

Way out beyond the walls of Jerusalem, Peter, James and John went up on a mountain with Jesus to pray. While they're up there, they see Jesus shining from the inside out. Elijah and Moses have appeared and are speaking with Him about events to come. And then, to top it all off, a cloud envelops them and the Father's voice declares, "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!"

Now, let's think about this experience against the background of the Old Testament. First, Jesus radiates white, lightning-like light. This is something that only Almighty God does, as He appears in white and fire on His throne in Daniel 7. This is exhibit A that Jesus is the Son of God.

Exhibit B: Moses and Elijah, who died so many centuries before, are alive and present and speaking with Jesus. They're talking about Him and what He is about to do. The English Standard Version of Luke's gospel says they speak of His "departure," but the literal word is "exodus;" they are speaking of a journey by which He will set His people free.

Why these two? It was to Moses that God gave the Law at Mt. Sinai, and it was Elijah who defeated the 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. These two "mountain men" came to represent the Law and the Prophets; and the "Law and the Prophets" was a nickname for the Old Testament scriptures. Therefore, as Moses and Elijah defer to Jesus on this mountaintop, they declare that the Old Testament scriptures-the Law and the Prophets-point to Jesus, too. Therefore, Jesus is the Messiah they've been waiting for. That's a pretty good Exhibit B.

But Exhibit C is even more convincing: A cloud appears and overshadows the disciples. It's not your average cloud, but a very Old Testament cloud-the kind of cloud that led the people of Israel out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, and through the wilderness. The kind of cloud that descended on Mt. Sinai when God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. The kind of cloud that filled the tabernacle and the temple, driving out the priests because of its glory. This cloud indicates that God the Father has arrived with an announcement to make. "This is My beloved Son. Listen to Him!" Peter, James and John should have no doubt: Their teacher Jesus is most certainly the Son of God, fully human and fully divine, the long-awaited Savior promised by God. On this mountain, the Lord makes this obvious to their eyes and ears. No matter what happens from here on out, they can look back at this mountain and be sure that He is the One.

From here, it's all downhill. Jesus will never look like that again on the way to Jerusalem. He's going to go down this mountain; He's going to heal and teach. Along the way, people will start to reject Him even more. It's only a matter of time until Jesus finds Himself at the hill called Calvary. He will be crucified at its summit. He won't look very glorious when the Roman palace guard is done scourging and beating Him. He won't look very powerful when He's up there between two thieves instead of Moses and Elijah. So, the Father cautions these three, Peter, James, and John: "Listen to Him." Appearances change, but the Word of the Lord remains the same.

Before the Transfiguration, Jesus has told them that He's going to be crucified and raised from the dead, and that Word will be fulfilled. And while the appearance of the Word made flesh looks far different up on the cross, He remains the same Savior that He was on the mountaintop, doing exactly what He came to do: redeem man by dying his death and suffering God's judgment

for his sin. The crucifixion looked bad. It was almost certainly far more horrible than any artist has ever been able to render. But it is not the defeat that it seems. Jesus had called it; He would be raised from the dead. God the Father had said, "Listen to Him." But appearances are powerful. Appearances are persuasive. Jesus' death had the appearance of a tragedy, and a gory one at that. The deep lesson here is that no matter how things look, God keeps His Word. Come Sunday, Jesus is raised, alive, breathing, eating, speaking, and it's just as He said. Listen to Him.

Listen to Jesus, no matter what your eyes lead you to believe, for the devil will use appearances to make you doubt the Word of God.

The last thing the accuser wants is to have you listen to the Lord Jesus, so he comes up with many tactics to prevent it. He will bombard you with distractions; anything to turn your attention from God's Word. Furthermore, the devil will do his best to make it appear that the Lord has forgotten you. It may be a matter of ill health which tries to shout louder than God's Word. It may be a matter of loneliness, and your isolation from other people makes you feel isolated from the Lord. It may be a matter of unbearable stress, tempting you to wonder if the Lord were indeed powerful, why would you have to suffer so? Now, all these things are more than just appearances-the pains and hurts are real. What I'm saying is that Satan would have you read these circumstances as God's verdict towards you; interpret these situations as how God feels about you, thereby moving you away from what God has said, definitively, in His Word. What has God said? In short, what He said of His Son, He says of you: "You are my beloved child. With you I am well pleased."

The Lord calls you to continue to listen to Him, no matter your circumstance. Illness and loneliness and stress will claim that God is out to get you. Growing in faith means that you pay attention to God's Word instead. You and I must endure dark times when the Lord seems neither glorious nor close by nor especially kind-hearted. But you have His Word that He forgives you, is with you, and will not forsake you. Listen to Him, especially when He speaks His Word of grace and forgiveness to you. Cling to His promise that He has made you His own in Baptism. Hold on tight to His Absolution and His Word, "I forgive you." Do not let go of the promise He makes when He says, "Take and eat, this is My body...take and drink, this is My blood...for the forgiveness of sins." For by these words, the same Lord who was transfigured in glory, crucified for your sin and raised for eternal life, is with you. Listen to Him, so you can say with St. Paul: "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)