

## 28 - THE TRANSFIGURATION

### Luke 9:28-36

However else this incident may be interpreted, it clarifies two major issues Luke had been dealing with throughout his narrative: Who is this Jesus of Nazareth? What does his life, death and resurrection mean for Luke's audience and for us today?

Some scholars see the story as a misplaced post-resurrection event. Sharon Ringe agrees that this is not likely for two reasons: 1) Unlike resurrection events, Jesus goes up the mountain *with* the disciples; he does not suddenly appear among them. 2) The voice from heaven is about Jesus whereas in resurrection events, Jesus *commissions* his disciples in some way or other.

By coming in the midst of a cloud, the voice from heaven clarified once and for all Jesus' identity as the Chosen One and Son of God. For Jews this meant that he is the promised Messiah. He would rescue them from the disasters that they had encountered all through their history and lead them into God's eternal kingdom. That this intensely spiritual experience happened on a mountain where Jesus was joined by Moses and Elijah was the symbol of Israel's whole past and anticipated future to come at the end-time.

For Gentiles the story clarified that Jesus is the Son of God on whom they can depend to guide them through life. By various means of divination, Gentiles looked to their gods for guidance in living, especially in difficult times when they needed answers to critical questions. Both groups were in Luke's audience.

There is yet another significant way to interpret this event. It tells of the continuity and also the discontinuity between Israel's faith history with the Apostolic Church and its mission. This double and paradoxical relationship continues to this day.

The Apostle Paul regarded the early congregations that he founded as "the New Israel" fulfilling the hopes and promises of the prophets of the Old Testament. This included the Gentiles to whom he felt called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah and reconciler of all people to God. Regardless of their previous religious or ethnic background, everyone he welcome everyone - Jew or Greek, slave or free - into the fellowship of Jesus' followers. In this same tradition, Luke told the Transfiguration story with a similar intent.

As the story concluded, the three disciples were both mystified by what they had experienced and wished to remain connected to what they knew. Peter proposed building three little tabernacles. On the Feast of Tabernacles Jews commemorated their ancestors' forty year journey through the wilderness under Moses' leadership from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. Peter wanted to cling to the past, as all religious conservatives want to do.

The scene ended with the disappearance of Moses and Elijah leaving Jesus alone with the disciples hearing God bid them to listen to Jesus, the Son of God. This signals that now fully revealed Jesus was about to set out for Jerusalem to die and to be raised to live forever in the Christian fellowship.