



Sense of the Sacred

February 22 • 2009

Focus Scripture

Mark 9:2-9

Additional Scriptures

2 Kings 2:1-12

Psalm 50:1-6

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Holy God, we see your glory in the face of Jesus the Christ. Grant that, as we look on Christ, we may be transformed and be strengthened to follow your call to serve in the world. Amen.

In the Season after the Epiphany, the church explores signs of God's glory shining in the world. Mark describes Jesus' transfiguration and, with the disciples, we sense the sacred moment; we will see things in a new way from this time forward. We catch Elisha's vision of the sacred as Elijah is caught up to heaven. With Paul and the psalmist, we give thanks that God's light shines forth through us.

Focus Scripture: Mark 9:2-9

The Season after the Epiphany ends with the story of Jesus' transfiguration. This revealing of Jesus' glory is a turning point, marking the end of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and the beginning of the journey towards Jerusalem and the fate that awaits Jesus there. Just before today's reading, Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah. But Peter does not understand Jesus' teaching about the kind of Messiah Jesus has come to be.

Six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a mountain. While there, Jesus' appearance is transfigured – Jesus shines. The disciples see Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah. This event has echoes of Hebrew Scriptures. Moses' face was transfigured on Mount Sinai when he was in God's presence and received the Law. Elijah also experienced God's presence on Sinai. Elijah's return will announce the coming of the Messiah. For Mark, Jesus fulfills the work of the Law and the prophets.

Jesus' shining garments mark him as one who has triumphed through martyrdom. Jesus' changed appearance – a "metamorphosis" – reflects his nature as both divine and human, and anticipates Jesus' changed appearance at the Resurrection.

Peter grasps a sense of the sacred, and wants to preserve it; he offers to build three tents. The word used for "tent" can mean "tabernacle," the same word used in John 1:14 to describe the incarnate Jesus "dwelling" among us. This word also connects with the Exodus story of the tent in the wilderness, and the Ark where God's glory dwells.

A cloud, a sign of God's presence, comes over the mountain. From it, a voice repeats the words from Jesus' baptism: "This is my Son, the Beloved." In Mark's account of Jesus' baptism, only Jesus hears the voice from heaven. Here the disciples hear the voice telling them to listen to Jesus.

This time must have been a terrifying and amazing experience for the three disciples, but Jesus cautions them not to tell anyone about it. We have seen this before in Mark's gospel. It is not yet time for the disciples to proclaim the good news. The meaning of Jesus' messiahship is to remain a secret for the time being. As we move into the Season of Lent, we feel the tension building as Jesus' ministry continues.

It is in the seeing and understanding that God's messenger is known. In **2 Kings 2:1-12**, the prophet Elijah is carried up to heaven, and Elisha glimpses the sacred and comes to a fuller understanding of who Elijah is. Elisha receives a double portion of the spirit of Elijah, and is thus known as a prophet in the true succession.

The awe-inspiring image of God's majesty and our response to it are central in the other texts. In **Psalm 50:1-6**, God's majesty and power shine forth from Zion. God calls and judges, gathering the faithful. Paul, in **2 Corinthians 4:3-6**, speaks in images of light and darkness, of blindness and sight. Just as Moses veiled his face when it shone with reflected glory, so the gospel of Christ is veiled and hidden from those who do not believe. As we live in faith, God's love shines in our hearts. As did the disciples on the mountain, we see God's glory in Jesus the Christ.

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"Epiphany" means "showing forth." During this season, we have explored many ways in which God's glory is revealed in the life and work of Jesus and the disciples. Where and when have you sensed the sacred or caught glimpses of God's presence? How do such moments define your life as a disciple and a church?

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

