Today we baptize Thatcher Gailie and we, this faith community, will share with him in his spiritual development.

Peter, in his letter to Christians in his congregations in Asia Minor, presents four sources for spiritual development. He names the first a few verses before the passage we read today. This first source of spiritual development is the call and answer – Jesus called Peter’s congregation and our congregation today – to be disciples and we, answer yes to that call and are baptized, just as Thatcher will be in a few minutes. In this sacrament of new birth, Jesus enlightens our lives with many gifts needed for ministry and He gives us grace and faith to continue to walk forward with Him.

The second source is Peter’s own life of faithfulness – many of us have grown spiritually through the example of other Christians such as parents, godparents or others within our community of faith. We hope and promise that Thatcher will grow spirituality as he observes our lives.

The third is the eyewitness testimony to the majesty of Christ. Peter had seen the Transfiguration and had heard the voice declare that Jesus was God’s Son. Peter and other disciples give that testimony to us in Scripture.

The fourth is prophecy. We know from reading Old Testament Scriptures that the Son of God would come to reconcile us to God, to love us, to die for us and to make His home in our hearts. When Jesus was transfigured on that mountain, his watching disciples received grace to know for sure that He was the Christ. They knew for sure that he was the lamp shining in a dark place, the morning star whose light overcomes all darkness and who rises in our hearts.

Several years ago I experienced a miracle that called to mind the transfiguration of Jesus – one moment of grace in which I knew for sure that Jesus was the Christ –the lamp shining in the dark place who overcomes darkness and rose in my heart.

This experience involved a family that I had come to love as I served as a Christian educator in a church in Northern Virginia. It’s a story of three generations of women -- the matriarch of the family had ministered faithfully in that congregation for many years, who I’ll call Grandmother. One of her daughters who lived about an hour and a half a way, who I’ll call the mother because she had daughter of her own, who was about 9 or 10. Some years before I arrived, when the child was first born, the mother had sought to have her baptized in that church. But the priest at the time had refused to do it because, even though grandmother was faithful in the church. The priest felt the distance to the home of mother and daughter was too far to make it possible for them to participate fully in the life of the church. Mother, understandably, became disillusioned with the church and would not try to have her child baptized anyplace else, to the great sadness of the grandmother.

While I was there, the grandmother became terminally ill. By this time, a different priest served that congregation and he encouraged this baptism as a way to reconcile mother and daughter to the church and to grant to the dying woman her fondest desire. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, mother decided to end her distance with the church and to have her daughter baptized. Although she still may not have been too sure about the church, her great love for her mother caused her to agree to this action. And anytime there is love, God is at work.

As the day approached for the baptism, the entire church was excited, although we also worried that the grandmother, whose health had declined significantly, might be too sick to actually come to see the baptism. And we knew that seeing the baptism was that dying woman’s fondest desire. So we prayed.

On the day of the baptism, it rained. In fact, it poured. We feared that the weather would prevent the grandmother from being able to attend the baptism, which was at the 10 a.m. service. In the middle of the 8 a.m. service, we received a message that the grandmother had died. We were heartbroken because she had died before seeing the baptism.

Despite this recent death, however, all the family assembled for the baptism as scheduled. Still it rained. And those of us watching weren’t quite sure whether to rejoice at the upcoming baptism or be sad about the untimely death. Why hadn’t God answered our prayer that grandmother be here today?

At precisely the moment when the bishop began to ask the girl and her mother the faith questions – do you renounce the powers of evil -- a bright light shone through the stained glass window that was right behind the font. At precisely the moment when the water was poured on the child, that light moved so that the face of that child glowed. This wasn’t an ordinary sort of glow like the sun on the girl’s face at a beach – it was a miraculous, transfiguring, holy glow. It was a moment when that child, her family and every member of that congregation knew without a doubt that Jesus had entered that room and transformed that child and that family.

I rather believe that Jesus wasn’t the only Being in that light that shined upon that child. I believe that Jesus brought with Him the spirit of that faithful grandmother, who had just hours before gone to be with Him. That grandmother who, if she had lived probably would have been too sick to come out in the rain, now saw that baptism clearly in the light of Christ.

Jesus, the morning star, rose like a lamp and overcame the disappointment of that congregation and instead brought joy. Jesus’s light poured into the heart of that child and, as we watched the morning star of Christ rise in that baptism, the star rose in our hearts too. Jesus was there among us, and in that light everything was glorious.

On that day, we had an extraordinary and dramatic sighting of God, a moment of grace for which I am still very grateful. Although not always this dramatic, God’s light is always with us, rising above and overcoming the darkness. God is here to provide us with what we need to develop spiritually. God is here to give us assurances. The more we open our eyes, the more we see that light.

In this baptism today, as in all the sacraments and sacramentalities of life, we see the light of Christ, maybe less dramatic than on that day years ago, but just as real. We will see that morning star rise in Thatcher, in his family and in us, as well.

Amen