

EPIPHANY: A TIME TO CELEBRATE GOD'S GIFT FOR ALL PEOPLE

**Last Sunday after the Epiphany
Feast of the Transfiguration
March 6, 2011**

Exodus 24:12-18
Psalm 2 or Psalm 99
2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 17:1-9

The Dazzling Light of God's Presence

Today is the last Sunday after the Epiphany. This Sunday marks the end of one part of the church year and the beginning of another. Today, Epiphany draws to a close, and this Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, marks the beginning of the Lenten season. Throughout Epiphany, the Gospel readings revealed Jesus Christ to us in numerous ways and places: From John the Baptist's proclamation of Jesus, to the visitors from the East recognizing the baby as the one for whom they have waited. Jesus was presented in the temple by his parents for dedication, and is recognized by Simeon and Anna as the anointed one from God for whom Israel had been waiting.

And in today's Gospel reading, Jesus is gloriously transfigured, accompanied by visions of Moses, Israel's lawgiver, and Elijah, Israel's prophet, before Peter, John, and James. The transfiguration is a turning point in Jesus' ministry. From this point onward, Jesus speaks more of his sufferings in Jerusalem. Today, we turn from looking back to the Incarnation and Christmas, and begin to look ahead: to Jerusalem, to the cross and to the empty tomb. But it is not enough simply to see God's glory in Christ. There needs to be a transfiguration in our lives. These mountaintop moments are meant to prepare and fortify us for what lies ahead—for ministry and mission, most often in the valleys.

This Wednesday in the Ash Wednesday service, everyone will be called to the "observance of a Holy Lent." As we enter this season of reflection and self-examination, can we set aside our selfish will and allow the dazzling light of God's presence to shine through us? Will the Lenten season transform us to experience an overshadowing of God in our lives, to have a cloud come upon us, to be enveloped in the love of God? Can we be transfigured into the Body of Christ?

Today's readings remind us, as we undertake our Lenten journey, of the majesty and the glory of the God who created us, and of the promise of the God who does not and who will not leave us on our own. Just as Moses' shining face was a reminder to the Israelites that God will not abandon his people, no matter how difficult those people are, so too does it reassure us of God's on-going presence in our lives. For us, a new exodus, a new departure, is about to become a possibility, one that will free us from the bondage of sin and death. We will be drawn into God's own amazing light, into a new reality.

Great and gracious God our Father, overshadow us, transform and transfigure us into the Body of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who was revealed in splendor before his death on the cross. Grant that we, beholding his majesty, may be strengthened to follow him and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory. Help us to become heirs to eternal life with him, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one true God, forever and ever. Amen.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Tenny Thomas, a Ph.D. candidate at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He also serves as a consultant for American Bible Society in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Bolivia – with thanks to God for the completion of the Revised Aymara Bible; and with prayers for the lives of those who worked on it; pray for the revision of the Central Quechua Bible, that God will provide the funds needed and guide the translators, that the projects this year will change lives, and that God's Word will reach more people in Bolivia; also pray that God will grant wisdom to the General Secretary and board in leading the Society; **Uruguay** – with thanks to God for the new *Invest in a Child* project; and with prayers that, in Bible schools with the basics of God's Word, the project will disciple 5,000 children per year; pray that the Society will have the wisdom to see crises as opportunities for service, that the ministry will grow stronger, and that the economy will stabilize so that they can become self-supporting; also pray that they will be able to buy a new vehicle to service the *New Horizons* project; **Paraguay** – With thanks to God for the work of the Society in Paraguay; and with prayers for the country's leaders and political class, that they may receive wisdom and, in the fear of God, be able to govern the country wisely and honestly in its hour of need.

Activity: "Be-Dazzled"

Supplies needed: Bible, flashlight, Song – "Thy Word" by Amy Grant

Exodus 24:16 speaks of Moses' encounter with "The dazzling light of the Lord's presence." Here, God gave Moses instructions, laws, for his people. Likewise, God shines his light on us, bedazzles us, with his Word that gives us instruction / guidance so that we will know God's plan for our lives. God's Word acts as a lamp and a light as we walk with him. Engage participants in the game, "Be-Dazzled," which will provide an opportunity for them to offer praises to God for the light of his Word.

Instruct participants to form a circle. Ask for a volunteer to stand in the middle of the circle, holding a flashlight that shines brightly. Inform the group that this light represents the glory of God, and the light of God's Word. The person in the circle will close his/her eyes and spin around while counting to the number 5 and pointing the flashlight straight ahead. On the count of 5, whoever the light shines on will read aloud a verse of Psalm 99, which highlights God as the supreme king. Participants should be encouraged to read as they would a proclamation. After reading, he/she will switch places with the person in the middle of the ring. This pattern will continue until all the verses have been read. Afterwards, sing together, "Thy Word" by Amy Grant.