

His mother is a mystic; his father is a geologist.

Good chance that William Caldwell King, who enters the waters of holy baptism today, is already part air, part earth, part mountaintop vista, part valley floor sediment.

He will no doubt prove to be, like all of us, a unique combination of his parents, part Mom, part Dad, part biologically, part environmentally, a child like the rest of us of a fallen humanity, that marvelous and majestic, celebrated and rebellious creature of God.

For years the church, particularly in its pietistic Protestant strains, has over-emphasized the sinfulness of humanity, bludgeoning people with guilt and shame while only reluctantly admitting Psalms 8 and 139, that we are *fearfully and wonderfully made, a little lower than the angels*.

At other times we have utterly overlooked our sinfulness and underwritten horrors and hubris, wars and pogroms and mindless abuse of creation blessed beneath the banner of human dominion, as if it was God's will for us to treat our home like frat boys treat a hotel room. The truth, of course, is that we are both wonderful and wayward, a strange combination of devil and divine, a tangled mess that Luther called in Latin *simul justus et peccator*, at the same time saint and sinner.

Our presiding bishop Mark Hanson has said that the reason he is a Lutheran is a three letter word--but no, the word isn't *sin*.

The three letter word is *and*.

Hanson appreciates the honesty of the Lutheran worldview that recognizes that we are both saint and sinner that, God's dreams are already *and* not yet come true, that Jesus is both human *and* divine, or as we will sing at Communion, *Son of God and Son of Man*.

Our boy William, air and water, peak and valley, child of humanity and child of God, is himself saint and sinner already, and both will become more clear as the years unfold.

With the rest of us, he will be a mix of fearful and faithful, loving and selfish, wise and foolish, saint and sinner making his way in the soupy muck of this world that itself is both beauty and brutality, health and horror, God's delight and God's headache mixed and mashed together.

In his wisdom, then, the gospel writer Luke puts before us not one but two stories, seemingly different but really very connected, with Jesus' shining on the mountaintop quickly going downhill to a valley floor where the disciples aren't so bright.

Mountain and valley, transfiguration and trouble, and we can't really either see or appreciate either of them unless we see them both.

The obvious, megawatt glory of Jesus blazing like a televangelist's smile in the holy company of Moses and Elijah, that mystical, magical, mysterious, marvelous moment for the burning eyes, is tempered by a conversation that burns the ears.

Moses, Elijah and Jesus speak of his departure, literally his exodus, in Jerusalem; their conversation is the cross.

The voice in the cloud never tells the three disciples to look at Jesus; the voice says *listen*.

The glory of God ablaze before them is on his way to die.

Don't lose sight, in the radiant splendor, of the evil that poisons even the destiny of God.

Then the disciples head down the mountain, where, obviously inspired by the transcendent transfiguration, still sunburned from the glory of God, they are unable to cast out a demon.

This is after they were very successfully casting them out earlier in chapter nine.

A father, with more than a hint of God Almighty in his voice, says to Jesus, *I beg you to look at my son.*

Jesus listens himself as the father explains, in vivid and wrenching detail, what the demon does to the boy, an account that has in it more than a hint of Jesus' own future in Jerusalem.

The demon thrashes the boy around one last time so that Jesus and all around can see darkness on full display, clothes dazzlingly dusty amid shrieks of pain, an anti-transfiguration where no one wants to build anything and everyone can't wait to slink away.

There, in the grip of failure and frustration and powerlessness before the face of evil, Jesus saves. In a scene as horrible as the cross, Jesus shines again, *and all were astounded at the greatness of God.*

In the dazzle gathers darkness...and in the horror gathers hope.

When our eyes see only glory, like the transfiguration or the crusades, we are blinded to what is really happening.

When our eyes see only our own failure and frustration, we are blinded to what is really happening in the weird and wondrous beauty of the cross.

The glory of God is in both places, on the mountain and in the valley, on the shining height where we expect it and in the ground level turmoil where we don't.

It will also be the same in William's life, as it is in ours.

We will sing of his shining light and pray for God's Holy Spirit, a spirit of wisdom and power and joy, and then on his forehead we will trace the cross, that symbol of a scene so gruesome and dark and hopeless that it takes Moses and Elijah to discuss it.

We will trace that cross this week both in oil and in ash, in darkness and in light, for that is where we live and where we are headed.

Some of us are struggling uphill to a glorious surprise we cannot guess.

Some of us are coasting downhill to a gruesome surprise we cannot avoid.

William is on his way we know not where, launched into a life that will likely be full of ups and downs, peaks and valleys, rocks and radiance, earth and sky.

Obvious and hidden, the glory of God is in it all.

And when his journey is finally over, when William is himself dashed to the ground and joins his Lord Jesus in death, a face will shine and he will discover that God has for him yet one more glorious And.