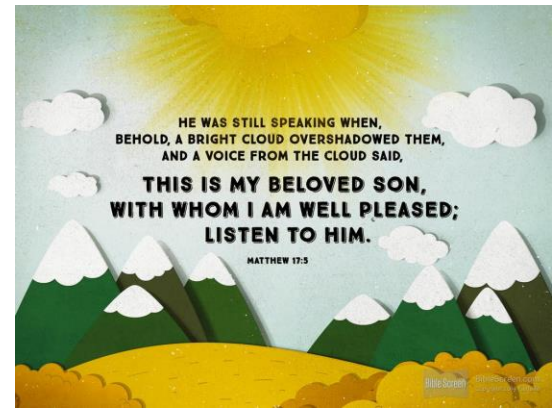


Exodus 24:12-18

Psalm 2

2 Peter 1:16-21

Matthew 17:1-9



## THIS IS MY BELOVED SON

*The Transfiguration of our Lord* is an appropriate subject for this last Sunday in Epiphany, because “Epiphany” comes from a Greek word meaning “manifestation.”

Three of the disciples of Jesus saw finally the Truth they had begun to believe. They saw Jesus, and they saw the Son of God. They saw the Bright Morning Star – the King of kings – the Prince of Peace – the Lamb of Revelation. Yet this was not a new person they saw – it was Jesus of Nazareth – the same teacher and friend who had eaten and slept with them. The Bible says, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*” (Heb 13:8). That is why we call this *The Transfiguration*, not “The Transformation.”

Matthew 17:1-9. *And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. <sup>2</sup>And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. <sup>3</sup>And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. <sup>4</sup>And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” <sup>5</sup>He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” <sup>6</sup>When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. <sup>7</sup>But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” <sup>8</sup>And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. <sup>9</sup>And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead.”<sup>1</sup>*

- *He was transfigured before them* (v.2). The seeds of this event lie in the unbelief of the Jews. They did not want to believe in Jesus because he was not the kind of Messiah they expected. Instead of fighting the enemies of the Jews, Jesus told his followers to love them. “What kind of Messiah is this?” they wondered. I might have wondered myself. By this time, late in the third year of Jesus’ ministry, he and the disciples were surrounded and nearly overwhelmed by rejection and unbelief. All of them, even Jesus, were tempted constantly by uncertainty and doubt. Some of this is related in Chapter 16, just before today’s lesson:

(Matt 16:1-4). The Jewish authorities asked Jesus for “a sign from heaven,” but Jesus told them, “*An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah.*”

(Matt 16:5-12). His disciples, on whom so much depended, did not seem to get the picture. When he said to them, “*Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees,*” they seemed to think they were out of bread. Jesus asked them, “*How is it that you fail to perceive that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*” Eventually they understood what he meant.

(Matt 16:13-20). In this passage Jesus and his disciples traveled north from Galilee to Caesarea Philippi. It was discouraging for Jesus and his disciples to be there because the narrow valley they were in was dominated by a huge white temple dedicated to Caesar, and by the spirits of other foreign gods.

Jesus knew his time was short. He needed men who were willing to believe who he is, and able to understand his purpose. He asked them, “*Who do you say that I am?*” There were times like this, when Jesus seemed to express doubt and uncertainty. Later, after many had left him, he asked his disciples, “*Do you also wish to go away?*” (John 6:67). Jesus knew the hearts of men. Why would he ask these questions?

“Who do you say that I am?” is a question you and I must answer personally. Most of the world today

<sup>1</sup> Bible quotations are from the RSV unless otherwise noted.

rejects Christ and his teaching. When times get hard, believers also may be of a mind to do the same, and then we seem to hear him say once more, *“Do you also wish to go away?”*

If time allows, review the rest of Matthew 16. Jesus said he *must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised* (Matt 16:21). Peter said there was no need for this, but Jesus said, *“You are not on the side of God, but of men,”* and then said to all the disciples, *“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”* (Matt 16:24). This was (and is) a difficult choice, and they needed more convincing.

Thus the stage was set for the Transfiguration. The disciples needed assurance. They needed to have the veil lifted so they could see the cross and beyond, if only for a moment. So do we, occasionally, and when we do, the Holy Spirit will, at times, give us glimpses of life in the kingdom of heaven.

- *Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother* (Matt 17:1). These three had been alone with him at the raising of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:51), and would be alone again with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:37). Peter would become the founder of the church. James would be the first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:2). John would go into exile on Patmos and receive the Revelation in his old age.

As we noted above, they had been in the region of Caesarea Philippi. Imagine their thoughts now as they climbed into the quietness of the hills, losing sight of the roads and towns and people below. *“Could this really be the Son of God,”* they wondered. Imagine their amazement as they saw Jesus change before them, as *“his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light* (v.2).

- *There appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him* (v.3). For the disciples, the presence of Moses and Elijah affirmed the authority of Jesus. But it was really the other way around. The authentication of Jesus Christ never comes from men. It came in the voice of God, who spoke that day and said, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased, listen to him”* (v.5). God spoke once before at the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:17), and he would speak once again after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12:28).

You cannot “authenticate” Jesus Christ. No person can. God must do this for you, and he will if you ask. Your life will be sealed with an unbreakable seal. *“In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory”* (Eph 1:13-14).

The law was given through *Moses*. He led Israel out of slavery in Egypt into the promise land. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. He leads people out of slavery in sin into the kingdom of God.

*Elijah* was the prophet who withstood the evil of his time and was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Ki 2:11). Jesus also withstood the evil of his time, and ascended to the right hand of God.

Jesus Christ has fulfilled, and is fulfilling, all the law and the prophets. He said, *“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them”* (Matt 5:17).

The Transfiguration was not a vision. It was a real event. Afterwards Jesus Christ set his face and went forth to Jerusalem to suffer and die on the cross (Luke 9:51). The Transfiguration enabled Peter, James, and John, as well as the other apostles, eventually to spread the news about Jesus with great confidence, never fearing for their lives, always eagerly anticipating their glorious inheritance in the kingdom of God.

Peter certainly never forgot the Transfiguration. Years later he would write, *“We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain”* (2 Pet 1:16-18).

We are all pilgrims on the road of life. We face times of darkness and are tempted to disbelieve. In this life we may not get to see what Peter and James and John saw, but then, neither did the other nine apostles.

Yet we see things *like* the Transfiguration. There are times when the eyes of a believer's heart are turned from the humble Son of man, and made to see the power and glory of the Son of God. These are the two aspects of the nature of Jesus, and our salvation depends on both, that is, my salvation depends entirely on who Jesus Christ is and what he has done to save me. Will you take him today to be your Savior?