

## **EPIPHANY: A TIME TO PROCLAIM GOD'S LOVE FOR ALL PEOPLE**

### **The Transfiguration of Our Lord**

**Last Sunday after the Epiphany**

**February 19, 2012**

**2 Kings 2:1-12**

**Psalm 50:1-6**

**2 Corinthians 4:3-6**

**Mark 9:2-9**

### **A Glimpse Into the Divine Realm**

The Transfiguration of Our Lord provides us with a rare moment to experience “the knowledge of God’s glory shining in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6b, *GNT*) – to see Jesus transfigured – the climactic manifestation of God’s glory towards which the pericopes throughout the Epiphany season have been building.

The Transfiguration takes place six days after Jesus had spoken for the first time about his death and resurrection (see Mark 8:31), and the writer of Mark’s Gospel has placed the event not long after Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29). Peter, James, and John are selected to witness this glimpse into the divine realm where they see Jesus transformed and conversing with Moses and Elijah.

What these three disciples see frightens them; Peter wants to “make three tents,” one for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah (9:5), but in his confusion “he did not know what to say” (9:6b, *GNT*). They do not comprehend this Transfiguration of their Lord as a preview of what they would later come to understand after Jesus had risen from the dead. Could this be why Jesus tells them not to tell anyone what they have seen “until the Son of Man has risen from death” (9:9, *GNT*)?

Jesus’ Transfiguration recalls God’s appearance to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:15-18). Here, too, a bright cloud is a sign of God’s presence, and the voice from heaven echoes the words we heard at Jesus’ baptism – only this time with an added imperative: “Listen to him!” (9:7).

But listening to what Jesus says about his impending death is not what the disciples want to hear. According to Mark’s Gospel, after telling the disciples the first time that he “will suffer much and be ... put to death” (8:31), Peter rebukes Jesus. When Jesus tells them a second time (9:31), the disciples do not understand (9:32) and begin arguing as to who among them is the greatest (9:34). And after telling them a third time, James and John concern themselves with their own sense of importance and request that they be seated on either side of Jesus in the glorious Kingdom (10:37).

As twenty-first century Christians reading these texts, we may well ponder why the disciples just did not “get it.” But are we any different? Are we not slow to understand what discipleship involves when Jesus says to us, “If any of you want to come with me . . . you must forget about yourself, carry your cross, and follow me” (8:34, *GNT*)? Do we “listen” and want to hear those Gospel texts that challenge us to move beyond our own comfort zones?

Even the disciples were quite willing to stay and savor the moment of Jesus’ glory. “Teacher, how good it is that we are here!” (9:5a, *GNT*). Peter’s first words upon witnessing Jesus with Moses and Elijah conveyed a desire to remain on the mountaintop. Like Peter, we, too, want to hold on to and bask in the glow of mountaintop experiences. But discipleship demands that we descend to the plain and confront life’s day-to-day challenges. Yet, we have the assurance that Jesus is there with us, in our struggles and our joys.

The apostle Paul exhorts us not to conform ourselves “to the standards of this world, but let God transform [us] inwardly by a complete change of mind” (Romans 12:2a, *GNT*). With Jesus, we *are* transformed! We have good news to share – news that is not to be contained in a “booth” or “tent” high up on a mountaintop – but news that must reach even those in the lowest valley since the Gospel is to be shared *in* the world.

Let us be attentive to Jesus’ loving voice and listen to him so that “all of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces, and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms us into his likeness in an ever greater degree of glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18, *GNT*).

*This week’s Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel who served, until retirement, on the staff of American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship. Barbara remains a valued consultant to ABS.*

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Madagascar** – with thanks to God for his provision of the revised Protestant Bible; and with prayers for this year’s launch; also pray for a good start to the Study Bible project, for peace and political stability, for the celebration of the bicentenary of Bible work in the Indian Ocean, that many people will become involved; also pray for Bible work on **Mayotte** and for more openings for the Gospel on the **Comoros Islands; Mauritius** – with thanks to God for the Society’s 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary and for the impact of the Créole New Testament to be used as the basis of an initiative to encourage spiritual growth; and with prayers that thousands of people will be touched by the Gospel message and that the anniversary celebration will give the ministry of the Society new impetus; also pray for the development of Bible work in **Réunion** and for efforts to use the Bible message to address the problem of teenage pregnancy in **Rodrigues; Seychelles** – with thanks to God for the production of the Book of Isaiah in Kreol Seselwa, due to be launched soon, and that the Society has been able to do translations as its main activity in recent decades; and with prayers that God will provide translators since the Society’s small group of four translators has declined to only two: one full-time and one part-time; also pray that translation projects can continue to make progress, for the faithful donors, and for the staff and board members of the Society;

**Mozambique** – with thanks to God for the impact of the *Good Samaritan* program; that the Society’s six ongoing translation projects are nearing completion; for the completion and launch of the New Testament in Cicopi, Xirhonga and Emakhuwa.; and for the successful implementation of the TAZI project; and with prayers for the rural literacy project; for the continued impact of the *FCBH* program; and for openness for Church leaders as they join the Society in challenging churches to make greater use of the Scriptures.

**Activity Corner: “Shining Hearts”**

Supplies needed: Bible; 8-1/2” x 11” construction paper; heart pattern (approximately 7” x 10”); scissors; pens or pencils.

Read together 2 Corinthians 4:3-6. Invite everyone in your household to trace and cut out a paper heart. On the front side, ask everyone to copy 2 Corinthians 4:6. On the reverse side, encourage everyone to write down the ways that the light of God’s love, which shines in their hearts, “transforms” them and helps them to live out their faith in their day-to-day activities and encounters with others. Throughout the week, during family devotions, ask members of your household to share their thoughts. Conclude by reading Psalm 50:1-6 and singing “Shine, Jesus, Shine” or one of your favorite hymns.

**“Transfiguration” Word Game**

Supplies needed: Writing paper; pencils or pens

Invite members of your household to form as many words as possible from the word “Transfiguration.” Words cannot be less than three letters; plural forms of words that are formed by adding “s” do not qualify. Set a time limit of 10 or 15 minutes.