

**A Sermon for The Last Sunday after the Epiphany  
March 2, 2025**



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[Last Sunday after the Epiphany – The Episcopal Church](#)

## Finding God on a Mountain Top

### Transfiguration, Year C

#### Luke 9: 28-36

The season after the Epiphany comes to a close, and turns toward Lent, with a final burst of light. The liturgical cycle that began with the light of the star guiding the magi to Jesus now ends with the light of Jesus revealed in his Transfiguration.

The purpose of the story of the Transfiguration is to demonstrate that Jesus has inherited the legacies of both Moses and Elijah.

Moses, of course, had been Yahweh's spokesman in obtaining the release of the captive Hebrew people from the Egyptian pharaoh. He was subsequently the one who received the commandments of Yahweh from the top of Mt. Horeb, and went on to lead the people to the promised land. The Torah, or law, which was contained in the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, were also attributed to Moses.

Elijah became the foremost of the Hebrew prophets, whose lives and works are recorded in the first and second books of Kings. Elijah, who, like Moses, had received his commission on Mt. Horeb, went on to become a spokesman for Yahweh.

In the time following the death of Moses, the Hebrew people were guided by the judges, men selected by the people to help them interpret the Law and to live uprightly and justly in their dealings with others. This was followed eventually by the reigns of a succession of kings. Yahweh had been against the idea of the people having a king to rule over them. Yahweh had believed that kings would become more concerned about their own power and less concerned about the needs of the people. But the people wanted to be like the other nations, and their will prevailed. Of course, Yahweh was right.

It was the prophet's role to remind the king about what Yahweh wanted. When a prophet said, "Thus says the Lord," he was *serious*. Elijah said that a lot. Elijah also had the specific role of proclaiming the coming of the Messiah, the anointed one of God. Further, Elijah is *not* reported as having died. Instead, the Scriptures inform us that he was taken to heaven by a fiery chariot.

The people were always looking for Elijah's return. John the Baptist was believed by some to have been Elijah. In the account relating Peter's declaration about Jesus, which precedes this story of the Transfiguration, Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" They mention Elijah, among others. Elijah's uniqueness in the Hebrew history is highlighted by the fact that, during Passover, a door is always left open, and a place is always set, for Elijah.

So, if Elijah represents the Hebrew prophets, and Moses represents the Law of Yahweh, together their presence signifies the totality of the Jewish religion, for whenever someone said, "The Law and the Prophets," they were essentially talking about, the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures. This mountain top experience, reported about Jesus, denoted a passing of a former way of believing and a new way of experiencing life.

Perhaps some of us have had such a mountain top experience—a time when we felt like we were on top of the world and in the presence of God. Sometimes it's in the birth of a child, a new creation of life—a life that has been given into our care. Sometimes it's in a special religious experience, such as a worship service or a moving piece of music. Sometimes it occurs as we sit quietly in prayer with God. Sometimes it's on an actual mountain top, as was the setting of the church camp that I attended for years, in the Cumberland Mountains of middle Tennessee, a place where I felt a special closeness to God.

Dr. Martin Luther King described such a mountain top experience in the famous sermon he preached on April 3, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. His sermon was entitled, "I see the Promised Land." Martin Luther King said that he didn't worry about anything because he had been to the mountaintop with God. He said he had no fear, "For my eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!" That's what mountain top experiences in our life are all about. Mountain top experiences help us to get ready for the tomorrows. They help us face the future in the hope and assurance that God is there with us.

Mountain top experiences also prepare us for the valleys in our lives. We are able to make it through those valleys because, like Martin Luther King, we've been to the mountain top with God. When we are in the valley of joblessness, or in the valley of loneliness, or in the valley of illness, or in the valley of depression, or in the darkest of all valleys, the valley of the shadow of death, we shall fear no evil for the Lord is with us.

We need to remember our mountaintop experiences and remember that, just as God was with us up on the mountaintop, God is with us in the valleys of our life, as well.

Mountaintop experiences are beautiful, but there is also a danger in those times. It's a danger that Peter faced. It's a danger we all face. We read that Peter was so enthralled with his mountain top experience that he wanted to stay there and revel in it. "Master," he said, "it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Peter didn't want to come down from the mountain into the valley of life. He didn't want the glorious event to end. He wanted to stay right there and bask in it.

The danger of mountaintop experiences is that they are *so* wonderful and *so* revealing that we never want them to end. Many people try to live out their life on the mountaintop. But life isn't meant to be lived on the mountaintop. It has to be lived in the valleys below. When Jesus, Peter, James, and John came down from the mountain, they found people who were hurting and in need. They came back to the reality of everyday life.

Having shared in this experience from our scriptures, may it help us to go out from our service today better prepared to enter into the season of Lent, a season of preparation, a season that starts out with Jesus's walking into the valley of his suffering and his death on the cross, but a season that ends up with the mountain top experience of the resurrection.

As we move from Epiphany to Lent, from the Mount of the Transfiguration to Mt. Calvary, there is a thought which we should carry with us: Jesus of Nazareth had valley of life experiences just like you and I have. Jesus suffered through the deepest and darkest of all valleys, the valley of crucifixion on the cross.

If the message of Jesus's suffering and death is to mean anything at all to us today, we must realize that Jesus overcame that valley and went *on* to the mountaintop. And let us be assured that Jesus is with us in the valleys—and will help us, always, to find our way to the mountain top.

In the Name of the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.