



# Weaving God's Promises

## LESSON 23

### The Transfiguration

#### Summary of Today's Story

On a trip to a high mountain, the disciples suddenly see Jesus "transfigured," changed from a person who is special but solely human to a clear and unmistakable incarnation of God.

As they try to deal with this revelation, God interrupts their distracted activity by saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved... Listen to him!"

#### Where You'll Find Today's Story

##### In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version* Bible.

**Matthew 17:1-9**

##### In Children's Bibles

If you plan to use a children's Bible for storytelling, write the page numbers of today's story in the space below.

##### In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's story is told in church on the following Sunday:

Year A: last Sunday after Epiphany

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## Weaving Our Story with the Biblical Story

We call this *the transfiguration of Jesus*, as if Jesus has been changed and suddenly becomes God. But this gospel is written from the disciples' point of view. Jesus is not transformed. The change is not a change in Jesus. The change is in his disciples. They are now ready to see him as he is, in his glory. Jesus is thus transformed, not by becoming who he is but by *showing* to his disciples who he in fact is and always was. They just hadn't seen him before. Jesus has opened their eyes.

And so we move closer to salvation as we begin to see God in Jesus. Jesus allows us to see him so that we can be drawn into him. But we need to be ready to see him by turning toward him. The disciples did this by going to a mountaintop to be alone with Jesus. Though sometimes divine revelation comes unexpectedly and on God's initiative, we can be ready to receive it – by praying and by allowing ourselves to be alone and vulnerable and open to God's presence.

When confronted with the divine presence in all its glory, we can feel frightened and lost. Notice how nervous Peter becomes. He needs to do something! He looks for tasks to keep himself busy. But soon God stills him, and the others, with this command, "This is my Son, the Beloved... Listen to him!"

Do we sometimes, like the disciples, let our own busy lives interfere with being open to God's presence and God's Spirit? Do we sometimes even purposely fill our lives with things to do in order to avoid encountering the Divine? Perhaps it would do well for us to take a few minutes from time to time for open reflection and contemplation – and let God enter into our hearts and our minds so we too can "listen to him."



## The Episcopal Thread

The Transfiguration is always the reading for the last Sunday after the Epiphany, just before Lent begins.

Hymns 129 through 138 in *The Hymnal 1982* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 1985) all tell of Christ manifesting his glory on the mountaintop.

The Church also recognizes August 6 as a Holy Day of The Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Transfiguration touches the mystical side of the Episcopal temperament, the side that honors the mystery of the word made flesh without seeking to comprehend all of its meaning or pretending

to understand all of its significance. (Given the Anglican spirit of moderation, we balance that with the practical side of the Episcopal temperament, which tells us, as Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.")

## MATTHEW 17:1-9

One day, Jesus wants to go for a walk into the mountains. It is a good day for a hike.

Jesus takes his closest friends with him. These are Peter and James, and James' brother John. It's just the four of them.

As the men head up the mountain, something strange happens. Jesus is changing. Peter, James and John move away from Jesus. Their eyes grow wide like owl's eyes. They are startled, maybe scared, and very confused. They don't know what to say. They just stare at the sight.

They look at Jesus' face. It is shining bright, like the sun. His face is dazzling bright. And his clothes also start to shine. His clothes become dazzling, blindingly white. The three friends can hardly stand to look at Jesus, so bright is he.

And then, while they are looking at Jesus and then looking away because of the brightness, suddenly two other men show up next to Jesus. The disciples know who these men are. They have heard about them many, many times in stories that their parents and teacher have told them while they were growing up.

*Moses and Elijah!* The two greatest men in their history! Moses and Elijah are here with them! Moses and Elijah start to talk with Jesus. And Jesus is talking with them.

Peter, James and John stand still, stunned. Then Peter has an idea. It's a funny idea, but maybe Peter doesn't know what he is talking about, so he says, "Hey, Jesus, this is very nice! Let's make a few tents for you all. I'll make one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!" And then he babbles on, "...and then, Jesus,

we can talk, and make plans, and..."

But while Peter is babbling away, something interrupts him. A bright cloud suddenly appears above them. The cloud casts a dark shadow on them. Out of the cloud comes a deep voice.

"This is my Son, the Beloved, and I am well pleased with him.

*Listen to him!*" Peter quiets down. "Listen to him!" God has just told him. "Stop talking!"

But all of the disciples hear the voice. They know who is talking to them – God!

In an instant, they fall down to the ground and cover their eyes. They are very afraid. They crouch and cower on the ground for what seems like forever. *What will God do to me?* they must wonder.

Then it is quiet. Peter, James and John feel a light touch on their shoulder. It is Jesus. Jesus says to them very gently, "You can get up now. Do not be afraid."

The friends look up. Jesus is smiling at them, with love in his eyes – and maybe a twinkle also. And he is alone. There is no one else there. It's just the four of them – and a good day for a hike.

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## **Weaving God's Beloved Community**

Perhaps when God's Beloved Community is fully realized, we would all see Jesus always transfigured and always recognized in his presence as God's Son, the Beloved. And we would always "listen to him" as God commanded.

But we would need to keep our hearts and minds open to flashes of divine revelation in our daily life. The good news is that we have help. Whereas the Israelites relied for guidance on Moses and Elijah, we have Jesus but also our modern prophets who preach God's justice to us all and advocate for large- scale social and institutional changes that would further God's Beloved Community. Who are they?

Topics that can be discussed with children:

Close your eyes and imagine Jesus as a person. Then try to imagine him still looking like Jesus but glowing and radiating light. Now picture that when somebody does a good deed, they also have a glow that comes from doing good. Picture how you might glow inside when you do something good for somebody.

Think of somebody who loves and cares for you – a parent or sibling, a teacher, a neighbor. Name something good that you have learned from one of them, and how they have shown God's love to you.