



**THE TRANSFIGURATION  
OF OUR LORD  
SUNDAY, AUGUST 9 ,2020**

**OLD TESTAMENT EXODUS: 34:29-35**

Here is the first mention of Moses' face shining. The text implies that something of God's glory has rubbed off on Moses, and that God's glory is visible in Moses' face. But Moses is unaware that he has absorbed something of God's glory.

Moses' shining face serves several purposes:

- For one thing, it makes it clear to the people of Israel that Moses has been in the presence of Yahweh.
- Second, it serves notice to the people of Israel that Yahweh has chosen Moses to serve as Yahweh's agent—the one who will communicate to the Israelites the word that Yahweh gives him. Yahweh has given Moses the commandments, and Moses is now ready to reveal to the people what he has received.
- Third, Moses' shining face will serve as an antecedent for Jesus' transfiguration.

It is not difficult to understand why the people were afraid to come near Moses with his shining face. Yahweh had earlier instructed Moses to warn the people not to climb Mount Sinai or even to touch it, because anyone who even touched it would be put to death (19:12).

Moses did not wear the veil when in the presence of Yahweh, nor did he wear it while speaking to the people. It is only after he is finished speaking to the people that he dons the veil. It seems that the absence of the veil (Moses' shining face) signifies that Moses is acting in his official role as a mediator between Yahweh and Israel. If this is the intent, then the veil indicates that Moses is off-duty—not acting in his official capacity as Yahweh's spokesman.

This story provides the background for Jesus transfiguration, which resulted in Jesus' face shining and his clothing becoming dazzling white. It is no accident that

the transfiguration took place on a high mountain, just as Moses' encounter with God took place on Mount Sinai.

### **EPISTLE: 2 Peter 1:13-21**

In this scripture reading, Peter is addressing the problem of false teachers who are denying Christ's Second Coming and are accusing the apostles of fomenting "cunningly devised fables". This heresy would remove an important incentive for Christians to live moral and ethical lives. If Christ isn't coming again—if there is nothing beyond this life—people would be less motivated to live the kind of life that Christ would have them live.

The scripture reading grounds the expectation of the return of our Lord in the experience of Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. That expectation is understood as having significant daily behavioral consequences which (ought to) distinguish Christians from an unholy world.

### **THE HOLY GOSPEL: Luke 9:28-36**

The emphasis throughout the episode is on the dazzling attestation of Jesus' identity. The change in the appearance of his face is reminiscent of Moses' face becoming radiant upon experiencing the presence. But the description of the change in Jesus' clothes distinguishes him from Moses significantly: Jesus' clothes become "dazzling white". Jesus' transformed appearance is not merely because he is experiencing God's glory (like Moses) but rather because he is the very source of divine glory. The point is made explicit when the three disciples are said to see Jesus' glory in verse 32.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah in verse 30 adds to the attestation of Jesus' identity. The two are commonly interpreted as embodying "the Law and the Prophets". The risen Jesus himself will later assert that Moses and the prophets point toward him. Luke tells us in our scene that Moses and Elijah "were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem", surely meant to anticipate Jesus' teaching that he is the ultimate fulfillment of scripture. Their appearance points to Jesus fulfilling specific prophecies associated with them as well as the more general notion of Jesus as the fulfillment of all of scripture.

The most dramatic attestation of Jesus' identity comes with the voice of God in verse 35. The basic message echoes the divine words spoken at Jesus' baptism, but there are notable differences:

- The message at Jesus' baptism was spoken directly to Jesus ("You are my son"), but here the message is for the disciples' ears ("This is my son").
- At the baptism the adjective describing Jesus' sonship was "beloved" -- again, a message directed at Jesus -- but here it is "chosen," further describing Jesus' relationship to God from the disciples' perspective.
- The message of Jesus' sonship here is given an imperative implication: "Listen to him!" Jesus' sonship is not a matter of abstract theology but requires the obedient response of the disciples to Jesus' message
- Whereas the voice at the baptism came "from heaven," here it comes from the very cloud in which the disciples are already enveloped. This suggests a rather intense experience of God's close presence! It also is again reminiscent of Moses' own experience of God's presence at Sinai.

One of the significant details of the story that is unique to Luke's account of the transfiguration is that it occurs in the context of prayer. Prayer is, in fact, a significant theme throughout Luke's writings. Luke is the only Gospel author to tell us of Jesus praying on other momentous occasions, too:

Following his baptism, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus while he is praying (3:21-22); Jesus' selection of the twelve apostles occurs after spending an entire night in prayer (6:12-16); Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah occurs in the context of Jesus' praying (9:18-20). Other key places where Luke shows Jesus praying include in the garden before his arrest (22:39-46) and on the cross (23:34, 46).

A point that we may especially observe in the transfiguration account, is that prayer for Jesus involved a dramatic encounter of God's presence. Prayer was not merely speaking words to God but was a truly spiritual experience of God. Lest we think that such a possibility of divine encounter is limited to Jesus, we see the same thing with a variety of characters in Acts, Luke's second volume.

Thus while we should not expect to have experiences like that of Jesus in the transfiguration on a regular basis in prayer, the transfiguration along with these other scenes should challenge us to seek something higher in prayer than speaking

mere words in the hope that God might possibly somehow listen to us. Prayer should be seeking the powerful presence of God in our lives. We must also remember, with the disciples in this scene, that dramatic experiences of Christ's glory come with the call to listen and follow in costly obedience.