

Thursday 6 August 2020

Daily email to friends of St Matthew Croydon

From Richard Hinder

Dear Friends

Today 6 August the church celebrates the 'Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord' - more simply known as 'Transfiguration'.

What is Transfiguration, and what is its wider context?

Events involving Jesus recorded in the Bible are many and varied. Many of the actions of Jesus and his sayings are recorded in the four gospels and remembered in letters (epistles) to early Christian churches.

Apart from the birth of Jesus which we celebrate at Christmas, of particular note are five outstanding events in the life of Jesus: his **Baptism, Transfiguration, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension.**

Transfiguration is perhaps the most revealing of the five major events. Yet in our times the Transfiguration of Christ comes and goes as if it were 'just another saint's day' sandwiched between Sundays Trinity 8 and Trinity 9: neither of which have any special provision for the Transfiguration. I offer no reasons for this relatively low profile given to such an important event. But you and I can give it due prominence by remembering and giving thanks on this special day.

Transfiguration is a pivotal moment in many respects. It is a miracle which happens not to another person but to Jesus himself. Its occurrence is recorded around the middle of the gospel accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke: so is **prominently placed.**

In Mark's gospel the Transfiguration follows on from the confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ. Furthermore, there is an allusion to the event in the Gospel of John 1.14 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and **we have seen his glory**, the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth'.



LORENZO LOTTO, 1510–1520

The Transfiguration underpins the identity of Jesus as the Son of God

For Biblical accounts look at [Matthew 17](#), [Mark 9](#) and [Luke 9](#). The precise sequence of events varies between the three accounts. Here I am following Luke.

The context of the Transfiguration is the climax of a gradual revelation of Jesus as the Son of God.

In the period prior to the Transfiguration Jesus sent his disciples out into the country to bring the good news to more people and to cure diseases everywhere. After a time the disciples regrouped to meet with Jesus near Bethsaida: a fishing village on the north side of the Sea of Galilee close to where the river Jordan enters. Crowds followed them, drawn to experience these miracles. As a result, thousands of people needed to be fed: the result was the miracle of the feeding of five thousand people - which Simon our Vicar encouraged us to reflect upon during his sermon on Sunday last.

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Once crowds had dispersed, Jesus was praying alone with his disciples near by. He asked his disciples "Who do the crowds say I am?" He followed up by asking "Who do **you** say I am?". It was Peter who then identified Jesus as the Son of God.

Jesus next foretold of his suffering, his being killed and being raised on the third day.

About a week after these events Jesus led three of his disciples Peter, James and John to the top of a mountain to pray. The place was Mount Tabor, located south-west of the Sea of Galilee: not far from Nazareth. Tabor is a striking mountain, rising over 400 metres above the land like a dome. In a sense climbing it would bring you closer to the 'heavens' than you would be anywhere else in that area. It was symbolic.

On reaching the summit, Jesus is praying: the disciples see the appearance of Jesus change and his clothes become dazzling white. They see two outstanding men from ancient days - Moses and Elijah - talking with Jesus: they hear the voice of God and they see the Holy Spirit as a cloud. Jesus appears in 'glory' and talks of the coming events in Jerusalem.

This is the Transfiguration: Jesus being seen for who he was, is now and shall be for ever: the Son of God: at one with God the Father and the Holy Spirit and in open discourse with ancient persons.

Of **Baptism, Transfiguration, Crucifixion, Resurrection** and **Ascension** it is for me Transfiguration which speaks most profoundly of the divinity of our Lord. I wish the event were more prominently celebrated during the church year!

Across the centuries the Transfiguration has been depicted by numerous artists - such as Lorenzo Lotto (top right on the first page). You can see further artistic interpretations [here](#).

What does the Transfiguration mean for us today? It invites us to meet Jesus and to

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be at the service of our neighbours during this holiday time - if we can - in rest and detachment from our normal chores. It may be that - owing to the pandemic, or other illness, or the need to maintain a job - we are unable to take a break.

But in quiet times let us try to detach ourselves from worldly things, focus on Jesus and contemplate.

Let us listen prayerfully to Christ, beloved Son of the Father and meet him in prayer as he is: in glory.

Prayer for the Transfiguration

**Father in heaven,
whose Son Jesus Christ was
wonderfully transfigured
before chosen witnesses upon the holy
mountain,
and spoke of the exodus he would
accomplish at Jerusalem:
give us strength so to hear his voice
and bear our cross
that in the world to come we may see
him as he is;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.**

May you be blessed as we remember the Transfiguration together.

Amen

Richard Hinder