St Luke’s account of this dazzling encounter is, well, dazzling. Perhaps we’ve all grown familiar with these readings (and that would be a good thing) but go home after Church and look up these verses and try and read them with fresh eyes. They are amazing. Luke’s setting and unfolding of this moment. The majesty of it, that somehow still oozes with humanity. St Luke is a wonderful writer, and my Greek teacher at college also reckoned Luke has the most stylish handle on Greek in the New Testament too.

But, the fabulousness of this moment aside, I’m afraid St Peter makes another howler. As ever, 10 out of 10 for enthusiasm from the Prince of the Apostles, but he’s not the full ticket. ‘Let’s stay here’, he says, ‘and build three dwellings for the Lord, Moses and Elijah’. It’s perhaps a little like that moment on holiday when you think ‘I think I’ll just stay here actually, with my glass of something nice, in this comfy chair, basking in the sun of a little town square in the Dordogne’ or wherever it is after lunch. ‘I think I’ll just stay here forever’. But, of course, you have to admit to yourself that the only reason you can travel there, sit there, eat that lunch, and buy that drink is because you spend most of the year working. If you did stay there, the bank account, plate, glass and everything else would soon be empty.
St Peter didn’t realise that this moment of Christ’s divinity being revealed, this moment of fulfillment of all that had been leading to Jesus over centuries of Jewish life, all the laws (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah), this moment of consummation was not in fact a destination. It was a signpost.

And we know where it’s pointing. It is pointing us to the upside-down, topsy-turvey, scandalous, shameful, infuriating, heart-breaking, confusion and death of the Cross, towards which we will begin our Lenten pilgrimage on Wednesday. On the cross, covered in blood and spit and sweat and, typically, urine and feces too, Christ would be lifted up again. In darkness this time rather than light. This lifting up, too, will be a revelation. It will reveal the cost of love when it is pure, it will reveal the depths of human despair and cruelty, it will lay bare any claims we might have made that we human beings are capable of saving ourselves; and it will, it will, flood those dark and deathly valleys with a Divine light that will never go out.

On the eve of Lent (and I do hope we’ll all take seriously our commitment to begin Lent well with Eucharist and ashes here or at a church near your home or work on Wednesday). On the eve of Lent, Holy Mother Church blinds us with light. It’s twin will not just dazzle, but so much more when the light of Easter breaks forth in a few short weeks.

Moses had to cover his face, we heard, because his face was shining so much because of being close to God. This is serious, this God, this light. But let’s go on…
Why, after all that, does St Luke pair this moment with the healing that follows in today’s Gospel. The Evangelists never did anything by accident. Why does Jesus come down the glorious mountain and have that slightly strained and strange encounter?

But perhaps it isn’t so discordant, because it loops right back round to where we began. St Peter not getting it on the Mount of Transfiguration. In this healing miracle the Apostles didn’t understand the powers entrusted to them and weren’t able to use them.

And that is so often the case for us in our life, isn’t it? We don’t understand, we complain. Not realising that everything we need is already present - what’s lacking is our understanding, our right judgement. The Transfiguration itself is the perfect illustration of this. Each year on 6th August we celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration. That very day, a day of Divine splendour and blinding light, is also the anniversary of the nuclear bombing of Japan towards the end of the Second World War. Blinding light, yes, but tragic as an illustration of our capacity to destroy the beauty of the earth and the human family that has been given to us by our Heavenly Father.

Back to the healing miracle today. The devil is very active in the Gospels. Some suggest a lot of the ailments are now things commonly and simply diagnosed. Some still see demons in their cornflakes every morning. Personally, I have never been surprised that when God walked the earth the devil got especially busy – surely, He knew it was His last chance
saloon. And indeed, it proved to be just that, Christ is Risen and His is a light that casts out all darkness. Evil, death and darkness are undone, completely. But the devil’s pathetic last throws, and more often our human frailty are real. Even in this moment of wonder, there they are. The Apostles’ and our inability to trust Jesus. Our insecure attempts to secure our own existence, just in case; our prioritising of hundreds of things a day over simply being loved by God and loving others and ourselves.

Today we’re confronted with a blinding moment of truth and wonder. All things pointing to Jesus. A God, who we can know, and be in real relationship with, who is not a capricious Mount Olympus giant, but a lover who will give his last gasp of air, his last drop of blood, in order to defeat death and open the way to everlasting life for the whole of His beloved creation. Today, we’re confronted, between these two thrones of Mount Tabor and Calvary, with our own short-sightedness, in the form of the Apostles. Yes with the devil’s pathetic doings, but more often our own flaws – huge (like Hiroshima and Nagasaki) and small and every-day.

St Luke’s account of the Transfiguration lays this landscape before us today, (no accident) as we journey into Lent. The question is how will we and our keeping of Lent be changed by it, as a result?