



## Sermon

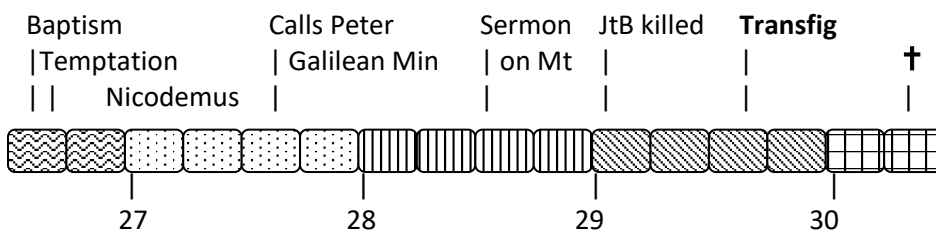
### ***Changed from Glory into Glory***

**Matthew 17:1-9**

8<sup>th</sup> March 2020

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It is easy to get muddled with the order of events in Jesus' ministry because of the way we tell them in the church calendar. The events of three years are overlaid onto a single church year. We have just heard the account of the transfiguration. Here is an approximate timeline of Jesus' ministry:



There is no suggestion that the transfiguration occurred during the 40 days in the wilderness. Well why read about the Transfiguration now in Lent? Because Lent isn't about following Jesus through his wilderness testing, it is a preparation for Good Friday and Easter. The Transfiguration is placed here in the Lectionary as an encouragement as we use Lent as a time of spiritual discipline. At the heart of the old collect for this Sunday was:

“...Grant that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory...”

It is set before us as an encouragement to bear our cross because of the glory of Jesus who said we need to carry our cross daily. It is set before us as an encouragement that God will continue the process of sanctification by which he changes us to be more like his Son. It is an encouragement to remember that we will be made like him.

### ***The Transfiguration***

Peter had realized (by revelation) that Jesus was the Messiah he made his declaration of who Jesus was: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,”<sup>1</sup> Jesus responded by telling them of the coming crucifixion and that

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16:16

his followers must bear their cross daily. A week later he took his inner group of disciples up the mountain where these events occurred.

But the transfiguration made it clear that Jesus was not just a man appointed to a role, but that he was and is God. He shone with divine glory and again there was the confirming witness of the truly awesome audible voice of God that Jesus is his beloved son and that the Father is well pleased with him. The disciples then and now are to listen to him.

Moses is obviously associated with the Law of God which he received and gave it to the people of Israel. Elijah is regarded as the chief of the prophets. Their presence represents all the revelation of God to that time (the Law and the Prophets). That revelation pointed to Jesus and was fulfilled by him even as he said in the Sermon on the Mount. This man is not just another teacher or prophet.

## Jesus' Glory

Jesus was transfigured by God. It is not something he did for himself. He was seen with divine glory - his own glory which he laid aside for the incarnation. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as light. This is not "Persil washes whiter" or "Cleans like a white tornado." The description is of light blazing from his face and shining from his clothes.

When John wrote the account of his vision on Patmos (The Book of Revelation) he described the glorified Jesus appearing to him with his face shining like the sun in all its brilliance. He wrote that when he saw him he fell at his feet as though dead. Here too, Jesus told him not to be afraid.

## The Father's Glory

When God the Father spoke, a cloud enveloped them. But this is not a normal cloud. It is bright or radiant. The word can mean composed of light. It was a cloud of light. That manifestation of God's presence was reported in the Old Testament.

When the Tabernacle was completed, "the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."<sup>2</sup>

In the same way, the glory of God appeared as a shining cloud, called the Shekinah at the opening of Solomon's temple. 1 Kings 8:10-11 records that "...the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." [ESV]

When God's presence is so strongly evident, humans fall down on the ground. It was so that day when the Temple was opened – the priests could not stand - it was so when the radiant cloud enveloped the mountain and they heard the voice – they fell down on the ground and they were greatly afraid.

God making his presence known in a radiant cloud was well known to Jews. So here, the Father speaks from the radiant cloud and identifies Jesus: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."

This account appears in Matthew, Mark and Luke and is probably behind the comment in John's gospel, "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."<sup>3</sup>

Peter refers to it in his second Epistle saying,

**2 Peter 1:16-18** We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 40:34-35

<sup>3</sup> John 1:14

This is a well-attested account of an extraordinary event. Peter tells us it is not made up but he was an eye-witness to it. We need to take seriously the claims of the apostles. Peter was rebuked or at least interrupted by the voice of the Father when he was proposing to build three tabernacles or shelters one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Why? Perhaps because this would be to make them equal significant spiritual humans. But Jesus is not equal with Moses or Elijah, he is God incarnate.

How often do people seek to reduce who Jesus is and present him in acceptable terms to their human thinking? Peter could say, I did that and I was rebuked by God. It was terrifying. Don't minimize who Jesus is.

God commanded that they listen to Jesus. We too need to attend to his words and his ways. Not to try to conform him to our ideas but respond humbly that we might repent and believe.

### **We are to be changed**

This word, "transfigure" used of the change in Jesus' appearance is *metamorphoo* in Greek – from which we get metamorphosis. We use that word for the astonishing transformation that occurs when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. Paul twice uses the same word about the transformation believers experience as a result of regeneration.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.<sup>4</sup>

When Moses had been in God's presence on Mt Sinai, he came down again with his face shining. Because with time, this reflected glory faded he veiled his face, so the people would not see the fading of the radiance. That is what Paul is referring to the other time he uses the word *metamorphoo*:

- But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Remember Jesus said that he is the Light of the world and then declared that his followers were to be the light of the world. How can that be? Paul says we are transfigured into his likeness with ever increasing glory – from glory to glory.

Mother Teresa shone with the light and love of Christ – this is her prayer:

Dear Jesus, help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with your Spirit and life. Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly that our lives may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through us and be so in us that every soul we come into contact with may feel your presence in our soul. Let them look up and see no longer us but only Jesus.

Stay with us and then we shall begin to shine as you shine; so to shine as to be a light to others; the light, O Jesus, shall be all from you, none of it will be ours: it will be you, shining on others through us. Let us thus praise you in the way you love best by shining on those around us. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 12:1-2

<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor 3