



## Opening Responses

Come, Holy Spirit, and open our hearts  
**for we're gathered in God's presence.**

Come, Holy Spirit, and ready our minds  
**for we're ready to meet with Christ.**

Come, Holy Spirit, and fire our imaginations  
**for we're open to new possibilities.**

## 'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

Where have you caught glimpses of God in the mix of everyday life, and what difference has this made to you?

## Prayers of Thanks and Praise

God of awe and wonder,  
you appeared to Moses on the mountainside,  
made his face shine with your brilliant light,  
and gifted your people laws to help them live well.  
You met with Elijah on the mountainside,  
not in fire or earthquake or wind, but in the still-small voice,  
transforming his despair into hope.  
You appeared to Jesus' disciples on the mountainside,  
in dazzling light and swirling cloud,  
and called them to trust your Son in the dark days ahead.

And now, God of awe and wonder,  
you meet with us in worship, in daily life, in service of others,  
transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary.  
Through our praise this day, and in the days to come,  
surprise us, change us, guide us, we pray.  
In Jesus' name. **Amen**

## Canticle Saviour of the World (Singing the Faith 795)

Jesus, Saviour of the world, come to us in your mercy:  
we look to you to save and help us.  
**By your cross and your life laid down,  
you set your people free:  
we look to you to save and help us.**  
When they were ready to perish, you saved your disciples:  
**we look to you to come to our help.**  
In the greatness of your mercy, loose us from our chains,  
forgive the sins of all your people.  
**Make yourself known as Saviour and mighty deliverer;  
save and help us that we may praise you.**  
Come now and dwell with us, Lord Christ Jesus:  
hear our prayer and be with us always.  
**And when you come in your glory:  
make us to be one with you  
and to share the life of your kingdom.**

## Prayers of Renewal

God of relationship and community,  
love isn't just what you do, but what you are:  
from the Father to the Son to the Spirit and back again,  
at your heart is movement, a dance of love.  
You long to draw all creation into your divine dance;  
you renew and remake us, day by day.

Let us bring to God those things in need of that renewal:

We bring to you those things for which we are sorry:

**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the times we've failed to love one another:

**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the burdens we carry and sorrows we bear:

**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the injustices and oppression in our world:

**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the failings and disunity of your Church:

**Restore us and heal us.**

God of transformation and hope,

you set us free from the past, to flourish in the future.

Thank you that you forgive, restore and call us on. **Amen**

**Readings** Exodus 34:29 – 35

2 Kings 2:9 – 12

Luke 9:28 – 36

## **Sermon**

As some of you might know, my academic background is in physics, specifically the physics of Black Holes, which are probably the most mysterious and monstrous objects found so far within our universe. While studying them. I met a fair few people who believed that being both a serious scientist and a person of faith is impossible to do with integrity. However, I have come to picture the two areas as partners. My experience of doing scientific research deepened, and enriched, my faith, because I realised that there is still much which we are yet to understand, and so much beautiful mathematics that we have not

yet stumbled upon. When I had my precious moments of discovery, it felt very much like being on 'holy ground', because I was exploring aspects of the creation nobody else had seen before. Moreover, I'm yet to come across a convincing 'secular' explanation for why those equations I pondered in Durham's many coffee shops should exhibit any resemblance to the universe at all, let alone describe it so well. There are clearly hidden depths to God's handiwork which are even more mysterious than black holes! I was privileged to glimpse some pieces of the jigsaw, but there was and is much more to discover in the future, which is what makes science so exciting.

Today's set reading recalls the unusual story of the Transfiguration, an event that is recalled by all three of the Synoptic Gospels – Mark, Matthew and Luke. Jesus is pictured as standing alongside both the man who had received the law from God upon Mount Sinai, and the greatest of the Prophets, who heard God's still small voice upon the mountainside in his time of crisis. It's very tempting to read this story largely through a theological lens, and it is true that Luke intends to reveal much about who Jesus is, and why he matters. However, this isn't the only way to explore its significance. All three Gospel writers recognise that Peter's trying to prolong the moment was misplaced. These disciples had glimpsed a spectacular piece of the jigsaw, but they needed to come down the mountain to see more of the 'picture' of the glory of God, albeit amid the rather messier circumstances of controversy and conflict awaiting them when they got there.

To make sense of why Peter may have responded in the manner in which he did, we need to put the narrative of the Transfiguration into its proper context. Stepping back a few paces within Luke 9, we find Jesus explaining to his disciples that he needed to journey onwards to the city of Jerusalem and suffer there at the hands of the religious authorities, before rising again three days later (Luke 9:21 – 22). As if this wasn't enough to contend with, Jesus then said that if anyone wanted to become a follower, they would need to deny themselves,

take up their crosses, and follow him. In other words, they had to be ready and willing to die and to rise again with Christ, as do we today, as disciples in twenty-first century Britain (9:23 – 27). All this would, I imagine, have left the disciples feeling shaken up; this was not the idea of what the Messiah would be like that most people – including Peter, when he became the first person to recognise Jesus as such – had in mind!

So it was that, eight days after this dramatic episode, Jesus directed his three closest friends up a mountainside. This itself is significant, because such places were often the settings where encounters with God took place, as we also see with Moses within the Exodus story. Without warning, Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes, and like Moses after he'd come down from Sinai, his face shone and his garments were dazzling white. Moses himself then appeared, along with Elijah, who never died, but was carried off into heaven within a fiery chariot. The two spoke with Jesus – though only Luke's version gives us a clue about what was said. Peter, who we are informed in verse thirty-three was so scared he didn't know what he was saying, offered to build three tabernacles or booths – one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah – like the dwellings built to house the Ark of the Covenant in Israel's wilderness period. If this was his attempt to prolong the moment, it didn't succeed, as a cloud descended onto the top of the mountain, as when Moses received the Law. Mirroring the pattern of his earlier baptism, Jesus was affirmed as God's Son, as God's Chosen, to whom his three friends needed to listen. Then, almost as suddenly as it began, the drama was over (9:28 – 36).

Now, as I have tried to indicate, the details of the story make various clear connections with the Exodus narratives of Moses receiving the Law from God in a fiery cloud on Mount Sinai, and his guiding of the people on their journey through the wilderness. Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah reflects his standing in that same tradition, as the One who embodied in his very being the life and calling of Israel,

and who would bring their journey to its conclusion. Hence, the story has deep theological significance; it is full of symbolism, and deeper meaning. However, as I have also argued here, it matters that Peter couldn't prolong the moment. Though the glimpse of God's glory the three received was spectacular, they needed to risk descending into the messiness of everyday life if they wanted to discover any further pieces of the jigsaw. Glimpses of God's glory may be discovered in worship, but one lesson that the story of the Transfiguration teaches us is that there's yet more to be discovered in everyday discipleship.

When I was studying for my PhD, I shared my office with ten others, all of whom described themselves as atheists or agnostics – making me the only person of faith in that environment. Engaging with them definitely felt like coming down the mountain compared with the joys of pondering Einstein's beautiful equations! More than once, I found myself fielding questions designed to catch me out, or being the butt of office jokes. However, when it was calmer and the more dominant characters weren't about, some of the lads would speak to me about their problems, and even on occasion, ask me to pray for/with them. I did catch some glimpses of the glory of God in those conversations and it was quite a privilege to be trusted with the stories shared. So, bringing all of this together, I wonder what it might mean for you to descend down the mountain, and where journeying faithfully with God might lead you?

I thank God for opportunities to glimpse the divine glories at the top of the mountain, in both the delights of scientific research and in the privilege of presiding at the Eucharist. I also thank God for the times I have come down from the mountain tops, and caught glimpses of God in the complexity and messiness of everyday life – as did Peter, James and John. Friends, we cannot see the full picture of the glory of God if we're not prepared to step down the mountain and engage with the real world out there. So, in this coming season of Lent, may God grant us the courage to take a step out of our comfort zone and

open our eyes to glimpses of divine glory waiting to be stumbled on,  
often in the most unlikely places. Amen

### Prayers of Intercession

In the power of the Spirit, and in union with Christ,  
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of glory, it is good that we are here.

In peace we make our prayer to you.

In trust we confirm our faith in you.

Help us set our faces towards where you would send us.

Lord, look with favour. **Lord, transfigure and heal.**

Lord of glory, look with favour on your Church,

proclaiming your beloved Son to the world

and listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

May she be renewed in holiness, and so reflect your glory.

Lord, look with favour. **Lord, transfigure and heal.**

Lord of glory, look with favour on the nations of the world,

scarred by hatred, strife and war.

May they be healed by the touch of your hand.

Lord, look with favour. **Lord, transfigure and heal.**

Lord of glory, look with favour on those in need and distress,

suffering as your Son has suffered,

and waiting for the salvation you promise.

May Christ the Morning Star bring the light of his presence.

Lord, look with favour. **Lord, transfigure and heal.**

Lord of glory, look with favour on all Christ's siblings,

so that we shall be glorified with you.

Open our eyes to see him in majesty,

and to be changed into his likeness from glory to glory.

Lord, look with favour. **Lord, transfigure and heal.**

### Lord's Prayer

### Blessing (Collect for Sunday before Lent)

God of life and light,

your Son was revealed in majesty

before he suffered death on the cross.

Give us grace to perceive his glory,

that we may be strengthened to follow him

and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory,

as we receive the blessings of divine love;

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. **Amen**