

Introduction

Today we mark the Transfiguration of Jesus, a mysterious episode recorded in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke and referred to in 2 Peter. On the mountain top Jesus is transfigured with glory and joined by Moses, representing the Law and Elijah representing the prophets. Yet even in the awe filled glory the others talk with Jesus about his suffering and death. Our readings all deal with glory – the glory of God in our reading from Exodus so shone from Moses he had to veil his face to stop the people of Israel being afraid. In our reading from 2 Corinthians Paul notes that as we see God’s glory we are transformed by it and, of course, the glory shines through our passage from St Luke. We’re always tempted to explain the Transfiguration but, as with all good mysteries we’re better off exploring it.

Call to Worship

Come and worship the One enthroned in heavenly splendour,
the one who defends us, and feeds us with His very self.

We come to worship and adore.

Come and worship, pay homage to the One who lifts us up,
cleanses our souls, and teaches us deep truths.

We come to worship and learn.

Come and worship the One whom angels hail,
who gives water from the rock and manna from heaven.

We come to worship and be changed.

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Grace

Eternal One, it is good for us to be here today,
to rest in your presence, to see your glory,
to find peace and contentment in heart and soul,
to be schooled in holiness, and sent out with joy.
We worship and adore you!

Risen Lord Jesus,
your glory shines around us both comforting and terrifying;
comforting with your love, terrifying with your insistent call.
Forgive us, good Lord,
when the hardness of our hearts has veiled our minds to your message,
when we've preferred sin's bondage rather than freedom's grace,
when we've swapped truth's openness for shameful underhand ways.
Forgive us and give us time to change.

Most Holy Spirit we see your glory in the world around us,
from birds' flight to clouds on the hills,
from the glory of a city's life, to the quiet streets of a village,
from nature's majesty to the innocent love of a child.
As a forgiven people seeking to forgive
may we be changed from glory to glory,
that we may shine with your presence.

O Trinity of love, let the glory we receive enable us to change,
and to be agents of transformation in our world. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

As we listen to you, O God,
lift the veils in our minds that stop us understanding,
remove the scales over our eyes that stop us seeing your glory,
and the fear in our hearts that stops us following. Amen.

All Age Activity

There are two good All Age Activities here
<https://www.allageworshipresources.org/tag/transfiguration/>

Readings

Exodus 34:29-35 | 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 | St Luke 9:28-36

Sermon Notes

Exodus

The veil is to protect the people from the reflected glory of God. Focused as we often are on the Cross we're a bit ambivalent to glory – leaving that to the mystics and Pentecostals. Yet despite the suspicion of the reformers about glory – they preferred to emphasise the

Cross – we're faced with the glory that frightened the shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem, the glory that made Isaiah tremble, and the glory that confused the disciples when Moses appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration. Glory, it seems, is something of a threat which is odd when we've been taught to think of God in the vulnerable and forsaken. Maybe glory is a balance to that idea. The glory of God made Moses conspicuous. So conspicuous he had to veil his face to protect others. Yet through God's glory Moses was given a mission of leadership and teaching. The One whom heaven and earth cannot contain made present to Moses and overspilled with a glory both tender and terrifying just as on Easter morning God's glory was revealed to incredulous disciples. Of course, we struggle to see God or God's word as glorious; we think of texts to be studied and expounded and church as a gathering of sinners hoping, vaguely, to be saints. Yet the glory we glimpse takes us to Easter where confusion, joy, and terror combine to dispel the gloom of death. The glory on Moses' face was the glory of God, the residue of God's steadfast love in the face of rejection, betrayal, and even death. The people of Israel did not seek this glory but gained it unaware its weight; we don't seek God's glory but receive it every time we look up at God.

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Paul contemplates our Old Testament passage and contrasts Moses' veiling his face and his desire, and that of Christians to live with unveiled faces. Paul, of course, is not being entirely fair in his comparisons – Moses saw God face to face and that encounter meant glory radiated from him and the veil was to protect the people. Paul sees the veil, slightly differently, and holds that Jewish people have a veil in their minds which, due to hardness of heart, stops them understanding Jesus as the Messiah. These are hard words – hard as they go to the heart of Paul's theology and because to read them after millennia of Christian antisemitism makes us queasy. Paul sees Christians as having been given an intellectual freedom with both hope and boldness to proclaim the Gospel – the outworking of God's glory – and so we are transformed – as Wesley paraphrased this passage – from glory into glory. Paul saw the glory of God that reflected from Moses as a means of bearing witness to life-changing experiences for all who encounter God. Perhaps, in Paul's thinking, Moses veiled himself to protect a people not willing to see where glory leads, a people not willing to be changed. If that's the case we shouldn't think of this as a condemnation of Jewish people – after all there are plenty of Christians who won't be changed! We remain settled in our ways and our narrow interpretations, exchanging the glory of God for the familiarity of the mediocre, the challenge for change for the comfort of conformity. The Jewish people saw the giving of the Law to Moses and the glory of the Lord which surrounded him but were unable to fathom its depths as, time and time again, they strayed from where God called them. Yet many of us can relate to that – we hear, week after week, year after year the proclamation of the Good News but never quite get it. We still think we have to prove ourselves to God, that God's audacious love doesn't extend to those we despise, and fail to realise that God's call to follow is to all of us in every aspect of our lives. We have a temptation to feel smug about God's original people not getting it whilst veiling our minds to the places where our inability to understand and follow are glaring. We can be blinded by our class, our money, our

politics, our nationality, our sexual orientation, our ethnicity, to see what's going in our world and what God would have us do about it. The things which veil us are like Moses' veil which stopped the people fully seeing God's glory. Our hearts, and minds, can be as hard as Paul felt the Jewish peoples were. Yet also for Paul only God can tear these veils and soften hard hearts, bondage and blindness, self-contempt and despair are overcome with the transforming power of God.

St Luke 9:28-36

Some think this is a misplaced post resurrection narrative – though one imagines the editor of Luke's Gospel would have been aware to that and filed the story in the right place. Some think that it's a reworking of a Pagan story from a mystery religion set into Christ's life. Some use technical language to describe this event – epiphany, theophany, Christophany or the more straightforward revelation of the Divine. Perhaps all this comes from an understandable, Enlightenment era, desire to explain mystery. Yet I suspect contemporary readers, along with their ancient counterparts, can cope with a bit of mystery. After all we are in a culture which adores the Harry Potter stories along with stories about good, and bad, vampires, angels and witches. So, the supernatural in story telling doesn't put us off (and is not always taken literally) so perhaps there's no need to try and explain the mystery but, instead, to explore it. The text tells us that Jesus' face, like Moses' in the first reading, changed. Jesus' clothes became dazzling white and he shone with God's glory. Here, in this part of the mystery, we have Jesus shining with the glory of the Lord, showing his divine status. So, one part of the mystery is Jesus' divinity – a part that becomes puzzling when Jesus allows himself to be given over to torture, unjust trial, and ignoble death. Another part of the mystery is the appearance of Moses and Elijah who speak of Jesus own exodus journey to Jerusalem. Sleepy disciples don't understand the mystery nor a possible interpretation that in Jesus the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah) find their fulfilment. Of course we, like the disciples, prefer sleep than knowing what's really going on. When God wakes us up we're always surprised! A third part of the mystery is the reaction of the disciples who, finally awake from sleep, want to build a shrine to encapsulate the experience; yet Jesus won't be confined to a shrine.

Weaving the Threads

There's a temptation in Christianity to create shrines, to lock God away in our buildings – sometimes in exquisite tabernacles with sanctuary lights, sometimes just a sense that people need to come to us to experience God. All our readings are about encountering God's glory and how that encounter changes things; Moses needed to veil his face as the people could not cope with the God's terrifying glory but that glory provided the Law. Paul saw the glory of God as something which transforms us into glory itself, and immediately after the encounter on the mountain Jesus exorcised a demon and changed a life. Peter's desire to create a shrine where the glory was is entirely understandable but would have tried to pin God down, to keep God safe and under control. Instead, we take God's glory to the world around us – to see where the glory already is, and to see where

transformation can happen due to the glory we reflect. Whether that's in the foodbank or a shift on the Samaritans, the after-school club or the group for asylum seekers, the Friendship Club or the toddler's play group we are called to reflect the glory we have received not veil or lock it down.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God, Creator of all that is, seen and unseen,
whose glory shines in both mountain and valley,
and from whom we want to hide our faces,
but who calls us to wake up.

So confusing and so very clear.

We believe in Jesus, who was born of Mary, lived in Palestine,
died a shameful criminal's death, yet rose again for us,
who calls us to follow, grants us his peace,
and bids us shine with his glory.

So confusing and so very clear.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who plays havoc with our dreams,
who calls us to life in both happiness and sadness
and all the shades between;
who allows us to see glory in people and in every living thing,
in every changing landscape and in every reaching thought.

So confusing and so very clear.

We believe in the Trinity of Love,
who draws us softly from our flickering prayers,
to face the changes we need to make
in ourselves and the world,
whose voice is so sudden and so ageless,

so confusing and so very clear.

with ideas from Stephen Church's song
So Confusing and So Very Clear

Offertory

God's glory is seen most clearly in Jesus who emptied himself of all but love, walked amongst us, taught us, lived and died for us, wakes us and calls us to follow. As we follow, we give of our time, our talents and of our treasure. As we are awakened to the life of the world, we see the need to give to transform places of pain into oases of healing, places of hate in temples of love. So let's give thanks for all the giving that goes on in our church – the selfless giving week after week on the plate, in envelopes or

directly to the bank, the fundraising and quiet giving to the foodbank and other charities which make a difference. Let's pray:

May your glory shine in this place O God,
not a glory based on power and pomp but on love and service;
not a glory which draws attention to itself, but a glory based on giving and sacrifice,
not a glory based on wealth and prestige,
but on humble gifts and transforming presence.
Bless all the gifts we have in this church, O God,
that your transforming glory will shine here
on those who need love and life. Amen.

Intercessions

The Word of God calls us to see
that all the places and occasions of the world,
even places of sorrow and death,
are transfigured by the presence of God's glory revealed in Jesus Christ.

We now pray for all who are in any kind of need,
commending them to God's transforming care, saying:
O merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are alone,
for the bereaved
and for those whose marriages and relationships have ended...

O merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the imprisoned, especially for those unjustly held,
for those whose only home is the street,
for those refugees on the move seeking sanctuary
and for those who cannot find safety anywhere....

O merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the hungry,
for those who cannot feed their children,
and for those who cannot make ends meet,
even those in work...

O merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those battling injustice
for asylum seekers and all held in poverty by racism...

O merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

And we pray for those who seek to transform the world,
for artists and writers and for those who think on the edge of our society,
for preachers and teachers who seek to expound the life giving Word of God,
for the Church and our leaders, seeking to be faithful and reflect God's awesome glory,
and for those who assume political leadership
that they may always seek the good of all, especially the poor.

O merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

In a moment's silence we bring to God close to our hearts in any kind of need....

O merciful God, **hear our prayer.**

As we join our prayers together we say, with confidence, as Jesus taught...Our Father...

based on a model for Transfiguration Sunday
in the *Worship Source Book*

Holy Communion

[God is here! | **God's Spirit is with us!**
Lift up your hearts | **we lift them up to God!**
Let us give God our thanks and praise! | **This is indeed our duty and joy!**]

It is [indeed] right and good, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
almighty and eternal Creator, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
For on this day he revealed his divinity,
uniting in him the Law and the prophets,
waking his sleepy disciples and unveiling their minds,
transforming them even as he was transformed
with a glory both awesome and terrifying.
And so, with joyful hearts we echo on earth
the song of the angels in heaven:

[*Any Holy, Holy, Holy could be said or sung here.*
In the URC service I use v4 of Bernadette Farrell's Blessed and Holy.]

The glory that shone so brightly led Jesus to the Cross,
where, in agony and injustice, he died as one forsaken,
showing glory can be hard, weak, and vulnerable.

But before he was given over to death he shared in a meal with his friends, of which
Paul wrote:

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,

“This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying,

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

And so, in obedience to the Lord's command we, his people, show forth his sacrifice on the Cross by the bread broken and the wine poured and as we eat and drink, Jesus himself, risen and ascended, is present and gives himself to us for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. United with Christ, and with the whole Church on earth and in heaven, we, his people, gathered at his table present our sacrifice of thanksgiving, renew the offering of ourselves, and rejoice in the promise of his coming in glory. Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and praise is yours, Eternal Creator, forever and ever, Amen.

These holy gifts are for God’s holy people,
Let us eat and drink recognising we are drawn into the presence of the Risen Lord who gives us His body and His blood, to keep us in eternal life.

Post Communion Prayer

Holy One,
we see your glory in the beauty of the world around us,
in dawn’s gentle light and the stillness of dusk,
in the people we meet and the love shown to stranger and friend,
let us reflect your glory in our lives and our loves,
that our world may be changed into your coming kingdom, Amen.

Blessing

May the One who meets you in mysterious glory,
the One who wakes and changes you,

and the One who won't let you be silent,
 bathe you in glory, continue to change you, and give you words to speak,
 that the Light of the World may bring change through you,
 and the blessing of Almighty God,
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, *or* Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word, and Holy Spirit
 be with you all now and forever, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Lord Enthroned in Heavenly Splendour			593	431
Immortal Invisible	67	132	55	327
Swiftly Pass the Clouds of Glory			260	
Transfigured Christ, none comprehends			261	
Jesus on the mountain peak			259	
Alleluia sing to Jesus		445	568	207
At the name of Jesus	261	458	317	41
Lord the Light of Your Love is Shining Shine Jesus Shine		448	59	445

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

From further afield.

[The King shall come when morning dawns](#) is normally an Advent hymn but has lots of references to brightness and glory. Written in 1907 it is in the public domain in 8686 / Common Metre so there are many tunes with which it would fit. The American tune Land of Rest, the Irish tune St Columba or Miles Lane would all work.

Sylvia Dunstan's *Song of the Transfiguration | Transform Us As You, Transfigured* goes to the haunting tune Piccardy. It's covered by OneLicence and the words can be found [here](#).

Blessed and Holy by Bernadette Farrell is lovely and well worth learning. The last verse makes a very good sung Holy, Holy, Holy for Communion. You can listen to it and buy the sheet music [here](#).