

Shadow Man
2 Kings 2:1-12

Shadow:

A dark image cast when light is blocked

A partial or imperfect copy

A follower

A look of gloom

The season of Epiphany has been about the opposite of shadows. It has not been darkness and gloom. It has been light and joy. John writes: *The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world ... And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth* (1:9, 14). Epiphany has been about dispelling the shadows – revealing to all the world who Jesus is and why He has come into our world.

We began our journey with Jesus' baptism, at which we heard God the Father declare, *You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased* (Mark 1:11). And today at Jesus' transfiguration we hear Him say, *This is my beloved Son; listen to him* (Mark 9:7).

How fitting that at Jesus' transfiguration His shadow should be present. Moses was a shadow of Jesus, but our Old Testament reading points us to another shadow – Elijah.

When we make a copy of something, we start with the original and then make something that looks like it. I place the original document on the photocopier, press the right button, and out comes a copy. Or in woodworking, I see something I like then endeavor to make something that looks like it. The original comes first; the shadow follows.

God does just the opposite in Scripture. The shadow comes first to give us a hint of what the true and perfect image will be like.

Two of Jesus' disciples were stuck in the shadows as they walked the road to Emmaus after Jesus was crucified. They were so much in the dark that they didn't know it was Jesus walking with them. They said to Him, *[W]e had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see* (Luke 24:21-24). Maybe you remember what Jesus tells them: *“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself* (25-27).

The shadows, Moses and the Prophets, came first always pointing to Jesus, the perfect image of God.

Elijah performed several miracles. Can you think of any of them? ... One is in our text – dividing the waters of the Jordan River so he and Elisha could walk across on dry ground. Do you remember the widow of Zarephath – the oil and flour that weren't used up, and bringing her son back to life? How about the little contest with the prophets of Baal – calling fire down from heaven to burn up the sacrifice and everything around it? Elijah, the shadow man, did some miraculous things. Jesus would do a lot more.

Also in our text, Elijah doesn't die, but ascends into heaven. Anyone else do that a few hundred years later? Jesus did, once His true glory was revealed.

Peter got it right when he said, "*You are the Christ*" (Mark 8:29). But he was confused about what that meant. He had in mind transfiguration stuff – radiant white clothes, hanging out with VIP's, God the Father speaking from a cloud. So when Jesus *began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again... Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man"* (Mark 31-33).

Jesus' transfiguration does bring to an end our Epiphany journey. But we leave this mountain to enter into Lent and approach another more important mountain – Calvary.

At Calvary, Jesus was transfigured with our sin and death. He looks much different than on the Mount of Transfiguration. Here, Jesus' clothes aren't a brilliant white. He is stripped naked. On this mount it is not Moses and Elijah with Him, but two criminals. His face doesn't gleam like the sun. It is stained with sweat and blood trickling down from the crown of thorns. His hands and feet are nailed to a cross. It does not appear to be a glorious sight.

But that is because we, too often, set our minds on the things of man rather than the things of God. Like Peter we get it wrong. We chase after things we think will bring us pleasure and happiness even when God has said about them: You shall not!

For this reason Jesus came to earth. For our sin Jesus went to the cross. It was His glory to fall under the shadow of the curse that should be ours. Instead He took our sin and death upon Himself. He died for your sin. He died your eternal death. And three days later He burst forth from the tomb to assure you that He was not victim, but victor! Jesus rose from the grave and lives and reigns as King forever.

Jesus will one day return in all His glory to judge the living and the dead. Until that time, He sends the Holy Spirit to bring to our hearts and minds everything Jesus said and did for us.

And so we gather in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We listen to His word read from the Scriptures and proclaimed in Holy Absolution and in the sermon. We approach His table to eat and drink Jesus' very body and blood given for us for the forgiveness of our sins. They are the real thing, but they are also a shadow – a foretaste – of the feast to come in the very presence of our Savior Himself.

The glory of Jesus' cross has earned for you the glory of life everlasting.

Wouldn't it have been great to be on the Mount of Transfiguration? Peter thought so: *Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.* But Jesus was looking forward to something even more permanent and glorious – life everlasting with you right there with Him.

That is your future! The shadow of death, and everything having to do with sin, will be gone. You will live in the light of Christ forever. Amen.