

I have read the story of the Transfiguration many times. Jesus ascends the mountain, lights up like a Friday night high school stadium, and then, just as suddenly, he is alone—leaving his three disciples bewildered, struggling to process how they had been drawn into a moment of glory alongside Moses and Elijah.

In hindsight, we moderns recognize the Transfiguration as a revelation of Jesus' divine glory and an affirmation of his identity as the Son of God. It also connects him to the fulfillment of the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). But beyond that, the cloud itself demands our attention. It envelops the disciples, calls them to listen, and its absence drives them off the mountain to recognize that glory often comes intertwined with suffering.

If we persist in faith, resurrection—both in this life and the next—awaits on the other side of pain. I hope you can have moments of enveloping light so that you can have gas in your tank to push toward resurrection.

As I read the text in 2025, what stood out to me was the cloud—its location, its movement, its role. While Peter gushes about glory, the gospel says, "*A cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.*" This is no passive mist. It is an active force, opening their eyes to divine radiance while also unsettling them, demanding their attention. They certainly were not groggy by the time they got wrapped in a cloud.

The story isn't a horror film, but I couldn't help thinking of how eerie and beautiful fog can be. The movie *The Fog* (both the 1980 original and the 2005 remake) features an ominous mist that terrifies a town, bringing doom in its wake. The disciples, too, were terrified—but in their case, the cloud carried not destruction, but revelation. Sometimes, intense beauty and spiritual awakening evoke fear, because they change us; because they insist on a different path.

What I love about this particular cloud is its physical insistence. It isn't just a backdrop—it's a player in the story, like an unexpected extra in an opera who suddenly takes center stage. Throughout scripture, clouds signify divine presence, guidance, mystery, judgment, and the glory of Christ:

- **Exodus 13** – By day, the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them.
- **Exodus 19** – I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, said the Lord, "so the people will hear me speaking with you."

- **Exodus 40** – Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.
- **Isaiah 19** – See, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt.
- **Ezekiel 30** – The day of the Lord is near—a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.
- **Daniel 7** – There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.
- **Matthew 17** – A bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son."
- **Acts 1** – He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.
- **Revelation 1** – Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him.

Liturgical Note- Mountains This Sunday, the last before Lent, is the first of two mountains. The Mount of Transfiguration is our starting point—a literal high place of glory before we descend into the valley of Lent. Valleys are not always welcome, but the brilliance of the transfigured Christ strengthens us for the journey ahead. That journey leads to another mountain—darker, harsher—Mount Golgotha. Yet this is the path to resurrection and life.

Broader Biblical Theme: Two Trees The vast plain of human history stretches between two trees. The first, in Genesis 3, stands in Eden with Adam and Eve's choice casting humanity into a long, dry wilderness. The second, in Revelation 22, is the Tree of Life, nourished by the river of life in the new creation. We live between these trees, shaping the world as either more barren or more fruitful.

We are not waiting to be whisked away to heaven. Rather, we carry the hope of heaven into this world, partnering with God to bring renewal, making the wilderness bloom even as we press toward the Tree of Life. For those who resonate with this theme, I still find deep inspiration in Rob Bell's early 2010s work, particularly his Nooma series. Nooma #3 is wonderful:

<https://youtu.be/ucO8xww-Iao>

March 2025 If this moment feels stressful, if our politics seem bewildering, if the future feels uncertain—you are not alone. But you can and must partner with God to bring Christ's light. You can receive grace to calm the storms around those you love. You can find the resolve to serve communities in need. May we all strengthen the bonds of affection that make the plains and valleys a little easier to cross. **Todd**