

Transfiguration b 2028 StC

Epiphany has been called the season when Christmas meets Easter, an apt description of this wonderous season that ends today. For Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter are all seasons of life and light: the light that we see in the face of Jesus Christ. The light we see reflected in those who love him. The light that shone out of darkness at Creation. That remarkable star in the East that led the Persian magicians to the site of Christ's nativity.

The light that emanated from the resurrected Christ and that we announce at the Easter Vigil, when, out of the dark a flint is struck, kindling is ignited, a taper is lighted, and the new Pascal Candle is processed to the intoned, "The light of Christ." The light we see bursting as a six-pointed star from the transfigured Christ in the great medieval icons of the Eastern Church (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theophanes_the_Greek 15th c). Rowan Williams profound meditation in *The Dwelling of the Light: Praying with Icons of Christ* moves beyond the western tradition of a sweet or excruciatingly crucified Jesus to images of Jesus that transcend time. As in so many things, I'm indebted to his insights here.

The light we celebrate today and I hope also palpably glimpse on Last Epiphany, hear at Adams and East, in this little patch of God's kingdom. And, I might add today that Easter also anticipates and our own resurrection as we too are transfigured on the last day, shining

ourselves in the image whom God created and raised from the dead and who then yanks us out of the grave. Or as St. Paul would have it – the great apostle who knew a thing or two about being blinded by the light of the resurrected Christ – “it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (Mark 9, NRSV). For, the great Eastern, often Russian, icons depict the resurrection as a breaking out of Hell: Christ bursts forth from the grave, dragging Adam and Eve and, by implication, all of us with him. Which has caused some theologians to argue: “Hell is real; Hell exists; it’s just empty.”

The Feast of the Transfiguration or the Metamorphosis to use Mark’s term, commemorates an extraordinary, momentous event – an event that we celebrate not once but twice in the church the year – in February and in August.

In February, the church ends the Season of Light, the Season of the shining star, the Season of Epiphany, with an account of the Transfiguration. For the Transfiguration is an event swathed in divine glory. In a wonderful symmetry, the first Sunday of Epiphany recounts Christ’s Baptism, with God proclaiming, as Jesus emerges from the waters of the Jordan: “This is my son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased.” And, to complete the symmetry, Epiphany closes with Jesus on the mountaintop with Moses and Elijah, appearing in glory. And then the pinnacle light is covered by cloud. And Peter and James and

John are terrified, and God's voice rings out, "'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' Listen to him.

We also mark the Transfiguration on August 6 or a nearby Sunday. August is more properly where the Transfiguration occurs in the story of Christ's ministry. For the long green season of Pentecost is the season when Christ's earthly ministry – Christ's teachings and miracles and parables – are recounted almost a chronological order.

So here, today, at a pivotal moment in his ministry, Jesus stands with two other visionaries who encountered God on the mountain top: Moses, who went into the volcanic cloud on Mt. Sinai and heard God speaking in the booming voice of truth and authority amidst earthquake and fire. And Elijah, alone and destitute on Mt. Horeb – likely another name for Mt. Sinai – Elijah in solitude heard God not in the earthquake nor in the fire, but in a still, small voice and was later transferred into heaven in that chariot of fire.

And now Jesus is transfigured with Moses and Elijah, on another mountain, traditionally Mt. Tabor above the Sea of Galilee. The three are bathed in dazzling light first, then encircled in cloud. Light and cloud contrasting – God of light, God of darkness – as amazement and fear sweep the emotions of Peter and James and John. And scare the living Jesus out of them – blasting them to the ground in the great iconic tradition.

Let us note carefully what Jesus and Moses and Elijah are talking about. They are talking, in our translation, about Jesus' departure. For near this pivotal moment in his ministry, both we and the disciples and Jesus himself are becoming haltingly aware that Jesus is not leading a movement that will exalt him on this Earth, either as a revolutionary hero or a religious reformer. He and we are becoming increasingly aware that his ministry will not restore an independent Israel or the defeat Roman tyranny or purify the Hebrew Temple religion. He is becoming increasingly aware that he will die, that he must die at the hands of the Jewish and Roman authorities. But he is also becoming aware that, only through that death, can he break the chains of sin and death and darkness and lead us to eternal life, the kingdom of heaven that begins now and comes again later..

Yes, our translation says that the great three are talking about the manner of Jesus' departure. But the Greek text uses a word laden with a far greater meaning. Jesus and Moses and Elijah are talking about Jesus' exodus, his exodus, his leading of God's chosen people through the waters of the sea and the torments of the wilderness into the promised land, this time a promised land, a kingdom of God, far greater than we can desire or imagine, a promised land that we haltingly call eternal life – life that we begin to lead now but that continues forever. As priests pray each Sunday when they absolve us, "Almighty God

forgive you all your sins, and KEEP you, KEEP you in eternal.” Eternal life; the exodus life, the life that Christ came into the world to give and drags us into by the hand and by our name at the End.