

Being blessed, and being salt and light is one thing, but being transfigured seems to be another league altogether. Perhaps it is a status or experience reserved for the few.

Like Moses' appearance that changed when he was on top of the mountain encountering God, and his face became so bright that they had to cover his face with a veil; so Jesus' appearance changes on top of this mountain and becomes as bright as the sun. In this vision of Jesus, Peter, James and John also see Moses and Elijah, representing the law and the prophets - the things that Jesus just finished saying that he wasn't going to abolish, but rather fulfill. It is a unique and powerful moment where time is suspended and heaven leaks into the earth like it did for the shepherds on the hillside of Judea.



Peter, James and John, are fixed on this image of Jesus transfigured and remark that they somehow desperately want to preserve it. "It is good for us to be here," Peter says.

"Let us pitch tents and make dwellings," he exclaims. But the permanence of this glimpse of divine glory is not possible. Like what the resurrected Jesus says to Mary, "you can't hold on to me." This vision is only a temporary thing.

But before Peter was finished speaking, like Moses being enveloped by a cloud, like the Hebrews being led through the wilderness by a cloud by day, like Isaiah being overwhelmed by a cloud in the temple, and like Mary being overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, you know what is going to happen: they too are overshadowed by a cloud.

In the cloud, there is, like every other time someone enters into a cloud, a great revelation, a concrete expression of the real and unveiled presence of God. They hear a voice repeating the same words that were spoken at Jesus' baptism, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" In our liturgy of communion we see this great unveiling of something eternal when the priest's host, the bread, is unveiled and lifted up for all to see.

For Peter, James and John the whole experience seems to express an intimacy between the Father

and Son that they now have the privilege of seeing and entering into for themselves.

“The Father and I are one,” Jesus explains elsewhere, and while Jesus’ baptism was another window into this reality, this radiant sound and light show, that is over as fast as it began, displays a unity, a communion and a love between these two on an earthy plane like none other. No wonder they want to preserve it.

So the season of Epiphany is intentionally bracketed by these two great narrative moments of revelation: the baptism, and the transfiguration.

In the baptism Jesus goes under the water, that great dark place where leviathan lurks, where chaos reigns, and people lose their lives in great and unpredictable storms, and comes up out of the water to a voice announcing his identity. After this moment, Jesus is sent to the wilderness.

At the the other end of Epiphany, Jesus goes up to the top of a mountain, enters a cloud, and reveals the brilliant light and love he has with the heavenly father, accompanied by the same voice to clarify his identity. From there we know we he is headed: the wilderness.

The only thing he can do now is to come *down* the mountain and begin the great descent into another place of chaos which will unfold in the wilderness of Jerusalem. It will be the chaos of the crowds, the condemnation, the abandonment and the death, with the eventual descent into hell.

So, before we begin that 40 day journey, the church intentionally gives us this story that we might have a glimpse of the heavenly glory and says don’t ever forget this. Burn this image in your minds because eventually, after we get through all the chaos, this is where it is all headed; and Jesus will ensure it happens, because Jesus will go before us to accomplish it.

The sign we have of that accomplishment is this bread. Transfigured, broken and given, a simple symbol is received and ingested; to say I take this into my life and follow the same pattern of descending into the chaos, only to come through the other side of it all into glory.

And so, Peter’s desire for the permanence of this experience is now fulfilled. It is embodied for each person, and each generation, every time we celebrate this act of communion. May we receive it with thanks and be refreshed on our journey.