

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

The Transfiguration of Our Lord

Last Sunday after the Epiphany

February 3, 2008

Exodus 24:12-18

Psalm 2 or Psalm 99

2 Peter 1:16-21

Matthew 17:1-9

Eyewitnesses

Watch! Be ready! Keep awake!

With these words, the Advent season began. We were told to prepare for the Lord's coming. Throughout the season of Advent we prepared our hearts to welcome our Lord and then, at Christmas, we proclaimed "Emmanuel! God with us!" At Epiphany, a star led us to Bethlehem and to the newborn king; and later, our journey took us to Jordan's banks where we witnessed Jesus' baptism.

Now, as the Epiphany season draws to a close, we receive yet another "wake up" call: "Be attentive!" (2 Peter 1:19) "Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5) This second wake-up call redirects our gaze; we turn from Bethlehem and now look toward Jerusalem. And we prepare again – this time for a journey to the cross.

Observing the Transfiguration of Our Lord on the Sunday before Lent points us toward Jerusalem where Jesus will be tried and condemned to death. But the story will not end there. Three days later he will be raised to life. The cross, a symbol of suffering and shame, will be transformed into a symbol of hope – a symbol of triumph over death.

With awe and wonder, Christ's Transfiguration concludes the Epiphany season – an event that is a climactic manifestation of God's glory. With Peter, James, and John, we become eyewitnesses to a glorious transformation. Jesus' future glory is revealed, and we catch a glimpse of the heavenly kingdom of God. Outside of the gospel accounts, the passage from 2 Peter is the only reference to Jesus' Transfiguration, and it provides us with the testimony of the "eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

The Transfiguration takes place six days after Jesus has foretold of his death and resurrection, and the writer of Matthew's Gospel has placed the event not long after Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah (16:16). Jesus' Transfiguration recalls God's appearance to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:15-18), and a bright cloud once again is a sign of God's presence (17:5). Here Matthew sees Jesus as the fulfillment of the Scriptures, conversing with Moses (representing *Torah*, the Law), and with Elijah

(representing *Nevi'im*, the Prophets). The voice from heaven echoes the words we heard at Jesus' baptism – only this time with an added imperative: “Listen to him!” The voice from heaven fills the disciples with fear, but Jesus touches them and tells them not to be afraid.

Occasionally we may have “mountain top” experiences, but much of our time is lived out day-to-day on the plain or in the valley where we encounter life's challenges. It is here that Jesus touches us, too. In our moments of “descent,” Jesus reassures us that we are not alone. He is with us, and he tells us not to be afraid. Let us be attentive to his gentle and loving voice and listen to him.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit 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: Ecuador – With thanks for God's blessings and with prayers for the continuing provision of Bibles for the people of Ecuador and that the Lord will continue encouraging and strengthening the preaching of the Gospel to those who have not yet experienced an encounter with Jesus Christ as their personal Savior; **Colombia** – With thanks to God for the newly-dramatized New Testament in *Contemporary Language*, for the work of *Lectio Divina* among youth Catholics, and for Scripture distribution in prisons and hospitals, and with prayers for work among indigenous peoples, for an end to the violence and for those displaced by it; **Venezuela** – With thanks to God for increased Scripture distribution and for *Lectio Divina*, which has encouraged more young Catholics to read Scripture, and with prayers for the growth of *Pan de Vida*, for the Piaroa translation project, for the acquisition of a Bible House, and for wisdom for the staff and board.

Activity Corner: “Awe and Wonder” Poster

Supplies needed: Large sheet of construction paper or poster board; markers; stickers or other art supplies to decorate the poster; magazines; scissors; glue or paste.

In large letters write: WOW! GOD IS AWESOME! THE VOICE OF THE LORD IS FULL OF MAJESTY! and decorate the poster. Look through magazines for pictures of mountains, cut them out and affix them to the poster. Display the poster in an area where you gather for family devotions. Discuss times when members of your household had experiences that they would describe as “awesome” or “wonderful” or maybe even beyond description. Throughout the week, alternate reading Psalms 2, 29, 99. At the conclusion of the reading, invite all family members to respond together with the words on the poster.