



Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue  
in the City of New York

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[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, February 10, 2002**  
*The Last Sunday after the Epiphany*

*Festal Eucharist*  
*at 11am*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector  
on  
Saint Matthew 17:1-9  
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### *THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST*

*[Peter] was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."*

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The word, epiphany, means manifestation or revelation, and in connection with the Church's Epiphany Season between Christmastide and Lent, this means the specific manifestation or revelation of Jesus' *glory*.

Our first hymn today shows what the Church means to teach throughout Epiphany Season. Jesus manifests his glory to the Wise Men, at his Baptism, at the wedding feast at Cana, in his works of mercy and healing, and now, in his Transfiguration before Peter, James and John, high on a mountain.

*Glory* in its biblical root in the Old Testament means "weightiness" or "worthiness." Combine these two words with other words associated with glory, such as beauty, splendor, honor, good name, power, and you have the *substantial reality* of God. As Jesus reveals his glory, he manifests his substantial reality as God incarnate.

In our lesson from Exodus, we hear of Moses going up on Mount Sinai and beholding the glory of God. When Moses came down from the mountain, his face shone from the encounter, and he even veiled his face from the Israelites for a time. But on the mountain of his Transfiguration, today's Gospel reading from Saint Matthew, Jesus *manifested his own glory*; it was not merely a reflection.

There is another important difference between Mount Sinai and the Mount of Jesus' Transfiguration, between Moses and Jesus. At Mount Sinai, the glory of God revealed the sin and disobedience of man, even of God's own people the Israelites. They were forbidden to come near the mountain lest they die. The code of the Law was a like a hedge or a fence between God's glory and man's sin. But on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus' disciples were told by the divine Voice to listen to Jesus, meaning, to follow and to cleave to him. Jesus himself would say he is the vine, we are the branches; he is the Good Shepherd, we are the sheep. Instead of a hedge or a fence, instead of Law, there is Grace; there is intimacy and access to God through Jesus.

The Transfiguration is a major milestone, a marker, in several ways. In Jesus' ministry the Transfiguration is a turning point. Peter has recently confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus, in response, has defined his divine Sonship in terms of his obedience to the Father and his rejection by men, even to death on his cross. Further, Jesus has defined discipleship as our taking up our own crosses and following his pattern.

Jesus' transfiguration points far back in the history of God's revelation, back beyond Moses and Elijah who appeared with him in that moment, back to the Son's pre-existent glory with the Father from before time. His transfiguration also points forward, beyond his passion, cross and death, to his Resurrection, Ascension, and to his glorious Second Coming to judge the world at the end of time.

Peter wanted to capture the glory of the Transfiguration by building three booths or tabernacles, as he said, "one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." It is striking that right at that moment, as Peter was speaking, the Voice from the cloud cut him off by speaking of the uniqueness of Jesus: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

Great as they were as servants of God, Moses and Elijah were flawed; they faltered at times. They were not the only-begotten and beloved Son; they were not the Christ. The Voice spoke, and when it was finished, the disciples saw Jesus only. Moses and Elijah were gone from the vision, having testified to Jesus.

There is a message here for us. *We in the Church need to understand the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.* The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is precisely this: his glory, as it is manifested in the Gospel.

First of all, Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Messiah of Israel, the Anointed Holy One of God foretold by the Old Testament. He is the Son of God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit before all worlds, very God of very God. He is the Word of God by whom all things were made, who holds all things together, and who is about the loving and gracious business of reconciling all things with God. He is also our Lord and God personally, as beloved Saint Thomas confessed the risen Jesus to be in the Upper Room at the first Easter, saying, "My Lord and my God."

And Jesus is the Son of man. Jesus Christ took upon him our flesh, our human nature. He lived our life as it is meant to be lived, in union and harmony with God, walking by the Spirit of God, tested and tried and tempted in every way as we are (and much more than we could ever imagine or bear), yet without sin. There never was a darkness or falseness in him. That is why when we see the Man of Sorrows, especially upon the cross in the supreme moment of his life, dying our death, we are gazing at the Glory of God, the epiphany of all epiphanies of Christ. It is this very Christ who in the end will come to be our judge, the standard the Father has given for us.

Let us never settle for anything less than the unique glory of Jesus Christ as set forth in the Gospel. Today the Church has invited us to go up on the mountain with Peter, James and John, to share the vision they saw and the voice they heard concerning Jesus. We are about to begin Lent, the time when we do well to put away distractions and focus our attention on the life-giving sacrifice of Christ. Even before thoughts of repentances and fresh starts, of ashes and humility, of prayer, fasting and almsgiving (which we will hear about on Ash Wednesday), we need first of all to see who it is that we are following on the way of the cross.

What we learn today on the Mount of Transfiguration, and in the weeks of Epiphany Season over the past month, is that the Lenten sacrifices and victories of Jesus mean so much, his sufferings in Holy Week are so significant, and his crucifixion and death are the center of all human history – precisely because the Man who is undergoing these things in none other than Almighty God.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.