

2026 Transfiguration Celebration

The transfiguration is a fairly well-known story. Though Peter is quick to remind us today this story is not made up - it was real and eyewitnessed. Nevertheless, we know this story well, Jesus gets all bright with Moses and Elijah there. We read it every year here before we go into lent. Just as Jesus will go down from this mountain and set his face toward the cross, so we, after today will turn toward the cross as lent begins this Wednesday.

But not everyone in the Church celebrates the transfiguration at this point in the church year. We have record of the feast as early as the 6th century, that's the 500s. And in the middle ages, the Roman Church, commemorating a victory in battle, placed the date for the feast on August 6th.

But now in the three-year series which is more recent, transfiguration Sunday has moved to today, before lent, colored it white, why? To allow it to be more *celebratory*.

Which invites the question: What are we celebrating at the transfiguration? At Christmas we celebrate God fulfilling his promise to come to save. At Easter he fulfills his promise to rise again and conquer death. At ascension we celebrate the enthronement of the true and good King.

So what are some things worth celebrating, finding joy in, on Transfiguration Sunday? I'm glad you asked:

1. Divinity. 2 Fulfillment 3. Merciful Truth 4. Lowliness 5. Eternal Life.

Divinity: We celebrate our Lord's divinity. Jesus is true God and true man. His humanity is shown often in his ministry and life as he grows hungry, tired, thirsty, as he dies. It's so apparent that many looking for God in the flesh, looking for the Messiah, look to Jesus and are disappointed, saying, "Isn't that just Joseph's son?" No, he shines. And three disciples get to see

it. Make no mistake Jesus is still God even when he is sick or hungry, but here, they get to see his divinity -the maker of the sun shines as bright as it. And this is reason for celebration because we in our brokenness long to see Christ's work in our lives. "A miracle please Lord, something to strengthen my faith Lord, I am struggling, Lord! Something, anything!"

Do you think the apostles thought that as Jesus died on the Cross? "Please, shine again Jesus, we know you can! Why won't you? Please, show them, show us!"

And this is actually the beginning of the answer to why at the end of our reading he tells them to tell no one until after he is risen. Jesus, true man, and true God, will shine again, but after the suffering, after the cross. Glory, in this kingdom comes through suffering. And so His apostles will live in victory but after the exile, the prisons, the martyrdoms. We, yes, we here, will live in victory, but after the cancer, after the accident, after the pain. But take heart. Jesus shines, the victory is real, and we will see it. That's worth celebrating, even in the hard times.

Two: fulfillment. Moses and Elijah show up on the mountain. We've heard these sermons before, right? Moses represents the law, Elijah the prophets, and so the whole Old Testament all of those threads, all of those promises and prophecies, all of what is good and pure and godly, finds itself here in Jesus.

Is it worth celebrating that Jesus fulfills all of this on our behalf? The Church for 1500 years, at the minimum, has thought so. This is the One who upholds the law and prophets, that we cannot. There will be a fulfillment of all God's Word and Truth and it is found in this One, Jesus.

Speaking of truth: that's our third point. The inner circle of the disciples are here on the mountain, of course, and I am cheating and stealing from the other transfiguration accounts here that point out more obviously that Peter, the disciple with the foot shaped mouth, "doesn't know

what he is saying” when we speaks. Here is Moses, Elijah, and the Messiah, Jesus and they are talking and what does Peter think, “Yeah, I should interject something here!” And so in the midst of that conversation between two saints and their King, foolish words are said. Foolish because Peter wants to stay there and dodge the cross, but no, then how can we be saved? Foolish words come up.

Over and against foolishness, a Word of Truth is spoken. The voice from Heaven, the Father, speaks and truth comes to put the foolishness away. Is that worth celebrating? That we can know where truth is found? “Listen to Him,” the voice says. And we have his word – God be praised.

We are inundated with foolish words, and we’ve said them too. And if you don’t think it’s a problem read the comments section online. Or better yet, don’t. You WILL find foolish words there. It’s in us, it’s all around us.

But lest we think our foolishness might separate us from this One who is Truth. We hear from Jesus, “Rise, and have no fear.” This is a merciful truth, from a merciful God. In the Old Testament people were on a mountaintop with God and the miracle was that “he did not lay his hand on them.” He didn’t smite them: sinners in his Holy presence. But on this mountain God does lay a hand on them, but do not fear, it is not to smite them for their sins, it’s a tender and reassuring touch.

How can this be? That sinners and lepers and people like us could not only be in the presence of God, or dine with Him, but to be touched by Perfect Holiness? If not through Christ who will shed his blood of the covenant to make us clean to be in His presence?

And so we celebrate today, that Christ does not stay on the mountaintop. He does not stay in tents made at the mountaintop. He leaves. And goes back down off the mountain.

God does not demand us to climb into the cloud of his holiness with our own work or effort, like the law demands and Moses did. No, he descends down into our lowliness and brokenness. He comes down into our foolishness, our broken relationships, our tears, our pain, our funerals. And when we are there begging, asking God, to show us his divinity, his power, a miracle, please to strengthen our faith – is He just Joseph’s son and nothing more? He comes down into our mire and pain and goes to a cross where his blood is spilled, where the sacrifice is made and he does not shine and come down off of it, he offers no miracle to save himself. He dies.

And as we live here, with no great mountaintop feeling, wondering if there is any point or hope or meaning, He comes with his word, sacrament, and promises: Rise, do not fear, the blood is upon you, the promises are true, and he has set aside his glory to walk with us through all even death, the cross, that he might overcome it for us. Shown at his resurrection.

Which leads me to my last reason to celebrate on transfiguration: eternal life. If I can bring us back up on that mountain again, we see it there don’t we? Here’s Elijah, like a thousand years after his ministry. Elijah ran scared from Jezebel, despairing, depressed, and God sustained him, even unto here. Safe and sound with the King.

Here’s Moses, he died across the Jordan, unable to go to the earthly promised land because of his sin. But here he is, in the promised land after all – something must have happened to his sin – taken away? There he stands an heir of the greater promised land of life, speaking with his King.

If this account is true, if that testimony from the epistle lesson is true, then we know eternal life is real. And yes, that’s the same of the resurrection of Christ, obviously, but it’s true here too isn’t it? We have all these doubts and fears, “Is it just a coping mechanism? How can it be real to live on after death? By what mechanism, in what state?” And on and on, But if this is true, if these

men were there, alive, speaking with their King, then perhaps, as he has promised, this King is strong enough to Author life – he certainly has as our eyes are now open (unless I've put you to sleep) and this is real. Who's to say whoever got us here to life, can't do it again?

And whoever might it be that is strong enough to accomplish this? "And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only." How many voices spoke to us during the super bowl commercials? Dozens, promising this or that to change your life... This One, Jesus, will go off the mountain, he will go through suffering and then receive his full coronation as the Risen One." He will see us through our suffering and to life eternal with the saints before us. Celebrate.

Divinity, Fulfillment, Merciful Truth, Lowliness, Eternal Life. God be praised. Amen.