

In the name of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Today is the **last Sunday of the season after Epiphany**. The season began with the New Year when we commemorated the visit of the wise ones to the child Jesus. They followed a star and God's purpose in Christ was revealed to them; to strangers, non-Jews, who have come to represent how God's light is meant for the whole world. Until today, our Christmas star has continued to hover over the altar to remind us of that light and of how we are meant to be its bearers into all of life. And in the gospel lessons for the Sundays in the season – light and love and new truths about Jesus were revealed week by week. We heard about his baptism and God's words **"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."** We heard of how the first disciples were drawn to his light and how Jesus called them to join him. We heard of Jesus' first miracles of healing and restoration. We heard how fresh and new and different was his teaching and how it gave people of new vision of God's kingdom. And in today's gospel, yet another story of light and revealing. Jesus goes up a mountain to pray with his closest followers and is transfigured before them – shining with a mysterious glory. God's voice speaks again the words heard at Jesus' baptism, **"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."** Those who are with him are tempted to stay and enjoy the presence of God and the shiny wonder of Jesus at that moment. But Jesus already knows that this is the end of the season of light, at least for a time. He knows he has dreadful and awesome work ahead of him, and he talks with visions of Moses and Elijah on that mountain, talks about the work he has to do. Jesus comes down that mountain and begins the long walk to Jerusalem and to the events of Holy Week and Good Friday. For us too, the season of light winds down. When we return to church this Wednesday, it will be observe Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the season of Lent. This is our long walk to Jerusalem and to the dreadful and awesome work Jesus will accomplish for us there. And on Wednesday, the star of Christmas, the light of Epiphany, will be gone. We will be invited to have another focus for the next six weeks - the weeks of Lent.

So today we bask in the light of the transfigured Jesus but we also can see the beginning of the road ahead. By next Sunday, we will be five days into the season of Lent, and so today, we get ready

with our gift to you – **Lent in a Bag!** (You might want to take up the bag that was given to you when you came in and have a look at the contents.) This little bag is brought to you by your hard-working Spiritual Development Team. In it, you will find a tri-fold pamphlet that will guide you in the use of the bag. It suggests two ways that you could use it: 1) with others in your family or group of friends gathered around for discussion or 2) for your own private devotion. The objects in the bag are symbols - 6 in total – one for each week of Lent. Each one has some brief commentary, a scripture passage or two and questions to think about or talk about with others. You might choose one night in each week and do this focus once or you might do it daily using the same object for a whole week. The objects will lead us to reflection, to focus on enhancing and growing our loving relationship with God.

To get a flavour of some of the objects, I'll just highlight two. A bag of sand begins the season. It reminds us of the desert wanderings of Jesus during his 40 days of testing. We're asked to read that story as it is recorded in three of the four gospels. And we're asked to reflect on what constitutes the wilderness in our lives? What have we learned there? And how do we remember that God is present with us in the wilderness times of life? And at the end of the season, the object will be seeds. We'll be asked to read the parables of the mustard seed and the unleavened bread as we begin to move toward the new life, growth and hope of Easter. We'll be asked to reflect on where there is hope in our lives? Where there is mystery? What transformation do you hope for as the Lenten season resolves itself into Easter? In your **Lent in a Bag** kit, you will also find a rock, a human figure, a candle and a shell and readings and questions to go with them as well. It's our hope that as we give ourselves to this little task each week or each day, God will use this time we set aside, to work in our hearts and to transform them.

It is so good that we celebrate the glory of the transfigured Jesus today, as we look down the Lenten road we're soon to walk. For he has lived and died and lived again to help us become transfigured people – showing forth his image from glory to glory. As the hymn we will go out from church today singing goes:
Transfigure us, O Lord, transfigure us, O Lord, break the chains that bind us, speak your healing word. And where you lead, we'll follow,

transfigure us, O Lord. May it be so – and blessed Lent to you.
Amen