

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

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight O God our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I reckon that if you've been attending church for a few years or more, then you've heard the transfiguration narrative a few times before. It is after all presented to us in three of the four gospels. It has been the subject of religious art for centuries and has graced the pages of dozens of illustrated children's books and is a favourite story taught in Sunday school.

I wonder if due to that familiarity, like me you take this story a little bit for granted. We ought to pay it close attention then because it is in fact the most important miraculous event in the life of Jesus before the cross. As I said, we are very familiar with this story, so calling it the most important miracle of Jesus might seem provocative. And I admit it's easy to read this narrative and see it as a minor and odd pit stop on the journey to the cross.

However it is far more than that! It is the one and only time before his death and resurrection that God reveals the truth of the divine identity of Jesus. It is an incredible moment of sovereign revelation from the Holy Trinity that proved to the friends of Jesus that their confession that he is the Christ is true. And he shows them that even though he must suffer and die, his glory will prevail.

Like so many biblical stories the surrounding verses shed much light on what we're reading. Just prior to the events of the transfiguration, the amazing confession from Peter on behalf of all the disciples occurs.

After traveling with Jesus for years and witnessing many signs and wonders his closest followers finally came to the point of faith where they could confess that Jesus was the Christ.

To believe that Jesus is the Christ is to have a right belief about him, a belief that gives eternal life. Peter makes this amazing confession on behalf of the apostles, and he does so by faith but in the events portrayed in our reading today he will see this truth before his very eyes.

However there's a hiccup in Peter's confession about the messiah though. The disciples could believe that Jesus was the Messiah, they were happy to hold to the glory of Jesus being Messiah, to all the benefits they thought that membership in the long awaited Kingdom of the Messiah would entail but as soon as he mentioned what he had to do in order to bring the kingdom about they stumbled.

This idea of a suffering messiah was so offensive to Peter that he even tried to rebuke Jesus! Peter was committed to the idea of a glorious messiah, but he found it hard to swallow the idea that the messiah had to suffer and die. Jesus rebukes Peter's folly and then in order to encourage his closest friends with a foretaste of the glory to come the Lord blessed them with a fleeting glimpse at his true and glorious nature.

I suspect that it must have been incredibly shocking to Peter, James and John to see their friend transformed like this. They had no hint or warning of what they were about to see as they climbed the steep mountain, echoing Old Testament encounters with God on mountain tops. And out of the blue, Jesus the humble Galilean carpenter who they had travelled with for the past couple of years is inexplicably changed!

Shining whiter than white and brighter than bright, the Greek word used literally means to glitter, shimmer and glow. Jesus had proved beyond a doubt that their faith in him as messiah and Lord was utterly correct. This event is unlike anything any human being had ever seen and it forever more changed his friends. His shining visage definitely revealed his true divine identity.

Beside Jesus, Moses and Elijah appear who represent the Law and the Prophets who Jesus had earlier claimed to fulfil, Luke's gospel tells us that the great heroes of the Old Testament were discussing Jesus' coming atoning work on the cross, a sign that all the Old Testament had pointed towards the Christ.

The voice of God boomed from the cloud that surrounded Jesus, mirroring God speaking from the cloud in Exodus, this was the ultimate qualification of Jesus' messianic and divine identity. In response the trio of disciples rightly tremble in fear and fall to the ground face first. They were acutely aware that they were now in the very presence of God almighty.

At the end of the event, Moses and Elijah fade away representing the fading of the old covenant and only Jesus the mediator of the incoming new covenant remains to tenderly comfort his frightened friends. What they have just seen, is the proof of their belief, the confirmation in the most dramatic way that Jesus is the Lord.

Peter James and John now had a bright hope to cling to in the face of despair. The torturous death that was about to come for their master and friend was inevitable but now they knew he would never lose his glory. That was the purpose of the transfiguration, to show them that he had to die, and that this death was ordained by God and it in no means negated his glory.

And further than that, it showed them that even in the midst of their own struggles and sufferings they could cling to the memory of what they had seen on that mountain top.

Just as the apostles struggled to see how the kingdom would look in the face of Jesus impending passion I wonder if sometimes in our walk with the Lord we can lose sight of Christ's glory in the midst of life's ups and downs.

I think sometimes acknowledge by faith that Jesus is Lord but forget how glorious he truly is. Jesus says to Thomas after his resurrection that blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed and the apostle Paul tells us that in the midst of this human life even though we are saved by grace through faith we can only glimpse at Christ as through a mirror darkly.

So for me at least the transfiguration narrative is an immense comfort, an eye witness recording of the incredible glory of Jesus. In his second epistle written years after the resurrection Peter used his eye witness account of the transfiguration as proof of the gospel he preached and an encouragement to believers saying "we did not follow cleverly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty." The transfiguration had such an impact on Peter that it sustained him for years to come.

It is that precious biblical witness that has helped me through some of life's toughest times, for instance you may have noticed the P plates on my car. Well that's because I only passed my license test last month. I had a lot riding on passing my test and the first time I failed miserably.

I was totally gutted and suddenly my best laid plans for the future became shaky. I was struck with fear and anxiety.

But after a couple of days lamenting, I realized that even though I failed and was humiliated I still had immeasurable blessing in knowing and loving the Lord Jesus. I didn't have a vision of Jesus to help pull me through but I did have the words of the Bible and the promises of God to help me stand firm. The precious hope of eternal life and the glory of King Jesus has helped me through life's tough times over and over again. And the good news is that a week to the day after my failure God blessed me with the ability to control my nerves and pass my test.

You see although we may never be granted a glorious vision of Jesus in this life, we are blessed to have the eyewitness accounts of the apostles recorded for us in the Bible as an encouragement that in the midst of life's difficulties we are able to hold fast to the hope of the glory of the heavenly kingdom and the majesty of the King who forever shines in glorious radiance. And even though for one reason or another life can blur our vision of Jesus, one day we will see him in glory. I think that's a tremendous hope and something we ought to cling to each time we read the transfiguration story.

Amen.