

St. Michael and All Angels

Ōtautahi Christchurch

16 March 2025

Homily

Luke 9:28-36 / NRSVUE

28. Now, about eight days after these sayings, Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.
29. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.
30. Suddenly, they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him.
31. They appeared in glory and were speaking about his exodus, which he was about to fulfil in Jerusalem.
32. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep, but as they awoke, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him.
33. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah,” not realising what he was saying.
34. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud.
35. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; Listen to him!”
36. When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and, in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

This morning's text, commonly known as the transfiguration, contains themes of light, the glory of Jesus and encouragement for our Lenten journey.

Children of the Light

To begin, let us reflect on the theme of light. Our text states, "While Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as lightning, as brilliant as light" (Luke 9:29).

Light is a strong theme throughout the Biblical narrative. From the opening of Genesis to the book of Revelation, the writers of the texts have drawn the readers' attention to the physical and metaphorical associations of God and light. From a biblical perspective, light represents motifs of creation, redemption, transfiguration, incarnation, the sacred, right relations and fellowship.

In the Bible, God is depicted as our "light and salvation."¹ God is "wrapped in light,"² and he "lights up *our* darkness."³ Jesus is the promised light spoken of in Isaiah (9:2), Matthew (4:16) and Luke (2:32). Christ's presence emits light in Acts (9:3), his clothes and face shine white like the sun in "dazzling white" in Mark (9:2-8), and God gives light to a city through 'the lamb' as its lamp in Revelation (21:23).

Consequently, as followers of God we are considered to be "children of the light"⁴ as following Christ should be associated with his works of salvation, truth and holiness.⁵

So, what does it mean to be "children of the light?" The phrase is a biblical term that describes individuals who actively follow Jesus and live according to his teachings, embodying the "light of the world" and adhering to 'the way' of goodness, truth and righteousness. They reflect their faith through their actions and shine brightly in a world consumed by darkness.

¹ Psalm 27:1

² Psalm 104:2

³ Psalm 18:28

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:5

⁵ John 1:7, Isaiah 5:20, John 8:12

Being a ‘child of the light’ signifies a commitment to reject evil and the powers of darkness, bringing the light of Christ into our daily lives and encounters. In saying that, I recognise that our individual understanding of evil is a complex and nuanced subject, so let me offer one way to observe how evil can manifest in the world.

Evil may be viewed as any structure or principality that opposes God’s action of redeeming creation and any force that obstructs or hinders a person’s connection with God and his sanctifying love and grace.⁶

Given that proposition, I would like to share a quote from theologian Stanley Hauerwas. He reminds us that the core function of the Church through the proclamation and actioning of the gospel is to become a “community that absorbs and transforms evil and suffering” for the benefit of the surrounding society.⁷

Christ’s Glory

Next, our reading prompts us to ask, ‘Who is this person called Jesus?’ Our gospel text serves several purposes, but primarily, it points us to who Jesus is and his glory. As such, the question was asked then and continues to be asked today: Who is this person we call Jesus?

God himself confirms the answer to this question. The heavenly proclamation addressed to Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:22) is now shared with the disciples at the site of the transfiguration when, from the overshadowing cloud, God says, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” Jesus is indeed the Christ, God’s Chosen. He is not Moses or Elijah risen from the dead. He is God’s Son.⁸

Early in our gospel text, we notice that this passage is not solely about Jesus—as Moses and Elijah are also present in the story. One way to understand their presence is as an endorsement of Christ’s ministry, recalling that Jesus said, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for Moses wrote about me” (John 5:46).

⁶ John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (London: SCM Press, 2018).

⁷ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, xi.

⁸ Robert A. Stein, *The New American Commentary Volume 24 - Luke* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), 287.

Moreover, the people standing with Jesus, surrounded by God’s glory, were not the disciples; instead, it was Moses and Elijah. Thus, they are present to illustrate Christ’s fulfilment of the divine plan in the Old Testament—*as it is Jesus who is the fulfilment of the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah)*.

Later in the gospel, Luke writes, “Flashes of lightning will light up the sky from one side to the other, and so it will be with the Son of Man on his day. But first he must endure much suffering and be rejected by this generation” (17:24-25).

Here, we see in today’s gospel that Christ’s appearance, “bright as a flash of lightning,” prepares us for the later revelation of his death and resurrection in a divine body and, ultimately, his return. Revelation echoes this sentiment when it states, “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple, and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder” (Revelation 11:19). “Luke’s description in our text shows the heavenly character of the event and can be understood as a foreshadowing of the glory of Jesus when he returns.”⁹

The Journey of Lent

Lastly, what can Christ’s transfiguration reveal about our Lenten journey? As we contemplate Lent, today’s reading from Luke invites us to reflect on Christ’s transfiguration as a moment of divine revelation that also speaks to our spiritual transformation.

Theologian Robert Stein notes that the first change was in the appearance of Christ’s face. Thus, the transfiguration was not caused by external conditions but rather originated from within. The ‘person’ of Jesus was transfigured before his clothing began to shine.¹⁰ Describing the same story, the author of Matthew 17:2 writes, “He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.”

⁹ Stein, *The New American Commentary*, 284.

¹⁰ Stein, *The New American Commentary*, 284.

These observations remind me of times when I have seen the countenance of a person's face change after encountering the Holy Spirit. Although their faces didn't shine like the sun, there was a noticeable difference: they appeared lighter and brighter, seeming radiant and glowing. So, perhaps on a significantly lesser scale, and in my simple way, maybe I too have observed a type of transfiguration as the Holy Spirit came to dwell in that person and, as such, began to shine through them. I wonder if you can recall similar experiences in your faith journey when you sensed or encountered something beautiful radiating from a person of faith.

In closing, just as Christ's divine nature was revealed to the disciples, our Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving help us uncover the presence of God already at work within us as "children of the light." And it is through self-giving and contemplation that we strip away the distractions that obscure our spiritual vision, allowing God's grace to shine through.

The transfiguration of Jesus affirms the glorious identity of our Lord as the Messiah and King over all creation while also assuring us that when the trials and tribulations of our lives are over, we will be drawn into a radiant future glory in Christ. "Raised up and seated with him in the heavenly places—where we will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of our God" (Ephesians 2:6; Matthew 13:43).

Let us pray

Heavenly Father,
we pray that the light of Christ,
revealed in his transfiguration,
may shine through us,
illuminating the darkness in our world
and in our own hearts.

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