



Sunday Reflection

Season of Epiphany

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 14 February 2021

Sunday before Lent

As we approach Lent we pause to glimpse God's glory revealed in scripture and sacrament. As we watch in wonder Christ transfigured, we ask God to transform our lives, bringing us fresh commitment and courage to make God's glory known to others.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

Mark 9:7

An Illustration to set the scene

In the fourteenth century a monk and theologian from Mount Athos named *Gregory Palamas* formulated the doctrine of the **Light of Tabor**, the "dazzling" light that was revealed at the transfiguration of Jesus.

In Eastern Orthodox theology this light is identified with that which was seen by Paul at his conversion and, indeed, there was a time when every monk who took up icon painting had to begin by depicting the transfiguration, because it was believed that this icon is painted not with colours but with *Taboric Light*.

Since then, generations of artists have attempted to depict Jesus transfigured. One of the best known is the last painting by the *Italian Renaissance artist Raphael*, who worked on it until his death in 1520.

Now kept in Vatican City, the painting depicts Jesus, flanked by Moses and Elijah, radiating from the centre of the canvas. Peter, James and John are on the ground shielding their eyes from the light.

Around forty years later, *Titian's Transfiguration of Christ* is very different in many respects although it, too, shows the prophets on either side of Jesus and the disciples on the ground.

William Blake's watercolour painting, painted in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, is far more nebulous, showing all the characters in creamy pastel shades.

In more recent years many have chosen abstract imagery. The Turkish artist *Armando Alemnar's* painting is a riot of fluid orange-and-yellow flame-like shapes, with no obvious figures, although you conjure them up in much the way that you can conjure up all kinds of images when you gaze into a fire.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Thomas Aquinas considered the transfiguration the greatest miracle, and it is certainly unique in that it happened to Jesus himself.

In addition, it is considered to be one of the five major milestones in the Gospel narrative of the life of Jesus, the others being **baptism, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension**.

The transfiguration is a pivotal event which brings together the old and the new,
the divine and the human,
the temporal and the eternal.

The mountain-top setting is significant as the place where God meets people.

It was on top of a mountain that God gave the Law to Moses, and it is on a mountain top that Jesus is revealed in his divinity.

The presence of Moses and Elijah brings together the old and the new. Moses was the giver of the Law, and Elijah was considered the greatest of the prophets.

Between them these two great figures represent the two principal components of the Old Testament – the Law and the Prophets.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

In Christian theology Jesus is held to be both perfectly divine and perfectly human.

Theologians and scholars of Christology debate the detail of that, but in our secular day and age we tend to see Jesus through the lens of humanity, choosing to characterise him as human rather than divine.

Perhaps we do so because the notion of divinity is challenging and at odds with the world in which we live.

Indeed, some come perilously close to seeing Jesus as merely a charismatic person who styled himself as the *Son of God*.

So for us, perhaps, the value of today's Gospel reading is that it reminds us of the divinity that is at the heart of Jesus' humanity, giving us an opportunity to be dazzled by his radiant beauty and to reflect on him as "the Beloved" Son of God, to whom God wants us to listen with reverence and awe.

Jesus' choice of Peter, James and John as witnesses to this remarkable event, and his command to them not to tell anyone else, suggests that this is a special insight, something that only those who have the potential to grasp the truth may see. This is echoed in our reading from Corinthians, when Paul writes that God "has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God".

This tells us that faith comes first.

We may be moved and inspired by the work of generations of artists, who have imagined and depicted the mysterious and dazzling scene.

Yet it's only once we have taken the leap of faith in our own lives that we glimpse the brilliant light for ourselves.

"This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

Mark 9:7

Here are links to images of the works of art mentioned in the reflection for today, take a look below on the following pages

Italian Renaissance artist Raphael *The Transfiguration from*
[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/Transfiguration by Raphael in the Pinacoteca Vaticana of the Vatican Museum %285790228342%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/Transfiguration_by_Raphael_in_the_Pinacoteca_Vaticana_of_the_Vatican_Museum_%285790228342%29.jpg)



Titian's - Transfiguration of Christ

from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d8/Titian_Transfiguration_c1560_SanSalvador.jpg



William Blake's watercolour painting of *The Transfiguration*

From <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/33/20/3b/33203b7f426334af193afd450112840c.jpg>



Armando Alemdar's painting of *The Transfiguration of Jesus*

From https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/3/34/Transfiguration_of_Jesus.jpg



Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk