

**Year A: Epiphany Lastb Ex. 24:12-18; Ps 99; 2Pet 1:16-21; Mt 17:1-9
St. Barnabas, Florissant – February 23, 2020**

Focus Sentence: We, too, are transfigured by our pilgrimage with Christ.

SERMON

I offer these thoughts in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit....

Just think what Peter, James, and John have just seen! As they looked on, a change came over Jesus. Jesus' face became as bright as the sun, and his clothes a dazzling white. And then these three disciples see Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. Finally, they hear: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!!"

PAUSE

Jesus had just been transfigured right before their eyes. Jesus had been given a new and exalted appearance right up there with the Law (signified by Moses) and the prophets (signified by Elijah.) This person who, moments before, had looked like an ordinary human being, is proclaimed as God's Son by a Heavenly Voice. And Jesus is proclaimed to have God's authority, so, "Listen to Him!"

PAUSE

This season of Epiphany, which began on the Feast of Epiphany itself, January 6, and which ends at Ash Wednesday (February 26, this year), is all about manifestation, or “showings” of Jesus to let the observers know exactly who Jesus is. On Epiphany itself, Jesus is “manifested” to the three magi, or wise astrologers from the East, who are not Jews, but Gentiles. This particular manifestation, or showing, is to tell us that Jesus is Messiah and Savior, not just for the Jews, but for all the nations of the earth.

Then, on the first Sunday after the Epiphany, we’re witnesses to another manifestation of Jesus, this one at his baptism in the Jordan River. Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, while baptizing Jesus, sees the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus in the form of a dove, and he hears a voice proclaiming Jesus to be God’s Son, thus showing Jesus to be not just the Messiah, but the very Son of God.

Next, on the Second Sunday after the Epiphany, John the Baptist witnesses to what John now knows about Jesus. John declares Jesus to be the Lamb of God “who takes away the sin of the world,” and John even directs two of his own disciples to go and follow Jesus. John thus manifests the Messiah, Jesus, to his own disciples, who will become followers of the “one who is greater than I,” Jesus. And we learn that one of these disciples, whom John points toward Jesus, is Andrew, the future Apostle, who in turn point his brother Simon Peter toward Jesus.

And on the Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Jesus calls yet more disciples who (we are told by Matthew) leave everything behind and throw in their lot with this amazing Teacher.

PAUSE

On this last Sunday after the Epiphany, the Gospel reading is always one of the accounts of the Transfiguration, the ultimate and the most compelling of these “manifestations” of Jesus and of his identity as the Son of God. The ultimacy of this last manifestation or showing is reinforced by Peter, who tells us in this morning’s New Testament reading that he had been eyewitness to the majesty of Jesus. Peter says that Jesus had “received honor and glory from God the Father” on the Transfiguration mountaintop, and therefore, “we did not follow [only] cleverly devised myths [like the Greeks or Romans and their gods] when we made known to you the power ... of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

PAUSE

But so what? What does all this mean, what does all this have to do with us today, and not just for those three disciples 2000 years ago?

Well, keep in mind that, just before this account of the Transfiguration, Matthew’s Gospel presents Jesus as teaching his disciples that Jesus would have to go to Jerusalem and suffer and die. Peter, the same Peter who would accompany James and John and Jesus to the mountaintop, rebukes Jesus, and he tells Jesus, “God forbid it! This must never happen to you.” Peter just can’t accept that suffering and death must be a part of the Messiah’s mission. And, like you and me, who would no doubt rather linger in this season of Christmas/Epiphany, rather than move into Lent, Peter would rather stay on the mountaintop and revel in this wonderful and amazing experience.

And so, Peter, along with the other two closest disciples of Jesus (James and John) become witnesses to this most powerful manifestation of Jesus, so that they will know that Jesus, tempted, misunderstood, mocked, scorned, and finally executed really is the victorious Lord of Life. The suffering servant, on the mountaintop before their very own eyes, takes on the exalted appearance of the victorious Christ of God.

PAUSE

We, too, like the disciples, are transfixed, transformed and transfigured, by our pilgrimage with Christ. In Baptism, we share in Christ's death and Resurrection. Rooted in Jesus Christ, we are granted a new and exalted status as the children and servants of God. The Lord of Life gives us life, and enables us to face the challenges, and the suffering and death that is part of every human life.

This magnificent change that God works in us is a daily theme of Christian life. The gifts of bread and wine that we will momentarily receive at the table of the Lord bring the Risen Lord Jesus, who lives in each of us, into clear and remarkable focus --- so that we, too, can be transfigured and manifest that light of God's great love before all God's people.

AMEN.