

Transfiguration of the Lord
Sunday 14th February 2021
Revd Alan F. Miller

Call to worship

The glory of God shines
like a consuming fire.
We have seen the glory of God
in the face of Jesus Christ.
The voice of God thunders
like a mighty storm.
Out of the cloud, God speaks:
This is my beloved Son; listen to him!

Hymn Immortal, invisible, God only wise

Prayer

Holy and mighty God,
gather us among your faithful ones,
the people of your covenant,
to stand in the light of your glory
and listen for the word of the Lord,
Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

Psalm 50 : 1-6

The mighty one, God the LORD,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to its setting.

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God shines forth.

Our God comes and does not keep silence,
before him is a devouring fire,
and a mighty tempest all around him.

He calls to the heavens above and to the earth,
that he may judge his people:
“Gather to me my faithful ones,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”

The heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge. Selah

Prayer of Confession

God alone is righteous;
God alone is perfect;
God alone is judge.
Yet this holy, righteous God
comes to us in love, to save us.
Rejoicing in God's grace,
let us confess our sin.

God of all glory, beauty, and grace,
we have tried to hide from you—
to hide our faces, to hide our sin—
yet you have never hidden your love for us.
We have tried to search for you—
in temples, in clouds, on mountaintops—
yet you have already revealed yourself to us
in the face of Jesus Christ.
Forgive us, and transform us
so that our lives may shine
with your glory, beauty, and grace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Our God comes and does not keep silence;
God speaks to us with grace and love,
saying: You are my beloved child.
This is the good news of the gospel:
In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

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Thanks be to God.

Mark 9:2-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Reflection

Speak to us, O Lord our God,
and let the fire of your Spirit
burn brightly in our hearts.
Open our minds to receive
the wisdom of the law,
the hope of the prophets,
and the life of the gospel:
Jesus Christ, your living Word. **Amen.**

The season of the Epiphany begins with one revelation, as the wise men follow the star to find the infant Christ in Bethlehem, bringing gifts and bowing down in worship – and ends with another, when Peter and James and John are given a glimpse of God’s glory when they see Jesus shining with the light and power of God on a high mountainside.

Both revelations speak of the true nature of Jesus, as the long-promised Messiah and Saviour, as the incarnation of God, and as God’s promise of love and life to the world; for both events reveal the true nature of God in Christ, compassionate, faithful, maker and redeemer of all, who in Christ is God with us, in all our living here now, and in the world to come.

In between them, Jesus is baptised and acclaimed as the Lamb of God, the one who will sacrifice his life upon the cross, to die and rise again in glory to renew all of creation and bring all people to new and everlasting life. His works and words of power and authority point to who he is, and for those who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand, the truth of God is laid before them.

His work of healing coupled to the proclamation of the coming kingdom draws people in large numbers to follow him around, amazed by what Jesus says and does in their midst. They are filled with hope and expectation, that here indeed is the one God has sent to set God’s people free from suffering and persecution, and who will usher in a new and glorious dawn.

The high point Jesus reaches on the mountain, with three of his closest disciples, is also a high point in the gospel story: there, they have a vision of Jesus as if blazing with light, accompanied by Moses and Elijah on either side: the Law and the Prophets come together to declare Jesus more than either of them, and more than all that has gone before; the one who fulfils the law and who is greater than any prophet.

For the disciples it is a moment of sudden and clear understanding. Whatever they might have guessed or hoped before, here is the divine revelation that is proof of who Jesus is – the sign that their faith has not been misplaced.

Delighted and amazed, of course they long for the moment to last, but that is not to be. They experience the Shekinah, the cloud that is the presence of God, descending around them, and they hear the voice of God, as at his baptism, declaring Jesus to be the beloved Son, to whom they must listen. In that moment, it is all over, the cloud is gone, and Jesus stands alone before them once more, and together they come down the mountain.

The Transfiguration marks both a high point and a turning point in the ministry of Jesus, and in the lives of his disciples: wherever he has gone up till now, he has been welcomed and acclaimed by the people of the towns and villages of Galilee through which he passes. As they descend from the mountain, the journey that lies ahead is one that will be much more difficult, on which Jesus will encounter opposition, jealousy, fear and hatred as he walks the path that will take him to Jerusalem, and to the darkness and suffering of the cross.

If up to this point the Good News has been evident in the works of power and proclamation of the kingdom, the journey down from the mountain will show how that power must confront and overcome the evil that distorts and disfigures so much of human life, in so many places in this world. It is a journey on which Jesus will be challenged by those who do not hear of the kingdom of God as good news, but as something to fear, for being either wealthy or powerful, or both, they have much to lose.

For us too, hearing the story, this Sunday marks a new stage in the Christian year, the end of the season of the Epiphany, of light and life and love, and the beginning this week of Lent, through which we must all travel, as if accompanying Jesus on his path to the cross, reflecting on our lives, on our faith, and on our relationship with God; a journey through six weeks in which we may put some things down and take others up, or may set time aside for prayer and reflection, so that we may know ourselves better, and follow Jesus more faithfully.

Like the disciples on the mountainside, we long to be able to stay for ever in the joyful moments of our lives, but listening to Jesus, we know like them we must turn to our troubled and broken world, to be bringers of that divine light and life into its darkest places, and in the light of resurrection life and the coming kingdom, cast out all fear with God's perfect love, dispelling the gloom that overshadows and threatens to overwhelm so much that is good and beautiful and true in God's creation.

Only by listening, only by walking with Jesus, only by walking his path through Lent, do we come to the joy of Easter Day, ready once more to celebrate and rejoice at the new life that is offered to us through Christ's resurrection, and the hope and promise of our loving God's eternal reign.

Intercessions

Mighty and merciful one,
you have come to us in glory;
now we come to you in prayer, saying,
Lord, by your Spirit, grant what we ask.

We pray for your glorious creation. . . .
Stamp out fires of destruction,
drive away clouds of pollution,
and restore the beauty of this world.
Lord, by your Spirit, grant what we ask.

We pray for the body of Christ. . . .
Open our hearts in faith,
enlighten our minds with knowledge,
and strengthen us to proclaim the gospel.
Lord, by your Spirit, grant what we ask.

We pray for the people of all nations. . . .
Show the nations your vision of justice,
offer the leaders your mantle of wisdom,
and give the people your blessing of peace.
Lord, by your Spirit, grant what we ask.

We pray for those who are perishing. . . .
Feed those who are starving,
comfort those who are suffering,
and receive the dying into your arms.
Lord, by your Spirit, grant what we ask.

We pray for those whom we love. . . .
Bless our families, friends, and neighbours,
help them in times of trouble,
and be near when they are afraid.
Lord, by your Spirit, grant what we ask.

Holy One, make us ready for the day
when this world is transfigured,
transformed, made new—
when all things will shine
in the dazzling light of your glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn Christ, whose glory fills the skies

Blessing

Now go and tell the good news:
the Lord of life and light is with us;
Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

The very face of God shines upon you
with beauty, blessing, and peace.