



St Marylebone  
Parish Church

**Sunday before Lent 2019 11 am**

**Transfiguration / Baptism**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

The story of our Lord's almost out-of-this-world Transfiguration, in the presence of Moses and Elijah, before Peter, James and John is set in a context of the all-too-worldly story of everyday life.

Read around the evangelists' accounts of the Transfiguration and you will find a rich and complex narrative in which the heights of ecstasy and epiphany are interwoven with stories of self-interest and bitter rebuke; stories in which the glories of the mountaintop are mixed with a tale of desperate pleading by a distraught father in the face of the intolerable suffering of his son.

Read around the story a little more widely and you will discover that the dazzling brightness of God's mountain-top

epiphany is mired in a tale of tax avoidance and an all-too human quest for social status.

Jesus had come with his disciples to the ethnically diverse and religiously complex district of Caesarea Philippi. Here, Peter made his great leap of faith<sup>1</sup> and declared Jesus to be ‘the Messiah, the Son of the Living God’.

But here too, even as the penny was dropping for Peter and life was, perhaps for the first time, beginning to make sense for him, ‘the Rock’ - who would be the very foundation-stone of the Church - was being rebuked and named as the very embodiment of ‘Satan’!

The Gospel writers take the transient, ephemeral, earthy, troubled, diseased life of first century Palestine: the muddled, mixed-up everyday world, with its contradictions and confusions and, with bare hands, they tear it open, so that we can catch a glimpse – albeit a fleeting one – of the realities of a world beyond, a world in which Christ is indeed ‘the Messiah, the Son of the Living God’, the Transfigured embodiment of the Law and the Prophets.

Today, as two thousand year ago, and indeed, as in all the years between, the world is a pretty muddled, messed-up, mixed-up place, or rather we to whom the Creator God has entrusted Creation are a pretty muddled, messed-up, mixed-up people!

On every continent, in every country, in every home, in every parish church, in every life, one finds beneath a pretty thin veneer, a rich and complex story of ecstasy and epiphany, self-interest and bitter rebuke; of questing after status and even, I suppose, worrying about tax.

These things are the all-too-real warp and weft of life in a fallen and sinful world; but it was into such a world that Christ came.

It is into this messy, unpleasant and troubled, or to use Thomas Hobbes' oft-quoted phrase, "solitary, poore, nasty, [and] brutish, " <sup>ii</sup> world that Kip has been born, but from the moment of his baptism Kip will live his life in the light and life of the transfigured Jesus: the crucified, resurrected, ascended and glorified Messiah.

Our gospel today, read on the brink of Lent, invites us to peel back the curtains, open our eyes, lift up our heads, and see the Transfigured One, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, standing among us and with us, no matter what the circumstance in which we find ourselves are – no matter what the circumstances will be in which Kip finds himself in the years ahead.

The story of the Transfiguration of Jesus is not just an oddly anomalous other-worldly event, but the visualisation of an ever-present reality; the reality that Jesus truly is Emmanuel,

God with us! God with is in the midst of everything - no matter how messy or mixed up - and that if we have ears to hear and eyes to see, if we are truly prepared to lift up our eyes, to look courageously out from the mess and the confusion in which we find ourselves, we will discover that the often painful and all too-bloody pathway which leads Christ to Calvary, is also the only assured route and means to living a truly transfigured and transformed life now.

So, Jesus' Transfiguration on the mountain top, is not just a comforting sop, an *amuse bouche*, if you like, of the heavenly banquet that awaits us at the Easter feast, but a powerful restatement of Jesus' promise to be with those who accept his invitation to follow him in every circumstance in which they find themselves.

The theologian, Bruce Epperly, has written, that the, "Transfiguration [of Jesus] leads us beyond ourselves to become God's partners in healing the world . . . [A]s we claim our vocation as "lights of the world". . . Jesus mediates the energy of transformation to bring wholeness and restoration . . . Transfiguration leads to mission, to letting our light shine, and giving glory to God by acts of mercy, kindness, and justice."<sup>iii</sup>

Today, as we prepare to step into the searching wilderness days of Lent, Kip becomes God's partner in healing the

world . . . he begins his vocation to be one of the “lights of the world”. . . and his parents and godparents accept on his behalf his God-given mission to give glory to God through committing reckless acts of mercy, kindness, and justice until he comes to take his place with all who have been baptised at the heavenly banquet.

May God give us all, with Kip, the grace and strength we need to open our eyes and our ears - to open our very selves - to the awesome reality and glorious light of the Transfiguration.

May we have the courage to lay ourselves open to God’s penetrating and searching brightness; to bring into Christ’s Light the world’s – and our own - dark and messy places, our hurts and our fears, our dis-eases and all that needs healing and transforming.

May Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, transfigured with Moses and Elijah before Peter, James and John be with Kip - and with us - today every day and, at the last, may Jesus bring us all into the everlasting joy and glory and assurance of Easter’s New Creation.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Matthew 16.16

<sup>ii</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651

<sup>iii</sup> Epperly, B, <http://www.processandfaith.org/lectionary/YearC/2009-2010/2010-02-14.shtml>