

# Art to Contemplate

“The Transfiguration” by Raphael (1520)



This magnificent painting was Raphael’s last work before he died on Good Friday in 1520.

What is happening here? We find two different New Testament scenes. The Transfiguration of Jesus fills the upper part of the painting while story of the possessed boy fills the lower space.

In the Transfiguration scene, Jesus raises his hands toward the Father in Heaven while Elijah (left) and Moses (right) gaze upon Jesus. Jesus is suspended in light and billowing clouds. At the feet of Christ are his apostles, from left to right, James, Peter, and John. The apostles shield their eyes from the brilliance of their Lord.

In the bottom scene, the nine disciples who didn’t climb the mountain with Jesus are seen on the left. They are attempting to heal the possessed boy, but it isn’t working. Matthew is in blue, consulting his

books; the boy’s father looks frantic. The scene seems chaotic.

Why would the artist put two seemingly unconnected stories in the same painting? The two scenes are occurring at the same time in the gospels: During the Transfiguration on the mountain, the nine disciples left behind are trying to heal the boy. In the painting, people point to the boy; they seem to be entreating the disciples to help. A few of the disciples point to Christ. They know Christ is the answer. In the gospels, after Jesus comes down the mountain, the father begs him to heal his son, and Jesus does. In desperate situations, we must pray and trust in Christ.

Let your children ponder the painting for a few days. Can they identify the upper scene? What do they think of the colors used for the upper part of the painting compared to the lower part?



