

Jesus Better Known

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We've had a long season of Epiphany this year, almost the longest it can be – we've had eight weeks of Epiphany and the longest it can be is nine

So we've had a lot of opportunities to hear the great stories of Jesus in his early years – both literally him as a child and the early years of his ministry

It has been a blessing for us to hear these stories of Jesus getting his feet under him

And, soon, we will transition to Jesus using those feet to journey towards Jerusalem, and journey towards the cross

Lent starts this coming Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, and it will be our time to come alongside Jesus as his life and ministry point him ever more towards his fate

And so it has been good for us to get to know Jesus and to get to hear how Jesus navigates the challenges of answering the questions: who is this guy? What is he all about? And, is he really God's chosen one, the Messiah?

Today's gospel lesson is the threshold from Jesus' youth to Jesus' maturity and that threshold is crossed at the top of a mountain with an extraordinary moment

Jesus and a few of his disciples go up a mountain and "while [Jesus] was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white"

Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes!

And that's not the end of it, it gets better!

Moses and Elijah show up and seem to shoot the fill-in-the-blank with Jesus about what will come next for him

Flabbergasted, Peter offers to make three dwelling places to mark this incredible occasion

And just then, a cloud appears and there is a voice from the cloud that announces: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

And then the cloud goes away, and it's just Jesus and his disciples – no more Moses and Elijah – and Jesus looks like himself again, but in a way he is very much *not* the same to the disciples anymore

If there was any question before about who this guy is, what he's all about, and, is he really God's chosen one, the Messiah? – Jesus' transfiguration before his friends leaves little doubt

If all the wisdom and truth that Jesus bore to his community in the stories we've heard throughout Epiphany didn't make it apparent who he is, what he's about, and whether he is really God's chosen one, the Messiah - this physical experience of transition made a *big* difference

It's all a bit much, but what can it all mean?

Mary Ann Saunders, a lecturer at the University of British Columbia in Canada, made some connections to this story about Jesus in her commentary this week from her perspective as a trans woman that I found really helpful

"I know what it is like to live in, and encounter daily, a world which demands signs, evidence, proof that I am who I say I am," Mary Ann writes. "And I

know that, no matter how many times I offer those signs, I will again be asked to provide them.”¹

This she relates to those Epiphany stories of Jesus I was mentioning earlier - who is this guy? What is he all about? And, is he really God’s chosen one, the Messiah?

Can he prove it? Can he demonstrate his holiness? But if he can he better not do it in a way that negates his humanness

When Jesus read the scroll in the temple, people loved how he read it but were disturbed by how he interpreted it – who does he think he is? Isn’t this Joseph’s boy?

Jesus lived in a world that demanded signs, evidence, and proof that he was who he said he was – or, more often than not, that he was who others claimed he was

And, it seems like no matter how many times Jesus offered those signs – or literally had voices speaking from the clouds like at his baptism and now at this transfiguration – Jesus would be asked again and again to provide those signs, evidence, and proof

Then comes this great transfiguration, Jesus and his disciples experience this transition that in a way manifests not only the truth about who Jesus is but who he will be, and who he always has been

“Through the Transfiguration,” Mary Ann writes, “[Jesus] shows us the truth of who [he] is but also shows us that [he] remains the person [he] was before. So often, trans people are perceived as becoming different people when, in fact, we are simply revealing something of ourselves, something that may not have been known to those around us but which has been known to God from the time we were formed in the womb.”

¹ <https://www.salalandcedar.com/wildlectionary/2025-2-transfiguration-yearc>

“Gender transition,” she continues, “is a shining forth which can (but doesn’t necessarily) include a visible change of form—a transfiguration—but whose outcome is not that we are wholly changed, but simply better known.”

The outcome is not that we are wholly changed, but simply better known

When trans people transition in any way, so often people interpret that action as becoming a *new* person when, in truth, as Mary Ann so wonderfully articulates, any kind of transition – transfiguration – is an expression not of becoming someone else, but becoming more fully yourself

The outcome is not that we are wholly changed, but simply better known

“When the voice had spoken,” and the cloud lifted, “Jesus was found alone” Luke writes – in other words, after this great transition what was left was simply, and yet magnificently, Jesus

The Jesus we have been getting to know through Epiphany, and the Jesus we will follow in Lent

It is Jesus – fully embodied in his authentic self – that begins the journey to Jerusalem

And it is Jesus – fully known to God and to his community – that will fulfill the ministry and mission God set out for him

This event on the mountain top is often interpreted as bearing meaning for the observers: Peter, John, and James and by means of the gospel, us, too – that Jesus’ transfiguration was an invitation to deeper knowledge and witness to who Jesus is, what he’ll do, and how he’s called

And, I think that remains true

But, at the same time, Mary Ann's insights make we wonder if this event was as much for Jesus as it is for us – maybe that fully human part of him

Jesus needed to know that he, fully embodied as his authentic self was fully known to God and fully loved by God and fully called by God to continue in the ministry that was, to say the least, off to a rocky start: it was meaningful, don't get me wrong, but it was also hard

Maybe Jesus needed to experience this transition as much as his friends needed to witness to it so that the full power of God might be known in who he is and what he's up to

So then we might approach this story from both perspectives – we might approach this story of the Messiah as the friends who witness to the embodied truths of our siblings in this discipleship journey who undergo their own transfigurations and as a result can live out their own God given missions embodied as their authentic selves and fully known to us and to God

Or, we, like Jesus, may need to experience our our own transition and transfiguration of body, mind, and spirit to know that who we are, fully embodied as our authentic selves, is known and loved by God and *nothing* can separate us from that love

As transfigured beloveds of God, we manifest the full power of God's love and grace in the world through our actions and through our discipleship

The transfiguration didn't wholly change Jesus, but made him simply better known

May we all know that grace, may we all be transfigured by that radical love, and may we follow this transfigured Jesus in the journey to the cross.

Amen.

