

Transfiguration Sunday

February 15, 2026

Exodus 24:12-18; Matthew 17:1-9; 2 Peter 1:16-21

Who among us hasn't wanted to linger on a mountaintop just a little longer? It's no accident that mountains serve as a metaphor for faith. The climb requires preparation and perseverance. It can be strenuous or even treacherous, and it is rarely meant to be undertaken alone. Along the way, we are changed. And when we reach the summit, the view is almost always worth it.

The Christian year is shaped by these same rhythms of ascent and descent. Transfiguration Sunday marks a threshold moment — the bright culmination of Advent's hope, Christmas's joy and Epiphany's guiding light — and the turning point where Jesus' journey, and ours, begins to bend unmistakably toward the cross. We stand at the close of one season and orient ourselves toward the Lenten wilderness ahead. It is here that Matthew's account of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9) meets the story of Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:12-18) and Peter's eyewitness testimony (2 Peter 1:16-21), inviting us to glimpse divine glory just before the descent begins.

The Transfiguration appears in all three synoptic gospels, but Matthew's account opens with a curious detail: "six days later." Later than what? Six days after the disciples first named Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 16:13-20) — and six days after Jesus predicted his suffering, death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21-23). The sequence is deliberate. The Transfiguration can't happen without the teaching that comes just before.

For the first part of Jesus's ministry, his teaching helps the disciples recognize who the Messiah is. The disciples likely would have held their own ideas about who this promised Messiah would be, what he would come to do, and how he would do it. Once they finally name Jesus as the Messiah, the focus changes. Jesus begins to teach not who the Messiah is, but what the Messiah has come to do — to suffer, to die and to be raised. This turn in the gospel narrative reshapes everything that follows and reaches its climax in the Transfiguration.

This is why Matthew's "six days later" matters — and why Matthew 17 cannot be read apart from Matthew 16. The story unfolds in a deliberate sequence: Peter names Jesus as the Messiah; Jesus then teaches that the Messiah must suffer and die; and only then is Jesus revealed in divine glory at the [Transfiguration](#).

Without this turn in Jesus' teaching, the Transfiguration could be mistaken for a confirmation of old expectations — a Messiah who descends in glory to conquer as a triumphant king. Instead, the vision on the mountain is framed by the cross. The disciples are allowed to see Jesus in glory only after they hear what kind of Savior he is: one who suffers and dies for the sake of the world. I wonder if the same is true for us. Can we see Jesus in his glory if we don't understand the call to die to sin?

I find Peter's rambling in Matthew 17 relatable. Perhaps overcome with emotion, perhaps constitutionally incapable of letting a moment be, he blurts out, "This is so good! Let's stay here forever! I can build a house for you, and for Moses, and for ..." and then he's interrupted by the voice of God, just like at Jesus's baptism, claiming Jesus as God's beloved Son. We don't get the disciples' reaction to God's voice thundering down at the baptism of Jesus, but we do see it here: they're afraid.

And so, Jesus comes to them, still in his glorious, light-filled state, and tells them the same thing the angel told the shepherds when they announced Christ's birth, and perhaps the same thing Jesus tells us as we turn our faces toward Jerusalem: "Do not be afraid" (Matthew 17:7).

At some point, we all have to come back down the mountain. At some point, we must all journey to the wilderness. But we do not go alone. May Jesus' words echo in our hearts and minds as we go, boldly, bravely, and unafraid.

Questions for reflection on the Transfiguration

1. Do you have a “mountaintop” moment? What was it like? Who was there? Would you describe yourself as “transformed?” What lessons do you still carry?
2. Do you think it makes a difference that the Transfiguration happens after the paradigm shift in Jesus’s teaching? What might we think of the miracle of the Transfiguration had Jesus not predicted his own death? What significance does it carry?
3. God speaks over Jesus during the Transfiguration, almost like a baptismal renewal. How are the two related? How might these moments be connected for us, as we remember our baptismal identity in Christ and prepare to follow a suffering servant into Lent?