

# Holy Textures

Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours

## Luke 9:28-36, (37-43)

*Short, easy to use, thought provoking background commentary for your sermon, bible study lesson, or scripture reflection.*

*Listed on The Text This Week, [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com).*

**Year C, Season of Epiphany**

**Transfiguration Sunday**

**Last Sunday After Epiphany**

**Sunday Before Ash Wednesday**

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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This passage requires reading the First Testament passages about the prophet Elijah, 2 Kings 2:1-12: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

"About 8 days after" could be a foreshadowing of a later 8th day - what we now call Easter Sunday. On the 7th day, Saturday, the Sabbath, God rested; on a Sunday, the next day, the 8th day, Jesus was raised from death to new life.

Jesus selects Peter, James, and John to accompany him. He leads them up a high mountain. Although unnamed and unstated, a "high mountain" is a "thin place," a place that is close to the spiritual realm, a place for sacred encounters.

Elijah and Moses represent the Prophets and the Law. Their talking with Jesus would signify the high spiritual status of Jesus.

Because Elijah was lifted up into the heavens before his physical death, he is still looked to by Jews today as a fore-runner of the Messiah.

(An interesting experience that Elijah, Moses and Jesus share is their 40 day fast: Exodus 34:28, 1 Kings 19:8, and Matthew 4:2)

The title, "my Son, the Beloved," was earlier heard by Jesus at his baptism as a voice coming from heaven while he was praying. (Luke 3:22)

It is now confirmed to Peter, James and John by a voice coming from a cloud. They are also instructed to "Listen to him," which suggests that Jesus is of higher status than Elijah and Moses.

Peter's offer to build three dwellings for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah provides a little comic relief, for, as the text says, they did not know what to say.

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See the latter part of my [Introduction to John](#) for an explanation of why Peter, James and John told no one about what they had seen until after Jesus' resurrection.

The story of the incident that happens the next day when "they" (presumably Jesus and all of the disciples) had come down from the mountain serves as a counter-point to the glorious revelation that has just occurred. The disciples are no longer having a mountain-top experience! (And the story of this incident should include Verses 44 and 45, since Verse 44 is specifically an instruction from Jesus: Listen to me - which is precisely the commandment spoken from the cloud during the Transfiguration.)

As Malina comments (page 266, see footnote below):

*A man with an only son who was seized by a spirit is in danger of being ostracized by the entire community. ... Since his son could not marry, the father faced the end of the family line, the loss of its land, and hence its place in the village. All members of his extended family were thus imperiled. The cure of this boy is thus the restoration of the family as well.*

Verse 41. Jesus' response to the news that the father begged the disciples to cure his son but they could not is an insult felt all the more sharply because it is given in public. The disciples would certainly be included among the "generation."

Jesus demonstrates his high spiritual status by successfully rebuking the unclean spirit which is possessing the boy. Healing the boy and returning him to his father also results in restoring the social standing of the whole family: the boy is returned to his rightful place in the family; the family is returned to its rightful place in the village.

In Verse 41, Jesus asks a rhetorical question:

*How much longer must I be with you and bear with you (you faithless and perverse generation)?*

In Verse 44, Jesus begins to answer his own question:

*The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.*

But the disciples are too thick to take it in.

The Transfiguration is an apt Preface to Lent and Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, because what lies ahead is both a confrontation between the non-violent justice of the Kingdom of God and the violent injustice of the Roman Empire; as well as the non-violent way of the Beloved versus the hoped-for

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victory by the Messiah. The crowds at Jerusalem will be cheering for "the one who is bringing the Kingdom of our ancestor David." This is not the same as welcoming God's Beloved.

I wonder how much in our hearts, we are still cheering for Jesus as the triumphant Victor?

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\* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.