For more than two years, the disciples had been with Jesus. They fished with him, ate with him, slept near him, walked with him, listened to him teach. They called him Rabbi, or teacher, or Jesus. He seemed like one of them – a mere mortal – only a more righteous one and a more knowledgeable one. He ate and slept just like them. He got tired, just like them. And, of course, Jesus was fully human. But at this moment – on the Mountain of Transfiguration – Jesus’s closest disciples saw his face shine with light from the inside out – and heard the voice of God. They now had the opportunity to know without a doubt that the human who had been among them was also fully divine. He was a good teacher and moral role model – yes – but He was more than that. He was God.

The transfiguration is very important – in fact, it has the same defining significance for Jesus’s life as His resurrection did for His death. It told the disciples and tells us today that we should recognize Jesus as the ultimate revelation of God – God Himself.

With God on that mountain was Moses, which represented the Law, and Elijah, which represented the prophecy, which demonstrated that Jesus had come to complete the law and that his Coming had been predicted by the Prophets. We don’t know what conversation transpired between Jesus and Moses and Elijah but some theologians have imagined that Moses might have said to Jesus, “You are the one, whose passion I prefigured through the slaughtered lamb and the completed Pesach [Passover].” Elijah might have said “I prefigured your resurrection by raising the widow’s son.” Everything in Holy Scriptures and the tradition of God’s people had led up to the Coming of God to earth, and to the sacrificial death and resurrection that was to follow. The three disciples, on seeing this, realized that this transfiguration much was more than all the external miracles they had seen Jesus’ do. This was about Jesus’ identity. The transfiguration of Jesus, in a way, was their transfiguration too, because suddenly their hearts were illumined. They understood.

Although we don’t have the opportunity to see Jesus in the flesh and to have seen the Transfiguration with our own eyes, we have opportunities in our lives to see Jesus for who is truly is. Of course, we have opportunities regularly to hear his teachings and to see him as a great moral teacher. But, we also have moments of transfiguration – very special times when we know for sure and feel especially close to the divinity of Christ. For me, one such time was at the death of my father. As my father was dying, there was a specific moment when I felt undeniably the Divine Presence of Christ coming into the room with more purpose than usual, taking my Father’s spirit with him, and hovering in the room briefly before ascending again. Perhaps others of us who have been by the side of the dying have had similar experiences. Or perhaps we have experienced the Divinity of God at times when we’ve felt afraid or faced other challenges in our lives. Or perhaps we’ve experienced the Divinity of God at what I’ll call thin places – those times or places when and where heaven and earth seem to collide – when we seem so close to God. These times open our hearts to all that Jesus is – to his wise teachings, yes, but also to His having created us and loved us – to his being truly the light of the world, the Passover Lamb, the one whose Resurrection was prefigured and preordained from the beginning of time. To one who is God.

Sacraments of the church also often bring us these special moments when we know Christ clearly as God. Sacraments such as baptism, confirmation, and our weekly remembrance of Christ at the Lord’s Table – where the Spirit takes the ordinary elements of bread and wine and makes them for us the Body and Blood of Christ – of God.

To be a disciple of Christ is about following Jesus and His teachings. But it’s also much more than that. It’s about believing that Jesus is God and having been transfigured ourselves by that belief.

C.S. Lewis, in Mere Christianity, expresses this need to accept both the humanity of Christ and the divinity of Christ in this way. He says:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

The clear choice for us as disciples today is that Jesus is God, not the devil and not a lunatic. The transfiguration gave his disciples and us the opportunity to realize that. Events in our lives and thin places also give us the opportunity. Jesus calls us to accept him as a human teacher AND as our God and Lord.

Amen