

Without doubt, one of the highlights for pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land is the visit to the Basilica of the Transfiguration atop Mt. Tabor. The mountain stands over a thousand meters high, towering above the flat and fertile Jezreel valley and the views from the Basilica are magnificent.

Whilst I have had the privilege of standing there four times, Jesus probably visited Mt. Tabor many times over the years, as it was only about 8 miles from where he grew up in Nazareth, but this occasion was to be different.

Here Jesus takes with him the inner circle of the twelve disciples, Peter, James and John and we are quite clearly told that Jesus was transfigured before them. Now I don't know about you, but transfigured is a word outside of this particular reading that I don't think I've ever heard used in everyday conversation.

So, what does it mean to be transfigured? Well, we are told that his face shone like a sun and his clothes became as white as light.

So, obviously at one level there's simply an element of change in Jesus's outward appearance, but a change also, I think, on an extraordinary level where Jesus's divine glory is being revealed. The glory which had been hidden due to his human nature but had been evident in his previously divine nature and to which he would return in due course.

It's almost as if Peter, James and John are being shown a glimpse of heaven, particularly if you add in the appearance of Moses and Elijah; Old Testament heroes representing the whole Jewish tradition of the Law and the Prophets.

The message starts to become clear. Not only can the disciples see for themselves that these two revered figures fully endorse what Jesus is doing and saying but also confirming all that Jesus has foretold about himself over the past 3 years.

Then, throw in a voice from the cloud, saying exactly the same words spoken from heaven at Jesus's baptism and it's easy to conclude that here was no mere man, but the very son of God, being transfigured.

But the thing I found most interesting in my research though is that the original Greek word which Matthew and Mark both use for 'transfigure' is the identical word used by St Paul when he talks about us being transformed from within.

The best analogy I can offer is to think of a woman who is expecting a child. As the child grows within her, her outward appearance changes. In addition to the obvious "baby bump," how often have you heard about how different the expectant mother looks, that she is radiant or "glowing." The transformation taking place within her is manifesting in her outward appearance.

This is the first time that Matthew identifies the three special disciples. The final time he does so is in the Garden of Gethsemane when according to the New Testament scholar Douglas Hare 'The three who behold his heavenly glory also see his earthly agony.'

In both cases they respond poorly, particularly Peter. If these are the "crème de la crème" of the disciples perhaps there is hope for me yet - or am I the only one who has nodded off during devotions.

But more importantly, I think that the account of Jesus' transfiguration can and should become the foundation for our own transformation. We have already envisioned a project which we call Transforming Trinity but from the outset we always said that it was not merely the structural body of our church we were seeking to transform, but the body of Christ within.

In just the same way that the disciples were invited to acknowledge and honour the past, through the representation of Moses and Elijah, so we will do likewise by continuing to use the ancient chancel and chapel for their original purposes.

And whilst our vision is to reimagine other parts of the church, any change must primarily be seen as a reflection of Christ's glory. The glory in his open armed welcome to all and in his wisdom, love and compassion to those in need. And that glory will be reflected in offering up our praise and thanks just as we do each morning in our church prayer.

As believers, we can put our trust in his ways which is why our daily prayers always seek his help according to his will and not our own because by expressing our need and gratitude for the higher power of God, our prayers give him glory.

And that, at the end of the day that is what Transforming Trinity is all about.

That day on the mountain was a turning point in the life and ministry of Jesus, and my prayer is that what I have said today can be a turning point for us as well. That the transformation of our building will always be matched by the continuous transformation in our hearts and minds, our missions and ministries.

Jesus was transfigured on that mountain top, and it also marked the start of the transformation of the disciples' minds and hearts. Jesus came down from that mountain top with his three disciples and began that fateful journey to Golgotha.

Lent starts on Wednesday and there is the opportunity in our two services at lunchtime and in the evening to symbolically accompany Jesus on that final journey. An opportunity to remember. To remember that it was from dust that we came and to dust we shall return. To remember also that Transforming Trinity is not just about our building but about ourselves too.

Amen

Rev. Terry Ward-Hall, 15 Feb 2026