

Epiphany of Our Lord

January 6, 2026



Now the Wise Men had the faith to follow the word of the Prophet Micah. They were not offended that the king was not born in Jerusalem. They left the Temple and went to the cow stall.

*– Martin Luther–
Christmas Book*

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

First Lesson: Isaiah 60:1–6

“Arise, shine; for your light has come.” After all of the suffering and sorrow brought about by the exile, Isaiah comes back to a word of promise. The darkness that has marked their time of punishment is giving way to the light of God’s presence among them once more. The mark of God’s people is hope. The promises of God pour into us a hope that shapes our lives and can be seen by those around us. It is not naive optimism, but the light of the Living God shining forth from us.

Isaiah spoke the word of promise to God’s people, the promise that God, himself, was bringing light to his people living in darkness. This promise meant no more living in despair and abandonment. Israel had reason for hope. Their time of exile, abandonment, and punishment, was ending. God, himself, intended to take up residence with them. This was a word of hope, not only for Israel, but for all the world.

- *What are some obstacles to living in hope? What renews our hope in this midst of despair?*
- *Has anyone ever said to you that they see the light of God shining in you? Can you see that in others?*

Psalms 72:1–11 (12–15)

This psalm, attributed to Solomon, is a prayer for the leadership of the king and the king’s son. Martin Luther spoke regularly about how leaders are chosen by God to serve the people, this psalm is a wonderful example of that viewpoint. It asks God for the qualities in a leader that will ensure the people are cared for in justice and mercy. It acknowledges that the political success of the king affects the people he rules. Luther expressed this sentiment in his *Address to the Christian Nobility* (1520), where he wrote: “God has given us a young and noble sovereign for our leader, thereby stirring up fresh hope in our hearts; our duty is to do our best to help him and to avail ourselves of this opportunity and his gracious favor.”

- *Do these words from Luther mean that the actions of our civic leaders are always in accord with God’s will?*
- *How is praying for our leadership an act of faith in God, not necessarily in the one being prayed for?*

Second Lesson: Ephesians 3:1–12

St. Paul explains to the church in Ephesus how God charged him with the “stewardship” (ESV) or “commission” (NRSV) of God’s grace. That is, Paul was entrusted with the message

of salvation in Jesus Christ — which was now being extended to the Gentiles and the whole world through the church. The church is commissioned to be the steward of God’s eternal purposes.

Paul understands that he is servant of the gospel that had been made known to him. He served this gospel by proclaiming it. The whole church, likewise, has a part in this mission. It is through the church that God’s word reaches into every corner of the world.

- *How might we, as the Church, understand the gift bestowed on us as stewards of the mysteries of God’s eternal purposes, but also acknowledge the tremendous responsibility as well?*
- *What are some of the ways we carry out the task that has been entrusted to the church? What are some things that get in the way of carrying out that work?*

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 2:1–12

Herod was not pleased with the notion that a new king had been born in Israel, and that he hadn’t been born into Herod’s house. This newborn king was a threat to Herod’s power and place in the world. But the main reaction Matthew describes is fear. Herod was frightened by the news of the birth of a king. And all of Jerusalem was frightened with him. They had come to rely on the good will of their Roman rulers. Any whisper that a challenger for the throne had been born would cause political turmoil and bring unwanted Roman attention to Judea. Herod wanted to head this off as quickly as possible.

The magi, naively assumed that any new king born in Israel must have been born to Herod. They unknowingly had a hand in endangering, not only Jesus, but all the children of Bethlehem. They had mistakenly assumed that the king of Israel must be in tune with the will of the God of Israel. They didn’t realize that Herod had cast his lot with Rome. Even the plans of God himself could not be allowed to upset the precarious peace.

But the wise men knew that Jesus was the one worthy of their honor. They knelt before him and gave him gifts. But Herod they defied by ignoring his direct order to report to him the whereabouts of the newborn king.

- *What does the experience of the magi with Herod tell us about the relationship between earthly rulers and God’s rule?*
- *In what sense was Jesus, even as a baby, a legitimate threat to the powers of this world?*

Baptism of our Lord

January 11, 2026



The Son is an innocent man who does more than is required of him; the Holy Spirit comes in a friendly form; the Father has a friendly voice: "I am not sending you prophets or apostles or angels; instead you have my Son, with whom I am completely pleased.

—Martin Luther—

Sermon, January 6, 1534

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

First Lesson: Isaiah 42:1–9

Isaiah spoke of the Lord's Servant at work, bringing justice and righteousness into the world. With God's Spirit upon him, he would accomplish God's will in the world. The servant was not arriving as a conqueror, but as a redeemer. He would release the captive and give sight to the blind. In this servant, God was doing a new thing.

God's servant is one who, in faithfulness, will not be deterred until the job is complete. This is the one of whom the prophet spoke: our Savior, Jesus Christ, who remained faithful unto death. God's faithfulness continued to be revealed, even beyond death, in the resurrection of Jesus from the grave.

- *How does Christ's steadfastness in his earthly life demonstrate how he continues to work faithfully in the world?*

Psalms 29

In a rather jarring contrast to Isaiah, the Psalm shifts our focus from servanthood to majesty. The Lord, the God of Israel, is powerful and without peer. When he decides to act, things happen. Cedars are broken. Nations skip. The wilderness shakes. The oaks whirl and the forests are stripped bare. There is power in the voice of the Lord. Power that is unmatched by anything we see in this world.

But even in light of the tremendous power of the Lord, the Psalmist has only one request: that God would bless his people with peace. The Psalmist hopes to see the wondrous power of the Lord of Hosts put to work for the sake of peace.

- *Are you more likely to think of God in the image of a servant in Isaiah or in the majestic language of the Psalm? Why?*
- *Why is it important that we hold on to both of these images?*

Second Lesson: Romans 6:1–11

Having received the miraculous gift of forgiveness through Christ, the Romans had come up with a new problem. They wondered whether, since God is so merciful — since they are free in Christ — was there any reason they had to live by any particular code of conduct. Was there any reason they couldn't just run wild?

Paul pointed out that this is not the question of one alive in faith; it is the question of one dead in sin. The question of running wild is of one who still clings to darkness. Those who have been crucified with Christ have been freed from

sin and death. The darkness is banished. The question itself is an indication of the power of sin still at work in the hearts of believer.

- *What makes sin and darkness so appealing to us? Why does this problem of sin keep hanging around?*
- *In what way does the sinner in us need to die daily? In practical, everyday terms, how does God spiritually put us to death and raise us to new life?*

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 3:13–17

Leading up to the moment of Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist calls people to repentance, or a turning away from their sin. The Pharisees and Sadducees apparently did not feel the need to repent and confess their sins. They were sure of their standing before God because they were descendants of the patriarch, Abraham. John is clearly upset by their lack of understanding and proclaims that one will come after him who is greater than he. This one will separate the wheat from the chaff.

- *In what ways do we become so overly confident in our standing with God, that we fail to see our need for him in our lives?*

Isaiah prepared our imaginations for a servant. The Psalmist prepared us for majesty. At the Jordan River we encounter the one who embodies both. Jesus goes to the river, entering into the waters that are teeming with the sins of his people, and takes that sin upon himself. He takes the form of a servant, placing himself even under the authority of John the Baptist.

But the majestic voice of the Lord will not be ignored on this day. As John does what Jesus has asked him to do, God proclaims for all to hear, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

- *What is God's intent in Jesus' baptism by John? In what way is Jesus taking upon himself our identity?*
- *How does the voice of the Father answer our questions by pointing us to Christ himself?*

The fruits of repentance are the visible sign of a changed life; a life that does not depend on lineage, social standing, wealth or anything else. Fruits of repentance are a blessing but also a witness to the One who transforms life. As Jesus arrives on the scene, John wonders why Jesus would want him to baptize him. He can't imagine what Jesus is doing. But the Messiah was coming into the world as a servant. And he would not let anything get between him and his people. Not even their sin.

Epiphany 2

January 18, 2026



*In the eyes of the world these words cannot be convincing,
because their meaning becomes clear only by faith.*

– Martin Luther –

Luther's Works 17:169 (Lectures on Isaiah)

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

First Lesson: Isaiah 49:1-7

In this Messianic prophecy, God's faithful servant is described as his "secret weapon" by which he would bring his people back to him. This servant would be concealed from the knowledge of others, hidden away until it was time to be born. But there is more! This servant will not only restore Israel to God, but also be a light to the nations. God's saving plan in Christ is for all people, to the ends of the earth.

- *Is it blindness on our part or the fact that God chooses to reveal his plan when the time is right? How might it be both?*

It is amazing how God is always busy working to restore his people to himself. Once the light to the nations is revealed, there is no more "in secret." The nations and people from far away are called upon to heed the word that Isaiah will speak on God's behalf. This light cannot be hidden from view, but rather draws attention, brings knowledge, and leads the way.

- *When and in what ways has God revealed his will for you?*
- *How is the true light of God specifically revealed in Christ?*

Psalms 40:1-11

The Psalmist was given a song to sing to the people of Israel. Because God had intervened and rescued him from the pit, a song of praise was now ever on the psalmist's lips. He recognized that the Lord, alone, was the source of his salvation. False gods could do nothing for him. He further understood that his only hope was in God's continued mercy, steadfast love, and faithfulness. This was the heart of his faith and his song.

The person of faith does not hide or conceal God's grace (v. 10), but rather, openly praises God for his faithfulness and salvation. Like the proverbial city on the hill, once God's plan is revealed there is no denying the goodness of the Lord, it cannot be concealed or hidden from view. This is how the gospel serves as its own motivation.

When something is really good in our lives we don't want to hide it, we want to shout from the rooftops the numerous blessings we have received. We want to praise God for all the wonders he has created.

- *Why do we conceal some things in our lives from others and reveal other things? What is at the root of this hiding and exposing? How does this happen in our lives of faith, as well?*

What makes the wonders of God so "wonder-full" is that

they are beyond our human ability to accomplish. The extraordinary character of God's works makes us "wonder" at them.

- *What things instill in you a sense of wonder and awe? How is such wonder an essential part of faith?*

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul begins his first letter to the Corinthians with a word of thanks for the grace that has been showered upon the Christians in Corinth. He jumps right into an issue that will be a central element of the epistle – spiritual gifts. Paul tips his hand right from the start with the simple, direct declaration that the Corinthians are not lacking in any spiritual gift. They have been given all that they need in order to remain steadfast until the day of the Lord.

Shifting the focus from what we will learn is a chief preoccupation of the Corinthians – themselves – Paul immediately points to the true source of their sanctification. Because God is faithful, the Corinthians will be found blameless.

- *What is the significance of shifting the Corinthian's attention from themselves and onto thoughts of Christ? How do we need that in our lives, daily?*

Gospel Lesson: John 1:29-42

John confesses that he did not recognize Jesus as he came to him to be baptized, but this was so that he would be revealed to Israel. But as Jesus is baptized, John hears the voice of God proclaiming that this is his Son and he will baptize with the Holy Spirit. John sees the Spirit descend like a dove on Jesus and tells the crowds that this is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (the same words we sing in the *Agnus Dei* of the Communion liturgy).

Others also saw something in Jesus. Upon hearing the Baptist's declaration, they follow Jesus, convinced that they had found the Messiah. Andrew, Simon Peter, and a third disciple are anxious to see what Jesus is going to do. Their quick recognition of him as Messiah will become confused as Jesus goes about his work in ways they do not understand.

- *Think about the words of the Lamb of God that we sing before Holy Communion. What does it mean that Jesus takes away the sin of the world? And yours?*
- *In what ways do you stand in awe of the grace of God poured out for you as you partake of the body and blood of Christ?*



Epiphany 3

January 25, 2026

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

We should never regard this call from God, which takes place through the preaching of the Word, as some kind of deception. Instead, we should know that God reveals his will through it, namely, that he wills to work through his Word in those whom he has called.
– Formula of Concord–

First Lesson: Isaiah 9:1–4

The prophet speaks of a promised son who will come into the darkness and obscurity of this world. But this royal heir will not be just another descendant of David, rather he will be the true Son of God. The names given for Christ in this prophetic passage are descriptive of his nature, and are names previously ascribed to God alone: *Pele Yo'etz* = Wonderful Counselor, *El Gibbor* = Mighty God; *Avi'ad* = Eternal Father, and *Sar Shalom* = Prince of Peace.

- How do each of these names for Christ help you to understand something about his mission on earth?

The prophet's familiar words about people living in darkness and gloom are heard both before and after the birth of Jesus.

- How is darkness (*hosek* in Hebrew) more than just the absence of light? How is a sign of those who do not know or outright reject the Lord?

Psalms 27:1–9

Psalms 27 is a beautiful hymn that points to the Lord's protective nature. It is comforting and assuring in dark times to know that we have One who is our sure defense. The psalmist recognizes that God has not promised freedom from adversity. He fully expects to experience armies encamped against him. He expects to encounter fierce opposition. But even in the midst of it, when he is standing face to face with an army bent on his destruction, he will be confident in God's presence and protection. The Lord is his salvation. In Hebrew, this word is *yesha*, the root of Jesus' name in Hebrew: *Yeshua* (Joshua), meaning: "he saves."

- In the midst of storms we seek safety in shelter. In what sense does the Lord offer protection in times of trouble?
- What does "seeking the Lord" mean to you? How do you seek him?

The psalmist refers to the Lord as "my place of safety and my defense."

- What is the difference between knowing the promises of God as information and believing these promises are for you?
- When have you felt safe in God's company? When has he been a defender for you?

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:10–18

From the context, we can surmise that Chloe was likely an ambassador for Paul who sent and received his letters and, perhaps, read them in the assembly of the congregation.

Here, Paul is responding to the word he received from Chloe's people that the Corinthian church was plagued with divisions and quarreling.

Paul urges the congregation to stop their divisive behavior, warning that arguments will splinter the group, and make them a poor witness to those around them. Paul reminds the Corinthians that no one, not Apollos, Cephas, or Paul himself, had any rightful claim upon the Corinthians except Christ alone. He is the only one who gave his life for them. The center of their faith, what binds them together, is their confession of Christ and him crucified.

- What does Paul say the message of the cross is to those who believe? What about to those who do not believe?
- How can our focus on the cross of Christ keep us from wandering elsewhere, like getting caught up in petty quarrels?

Paul makes an important point about the message of the cross. Its power does not come from the eloquence or persuasiveness of the preacher. The Word itself, the strange word that Christ died for the ungodly, is salvation for those whom God has chosen. What sounds like nonsense to the world is pure joy and peace to the believer.

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 4:12–25

Matthew reiterates the Isaiah passage, showing that Jesus' ministry is the fulfillment of prophecy. The kingdom of heaven is close at hand, Jesus proclaims. It is time to repent as the here and now comes face-to-face with God's kingdom. The light has dawned and the new age has come. The appropriate response to this news is to repent of the sin that clings so closely to us. But as we will see as the Gospel unfolds, the call to repent is not enough to bring about repentance.

On the other hand, as soon as Jesus announces the arrival of the kingdom he calls his disciples from among ordinary men. Jesus speaks ... and they come! They fall in behind him, leaving everything, including home, family, and work. The call of Christ is a miracle in itself; his very word makes things happen!

- Have you ever had to leave something or someone behind to follow Jesus? If so, how easy or difficult was that for you?
- What kind of people did Jesus call to come and follow him? What does that say about who Jesus calls today?
- In what sense is this story an example of the power of God's Word to fulfill itself?

Epiphany 4

February 1, 2026



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

(God) is now reminding them of past blessings— first, the rescue from the wretched slavery of Egypt. He wanted to show them this external example as a sign to admonish them to remember divine goodness. He has given us, too, those external signs of grace, Baptism and the Eucharist, by which He encourages us to remember those things which have happened to us through the gospel.

– Martin Luther –

First Lesson: Micah 6:1–8

In this lesson, the prophet Micah relays a message to Israel that God has a problem with them. A controversy of sorts is brewing between God and his people. The language is like a court case where God insists the people make their defense before him. Let the jury of the hills and mountains decide the peoples' fate!

God asks the question, "What have I done to you?" God demands an answer as he makes his own case, saying: I brought you out of Egypt; I bought you back from the slave owners; I showed you my righteousness! For their part, the people seem to be baffled by what God could possibly expect of them. They speak as if he has placed before them a host of impossible demands – burnt offerings, thousands of rams, ten thousands of rivers of oil, firstborn children.

But all of these demands are imagined by the people. They bear no resemblance to what God actually demands. The prophet reminded the people what is required of them in this relationship: do justice, love kindness and, walk humbly with your God.

- *Have you ever demanded an answer of someone who wronged you? What sort of response were you looking for from your transgressor? What do you think God is looking for from us?*
- *What are some ways we continue to imagine that God makes impossible demands of us?*
- *What does it mean to "walk humbly" with the Lord? What does it look like?*

Psalm 15

As with the passage from Isaiah, Psalm 15 offers a glimpse into what God expects of his people. And again, it has nothing to do with burnt offerings or sacrifices. The psalmist makes clear that God's concern is how his people treat one another. A holy life is not one marked by displays of piety. Rather, it is a life lived for the neighbor – speaking the truth with grace, keeping one's word, not charging interest, not taking bribes. This is the witness of the believer in the world.

- *How is a right relationship with our neighbors related to a right relationship with God?*
- *What makes it possible to live for others?*

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:18–31

The phrase "stumbling block" (v.23) is the same Greek word from which get our word "scandal." We are a culture that

loves to watch a juicy scandal unfold on the television. We will curiously watch to see the latest sports hero fall from grace, the most popular actress end up in jail, or the high and mighty politician mess up and ruin his career.

However, when we face scandal in our own lives, we don't like it very much. The last thing we want is to be the center of attention for doing something stupid or ill-advised. We would much rather distance ourselves from the gossip and pain as it unfolds.

- *In what sense is the cross of Christ a scandal? How is the cross offensive or laughable to the world?*
- *In faith, how is the cross an assurance? How does it serve as balm in our pain and suffering?*

Paul says that the wisdom of God is foolishness to the world. Through the media of our own day, we see how often the world portrays those who believe in Jesus as backward, superstitious, and unintelligent. But Paul reminds the church that this foolishness of the cross is the power of God to change the course of human history, to change the lives of all who believe. What is scandalous to the world, a stumbling block to those who do not believe, is the very way that God reveals his love for humanity.

- *Why do we, as Christians, often let the world determine what we consider wise and foolish?*
- *Why does the world's judgment upon us as "fools" bother us instead of bolster us as a badge of honor?*
- *How does this relate to what God says in Isaiah 55:8–9, "My ways are not your ways..." How is this a promise for us?*

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 5:1–12

The temptation when reading the beatitudes is to see them as a project Jesus is laying out before us. If we wish to be blessed we must find our way into one of these blessed categories. In fact, the beatitudes simply are what they present themselves to be – blessings. Jesus is blessing those that the world sees as cursed. Once again the foolishness of God's wisdom is on display. Those who follow Christ can expect to suffer hardship, famine, loneliness and rejection but this is not a sign that they are rejected by God. In the midst of hardship he continues to bless his beloved.

- *In what sense are the greatest blessings of God often revealed under the form of their opposite? Why does God do that?*
- *How does following Christ bring blessings beyond what we could ever imagine?*

Epiphany 5

February 8, 2026



For the office of the ministry and the word of God are hence to shine as the sun, and not go sneaking and plotting in the dark, as in the play of blindman's bluff; but all must be done in broad daylight, that it may be clearly seen that both preacher and hearer are sure of this, that the teaching is rightly done...

– Martin Luther –

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

First Lesson: Isaiah 58:3–9a

“Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?” The total lack of shame in asking such a question is remarkable. Where true humility seeks to divert attention from the self, God’s people have adopted “humble” acts with an expectation of getting God’s attention for them. In the chapter that precedes this lesson, God is angry and has hidden his face from Israel because of their wickedness and idolatry. In that context the people cry out to the Lord, “Why have you not seen our fasting?” God answers their cry reminding them that their fasting is not done as an act of true worship. Their piety is misplaced. Their humility is insincere. God’s fast is one that has a distinct purpose: to loose people from bondage, to free the oppressed, and to break unhealthy yokes that keep them enslaved.

- How is our worship of God meant to be a reflection of our love for him and the whole creation?
- How do we often miss that mark and make worship about us rather than about true devotion to our Lord?

Psalms 112:1–9

In speaking of how the righteous live in the world, the psalmist offers a rather optimistic picture. Those who fear the Lord, who abide by his word, are blessed. They have wealth and riches. They will not be forgotten. They will look in triumph on their foes. It sounds too good to be true.

As we read words like these we want to believe that they provide a formula for success in this life. Follow God’s commands and you will be rewarded richly. The problem is that this flies in the face of the theology of the cross. Passages such as this one do not negate what we have heard elsewhere about the adversity God’s people can expect.

Crucial to a proper understanding of this psalm is to recall that God’s ways are not our ways. God’s ideas about riches and blessedness are at odds with what we value. The ultimate fulfillment of the great promise found in this psalm must await the resurrection. In the new kingdom we are blessed with riches beyond measure. In the new kingdom our names are remembered forever by God himself. That is true blessedness.

Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 2:1–12 (13–18)

In Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, he reminds them that he did not come to them with a superiority complex,

lording over them his vast knowledge and deep faith. Rather, he came to them having “decided to know nothing among you except Christ crucified.”

- What is the central thing we need to know about Jesus? How does that shape the way we talk about our faith to others?

Paul continues his letter by admitting his weaknesses and fears, his inability to woo them with eloquent speech, and his full reliance upon the Holy Spirit. He says that this is what brought them to faith, not anything that he did.

He reminds them that together they speak in words that reflect the wisdom of God, which calls them to a greater maturity. This wisdom is a mystery that can only be discerned by the Spirit of God.

- What is spiritual maturity? How do you know if you are becoming more mature in your faith?
- How are the most humble of leaders often the ones who are able to teach us the most?

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 5:13–20

We’ve probably all grown up hearing the expression “salt of the earth” used to describe people. It usually refers to people who are honest, humble, and hardworking, people who can be relied upon.

- Is this the same thing Jesus is talking about here?

Jesus refers to salt that loses its saltiness. When have you ever had salt that wasn’t salty? The salt of the gospel of Jesus Christ never loses its ability to transform lives. As followers of Christ we are called to be salty for the good news, to let our light shine, and to never lose our zeal for the gospel.

- When so many people in the world go without hearing the message of Jesus, is that the fault of the gospel? What can we, as individuals, do to share the good news?

At our baptism we hear these words of Christ, “Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” The light that others see in us has nothing to do with our personality, intelligence, charisma, or generosity. Rather, it has everything to do with the light shining through us that comes from the Light of the World. Any good works we might accomplish are led by the Holy Spirit and not our human will.

- In what ways do our lives point others to Christ?
- In what ways do you understand that light as something that comes only from God?

Transfiguration of Our Lord

February 15, 2026



He is the Hope and saving Light of lands benighted; By Him are they who dwelt in night fed and lighted. He is Israel's praise and bliss, their joy, reward, and glory.

– Martin Luther –

Hymn Text: “In Peace and Joy I Now Depart”

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

First Lesson: Exodus 24:8-18

Just before this passage begins, Moses had read the law publicly to Israel. In response to that reading they vow to the Lord that they will be obedient to his will. Moses then sacrifices a young bull on the altar and sprinkles the people with the blood of the covenant which seals the deal. Afterwards God calls Moses to come up to the top of Mt. Sinai where he gives the stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments. For forty days and forty nights Moses is in the cloud with the Lord. As the people look on this all-consuming fire, they experience a “theophany” — a manifestation of God’s presence.

- In what ways is God revealing something very important to Israel as he calls Moses to the mountaintop?
- What would you expect to see in a face-to-face encounter with God?

As the vision of God is revealed, Scripture points out in verse 11 that none of the elders died! (i.e. “God did not raise his hand against them.”)

- Compare what Jacob says in Genesis 32:30 after his encounter with God. Why would this be so surprising?
- What does all this say about the raw power of God?

Psalms 2:6-11

“You are my son; today I have begotten you.” These words ring out in a new way on the Day of Transfiguration. What may once have described David or another Israelite king, is now linked to Jesus, God in the flesh. The true ruler of Israel, the one anointed by God, demonstrates total faithfulness, a right relationship with the Father from beginning to end. He trusts in the Lord to provide for him, rather than relying on his own strength. Those who reject God’s rule will experience his wrath. It is only in the Lord himself that refuge is to be found. To be outside of the Lord is to be outside of his mercy.

- How does this psalm shape our understanding of the events on the Mountain of Transfiguration? How is our understanding of this psalm shaped by the events on that mountain?

Second Lesson: 2 Peter 1:16-21

As they waited for Christ to return, the people of the early church occasionally succumbed to doubt and fear. Countless teachers, with conflicting views of what God was doing in the world, vied for their loyalty. Peter contrasted

these teachers, and their cleverly devised myths, with the eyewitness reports they had been given of Christ Jesus and his power and authority.

Peter writes this letter to encourage believers to continue in the faith. He reminds them that as long as he is with them he will continue to tell them stories of Jesus so that their faith might be bolstered. The authority that Peter has to do this has been granted him by virtue of being with Jesus and seeing him in all of his glory. He and the other disciples had seen all that Christ said and did. They had heard the affirmation from heaven through the voice of God saying, “This is my Son, with him I am well pleased.”

- What is the benefit of hearing the stories of Jesus first hand from an eye-witness?
- Have you ever been strengthened by the witness of a fellow believer? What was that like and how did it help you grow in your own faith?

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 17:1-9

In our gospel reading for this Sunday we hear the familiar story of the transfiguration of Jesus, whose appearance changed on the mountaintop to a glowing figure of light. Like the theophany on Mount Sinai, when God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, the disciples had the privilege of seeing Christ in all of his divinity and they were very afraid. They did not understand how to interpret what they were seeing.

- In the Small Catechism, Luther taught that we are to “fear and love God.” How can both these be true at the same time?
- Why is it important for us that we brought to God through Christ?
- Why does Jesus continually tell the disciples not to be afraid in these moments when God reveals who Jesus really is?

The prophets Moses and Elijah converse with Jesus on the mountain, but we never hear what it is that they speak about. All we hear is the voice of God affirming the true identity of his Son, and that we should “listen to him!” (v. 5). Despite their appearance in this important moment of revelation, finally, Moses and Elijah disappear. It is not their word we are called to, but the Word that is Christ.

- In the face of all that we are not told about God, why is it important to focus on what we are told?
- How do you think knowing the true divine identity of Jesus, and recognizing his light, help believers to see God more clearly in our lives?