

19 February 2012
The Transfiguration of our Lord

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Vienna, VA

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“A Man on a Mission”

Text: Mark 9:2-9; 2 Kings 2:1-12; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:6

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

The amazing thing about the Transfiguration of our Lord is not that Jesus began to shine with a brightness unlike anything else on earth - the amazing thing about the Transfiguration is that this brightness, this glory of the Lord of heaven and earth, is contained in this man Jesus.

This glory was there from the moment of His conception, hidden in the One growing in the womb of His mother Mary. This glory was hidden in the One wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger. It was hidden in the child growing up in Nazareth, obedient to His mother and father. It was always there, for it is His. It is who He really is, true God made true man.

But on this day, on a mountain in Galilee, Jesus reveals this glory to His three closest disciples, Peter, James, and John. He is transfigured, or literally *morphed*, before their eyes. And then, just as quickly, it is hidden again. For now is not the time for glory. Now is not the time to shine. Now, Jesus is a man, a *God-man*, on a mission. And He has been sent to do one thing: **to take that glory and hang it on a cross.**

And so hiding His glory again and starting back down the mountain, He charges the three ***not to tell anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.*** Until He finishes what He has come to do. Until His mission is accomplished.

That mission had been foreshadowed by those who appeared with Jesus on the mountain that day - Moses and Elijah. Their appearance testifies to His mission, for God *began* to do through them what would be fulfilled and finally accomplished by Jesus.

First there was **Moses**. He is best known for going up on Mount Sinai and receiving the Ten Commandments, *but that is not all He received* - He also received the instructions for the building of the Tabernacle, the mobile Temple which would accompany the people of Israel through the wilderness and into the Promised Land.

The Tabernacle was where the glory of God graciously dwelled with His people in the wilderness, and where the sacrifices were offered to atone for the sins of the people. . . .

Moses now stood on the Mount of Transfiguration and beheld with his eyes the true Tabernacle of God in human flesh. For here, in Jesus, was the glory of God graciously dwelling with His people. Here, in Jesus, was the sacrifice which would atone for the sin of the world. Here, in Jesus, was the One who would do what Moses could not do - complete the journey of the people into the Promised Land of heaven. What Moses then beheld by faith, he now sees with his own eyes.

But then there is also **Elijah**. Elijah is perhaps best known for his battle with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. There, it was 450 against one - 450 prophets of Baal against just Elijah. They would each offer a sacrifice, and whichever one was accepted by God by fire - that was the true God. Of course, the prophets of Baal prayed in vain, while Elijah's water-soaked sacrifice was consumed, overthrowing Baal and his prophets in a great victory. . . .

Now, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Elijah beheld with his eyes the true sacrifice which would overthrow satan and all his evil minions. This sacrifice, too, had been water-soaked in His baptism in the Jordan, and would be consumed by the fire of God's wrath against sin. Here, in Jesus, was the victory of God for all time. Here, in Jesus, was the One who would do what Elijah could not do - overthrow not just one false god, but the one who is the source of all false gods and false beliefs: satan himself. What Elijah then beheld by faith, he now sees with his own eyes.

Now, Peter, James, and John see all this too - though they do not yet understand it. They *cannot* understand it yet. They are instead filled with fear. The unveiled glory of the Lord is too much for them right now. Moses and Elijah knew something of fear, too, when they walked among us. But now in glory, they behold the Lord's glory without fear. We will too. Peter, James, John, you and me. But not yet. And so Jesus tells the three not to speak of what they do not yet understand. The Gospel of the cross is still veiled to them right now.

And it would be veiled to them when they saw Jesus at the top of Mount Calvary hanging on that cross, fulfilling His mission. They would not see the glory when faced with fear and death and the hoardes of hell in battle formation against their dear friend; against the One they confessed to be the very Son of God. They would not see the glory in what looked like a humiliating and horrid defeat.

Yet the glory of the cross was the very same as the glory they witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration. In fact, even greater, if it is possible to say that. For on the Mount of Transfiguration, we see the glory of Jesus that was always His. But

mounted on the cross on that place called Golgotha, or, the place of the skull, **we see the glory of Jesus that is for us.** The glory of His self-giving love. The glory of Jesus laying down His glorious life, that you and I share in that glory. That by virtue of His fulfilling His mission, not just He, but we be transformed and share in his glory.

To do that would take a death and resurrection. The first part of that we can do - the death part. We die; the penalty of our sin and sinfulness. But the second part - the resurrection part - we cannot do. Apart from Jesus, sin, death, grave, and hell is our home and all we have to look forward to.

But the Transfiguration of Jesus shows us that the One who enters into our sin, death, grave, and hell on the cross is not One who is imprisoned by them, but the One who has come to take our *captivity captive* (Ephesians 4:8 KJV) and so set us free. Free when we enter into His glory in eternal life, yes. But free even now in this life, too. Free, that even though we sin and are sinned against, that even though we will die and mourn the deaths of others, that even though satan seems powerful in this world and life, because of Jesus' death and resurrection, these things cannot hold us captive. Theirs is but a temporary conquest; the victory of Christ Jesus is everlasting.

And it is one more Old Testament story that helps us see this - the one we heard today, when Elijah was taken up into heaven. That is a foreshadowing of Jesus' own ascension, but it's what comes next that is most significant for you and I here today. For after Elijah is taken up into heaven by fire and wind, Elisha is given a double portion of his spirit to carry on. . . .

But now, after *Jesus'* ascension, the *fullness* of the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the church by fire and wind on Pentecost. And in the power of His Spirit we now carry on. We don't succeed him, like Elisha succeeded Elijah - He now lives in us, taking us through this life with its sorrows and challenges, through our own death in His resurrection, and finally into life with Him, and with Moses and Elijah and all the saints who have gone before us.

And so the man on a mission has completed His mission for us, and is now completing His mission in us. His Spirit is poured out upon you in Holy Baptism and you are washed clean from the stench and decay of your sin and death by His blood - and by that washing of Jesus, you are made whiter than anything on this earth could make you. That's the reason why there used to be a custom in the church that a newly baptized person would be clothed in a garment of white as soon as they came out of the font to symbolize and confess that Baptism is our Transfiguration. As one pastor I recently read said, "*It's the moment when Jesus grabs hold of us and marks us as co-heirs with Him of His glory. When He says:*

“You're my family. You're my sister. You're my brother. You will share my glory with me forever.” (Pastor William Weedon, Sermon for the Transfiguration of our Lord 2011). And so in Baptism, Jesus is still on a mission for you.

A mission which continues now too in His Supper, as the Body and Blood of our Lord comes to feed you and glorify you with His forgiveness, life, and salvation here given to you. That you may be changed. For the food given to you here isn't changed into you - it changes you into what it is: a full-fledged child of God, with whom your Father in heaven is well-pleased.

And so the Transfiguration of our Lord “lifts the veil,” as St. Paul would say, and ***gives the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*** to us. To see the glory that Christ has provided for us, that awaits us, and that is here for us. A glory that is ours even in the midst of suffering, trial, temptation, and loss. We experience all of things here and now, but that doesn't mean there is no glory. Jesus teaches us today how to see the glory that is now hidden, *but real*. The glory that is on top of the mountain and also comes down the mountain. The glory of Christ and His life that, as that same Peter would later write, *is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, and being kept in heaven for you* (1 Peter 1:4).

Now, looking to heaven and eternal life that *doesn't* mean that we live with our feet off the ground and our heads in the clouds - as Christians are sometimes accused of. It means, rather, that we can live a grounded life of Christian vocation now in its fullness and freedom. Loving, giving, serving, and forgiving no matter what the outcome. That's what those disciples did. They went down the Mount of Jesus' Transfiguration and later down off the Mount of His Ascension, and they lived life in its fullness and freedom, even giving their lives in martyrdom. For they had been changed.

And *you* have been changed. Make no mistake about it! And so too you now live in this glorious freedom. And therefore, confident of your Saviour's love and forgiveness, and the glory He has bestowed upon you, you can confess with Peter: ***It is good to be here.*** And it is. Wherever you are and whatever you happen to be going through - the good or the bad, the high or the low, joy or sorrow, ease or difficulty. It is good. For though the mountains change, the glory does not. *For the man on a mission* is working still . . .

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.