

Feast of the Transfiguration
RCL
Revised

Exodus 34:29-35

The Latin Vulgate misunderstands the Hebrew in verse 30 *qaran*, “shone” as *qeren*, “horn.” This misunderstanding led to the idea of the “Horned Moses,” an image preserved for us most eloquently in Michelangelo’s sculpture of that name. In Near Eastern tradition human beings who saw the gods directly were forever changed physically by that encounter, and the shining face of Moses derives from that tradition. Some commentators contend that the veil in verses 33-34 was actually a cult mask, but there is no direct evidence to support this idea.

Psalm 99

Some interpreters call this *hymn* an *enthronement psalm* out of the belief that it was used as part of a yearly enthronement ceremony in which Israel recognized Yahweh as king. The *cherubim* (1:1, singular: *cherub*) are winged sphinxes, very common in the royal iconography of the near east. The Ark of the Covenant, which was Yahweh's throne, had figures of cherubim that comprised his seat. This hymn celebrates Yahweh's permanent residence in Jerusalem (Zion) as righteous judge and lawgiver.

2 Peter 1:13-21

The unknown author of 2 Peter knows and refers to 1 Peter (2 Peter 3:1); he has also clearly read and made use of the Epistle of Jude. The letter is written against opponents who are almost certainly Gnostic in conviction, *i. e.* people who deny the goodness of the created, material world and think of salvation as transfer into a purely spiritual realm. Christian Gnostics thought of Christ as a savior who came to reveal this other, spiritual realm to us and denied that Christ would come again physically to redeem this material world of ours. “Myths” (1:16) are probably the intricate genealogies of the heavens characteristic of the Gnostics. For the Gnostics the savior was but one of several emanations of the “Father of Lights.”

Luke 9:28-36

The author of Luke’s Gospel took the story of the Transfiguration from Mark 9:2-10 but added verses 31-33a to Mark’s account. In these additional verses, the author describes the subject on which Jesus, Moses, and Elijah discussed: Jesus’ “departure” in Jerusalem *i. e.* his death, resurrection, and ascension. As in the account of Moses’ conversation with God in Exodus 34:29-31 (see above), Jesus too has his appearance altered as a result of the heavenly encounter. Peter, John, and James witness this event, but they are “weighed down with sleep” and cannot respond adequately. This is the way this Gospel explains Peter’s *non sequitur* about building booths for the three transcendent personages.

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