretation, but rather on the Holy Spirit’s moving among God’s people. “... 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.” (2 Peter 1:20b-21 NRSV)

2. *Discuss the importance of hearing testimonies from eyewitnesses of God’s mighty daily acts.*
3. *How do we discern the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives?*

faith practice in daily life

Live among God’s faithful people

Many congregations spend time in study and prayer to discern their mission. The discernment should involve the whole community of faith. We need one another as we consider our corporate and individual calling. We need the voices of those who are often not heard; we need the voices of those who have been eyewitnesses to the seminal events in the congregation’s history. We need to hear the testimony of the Holy Spirit’s movement in the lives of the faithful.

4. *What is the mission of your congregation? Do you have a mission statement?*
5. *How do you personally give testimony of the work God is doing through your congregation?*

Gracious God, we thank you for faithful eyewitnesses to your work in our lives. Grant us vision to know and do your will; through Christ our Lord. Amen

last word

Reflect on your calling and mission as an individual and a congregation.

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