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## *We Become What We Watch*

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**  
**The Last Sunday after the Epiphany**

*Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ,and later, Jesus led Peter and James and John up a high mountain, by themselves. And Jesus was transfigured before them. -Exodus 24:12-18 and Matthew 17: 1-9*

In the light of modern science, some of these stories in the Bible are downright silly! Listen to this one from Genesis chapter thirty.

It's the story of how Jacob devised a plan to get strong sheep. All of us want the best offspring, don't we? Ask any of these new parents here today whether they want strong children. Of course, they do. They want these little lambs to grow up strong. We all do.

Jacob wanted the strongest, too. But he wanted the best sheep, the best lambs. So he arranged a deal with his father-in-law. (Watch out, you fathers-in-law!) When the time came for Jacob and his father-in-law to go their separate ways, they had to divide the joint assets between them. Any of you in family businesses know what this is like. Back in the days of Jacob, the assets were sheep.

Jacob's deal with his father-in-law was that he, Jacob, would get all the lambs that were striped or speckled or spotted. His father-in-law would get the rest. Basically, that meant for Jacob that he would get all the lambs that had some white in them (the white caused the stripes).

Jacob wanted the best offspring, the strongest sheep, so he went and got some poplar and almond trees. He peeled back the bark so that the white of the wood was showing. How was this plan going to help?

Well, when the strong sheep got ready to have children, Jacob put the strips of wood in front of their eyes. The theory was that if the mother sheep and daddy sheep were looking at white streaks and white spots while they were raising children, then their children would also have white streaks and white spots on them. Jacob made sure that the strong sheep were seeing the streaks and stripes; that way, their children -the strong lambs""would have streaks and stripes. (It's right there in Genesis 30).

Isn't that delightful? And it's even more wonderful that it worked. The strongest of the new flock had stripes and streaks and spots, and the strongest of the flock belonged to Jacob.

I love that story. But I must admit that it flies in the face of modern science and genetics and breeding technique. Do we really believe that when mother sheep and father sheep are looking at stripes when they are together, that they will have striped children?

That takes some faith. Where is the faith of the great monk, Gregor Mendel, when you need him?

Well, I used to think that this story was silly and non-scientific. But not so now. I have learned that the Bible often speaks of a deeper truth. The deeper truth is this: We become what we pay attention to. We become what we watch. You've heard it said, "We are what we eat." That may be true. But it is also true that "We are what we watch."

What we hear and watch during life makes a difference during our formation. And, more importantly, it makes a difference to how our children are formed, too.

If we watch stripes all the time, we do become striped. If we watch spots, we become spotted. If we watch pessimism all the time, we become pessimistic. If we watch hope all the time, we become hopeful. If we watch trash all the time,

Consider what we read. Consider what we watch on television, especially during this election season. Apparently, some people say that CNN and the FOX news network present information in different ways. Maybe watching one network or the other, or a third or fourth, can make a difference in how we are formed.

It is certainly true in the Bible. So it was that Moses entered the cloud of glory when his people were wandering in the wilderness. Moses needed to see something other than the empty and forlorn desert before him. And he went away. He went away in order to spend time with the divine. He was on a mountain in a cloud of glory.

And the Bible claims that when Moses came back down from the mountain, he was actually radiant. His face shone with the glory of God. The point is that what Moses was watching changed his very appearance.

Today's gospel story is set at one of the turning points of Jesus' ministry, just before he was to set his face toward Jerusalem, his promised land of suffering and resurrection. At that point, Jesus, too, went up on a mountain. He took his inner circle of disciples, Peter and James and John. And Jesus, too, like Moses, entered a cloud of glory.

Or, at least, the cloud of glory descended upon Jesus and overwhelmed all of them. Jesus was transfigured before them, and his flesh shone with a beautiful, glistening white glory. Jesus saw something glorious in that event, and he saw enough to give him strength for what was to come. What he saw changed him.

The same was meant for his disciples. They were to see Jesus so transfigured, that they would be strengthened also to see this same Jesus on the cross of suffering not long afterwards. That is why we hear this gospel just before we enter the season of Lent.

What we see changes us. What we watch changes us.

And what we present before the eyes of our children changes them. Whatever streaks and spots we are watching while we raise children will definitely be imprinted on them, too.

We have some parents here this morning who are presenting their children for baptism. They are exposing their children to other Christians. They are showing their children the Church. In doing so, these parents want to show their children the transfiguring glory of God.

What these children see will change them.

And so I ask all of you, today. I ask all of you parents of children being baptized, and all of you parents presenting your children for Holy Communion and Eucharist, and all the rest of us who want to produce strong and healthy offspring. In short, I ask all of us today:

What are we showing our children? What are we presenting before our children?

Do we dare walk with them up the mountain, to show them the overwhelming glory of God? Do we know how to do that? I hope so. Do we show them the holy way of the next 40 days of Lent? Do we know that way ourselves? Do we commit to show them an experience of the holy? Do we know how to find such an experience ourselves? I hope so.

I hope so. For what we show our children forms what they will become. Christianity itself is not magic. Baptism is not a magic act that defeats the laws of science and nature and experience. Deeper laws realize that we become what we watch, what we hear, what we experience.

Baptism is the first glimpse, the first experience, of what it means to grow into the full stature of Christ. We will show others that experience of Christ over and over again. In that way, over time, every Sunday, our baptisms become real and true. The more we show these little lambs Jesus Christ, the more they will grow into Christ themselves.

AMEN.

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Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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