

Sunday, February 19, 2023 – Transfiguration of Our Lord

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Introduction

Today's festival is a bridge between the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany cycle that comes to a close today and the Lent-Easter cycle that begins in several days. On a high mountain Jesus is revealed as God's beloved Son, echoing the words at his baptism. This vision of glory sustains us as Jesus faces his impending death in Jerusalem. We turn this week to Ash Wednesday and our yearly baptismal journey from Lent to Easter. Some churches put aside the alleluia at the conclusion of today's liturgy. This word of joy will be omitted during the penitential season of Lent and will be sung again at Easter.

Prayer of the Day

O God, in the transfiguration of your Son you confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the witness of Moses and Elijah, and in the voice from the bright cloud declaring Jesus your beloved Son, you foreshadowed our adoption as your children. Make us heirs with Christ of your glory, and bring us to enjoy its fullness, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Exodus 24:12-18

At Mount Sinai, Moses experienced the presence of God for forty days and forty nights. The "glory of the LORD" settled on the mountain, and on the seventh day God called out to Moses. On the mountain God gave Moses the stone tablets inscribed with the ten commandments.

¹²The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." ¹³So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. ¹⁴To the elders he had said, "Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them."

¹⁵Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. ¹⁷Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. ¹⁸Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Psalm 2

¹Why are the nations | in an uproar?

Why do the peoples mutter | empty threats?

²**Why do the kings of the earth rise up in revolt, and the princes | plot together,
against the LORD and against the | LORD's anointed?**

³"Let us break their | yoke," they say;

"let us cast off their | bonds from us."

⁴**God whose throne is in heav- | en is laughing;
the LORD holds them | in derision.**

⁵Then in wrath God | speaks to them,

and in rage fills | them with terror.

⁶**"As for me, I have anoint- | ed my king
upon Zion, my | holy mountain."**

⁷Let me announce the decree | of the LORD,

who said to me, "You are my son; this day have I be- | gotten you.

⁸**Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for | your inheritance
and the ends of the earth for | your possession.**

⁹You shall crush them with an | iron rod

and shatter them like a | piece of pottery."

¹⁰**And now, you | kings, be wise;**

be warned, you rulers | of the earth.

¹¹Submit to the | LORD with fear,

and with trembling | bow in worship;

¹²**lest the LORD be angry, and you perish in a sudden | blaze of wrath.**

Happy are all who take ref- | uge in God!

Second Reading: 2 Peter 1:16-21

At the transfiguration, God's voice was heard, declaring Jesus to be the beloved Son. By the activity of the Holy Spirit, God's voice continues to be heard through the word of scripture.

¹⁶For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For he

received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the

Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." ¹⁸We

ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

¹⁹So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in

your hearts. ²⁰First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Gospel: Matthew 17:1-9

Shortly before he enters Jerusalem, where he will be crucified, Jesus is revealed to Peter, James, and John in a mountaintop experience of divine glory called the transfiguration.

¹Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Prayers of Intercession

Called together to follow Jesus, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need, saying “Merciful God,” and responding, “receive our prayer.”

A brief silence.

Embolden your church as it witnesses to the majesty and mercy of your Son. Equip lay preachers, deacons, and pastors. Move us to share our stories of your faithfulness and forgiveness; may our lives proclaim your greatness. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Dwell with your whole creation, from the tallest mountain peak to the deepest valley. Bless the work of conservation organizations and protect vital habitats (*locally threatened waters or lands may be named*). Support the work of disaster relief agencies around the world. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Guide and give wisdom to all in authority: our mayor (name) and local leaders, our governor (*name*) and state legislators, our president (*name*) and national legislators. Bring freedom and justice to all nations. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Give shelter to those lacking safe homes. Spur communities to work for fair housing for all. Protect our neighbours whose dwellings do not keep out dangerous cold or heat; accompany with your touch those who are homebound, sick, or isolated (*especially*). Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Make us eager to receive your Word in scripture. Help us recognize Jesus’ voice in the needs of our neighbours; make us confident to follow the way of the cross. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Receive our thanksgiving for the holy ones who have guided us in faithfulness and gathered even the unlikely as your people. With our forebears in faith and all who have hoped in you, teach us to wait with courage until the promised day dawns. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We bring to you our needs and hopes, O God, trusting your wisdom and power revealed in Christ crucified.

Amen.

A reflection for this Transfiguration of Our Lord Sunday...

Finding God in the Clouds

We often speak of mountaintop experiences as those joyous times we look forward to with excitement and look back upon fondly, such as summer camp or an annual hiking trip. The mountaintop moments in today's readings were different: awe-inspiring, yes, but also full of devouring fires, clouds, and fear. Vision is obscured, the familiar becomes unknown, and nothing is the same. People get lost in fires, clouds, and fear, unable to find their way, but God's presence is where we get both lost *and* found. Many biblical encounters with God involved fear, pointing to the awesome reality of God that is much more than the gentle shepherd we often imagine (though God is that, too). God is, as C. S. Lewis famously said, "not a tame lion" (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, London: HarperCollins Children's Books, 2001, p. 197). The truth is, we can no more plan our mountaintop times with God than we can stay there forever, as much as we think we would like to. God's place is to invite, ours to respond, faces bowed to the ground.

Eventually, of course, the time comes to leave that mountain, walking with Jesus down to the valley and getting dusty with the ashes of daily life. Many churches symbolically "roll up the Alleluias" today, recognizing that this is the end of a glorious season celebrating Christ's light and the entrance to a no-less-real season of Jesus' and our own lives, the "valley" season of Lent. But that doesn't mean there is nothing to do down in the valley. On the contrary, the traditional disciplines of Lent—fasting, prayer, and gifts to the poor—all help us maintain the eyes, ears, and heart to see and hear God whenever and however God appears.

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