

Worship at home
February 14, 2021



<https://eeparchy.com/2020/07/20/transfiguration-of-our-lord-jesus-christ/>

Hymn: #186 “Swiftly pass the clouds of glory”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-EQz8PWL1Y>

(Westminster Presbyterian Church, Buffalo)

Call to worship:

The Lord is king! Let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!
Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
The heavens proclaim his righteousness;
and all the people behold his glory.
Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous,
and give thanks to his holy name!¹

Prayers of adoration and confession:

God of grace and glory,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
to this worried world,
through the witness of your servants
you reveal your presence in radiant glory and in gentle whispers,
on mountain tops and in shadowed valleys,
in classrooms and hospital beds,

¹ Psalm 97:1, 2, 6, 12

in homes and churches,
in the quiet of nature and on busy streets.
Yours is the presence that pushes past our fear to calm us;
yours is the love that transforms our doubt with reassurance.
We come to dwell in your goodness
and offer you the praise you deserve.

God of mercy and forgiveness,
we confess that many things keep us from trusting fully in your love.
We are often distracted by our own desires and disappointments.
We cling to anger and resentment.
We fear for the future rather than seek signs of hope.
Forgive us.
Shine your love upon us so that your glory may be seen in us,
and give us courage to follow Jesus wherever he leads,
for we pray in his name. Amen.²

Hymn #198 “We have come at Christ’s own bidding”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEs5uT9USi0>

God’s word read and interpreted:

READ MARK 8:27-33; 9:2-8.

² adapted from worship resource for February 14, 2021 available at <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

Embracing the necessary season

1. The story of Jesus' transfiguration is what's known as a theophany. It's a revelation of God to humans. There are many parallels between this event and the stories of Moses' experience of a theophany on Mt. Sinai when he received the Law, summarized by the Ten Commandments. Moses experience is found in the book of the Exodus and especially in chapters 24 and 34. Although the details might not always follow linearly, in our attempt to interpret Jesus' transfiguration it's worthwhile to note the similarities:

Moses	Jesus
Ascended Mt. Sinai and entered into the presence of God 6 days after "the glory of the Lord settled..." (Ex. 24:15-18)	Ascended unknown mountain 6 days after Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Messiah. The anointed Saviour who stands in the presence of God.
Took with him 3 named people: Aaron (the high priest), Nadab and Abihu (brothers).	Took with him 3 people: Peter (the first of the succession of Christian priests), James and John (brothers)
Cloud representing God's presence/glory engulfed Moses and the mountain top.	Cloud representing God's presence/glory overshadowed them.
God spoke from the cloud.	The divine Voice spoke from the cloud.
God gave commandments. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses was given words to express the polity of the nation. • Words that would shape and identify the people of God. 	The divine Voice commanded that Peter, James, and John listen to Jesus, the Beloved Son of God. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter, James, John and hence the kingdom of God are given Jesus, the Word made flesh. • Jesus, both in his person and in his words and commandments <i>is</i> the polity that shapes the community of God.
Moses' face reflected the light of God.	Jesus transfigured/metamorphosized such that didn't just reflect the glory of God; he was the glory of God.

Moses was the founding shepherd and policy maker of Israel. He led the flock through the Exodus from Egypt and solidified their identity in the wilderness. Jesus is the Shepherd and policy maker of the kingdom of God. He will lead the flock through the Exodus from sin and death and will solidify their identity in this age between the Resurrection and his coming again.

Then there's Elijah. If Moses was the founding shepherd of Israel, Elijah was viewed as the prophet of Israel's restoration. The scriptural tradition holds that Elijah would return as harbinger of the promised Messiah just as John the Baptist appeared proclaiming the advent of Jesus. If John the Baptist fulfilled the role of Elijah, then Jesus of Nazareth, who fulfills and surpasses the ministry of Moses, must truly be the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

The third aspect to consider is Jesus' robes. White robes are the garment worn in the book of the Revelation by those who have been executed for their Christian faith. Their faith is proven true at the fulfillment of salvation history when Christ returns, heaven and earth are wed, the dead are raised and the martyrs are vindicated. Here we see Jesus wearing the robe of the vindicated martyrs. His resurrection and subsequent ascension proved the validity of his identity as the Messiah and the Son of the Living God.

With this image of Jesus in his glory, it's not hard to understand Peter's confusion and desire to preserve the moment! This theophany reveals Jesus' true self and his vindication. It's easy to then fail to hear completely Jesus' proclamation of what must happen between now and his resurrection.

2. Wednesday is Ash Wednesday which marks the beginning of the season of Lent. Today, the Sunday of the Transfiguration marks the end of the ordinary season of Epiphany. Today we begin to shift our contemplations from the cradle to the cross. It can be a shock to our systems to turn from the hope and the promise of Christmas and face the darkness and violence of the cross. Thus far in our study of Mark's gospel we've encountered Jesus proclaiming the hope-filled news that the kingdom of God has come near; we've seen him heal all manner of physical illness; we've seen him restore people's emotional and mental states; we've seen him walk on water and feed thousands of souls; we've even seen his apostles and disciples continue his ministry in his name and his absence. We have seen the good news of Christmas come to life in the ministry and teaching of Jesus. Through the witness of the apostles, we've seen this theophany, the vindicated martyr-Messiah, the glory of God on earth. Let's just camp here. Let's stay in the glory of this moment. Let's not go down the mountain.

Yet that is precisely what the season of Lent calls us to do.

3. It is, after all, for this reason that Jesus came. He sacrificed the glory of his union with the Father to embrace our humanity and redeem us. By the cross he fought our battle with the devil. By the cross he confronted the final enemy (death) on our behalf. By the cross he forgives sin.

Christmas is only good news because of Good Friday.

However, without Easter, Good Friday would have been the ignoble end of a failed prophet. By the empty tomb Jesus gives life in the renewed state of grace; the

kingdom of God. By the empty tomb Jesus won the battle against the devil, against all that seeks to destroy our bodies, minds, and spirits; against death itself.

Christmas is only good news because of Good Friday.

Good Friday is only good news because of Easter Sunday.

However, without Jesus' Ascension and without Pentecost, the empty tomb would be mere propaganda for the blindly optimistic. By his ascension to the throne of heaven and earth and by the Holy Spirit warming our hearts and speaking through the written Word of God, Jesus continues to watch over, rule, shape, and equip his people to get to work making visible the kingdom of God.

The cradle of Christmas is a symbol of good news
only because of the cross of Good Friday.

The cross of Good Friday is a symbol of good news
only because of the empty tomb of Easter.

The empty tomb of Easter is a symbol of good news
only because of the throne on which Jesus now sits,
because of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us
by our baptism in the Triune Name,
and because of the community of disciples willing to pick up their own crosses
and listen to the Messiah; to hear and to obey the man who was born in
a stable in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph.

4. If the season of Epiphany is intended to help us contemplate the implications of the Christmas, Lent focusses us on the necessity and cost of the cross. And the Transfiguration of Jesus helps us move from the one towards the other. By the

transfiguration we receive the assurance that our faith is real. Here we see Jesus acting like a Moses, yet in ways that surpass Moses. We see him in the presence of Elijah. We see him wearing the robes of the vindicated martyr. We see him not reflecting the light of God, but physically radiating the light of God from within. And, in case there was any doubt, we hear, with Peter, James, and John the divine Voice that this man is the Beloved, the Son of the Living God.

Yet it does raise at least three questions of application:

- (i) Am I willing to believe that Jesus is *the* Messiah *on his terms*?
- (ii) Am I willing to believe that his agenda, his ways, and his means, while not always safe are ultimately good?
- (iii) Am I prepared to hear and abide by his words and commandments, whatever the cost?

These will be our guiding questions as we look from the cradle to the cross through this necessary season of Lent.

For the glory of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:

God of life, God of love:

You created us and set us in relationship with each other—
in families and neighbourhoods, communities and countries, cultures and nations.

We give you thanks for all the supportive relationships
which bring meaning and encouragement to our lives,
and have meant so much in times of isolation.

Help us contribute what we can to sustain the wellbeing of our community
for all who call it home.

God, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

God of our faith & our future,

there are so many pressures on homes and families today.

Draw near to those who are struggling in economic difficulty
and those burdened by the challenges to health and happiness this winter.

Work with parents and children, married partners, and next-door neighbours
who face conflict their relationships

to create solutions that express mutual respect and resolve tension.

Help our congregation support families, whatever their size or situation,
as well as people living on their own, to know your love.

God, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

God of mercy and forgiveness,

You call us to live together in peace and unity.

We pray for our neighbourhoods and our nation.

Where people are divided and bitterness turns into resentment,
show us how to work for reconciliation.

As the pandemic stretches on,

we pray for all those whose skill and dedication is needed
to support our common life.

Wherever we can, may we offer words of encouragement and appreciation
so others know much they matter to you and to us all.

God, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Today we give thanks for our church family

and for the years of worship and witness offered here.

So much has changed for us over these past few months

and we pray you will bless our leaders
who have to think carefully and creatively so congregational life continues.

We remember those of our number in need of your special attention today...

(Hold a silence)

Guide us all with your wisdom and insight
so we find ways to reach out to each other in support and friendship.
Open our eyes to opportunities to reach out beyond our own fellowship
as agents of your healing and hope
for we offer ourselves to you in Jesus' name in the words he taught us to pray:

The Lord's Prayer³

Hymn #356 "You, Lord, are both lamb and shepherd"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJQtcRJSU3c>

(Clarkstown Reformed Church)

Charge and Benediction:

Go now, and speak of what you have seen of God's glory.
Do not cling to the holy moments
when heaven overshadows you,
but as the Lord lives, listen to Christ and follow him
from the places of revelation
to the places of mission.

And may God shine the light of glory into your hearts.
May Christ be with you and never leave you.
And may the Spirit renew the image of God within you.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
.....*In the name of Christ. Amen.*⁴

³ adapted from worship resource for February 14, 2021 available at <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

⁴ Nathan Nettleton, <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/01/benediction-transfiguration-sunday.html>