

Year A Sunday Last before Lent, Transfiguration. 15 February 2026

Exodus 24:12-18. 2Peter1: 16-21. Matthew 17: 1-9.

This year, the season of Epiphany has only five Sundays. The length of this season is determined by the date when Easter falls. The earlier Easter falls the shorter the season of Epiphany is. Each priest can choose whether to use the readings for the numbered Sunday in Epiphany – this would be the fifth Sunday after Epiphany – or to use the readings for the Sunday Last before Lent, when the Gospel readings tell the story of the Transfiguration of Christ. As I hope you were alert enough this morning to note, as usual my preference is to use the Transfiguration readings. The Transfiguration is a pivotal moment in Jesus' ministry for more than one reason. Firstly, it is where Jesus understands he must now face and travel towards Jerusalem. In order to complete his mission, he must go to the seat of power, both religious and political, to pronounce the Good News and show through words and action that God's kingdom was available to all who truly desired it. Secondly, Jesus was drawn to the mountain to pray to God, to be certain of his calling; and God reciprocated with affirmation and a communion with the most revered Hebrew prophets, Moses and Elijah.

Our reading from the Hebrew Scriptures recounts the first time Moses was invited up God's mountain, which we understand is Mount Sinai, to be given tablets of stone with the law and the commandments for the instruction of the Israelites. Today that mountain is also known as Jabal Musa, or Mount Moses. It is 2,285m, (7,497 feet) high, with the ancient monastery of St Catherine at its base. It is in the southern Sinia peninsula in Egypt. At that height it is not a surprise to read that the mountain was shrouded in cloud. God told Moses to go to the mountain and wait there. On Moses seventh day on the mountain he was called by God out of the cloud and Moses entered the cloud and climbed further up the mountain. Altogether Moses spent forty days and forty nights on the mountain. Hopefully forty days and forty nights gives you the link to Jesus' wilderness experience before his ministry commenced. Forty days and forty nights may also remind you of how many days we have been in cloud so far this year!

But also note that from below the Israelites experience was quite different. The glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain.

Our gospel reading is also about mountains, clouds, and meeting God. On that mountain top Jesus was transfigured, his face shone like the sun and his clothes became bright as light. We use the word transfigured but seldom spend any time thinking what it really means. In the Biblical sense it means to be changed into something more beautiful, more heavenly, more charged with God's spirit. No wonder his face shone like the sun. No wonder his clothes became as bright as light. And as if to accentuate this divine transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared and were talking with Jesus. We are told that a bright cloud overshadowed Peter, James and John, and they heard God's voice from within the cloud. God said, "This is my Son, the beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" No wonder they all fell to the ground, quaking with fear. What had started out as a normal walk with Jesus away from the crowds for what I am sure Peter, James and John thought would be a time for rest and maybe some words of wisdom by Jesus, turned into an encounter with God.

There are many ideas as to why Jesus took the three disciples with him to experience the transfiguration. Was it to confirm beyond any doubt that Jesus was the Messiah? Was it to give them the courage and resilience to carry on after Jesus' death, having had this 'high point' in their memory banks to fall back on when times got tough? One theologian suggests Jesus wanted them to practice 'letting go', having seen and experienced his transfiguration, Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone about the vision until after he had been raised from the dead.

Our reading from Peter's second epistle gives us a unique insight into his reflections on the experience of the Transfiguration. He was clear that Jesus received honour and glory from God, and it confirmed the prophetic message that Jesus had been teaching them, and that true prophecy came upon men and women moved by the Holy Spirit.

As I said in my introduction, the Transfiguration is a pivotal moment in Jesus ministry. I have a real sense that Jesus needed that time with God, to be clear that turning to and journeying towards Jerusalem was what he was to do. And I firmly have a sense that the Transfiguration was a way of equipping Jesus for

this journey to the Cross. A time of intimate communion with Moses and Elijah, as well as affirmation by God, that his path was blessed, even if it was to be one that led to his passion and death.

I think that these stories may also say something of our lives. Most often we may have a sense of God, but God is partially hidden from us, and we see through a glass darkly, as Paul describes it (in the KJV anyway). I have sat on mountain tops and felt closer to God than in some churches. But, then again, I have sat in a time of Christian meditation in an office building and felt closer to God than in many other places. You may be relieved to know that we do not need to physically walk up or climb mountains to have communion with God. But, like a walk up a mountain, you do need to set aside time, to prepare, and make some effort to become still to receive a sense of God's love and presence washing over you. I cannot guarantee that you will be glowing as brightly as Jesus did, but you may have a real sense of inner peace, or a sense of affirmation for a decision to be made, that will give you a glow, a glow of knowing God's love for you. For you are a child of God and there is nothing you can do to make God love you more.

So, put away your walking boots, your waterproofs and Kendal Mint Cake (other sugary foods are available) and think about where you may find communion with God, as we prepare to journey with Christ to the foot of the Cross over the next six weeks. What time might you set aside?

In that time, may you know God's blessings and peace.

I want to end with a poem in Sonnet format by the fabulously talented and bearded Malcolm Guite, called, 'The Transfiguration'.

The Transfiguration by Malcolm Guite (b.1957)¹

For that one moment, 'in and out of time',
On that one mountain where all moments meet,
The daily veil that covers the sublime
In darkling glass fell dazzled at his feet.
There were no angels full of eyes and wings

¹ From 'Sounding the Seasons (enlarged edition): One Hundred and Ten Sonnets for the Christian Year', Canterbury Press. 2024 ISBN 978-1786225634.

Just living glory full of truth and grace.
The Love that dances at the heart of things
Shone out upon us from a human face
And to that light the light in us leaped up,
We felt it quicken somewhere deep within,
A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope
Trembled and tingled through the tender skin.
Nor can this blackened sky, this darkened scar
Eclipse that glimpse of how things really are.