

# **Christ Church, Ipswich**

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August 2021**

**Sunday Worship  
led by Richard Jurd**

## **Welcome**

Welcome to Worship at Christ Church today, whether you are with us in person in our Church, are watching this service at home in a video-recording, or are following the service in printed, paper form. May I say how honoured and pleased I am to be invited to lead worship here again today. May I also bring with me the greetings of Lion Walk United Reformed Church in Colchester.

## **Let us worship God**

O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the sheep of his hand. *Psalms 95:6 – 7*

The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. *Lamentations 3:25 – 26*

God has never left us orphaned.

He has always offered himself to us in love

God has never stopped searching for us

He has always spoken a word to those who will listen

God has never stopped surprising us

He has always found new ways of meeting us

Thanks be to God.

## **Prayer**

We are your people, loving God, because you have called us. We do not know you well enough, so we have come today to know you better.

We do not understand your ways, so we come as those who search your truth, and find in prayers and hymns and worship, in thinking and meditation and in quiet, new signs of hope and purpose.

But if, as often in the past, we fail; still this we know: we are still your people because you have called us.

**Amen.**

## **The Lord's Prayer (said quietly together)**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever: **Amen.**

## Hymn Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory (R&S 33)

Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory  
cascades through life in overflowing grace,  
to tell creation's meaning in the story  
of love evolving love from time and space.

Eternal Son of God, uniquely precious,  
in you, deserted, scorned and crucified,  
God's love has fathomed sin and death's deep  
darkness, and flawed humanity is glorified.

Eternal Spirit, with us like a mother,  
embracing us in love serene and pure:  
you nurture strength to follow Christ our brother,  
as full-grown children, confident and sure.

Love's trinity, self-perfect, self-sustaining;  
love which commands, enables and obeys:  
you give yourself, in boundless joy, creating  
one vast increasing harmony of praise.

We ask you now, complete your image in us;  
this love of yours, our source and guide and goal.  
May love in us, seek love and serve love's  
purpose,  
till we ascend with Christ and find love whole.

Alan Gaunt; tune: Charterhouse

## Welcome to the younger children and a prayer as they leave for their meeting.

### Prayer of Confession

Saviour God, we confess our folly:

Though you were quick to teach, we have been slow to learn;

Though you love to share your knowledge of the Father, we neglect the simple truth you offer;

Though with persuasive words you open up the new way to life, we prefer to choose our own road;

Though with love you explain both life and death, we take one for granted and fear the other.

Give us a teachable spirit, so that hearing your stories and relishing your words, we may understand, and in our understanding find forgiveness and new life.

**Amen.**

### Old Testament Reading Exodus 3:1 – 15

#### *Moses at the Burning Bush*

**3** Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' <sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' <sup>5</sup> Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' <sup>6</sup> He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, <sup>8</sup> and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup> So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.' <sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' <sup>12</sup> He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

*The Divine Name Revealed*

<sup>13</sup> But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' <sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I AM has sent me to you."' <sup>15</sup> God also said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you": This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations.

**Psalm 121 (R&S 725)**

I lift my eyes to the hills; from whence is my help to come?

**My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth**

He will not let your foot be moved, and he who watches over you will not fall asleep;

**Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep;**

The Lord himself watches over you; the Lord is your shade at your right hand,

**So that the sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.**

The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; it is he who shall keep you safe.

**The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in,  
from this time forth for evermore. Amen.**

**Gospel Reading St Mark 9:2-9**

*The Transfiguration*

<sup>2</sup> Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one<sup>[a]</sup> on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings,<sup>[b]</sup> one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' <sup>6</sup> He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved;<sup>[c]</sup> listen to him!' <sup>8</sup> Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

**Hymn How good, Lord, to be here! (R&S 203)**

How good, Lord, to be here!  
Your glory fills the night;  
Your face and garments like the sun,  
Shine with unborrowed light.

How good, Lord, to be here,  
Your beauty to behold,  
Where Moses and Elijah stand,  
Your messengers of old.

Fulfiller of the past,  
 Promise of things to be:  
 We hail your body glorified,  
 And our redemption see.

Before we taste of death,  
 We see your kingdom come;  
 We have to hold the vision bright,  
 And make this hill our home.

How good, Lord, to be here!  
 Yet we will not remain;  
 But since you bid us leave the mount,  
 Come with us to the plain.

J Armitage Robinson; Tune: Venice

## Talk

### *DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN-TOP (TRANSFIGURATION)*

*"Coming down the mountain"*

*(St Mark 9:9)*

My daughter Mary, who is a clinical dietitian working in Lancashire, once telephoned to tell me that she had spent last weekend camping under canvas with her husband, before their two sons were born, on Dollywaggon Pike in the Lake District. When she woke up on the Sunday morning her walking boots were so frozen that she could not undo the laces. But, "The sunrises across the snowy fells are magnificent, Dad", she told me. It is strange the fascination that mountains exert on people. Elizabeth and I like mountains too, but we prefer to walk when the temperature is at least a few degrees above freezing and we have a nice cosy, warm, dry holiday cottage to retreat to in the evening. Certainly Helvellyn, Snowdon, Cader Idris, Ingleborough, Wharfedale and many others climbed are among our treasured memories.

Mountains feature in the Bible, although I do not think that people walked them so much for pleasure or for the scenery in Biblical days. At a time when there was a rather more simplistic world-view, and God was seen as "up there", ascending a mountain would perhaps bring one closer to God. More sophisticated believers realised, though, that getting away from the concerns of everyday life with its busyness and hurly-burly by going into the mountains was a way of heightening a spiritual awareness, coming closer to the Divine, making an encounter with God. In the early Genesis poem of the Flood, Noah's Ark makes landfall on Mount Ararat, where God makes his Covenant with his people, demonstrated by the sign of a rainbow. Moses climbed Mount Sinai for receive the Ten Commandments. Elijah fled into the hills to escape the vindictive wrath of Ahab and his queen, Jezebel: here he encountered God not in the earthquake, the wind or the fire, but as a "sound of silence", the still, small voice. The same prophet invoked the intervention of God from the heights of Mount Carmel when he had his showdown with the priests of Baal. "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help" sings the psalmist in Psalm 121.

We also know that Jesus sought solitude in the hills and mountains to the east of the Sea of Galilee when the rigours of his ministry took a heavy physical and mental toll on him, often asking his fishermen friends to ferry him round to the lonely far shore. The Mount of Olives near Jerusalem also features: Jesus, before his Passion, stands on the Mount before his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey and weeps over Jerusalem's fate, only too conscious that many would not heed his message of peace and reconciliation; later, from the Mount, Jesus finally take leave of his disciples as a physical presence in that strange and enigmatic episode that is described as the Ascension.

Most importantly Jesus retreated to the wilderness mountains in Judaea, after his baptism by John in the River Jordan, to reflect and pray. He was, we learn, "tempted" to abuse his unique relationship with God;

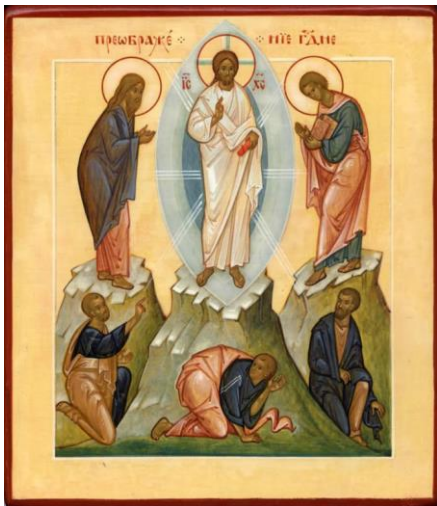
he resisted the temptations and he came to terms with his destiny. From the trials, the prayer, the reflection, the self-denial Jesus emerged stronger to face the physical, psychological and spiritual challenges of his Ministry with its focus on the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

Today, in our Bible readings, we heard about two other mountain encounters. One was Moses' early meeting with God on Mount Horeb described through the incident of the Burning Bush. The other was the strange story of Jesus' Transfiguration. (We heard Mark's version, terse and to the point as always, but it is essentially the same in Matthew and in Luke.)

Let's first think about Moses and the Burning Bush. Moses is a fugitive. He had been brought up in the court of the king (Moses and the bulrushes and all that). But now he is fleeing the wrath of Pharaoh because he has killed an Egyptian who was ill-treating one of Moses' own kin, a Hebrew slave. Moses is but a humble shepherd, minding the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro, in Midian. High on the lonely mountain he seems to see a bush that is on fire, but the flames do not consume the bush. A voice calls to him, and in the story Moses learns that the voice is that of God; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, his forebears. Moses learns of his destiny – to be the leader of God's people, the Hebrews, and to confront Pharaoh. Moses will take the Children of Grandfather Israel out of Egypt and slavery to form the nucleus of a new nation, God's own people. Quite a task. God assures Moses that He will be with him. What is your Name? "I AM who I am" is the answer... "When you have brought the people out of Egypt you shall worship God on this mountain." Strong stuff, and little room for doubt.



The story that we read from Mark's Gospel is rather different. Jesus goes up into a "high mountain" with Peter, James and John – his inner circle of closest friends. We read that he is "transfigured" – he wears dazzling white garments such as no-one had seen before. With him is Moses, a patriarch, and giver of the Law, who is also associated with mountains, as we have just seen! Also present is Elijah, representing prophecy. Jesus' two companions could be seen as representing His links with the old dispensation of the Law and with the voice of prophecy. To underline this a Voice from heaven proclaims, "This is my Son: listen to Him!", echoing the Voice of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism. Jesus' credentials are established on the mountain: His unique relationship with God is authenticated. Jesus and God are One: the basis of the Christian belief that Jesus is so filled with God that He is God. The continuum with the Old Testament Law and Prophecy add additional weight to this.



Then the scene changes: suddenly the vision disappears and the three disciples are left standing alone with the Jesus. They come down from the Mountain.

Two intense, mysterious spiritual experiences: a Burning Bush and a Transfiguration. Before we re-join Jesus and his disciples, let's return to Moses. Moses, after his encounter with God, symbolised by the Burning Bush which incandesces but does not consume or destroy (there's another sermon there!), comes down from the mountain-top. He does not linger, vaguely contemplating the wonder he has seen. He has a job to do. He has to confront Pharaoh: "Let my people go!"

Likewise Jesus and the disciples. They have a task to perform: they cannot stay on the mountain-top, away from the people, in a holy haze. Jesus must continue with his teaching, healing, caring Ministry, and the disciples must continue to support Him and learn from Him.

Spiritual experiences on mountain-tops (or anywhere else – in church, on a retreat, at home, by the sea, wherever) are important parts of our Christian lives, perhaps gained through prayer, meditation, reflection,

being in the fellowship of other Christians or just being alone. They enrich us and strengthen us. But they cannot be ends in themselves. They are calls to action and lives and lives of service and love.

For my daughter (who does not call herself a confessing Christian) her experiences in the Lake District mountains (which one could perhaps describe as spiritual) make a break from the stresses of her job working with severely ill people. For Moses his mountain encounter with God gave him the strength to face up to Pharaoh and eventually to lead his people out of slavery. For Jesus and the disciples the Transfiguration was a chance to learn of Jesus' uniqueness and to be enlivened and invigorated to return to the world and its people whom the Christian is called to serve.

Transfiguration: reflection on a heavenly experience leading to resolve and action in everyday Christian life.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord: **Amen.**

*[Pictures: Moses and the Burning Bush – William Blake  
Transfiguration – Greek Orthodox icon]*

### **Poem Transcendence by Veronica Popescu**

Not for three months, let alone nine  
     could Mary conceal His presence –  
 Nor was Joseph kept in the dark  
     before His eruption like the morning star  
 at midnight breaking in winter –  
     He dazzled both shepherds and wise men:  
 we twelve were all blinded – three years –  
     till flesh failed to veil Him, even from us,  
 in a calm stilled sea, and on one mountain top.

How then could we conspire to cover him  
     with heavy human robes –  
 bury Him in puny feudal powers? Him,  
     whose setting the sun mourned,  
 whose light Death could not extinguish?

he burst out of that grave, propelled  
     by resurrection – casting us all before Him  
 by the blaze of his uprising.

### **Music for Reflection and Thought**

#### **Prayers**

*A prayer of St Benedict:*

Gracious and Holy Father, give us the wisdom to discover you, the intelligence to understand you, the diligence to seek after you, the patience to wait for you, eyes to behold you, a heart to meditate upon you, and a life to proclaim you,

Through the power of the Spirit of Jesus, our Lord. **Amen.**

God of the poor, you are my God: make me more generous and ready to share my riches;

God of the Man tortured by his oppressors, you are my God, make me dissatisfied until all can share my freedom;

God of the woman whose pantry is bare against her infant's cry, you are my God: make me more liberal in my giving;

God of the fugitive and the refugee, you are my God, help me by prayer and protest to seek the security of others;

God of justice and peace in whose Kingdom all are one, prompt me to care, and stir me to action.

Unless there are those who dream dreams, unless there are those who think the impossible, unless there are those ready to be scorned as romantics, unless there are those with ambitions beyond present realities,

Hope will never be formed, seeds will never be sown, vision will fade, the status quo will drop form anchor, and the Kingdom of God will be stillborn...

Be present with us now as we bring before you, in the silence, our own secret prayers...

Time of Silence ....

Lord, in your mercy: Hear our prayers.

In the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord: **Amen.**

### **Hymn O vision blest of heavenly light (R&S 204)**

O vision blest of heavenly light  
Which meets the three disciples' sight  
When on the holy mount they see  
Their Lord's transfigured majesty.

O Light from light, by love inclined,  
Jesus, Redeemer of mankind,  
Accept they people's prayer and praise  
Which on the mount to thee they raise.

More bright than day his raiment shone;  
The Father's voice proclaimed the Son  
Belov'd before the worlds were made,  
For us in mortal flesh arrayed.

Be with us, Lord, as we descend  
To walk with thee to journey's end,  
That through they cross we too may rise,  
To share thy life and claim the prize.

And with him there on either hand  
Both Moses and Elijah stand,  
To show how Christ, to those who see,  
Fulfil both law and prophecy.

To thee, O Father, Christ to thee,  
Let praise and endless glory be,  
With whom the Spirit we adore,  
One Lord, one God for evermore

[George Timms, based on 15th century Latin hymn; tune: Deus tuorum militum]

### **Dismissal and Blessing:**

Be thou a smooth path below me,  
Be thou a bright flame before me,  
Be thou a guiding star above me,  
Be thou a kindly shepherd behind me,  
Today and always.

[St Columba]

Christian People: Go up to the Mountain and see the Vision of the Kingdom of God; descend from the Mountain to live the Life as Disciples of Christ in God's World.

### **The Grace**

Holding one another in our prayers, we say together:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all, for evermore. Amen.**