

# The Transfiguration of Our Lord

## SNEAK PREVIEW

Luke 9:28-36

## The Transfiguration of Our Lord

By Steven E. Albertin

28Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. 29And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. 30Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. 31They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. 33Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” – not knowing what he said. 34While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. 35Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen listen to him!” 36When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

*Note from the author: Have you ever been to the “sneak preview” of a film? Every once in a while prior to the release of a major motion picture, the film’s producer will allow the film to be shown in a select number of theaters in advance of its release*

*for mass distribution. The hope is that such a sneak preview will “prime the pump” and build public interest. Such advance publicity will spread a good word to others about the film and increase attendance when it is finally released to the general public.*

*One way to understand the bizarre and mysterious event reported in today’s Gospel is as a sneak preview. Before the final events of Jesus’ life and ministry actually unfold, the disciples get a glimpse not only of Jesus’ final destiny but also theirs. The question is whether they (and we) will recognize this amazing epiphany for what it is and trust the promise that it bears.*

---

## **DIAGNOSIS: Doomed**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : Anxious**

Luke has made it clear that Jesus is inexorably making his way to Jerusalem. Jesus has openly spoken of the fact that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Such a dire prediction surely must have shaken the disciples. Then Jesus must have added to their anxiety when he took them up a mountain to pray. They were going to need God’s help for what lie ahead. They were going to be walking straight into the gaping jaws of those who wanted to chew them up and spit them out. They needed all the help they could get. They needed to pray.

God answers their prayers by showing up in a dazzling display of power and glory. Jesus is metamorphosized before their very eyes and literally glows in the dark. Moses and Elijah, symbols of the Law and the Prophets, also show up and talk with Jesus about the departure/exodus that lies ahead. Another miraculous deliverance like the one that enabled the Israelites to escape the Egyptians through the sea must lie ahead.

Peter is captivated by it all and thinks this can calm his anxiety about their impending journey to Jerusalem. This is a sneak preview of what lies ahead. Since Jesus is having a friendly chat with Moses and Elijah, he must be carrying out the same mission that Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophets) did before him. Like the mountain-top experiences of Moses at Sinai and Elijah at Carmel, God must be showing them in this spectacular epiphany that Jesus is just another version Moses and Elijah. If Peter and his buddies keep the demands of Sinai, if they heed the shrieks of Elijah and the rest of his prophetic cohort, then they will be faithfully following Jesus. Then they will be able to deal with the danger that lies ahead of them in Jerusalem. Then they will have the life and peace they crave.

Better yet, Peter decides that the best way to be prepared for what lie ahead is to preserve this holy moment. Capture and bottle this mountain-top experience. He sets up three tents, one each for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. They are all the same since all three are about the same thing: keeping the law. Perhaps by providing these tents, Peter is hoping to garner some good will as he prepares to face Jerusalem. But Luke notes that Peter doesn't get it. Peter doesn't know what he is doing. Jesus is not just another Moses or the next prophet like Elijah to come along. Jesus is different. That Jesus is changed and metamorphosized indicates as much. Jesus' departure/exodus is going to be different from Moses and Elijah before him.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Terrified***

We too look for a way through a future filled with danger and uncertainty. We even hope that Jesus is the one who can do it. But if we think that Jesus is just another Moses telling us what we should do or another Elijah prophetically reading us the riot act for our perpetual moral lapses, we are in for a surprise. This is not the sneak preview we wanted or expected.

A cloud overshadows Peter and his buddies. In the presence of such divine scrutiny, they shudder in their shoes. They are terrified. Being in the presence of Moses and Elijah is not good news. They know that have not measured up to the Law of Moses, the words of the prophets, let alone the very presence of God. They should shudder and shake. That is what sinners do in the presence of such holiness.

We too cannot measure up to Moses and the prophets. And when God shows up in Jesus, it only gets worse. Jesus exposes us for the failures we are. The voice from the cloud asks us to trust Jesus, not Moses or Elijah. We don't listen. We cling to what we can do. We have a better idea. Surely three tents can do it! Don't they look nice! We are so proud of ourselves and what we have done. But we have utterly missed the point. This is not about what we can do. This is not about honoring Moses and Elijah but about clinging to Jesus; and we don't. As a result, we are terrified.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Doomed***

Peter, his buddies, and we are going to have to “go to Jerusalem” (the place of judgment) without the benefit of the sneak preview God wanted to give us. Without such assurance we will only stumble down the mountain dazed, confused and doomed. We have not listened. We have not believed. We have not recognized that Jesus is different from Moses and Elijah. We have not trusted God's word from the cloud. We are a “faithless and perverse generation” (9:41). Refusing to listen and trust the voice from the cloud puts us at odds with God. That is not a good place to be. We are destined for a Jerusalem where we are certain to die, deservedly so.

## **PROGNOSIS: Chosen**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Sneak Preview***

God's voice from the cloud acknowledges the promised identity

that Jesus had already received at his baptism: He is God's Son, God's Chosen. In spite of the danger that lies ahead in Jerusalem, God will keep the promise given to his Son at the Jordan River. The transformed appearance of Jesus and the voice from the cloud provided visual and audio reinforcement of that promise. It was a glimpse of the Easter glory that was still to come. It was a promise of what was to be. It was a sneak preview of the blessed fate that awaited Jesus.

It also set Jesus apart from Moses and Elijah. After the voice spoke from the cloud, "Jesus was found alone" (v. 36). Jesus alone would lead the disciples down the mountain to Jerusalem. Moses and Elijah did not come to help Jesus. Jesus alone would do it. What Moses and Elijah were unable to do, Jesus would do by going to Jerusalem, to the gaping jaws of his enemies and to his death on the cross. There he would bear the shame and terror that made the disciples and all of us sinners shudder. There he would willingly be numbered along with all those who are members of this "faithless and perverse generation" and suffer their fate.

This is what it meant for Jesus to be "my Son, the Chosen." Jesus heard the voice at his baptism. He heard it again on the mountaintop. He would trust it all the way to Jerusalem and to his death. In the tomb it looked like Jesus was no better than Peter and didn't know what he was doing. But when God raised Jesus on "the third day," it was evident to all: God kept God's promise. Jesus was no fool.

#### **Step 5: Advance Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Listen**

This was all part of God's marvelous plan to love the world and do for the world what Moses and Elijah could never do: take us to the mountaintop where we could stand in the very presence of God, be overshadowed with God's dazzling glory . . . and, in spite of our sin, still believe that we too are God's chosen son

and daughters.

When we listen to the voice from the cloud and believe that it is true, there is no need for us to shudder in fear and terror. Because we have seen and believed the sneak preview; because we have been to the mountaintop and seen Jesus for who and what he really is, we don't need to stumble to Jerusalem, dazed and confused, blubbing and blathering all kinds of nonsense because we don't know where we are going.

Luke says that the disciples "kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen" (v. 36). This is not the silence of fear or confusion but the silence that comes when one is sure of where he is going. We don't need to ask for directions. We can quietly with faith follow Jesus into a world filled with suffering and sacrifice.

#### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Confident***

Because we have been to the mountaintop, we can go to Jerusalem confident of our destiny. We have seen the sneak preview of Jesus' destiny and ours. We don't want to stay on the mountaintop. We want to follow Jesus down the mountain into the valley of the shadow of death, all the way to Jerusalem. We can take our time along the way to care for those who are dazed, confused and afraid. Even those who are members of a "faithless and perverse generation," even those who are afflicted with unclean spirits, can get in on the sneak preview. Through care of creation and love of neighbor, we give them a sneak preview that can change their lives. We join Jesus in rebuking the unclean spirits, sending the demons into convulsions and giving their victims a sneak preview of the destiny God has given them. They are healed. They are returned to their fathers. "And they [are] astounded at the greatness of God" (9:43).