The Transfiguration

Deep Prep

Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36

The Big Idea: God reveals his Son in brilliant light on the mountaintop: He is the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets.

Learning Goal: Learners will learn about the roles Moses and Elijah play in the history of God's people, and begin to appreciate the distinctiveness of Jesus' role as God's Son and messenger.

The transfiguration story is a bit of a mystery. Pastors with a sermon file of a certain thickness often have a few transfiguration sermons—all of them different and most of them probably valid. Interpreters do not agree on the transfiguration's historical roots or its meaning and most people sitting in the pew or confirmation class usually just shrug their shoulders in bewilderment when the story is read. So did Peter, James, and John—and they were there! Such bewilderment is the starting point for exploring the meaning in this story.

One argument suggests that Moses and Elijah might signify the Law and the Prophets, and now Jesus is standing right there with them. Many sermons and Bible studies take it a step further and insist that Jesus is greater than Moses and Elijah—he is the Law and the Prophets, and something more.

Another argument proposes that Jesus' presence with Moses and Elijah is meant to signify a continuation (leading to fulfillment) of what Moses and Elijah/Elisha began. Like Moses, Jesus shows mastery over the sea and fed the multitudes in the wilderness. Like Elijah and Elisha, Jesus multiplied loaves, cleansed lepers, and raised the dead.

A third possibility is that perhaps Jesus is simply being likened to important prophets who were initially rejected by the people and later vindicated by God. Moses and Elijah were supreme covenant and Torah advocates, they worked miracles, and they were taken directly into heaven instead of dying like everyone else (Elijah in Scripture and Moses by tradition). All of these arguments are plausible and meaningful.

The Greek word behind transfiguration is metamorphoomai. The English word metamorphose means to change the nature of something. This coupled with the literary form and genre of this story, that of any epiphany or sudden manifestation of the divine, would suggest that the transfiguration changes, or at the very least clarifies, Jesus' identity somehow. The divine voice heard in this story gives the fullest answer to the question of Jesus' identity that the disciples or we could ask for. Jesus is seen in full glory (the appearance of his face changed, just like Moses) with Moses and Elijah, and God says from a cloud, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35).

In some sense, the transfiguration story reminds us of events from Jesus' entire life. We are easily reminded of his baptism when we read this story and remember God's voice from the clouds at...
that time. There is some link between Jesus and the Law and Prophets, and there is something that makes us think of his death and resurrection, his ascension, and his future coming. It may be hard to know exactly what to make of the transfiguration, but there is an interesting collage of sorts that emerges from this strange story. The strains of many a theme and many a story come together in the transfiguration. The climax of the story is the voice from the clouds, "This is my Son, my Chosen; Listen to him!" (Luke 9:35). That's a clear message.

Peter wants to commemorate the place (which isn't named in any of the Gospels) and freeze the moment in time. We can sympathize with Peter. We know that something great has happened even if we don't know exactly what it is. But faithfulness in discipleship, as seen in the Gospels, always involves following and action, not frozen nostalgic moments. The disciples don't seem to have been transformed by the transfiguration. They don't get it. There's some encouragement in that anyway. The disciples were actually there, and they don't get it. They continue to bumble, to look for an early restoration of Israel instead of pay attention to what Jesus is doing before their eyes. They don't preach about the transfiguration, even in Acts. It is as if it was a one-time confusing event. There is some clarity in the voice, however. Jesus is God's Son. God's chosen one. We are to listen to him.

Quick Prep

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• The transfiguration story is a bit of a mystery. Interpreters do not agree on the transfiguration's historical roots or its meaning.

• The Greek word behind transfiguration is metamorphoomai. The English word metamorphose means to change the nature of something. This coupled with the literary form and genre of this story, that of any epiphany or sudden manifestation of the divine, would suggest that the transfiguration changes, or at the very least clarifies, Jesus' identity.

• The divine voice heard in this story gives the fullest answer to the question of Jesus' identity that the disciples could ask for. Jesus is seen in full glory and God says from a cloud, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35).

• The transfiguration story reminds us of events from Jesus' entire life.

Adolescent Connection

Learning is connected through emotions. A highly emotional experience will last in the brain for decades and can be pulled up at a moment's notice. This moment of transfiguration was an
exciting, emotional experience for those who witnessed it. If youth can connect this teaching with a sense of the excitement of the moment, they can get a glimpse of the importance of Jesus meeting with two of the most important people of the Hebrew testament—Moses and Elijah. Guiding youth to see this event as an emotionally exciting time will help them to realize its importance. God's Son is conversing with God's chosen messengers from history.

Baptismal Connection

In the Rite of Affirmation of Baptism, a five-part question addresses each confirmand's intent to continue in the covenant God made with them in Holy Baptism. Here We Stand resources help adolescents—with support from parents, leaders, and the entire congregation—prepare to answer this question as they continue in their lifelong faith journey. Today's lesson focuses on the clause "to live among God's faithful people" (Lutheran Book of Worship, page 201; Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 236).

Welcoming

Prepare your large group space by playing upbeat music in the background and by welcoming learners as they arrive. Make a special effort to welcome and thank adult small group leaders for their presence and for being willing to help pass on the faith to the next generation.

• Begin by thanking learners for coming! Remind the group what a privilege you feel it is to serve God by leading confirmation, and what a gift from God you consider all of them to be.

• Ask learners to recall last week's Big Idea if they can. Reward the first person to get it right with a handful of candy or some other small treat to share with their small group. (Be aware of any food allergies in the group.) Ask for a volunteer to capture last week's lesson in their own words; affirm all genuine responses; keep going until you're satisfied everyone has been oriented.

• Project this week's Big Idea on the screen or write it in HUGE block letters on your presentation board or overhead slide. Invite learners to recite it with you aloud. Repeat it two or three times.

Skit: The Boat and the Map

Ask or assign a small group to perform the skit. In a pinch, grab enough volunteers from the audience to form an impromptu 'readers' theater' troupe.

CHARACTERS: Jordan (trying to read the map), Simone (trying to keep her cool), Carston (steering the boat), Jesus

PROPS: two cutouts of a boat—one with large crack with the name "S.S. The Law" and one without a crack with the name "S.S. The Law on Your Hearts"; a large map titled "The Prophets" so the audience can see it

The scene opens with the three students "in the boat" (sitting or standing behind the cutout boat}
SIMONE: We're going to die out here in the middle of the ocean!

CARSTON: No, Simone, we still have a chance. Jordan, just tell me where The Prophets Map says we should go.

JORDAN: Carston, I'm trying, okay? I'm trying to read the map but the ocean is a bit bumpy. And some of this stuff is confusing: "born in Bethlehem," "cast lots for his clothing." What does that mean?

SIMONE: And, by the way, last time Jordan told you which way to steer the boat, you didn't exactly do a stellar job. We only ended up with more hull damage!

CARSTON: Um, Simone, hello...the boat is leaking. There is a split down the side of it the size of Montana! Every second we're out here it gets worse! It is impossible to steer this thing. You're right. We're just going to die here in the middle of the ocean!

JORDAN: All right. Just calm down, both of you. We have to think.

(The three pause to think.)

JORDAN: No, it's true. We're going to die.

(All calmly agree.)

CARSTON: Stupid Law.

JORDAN: Stupid Prophets.

SIMONE: A lot of good they did us.

(Jesus enters in the second, undamaged boat.)

JORDAN: Whoa! Hey, look that guy! He's got a boat!

CARSTON: It's just like ours! But it isn't broken!

JESUS: Hi, guys. Need a ride?

JORDAN: Yes!

CARSTON: Oh, am I glad to see you!

SIMONE: Wait a second, guys. Maybe this is a mirage or something. How do we know that we can trust this guy? He just appeared in the middle of the ocean. Who's to say he's not as lost as we are?

JORDAN: Well, his boat sure looks better than ours.
CARSTON: Hey! Look at "The Prophets"! Wow! Some of this makes a lot more sense now. This is what the map was leading to—this guy. This is how we know he'll take us to safety.

JESUS: Come, follow me.

*(Jesus helps each one climb from the broken boat into his boat. They begin to exit.)*

SIMONE: I guess the Prophets weren't as stupid as I thought.

JORDAN: Yeah. And I'm glad Jesus has the Law that is not broken.

CARSTON: And I'm glad he came all the way out here to find us.

SIMONE: Hey, Jordan, maybe Jesus will walk on the water.

JORDAN: Simone, that's impossible!

**Quiz Show**

Set up a chair for each contestant, perhaps choosing one from each grade level or forming two or more teams and choosing one person from each team. Provide each contestant with an empty soup can and a wooden spoon, or similar objects. Contestants should bang on the bottom of the can when they believe they know the correct answer. Reward players with candy prizes.

1. When you think you understand absolutely everything in the Bible,...
   a. you may be delusional.
   b. you should trade up to a Bible with more words and fewer pictures.
   c. B and possibly A. *(Correct.)*
   d. you get a free ticket to heaven.

2. How many syllables are in the word transfiguration? *(Five.)*

3. True or false: Stories of the life and times of Moses and Elijah are found in the New Testament, just like stories of Jesus. *(False. The Moses and Elijah stories are found in the Old Testament.)*

4. Transfiguration is...
   a. a new kind of figure skating.
   b. a diet that transforms your figure.
   c. a rare magic trick.
   d. the occurrence on the mountain when Jesus had a mystical interaction with Jewish holy figures. *(Correct.)*

5. Faith involves...
   a. giving up fun stuff for Lent.

*The Transfiguration page 5*
b. a whole lot of mysteries and unknowns. (Correct.)
c. only believing in things that can be proven.
d. mustard and ketchup, but never mayo.

6. If you hear a voice from the clouds,...
   a. run like a scared kitten.
   b. listen up; God might be telling you something. (Correct.)
   c. check in with your local mental-health provider the next business day.
   d. get your ears cleaned.

7. On the mountaintop of the transfiguration, Jesus is shown to be...
   a. the fulfillment of the law and prophets.
   b. one dazzling dude.
   c. A, B, and the next one too. (Correct.)
   d. a really good Son.

8. True or false: Listening to someone is a sign of respect. (True.)

9. Fill in the blank: God said about Jesus, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; ______ to him!" (Listen.)

10. We celebrate the transfiguration by...
    a. putting up a transfiguration tree.
    b. sending transfiguration cards with sparkles enclosed.
    c. remembering that we, too, are transformed through Christ. (Correct.)
    d. watching transfiguration cartoon specials on TV.

**Presenter's Interruptions**

Keep this menu of short theme-related bits at the ready for those moments when you feel you're losing your audience.

- Prior to class, locate a small squirt bottle and cut two cloud shapes out of white paper. On one cloud, write Luke 9:35: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" Cut a small hole in the other cloud and slip it over the nozzle of the squirt bottle. Walk among the students holding the clouds over the students' heads. Students can recite the verse by reading the one cloud before the other cloud might "rain" on them.

- Prior to class, purchase sparkling nail polish. Walk through the group and write a "T" on student thumbnails to remind them that they, too, are transformed into something dazzling by the presence of Christ.

**Opening Prayer**

The Transfiguration page 6
Teach the litany response to the class or write it on the board or on chart paper. Dim the lights and play soft music as you pray the litany:

**Leader:** Lord, let us pray that we would open our eyes to see you.

**All:** Let's go up the mountain to meet Jesus.

**Leader:** Lord, let us pray that we would open our ears to hear you.

**All:** Let's go up the mountain to meet Jesus.

**Leader:** Lord, let us pray that we would open our minds to know you.

**All:** Let's go up the mountain to meet Jesus.

**Leader:** Lord, let us pray that we would open our hearts to love you.

**All:** Let's go up the mountain to meet Jesus.

**Leader:** Lord, let us pray that we would be transformed as your dazzling light shines upon us.

**All:** Let's go up the mountain to meet Jesus.

**Leader:** Lord, let us pray that we would reflect the good news of your presence.

**All:** Let's go into the world to meet Jesus. Amen

**My Faith Story**

Many people admire Jesus and respect his teachings, but do not believe Jesus is the Son of God. We can't have it both ways. Either we believe Jesus truly is the Son of God or we see him as a delusional lunatic. How does believing that Jesus is God's Son change you? The Christ that we worship is the one the prophets and law foretold. What does it mean to be part of something so much bigger than yourself? How do you reflect the mystery of Christ in your own life?

**Guest Speaker**

Most of us won't have the opportunity to see Jesus dazzling white on the mountaintop, but all of us will have the opportunity to do as God commanded to the disciples: we can listen to Jesus. Invite someone from the faith community who has heard the call of Jesus in his or her life. Ask this person to talk with the class about what Christ called him or her to do. How did he or she respond? How did his or her choice glorify God?
Cartoon Connection: When I Grow Up...

*The Funny Shape of Faith, page 296*

Would we recognize Jesus if he were living among us today? If he wasn't appearing in a "Hall of Fame" or wearing a big neon sign that said "I'm the Messiah," how would we know who he was? Come to think of it, if I saw someone with a neon sign that said "I'm the Messiah," I'd probably be more than a little skeptical. It was the same in Jesus' time. People were getting excited about this guy: A man who had been traveling all over, performing miracles and speaking out on behalf of the oppressed. A man who was challenging the authority of the Roman occupation and inspiring fishermen to leave their work to follow him. They knew he was someone special, but they had been inspired by people before. God had to actually spell it out for them—sending Moses and Elijah from the dead to show that Jesus was God's own son.

Who are the people in the world today who are leaders for social justice and the rights of oppressed peoples? Are these people prophets? Are they disciples? Jesus promised to come again—how will we recognize him when he does?

Handbook Connection

Ask students to open *The Lutheran Handbook* to page 154. Review Moses' life by reading section 3 of "The Top 10 Bible Heroes." Invite students to write, "Showed up at the transfiguration with Jesus" in the margin. Moses led the Israelites out of bondage into freedom. How might Jesus' life parallel Moses' life? *(Like Moses, Jesus showed people how to be free from the bondage of their sin.)* Why is it not a coincidence that Moses and the prophet Elijah were part of the mountain experience with Jesus? *(All three were God's messengers and brought messages of redemption to people.)*

Turn to pages 96-97 in *The Lutheran Handbook*. Review the sections of "How to Identify a Genuine Miracle." Evaluate the transfiguration through the five points and decide: miracle or not?

Peter's random comment to Jesus at the transfiguration was to offer to build three dwellings on the mountaintop: one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Feeding them might have been a better idea. Turn to pages 48-51 in *The Lutheran Handbook* and read "What to Bring to a Church Potluck." Invite students to decide which dishes might be appropriate for a potluck with two dead biblical figures, some disciples, and the Son of God. Remember, Elijah was partial to "angel food" cake and water (1 Kings 19:5-6)!

Bible Connection: Listening Up, Packing Out

• Read Luke 9:34-35. Ask the females to be the voice of God and the males to narrate. Reverse and repeat. It doesn't get much clearer than this: God commanded the disciples to listen to Jesus. That's nothing new; it has always been the task of the disciple. We are disciples too; we can safely assume this applies to us as well. How do we listen to Jesus? Break into small groups and have each group create two lists of areas in their lives where they need to listen to Jesus through
his life and teachings. One list should be for areas that are relatively easy, such as taking time for church, obeying the Commandment to not kill, and so forth. The other list is for areas that are more challenging, such as not lusting in your heart, befriending those who are hated, striving for greatness through servitude, and so forth.

• Read Matthew 17:1-4. In verse 4, Peter offered to build three dwellings for Jesus and the two ghosts. Let's face it; the disciples weren't always on their best game. Peter's response didn't make much sense. If you had been on the mountaintop to see the vision as Peter did, what would you have said? Bonus points for funny, rhyming, or rapping answers.

• Read a piece of the Israelites' history in Exodus 13:19-22. Moses, imperfect human though he was, led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to freedom in the promised land. On the way, Moses carried the bones of Joseph, his forefather in the faith. Jesus carried all the history of the Jewish people with him, including Moses and Elijah. Whose bones do you carry on your faith journey? Whose faith story is connected to yours?

More Bible Connections

• Read Luke 9:1-8, the account of Jesus sending the disciples out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. The text says that King Herod was confused by what was being reported back to him—including the account that Elijah had appeared. Offer some reasons why this would be upsetting to the nonbelieving king. (Herod was probably concerned about maintaining power. He had repeatedly tried to squash the believers when they seemed to be gathering momentum.)

• Read Luke 11:27-28. How does this verse relate to the key verse of this lesson (Luke 9:34-35)? (Listening to God is an essential part of being a believer.)

• Read Ephesians 2:13-18. This letter from Paul to the Ephesians describes how Christ came for both the Jews (those who followed the laws of the people of Israel) and the Gentiles (those who did not follow the Jewish law). Now there are no longer two, but one people because of Christ. How is this good news to those who were "far off" (the Gentiles)? (They realize that Jesus and the gospel is for all people.) Why would this cause tension to those who had been following the law for generations? (Years of what they thought was "right living" based on following strict rules was not important for salvation and being people of God.)

Object Lesson: Family Tress

Prior to class time, create or locate a family tree diagram, the kind often found on the inside of old family Bibles. If possible, bring old family photos, preferably large black and white photos that are easy to see. Do you know interesting—both good and bad—stories about your family? Share a few.

A recent study from Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, found that children who know more about their family history tended to have higher self-esteem, interact better with their peers, and show higher resilience in the face of adversity. Knowing the good, the bad, and the mundane of our family histories helps teach us what to expect in life and how to deal with it. (See www.marial.emory.edu for more information about the study.)

Knowing who we come from helps ground us. Our faith history is not so different from our
family ancestry. Jesus’ ministry was built on those who came before him—the prophets, teachers, and martyrs of the faith—people like Moses and Elijah. They weren't perfect, but they help teach us who we are as members of a long tradition of believers—a family tradition.

Science Connection: Beyond the Light

_In advance of this lesson, assemble the following items and read through this experiment._

Window, a computer monitor screen, and a fluorescent light fixture  
Pair of dark sunglasses  
Purchase or make a spectroscope. (Directions for making an inexpensive spectroscope can be found on the Internet.)

Turn your back to the students and put on the sunglasses. Stand for a moment, then turn and face them. Make comments about how dark it is and how you cannot see well. Remove the glasses and comment on how much better that is and how you can now see clearly. Ask the students if anyone has ever been in a situation where she or he couldn't see clearly until someone turned on a bright light, which made a big difference. That might be like what happened to the disciples with Jesus when they were on the mountaintop, and God revealed Jesus in a brilliant light.

Show the students the spectroscope and ask if any of them have used one before. Explain what the spectroscope does. A spectroscope separates light into different color components. Unlike a prism, a spectroscope separates color into distinct, measurable bands. Most spectroscopes are triangular and you point the wide end toward the light source. Try these experiments:

- Point a spectroscope at the window. What do you see? The letters on the continuum should show you the wavelength lines.
- Point the spectroscope at the computer monitor screen. What do you see? You will see red, blue, and green light. Dots of these colors are used to make the colors on the screen.
- Now point the spectroscope at a fluorescent light fixture that is on. You should notice that the bright white light is not the same as the "natural light" seen through the window. Speculate about what you might have seen if you were able to look at the transfigured Jesus through a spectroscope.

Video/DVD: The Extraordinary

Option 1: The Shaggy Dog

Start cue: (Chapter 16, 01:05:47) Josh rushes down the stairs past Carly. "Where's Trey? We're gonna be late for school. Shoulda gotten a ride from Mom." ?"
End cue: (Chapter 16, 01:09:16) Carly leaves a phone message telling her mom to call her back right away.
A recent bite from a mutant dog has transformed Dave into a part-time dad/part-time dog! He is unable to control when he changes from human to dog and back. Unfortunately, Josh and Carly don't know that their new dog, Shaggy, is actually their father. In fact, Dave's recent weird behavior has led Carly to suspect that he and their mom are having problems. When Dave discovers this, he knows he must reveal "Shaggy's" true identity.

• How does Dave's revelation restore hope for his children? How does Dave encourage his son?
• What did the disciples learn about Jesus at the transfiguration? How do you think this experience encouraged them in their faith?

Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.

Option 2: The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers


Start cue: (Chapter 13, 0:41) Gimli tastes the residue from a leaf. "Ptew! Orc blood!"
End cue: "It cannot be... You fell."

After the death of their friend Gandalf, three warriors search for their other captured comrades. Their suspicion that they have stumbled upon the fearsome White Wizard turns to wonder when they realize the stranger's true identity.

• How might your faith have been affected if you had been with the disciples at the transfiguration?
• When have you experienced an "aha" moment that clarified something about God for you?

Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.

Option 3: Little Black Book


Start cue: (Chapter 28, 1:36) A yellow Volkswagen drives along the highway. "By fall, I was ready to try again."
End cue: "I think this is just about the greatest day of my whole entire life!"

Stacy and her mother have had their share of hard times, and they have always turned to the work of their musical heroine, Carly Simon, for inspiration and hope. Today, as Stacy interviews for her dream job, Carly's presence once again confirms that she is on the right path.

• When has God turned an ordinary day into an extraordinary one in your life?
• When have you been surprised by the sudden realization of God's presence?

Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.
Music: A Sign

Option 1: "How Great Is Our God"


The story of the transfiguration is one of excitement and emotion. Jesus is declared to be the Son of God, and glory shines everywhere. Chris Tomlin's song "How Great Is Our God" captures the wonder and awe of that amazing moment, and also reminds us that the love of God will continue forever.

• How would you have felt if you had witnessed the transfiguration? Why?
• In what ways is the love of God visible in your life and the life of the world?

*Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.*

Option 2: "Shine"

Provide the song "Shine" by Salvador (from Dismiss The Mystery, Word Entertainment LLC, 2006).

The transfiguration is an exciting event that was filled with the shining light of glory. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were surrounded by brilliance and radiance. This song by Salvador captures how we can live the life that Jesus wanted us to live, choosing to be a reflection of the shining light of his glory.

• What exactly does it mean for you to become a reflection of the shining light of Jesus?
• How can you shine the light of Jesus into your own world? Do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable with doing so? Why?

*Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.*

Option 3: "The Transfiguration"

Provide the song "The Transfiguration" by Sufjan Stevens (from Seven Swans, Sounds Familyre, 2004).

In the account of the transfiguration, Jesus is letting a few of his disciples into a restricted area of knowledge and experience. When Elijah and Moses appear, it's like meeting the biggest rock stars of the faith, and it's also seeing for themselves that there is life after death. After witnessing this event, Peter is dumbfounded, so he offers to build houses for them! What might we have done or...
said if we had seen and heard the same things as Peter?

• What roles do Moses and Elijah play in the Christian faith? What new information was revealed to Peter, James, and John on the mountaintop?

• If you could talk to one person from the Bible, who would it be? Why?

Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.

Learning in Motion: Simon Says!

God was clear about the need to listen, so now is a good time to practice. Play a game of "Simon Says." To begin the game, create an imaginary line on the floor and have students line up. Play the part of Simon and stand a good distance from the line. Command the players to move forward while performing a certain movement, such as, "Simon says, hop three times on one foot." If the command is preceded by "Simon says," the players may do as directed. If the command is not preceded by "Simon says," anyone who moved forward must return to the starting line. The first player to reach Simon wins. Emphasize how important listening is in this game, and in hearing God speak to us.

Closing Questions

Consider starting the Closing Time with a "Stump the Presenter!" moment in which learners may ask you questions that have come up during their small group discussions, but for which they want further explanation. This gives the small group leaders an "honorable out" when they get into sticky theological territory, and it's a great way to start out your final minutes together.

If there are no "Stump the Presenter!" questions, tickle learners with one or more of the following questions to connect Small Group Time with the larger conversation:

• How does this dazzling Jesus shine light into our world?

• How are you listening to Jesus?

• How will you live out your faith in a mysterious God?

Closing Ritual

Teach the litany response. Project it or write it on the board or on chart paper. Responsively pray the closing litany.

Leader: Lord, the events of the transfiguration are dazzling.

All: Let's descend from the mountain to tell of Jesus.

Leader: But on the mountain you did not stay.
All: Let's descend from the mountain to follow Jesus.

Leader: Jesus, take us along to shine light in all the dark places.

All: Let's descend from the mountain to reflect Jesus.

Leader: Lord, you fulfilled the words of the prophets from ages ago.

All: Let's descend from the mountain to praise Jesus. Amen

Closing Blessing

Before anyone leaves to go home, make sure each learner receives the following blessing from the small group leader, or from you! (Or, if you like, consider writing your own blessing, based on your teaching time.) Have leaders trace the cross on each learner's forehead as they say the blessing.

(Insert name) ________, child of God, may you be a dazzling reflection of the mysterious Christ. Amen
Small Group Leader Sheet: The Transfiguration

Instructions

Make sure each learner has a Learner Sheet for use during your discussion. At the end of the lesson they can take the Learner Take-Home Sheet to use with their household at dinner or bedtime.

Be sure to start on a positive note. Welcome each learner by name. Let them know you're glad they're here! If anyone is absent, mention you'll be praying for that person together. Small Group Time is for give-and-take discussion. Your main job is to draw learners out and get them talking about the theme. Ask open-ended questions that will provoke responses. Once the conversation begins, intervene only to bring it back on track or to stimulate more talk.

Quick Prep

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• The Greek word behind transfiguration is metamorphoomai. The English word metamorphose means to change the nature of something. This coupled with the literary form and genre of this story, that of any epiphany or sudden manifestation of the divine, would suggest that the transfiguration changes, or at the very least clarifies, Jesus' identity.

• The divine voice heard in this story gives the fullest answer to the question of Jesus' identity that the disciples could ask for. Jesus is seen in full glory and God says from a cloud, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35).

• The transfiguration story reminds us of events from Jesus' entire life.

Prayer Time

Go around the group and have each learner share the best and worst thing from his or her week. Remind learners to pay special attention to (for example) the person on their right, as they will be praying for that person in a moment (alternate prayer partners from week to week). When the group has finished, prayer partners can pray for each other.

Key Words
TRANSFIGURATION is when Jesus had a mystical interaction with Moses and Elijah, and Jesus' physical appearance became brilliant white.

PROPHET is a messenger from God. Often the message seeks to warn the people of wrongdoing in an attempt to bring them back on track with God.

THE LAW is the ceremonial law prescribed in the Old Testament governing the rites and ceremonies of worship, eating, hygiene, and so forth. The law points out our imperfections and sins.

MOSES was a Hebrew raised as an Egyptian who led the chosen people (Israelites) out of slavery and finally to the promised land.

ELIJAH was a Jewish prophet living in an era of idol worship who warned the Israelites of worshiping false gods.

Discussion Time

Use the following questions to kick off a conversation about the theme:

• Hand out two sheets of paper to each student. Invite them to draw a family tree on one sheet and "faith family tree" on the other—filling in the branches with people who have influenced their faith, for example, parents, Sunday school teachers, pastors, and confirmation guides. But who comes before them? Some obvious individuals might be Jesus, Mary, and Martin Luther, but challenge students to think about immigrant ancestors who passed on the faith, camp counselors, or particular biblical personalities to whom they connect. (Accept all answers.)

• Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and prophets, but in many ways he was not the king or messiah that was expected. Why do you think that was? (Jesus behaved contradictory to a king; he taught servitude, humbleness, sacrifice, and so forth. Jesus was not the warrior king that many in Israel hoped would stomp enemies and reunite the people.)

• God told the disciples to listen to Jesus. As a disciple, where do you think Jesus' voice needs to be heard most in the world today? (Where people go hungry, where there is war and suffering, and so forth.)

• What other major Old Testament figure might have been seen on the mountain with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah? See pages 153-154 in The Lutheran Handbook for hints. (Answers may vary, but David, Abraham and Sarah, or Noah would have been likely because of their roles in the covenants God made with God's people.)

Big Fun Idea

Since the local baker is probably fresh out of transfiguration cookies, make some of your own. Use gingerbread cookie-cutters and lots of dazzling sprinkles on top to create figures from the biblical story. You may want to make enough cookies to share with others at a Sunday service.

Big Serving Idea

The followers of Christ are benefactors of the Jewish faith. Make an effort to better understand
Jewish religious beliefs, holidays, worship practices, and history. After studying, seek to interview a rabbi or attend worship at a Jewish temple. What things do we hold in common? How can you serve your neighbors by listening to them and learning about their culture?
Funny Shape of Faith Small Group Devotions: The Transfiguration

Have a volunteer read the devotion that corresponds with this cartoon: "When I Grow Up...," *The Funny Shape of Faith: Devotions for the Rest of Us* (Augsburg Fortress, 2007), p. 297. Then use the following questions to spark group discussion.

What did Moses and the prophets write about Jesus?

Who are your heroes? Why?

How do you use Jesus as your model and hero?
Learner Sheet: The Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36

The Big Idea: God reveals his Son in brilliant light on the mountaintop: He is the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets.

Big Fun Idea

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Prayer Time

*Remember your partner's prayer needs—record them here.*

Discussion Time

- Draw a family tree on a sheet of paper. Next, draw a faith family tree on another sheet of paper. Fill in the branches with people who have influenced your faith, for example, parents, Sunday school teachers, pastors, and confirmation guides. But who comes before them? Some obvious individuals might be Jesus, Mary, and Martin Luther, but think about immigrant ancestors who passed on the faith, camp counselors, or particular biblical personalities to whom you connect.
- Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and prophets, but in many ways he was not the king or messiah that was expected. Why do you think that was?
- God told the disciples to listen to Jesus. As a disciple, where do you think Jesus' voice needs to be heard most in the world today?
- What other major Old Testament figure might have been seen on the mountain with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah? See pages 153-154 in *The Lutheran Handbook* for hints.
Learner Take-Home Sheet: The Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36

*Take this sheet home and keep it someplace near the dinner table, like on the fridge. At least three times next week at dinner, use Prayer Time and one other family activity to make your confirmation learning come alive!*

**Prayer Time**

Open your phone book to "churches" in the yellow pages. Write the names of other worshiping communities in your area. If your area listing is large, include various Christian denominations and a sampling of other faiths—Judaism, Muslim, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, and so forth. Use this prayer to pray for each worshipping body on your list:

*God of all, we pray for all our brothers and sister, especially *insert names from list*. Despite our differences, may we work together for the good of all people. Amen*

**Key Words**

Keep a family white board someplace near the dinner table, and write these words on it. Try writing a family definition for each one during the week.

TRANSFIGURATION

PROPHET

THE LAW

MOSES

ELIJAH

**Talk Time**

- The transfiguration scene is rather mysterious. What other things in the Bible are hard to understand or even accept?
- It was not a coincidence that Moses, the giver of the law, and Elijah, a prophet, were on the mountaintop with Jesus. Jesus was the fulfillment of both the law and the prophets, the one for whom generations had waited. In what ways do you think Jesus was a surprise?
- Christians spend a lot of time publicly debating, disagreeing, and outright fighting with each other. Starting with love, how can beliefs held in common overcome areas where we differ?

**Web Time**

Turn to page 67 in *The Lutheran Handbook*. Select five world religions about which you know
very little. Search the Web for information about their beliefs, history, and members. What do they have in common with Christianity? What things are different? Avoid Web sites that have a bias against a particular faith.

Ritual Time

God's command to the disciples was to listen to Jesus. We live in a very loud world that makes listening difficult, particularly listening to Jesus. Challenge your family to an hour of silence with all technology turned off, including phones, computer, TV, and music. Begin and end your hour in prayer.
Video 1 (High Resolution): Afraid of the Light

*Media file: TheTransfiguration.mov*

In a sequence reminiscent of *The Blair Witch Project*, this clip opens with five people (four visible, one through whose perspective we see everything) running through the forest at night. When they stop to rest and check in, one of them turns on a flashlight to take a head count. As they go around the group, the light reveals an unexpected sixth person standing behind them. Terrified, they scream and run away.

- How is this scene similar to what happened at the Transfiguration?
- How would you react if one of your teachers or pastors was suddenly illuminated by a bright light and a booming heavenly voice commanded you to listen to him or her?
- How do you think the disciples were changed by what they saw at the Transfiguration? What effect do you think it had on their faith?
Video 1 (Low Resolution): Afraid of the Light

*Media file: TheTransfiguration.mp4*

In a sequence reminiscent of *The Blair Witch Project*, this clip opens with five people (four visible, one through whose perspective we see everything) running through the forest at night. When they stop to rest and check in, one of them turns on a flashlight to take a head count. As they go around the group, the light reveals an unexpected sixth person standing behind them. Terrified, they scream and run away.

- How is this scene similar to what happened at the Transfiguration?
- How would you react if one of your teachers or pastors was suddenly illuminated by a bright light and a booming heavenly voice commanded you to listen to him or her?
- How do you think the disciples were changed by what they saw at the Transfiguration? What effect do you think it had on their faith?
Video 2: Mountaintop Experiences

Media file: TheTransfiguration.mpg

Imagine yourself as one of Jesus' disciples, walking along with this guy who is both your teacher and friend. All of a sudden—BAM!—he starts glowing, a voice rings out from the sky, and famous dead heroes appear. How would you feel? Jesus' disciples witnessed an amazing sight at the Transfiguration, and it surely gave them a new understanding of Jesus' true identity. Naturally they wanted to stay and soak it in, but the time eventually came for them to return to work in the world below.

Ask group members to describe a "mountaintop experience" in their faith lives. What did they learn about God? Each time we meet God on the mountain, we are equipped to better serve God on the plains. God is always with us, not only on the mountaintop, but everywhere we go.
Music Clip: Past, Present, and Future

*Media file: TheTransfiguration.mp3*

Song: "Christ Is Coming"
CD: *Worldmaking* (www.worldmaking.net)
Artist: Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan
© Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan

In the beginning was the Word, God and with God
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
From the beginning it was life, the light for all people
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again
Christ is coming, ever coming, coming again

The New Testament refers to Jesus getting God's approval with a voice thundering out of a cloud exclaiming, "This is my Son, my chosen One!" That would be a hard point to argue. However, we can't forget that Jesus, who is also God, knew all along the significance of his role as messenger and messiah. Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan's song "Christ Is Coming" might seem simple lyrically. However, if you look closely at the different verb tenses he uses in the song, you see past, present, and future tense. Interesting...

- Do the different verb tenses mean anything?
- Are these grammatical errors or do you think it's on purpose?
- What images do the lyrics inspire?

Note: You can purchase the CD featuring this song from the Augsburg Fortress online store (www.augsburgfortress.org).
PPT® Presentation (versions 2002 and later)

This presentation includes a video file and an audio file. All three (the presentation, the video, and the audio) will download at once as a ZIP archive. Unzipping the archive will produce a single folder containing all three files. **For the presentation to work properly, the files must all be in the same folder;** therefore, we recommend you not remove them from the folder produced when you unzip the archive, but rather move the entire folder as a single unit.

*Media file: TheTransfiguration.zip*
Cartoon

Media file: TheTransfiguration.tif

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