

**ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
COMPASS, PA**

August 6, 2023 – TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Jesus Christ—Light in our Darkness*”

Old Testament	Exodus 34:29-35	(The Lord appears to Moses on Mt. Sinai)
Psalter	Psalm 99	(The Lord is King; proclaim His greatness)
Epistle	2 Peter 1:13-21	(Jesus received glory and honor when He appeared on the mountain)
Gospel	St. Luke 9:28-36	(Christ is transfigured on the mountaintop with Moses and Elijah)

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Because many of us encountered in school—or through witnessing the Zurcher family’s annual Mother’s Day project—the amazing transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly, we are familiar with the concept of “metamorphosis.” The Greek word means “to change shape or transition from having one image to another.” The concept with its Latin root, “transfiguration,” is associated more with a *spiritual* experience, specifically the occasion recounted for us by St. Luke in this morning’s Gospel, which appears in Matthew’s and Mark’s, as well.

This luminous tale with its brilliant light has blinded Bible scholars into flights of fancy or has left them, and us, simply dazzled. But notice: all the other Gospel stories prior to Christ’s resurrection— involving signs and miracles—are quite earthbound. They’re about sick and troubled women; blind and disabled men; dying children; desperate, possessed people, all of whom are healed or set free. Earthly stuff. Things of this world, with which we are familiar.

Also, the miracle stories involving Jesus are always other-directed—they are for us. But today’s account of a supernatural encounter concerns Jesus Himself, surrounded by an otherworldly atmosphere. The story of the Transfiguration takes us and His three chosen disciples—Peter, James and John—to a height where the earthly veil is torn asunder for a few seconds, and both they and we are privileged to see into the essence of God, the reality of the Divine: *Light!* Light like no other. The light which, at Creation, broke into the darkness of nothing to bring forth more light—the starry heavens. Writing about Jesus Christ, St. John (1:2-5) declares:

“He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Christ is the eternal and unquenchable light sent from God to illumine the darkness of our souls, to guide us out of sin and into salvation.

Living in a world filled with spiritual, and at times, literal, darkness, we can understand why we need the light of Christ as His divine glory was revealed on that mountaintop. But why would Jesus need the Transfiguration? He knew that He was both God and man and had no need to reveal His glory.

For that answer, we have to look at the chronology of Jesus ministry. This story comes at a time when He has been preparing His beloved followers for His impending death. He knows what’s coming, but his disciples continually fail to understand what He’s trying to tell them.

Some of you know that I published a novel earlier this year, and that I’m writing another one. Thanks to Artificial Intelligence, I can run my manuscript through an online program that will critique my writing for me. Apparently, I have two chronic problems as an author, one of which is that I don’t seem to know how to *show* rather than *tell*—the former is much more powerful.

Clearly, Jesus understands this dynamic. So I think the Transfiguration was a key point in *His* story when, after repeatedly trying to *tell* His closest followers who He is, Jesus decides to *show them* He is God the Son, and to participate in a heavenly vision that would provide both Him and them light in the darkness that was coming.

But there's more! A voice from heaven booms out, saying: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." Now terrified, they fall on their faces. And then, just as suddenly, they are left alone and Jesus looks as He always did. His time has not yet come, yet the Cross cannot be avoided. They will go down from the mountain and Jesus will set His face toward Jerusalem. Arrest, torture, suffering, and death await Him.

"Was it real?" They must have been wondering as they descended from the heights. In his account, Matthew uses the Greek word "*órama*"—a vision. But as we know, dreams and visions can be as real to us as what we can touch, smell, and hear. Did Peter, James, and John remember it afterward when they saw Jesus undergo those agonizing hours on the Via Dolorosa? We can only hope so.

But, as I mentioned before, it's very possible the Transfiguration took place because *Jesus* needed it. His three friends just happened to be there to witness His divine glory. What awaited Jesus was a horror beyond words—not only for His physical body, but in the dreadful abandonment He felt on the Cross. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" He needed to be able to cling to the Light on the Mount of Transfiguration as well as His Father's words of encouragement and affirmation He heard that day.

In times of fear and desperation in our lives, we all need to be able to recall words that encouraged us, or times when we may have seen more light. We can imagine that Jesus clung to the Light as He walked the way of the Cross and darkness filled the skies as He neared death on Calvary's Hill.<sup>1</sup>

So let us take today's Gospel as a reminder: Whenever *we* feel the darkness approaching, let *us* cling to the Light. Let us trust that God loves *us* as much as He loves Jesus, and that our risen and ascended Lord is always with us. As the Light of the World, Christ will show us the way. He has promised to never leave us or forsake us—and nothing is impossible with God!

One more thought: Psalm 119:5 reminds us: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Whenever we go walking in the dark, we need a flashlight. On the path of *life*, we have Jesus, God's *living* Word, and the Bible, and God's *written* Word to light our way.

Thanks be to God! *Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Adapt. Katerina Katsarka Whitley, "Clinging to the Light," 6 August 2020, [EpiscopalChurch.org](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/clinging-to-the-light-the-transfiguration-august-6-2020/), <<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/clinging-to-the-light-the-transfiguration-august-6-2020/>> 29 July 2023. Used with permission.