

May the light and peace of Jesus Christ our Lord be with you.

**The Lord bless you.**

**Lord our God,**

**in our sin we have avoided your call.**

**Our love for you is like a morning cloud,**

**like the dew that goes away early.**

**Have mercy on us;**

**deliver us from judgement;**

**bind up our wounds and revive us;**

**in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**Absolution** May God our Father forgive us our sins,  
and bring us to the fellowship of his table with his saints for ever. **Amen.**

**2Kings 2:1-12** [Elijah Ascends to Heaven]

Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, 'Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.' But Elisha said, 'As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, 'Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?'

And he said, 'Yes, I know; keep silent.' Elijah said to him, 'Elisha, stay here; for the LORD has sent me to Jericho.' But he said, 'As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, 'Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?' And he answered, 'Yes, I know; be silent.'

Then Elijah said to him, 'Stay here; for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.' But he said, 'As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan.

Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground. When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.' Elisha said, 'Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.' He responded, 'You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.'

As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, 'Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

This is the word of the Lord;

**Thanks be to God.**

**Psalm 50**

The Lord, the most mighty God, has spoken

and called the world from the rising of the sun to its setting.

Out of Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth;

our God comes and will not keep silence...

**Mark 9:2-9** [The Transfiguration]

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

This is the gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

### **Sermon**

May the words of my lips and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

The setting of today's stories begins with the journey of two prophets to a hugely symbolic place called Gilgal, the place where the Israelites camped after crossing the Jordan River. It is the final journey of the premier prophet of the Jewish people, Elijah with his chosen successor, Elisha. But of course, the story is much more than just the death of this prophet. It describes that mysterious, awesome event - the bodily ascension into heaven of Elijah. It is such a rare event in the Jewish-Israelite history of belief that is worthwhile to note some of the kernel points of the story. It is told almost as a teaching, testing dialogue between the two. For instance, we're told that when Elijah reached the Jordan on that day, he rolled up his mantle and struck the water to allow them cross on dry ground, recalling both the entry of Israel into Canaan, and Moses' parting of the sea during the exodus from Egypt.

So it is full of symbolism. Elisha asks Elijah something that we can easily miss or ignore: "Let me inherit a double share of your spirit." According to Mosaic law, a first-born son must receive a double portion of the inheritance. Elisha thus asks to have the status of Elijah's first-born and to inherit more of his spirit than any other prophetic heirs. And then we come to the central point of the story: "As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven." (fire is a traditional Old Testament symbol of God's active presence) We are told that Elisha kept watching and crying out, 'Father, father!' The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!"

But that is really just an introduction to today, because we are celebrating the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. We're told that he was really transfigured – that he had a radical change of appearance while he was with Peter, James and John. This celebration is mainly marked on August 6<sup>th</sup>. But the Transfiguration is also marked on the last Sunday after the Epiphany in the lectionary. Hence today's readings.

The Transfiguration is the opening event in the second half of Mark's Gospel. For a brief moment the veil of ordinariness is lifted and the three privileged disciples see Jesus as he really is, his human nature diffused with his divine glory. It's one of those events without which the astounding nature of the Christian hope would be much dimmer. It took place at the top of what the gospel called "a high mountain". It is traditionally considered to be Mount Tabor, a mountain of 1886 feet, rising out of the Jezreel valley in Lower Galilee. The location is really not important, but the story of the Transfiguration IS important. Because until now Mark has been keen to show Jesus as a quite ordinary man – a real human being like us. So today we get a rare glimpse of the other side of Jesus – the Jesus whom Mark is beginning to show us as something absolutely unique and different – that he is the Son of God.

The Transfiguration provides one of the most distinctive and dramatic showings of Jesus' divinity. We read it today from Mark, the first and shortest gospel, and it is echoed and embellished in both Matthew and Luke. The way I see it, Mark's focus in his gospel is on four signposts or stages in the progress of Jesus' life; and this is one of them. Why is the Transfiguration important? Because it is an amazing visionary experience – brilliant light; garments brighter than any fuller (a launderer - someone who bleached cloth) could make them – dazzling white.

It has huge echoes of Judaism all through it. Both Moses and Elijah appear, talking to Jesus; so this is a unique theological occurrence. Both Moses and Elijah had experienced incredible things on a mountain top; an overshadowing cloud, and a voice from the cloud. All this is repeated in this theophany – and on his day we're told that a voice also came from the cloud: "this is my Son, the beloved. Listen to him."

What does it say to us? Well, two things that are not just important, but absolutely central to our Christian theology - Jesus is being linked effortlessly to the patriarchs of old Israel; and Jesus is identified as the Son of God.

Did it really happen? We can't tell, but, honestly, historical accuracy is unimportant; rather – we are deeply involved in the huge symbolism of connections to Jewish history and lineage. It demonstrates that Jesus is not just some itinerant preacher like John the Baptist, but the eternal, beloved Son of God. Its obvious from the

narrative story that these events must have awed and invigorated Jesus' closest disciples, Peter, James & John. And the veracity of the story is increased by the fact that it is repeated in Matthew and Luke. It is a totally spiritual story. It is an important stage in the development of the gospel story of Mark. It moves us forward in our journey of a fully developed belief in the divinity – the importance – of Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

### **The Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.  
**Amen.**

### **Intercessions, beginning with the Collect of the Transfiguration of Christ**

Almighty Father,  
whose Son was revealed in majesty before he suffered death on the cross:  
Give us grace to perceive his glory,  
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him  
and he changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;  
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**

Let us pray for the healing of all ills in the Church and in the world. May the Church ever proclaim the message of salvation and bring to others the new life which is in Christ. May she receive in love all who come to her with their needs. Lord, in your mercy, *hear our prayer*

We pray that all who are worn down by the weight of responsibility, those who are under stress in their work and in their relationships. Give them the wisdom to draw apart, the grace to be still and find new strength in the presence of God. *hear our prayer*

Have mercy on the outcasts of the world, the refugees and the homeless, those who are shunned for their race or their faith, Change the hearts of the oppressors and persecutors, that all people may value one another as children of God. *hear our prayer*

Bless us in our families, and with our friends and neighbours, to care for the sick and help the weak. We remember especially, as always, those who have been affected by the COVID pandemic. We give thanks for all who have cared for us, for those who have uplifted our spirits and given us new hope. *hear our prayer*

Have mercy on the departed who have come through the winding ways of this world, to be brought at last to the feet of Christ. Their infirmities healed and their sins forgiven, may they glorify God in eternal life. *hear our prayer*

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done on earth  
as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever, Amen.

### **Dismissal:**

We offer you our souls and bodies,  
our thoughts and words and deeds,  
our love for one another.  
Unite our wills in your will,  
that we may grow in love and peace all the days of our life;  
and the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you and remain with you always.  
**Amen.**