

## Week 2 - The Mystery of God's Glory

### Readings

- Genesis 15.1-12, 17-18
- Psalm 27
- Philippians 3.17-4:1
- Luke 13.31-35 or Luke 9.28-36, (37-43a)

### Starting out - God gets our attention

Have you ever watched a thunderstorm approaching? Against the darkness of the thunderclouds, you might suddenly see a big lightning strike or a sheet of white light flicker suddenly and disappear. If you are looking directly at it, you might see an after-image of the intense brightness on your vision. That can be a startling and awe-inspiring experience – we see the power and intensity of nature at work.

It can be difficult to get across the idea of a transcendent experience and for many people who have had powerful and life-changing experiences of God, words simply fail them. In classical art, many representations of God and Jesus and in paintings of scenes from the Bible often show figures surrounded by haloes of brilliant light or lit with sun-rays. Other artists have used gold and silver to depict the idea of God's glory and what it might be like to look upon something heavenly rather than earthly. Similarly in today's reading about the Transfiguration of Jesus, Peter sees Jesus shining in clothes of dazzling white.

### Quote

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil*

Gerard Manley Hopkins,  
*God's Grandeur*

### Something to talk about - Glimpsing God at work

- Where and when has God managed to catch your attention?
- When you look back, where do you see God at work in your life?
- What is your most memorable spiritual experience?
- When do you see God shining out from the lives of others?

### Some scripture to ponder – A mysterious sign from God

*As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.*

*When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces [of the sacrifice]*

(Genesis 15.12;17)

In this mysterious and spine-tingling scene, Abraham falls into a sleep as deep as that of Adam at the creation of Eve. God has promised him that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens, but from this cosmic external vision, Abraham is now alone with God in

this extraordinary internal darkness. Here too, he encounters God. God continues the solemn promise, a covenant, about his future and that of his descendants. The scene ends with something even more mysterious: a smoking brazier and a flaming light moving around the sacrifice in the darkness.

### Questions

- Have you ever encountered God externally in the beauty of nature or internally in a dream? If so, what happened in that encounter and what effect did it have on your life?
- What do you make of the fiery lights? Where do you think we see God at work today?
- How do we know God is faithful to God's promises?

### The Mystery of God - God reveals God's Glory

*Our King comes in majestic glory.  
Let us light our lamps and go forth to meet Him.*

*Let us find our joy in Him, for He has found joy in us.  
He will indeed rejoice us with His marvellous light.  
Let us glorify the majesty of the Son and give thanks to the almighty Father  
Who, in an outpouring of love, sent Him to us, to fill us with hope and salvation.  
When He manifests Himself, the saints awaiting Him in weariness and sorrow,  
will go forth to meet Him with lighted lamps.*

From *Hymn to the Light*,  
St Ephrem the Syrian

Some of the most mysterious parts of the Bible are powerful descriptions of direct encounters with God or angels as messengers of God. In the book of Exodus, Moses asks to see the full extent of the glory of God, but God says that no one can fully encounter God's own self and stay alive. Instead, God gives Moses a glimpse of glory while protecting him from being overwhelmed by the Presence (33.17-23). Later, when Moses comes down from the mountain, he is transfigured by his encounter; his skin shines (34.29-30). Such encounters are called in Latin, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, which means an experience of the numinous which is both terrifying and fascinating at the same time, inspiring awe. When the prophet Ezekiel meets God, he is completely overwhelmed and dumbfounded by the incredible vision (Ezekiel 1). Listen to the ringing words of Isaiah 6.1-5, and the incredible impact of angel voices, wings beating, the smoke swirling and the pillars trembling. Similarly, the shepherds in the account of the Jesus' birth are amazed and overcome by the dazzling sight of angels (Luke 2.8-14).

So encounters with God change us forever, but in a way which others can see, - if we let them. Peter wonders what he is supposed to do in response to the vision of glory. But Scripture shows us the answer, the vision of the glory of God comes in unforgettable experiences with news for human beings about who God is and what God is doing in the world – the Ten Commandments, the Good News of Jesus' birth, the reality of Jesus as God's Beloved Son.

And later, the disciples will find two dazzling supernatural beings sitting in an empty tomb... but that is for the end of our journey.

### Question

- Where do you think people meet angels of God today?

## Something to pray

*Lord God,*

You appear to us in unexpected places:  
In forests and on mountain-tops  
On city streets and in neon lights.  
You come to us in the lives of others  
In loved ones, in unloved ones on the street.  
We see you shine out from the ordinary.  
We hear your still, small voice.  
We feel your presence in our hearts.  
We know your glory in our worship  
In bread and wine shared  
In music made together  
In fellowship with one another.  
Help us to name your glory  
In our words and in our witness  
So that all may find you for themselves.

*Amen*

We finish by joining together in saying the Lord's Prayer.