

## 1 Transfiguration – Matthew 17

Jesus is the light of the world who gives light to all people. He is the true light. This means that he is the source of all lasting light. Jesus also tells his disciples, “You are the light of the world,” and “Let your lights shine before men.” We are not the true light. Jesus is the true light. Instead, we have been brought into his light. We have been called by the gospel and enlightened by his gift of salvation and eternal life. His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. So when we hold onto his Word as a light shining in a dark place, he promises that the day will dawn and the morning star will rise in our hearts. God promises that when Christ our Lord appears in his bright and glorious light then we will appear with him and be just as he is (1 John 3:2; Col 3:4). So we live in this world with this hope. Christ, who dwells in unapproachable light, will come to bring us to where he is. Until then, he remains our light in the darkness.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a high mountain, and his appearance was transformed right in front of them. His face shone like the sun. His clothes were as bright as light. There they saw Jesus as he truly is. He is the true divine light of the Father. He is the eternal light who came into this world to give light to all people.

All the prophets pointed to this one eternal light. They lived as strangers in this world, with the darkness all around them. But they looked to the light of God’s salvation, which was to come. These prophets experienced great expressions of God’s light. Moses led God’s people out of Egypt, seeing God appear to him in a burning bush, a pillar of fire, and lightning on Mount Sinai. When darkness came over the whole land of Egypt, Moses and the children of Israel had light in their houses. But this was only a shadow of God’s true and lasting light. Moses begged God to show him his face, but he would have to wait. Elijah was a prophet in Israel when the king and queen were promoting the darkness of idol worship. He saw God send fire down from heaven, and he even ran down to Mount Sinai to get some more of that fire from God. But again, the fire was only a shadow of the light who was to come. The true light would shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

God had called his prophets to be lights in this world. They were not the true lights, but they pointed people to the light of God’s salvation. They called on the people to turn from their dark sin and walk in the light of Christ. As Aaron blessed the people, “The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious unto you” (Num 6:25). And as Isaiah says, “O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the LORD” (Is 2:5)!

So now, on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus in his glorious light. What they longed for, what all the prophets yearned for, what every saint who held onto the promises of God waited for with a firm hope, they were now seeing. This is a snapshot of what our hope is. Just as Moses, Elijah, and all the people of Old Testament waited for Christ to appear, we do the same. Just as they relied on God’s Word, we do the same. And just as they served as little lights bearing witness to the one and only light, God calls us into that same light.

And yet, we live in a world that still sits in darkness. This means that the light Jesus gives us is hardly recognized. It doesn’t seem to shine as brightly as you might expect. Our surrounding culture embraces the darkness of sin and unbelief. Of course, it’s alarming that so many people defend the so called right of a woman to put her unborn child to death. It’s a travesty that sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, and transsexualism are embraced as the new normal. Less and less children go home to their mom and their dad loving each other. There is certainly a lot of chaos and moral decay in our society.

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But it's not just a moral issue. The darkness runs much deeper than people acting strange. How many of the children in our own town can recite the Ten Commandments, the Apostles Creed, or the Lord's Prayer? How many have ever heard the gospel, the good news that God sent his Son to save them from sin and give them a new life?

Sure, we might assume that lots of people know about these things. Doesn't everyone know who Adam and Eve were, or Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or Moses, Elijah, Daniel, and other prophets? Doesn't everyone know who Jesus is? No. They don't. Where are they going to learn about these things? At school? At work? In Super Bowl commercials? Maybe some of them will hear about Jesus as they occasionally attend church. They might be vaguely familiar with the word Savior. But far less people know the gospel than you might think. Last summer we took some boys around the neighborhood to ask people about what they believed. Some people knew the gospel. But others either rejected it or had no idea what it was. We talked to one older lady who had been a Catholic her whole life and attended Mass. When we asked her why she thought she was going to heaven when she died, she said, "Because I'm not aware of any sins I have committed." When we told her why we believed we would go to heaven, that we are sinful but that God sent his Son to die for our sins and that he freely forgives us of our sins, she just stared at us confused.

You see, the light of the gospel is a rare guest in this world. This should give you perspective into what is truly going on with all the strange and perverted and immoral stuff in our society. The kid in your class who embraces the homosexual life style, your friends who shack up with their boyfriends and girlfriends or jump from one sexual partner to another, those who are slaves to drugs and alcohol – what is their deeper problem? It isn't that they are weird or cringy or stupid. As true as these things may be, their deeper problem is much worse. It's that they don't know Christ. They need to know him. They need his light just like you and I do. Because we would be in just as much darkness if it weren't for our Savior.

Now, maybe those who don't know Christ think they know him. They have been fed a version of Christ that encourages them to give into their selfish thoughts and ideas. Or maybe they know about a Christ will save them only after they have been good and well behaved enough. Or they see Christ as some mythical character no different than Zeus or Pokémon. In either case, they don't know Christ as the true Light of Light and God of God, the eternal Son of the Father who came into this world to save sinners. They don't know the comfort of Christ who not only died for them but also promises to remain with them and continues to forgive and strengthen them by the light of his Word and sacraments.

In other words, they are in darkness. But you have been given the light of Christ. Jesus calls you light in this world. And he tells you to let your light shine. Talk about Christ with your friends. Don't go along with the crowd when they are celebrating dark and immoral behavior. Don't laugh at jokes that mock the truth of God's Word. If your fellow Christians offer correction to you when you are behaving in a worldly way, then take it with humility. And if they seem a bit overbearing, then cover it up with love. Forgive those who sin against you, because you know that God in Christ forgives you. Show affection toward your fellow Christians. Defend them, support them, and encourage them with the gospel of your Savior, so that others may know you by how you love one another. Have nothing to do with the unfruitful works of darkness. Instead, expose them and urge one another to remain in the light of God's Word. Let that same Word expose the darkness of your own sin while it covers you with the

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forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. This is what it means to let your light shine. It means to live and walk in the light of Christ.

Living as a light in this world is difficult. Because the darkness doesn't like the light. Your own sin doesn't like it. The world scoffs at it, makes fun of it, and runs away from it. This is why we look forward to the day when Jesus will appear in all his glorious light. Then there will be no more darkness at all, no more temptations, no more confusion, no more awkward conversations, no more hostility against the truth, no more death or sadness. It will be like it was for Moses and Elijah who appeared with Jesus in his glory. That is a picture of what we will enjoy forever. Peter, James, and John were given a glimpse of it for a moment, and they didn't want to leave. They wanted to set up camp, so to speak, and stick around for a while. This was why Peter offered to make three tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Peter recognized that he was in the presence of God. In other words, he was in heaven.

But God does not make us children of the light by bringing us straight to heaven. No, he makes us light in this world first. He did not make Peter, James, and John children of the light when he showed them the glory of his Son. Jesus showed his glory to them so that they could see what he has prepared for all who trust in him. In the meantime, Jesus made them his disciples by his Word. He gave them his light by his Word. He makes us all children of the light by the light of his gospel promise. So when Peter was still talking, the Father interrupted him through a bright cloud and said, "This is my Son whom I love. Listen to him!" Then after falling to the ground with great fear, they looked up and saw only Jesus. This same Lord Jesus came down with them from the mountain, telling them about his death and resurrection.

This is what Jesus does for us. He died for us, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. But he doesn't just sit in heaven waiting for us to get there. No, he comes down to us in his Word and sacraments. He remains with us in this dark world, guiding us and strengthening us with the light of his Word. He teaches us to bear our cross, put up with mocking and mistreatment, fight against temptation, repent of our sins, and find assurance in his blood shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins. His Word continues to set us apart from this dying world so that we may be lights to this world.

Jesus did not present himself as the light of the world by showing his full splendor and glory to everyone. Instead, he came in humility and meekness, obedient as a servant all the way to death on a cross. Of course, he performed many amazing miracles, but they all served simply to point people to the light of his Word. He was obedient to what his Father commanded. He bore the darkness of our sin and guilt in his own body, all while appealing only to the Word his Father gave him to fulfill.

It is therefore by his Word that we have his light. We look forward to enjoying the full splendor of his light in heaven. Until then, God has called us to let the light shine in the darkness for a while. But don't be intimidated by the darkness. Don't be fooled by it. Don't give your approval to it. Instead, expose it by confessing your Savior. Let his Word guide you. Walk in his light. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do in the name of Jesus Christ, the only true Light of the Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.