



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora  
February 11 2024 - Last Sunday after Epiphany  
Canon Paul Walker

Bookends are helpful things. They hold things together on a shelf to make sure they don't fall off. They are like brackets that hold a set of numbers or a string of words together. They are punctuation marks.

The season of Epiphany is bookended by two different events when we hear the same words being spoken by God: "This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him." These are the words are spoken and heard at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and at the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain. Two very different events but they both reveal something about God and the Son. This is God's beloved one, there is a relationship established here, and we are invited to listen to him as he reveals something significant about God.

The baptism of Jesus by John is a public event that many people will participate in. It shows that God is descending into the depths, under the water, and coming up out of it.

In contrast, the event of the Transfiguration of Jesus is a unique and private event, witnessed only by a few close friends and something that not many people will experience themselves. Peter, James and John wanted to preserve and keep the experience. But like a

fleeting flash of light it was all over in a few moments.

I find it helpful to hear these two stories that give us a glimpse into the bond and relationship between two members of the Trinity: the Father and Son, the Creator and Redeemer.

It is particularly helpful when we hear this story of Jesus' appearance changing and becoming dazzling light just before we begin the season of Lent. Just before we enter a season of wilderness, we are invited to the mountain top to get a glimpse of something that will sustain us right through Lent and Holy Week to the next big moment of revelation: Easter.

Like Moses who had to cover his face when he came away from meeting God face to face on the mountain, so Peter, James and John needed some sunglasses. Thankfully a cloud came to overshadow them. They were overcome with awe when they were overshadowed by a cloud; and in the midst of this cloud they saw the brightness of the Father and Son together.

For them it was a window or a portal into encountering this eternal bond that could never be broken. They were completely overcome, in fact, like the shepherds on the hillside who encountered the heavenly host, they were terrified. And no wonder. It was other-worldly. There was Moses and Elijah with

Jesus - it was a moment that seemed to suspend the temporal constraints of time and space. Eternity was unveiled. All their usual bearings seemed to be loosened as they stood on the edge of having one foot in this world and one foot in eternity. Peering into the communion of saints bathed in light.

And then it was over. And coming down the mountain, Jesus asks them not to tell anyone about this until after he was raised from the dead.

It's the same instruction Jesus gives to those who are healed, delivered, and cleansed: don't tell anyone. But they can't contain it. The fact that the blind beggar can now see, and the leper can now enter the city freely, and the hemorrhaging woman can now live without shame, means that all this gets noticed. For these people there is a transfiguration of sorts that reflects the light of God. Their lives and bodies are changed. Because of their encounters they become witnesses to the glory of God in their midst. They become shining vessels of God's light themselves. They cannot hide their light under a bushel. As much as they might try to contain it, the light just keeps leaking out. Even the stones cry out.

It's interesting that this occurs "six days later." Like the wedding at Cana with *six* stone water jars used for the purification rites, here we have a reference in time to six days later. It's very close, but not quite complete. The "seventh" day will be the day of

completion, and that will be the day of resurrection. It is yet to come. But here is a glimpse of what is to come.

Today we will burn any left over palms from last year and the ash will be used for Ash Wednesday this week. This serves as bookends to the year, from the glory of the palms to the sombre recollection of ashes imposed on our foreheads in the sign of the cross. It also serves as bookends to Lent. We light a fire today to burn the palms at the end of Epiphany, and this year, on Saturday of Easter weekend, we gather for an Easter Vigil, and outside we light a fire from which the pascal candle will be lit and processed into a dark church.

The only other times we are signed with the cross is with chrism oil at our baptism, and with unction oil when we are in need for healing. "I sign you with the cross and mark you as Christ's own, for ever." Or, "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy uphold and strengthen you in your mind and body." They are moments of wholeness that point us to where we belong. The ashes similarly point us to a place where we belong: in the loving mercy of Almighty God the Creator, who was able to create us out of the dust of the earth, and when we return to the earth, also holds the power to make a new creation called resurrection. That is the glory of God. That is light and love of God. And that is our hope.