

Sense of the Sacred

In the Season after the Epiphany, the church explores signs of God's glory shining in the world. Mark describes Jesus' transfiguration and, with the disciples, we sense the sacred moment; we will see things in a new way from this time forward. We catch Elisha's vision of the sacred as Elijah is caught up to heaven. With Paul and the psalmist, we give thanks that God's light shines forth through us.

Focus Scripture: Mark 9:2–9

The Season after the Epiphany ends with the story of Jesus' transfiguration. This revealing of Jesus' glory is a turning point, marking the end of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and the beginning of the journey towards Jerusalem and the fate that awaits Jesus there. Just before today's reading, Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah. But Peter does not understand Jesus' teaching about the kind of Messiah Jesus has come to be.

Six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a mountain. While there, Jesus' appearance is transfigured—Jesus shines. The disciples see Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah. This event has echoes of Hebrew Scriptures. Moses' face was transfigured on Mount Sinai when he was in God's presence and received the Law. Elijah also experienced God's presence on Sinai. Elijah's return will announce the coming of the Messiah. For Mark, Jesus fulfills the work of the Law and the prophets.

Jesus' shining garments mark him as one who has triumphed through martyrdom. Jesus' changed appearance—a "metamorphosis"—reflects his nature as both divine and human, and anticipates Jesus' changed appearance at the Resurrection.

Peter grasps a sense of the sacred, and wants to preserve it; he offers to build three tents. The word used for "tent" can mean "tabernacle," the same word used in John 1:14 to describe the incarnate Jesus "dwelling" among us. This word also connects with the Exodus story of the tent in the wilderness, and the Ark where God's glory dwells.

A cloud, a sign of God's presence, comes over the mountain. From it, a voice repeats the words from Jesus' baptism: "This is my Son, the Beloved." In Mark's account of Jesus' baptism, only Jesus hears the voice from heaven. Here the disciples hear the voice telling them to listen to Jesus.

This time must have been a terrifying and amazing experience for the three disciples, but Jesus cautions them not to tell anyone about it. We have seen this before in Mark's gospel. It is not yet time for the disciples to proclaim the good news. The meaning of Jesus' messiahship is to remain a secret for the time being. As we move into the Season of Lent, we feel the tension building as Jesus' ministry continues.

It is in the seeing and understanding that God's messenger is known. In **2 Kings 2:1–12**, the prophet Elijah is carried up to heaven, and Elisha glimpses the sacred and comes to a fuller understanding of who Elijah is. Elisha receives a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, and is thus known as a prophet in the true succession.

The awe-inspiring image of God's majesty and our response to it are central in the other texts. In **Psalms 50:1–6**, God's majesty and power shine forth from Zion. God calls and judges, gathering the faithful. Paul, in **2 Corinthians 4:3–6**, speaks in images of light and darkness, of blindness and sight. Just as Moses veiled his face when it shone with reflected glory, so the gospel of Christ is veiled and hidden from those who do not believe. As we live in faith, God's love shines in our hearts. As did the disciples on the mountain, we see God's glory in Jesus the Christ.

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"Epiphany" means "showing forth." During this season, we have explored many ways in which God's glory is revealed in the life and work of Jesus and the disciples. Where and when have you sensed the sacred or caught glimpses of God's presence? How do such moments define your life as a disciple and a church?



February 22, 2009

Focus Scripture

Mark 9:2–9

Additional Scriptures

2 Kings 2:1–12

Psalms 50:1–6

2 Corinthians 4:3–6

Holy God, we see your glory in the face of Jesus the Christ. Grant that, as we look on Christ, we may be transformed and be strengthened to follow your call to serve in the world. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.



The Focus for Adults

From time to time, adults have what they might call “mountaintop experiences.” These are those moments in life when one senses or catches a glimpse, however fleeting, of God’s glory. Today is Transfiguration Sunday, a day when the church recalls such a “mountaintop moment” experienced by Jesus and three of the disciples. As you engage the text, be sensitive to the great variety of spiritual experience – not all group members may have had a spiritual experience they would consider “mountaintop,” or one that they feel comfortable sharing with others. Invite members to share if they wish, but be careful not to pressure any to do so.

This session marks the completion of the seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. Several of the activities give an opportunity to reflect on the learning from these sessions. What “aha” moments have you witnessed

in the lives of group members during these three months? Part of the reward of facilitating an adult study group is to see people come to new understandings, to see lives changed as people are caught up in the excitement of learning. Pray for all group members, that each of you may continue to grow in discipleship and in the knowledge of God’s transforming power.

The resource sheet “Transfiguration” poem should be prepared ahead of time to make it easy for choral reading. Read through the poem and think about how it might be used most effectively in the group. Make a copy of the poem for each person. Mark each copy, highlighting a different set of lines on each one, so that individual voices are reading certain lines or paragraphs. Highlight some key lines or phrases on all sheets so that they will be read in unison.

February 22, 2009

PREPARE

Materials needed

Before the session

- Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s scriptures — 2 Kings 2:1–12, Psalm 50:1–6, 2 Corinthians 4:3–6, Mark 9:2–9 — and biblical background material on page 75.
- If you have access to the Internet, go to www.spiritseasons.com and click on Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage. Bring *information* that might inform this week’s session.
- Bring *basic supply kit* (see p. 2) and, if available, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 7* and *CD player*.

Gather

- Prepare the worship space with *white fabric* and a *candle*. Add *gold* or *silver ribbon streamers*.
- Bring *song “Pulsing Spirit”* (p. 4–5 in the *Music Section*, also # 7 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- Bring *index cards*.

Engage

- Bring *copies of “Transfiguration,”* the two-page resource sheet for this session. On each copy, highlight verses for reading, as described above in “The Focus for Adults.”

Respond

Choose one or more options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- **Images of God’s glory:** *six posters for this season*
- **Songs of praise:** *hymnals or songbooks your church uses*
- **Handing on the story:** *poster “Epiphany”*

Bless

- Bring *poster “Bethlehem Star”* and one star shape cut from *yellow construction paper*. A pattern is available on “Patterns” resource sheet (p. 84).
- Bring *hymnals* or *songbooks your church uses*.
- Bring *copies of the biblical background material for March 1*, found in the materials for Lent Easter 2009.

Sense of the Sacred



Scripture

Mark 9:2–9

FOCUS To celebrate the glimpses we catch of God's shining glory.

GATHER

Welcome participants by name.

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space, light the candle, and sing or listen to "Pulsing Spirit" (p. 4–5 in the *Music Section*, also #7 on *Seasons Music CD*). Read in unison **Psalm 50:1–6** as the opening prayer.

Moving into the theme

The texts for the Sundays after the Epiphany have explored the ways in which God's glory was revealed to earlier believers and encourages dis-

ciples today to be open to God's presence. Form pairs to ponder this question:

- **When have you felt an awareness of God's presence or sensed catching a glimpse of God's glory?**

Invite each group member to think of an image or symbol that describes this experience and draw it on an index card. Place cards in the worship space, welcoming comments and stories from any who wish to share.

Set the context

The story of the Transfiguration concludes the Season after the Epiphany. This turning point marks the end of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and the beginning of Jesus' journey towards Jerusalem and the fate that awaits him there. Just before today's passage, Peter has a moment of insight and declares that Jesus is the Messiah. But Peter does not understand Jesus' teaching about the kind of Messiah he has come to be, and Jesus rebukes him.

Explore the texts

On the mountain Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Mark 9:2–9**. Allow a moment of silence, then, without any commentary, distribute the marked copies of "Transfiguration" resource sheet and invite group members to read the highlighted portions on their sheets. Be ready to read the lines for those not comfortable reading aloud.

- **What does this poem add to your understanding of Jesus' transfiguration?**
- **What does this event reveal about Jesus? What are the signs of God's presence?**

Review information about Moses and Elijah in the biblical background.

- **What do you think is the significance of Moses and Elijah being present?**

- **What is significant about this event taking place on a mountain?**

Earlier in the gospel (Mark 8:29), Peter declared that Jesus is the Messiah.

- **What is Peter's reaction to the Transfiguration?**

God speaks from a cloud as on other occasions in scripture.

- **How is this revelation different from that at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:11)?**
- **Why do you think Jesus asks the disciples to tell no one about this experience?**

Fire and light **2 Kings 2:1–12** describes how the mantle of prophecy was handed on from Elijah to his disciple Elisha. Ask a volunteer to read the text aloud. Discuss:

- **How is Elisha to know if he is the one to inherit the spirit of Elijah? What does Elisha see?**

Ask a volunteer to read aloud **2 Corinthians 4:3–6**.

- **What images does Paul use to talk about awareness of God's presence?**
- **What might keep us from seeing the glory of God in Jesus the Christ?**

Make life connections

The texts today suggest that after a person has met Jesus and experienced God's presence, he or she will never again see things in the same way.

ENGAGE

- **What kinds of transformation may result when one senses the sacred presence of God in the details of daily living?**

- **How are our lives changed when we catch glimpses of God – when we see God made manifest in our midst? What might we do to celebrate or mark such moments?**

3

RESPOND

Choose one or more of the following options:

- **Images of God's glory** The Season after the Epiphany invites us to consider how God's love is revealed in our lives. Display the six posters for this season, and take a quiet moment to view them. Discuss: Where in these art images do you see examples of God's presence being made manifest or showing forth? Which image expresses most clearly your own experience of God? The images include both human figures and landscapes. If you were to paint a picture of a person in whose life you see an expression of God's presence, who would that person be? Who else would be in the picture? Describe a landscape where you feel a sense of God's presence. Write a prayer that the person in your picture might pray, or a prayer that this landscape evokes in you. Share it with the group at Bless.
- **Songs of praise** God's glory is shown forth in the world to illumine and inspire us. One way churches express confidence in this revealing, and celebrate it, is in hymns and songs sung in worship. Provide hym-

nals or songbooks that your church uses. Look at the hymns in the Epiphany section, or hymns of praise for God's glory. What images of God do you find in these hymns? Which hymn best reflects what has been revealed about God in the Bible readings this season? Sing one or two of the hymns.

- **Handing on the story** The Season after the Epiphany is a traditional time for the church to reflect on how the gospel might be proclaimed to all. Look together at the poster *Epiphany*. Imagine that this child has experienced the Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany seasons in your church. Discuss: What questions might this child be asking? What experiences of these seasons in your church have shaped this child in faith? What do you want to tell this child about how God's presence and glory are revealed? Expand your conversation to consider ways to make your church a more welcoming place of learning for children and youth, and think about how these ideas might be shared and implemented.

4

BLESS

Gather in the worship space and view the poster *Bethlehem's Star*. Invite group members to share insights revealed in this session about what it means to celebrate God's shining glory in our midst. As a group, choose one imperative verb (such as "follow," "listen," "be open") to summarize what you think God is calling you to do, based on your study and discussion today. Write this verb on the paper star and tape it to an edge of the poster. Take a

moment to review the stars you've added this Season after the Epiphany. What might you summarize from them about God's call to you and your church?

Invite those who wrote prayers in Respond to share them with the group. Join in singing an Epiphany hymn from your church's hymnal or songbook.

Hand out the biblical background material for March 1.

REFLECT

Thank you for your leadership this season. What has pleased you about the role of facilitator during these sessions? What has challenged you? How have you grown as a leader?



Transfiguration

It was amazing!
Incredible!
Wonderful!
Stupendous!
Awesome!
Electrifying!
Awe-full!
Inexplicable!
Remarkable!
Powerful!
Unbelievable – no, that's not right.
Not quite right.

His clothes were brilliant!
Dazzling!
Sparkling!
Luminescent!
Beaming!
Glowing!
Snazzy!
Jazzy!
Wonderful!
Unforgettable!
Bright – no, that's not right.
Not quite right.

They were speaking,
Sharing,
Chatting
Discussing,
Recalling,
Lecturing,
Pontificating,
Storytelling,
Reminiscing,
Communing,
Talking – no, that's not right.
Not quite right.

The witnesses were frightened,
Speechless,
Scared,
Incredulous,
Terrified,
Awe struck,
Shaking,
Quaking,
Wondering,
Rumbling,
Dumbstruck – no, that's not right.
Not quite right.

The voice from heaven was bold,
Gentle,
Booming,
Loving,
Overwhelming,
Powerful,
Other-worldly,
Mysterious,
Incredible,
Surprising,
Familiar – no that's not right.
Not quite right.

The problem is,
And has always been
Transfiguration is beyond the
power of words to express,
Beyond our ability to describe or tell,
Yet the event was too amazing!
Incredible!
Wonderful!
Stupendous!
Awesome!

Electrifying!
Awe-full!
Inexplicable!
Remarkable!
Powerful!
For silence.
It must be told.

No wonder Jesus told them not to
tell just then.
No wonder they couldn't begin to
keep it in,
But what words to speak?
What words to express?
What description to use?
They had to tell the story again
And again
And again:

In one moment
Exactly how long we cannot say
As if time stood still
Or simply wasn't time at all
Past
And present
And future
Were one
All together
On a mountaintop.
In one brilliant moment
A mountaintop moment
We began to understand
To really comprehend
It's not about us
It's not about us!
Not our time
Our space



Our perspective
Our vision
Our viewpoint
Our hopes
Our dreams
Our fears
Our pain
Our sorrows
It's not about us alone.
It's not about us alone.

God with us
Emmanuel
Means it's not about us alone
For we are not alone.

God with us
Emmanuel
Means we are a people with a past.
Faith did not begin in our generation.
In our time
Faith is not ours alone.

The great Exodus is our Exodus.
The journey from slavery to freedom is our journey.
The great leaders are our leaders.
Our grandfather Moses called us
When we were enslaved
When we disobeyed
When we were afraid
When we were hungry
And thirsty
And grumbling
And wandering in the wilderness.
Our Grandfather Moses would not let us forget the promise.

It's not about us alone
For we are not alone.
The great prophet Elijah
Who the ancients taught us would
someday return
To speak God's truth to our people
In a crucial moment of time,
Elijah is not some relic of the past
Forever gone
A distant memory
A story only
Elijah is real!
Elijah speaks to us today!

It's not about us alone
For we are not alone.
And once we realize we belong to
a people with a past
We begin to understand our
legacy is not ours alone
But a trust to live in
And be passed on
To generations yet unborn
For we belong to a people with a
future
A hope
A tomorrow
Though we sometimes feel weak
And insignificant
And tiny
And un-noticed
And un-loved
And un-important
And powerless
And hopeless
And futureless
And small
So small
We are a part of it all.

And if God is in every time
Then surely God is in every place
And we don't need to go up to the
mountain
To experience the power of God's
grace.

This is my Child,
The Beloved;
To this one you shall listen!
This is my Child,
The Beloved;
To this one you shall listen!
A message from God,
To Jesus,
To us,
To all,
To be shared
This is my Child,
The Beloved;
To this one you shall listen!

It was amazing!
Incredible!
Wonderful!
Stupendous!
Awesome!
Electrifying!
Awe-full!
Inexplicable!
Remarkable!
Powerful!
All this and more
So very much more
So we will tell it not only to you
But to our children's children
For a thousand generations.
And more
And more
And more!

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