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THE LOOKOUT

DECEMBER 2021

Unit: LUKE
Theme: SURPRISE!

Overview: The God of the Bible is a God of surprises. About the time we think we have God figured out, he does a “180” and leaves us with our mouths open. Luke’s Gospel of messianic joy holds surprises for soldiers, disciples, shepherds, religious leaders, and others. The ultimate surprise to the crucifixion may well be the resurrection. Buckle up for a study in Luke about a God who surprises.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF DECEMBER 12, 2021

LESSON AIM: **“Let God’s unexpected transfiguration of Jesus move you to listen to Jesus.”**

UNIT: Luke

THEME: Surprise!

LESSON TEXT: Luke 9:28-36

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Luke 3:21-22; Revelation 1:10-18; 5:6-14;
James 1:19, 22-25

UNEXPECTED GLORY

BY MARK SCOTT

God spoke audibly from heaven only three times during Jesus' earthly ministry—after his baptism (Luke 3:22), at his transfiguration (this text), and during the week of his crucifixion (John 12:28). For a God who is used to speaking (cf. Psalm 29), these times are incredibly rare. Perhaps their rarity underlines their importance.

A short time after the third Passover during Jesus' ministry (which he missed due to having his own meal in the wilderness, Luke 9:10-17), Jesus questioned his disciples about his identity (Luke 9:18-21). Peter voiced the correct answer, "You are God's Messiah." Jesus immediately gave the first of three "clear" predictions about the cross and then taught them what cross-bearing was all about. *About eight days* later (Matthew and Mark say "after six days") Jesus experienced his transfiguration. This took place on a high mountain (Mount Tabor, Mount Meron, and Mount Hermon have been suggested).

Witnessing Glory

Luke 9:28-29

Israelites were not unaccustomed to seeing the glory of God (Genesis 28:10-17; Exodus 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Kings 2:11-12; Isaiah 6:1-4). But this event astonished Peter, James, and John. Luke said the purpose of going to this mountain was to *pray*. Luke is ever the Gospel of prayer so we should not be surprised (Luke 5:16).

During this prayer, Jesus was *transfigured* (Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2 used this word from which we get the English word *metamorphosis*—i.e., a change in form). Luke did not use this word, but he described what happened. Jesus' face and clothing experienced a dramatic change. Matthew said "his face shone like the sun" (17:2). His clothes in particular became *as bright as a flash of lightning*. Mark said no one on earth could bleach them this white (9:3). The three disciples concluded they were experiencing some kind of theophany (i.e., God encounter) though they seemed clueless about what it meant.

Eclipsed Glory

Luke 9:30-33

There is glory, and then there is *glory*. Moses had witnessed glory (Exodus 3:1-6; 33:7-11; 2 Corinthians 3:7-11). Elijah was taken up in glory (2 Kings 2:9-12). But Jesus was the embodiment of the glory of God (John 1:14). His glory eclipsed that of the great lawgiver and of the great prophet. Moses' life and Elijah's life paralleled

Jesus' life and ministry in many ways (not the least of which were experiences on mountains and with miracles—Exodus 19:16-28; 1 Kings 18:20-40).

How the disciples knew the figures with Jesus were Moses and Elijah was not shared. Were introductions made? Name tags? But we do know the content of the conversation. *They spoke about his departure (exodus), which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.* We might assume from this that Moses and Elijah admitted the reality of the cross but also encouraged Jesus with regard to the resurrection and his exaltation to the Father's right hand.

This was all so overwhelming to the disciples. Their sleep deprivation was noted. Few of us make much sense when we are sleepy, and Peter was no exception. As Moses and Elijah began to leave, Peter acknowledged the moment (*it is good for us to be here*) and then suggested they build *three shelters* (tents or booths) to extend the visionary experience. Maybe having seen Moses and Elijah caused Peter to think of the wilderness (after all, both men knew something about living in the wilderness) and he fast-forwarded to the Feast of Tabernacles, which lay in the distant future. Luke parenthetically added, *He did not know what he was saying.* The disciples had to learn what we need to learn—i.e., Jesus' glory will not be eclipsed by anyone else's glory, even that of Moses and Elijah.

Concealed Glory

Luke 9:34-36

Jesus put the glory of God back in a box for the present. The cloud (mentioned three times) concealed the glory for the time being. Jesus and the disciples would come off the mountain of glory and head back into the valley of despair. As Warren Wiersbe said, "Another father needed Jesus now."

God, who used mountains and clouds in Scripture as means of revelation, spoke words of endearment (*my Son*), words of election (*whom I have chosen*), and words of admonition (*listen to him*). The word *listen* makes one think of God calling Israel to worship (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). This was a preview of coming attractions (resurrection, ascension, and exaltation). Some thought God's voice thundered the next time it was heard from heaven (John 12:29). Hear that same voice on this, the third Sunday of Advent. ■

FIGURING OUT THE TRANSFIGURATION

BY DAVID FAUST

During a trip to Israel, I stood on Mount Tabor and took in the panoramic view. In a place like this, God pulled back the curtain and gave Peter, John, and James a private glimpse of Christ's radiant glory. Matthew 17:2 says Jesus' face "shone like the sun," Mark 9:3 says his clothes looked "whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them," and Luke 9:29 says it was like beholding "a flash of lightning."

Like me, maybe you find it difficult to completely figure out the transfiguration, and you wonder how this incident applies to us today. Here are some practical points to consider.

The transfiguration reminds us to make prayer a priority. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark tell about the transfiguration, but only Luke specifically mentions that on this occasion Jesus went up on the mountain to pray. Jesus' appearance was transformed "as he was praying" (Luke 9:29). This wasn't the first time Jesus headed to the mountains for prayer. He "often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16), and before selecting the 12 apostles he spent the night praying on a mountainside (Luke 6:12). We can pray anywhere, but there is something inspirational about praying outdoors. Nature's beauty can open our hearts to worship the Creator.

The transfiguration also provides tantalizing hints about the afterlife. Moses and Elijah had departed from earth centuries before, but they both appeared on the mountaintop, alive and well and conversing with Jesus. They were recognizable, identifiable, and able to communicate. I won't press the point too far, but this incident provides biblical evidence suggesting that individuals retain their identity after death. If you ever wonder if we will know each other in Heaven, this is a helpful Scripture to consider.

The transfiguration reveals the surpassing glory of Jesus Christ. Moses was the great lawgiver and Elijah was an outstanding prophet, but a greater God-revealer had arrived on the scene. The heavenly Father said of Jesus, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him" (Luke 9:35). Jesus' three disciples watched and listened in awe while the Lord discussed with Moses and Elijah his upcoming "departure" (his death, burial, and resurrection), which would fulfill the Law and the Prophets. After God's voice spoke from Heaven, the disciples "found that Jesus was alone" (Luke 9:36). Jesus truly stands alone, surpassing any other religious leader.

The transfiguration reminds us to hold our tongues and respond with humility and awe when we confront the mysteries of God. Peter was overwhelmed with fear and amazement. Luke 9:33 says, "He did not know what he was saying" . . . but that didn't stop him from saying something! Impulsive and action-oriented, he blurted out an idea: Why not build three shelters that Jesus, Moses, and Elijah could use for their mountaintop retreat? We chuckle about Peter's clumsy suggestion, but we all have spoken poorly considered words. When things happen that we don't fully understand, it's wise to remain silent and let God speak for himself.

Years later, when Peter looked back at the transfiguration, he viewed it as further confirmation of the truth of the gospel. He wrote, "For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

Personal Challenge: What stands out most to you when you read about the transfiguration of Jesus? Today, spend some time in prayer outdoors. Thank the Lord for the ways he has revealed his power and glory to you. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you emulate the centurion's "great faith" last week—in his humility, surrender, or generosity?
2. During the past week, how have you seen Jesus bring healing to you?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 9:28-36** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the events of the passage.

3. If you had been one of Jesus' three disciples present with him on the mountain, what would have been most surprising to you?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - In your own words, describe Jesus' appearance as he was transfigured.
 - Moses represented the Old Testament Law. Elijah represented the Old Testament prophets. There are many reasons these two men may have been chosen, but how does their meeting help explain Jesus' self-declared mission: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17)?
 - What do you make of Peter's idea?
 - What is significant about God calling Jesus (1) his Son and (2) the one he chose?
 - What is significant about God saying, "Listen to him"?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. Of course, listening to Jesus is critical for his followers. James 1:22 says, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." How will you focus on both listening and doing this week?
8. Spiritual mountaintop experiences can bolster our faith. But it's been said we must return from the mountain to the valleys, to be able to minister to others. How can your time with God provide you with what you need to serve others well?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What encouragement do you need for this upcoming week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Luke 2:5-20** as we continue a four-week study in the book of Luke with the theme, "Surprise!" You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■

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