



February 3, 2008

Focus Scripture

Matthew 17:1-9

Additional Scriptures

Exodus 24:12-18

Psalms 2 or Psalm 99

2 Peter 1:16-21

Holy God, you encounter us in places where we seek you, and in places where we flee from you. Ease our fears. Open our ears and eyes to you, wherever and in whomever you reveal yourself to us. Prepare us to journey as you call. Amen.

Holy Encounter

As Advent opened, so the Season after the Epiphany closes: on a holy mountain where God may be found. It is a place of sacred mystery, where shining and shadow convey holy presence. It is a place of community across time, where God's people of past and present meet. It is a place of silence and witness, where visions are kept quiet and God says of Jesus: "Listen to him."

Focus Scripture: Matthew 17:1-9

Matthew often links the stories of Jesus with allusions from Hebrew Scriptures. The story of the transfiguration of Jesus echoes the story of Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:29-35). Both are encounters with God on a cloud-covered mountaintop; in both, God's voice is heard from within the covering cloud. Jesus' face shines as Moses' did on his descent from Mount Sinai.

The symbolism of Moses and Elijah in this text connects with key themes in Jesus' life and destiny. Both Moses and Elijah endured rejection by the people, but had support from God. Both were supporters of the Torah (law) and performed miracles. Elijah was taken up into heaven without having died (2 Kings 2:11). Legends in first-century Judaism suggest Moses also was taken up into heaven before death.

"Transfigured" in verse 2 translates the Greek verb *metamorphoo*. Elsewhere in the New Testament, that verb is used to suggest changes deep within a person. For example: "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Romans 12:2). The story of Jesus' transfiguration uses outward details to hint at the deeper mystery of metamorphosis. The face of Jesus shines. The clothes of Jesus become like light ("dazzling" translates a word that literally means "light").

Jesus takes James, Peter, and John with him up this mountain. Jesus later asks these three to remain with him while praying in Gethsemane. All three were major figures in the early church. Peter became a leader among the disciples. John, whom many believe is the one referred to as "the beloved disciple," served as a model for closeness of relationship with Jesus. Matthew does not tell us if this was James the brother of John or James the brother of Jesus. James the brother of Jesus was a leading figure in the Jerusa-

lem church. In the four lists of the twelve disciples in the New Testament, the name of James the brother of John always appears among the first three named.

The voice from the cloud makes the same affirmation that Jesus heard at his baptism (Matthew 3:17). The one difference is the command: "listen to him." "Listen to him" clarifies that this holy encounter is meant to lead to obedience and following. Jesus' words, "do not be afraid," likewise make it possible to take up the challenging call of discipleship. Listening to Jesus reveals what is required to follow Jesus on the journey to Jerusalem.

Today's other texts share themes of encounters with God that are rich in mystery and awe. **Exodus 24:12-18** tells of Moses ascending Mount Sinai. God's glory meets Moses in shadow and light. The words of **Psalms 99** balance God's holiness with affirmation of God's justice. The "holy mountain" of the Temple on Mount Zion continues to offer a place of holy encounter. In **Psalms 2**, the psalmist warns against those who act with indifference toward God. God cares, and out of that care comes invitation to faithfulness. In **2 Peter 1:16-21** we hear of God's majesty in an account of Jesus' transfiguration. This witness summons our attentiveness to God.



The Season after the Epiphany closes with Jesus' holy encounter on a mountain. Transfiguration reveals Jesus not merely in the details of "shining," but in the words of God's favour and our summons to "listen to him." What have been your experiences of holy encounter and transformation? In what ways do you and your faith community listen to Jesus; how has such listening changed you?

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage. Use user name *spirit* and password *linking*.

