

Transfiguration.

Peter, James and John had witnessed many miraculous events. I wonder if they got used to seeing miraculous things happening?

Seeing someone healed from blindness, or leprosy, or deformity would be amazing...but if you saw it 10 times, 100 times, a 1,000 times you would get used to seeing it happen. Wouldn't you?

I think the disciples would get used to miracles, even the ones that only happened once...like turning water into wine.

Surely you would get to a place where the sheer surprise at what Jesus did would be less, even if the joy at what he did was still there. You would be used to him doing incredible things.

I think the transfiguration was in a whole different category.

There are four incredible things that happened.

Firstly Jesus transforms into a shining human figure. They have never seen anything like this.

No sooner has this happened than two, long dead people appear.

Peter has no idea how to respond to this.

The Shaking glory of God descends (that's the bright cloud) the same experience as Moses on the mountain top, the ark being brought into the temple. The disciples have read about this in their Bible. Now they experience it as the cloud envelops them.

Then God speaks. "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

It creates an overload of the senses and the three disciples cower to the ground terrified. The nearness of God leaves them terrified.

The transfiguration is recorded in each synoptic Gospel. The way Mark tells it – it's part of the Messianic mystery...the slow revealing of who this person really is. The way Luke tells it, the event occurs out of prayer with the conclusion that if you want to see amazing things happening, prayer is the key. For Matthew it's further proof Jesus was the Messiah. Every step of the way Matthew is linking the story of Jesus to Old Testament proofs he is the Messiah.

But what does it mean to you?

The New Testament poses the question 'who is this person Jesus'? Jesus asks his disciples the question. 'Who do people say that I am?' It's Peter who answers – you are the Christ, the Messiah.

It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who asked the question "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?"

In the opening lines of his song, The Servant King, Graham Kendrick writes

From heaven you came helpless babe  
Entered our world, your glory veiled

The disciples come to know Jesus as fully human...he is like them. He gets tired and weary and hungry, he gets annoyed and angry, he shows frustration, he shows amazement at finding faith where he doesn't expect to find it. All this is in the text. He is fully human.

On this one occasion before his death and resurrection, the disciples get a glimpse of who Jesus truly is. The glory that has been veiled, is revealed. This scripture is given to us just before Lent. It reminds us that the Jesus who journeys to the crucifixion is the Son of God.

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How are we to understand the transfiguration?

We can have the habit of making Jesus fit our pre-conceived ideas and experiences.

Earlier this week our daughter Anna was in touch. She is studying for a PhD in Theology and her exploration concerns how people read the bible.

Hullo family. Help please. I have come across an interesting point in my research. Two different church groups (of very different ages) all remembered that Noah (of the ark) was made fun of by his contemporaries. This however is not part of the text. Does anyone have any idea if there's a popular storybook or teaching or film where this idea might have come from?! Have you come across it before?

There was some conversation about it and Anna concluded...

I think I've come across the Old Testament version of the Christmas donkey!

The Christmas Donkey is a well-known part of the Christmas story isn't it? Mary riding to Bethlehem on a donkey. Nowhere in Matthew and Luke is a donkey mentioned.

Just as we can imaginatively add to the bible, we can do the reverse. We can ignore bits of the text that don't fit what we want the bible to say or our concepts.

I knew a chap who couldn't accept the miracles of Jesus. He was quite ingenious at explaining them away. I don't remember all his explanations, but the feeding of the 5,000 happened because people began to share with each other when they saw the example of the boy with 5 loaves and 2 fish.

Learning not to add or take away from the text presents us with Jesus in – literally – a new light. He is shining, transfigured... metamorphosed into something never seen before. The three Gospel writers agree, it revealed that Jesus was the Son of God.

Our sermons this year have been showing us who Jesus is and asking, in the light of who he is, who are you? We've been encouraged to truly be ourselves. NOT some sort of Christian Church Pleasing Clone !!

In preparing for today I was reminded of a quote – wrongly attributed to Nelson Mandela, it is actually by Marianne Williamson from her book *A return to love: Reflections on the principles of a course in miracles*.

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.*

Jesus deliberately veiled his glory apart from this one occasion. He chose to let the three disciples glimpse who he truly was. It was only after his death and resurrection and ascension that they could start to piece it all together.

Transfiguration.

We veil ourselves too but for the wrong reasons. Our fears, not wanting to stand out, feeling inadequate. But being less than God created does not glorify him.

Who is Jesus Christ for us today?

The more authentic and true to ourselves we can be In Christ, the more we shine as children of God. Even that sounds fanciful...but it's true. We will only know who our apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, administrators and helpers are IF we allow ourselves to shine, unafraid of being rebuffed or made to feel unwelcome.

Naturally Peter, James and John felt tremendous fear when God spoke. It was Jesus touch that reassured them. As we continue to hear the same call "who are you", may we each experience Jesus reassuring touch and have the courage to overcome our fears to become the free, fulfilled people God created us to be.

I have a scene in my head where the Bishop, or Archdeacon, or some such asks me :what are the people at Holy Trinity like?

To which I answer, "themselves, In Christ".

Amen.