

Lesson 19

Transfiguration of Our Lord

The Holy Gospel: Mark 9:2–9

The Epiphany Season follows the celebration of the birth of Jesus and points to His life and ministry with an emphasis on His *manifesting* Himself as the Son of God (which is what “epiphany” means). The Feast of the Epiphany is always January 6, a remembrance of the coming of the Magi. The first Sunday to follow is always devoted to the Baptism of Our Lord, and the last Sunday of the season always celebrates the Transfiguration of Our Lord. These two occasions, on which a voice from heaven declared to Jesus, “You are My Son, whom I love,” are like bookends that hold the story of Jesus’ ministry together and provide their own distinct epiphanies of Jesus as the Son of God.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to witness the manifestation of His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. This inner circle was granted the privilege of being close to Jesus at special times (see Mark 5:35–42; 14:32–34). These three, along with Andrew, Peter’s brother, were the first to be called by Jesus to be His disciples. Why Andrew was not included in the inner circle we cannot say, but there is no evidence of any friction as a result of the Lord’s granting this special position to the three.

271. Why did Jesus want an inner circle of disciples who would enjoy an especially close relationship with Him?

“After six days” attaches this event to what went before (see Mark 8:27–38, noting especially v. 38). Jesus was “transfigured” before them. *Metemorphōthe* means a change in form, a transfiguration revealing something from within. Jesus was giving His inner circle of disciples a visual demonstration of His true glory as the Son of God.

272. What significance do you see in the fact that Mark emphasizes that even Jesus’ clothing became dazzling white? (See Isaiah 64:6; Revelation 7:13–14.)

273. Moses and Elijah came to interact with Jesus as part of this dramatic display of His divine glory. Why was it these two who appeared with Him? What did they talk about? (See Luke 9:30–31.)

All of the evangelists tell of Peter’s reaction and suggestion that he build three shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, and Mark’s Gospel is generally understood to be Peter’s own eyewitness account. Peter later made the incident part of his testimony (see 2 Peter 1:16–18).

274. What was going on in Peter's mind to suggest his building the shelters? What does it show us about Peter that he was ready to admit that he was fearful and didn't know what to say, but spoke up anyway?

The voice from heaven spoke from a cloud. Clouds often were the setting of God's revelation of Himself to His people (see Exodus 19:16–19; 40:34–39; Acts 1:9).

275. What was the Father's main concern for the three disciples relative to their recognizing Jesus as His Son?

276. Why did Jesus order the three not to tell about this experience until after He had risen from the dead?

277. What does this manifestation of Jesus' glory say to us for our life today?

The Old Testament Lesson: 2 Kings 2:1–12

278. Elijah, aware that his time was coming to an end, tried to take leave of his assistant, but Elisha was persistent in staying with him. What was Elisha anticipating?

The companies (literally “sons”) of the prophets at Gilgal and Bethel and Jericho were the theological students of their day. Scholars point to Samuel as one who originated or at least developed this concept of the Lord's prophets training others to be “forth-tellers” of the Word. It appears here that Elijah was under divine constraint to meet one last time with each of these companies, which were under his prophetic authority. These men sensed that Elijah was to be taken from them that day, and 50 from the Jericho school followed Elijah and Elisha to the Jordan River. Elijah rolled up his cloak and struck the water of the Jordan. The water divided to allow them to cross over on dry land.

279. Of what did this remind Elisha and the students? What did it say to them about their master, Elijah?

Elisha's request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit is generally seen not as a request for twice as much as Elijah had received, but as a request for "the inheritance of the firstborn." In Jewish society, the firstborn son inherited twice as much as his brothers and became the head of the family. Elisha was asking for the position of leadership as a prophet and for the power of the Spirit to equip him for it.

280. Why did Elijah say Elisha had asked "a hard thing"?

281. Why was Elisha's receiving what he had requested made contingent on his seeing Elijah's departure?

Elisha saw the chariot and horses of fire and his master being swept up bodily into heaven, and he knew his request had been granted. His cry "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" is generally seen as Elisha's referring to Elijah himself as God's powerful "army." The same will be said of Elisha (2 Kings 13:14).

282. When he could see Elijah no longer, why did Elisha tear his clothing?

283. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: 2 Corinthians 3:12–4:6

Moses was the prophet whom "the LORD knew face to face" (Deuteronomy 34:10). The Lord invited Moses to come into His presence on Mount Sinai, and He continued to meet Moses in the Tent of Meeting. On the occasions when Moses interacted with God in this direct way, he would come out of the tent with his face glowing—a reflection of the glory of God. It was an awesome sight, and it put fear into the hearts of the Israelites and their leaders. So Moses would accommodate them by wearing a veil over his face until the "glory" faded and his face took its normal appearance once again.

Paul referred to this as he wrote about the surpassing glory of the new covenant in Christ over the old covenant. But he changed the veil's point of reference as he applied it to his own day. He talked about a veil being over the ____ of those who stubbornly clung to the old covenant when they heard the message of Christ, and said that only in ____ is that veil taken away for anyone who turns to Him. Then, where the ____ of the Lord is, there is ____, and we, with ____ faces, reflect ____.

284. We reflect our Lord's glory by faith. It is not given to us a part at a time—but we "*have* redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Ephesians 1:7). What process, then, is Paul describing with his "we all . . . are being transformed into [His] image from one degree of glory to another"? What is the dynamic that energizes this process?

Paul changed the veil's point of reference again and wrote of the *Gospel* being veiled to those who are perishing. He said the Gospel was veiled to them because they were blinded by "the god of this world."

285. Who is this "god of this world"? Compare Jesus' own term for him in John 12:31.

286. What is it about the natural man that causes a blind spot when it comes to the Good News of Jesus? (See 1 Corinthians 2:14.) What is the point over which blindness or stumbling occurs? (See 1:23.)

287. Why was the preaching of the cross a stumbling block to Jews? Why is the preaching of the cross "foolishness" to the worldly wise?

288. In the face of the world's blindness and self-styled wisdom, why is it tempting to preach ourselves instead of Jesus Christ as Lord?

289. What is involved in preaching Jesus Christ as Lord?

290. If the Israelites of old couldn't bear to look at the reflected glory on the face of Moses, God's prophet, how are we able to look at the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ, the very Son of God? (See John 1:17.)

291. How does Paul's attitude toward his ministry challenge pastors, teachers, and lay leaders of the Church today?