

# Transfiguration Sunday

**CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF REIGN**

**Exodus 34:29-35**

**Transfiguration Sunday**

**Analysis by Chris Repp**

29Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. 30When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. 31But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. 32Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. 33When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; 34but whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Overcast**

**Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) :** *Head in the Clouds*

The people of Israel enthusiastically followed Moses out of captivity in Egypt but, after only a short time on the move, began to look back. They voted for change, but now they're not

sure. Things were better in Egypt-at least the food was. The people of the former Soviet Union experienced something like this. They were glad for “glasnost” (openness) and “perestroika” (rebuilding), and then for the demise of the Soviet Union and the rise of democracy. But then they weren’t sure-many still aren’t. Some even long for the “good old days” under Joseph Stalin! “Too much freedom for bad people” was a common refrain heard in the 1990s. In our own country, undergoing its own crisis, many are impatient for the change that was promised. And they are feeling cut off from the decision-making. Is this how the people of Israel felt when Moses-their leader, their head-went up the mountain, into the cloud (see Exodus 24) to talk things over with God? They were impatient enough to give up on Moses and his God altogether, and turn to the god of the Golden Calf. But then Moses did come down, after averting disaster for his people (did they know? See Exodus 32), and with these tablets of laws that nobody voted for.

### **Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *A Veiled Threat***

Moses is changed by his encounter with God in the cloud, and that scares people. He’s not like them any more. He’s got an aura about him-a certain glow-and they don’t want to get too close. Is this the sort of thing Jesus was talking about when he said that the light had come into the world, but people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil (John 3:19)? Moses is forced to hide his light under a bushel, as it were, in order to continue dwelling with this people walking in darkness. Deep down they really don’t want change. They like things the way they are.

### **Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Under a Cloud/Gloom and Doom***

The glory of God, reflected in Moses’ face, exposes the darkness of the people. They are far off from God way up there in the cloud on the mountain and do not want to come near. Nor do they want God to come near them. They deserve to be “consumed from

the face of the earth” as God intended (Exodus 32:12). Only God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel stands in the way of their just rewards.

## **PROGNOSIS: Clear and Sonny**

### **Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Sonburst***

It is Moses’ appeal to God’s promise back in chapter 32 that clinches his argument to spare the people and that makes chapter 34 possible. Only because God is faithful to God’s promise is Moses sent down the mountain a second time with new tablets of the law. And this little second chance for the people of Israel is a foretaste of God’s big second chance for all people, Moses’ little light a dim reflection of the Big Light yet to come. (Moses was up there on the mountain in the presence of that Big Light after all—just have a look at today’s gospel reading!) It turns out that the scary light shining in our darkness is the very grace of God, sent down for us and for our salvation, as the Nicene Creed puts it, the light of the world who is Jesus Christ, THE fulfillment of all God’s promises.

### **Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *A Veiled Promise***

The light does not shine on us in our darkness with its full intensity though. That would be too much for us all at once. (See Exodus 32:20ff where God cannot allow Moses to see his face because it would be fatal for him.) It comes to us, rather, as one of us: “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!” says the Christmas hymn, “Hail the incarnate deity! Pleased as man with us to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel!” But the veil comes off every time the word of the Gospel is spoken into our hearts, the unveiled, unvarnished word that by the power of the Holy Spirit works faith in us to trust the promises of God. (See Augsburg Confession, Article V.)

### **Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Rise and Shine (or A Cloud with a Silver Lining)***

Just as Moses' encounter with God changed him, so our encounter with God-with-us changes us. Through faith we now shine with the brightness of the Risen Christ. Baptized into his death, we are raised with him to new, abundant, everlasting life, and we reflect the reality of that new life in the deep darkness that still covers our world. With our lives we proclaim that the One who once spoke from a cloud now reigns in our hearts, whose glory we unveil whenever and wherever we share the word of the Gospel.