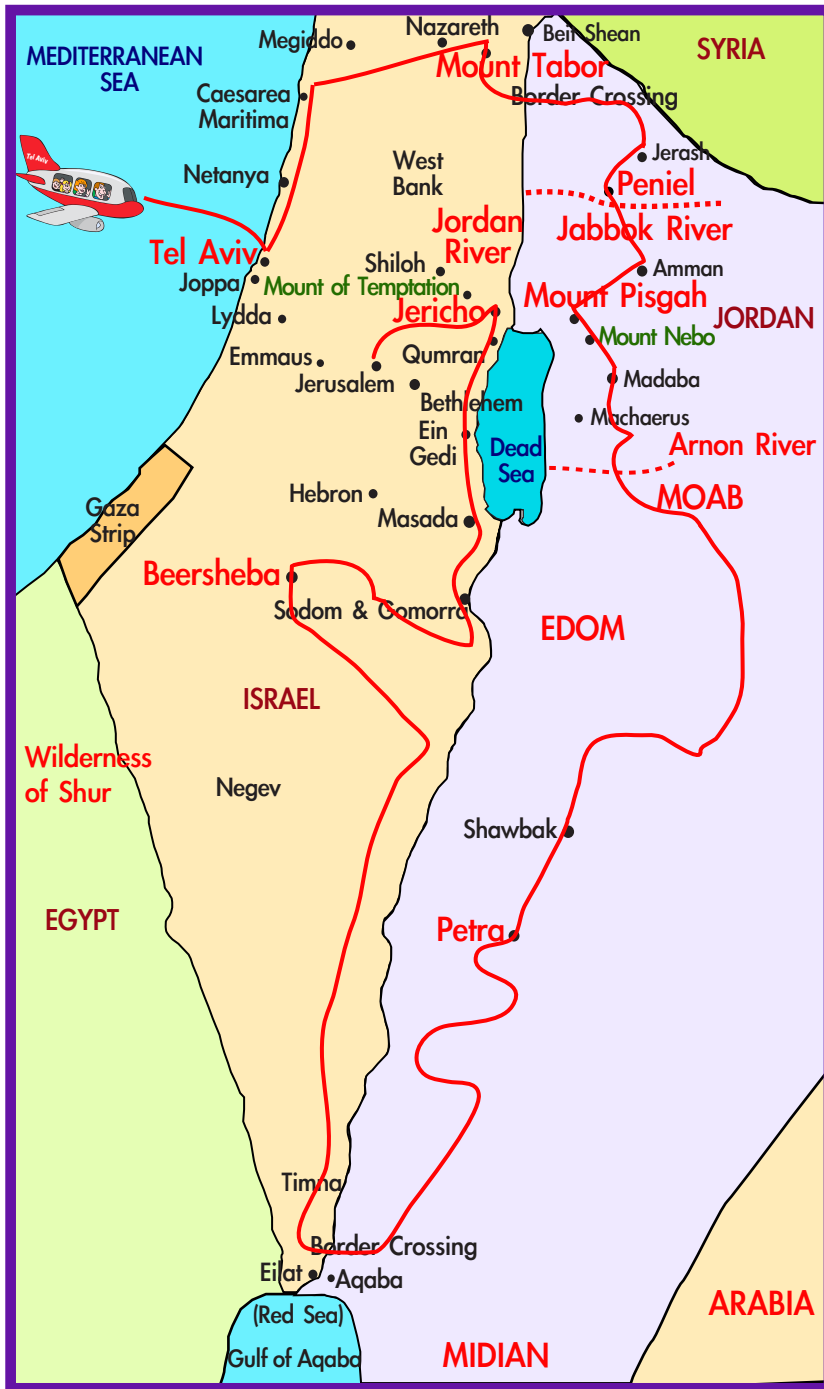


Tour of the Holy Lands - Mount Tabor



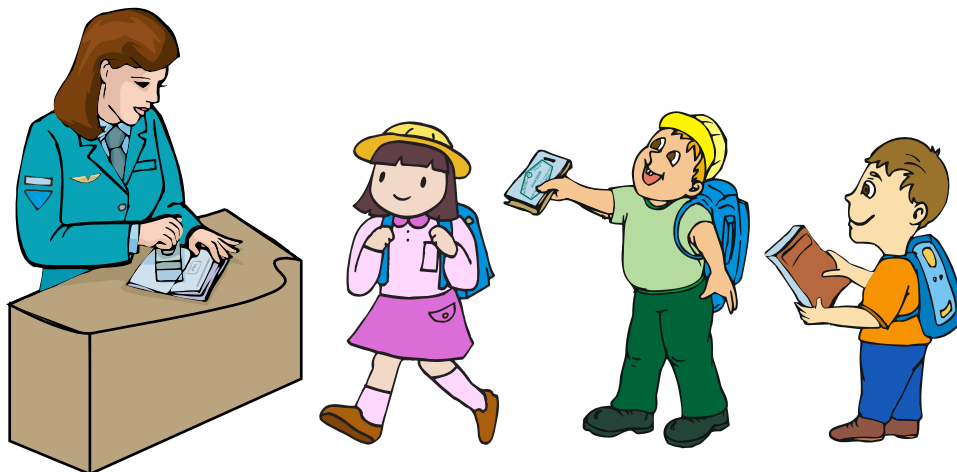
Not many people get the chance to visit the ancient lands where biblical heroes lived and preached and healed. We did that very thing last summer and many of you joined us. We loved hearing reports about how much you enjoyed your adventures and how much you learned.

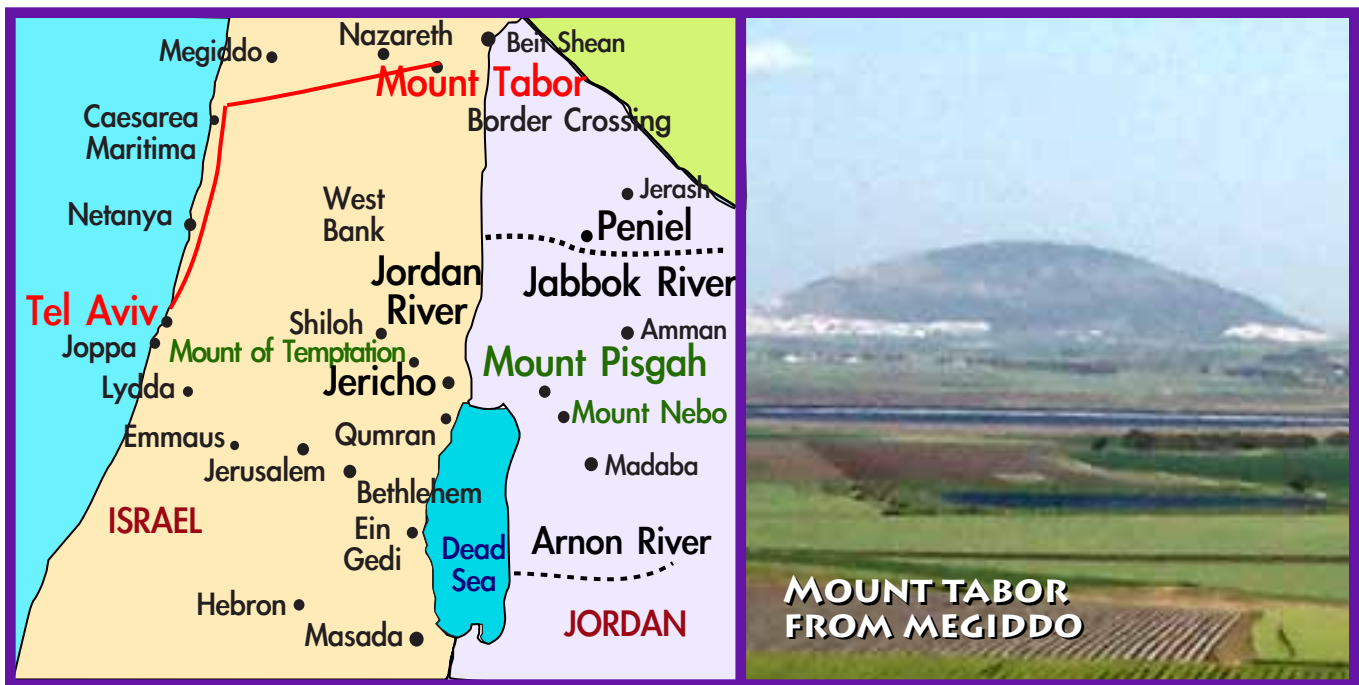
This summer we're returning to the Holy Land – we'll begin where we left off and continue our journey, visiting more places along the way. We invite you to join us and to bring your friends.



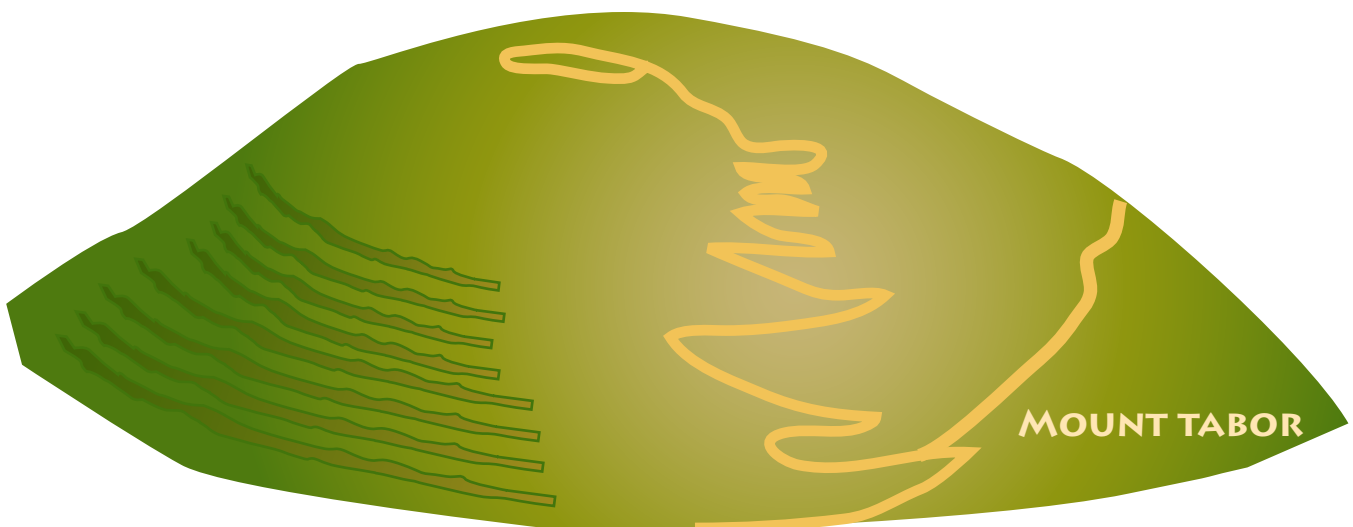


Landing in Tel Aviv is like coming back home. Just as we did last year, we get our passports stamped at the airport, pick up our back-packs, climb into that familiar bus, and head toward the hotel by the Mediterranean Sea. From up high in our hotel, we can look down on the palm trees and sandy beaches. Last year we saw parasailors in the sky. This year, looking straight out to sea, we can see one lone surfer riding the waves, unafraid. In Bible times, Hebrews were afraid of the waters of the sea, afraid of its unknown dangers and its mighty waves that pushed violently against the shore. We're not afraid, though. Early in the morning, we're eager to dip our toes into its salty waters.



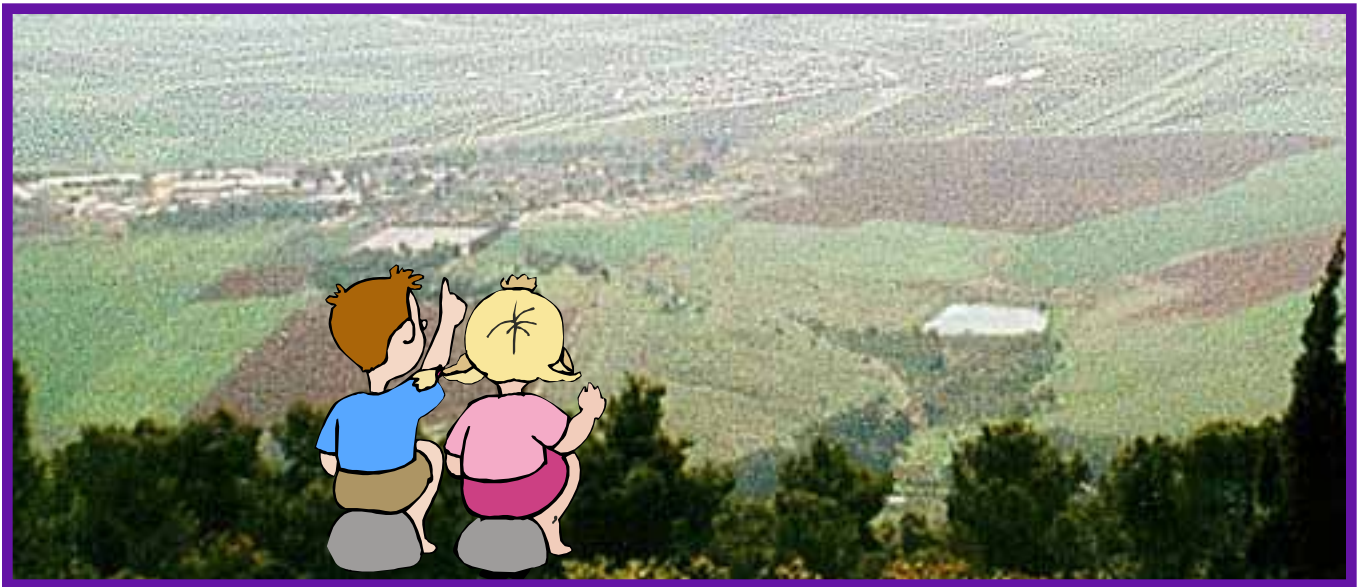


Today we're in for a treat. We'll drive across the country to a well-known site called Mount Tabor, which some describe as shaped like a dome, while others say it looks like a tea cup. Mount Tabor sits all alone in the middle of flat farmland. Last year we saw it from Megiddo, a high point on this side of the country. In the Old Testament, several important battles were fought there by warriors such as Deborah and Gideon. But today we'll be talking about a New Testament story that took place on Mount Tabor. This story is called the Transfiguration and is told in three Gospels – Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-9, and Luke 9:28-36.





In the book of Matthew, Jesus' disciples have just learned the good news that their beloved teacher is the long-awaited Messiah. But the bad news is that he must suffer and die. This is very disturbing to them and they would like to save him from this end. Something will happen on this mountain that will help them understand the Messiah and God's will for him. Nothing must interfere with God's plan even if it means that Jesus must endure pain and suffering. Jesus invites his three closest disciples - Peter, James and John - to climb this mountain with him and witness the event. If three men told the same story in those days, it proved the story to be true. God will provide a message for them they will never forget. If we are going to hear the rest of the story, we had better start climbing Mount Tabor now.

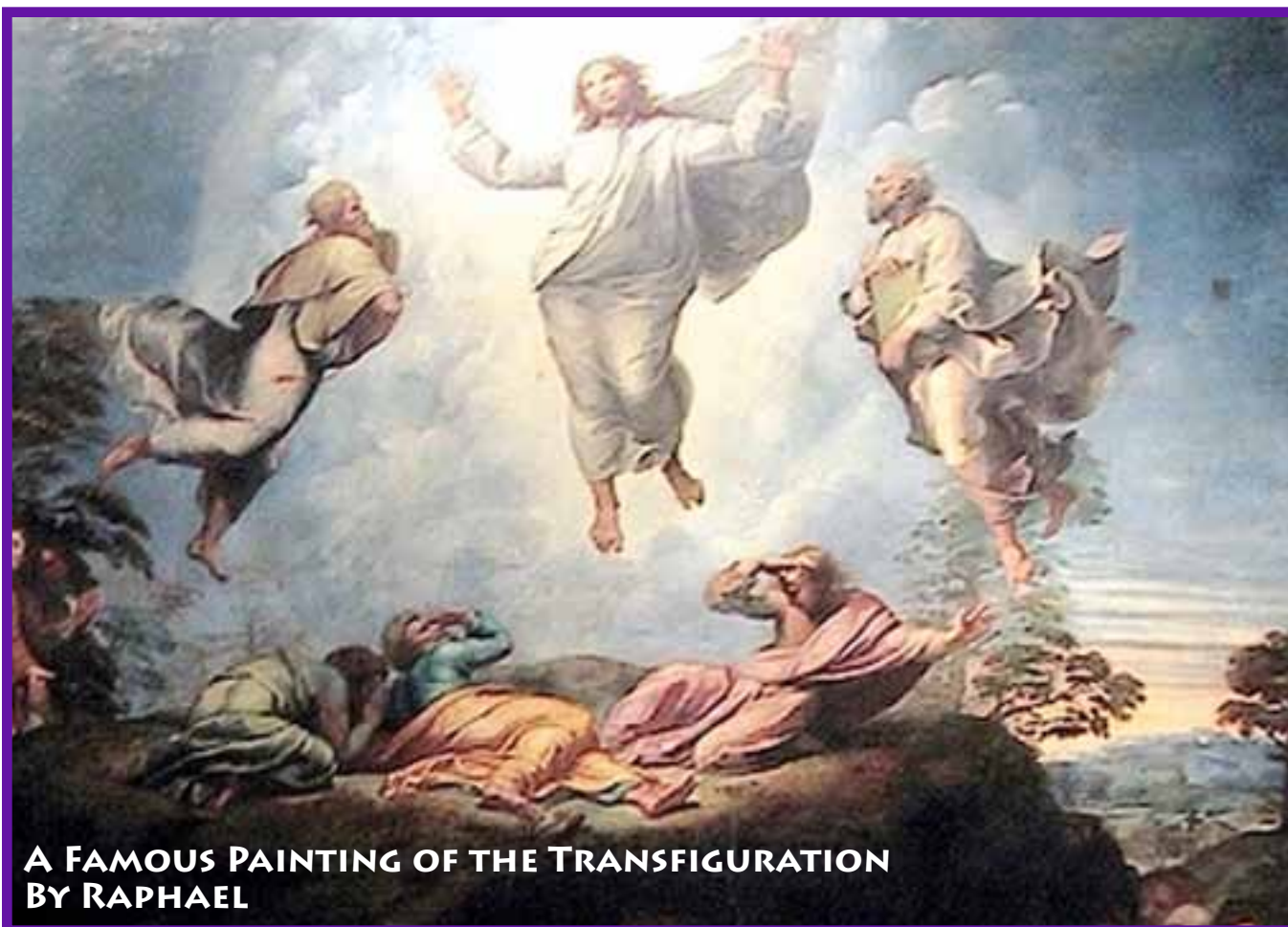


Mount Tabor's sides are steep. Large buses will not fit on the narrow winding road. Early pilgrims had to climb 4,300 steps. A large church stands at the top of the mount as a reminder of the events that took place here. The higher we get today, the farther we can see out over the colorful checkered farms. The view from the top is magnificent. What a privilege to hear the Transfiguration story from the spot where Jesus may have stood.





As Jesus neared the top, a great change began to come over him. A light as bright as the sun began pouring from his face. The light has been described as glorious. Not only did his face shine, but his robes were as dazzling white as the light. Some say that the disciples were no longer seeing their Master as material , but in his true spiritual nature.



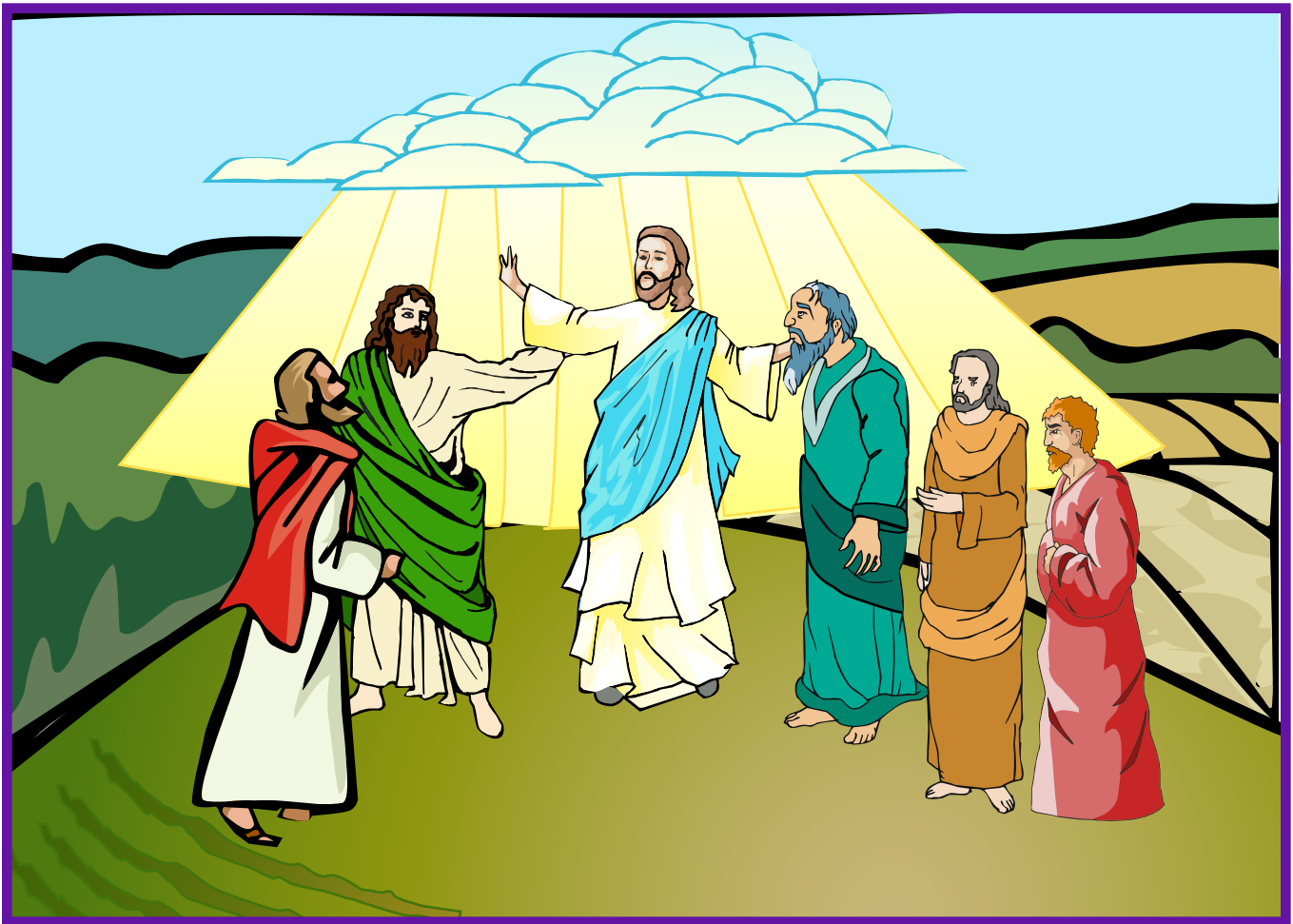
**A FAMOUS PAINTING OF THE TRANSFIGURATION
BY RAPHAEL**

That wasn't the only thing the disciples saw that day. A vision of two men appeared - men who had long since left this earth. The first was Moses and the second was Elijah. They didn't say anything to the disciples, but they did talk with Jesus. Much has been written about what this vision meant to the disciples who were watching. Many say that Moses stood for the Law, Elijah stood for the Prophets, and Jesus' life brought them both to perfection - that is, he lived them to the fullest. It's interesting to note that mountain tops played important parts in all three lives and each man left this world in unusual circumstances. What did the men talk about on the mountaintop? Luke said they spoke of Jesus' death in Jerusalem. Moses and Elijah might have brought encouragement to Jesus before facing his enemies. Or they may have shared the glory they saw beyond this world.



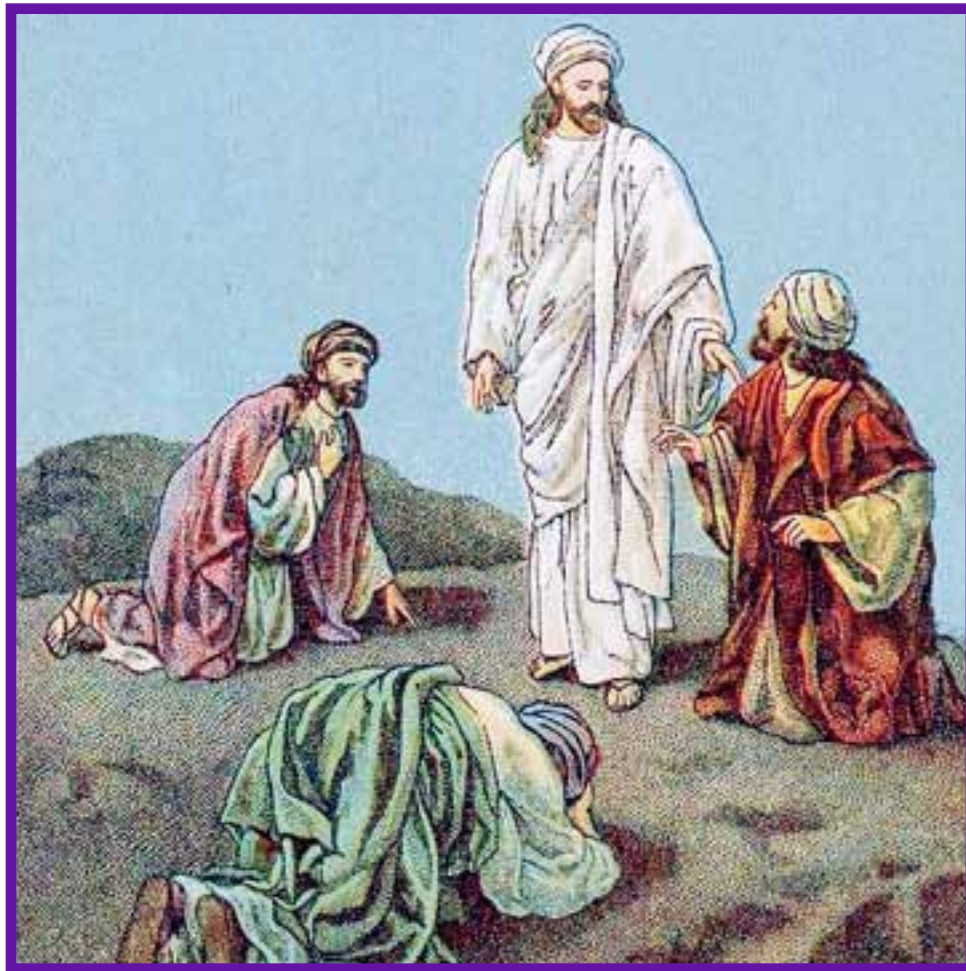
Then one of the disciples interrupted. Which one, you may ask? You may already know. It's the one who often spoke without thinking. It was Peter, of course. "Jesus, Master, it's wonderful for us to be here! What would you think if we set up three tents on this mountain - one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah?"

We smiled as we thought of Peter's words. How could a vision be put into a tent? Maybe Peter thought it was time for God's kingdom to rule and these holy men could dwell on earth forever and rule from this mountain. Maybe Peter was remembering the tent Moses made in the wilderness for the glory of God. Maybe he was thinking of the simple shelters of branches and leaves made in the wilderness. Maybe he thought that if these three holy men lived on this mountain, this wonderful moment would never end.



All of a sudden, a bright shining cloud covered them all. Could this mean what they think it means? Was this like the cloud they'd heard about all their lives, the cloud called the Shekinah, the symbol of God spoken of by their ancestors in the wilderness, the cloud that covered Mount Sinai, the cloud that guided the children of Israel through the wilderness? Was God there with them in the cloud on Mount Tabor?

Then with excitement, the storyteller said, “And behold a voice out of the cloud, which said...” He used the word “behold” three times to make sure his readers became just as excited as he was. Today, we would say, “Look, Look, Look!” Just imagine, the same God whose voice sounded like a trumpet on Sinai, was speaking directly out of the cloud to Jesus’ disciples! It certainly gave us shivers to think about it! The voice spoke: “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him.” In other words, listen to him, follow him.



Were the disciples as afraid as we would have been? Yes! They were so frightened that they fell flat on their faces on the ground, on the very ground where we were standing. Then Jesus came and touched them. "Get up, don't be afraid," he said. His words and his touch reminded them that he was real and not a vision. They would remember that moment for the rest of their lives. It would remind them that they had been taught by the Messiah, the Son of God, and that his eternal life matched that of Moses and Elijah. The lessons of the Transfiguration would help heal their own grief. It would help them heal the sick and raise the dead as he did. Their teacher would be with them forever.



As they came down from the mountain, Jesus warned them not to say a word about the vision to anyone until he was risen from the dead. They kept their word. We don't have to make the same promise, so we're taking lots of pictures and writing in our journals for our friends and family and for ourselves for years to come. Back on the bus some of us are going to read about Deborah and Gideon. They were here too. (Judges 4-7)

