

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Well, I'm very, very pleased that we have a trumpet with us today. Thank you, Ken, wherever he is, lurking around the back. Any day is a good day for a trumpet as far as I'm concerned, but especially today because today is a major feast day, the Feast of the Transfiguration. It is a feast day that often gets overlooked. The reason being, I think, it's quite a difficult story to understand. It's certainly enigmatic. And it's challenging because it doesn't seem to quite fit with the rest of the gospel narrative. But we should pay attention to it here anyway because it's one of the very few stories in which our Patron Saint, James, actually does anything or appears or certainly does anything positive. So he is one of the three disciples that is up the mountain with Jesus at this amazing moment of transfiguration. And much of the story in Luke's gospel is much easier to relate to.

We see in the rest of the gospel, Jesus is a figure that we can recognize, a religious teacher going about preaching and healing. There's stories of Him praying, even sometimes getting angry. But what we have in this gospel story today has a different feel to it, has a different tone. The one who is transfigured is clearly no ordinary mortal. There's something else going on here.

But before I address the story directly, let me say something by way of the context. The story comes right in the middle of Luke's gospel. It's the hinge on which the gospel pivots. In all the gospels, this story of transfiguration comes straight after Jesus has been first recognized as the Messiah by St. Peter. St. Peter, if you remember, at the town of Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus says, "Who do people say that I am?" Says, "You are the Messiah." And straight after that moment of recognition, Jesus starts to talk about His suffering for the first time. And in all the gospels, we then get this story of transfiguration.

And I want to draw out three phrases that we see in this passage. The first is this. They saw His glory. Peter, James, and John rose from their slumber to see the glory of Jesus. It's interesting to note that Luke, unlike the other gospel writers, doesn't actually use the word transfiguration, which I think is because he was writing to a non-Jewish Gentile audience, and he

didn't want them confused. Because in their pagan culture, there were lots of stories going around and myths which were stories of transfiguration. And Luke wanted to say, this is slightly different. And to illustrate the point, transfiguration is still sometimes used in those unhelpful terms. If you are a Harry Potter fan, as I'm sure at least one or two people are, what I'm about to say won't be lost on you. I'm about to quote Hermione Granger, who I've never quoted in a sermon before, but Hermione Granger says this, which is typically Hermione if you've read the books. "I'm particularly interested in transfiguration, you know, turning something into something else. It's supposed to be very difficult."

But this kind of transfiguration that Hermione Granger is learning about at Hogwarts is very different to the transfiguration that occurred on the mountaintop that we're thinking about today. What Luke wants us to realize is that this isn't a case of turning something into something else. This was a moment when Jesus stayed the same, but something about Him was revealed that hadn't been revealed before. It's not Jesus becoming something else. This is a story of something very important about Jesus's identity being made known. So, Luke doesn't say that Jesus was transfigured. He says instead, the disciples saw Him, not transfigured, but they saw His glory. What the disciples saw was still Jesus, but it was Jesus in all His glory. And glory is the word that's unique to Luke here. It's a word that speaks of divinity, because all glory belongs to God. He alone is truly glorious. So what the disciples are witnessing here is they're catching a glimpse of Jesus's divine glory. They are seeing that Jesus isn't just from God, but He's of God.

We can see in this story of transfiguration, a vivid demonstration of who Jesus is. Peter has just named Him as the Messiah. And in this story of transfiguration, that identity, that divine identity is being confirmed. In my favorite Christmas carol Hark, the Herald Angels Sing, we sing these words. "Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity." Well, in this story of transfiguration, what happens on the mountain is that veil is pulled back for a moment and the disciples see behind the veil to Jesus's full divine glory.

Now, I'm very aware that this is a stumbling block to many people. I often hear people say, "Well, I can get

my idea around the notion of God, and I can see that Jesus is a very good moral and religious teacher, but I can't go the whole hog and see Him as divine." Well, this is a thought that's been around for generations. It's something that C.S. Lewis tackled head on in his book, *Mere Christianity*. So let me just read out how C.S. Lewis responded to that view. It's a long quote, but I think it's worth hearing. Lewis says this.

"I'm trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus. I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God. This is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the son of God or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool. You can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that option open to us. He did not intend to." So, to paraphrase, Jesus was either mad, bad, or God. And the story of the transfiguration is evidence of the latter. On the mountain, the disciples caught a glimpse of the divine majesty in the person of Jesus.

The second phrase I want to draw out to your attention is this. Peter says to Jesus, after witnessing this moment of transfiguration, "Master, it is good for us to be here." It's good for us to be here. Do we think that it's good for us to be here? I'd say it is. We have this amazing privilege of coming together freely to worship God in this beautiful building, in a beautiful place, beautiful music with other people. It is good for us to be here. It's a privilege. And it's not just at church that we can enjoy the company of God and know the joy that comes with that. We worship a God who goes with us, who dwells within us by His Holy Spirit. There was a woman in my last church who typed out this text and put it in her bathroom, so every morning when she got up to brush her teeth, she saw this phrase and was reminded. It is good for us to be here.

Finally, look at what the voice from the cloud says. "This is my son, my chosen. Listen to Him." The world is so noisy, it's good to be reminded of the need to be silent and to listen. To listen to Him. The disciples followed Jesus's advice. The gospel reading ends with us being told they kept silent. And in those days they told no one of the things they had seen. And what could they say? They must have been overwhelmed by what they'd witnessed. They'd known Jesus as a teacher and as a friend. And on the mountaintop, they caught a glimpse of Him in His glory. And the rest is silence. We too can benefit from turning down the constant babble of the world around us and the commentary that goes on in our heads and ponder the glory and the majesty that is made known in the person of Jesus Christ and available to us by His spirit that dwells within us.

In the words of Peter in our epistle, "Be attentive. Be attentive to this message so as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." Let's strive to be attentive to the God made known in Jesus who dwells by His spirit within us. And when we pray, remember that our prayers aren't just made up of words. We're not simply asking God for things. We can sit silently in the presence of God and open ourselves up to His transforming spirit. Prayer is not always about us trying to change God's mind, it's about the possibility of us being changed by God. May the God who transformed and transfigured Jesus be at work in each one of us by His spirit, that we too may be transformed into His likeness. Amen.