

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Fr. Samuel Springuel

25 January, 2026

1st Reading Isaiah 8:23–9:3

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 27:1,4,13–14

2nd Reading 1 Corinthians 1:10–13,17

Gospel Matthew 4:12–23

We celebrated the Feast of Epiphany 3 weeks ago now, and yet we find that our readings today continue to focus on the theme of light. Light is a natural theme for Epiphany, featuring as it does the Star of Bethlehem which guided the Magi to the stable where Jesus lay. After all, stars are points of light in the night sky, a literal light in the darkness that we hear mentioned in both our first reading and the Gospel today. But why are we still looking at the theme of light?

There is more to the light in the darkness of today's reading than just a memory of the single pin-prick of a star in the night sky. The light of the Star of Bethlehem has given way to a greater light, one which banishes the darkness entirely: the light of Christ. We saw hints of this in the Baptism, 2 weeks ago, when the heavens were opened and the Spirit came down like a dove. That phrase, "the heavens were opened," does not explicitly mention light, but think about almost any artistic depiction of the Baptism and you'll find clouds spreading apart and rays of light shining through with the dove of the Spirit in their midst.

And then there was the voice: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." A voice that foreshadows, one we hear echoed in the Transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." And what do we see at the Transfiguration: the cloud itself is now "bright," a source of light. Jesus himself "shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light." Once more, the greater light of Christ shines in the heavens.

But it is not just the heavens that proclaim and reflect the light of Christ. This coming of the light happens here on earth too. It happens in the synagogues when Jesus declares that the prophecy of "recovery of sight to the blind" has been fulfilled. It happens on the roads of Galilee and Judea when blind men actually receive their sight. It happens on the shores of the Sea of Galilee when "the people who sit in darkness [see] a great light."

Frustratingly, though, this light does not come all at once. Christ may be the "Rising Dawn," to use one of the titles we sing of him during the Great O Antiphons just before Christmas, but it is a dawn that is very slow in coming. The Resurrection, the ultimate light of the everlasting day has shone, has flashed over the land in history, and yet we continue to stumble in the twilight. We trip over roots and rocks, sins and failings, that we could see clearly if only we

had more light. As bright as the Resurrection was, it seems to be just over the horizon in our own lives and we are impatient for it to arrive faster.

A different view, I think, is called for. One brought to mind to me by my recent travels to England. As I traveled to England, I took an overnight flight. When I took off, it was 7:40pm here in Washington. When my first leg landed in Reykjavik, it was 5:50am. By the clock it was some 10 hours and 10 minutes later, easily a full night. And yet, because of the change in time zone incurred by traveling east, I only experienced 5 hours and 50 minutes. That's no where near enough time for a full night's sleep, even for someone in a bed, let alone someone trying to sleep in an airline seat. I was moving towards the dawn, and I moved quickly. One might say I was acting impatiently, seeking the light of the new day, rather than letting it come to me. And I paid a price for that. I was tired when I arrived in England. Not really ready, and thankfully not needing to, start the work of the conference I was there to attend.

So it is with the coming of Christ's light. We are impatient, eager to get on the plane and fly to that point over our current horizon where his light fully shines already. But if we do this, we won't be ready when we get there. Instead of being able to enjoy the light, to rejoice in it, we'll be tired, needing to hide from the light and take a nap. The twilight of our current circumstances are not a mistake, but Christ's mercy allowing us to prepare for the radiance of the light so that when it finally comes in our life, we will bask in its glory and not try to hide in the shadows.

There is a tradition in some Eastern iconography in which the area directly behind Jesus in icons of the Transfiguration is painted a very dark color, even black. This serves to highlight the brilliant whiteness of Jesus's garments making them register as "dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them," even though the artist is confined to materials which have those earthly limitations. It also hints that Christ's light, to the unprepared apostles depicted in the icon and we who see the event through it, is blinding. Yes, Christ came to give sight to the blind, but the light he brings also makes it impossible to see in the gloom of the earth. Think of a street light at night. Everything under the light, illuminated by it, is clearly visible. But everything outside of it, the areas where the light does not fall, or falls only indirectly, are impossible to see. Now imagine that effect multiplied a hundred-fold or more as we see not just the glimpse through the keyhole of the Transfiguration, but the final coming of Christ in all his glory forever. Caught unawares, unprepared, we will be blind, unable to see the final glory and revel in it. And so Christ has shaded his light, allows it to appear slowly in our lives so that we have the chance to become accustomed to it, to revel in each new revelation as the light grows steadily brighter.

Christ is light from light, the divine light both concealed and revealed in his human nature. Step by step we raise our eyes towards his glory, steadily becoming more accustomed to the light so that when we come before the fullness of its glory, we will revel in it.