

*This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him.* I speak to you in the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN

I am preaching today about the mystery of the transfiguration of Jesus, the Beloved Son of God. As I do this I am reminded of the woman who went off to church one morning leaving her sick husband at home in bed. When she returned home sometime later he was feeling better and was anxious to hear about her morning. He asked – *Honey, what did the preacher preach about today?* – She thought for a moment and replied – *I don't know, he never really said.*

So, just in case anyone asks you about today's sermon, I want you to be able to tell them that the sermon today was about the mystery of the transfiguration of Jesus, the Beloved Son of God. If they press for any more details, you have my permission to simply shrug your shoulders and say – *It's a mystery.* That's pretty much the sermon in a nutshell.

The transfiguration of Jesus is an odd story. It does not fit into any neat categories. It is not like any other miracle story in the gospels because this is not a miracle performed by Jesus, but rather it is a miracle that happens to Jesus. The text itself records that the even at the time Peter, and James, and John were confused by what they had just witnessed. The early church wasn't sure what to do with this story either. The Feast of the Transfiguration didn't even become a feast of the Church until the 11th Century in the Eastern Church and not until the 15th Century in the Western Church. Even today biblical scholars still aren't exactly sure what to make of it. They still debate this event with a broad range of opinion. Some believe it simply didn't happen, some believe it was a vision or dream of the Apostle Peter, some believe that the event really happened but it is recorded in the wrong place in the Gospel. They make the claim that this is really a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus - not a pre-resurrection appearance. Of course, there are the majority of the others who hold that in fact there is no mistake, this event really did happen, and it belongs precisely where it is in the text. Nevertheless, regardless of how we account for it – it is an odd story – it is a mystery.

When we hear the story of the transfiguration at this time of year, it can only mean one thing. It means that we have come to the end of the season of Epiphany. It can only mean that Ash Wednesday and Lent are only three days away. No matter however long, or short the season of epiphany is, the story of the Transfiguration is always told on the Last Sunday. Throughout this Season of Epiphany, which now draws to a close, the church places before us every Sunday the great mystery of Incarnation, Jesus being completely human and completely God. In many ways the season of Epiphany is the Church's attempt to help us comprehend the incomprehensible, to understand that which is beyond understanding, to grasp the mystery that is beyond our reach.

Each one of the amazing Epiphany stories points us toward this mystery:

- First the magi, those astrologers from a distant land, they were not part of the chosen covenant community, yet they followed a star, find the baby Jesus, and bow down and worship him.
- Next John the Baptist, stands by the banks of the Jordan River, and recognizes Jesus as the One who is to Come after him, the Messiah of God.
- Next Jesus begins calling disciples and it is Andrew who recognizes God in Jesus and tells the others, *We have found the Messiah.*
- Next we meet Simeon and Anna who are praying night and day in the Temple for the coming of the reign of God. And as Jesus is presented by his parents in the Temple they both suddenly realize, that in this child, their prayers have been answered.

In these Epiphany the true identity of Jesus is being revealed. All of these people, in all of these stories, had the ability to look at Jesus, and see God. Of all the Epiphany stories, perhaps this morning's story is the most explicit. It is the Season finale, the big finish. For Matthew, mountains have great significance. For him, mountains are the place where earth and heaven meet. It is on a mountain that Jesus goes to pray, it is on a mountain that Jesus preaches his inaugural sermon, it is on a mountain that he feeds the multitudes, it is on a mountain that Jesus is tempted and tested, it is on a mountain that he is crucified, and it is on a mountain that he ascends into heaven following the resurrection.

It is not an accident that Jesus is transfigured on a mountain. His face was made to shine like the sun and his clothes became dazzling white. Peter, James, and John are witnesses of this event, along with Moses and Elijah who are also part of this Epiphany. This event clears up any remaining doubt about the identity of Jesus, God speaks these words and proclaims, *This is my Son, the Beloved son, listen to him.* It is the very same phrase that is spoken by God at the baptism of Jesus.

Listen to him: Listen to him when he speaks of loving God, loving our neighbor, loving our enemies; Listen to him when he speaks of doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God; Listen to him when he invites us to follow him, to trust him, and promises to be with us always - even to the end of the age.

I am preaching today about the mystery of the transfiguration of Jesus, the beloved Son of God. We are the heirs of that same great mystery.

I speak to you in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN