

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Transfiguration Sunday
February 14, 2021
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
Who is this Jesus?

—Mark 9:2-9

“Who is this Jesus?” That’s the question that was on everyone’s mind. “Who is this teacher from Galilee?” You have someone who can drive out evil spirits. He can give sight to people who were blind from birth. He speaks a word, and the lame leap from their beds and dance with joy. He stretches out his hand, and a dead person comes back to life. If you had these things going on in your midst wouldn’t you be asking, “Who is this guy?” Wouldn’t you be bringing your sick and lame and deaf and blind relatives to this guy and asking him to heal them? Where did he get this power? Was it real, or was it just parlor tricks or sleight of hand? Was Jesus just a first-century version of David Copperfield, who was a master of illusion? Or were these supernatural miracles that shattered the laws of physics and demonstrated otherworldly power? Well, Uncle Mordecai used to be in a leper colony, where his skin was falling off, but now he has rejoined society, and his skin is as clear as that of a newborn baby—because of Jesus; that was no sleight of hand. Cousin Bartimaeus used to beg for alms at the city gate because he was blind from birth, but now he sees the world with 20/20 vision; that was no illusion. That little girl in Capernaum, the daughter of Jairus, once lay on the bed where her soul had departed her body. She was dead as dust, but because Jesus spoke to her now she’s alive and well. These things are not tricks. They are realities to be reckoned with. Who is this Jesus? It’s a question that cannot be ignored.

And this Jesus teaches with authority. He’s not like the teachers of the law, who have this shallow, perfunctory understanding of the Law of Moses. This Jesus goes deep. He explains God’s Word in ways that are personal and powerful. He cuts to the heart, then he heals with words of grace. He tells people to repent of their sins because the Kingdom of God is at hand. Then he tells them to believe the good news that their sins are forgiven.

Who is this Jesus? How can Jesus do these things? People had their theories. “He does these miracles by the power of Satan,” said his enemies, the Pharisees. “He drives out demons by the prince of demons.” Other people said Jesus was a prophet, a teacher sent from heaven—very great, but nothing more. Some people said Jesus was the Prophet Elijah come back to life, perhaps John the Baptist reincarnated. It was Peter who nailed it when he said to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Who is this Jesus? Today we see exactly who this Jesus is. Jesus led his disciples Peter, James and John up a high mountain. *There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.* Today Jesus sets aside his humility for just a few moments, and we get a glimpse of his glory. The disciples on the mountaintop get to peer as if through a keyhole into the dazzling glory of heaven, and they see Jesus radiant with the glory he had with his Father before the worlds began. Moses and Elijah appear and speak with Jesus, these great prophets from Israel’s past stand and speak before one who is greater than they. *Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”* Here there is no question whatsoever who this Jesus is. God the Father in heaven tells us who this Jesus is: *“This is my Son, whom I love.”* This Jesus is the only Son of God from heaven, God in the flesh, begotten of the Father before all worlds began to be. He is the one through whom this world was created, the Word made flesh. He is not another Moses, another lawgiver; he is the one who brings grace from heaven and shows the Father’s smiling face, as he beams with grace upon the world.

“Listen to him!” the Father says. This Jesus has the words of eternal life, forgiveness and salvation. “I am the way and the truth and the life,” says Jesus. “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Listen to him! There is no other way to escape eternal damnation. There is no other way to escape from the crushing guilt of our sins. Trust in Jesus, fall on him for mercy, and find grace to help you in the hour of your need. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Today Jesus is manifested as the Son of God. He is the one who makes God known to us. “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18). Jesus is the God-revealer.

Who is this Jesus? He is the one who loves us. Peter, James and John came face to face with the glory of God in Christ, yet they were not destroyed. Do you realize that every time in Scripture we see an example of mortal human beings coming face to face with God’s glory, it’s a terrifying experience? From Moses on Mount Sinai to the shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem, when the glory of the Lord is revealed, human hearts are terrified. The disciples were terrified, too, to be in Jesus’ glorified presence, but Jesus took away their fear because Jesus is the one who loves us. He came to take away our fear of God, to wash away our sins, so that there is no more fear of condemnation for our disobedience. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever

does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18). This Jesus is love personified, love in the flesh, the perfect manifestation of God's eternal love for sinners, the perfect embodiment of God's intense desire that every human being should turn from sin, find grace in Jesus, and live forever in heaven.

Who is this Jesus? He is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies about him. He came to sacrifice himself for us, to give his life for us, to pay the price for our sins, to reconcile us to the Father. He came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark doesn't tell us what Moses and Elijah were talking about with Jesus, but Luke does. Luke tells us that they were speaking about Jesus' departure—his suffering and death—which he was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem. Jesus' transfiguration on the mountaintop lasted only a little while. Then he again cloaked his glory with humility and came back down the mountain of Transfiguration, so that a little while later he could climb another mountain called Calvary. He climbed that little hill outside Jerusalem to be nailed to a Roman cross. There he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was laid upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53). This Jesus is the sin-bearer, the one who set aside heavenly glory for a little while, so that he could be covered in shame and suffer and die for the sin of the world.

Who is this Jesus? He is the firstborn from the dead. He rose from the dead on the third day to declare death defeated, the sins of the world forgiven, and to show that he himself is the Son of God. On the mountain of transfiguration only Peter, James and John saw Jesus' glory. After his resurrection many people saw Jesus alive and could see for themselves that the one who died in shame was raised to life with power.

Who is this Jesus? He is the one who will judge us. The Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). You and I will see Jesus glorified, seated on his throne, his face like lightning, not temporarily transfigured but forever crowned with the glory he had with the Father before the world began. On that day every knee will bow and confess, "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father," as Jesus the Christ treads his enemies under his feet and takes you and all his people home.

The apostles did not spin clever stories, as they tell us the things Jesus did to manifest himself as the Savior of the world. Peter said, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain" (2 Peter 1:16-18). Peter, James and John went on to testify that they had seen the baptized Jesus, the teaching Jesus, the miracle-performing Jesus, the transfigured Jesus, and finally the crucified, risen and ascended Jesus. They testified with their lips, and they testified with their lives, as they won their martyr's crown, because they had been with Jesus, and they could not stop telling about the things they had heard and seen.

Who is this Jesus? That's a question you have to answer. It's a question that demands an answer. And the answer has eternal consequences.

Throughout this season of Epiphany I've reminded you several times that the word "Epiphany" means "manifestation" or "revelation." We have seen Jesus revealed as the Savior not only of Jews but of Gentiles, the Savior of the whole world, the one who calls sinners to repentance and justifies the wicked—even the most wicked of the wicked—remember Jonah and the Ninevites? It's more than just a fish story. We have seen Jesus revealed as the one who brings us freedom—remember "to eat or not to eat?"—freedom to live for God and to love our neighbor. We've seen Jesus revealed as the one who invites little children to come to him, to sit at his feet and learn from their loving Savior. The season of Epiphany has as its bookends God speaking from heaven: At the start of Jesus' ministry at his baptism Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and God the Father spoke from heaven and said, "This is my Son whom I love. With him I am well pleased." Today, as Jesus' earthly ministry nears its end, we hear the Father say on the mountain of transfiguration. "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" In both Jesus' baptism and his transfiguration we see the ultimate manifestation of who Jesus is.

Who is this Jesus? You know the answer: He is the Christ, the Chosen One of God. He is the one who loves you. He is your forgiveness, your life, your salvation. He is your glorious Lord and King. Jesus is your Savior. Amen.