

6 March 2011  
The Transfiguration of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Cross Over to 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.

What a glorious scene the Holy Gospel presents to us today! The glory of Jesus, the Son of God, revealed in His transfiguration. To this revelation the whole of the Epiphany season has been leading us. We have been building to this day for the past nine weeks.

For the Epiphany season has “unwrapped” the gift of God, born to us at Christmas. Epiphany has unwrapped the *person* of Jesus for us and revealed to us who this man is: that, in fact, this son of Mary is no mere man, but the very Son of God, the Lamb of God, the Bridegroom of His Bride, the Church.

The Epiphany season has also unwrapped the *work* of Jesus for us and revealed to us the blessing, mercy, love, and care that the Son of God in human flesh has come to provide for us.

Today is the bow on the present; the icing on the cake. For the whole Epiphany season finds its highpoint and culmination today, as Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James, and John. It is not for Himself that He is transfigured, but for them. And for us. All the glory of Jesus’ person and work is on display in this most stunning way today.

And then on Wednesday, we will plunge into ashes. We will plunge from the mountain of glory into the depth of our sin. White will turn to black. Peter’s “*Tis good, Lord, to be here*” will be changed into “*Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.*” Yet the two are not so different. For to have mercy on us, to deal with our sin, is the reason why the glory of God resides on earth. The Son of God came down from heaven and was born *for us and for our salvation*.

So if you thought the transfiguration, or the transformation of Jesus, on the Mount of Transfiguration was awesome . . . well, just wait. For over these next 40 days of Lent, you are going to again see Jesus transformed. You will see His glory as He journeys to the cross. As the God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God is transformed into the worst of sinners. As Jesus bears the sin of the world on the

cross. As all our sins - all the murder, all the lies, all the greed, all the jealousy, all the lust and impurity - all of it, is imputed to Him, or counted against Him, in our place. And then on Good Friday, on a different mountain, we will again say: what glory! Not a different glory, but the same glory as is displayed for us today. The glory of God who has come to save sinners.

That's why Peter's three tents won't do. They could have stayed on that mountain with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, for what? Another 30, 40, or 50 years? And then what? What happens when Peter, James, and John die? When you and I die? When we die in our sins? It is to provide a *good* answer to that question that the glorious Son of God has come. That, as we prayed, the transfiguration foreshow the glory that Jesus has come to provide for us. The glory only available to us through the cross.

For truly, the cross is not *Jesus'* path to glory. As we see today, He is glorious in Himself as God. No, the cross is *our* path to glory. Jesus atoning for our sin in His death, conquering death in His resurrection, paving the way to heaven in His ascension, and uniting us to Himself in sending His Spirit to us. He needs none of it. We need all of it. And so Jesus has come to join us in death, that we might join Him in life. That our shame be His, and His glory be ours. The glory only available to us through the cross.

And so for that reason, **Jesus calls us to the cross** - not just to watch Him; He bids us die and rise with Him. That in this life we not seek to bypass the cross, but find our life in it. *Which is easier said than done, isn't it?* Because we don't want to die. We don't like death. We don't like thinking about it, planning for it, or looking at it in funeral homes. It is unnatural to us - we were not created to die. Death is an intrusion into life. The wages of sin. But die we will. Die we must.

But Jesus bids us die **with Him**, for to die with Him means to die a death that ends in glory. To die a death that is not the end, but that ends in resurrection and eternal life. And so **Jesus calls us to the font** - for there, even now, we die and rise with Him. There, through His Word and Spirit, joined by His promise to those waters, the death and resurrection of Jesus is applied to you. The old sinner in you dies, and a new man is raised to life. A life of faith, a life of Christ, a life of glory.

Ah, but glory is a tricky thing! The world has its own version and vision of glory, and calls us to it. And we listen to that call, don't we? Instead of - as the Father said from the bright cloud - *listening to Jesus*. And so we revert back to old ways, sinful habits and instincts, self-interest and self-centeredness, that obscure the glory of the new life that is ours. The glory of a life of faithful dependence on our Saviour. The glory of a life of loving service to our neighbor. The glory of life as sons and daughters of God.

That is why our good and gracious Lord continues to mercifully keep the cross in your life. To lead you to glory. Not the world's temporary and fickle glory, but true glory. His glory. To lead you to repentance and back to your baptism, to remember who you are. A child of God. And to receive the gift of His forgiveness. For your Lord will not just give you new birth and then drop you on the doorstep of the world, to take care of the rest yourself. Because you can't. And so as a true Father, He continues to care for us, to lead us to glory.

And all He gives, He gives to fulfill this purpose - whether it seem to us good or bad, fortunate or unfortunate, joyful or sad. And perhaps here Moses and Elijah can teach us something. For years before they appeared with Jesus in the glory of the transfiguration, the Son of God had worked glorious things in their lives - Moses on Mt. Sinai, and Elijah on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18). Moses, who entered the cloud, spoke with God, and received the Law of God; and Elijah, through whom God defeated the prophets of Baal in a glorious battle, even though they out-numbered Elijah 450-to-1. . . . Yet Moses and Elijah could not stay in this glory. Moses spent the next 40 years in the wilderness, and Elijah ran away and spent the next 40 days in a cave because Queen Jezebel was upset that her god and prophets had lost and wanted to kill Elijah.

And maybe you know how they felt. Maybe you feel like you're wandering in the wilderness. Maybe you feel like hiding in a cave from the troubles of life. Maybe you feel like the world is against you. Or maybe for you it feels like death is winning, as your body is falling apart and you can't do what you used to be able to do. And you don't feel very glorious at all.

But how did God save Moses and Elijah? Not by whisking them out of this world, or making their troubles miraculously go away, but by feeding them, strengthening them in both body and soul, that the crosses they now bore would end in glory.

And so your Lord deals with you. **He calls you to the altar.** For here, He sets His table before you in the presence of your enemy, satan, to strengthen you body and soul with the food of His own Body and Blood, feeding you with His forgiveness, life, and salvation. That the crosses you now bear end in glory.

And though we may wish for a glimpse of His glory now, we have, as St. Peter told us today, ***something more sure - the prophetic Word***; the Word of God. Which is greater because through this Word we are not only told of this glory, *but promised it*. Through this Word we not only see it, *but receive it*. For the Word of God created us, the Word of God redeemed us, the Word of God forgives us, and the Word of God will raise us from our graves in the end, and we will be transfigured, glorified, in Jesus. And we will take our places at His right and left, in His glory.

But that glory comes only through the cross. So no, Peter, we cannot stay. It is time for Jesus to go to Jerusalem and die. And no, dear Christians, we cannot stay. It is time for us to repent and die; to enter into Lent and follow Jesus to His cross; to bear the crosses He gives us for our good. Or as we will soon sing: *Alleluia cannot always be our song while here below* (LSB #417 v.3).

But it will not always be so. And Jesus' transfiguration and His Word of promise give us the faith and strength to live and walk through this world and life, not fearful but confident. For we are not on our way to the Mount of Transfiguration and a glimpse of the glory of God, but on our way to Mount Zion and the glory of the everlasting presence of God!

And it is the Word that lights our way, that is our ***lamp shining in a dark place***. The Word that is proclaimed, the Word that forgives, the Word that washes, the Word that feeds, the Word that gives life. **And the darker this world gets, the brighter that Word shines, with the glory of Jesus.** The glory He has come to give to you.

*Therefore in our hymns we pray Thee,  
Grant us, blessed Trinity,  
At the last to keep Thine Easter  
With Thy faithful saints on high;  
There to Thee forever singing  
Alleluia joyfully* (LSB #417 v.4).

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.