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The Transfiguration of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Lasting Glory”

Text: Matthew 17:1-9 (2 Peter 1:16-21; Exodus 24:8-18)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we heard again the remarkable story of the Transfiguration of our Lord. That moment in time when Jesus allowed His divine nature to show through His human nature. With this, Jesus Himself did not change – only His appearance changed. He was, and continued to be, who He was all along. God and man in one person. But for this moment in time, He allowed what was hidden to be revealed. And it is a glimpse of Heaven, that place which *“has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”* (Rev 21:23)

But that was not the only remarkable thing that happened that day – Moses and Elijah also appeared, speaking with Jesus. For all the Law and the Prophets point to Jesus and testify of Him. (Lk 24:27)

There was the bright cloud that overshadowed them. The same cloud that covered Mt. Sinai (Ex 24:15), and that led the people of Israel through the wilderness (Ex 13:21-22), and that filled the Tabernacle and the Temple (Num 9:15-17). The cloud that marked the presence of God with His people.

And then the voice of the Father from the cloud: *“This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.”* The same voice, the same words, that thundered from Heaven at Jesus’ baptism (Mt 3:17), that indicated that the Father was well pleased that His Son had come to be with sinners, to take our sins, and be our Saviour. This work of Jesus continues, and is, in fact, now about to be accomplished. For the cross is now very near.

And there is so much more in this reading! In this one reading that seems to bring all of the theology in the Bible together in one brief moment of time. . . . But I don’t want to lecture you about all of that (as interesting as it may be), but instead

ask you a question: *If you had to pick, what would you say is the climax of this story? Is it Jesus' divinity shining through? Is it Moses and Elijah there with Him? Is it the cloud? The voice? What would you pick?*

Well the answer is **none of the above**. For as remarkable as all those things are, the climax of the story is what seems perhaps tagged onto the end, and so easy to overlook: when our Lord Jesus quietly comes to those three terrified disciples, touches them, and says, "*Rise, have no fear.*" That this glorious God would come to be with us. And then they lift up their eyes and see Jesus only.

If you got that question wrong, that's okay - *so did Peter!* He wanted to stay in the glory, and set up three tents. For, he thought, this was it! This is what it was all about! This is what they had been waiting for! . . . *But no, you see, he hadn't been listening.* Jesus had told him just six days ago that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, and that those who follow Him will *also* have to take up the cross. (Mt 16) And so the Father tells him: *listen!* Jesus' glory is not what you think. For His glory is about God coming to take His place with sinners - in the waters of the Jordan, and then on the wood of the cross. His glory is to take our sin and die with it, not so that *He* may be glorified, but so that *we* could. The glory is His. He has come to give it to us. To give it to us in the forgiveness of our sins. Peter wanted to stay so that this glory and moment *could* last. Jesus wanted to go down and to the cross, so that this glory *would* last, forever.

And so just as Jesus came down from Heaven in His incarnation, so He comes down from His glory here, and touches the three. The same touch that cleansed lepers, that restored sight to the blind, that healed the deaf, and that raised the dead, now raises these three and takes away their fear. Jesus is with them again. Not the frightening glory and voice, but His merciful presence, His comforting voice, and His life-giving touch.

And that is the same merciful presence, comforting voice, and life-giving touch that is here for us as well. For all of us Peters who are quick to speak and slow to listen. For us Peters who love glory and want to avoid the cross. For us Peters who are frightened and terrified by the things of this world and life. For us Peters, Jesus is here and says, "*have no fear.*" For though it is necessary for us to bear the cross here in this life, it is **good**. For the cross forces us to stop relying on ourselves and what we think and what we can do - making our own little tents - and rely on Him. The cross kills all pretensions of glory that live in us, our visions of grandeur, and

illusions of self-sufficiency and independence, that we rely on Christ. To realize that I am dependent on Him for everything, and that apart from Him we can do nothing (Jn 15:5). But in Him, we have everything, even if the glory is hidden here, for awhile, under the cross.

And so to us bowed down in fear, burdened by sin, afflicted by disease, oppressed by evil, weak in faith and plagued with doubt – to us frightened disciples our Lord now comes quietly, with His Word and with His touch, and says to you, “*have no fear.*” *Have no fear*, for behold, you are baptized, by your Lord’s own hand, and His voice that said to you: *You are now my beloved son; my beloved daughter.* And you are. *Have no fear*, for behold, the hand of the Lord upon your head, and His voice that proclaims to you the forgiveness of all your sins. And you are forgiven. What separated you from God is now gone; atoned for in the blood of the Lamb of God. *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Rom 8:1). *Have no fear*, for behold, the body and blood of the Lord touching your lips and poured into your mouth, and His voice which proclaims “*given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.*” (Mt 26:28) And so it is.

And through these means we who once were blind are given the eyes of faith; we who once were deaf are given ears to hear; and we who once were lame in sin are given the strength to arise and depart in peace. For we who once were dead have been made alive in Christ. For He has come down to us in flesh and blood to give us life.

And in these means, we *see Jesus only*. Not in His shining brilliance, but in the glory of His condescension. In the glory of His flesh. In the glory of His cross.

Peter eventually got this. For notice what he later wrote in his Epistle that we heard earlier. Yes, they were eyewitnesses of His glory, but what does he point us to that is **even more sure?** The Word. For it is the Word that, Peter says, “*we do well to pay attention [to] as a lamp shining in a dark place.*” In the dark places of sin, in the dark places of suffering, in the dark places of despair, in the dark places that will be with us all this life, we may not see any light at the end of the tunnel, we may see no glory or hope – but the Word tells us otherwise and shows us what is now hidden. The good of the cross, the hope of glory, and the promise of the resurrection. That we might confess with St. Paul, that “*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*” (Rom 8:18)

For the time is coming when this glory *will be* revealed to us, when Jesus returns in *all* His glory – this time not with Moses and Elijah, but with all the heavenly host. And at that time *all* will listen to His voice and come out of their graves. And then, then, we will stay with Him, eating and drinking at His table, in the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end.

But not yet. Now, we receive a foretaste of the feast, a glimpse of the glory, but it is not yet time to ascend, but to descend. Not alone, but with Him who knows our weakness, who knows our fear, who knows our struggle. And we need not fear, for all that we fear has been overcome by Him. There is now nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom 8:38-39). Your sins are forgiven, your death defeated, your adversary overthrown.

So come, let us go down. To bear our cross and follow Him. To serve, to love, to forgive, and yes, to die, even as He has done for us. For these are glorious. And have no fear. For the farther you descend, the closer you are to Him in His glory; to Him who came all the way to our depths, to the glory of the cross. And know that He who loved you there to the end will not leave you now.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.