

Every year on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany, we read an account of the Transfiguration. Epiphany is the season when we remember and review the ways God's glory shines forth in the world. The Transfiguration is one of the supreme examples of God's glory shining forth through Jesus Christ. Therefore, we use it to close the season of Epiphany every year.

This year we read Mark's version of the Transfiguration.

For Jesus' disciples, it's not a moment too soon. They needed this vision of the Transfiguration, this vision of Christ in his glory. Because I imagine they were depressed by recent events.

Mark basically divides his Gospel into two parts. In the first half of the gospel, the basic question is, "Who is this Jesus?" Mark tells us who he is, the Christ, the Messiah, God's savior. In the past couple of weeks we've heard that the demons know who Jesus is. But the people and the disciples are not sure. 'Who is this?' they ask time and time again.

But in the middle of the Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" He gets a variety of answers.

But then he asks his disciples, "But who do you say that I am."

And Peter jumps out there and says, "You're the Messiah, the Christ, God's anointed servant."

And that's the end of the first half of Mark. Now the disciples know who Jesus is.

But the next section focuses on another question. And that question is basically a follow up question. OK, you know Jesus is the Messiah. But what does it mean that he is the Messiah? What kind of Messiah is he?

And Jesus starts this section by telling his disciples that he has to undergo great suffering, and be killed, and on the third day rise again. We'll backtrack and hear this section in a couple of weeks.

And when Jesus says that his future involves a cross and death, Peter rebukes him. A true Messiah can't suffer and be killed. Surely not?

And Jesus rebukes Peter and says, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

In other words, he's saying, 'Peter, you may know that I am the Messiah. But you have no idea what me being Messiah means. If you think that I'm not supposed to suffer, than you're on Satan's side, not God's side.' Bummer, all the way 'round.

So I suspect that morale must have been pretty low for the disciples. They might have even been questioning whether or not Jesus was in his right mind. I can imagine the questions they might be asking: Is he suicidal? Does he have a death wish? Is he a couple of cans shy of a six pack? Surely no reasonable human being would be talking about getting killed and then being raised on the third day.

Which brings us to our Gospel lesson. Today's reading begins with the words, "Six days later." Six days after what? After Jesus saying he must suffer and die. The Transfiguration is God's answer to the disciples' questions. In a way, it's not a moment too soon for them.

Jesus has led three of his disciples up to the top of a mountain. And there he is transfigured before them. At the top of the mountain, Peter, James, and John, see the human Jesus transformed into something different, something more. They get a glimpse of what Jesus will look like after the resurrection. They see Jesus not only as a human but also as the second person of the Trinity, the Lamb of God who came down from heaven, and who will return to at God's right hand in glory. They see the glory of God shining forth from the person of Jesus Christ. The three disciples have an incredible experience of the reality of Jesus' nature, not only human, but divine as well.

So when they go to the top of the mountains, the disciples get a strong message. Their master isn't just an ordinary human being. Yes, he is Jesus, the son of Joseph. Yes, he's a carpenter from the little town of Nazareth. Yes, he's a human being just like the rest of them.

But there is more. In addition to all of these things, Jesus is also God's beloved Son. Jesus is the only begotten of the Father. God's very own glory shines forth from Jesus' body. God's glory is so apparent in the Transfigured Jesus that even Jesus' clothing is changed by the glory of God shining forth from within him.

Make no mistake. Mark isn't talking about Jesus getting lit up, getting illuminated, from the outside. God isn't shining a big spotlight from heaven on Jesus.

Instead, Mark uses a very specific word that we translate as 'Transfiguration.' The word is, "metemorphóthe."

In English, the word is metamorphosis. The change in Jesus is not some external, cosmetic change. The change in Jesus is a metamorphosis, the kind of change a caterpillar undergoes when it becomes a butterfly. The caterpillar and the butterfly are the same creature, yet the butterfly is a much more radiant and beautiful creature than the caterpillar.

Like the butterfly, Jesus is changed. God's glory doesn't shine on Jesus. God's glory shines from within Jesus.

God's glory shines so brightly in Jesus that even Jesus' clothes are changed. They become white. They become whiter, Mark says, than any earthly bleach could bleach them.

This change in Jesus, this foretaste of his Resurrected glory, is meant to give the disciples a clear message. This is not a guy who's a few cans short of a six pack. This is not a suicidal man with a death wish. Instead, this is a man who is a vessel of God's very glory. And if they don't get the message, God makes it even more explicit. There is a voice from the cloud, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

The implication is clear. If Jesus were just a regular man, then he'd be crazy to go to Jerusalem and die. But Jesus isn't just a regular man. He's the incarnate Son of God. Therefore, listen to him.

When he talks of his suffering and death, listen to him. That is his mission. That's what he has come to do.

Peter and the others are witnesses of God's glory shining forth from Jesus Christ. As apostles, they later carried that light to others. In their hearts they had a small piece of Jesus' glorious light. Through their lives and teaching, they spread that light to others. All of us are called to do the same.

There's an old story about a Sunday school teacher who asked her class, "What is a saint?" One child responded, "A saint is someone the light shines through." The teacher thought that the child was confused, and that the child was thinking not of human saints, but instead of the saints whose portraits were in the stained glass windows of the church. The teacher missed the whole point. Saints are people that the light shines through.

We're called to be stained glass windows, to let the light of God shine through us. We each give that light unique colors as it passes through us. Nevertheless, the light that shines through us comes not from us, but from God. The glory of Christ has shined forth from the holy mountain. It also shines in our hearts. Our job is to bring that light to others.

(In a few moments / At the 10:30 service) we will baptize Everett Jackson Sanford as the newest member of Christ's body. And we will give him a lit candle, a candle lighted from the Paschal candle, the candle that represents the light of Christ.

We will hand it to him, and tell him,
"Receive the light of Christ. Shine as his light in the world to the glory of God the Father."

You too have received the light of Christ.
May you shine with the radiance of Christ's glory.
May your life be a light to the world.