

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins - Curate

Scripture: Luke 9:28-43

Who is Jesus?

This morning's Gospel reading is a record of a most extraordinary event - the Transfiguration. The word transfiguration (from the Latin *transfiguratio*) refers to the "remarkable transformation that once took place in the appearance of Jesus." The three synoptic Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke, all mention the Transfiguration and so the obvious question to ask is: "Why did the event take place?"

In order for us to understand why, we need to look at the background to the story. In Luke Chapters 8 and 9, the central issue of those chapters is: Who is Jesus? We see this question asked three times in these two chapters.

- The first time the question is asked is in Luke 8:22-28. Jesus has just walked on the water and calmed the raging storm. And in Luke 8:25 the disciples ask the question: "*Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.*"
- The second time the question is asked is in Luke 9:7-9. Jesus and his disciples had been performing marvelous miracles – driving out demons and curing the sick and this comes to the attention of the local ruler Herod the Tetrarch. St Luke records Herod saying: "*I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?*"
- And the third time this question is asked is in Luke 9:18-20. Jesus is alone with his disciples at prayer and asks them this question: "*Who do the crowds say I am?*" *They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "The Messiah of God."*

I believe the Transfiguration took place **because Almighty God wanted, once and for all, to answer the question: Who is Jesus?** God the Father himself answers this all important question with the simple and clear words: "***This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!***" (Luke 9:35) Jesus took the three disciples - Peter, James and John to a mountain – which tradition says very well may be Mount Hermon – right near Caesarea Philippi – the scene where Peter proclaimed Jesus the Christ, the Messiah – the Son of the Living God.

We have set the background, so now let us look at the Transfiguration in more detail

The Transfiguration

At the Transfiguration, **three significant events occurred:**

- Jesus' earthly appearance was transformed.
- Moses and Elijah appeared with him on the mountain and
- God the Father spoke to the disciples

Let us look at the **first significant event - the actual Transfiguration**

The Scripture tells us "*Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.*" (Luke 9:28-29)

As we saw earlier in Luke Chapters 8 and 9, a great many words have been said about who Jesus is. But

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now God Almighty, Himself, reveals to all mankind through Peter, James and John, something very visual about who Jesus is; **His glory**. At the Transfiguration, God the Father gives the disciples **clear visual evidence of who Jesus is**. He shows them the Glory of His Christ; the glory of the Son of God. He shows them Jesus transfigured – engulfed in “dazzling white.” In today’s Old Testament lesson taken from the Book of Exodus – we read that Moses witnessed the Glory of God – and because of it – Moses’ face was absolutely shining. Just being near His glory was enough to cause Moses to wear a veil before others. How awesome!

The **second significant event** at the Transfiguration is the **appearance of Moses and Elijah**. Luke’s Gospel records it like this: “*Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*” (Luke 9:30-31)

I find it fascinating that the Greek word used for Jesus’ departure is ἔξοδον (exodon) from which we get the word “Exodus.” In the Gospels, there are, I believe direct, distinct, reminders for us of the first Exodus, when Moses brought the children of Israel out of the slavery of Egypt. And that exodus was remembered each year by the killing of a Passover Lamb. The new exodus – the freeing of God’s people from the slavery of sin - would come with Jesus’ impending death on the Cross and his resurrection in Jerusalem.

So, who is Jesus? Clearly, **Jesus is the Passover Lamb of the New Exodus**, and the one who was pointed to in the Holy Scripture account of the first Exodus.

Moses and Elijah’s presence represent the Law and the Prophets. I find it significant that in verse 36, after God the Father has spoken, Moses and Elijah disappear and Jesus alone remains.

It could most certainly be said that the Law and the Prophets have served their turn and pass away. Now, He, who is the fulfillment of both the Law and the Prophets, alone remains.

Who is Jesus? He is the one who fulfills the Old Covenant and brings us the New Covenant. On that mountain, that day, a new era was on the horizon. The Old Covenant, represented by Moses and Elijah was going to pass away and the new Covenant was going to come, through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This new covenant, the relationship with Jesus – and the partaking in that New Covenant through His Body and Blood is the most precious gift that we, believers of who Jesus is, have been given.

The **third significant event** that happened at the Transfiguration was **God the Father’s answer to this question: Who is Jesus?**

Luke’s Gospel says: “*While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”* **When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone**” (Luke 9:34-36)

It is most interesting that when God the Father speaks, He simply says these words, “*This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!*” **So -who is Jesus? - Jesus is the Son of God!**

I believe that in the church today – **the major divisive issue is not human sexuality**, although it is a very important issue that remains in constant debate. **The major issue is: which Jesus do you serve?**
Who is Jesus?

- Is Jesus the Son of God - that God the Father proclaimed on the mountain that day, or is He someone else?

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- Is Jesus the one who required repentance for sin – and then provided forgiveness – or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus the one who sacrificed Himself – on the hard wood of the cross – so that “whoever believes in Him – shall not perish – but have eternal life?” Or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who touched hearts and cured bodies and souls of people who have faith in Him – or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets – or is He someone else who turns a blind eye at the Law that His Father gave to Moses?
- Is Jesus someone who believes every word that is in the Scriptures – as the written Word of God – or is He someone else?
- Is Jesus someone who invites people to come to Him and be transformed – never to be the same again – healed of affliction, disease, addictions, perversions and sinful behavior? Or is He someone else – who says come to me and stay as you are – have fun and forget what my Father said – that was for another time?

I find it remarkable that there are people *who like to “call themselves” Christians* today who **cannot – or will not** attest to the fact that Jesus is who God says He is. They will either say – Oh, he was a great prophet, or teacher, or even that he had great power that was used to lead us to our own divinity. One famous German theologian from the 19th Century, Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, believed that Jesus had more “God consciousness” than any other human had ever had. Others like Episcopal Priest and theologian Marcus Borg claim that the story of Jesus is just metaphor, while others make the claim that Jesus is pure mythology. The retired Bishop of Newark, John Shelby Spong believes that the atonement – the sacrifice that Jesus made when He shed His blood, dying on the cross – to pay the price for our sins, is "child abuse" by God the Father, and he believes that the resurrection never happened! There are quite a few other things that he doesn't believe as well – like the virgin birth or Jesus' miracles!

Let ask you this: how can a priest stand at the Communion Table of the Lord, say “Let us proclaim the mystery of faith – Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again” and not be a hypocrite – when they don't believe a word they are saying? Let me tell you, there are priests in the church that stand when the Nicene Creed is said, and either hold their breath or cross their fingers when they don't believe something that is being professed! **Why are they priests?**

Hearing these descriptions of “unfaith” – is like finger nails scraping on a blackboard!

To me, one thing is clear – **you either accept the Divinity of Jesus Christ as the only Son of God – who died on the cross for the atonement of our sins – OR NOT! Believe in Him – and what the Bible says about Him - OR NOT!** If you do believe in Him, then it is my honest opinion that you can call yourself a follower of Christ or Christian; if not – then you are making up another religion all together – and you are following a different God. I suggest to you that these people need to end their charade – and either submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ or not. Forgive me for being blunt– but you either believe what the Bible says – or you don't. If you don't believe what the Bible says -- then call yourself something other than a Christian – and start living whatever truth you do believe in. Presiding **Bishop Katharine Jefferts-Schori claims that Jesus is only one of many ways to God** – including her infamous speech about Mother Jesus. Former Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold claims at there are pluriform or multiple truths that you can believe in. Instead of truth we get double talk and a shell game of words that create a new vocabulary. Please, let's end the game of claiming that each of our interpretations rule – “you believe what YOU want and I'll believe what I want and let's all just get along.” The beloved Apostle John warns us of this kind of deception with these words from **2 John 1:7-9** “*Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in*

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the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist! Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but may receive a full reward. Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son."

Bishop Schori has gone so far as in a recent interview with USA TODAY "that **she saw "two strands of faith"**

- One "concerned with atonement that Jesus died for our sins and our most important task is to repent..."
- The more gracious strand is to talk about life, to claim the joy and the blessings for good that it offers, to look forward."

Instead of repentance and Jesus – she apparently believes it is more gracious to dazzle and distract the world with Millennium Development Goals - than to deal with God's truth and the eternal salvation that can only be found in Jesus Christ. Let me go on the record that the U. N. Millennium Development Goals are wonderful, important and should be high on a list of priorities – but they should not be our entire list! They are not what bring one eternal salvation.

She went on in that same article to say "God became human in order that we may become divine."

- **Welcome once again to the First Church of I, Me, Mine!**

Over the last 40 years many have caused distraction with arguments about human sexuality - while they subtly have been watering down and ignoring Holy Scripture. Once again, the problems we are facing today in the church are based in **who Jesus is** and **the authority of God's Word**. If you believe that Jesus is who He says He is, and that God's Holy Word is true – then other issues fall into submission to Jesus Christ and to Holy Scripture. **That is the issue we face – and that is the solution**. Let Jesus and God's Word transform us to His ways – not transform Jesus and Scripture to ours.

There is only ONE TRUTH - God has spoken – JESUS IS HIS SON – and we are to listen to Him!

Once again, my brothers and sisters let me remind you: when the Father had finished speaking, Elijah and Moses were gone! **The Christian message is that Christ alone is sufficient**. The Father did not say Listen to Jesus and Moses and Elijah. No, the Father said just simply "*Listen to Him.*" This is why we can absolutely rely on the words that Jesus spoke, when He said: "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" (John 14:6) **His words are reliable, and true. God said so!**