

## **TRANSFIGURATION MARCH 2, 2025 (Luke 9:28-45)**

In the beginning, when God began creating the heavens and the earth, there was deep darkness. It was darker than the sight of a man blind from birth, darker than a cave hundreds of miles beneath the ground, darker even than the centre of a black hole in the void of space. It was a deep unfathomable darkness that had never known even the faintest glimmer, spark, or flame. And it was in the midst of this darkness that God said, "Let there be light." And it was so. But how so?

Where did this light come from? There were not yet sun, moon, or stars to give light. There were certainly no lamps, candles, or even yet fires for people to tend and gather round. So what created this light on the first day with no wood, oil, or heavenly bodies? From what source did it emanate?

We Protestants usually don't think about these things. We're too busy arguing about atonement theories and doctrines of predestination and free will. But our Eastern Orthodox siblings have thought about this long and hard. And they have a beautiful answer that has something to teach us.

According to the Eastern Orthodox, the first light of creation which God spoke into being was the Uncreated Light. The Light that needs no flame or celestial body, because it emanates from God's self. This divine Uncreated Light is infinitely brighter than the mortal eye can comprehend. Those who have seen it, report that after experiencing the Uncreated Light, even sun and moon appear black to them. And, yes, some have seen it.

The first person known to have seen the Uncreated Light was Moses. This is the light he saw at the burning bush. It was infinite light without source. That is why the wood and leaves of the bush were not consumed by it. Moses saw it again when he beheld God's glory. He was on Mount Sinai. He had just asked for new tablets because he had smashed the first set in anger when he saw the Hebrews worshipping the golden calf at the foot of the mountain. God had agreed to forgive the people and make new tablets for them.

Then Moses asked if he could see God's face. God told Moses that no one could see his face and live but he would let Moses behold his glory. So the next morning Moses hid in the cleft of the rock. Then when God had passed, Moses was able to see his glory as he was walking away. The Uncreated Light. For the rest of his life, he wore a veil because seeing God's glory would cause his own face to shine.

When the Israelites were freed from Pharaoh's hand, and were wandering in the wilderness, God's Presence stayed with them in a visible way: a pillar of fire by night, and a pillar of cloud by day. When they became scared, hungry, thirsty, and needed to find God — all they needed to do was look to the cloud. When Moses climbed Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, a cloud descended upon the mountain, obscuring it.

When God instructed the Israelites to construct a portable Tabernacle, God filled the tent with his Presence in the form of a cloud. And, later, when Solomon built the Temple, once again a cloud filled the sanctuary. So, when the cloud descends atop the mountain with Jesus, Peter, John and James

... we shouldn't be surprised.

The Presence of God is enveloping them, as the Presence of God has done time and time again to God's faithful people. God's Presence manifest as a cloud says something about God. The clouds don't bring more clarity, they obscure. They hide. They remind us of the mystery of God.

In our world we want to know things. We want Google always at our fingertips to tell us everything about anything. As humans we've always had a hunger and thirst for knowledge, ever since Eden. And, as technology advances through the millennia, we want more and more knowledge within our grasp at all times. And, for the faithful, that includes our relationship with God.

We want to know things about God. We want to know how to relate to God. We want to know how this story, or this proverb, or this parable applies to our life. Tangibly. Meaningfully. And, why wait? We'd like to know right now, please. But, a relationship with God isn't so easy. God isn't composed of a series of facts, easily digestible and readily relatable.

God is a mystery. God's Presence is enveloped in mystery. Coming into God's Presence isn't downloading a set of search results. It's like entering a thick cloud, where everything is obscured, distorted, colourless, disoriented. But, there, in the midst of the cloud is the Presence of God who comes to be with us.

So, our challenge is to learn how to sit in the cloud, to learn patience, to learn to be comfortable not knowing everything we think we have to know, and to be open to change. Moses came down from the clouded mountain with his face radiant, changed. It's in the cloud that we're changed. Peter, James, and John had gone up the mountain to pray with Jesus. In the midst of their praying they had a visionary experience. They saw Jesus' face shining. His clothes became bright as a flash of lightning. Their humble rabbi was radiating with the Uncreated Light! And suddenly beside him were Moses and Elijah, also shining with glory.

Then the disciples began to feel very drowsy, as Jesus and the two prophets spoke together. The last thing they heard before falling into a deep sleep was something about Jesus and a new Exodus.

Oh, they had such visions. Peter felt that he had been called out of darkness into wonderful light. James understood that every great thing came from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. And John knew that Jesus was the true light, the light of humanity. That the light had come into the world and the darkness had not overcome it.

When they awoke, the two prophets were leaving. But the disciples didn't want the experience to end. Peter called out, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters — one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Then they looked up and a cloud was descending upon the mountain. They were filled with fear and dread as the cloud enveloped them. There in the darkness of the cloud, they heard a voice: "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."

As soon as the voice was done speaking, the vision was over. They were alone on the mountain with Jesus. The disciples kept their encounter with the Uncreated Light to themselves until after Jesus had been taken up into heaven.

Peter, James, and John were changed on that mountain, forever and, not because they learned lots of facts. They probably descended with more questions than answers. But, like Moses, they met the Living God. That's what changes us. That's what alters the course of our lives. That's what we're all about: being in the Presence of God.

One of the often over-looked lessons in the story is that the glory of God is only possible if lived together, in community. Nobody, not even Jesus, could shine alone! The work of that trinity shows that only when we are together in God's radiance can we light each other's lives. Glory is only possible if shared, and that means that we are to share the light of Christ to the world, especially those placed in the shadows of our society.

This is related to the second theological point. The shadow, which they disappear into, carries the voice of God affirming Jesus. In that way, when we light the lives of those placed in the shadows of society, we know that it is from those shadows, from those clouds that the voice of God appears, affirming Jesus!

Third, this metamorphosis directs Jesus back into his mission. While the disciples wanted to hang out there amidst those giants of faith, basking in the

glory and transfiguration of Jesus, they were directed to go back to their lives.

Astronaut Chris Hadfield wrote: The blast of glory that attends launch and landing doesn't last long. The spotlight moves on, and astronauts need to, as well. If you can't, you'll end up hobbled by self-importance, or by the fear that nothing else you do will ever measure up ... More than 600 people have had the opportunity to see our planet from afar, and for most of them, the experience seems to have reinforced or induced humility. Seeing the whole world ... is not only awe-inspiring, but profoundly humbling.

Space travel has made us feel that we have a personal obligation to be good stewards of our planet and to educate others about what's happening to it." The spotlight moves on, and astronauts need to, as well ..." Life moves on, and Christians who have been blessed to glimpse God's glory need to, as well.

In between the transfiguration and the noisy streets of our lives, we keep in silence trying to figure out the transfigured Jesus, knowing that we are part of this transfiguration, and that means that God will re-figure our lives, our thinking, our actions our path. When we meet the transfigured Jesus we are disfigured, transfigured, and re-figured.

At this juncture we can understand why the mountaintop story needs the story that follows the descent from the mountain, the story about the miracle of healing of the suffering boy. The boy is in psychological and social chains; the demons have taken hold of his life. The disciples were not transfigured

enough to deal with the suffering boy. The transfiguration of Jesus shows that Jesus has little patience with their lack of power, their lack of understanding and figuring out who he is and what message he has to offer. So, Jesus' indictment of the faith of the disciples: "You faithless and perverse generation," sounds true to us as disciples of Jesus today.

Our world is dashing the poor against the rocks of despair, hunger, and abandonment every day. The economic beast controlled by few demons is making our people convulse day and night. The homeless, the immigrant, the incarcerated, mothers who work three jobs to make a minimum wage to feed their children are like that boy, thrown into the shadows of our society, convulsing day and night right in front of us! And we, who seem to not know anything about the transfiguration of Jesus or our own transfiguration (metamorphosis) are looking at these people while asking Jesus: can we dwell in our worship tabernacles basking in your glory, away from the people and their pressing needs?

Unless we get out of the fortress of our worship spaces, and rebuke the unclean spirits of the powers that be, and shed light into the lives of the poor of our communities, we will never know what transfiguration means. Glory will be an unknown word and experience. We can have a sound theology and say that in that passage, Jesus is the connection between the shadow and the light of God, the incarnation of the most divine glory.

However, if in the name and by the grace of God we cannot heal the children of our communities and our world, and give them back to their parents, we will never know what transfiguration means, what shared glory looks like,

and we will never be “astounded at the greatness of God.”

To retreat to worship, to listen to the Word, to be immersed in the cross, and to be gathered in prayer leads inevitably to a return to the “everyday world” of human need where Jesus heals the sick and opposes the forces of evil. If worship is a retreat, it is not a retreat from the world but a retreat in order to come back to the world in love, mercy and grace.

This, is what worship is meant to be, a moment of reflection, immersion, companionship, and prayer so that we might embrace our callings in the world, to respond to the needs of God’s beloved children, with renewed energy, confidence, and determination.

But do we always see this hour of worship each Sunday in these terms? Do we simply come out of routine or obligation, to hear good music, or for a brief escape from the hectic pace of their lives? It is important to acknowledge, and to see a vision that church can be so, so much more. Worship can be the place where we hear God’s voice, focus on the nature of grace as we experience it in the cross, meet each other in prayer and song, and leave renewed for lives of meaning and purpose that come through service to neighbour.

A young couple that was relatively new to the church once explained to the pastor how important church had become for them. Whenever one of them could not make it – if, for instance, if their children were sick – they’d do a quick two-minute drill to check in on the week they had just been through and the week about to come to determine, as they said, “who needed church



more.” “Church is what helps us make sense of our lives,” they explained, “it’s that pick-me-up that connects us with God and our calling and sends us back into the week.”

What a difference that would make to all the corners of the community and the world we touch, if church were your pick-me-up that connects you with God and your calling! Well, that’s the opportunity we have before us each and every week, to be reminded that you are God’s beloved children, that God has in Jesus’ cross and resurrection revealed just how much God loves us and that this love conquers all, and has called, commissioned, and equipped us to make a difference in the lives of those around us.

There was a painting that hung in a gallery. It was of an unknown Cathedral in a distant land. Its majestic spires pointed to a swirling blue heaven dotted with clusters of bright yellow stars. Its mason work was intricate and elegant. It had recesses and arcs and flying buttresses. And in the centre was a round brightly-lit stained glass window depicting a saint who stared out from the window with a peaceful gaze.

A young man stood and admired the painting. He stood observing it for hours. Tears streaming down his cheeks. Finally he went home and told his parents he was quitting law school so he could become a painter. He wanted to be able to paint spires piercing the swirling nights with yellow stars.

The next day, a mother stood and admired the painting. She stood there for hours. Tears streaming down her cheeks. She went home and announced to her husband that she didn’t know how, but she was going to go to school

and become an architect. She wanted to build beautiful cathedrals with intricate stonework, and arcs and flying buttresses, like the one in the painting.

The following day, a successful business man stopped to admire the painting. He stood and stared at it for hours. Tears streaming down his face. He went home and sold his business and used the money to help people in need. Then he went about doing good to all he met, so that he might discover the source of the mysterious light that illuminated the saint.

Just imagine what could happen as more and more of us, upon hearing this message, would catch this vision. It may just be that our worship – and along with it the whole Church – is transfigured by the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

**Amen.**

## **TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY PRAYERS FOR MARCH 2, 2025**

It is a strange time of year, O God. We linger between the seasons of Epiphany and Lent. We live between the joy of your appearing and the horror of your undoing at the hands of those who would not or could not accept your message of love, grace and forgiveness or embrace your way of life.

We, – like Peter, James, and John – wait for your appearing in dazzling light and unmistakable clarity: We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus who is the truth – the truth that love is stronger than hate; that peace is possible; that life can emerge even in the midst of devastation. We pray for that truth to be known.

We give thanks for the good news that unfolds in the world as people dream your dreams, follow your nudging, and seek you in the faces they meet each day. Perhaps, God, it is the only Transfiguration we really need.

We pray for the people of the world whose names we will never know, whose faces flash across our screens in anonymity born of numbers; those who bear the weight of earth's pain: those working in refugee camps trying to ease the pain of homeless, war-ravaged people; those providing medical aid; those supplying essential supplies and resources; and those volunteering for relief agencies and nongovernment agencies including Lutheran World Relief. We pray for the innocent civilians caught in the travesties of wars, for prisoners of war, refugees, and the vulnerable, including women, children and the frail. We pray for those who respond to floods, devastating fires, avalanches, earthquakes, and storms.

We pray that the world leaders look to you for wisdom and support as they try to negotiate for peace, in solidarity, with love and compassion: We pray for peace in Ukraine, in the Middle East, and South Sudan, Haiti, the Congo, and the many regions of conflicts throughout our world.

Renew and restore in us a compelling vision and doing what we can to care for your Creation. Encourage us in a counter-cultural faithfulness that is not

about consumerism. Spur us with new insight and a deeper understanding that we may live mindfully each day, conscious of the impact we have on your Creation. Help us to be better stewards of your Creation, in gratitude and respect using what supports our lives but neither squandering or taking more than what is sustainable or necessary. For the sake of future generations help us to protect, restore, and preserve the infinite beauty and bounty of your Creation.

For all those who live lives of quiet witness to your love and way of life, we give thanks, O God. Draw us into the rhythm of Lent as it unfolds in our midst; a sacred invitation to slow down, to be still, to open our hearts and souls to explore and reflect upon your life and love in these upcoming days. Open us to your light that we might see ourselves clearly, with all our fears and shortcomings, and responsibilities that distract us from our relationship with you; and give us the will to recommit our faith in you and your will for our lives, with all we are, including our hopes, desires and dreams.

Transform your world as you transform your church, that all may be made new and whole. Lord Jesus Christ, when we do not know what to do, when we are surprised or overwhelmed by your presence in our lives, give us the wisdom to slow down, to listen deeply for your quiet voice, to marvel and ponder in awe and wonder at the mystery embedded in our faith, and to renew our commitment to follow you all the days of our lives.

We pray for the transfiguration of our churches and their leaders: Bishops Susan and Kathy, Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Anne Germond, Bishops of the Moravian Worldwide church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, our sister congregation San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastor Ana Maria Jara, Our Redeemer Lutheran in Penticton - Bishop Larry Kochendorfer (Interim), Trinity Anglican + Lutheran Church in Port Alberni, all pastors, priests, deacons, musicians and volunteers. Bless them and their ministries.

We pray for our Muslim community here, and around the world, which is beginning the holy month of Ramadan. May the holiness of shared sacred prayers, music, and rituals bring about a deepening love, peace, and unity to all who follow the Muslim faith tradition.

We pray for all whose needs are beyond our power to meet, knowing that you, alone, are the Great Physician. Great Comforter, surround the family of Pr. Elmer Krushel, father of Eric, Brian, and Keith as they mourn his death. We are grateful for the life of Pr. Pamela McGee who passed away this week in Gibsons, B.C. She was the first woman ordained in the ELCIC on May 7, 1976. May the promise of eternal life with you be a source of comfort to those who mourn.

Help us to see your presence in our lifelong journey of discipleship and faith, and that your appearance in all our circumstances brings reassurance and peace. Like Peter, James, and John may we come down from the mountain and commit to engaging in relationships with others in the world, bringing hope and light and sharing the good news of your redeeming love, mercy, and forgiveness. We ask all these things in the name of Christ Jesus, who taught us to pray:

**Our Father ...**