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**Hebrews 1:1-9**  
**WHERE IS THIS RADIANCE?**

Hebrews 1 says, *The Son is the radiance of God's glory.* This is no doubt true in the heavenly realms. Yet is that true about the Son of God who was born as a baby in Bethlehem –the radiance of God's glory? Is the song correct: *Love's pure light radiant beams from thy holy face?* Is that what the Shepherds saw as they bent down and beheld the Baby in the manger –rays of light were beaming out from the Baby's face? If yes, if there was a noticeably glowing aura about Jesus that made Him stand out, why did His enemies explain their desire to kill Him by saying: *Because you, a mere man, claim to be God?* Apparently, they didn't see any radiant beams if they called Him a mere man. What's more, the prophet Isaiah foretold about Jesus: *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men.*

If that's the case, what does Hebrews 1 mean by calling Jesus "the radiance of God's glory?" But maybe first, a more fundamental question: why does this matter to you and me? It matters on the one hand because for our salvation's sake we need the assurance that Christ truly is God from God and Light from Light. Secondly, it matters because if what Hebrews 1 says is true – that He is the radiance of God's glory – then why don't we see it more? This world seems as dark as ever. Our lives are as troubled as ever. How is His radiance supposed to be shining on us?

That phrase, "the radiance of God's glory," describes God the Son as like the rays of light to a source of light. That sounds like a fine distinction. For it's really impossible to separate the rays of light from their source and to say they are different from each other. The rays convey the light that comes from the source. In a similar way, the Son is begotten of the Father. He is one with God the Father and the Spirit and yet the Son also conveys God's message and who God is to the world. The Son is the rays of light emitted by the Trinity.

In heaven we shall see that bright light of glory in all its fullness. The book of Revelation tells us that there will

be no moon or sun (s-u-n), nor any need for a lamp because the Son of God will be our light. On the Mount of Transfiguration Peter, James and John caught a glimpse of that heavenly glory emanating from Jesus. But they collapsed to the ground terrified. Sinful humankind cannot tolerate being exposed to God's holy glory. It lays bare our ghastly depravity.

So God conveyed Himself to us not with rays of glory. Rather, He presented Himself to us in a way we could handle -in human flesh. Hebrews 1 states that Jesus is also the *exact imprint of the divine nature*. Consider the way a mold imprints the likeness of Abraham Lincoln on a penny. The point is not that the image looks like Abraham Lincoln, but that the imprint on the penny exactly matches the mold that pressed it. In the same way, Jesus Christ is the imprint who exactly matches the mold. He shows us precisely who God is. One time, when Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus replied, *Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father?" Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me?*

But why would God do this? What was His purpose in conveying Himself to us? Here we need to adjust our thinking –or think outside the box, as it were –as to what God’s glory looks like. Do not think of God’s glory as rays of light. God’s glory shines out to us in the form of mercy. God is many things, but He is above all else merciful. That’s what He gets glory for –mercy. We see God’s mercy nowhere more clearly, nowhere emanating more brightly than in the person of Jesus Christ. It was mercy that induced God to send His Son to join the human race. In mercy Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons and preached. In mercy He offered Himself to death on the cross to make atonement to God for our sin. In mercy for us He broke through death and rose again to life. He did none of this for His own sake. He had no need to do any of this for Himself. He did it all entirely for us.

Jesus once said, *God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.* Thus, in the person of Jesus Christ you will always find God’s intent to be kind and to save you, God’s mercy, mercy in His forgiveness, mercy in His comfort, mercy in rescuing us from death, mercy in giving us an eternal future, mercy in seeing our daily earthly plight and answering our continuous pleas with

His promises. God's mercy pours out of Jesus more abundantly than rays of light pour out from the sun in the sky.

That brings us to another question. Where do we find Jesus? Since He ascended into heaven and we can no longer see Him with our eyes, where can He be found so that His mercy shines on us? Jesus comes to us with His mercy in His Word and in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The shepherds were not excited about the baby Jesus because He was glowing. They were excited because they believed what the angels said about the baby. In the same way, the Magi did not worship the baby because they noticed something extraordinary about His appearance, they worshiped Him because they believed what the Scriptures said about the Child.

Hebrews 1 told us, *In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son.* The Son speaks to us through His Word. All of the Bible is His Word. He comes to us so humbly, so gently, so mercifully—in such a non-intimidating way through words and water and bread and wine. That's because His purpose is not to scare but to save. Words, water and bread and wine—they seem and feel like nothing. But they communicate the most profound things: forgiveness from an Almighty Being,

rescue from death and the devil, the resurrection of our bodies in glory, a life with no end –also a status, a declaration, of holiness so that we will not feel terror when we see Him in heaven.

The day will come when we get to see and feel the radiance of God's glory unmasked, but if we decide not to bother with it until that day, it will be too late. Now is the time for us to apprehend His glorious mercy in the way He has chosen to give it to us: through Word and Sacrament. For if we believe His words now, the light of His glory in heaven will have the same effect that His words have –it will be a warm, healing, refreshing, life-giving, saving, uplifting, embracing light.

Now is the time. Learn about your God by looking at Jesus. Learn who Jesus is by searching His Word. Seek His mercy there. He says the door will be opened. He will not refuse you. For He is the radiance of God's glory.