

The Festival of the Transfiguration of our Lord
St. Matthew 17:1-9
February 10th, 2019
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

He Was Transfigured Before Them

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

The Israelites were led out of Egypt by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. This same pillar of fire and cloud stood between the army of Pharaoh and the people of Israel as they entered into the Red Sea. After Moses consecrated the Tabernacle of Meeting a thick cloud covered the entire Tabernacle of Meeting so thickly that Moses could not enter into the Tabernacle of Meeting. The Lord God Who was in the cloud would lead the people of Israel for forty years as they wandered in the wilderness. This same cloud appeared when Solomon dedicated the temple. Again, the cloud was so thick that the priests could not minister in the Holy Place because the cloud was filled with *“the glory of the Lord”* and that glory filled the temple.

This cloud was the physical representation of the Lord God dwelling with His people. Where the cloud was, the Lord God was. Where the cloud went, the Lord God went. And the people of Israel followed Him and stayed with Him when He remained in one place. The Apostle St. Peter talks about this *“glory”* in his second epistle to the faithful followers of the Lord God. He calls it an *“Excellent Glory.”* He, and Sts James and John, beheld the glory of the Lord. They were in the presence of the Lord God while they were surrounded by the cloud. And St. Peter relates that experience to the faithful in his second epistle. It was an experience he would never forget. He was in the presence of the Lord God. The Lord + Jesus had transfigured before them. He shed for a moment the image of His humanity, and revealed to them, as He spoke with Moses and Elijah, the true nature of Who He was. He was the Messiah, the Son of God, just as St. Peter had confessed just six days prior to this (as the Evangelist St. Matthew alludes to at the beginning of our reading). Here on this holy mountain, the Lord + Jesus pulls back the veil to reveal Who the Son of God really is.

No wonder he and Sts. James and John were so very terrified. Sinners were in the presence of the righteous and holy Lord God. They were right to fall on their faces. Sinners, meaning us, should also be terrified of our sinfulness in the presence of the holy Lord God. And, we are in His presence when we come into this holy place. He is present in His Word and His sacraments. We who are unholy on account of our sin, come to meet with the sinless and holy Lord God in this place. Our sins and unrighteousness should frighten us.

But even though the disciples Sts. Peter, James and John were scared out of their gourd, they still did not want the event to end. The *“glory of the Lord”* was so great they did not want it to end. The

“Excellent Glory” was so terrifying but thrilling that they wanted to remain there on the holy mountain. So then, as Elijah and Moses were about to depart (we are told in another Gospel), St. Peter speaks up and tells the Lord + Jesus that it was good to be there, and that three tabernacles should be built, one for the Lord + Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. We are, again, told by another Gospel Evangelist that St. Peter was so afraid he was not aware of what he was saying.

St. Peter wanted this to go on even though he was scared out of his wits. But, he had it all wrong. The dwelling with the Lord God was not to take place in tents or tabernacles. The dwelling of the Lord God with His people was to take place in the Man Christ + Jesus. He was the living, breathing, walking, talking tabernacle of the Lord God. Even though He shone like the sun in all of His *“Excellent Glory”* and it scared them so, this Man was God in the flesh and it was through Him that men might be in the presence of the Lord God.

We are shown this by the events of the Gospel reading, for while St. Peter was still talking about building tabernacles for the Lord, Moses and Elijah, a bright cloud appeared and enveloped them. The same cloud that led the Israelites out of Egypt. The same cloud that stood between them and the army of Pharaoh. The same cloud that enveloped the Tabernacle of Meeting so that Moses could not enter, and the same cloud that enveloped the Temple of Solomon so that the priests could not minister in the Holy Place, was now enveloping the Lord + Jesus, Moses, Elijah, and Sts. Peter, James and John. They were frightened before, but now they were downright terrified as they experienced the presence of the Lord God. The same presence of the Lord God that Moses spent time with on the holy mountain when he received the Law, and Whom Elijah preached and prophesied about.

A Voice came from the cloud and set St. Peter aright. *“If you want to dwell with Me, I AM not found in tabernacles built by the hands of man, but I AM found in flesh of this Man Who is God. He is My Beloved Son in Whom I AM well-pleased, hear Him!”* The Lord + Jesus is the One in Whom we are to look if we want to be in the presence of the Lord God. Sts. Peter, James and John, had been in the presence of the Lord God for three years now. They had confessed as much just six days prior to the events of today’s Gospel, when the Lord + Jesus had pulled His disciples aside and asked them, *“Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”* To which St. Peter famously said, that He was the Christ, the Son of God. They knew He was the Son of God. They had confessed that. Today, they get to see exactly what that means.

“He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white and the light.” The Lord God had chosen to dwell with His people. He had taken upon Himself our flesh, and chose to dwell with us. Moreover, He did not just desire to dwell with us—to hang out with us for a few years—he desired to redeem us from sin, death and the power of the devil. He became Man so that He could fulfill the Law for us. He became Man so that He could take our punishment upon Himself and suffer and die for us. He became Man so that after He accomplished our redemption, He might send to us His Comforter—the Holy Ghost—so that we might be given faith through the means of grace.

Sts. Peter, James and John were terrified when the cloud enveloped them and spoke to them about the Son of God, our Lord + Jesus Christ for the full *“Excellent Glory”* of the Lord + Jesus was revealed to them. The physical representation of the Lord God among His people was found in the cloud that lead them and dwelled with them. But now, the physical presence of the Lord God was found in the Man Christ + Jesus. It is to Him where we go if we want to be with the Lord God. It is to Him we must listen if we want to be in the presence of the Lord God.

The Apostles were in the presence of the Lord God when they were with the Lord + Jesus. We are in the presence of the Lord God whenever we are participating in the means of grace. The means of grace are the representation of the Lord + Jesus in our midst. When we hear His Word—His preaching—we are in His presence. He is here with us today through His Word, both the Word words

found in the liturgy and the Scripture readings, and from the voice of His servant from this pulpit. He is here with us today in His Word. He is with us every day when we meet Him in His Word.

He is also with us every day when we remember and live in our Holy Baptisms. In our Holy Baptism He first revealed to us His glory. For He spiritually drowned us and all sins within us, and filled us with His Holy Ghost, so that we may live righteously and holy before Him. Whenever we remember that we are baptized—whenever we remember that the Old Adam in us has been drowned and killed, so that we are now a new creation—we are in the presence of the Lord + Jesus, for He casts out of us all our sin, and replaces it with His Holy Ghost, as we live as a New Adam in His presence.

This Holy Baptism that we remember causes us to confess our sins to the pastor as if to the Lord God Himself. And we are once again brought to be in the presence of the Lord + Jesus when we are reminded by the pastor that our sins are forgiven. Not on account of anything we have done. But solely because of the passive and active obedience of our Lord + Jesus. We are reminded that our sins are forgiven because Christ + Jesus fulfilled the Law for us and suffered and died in our place on the tree of the holy cross.

We are brought to this cross whenever we eat and drink our Lord's Body and Blood in bread and wine. Just as we are buried with Him in the waters of our Holy Baptism, in the Lord's Supper we remember His death for us when we commune with Him. We are brought to the cross to dwell with Him and eat and drink with Him. It is a foretaste of what is to come in Heaven. The Lamb of God—our Lord + Jesus—dwelling with His Bride—the Church; dwelling with us. In this meal we get a very small picture of what it will be like in Heaven as we dwell for all eternity with our Lord + Jesus Christ, and all the saints who clung in faith to the Lord + Jesus during their earthly lives.

This place of worship is also a very small picture of what Heaven will be like. Here in this place, as our Lord + Jesus promised that wherever two or three persons were gathered together in His Name, He would be with us. That means that He is here with us, His people. We as the people of God gather together to be with Him. Indeed! But we also gather together as the Body of Christ—the Body of Believer in the Lord + Jesus. So that we might share our joys and hopes with one another, and share our tears and sorrow with one another. We comfort one another, and rejoice with one another, because we cling to the Lord + Jesus. We comfort one another with the remembrance of all that He has done for us in spite of who we are or what we have done. And we rejoice with one another for the same reason; that He has done so many great and wonderful things for us. In this place, this tiny picture of Heaven, we remind one another what our Lord + Jesus does and has done for us.

Therefore, the cloud that enveloped the holy mountain and terrified Sts. Peter, James and John so, is now found in the Person of the Son of God, the Messiah, our Lord + Jesus Christ. We do not have to go up into a high mountain to be with Him, we just need to come to this place of worship, and join with other fellow believers in Christ and share His gifts for us. Just as He touched the disciples and dispelled their fear, He comes to us through His Word and tells us that there is no need to be afraid, for He has taken away the power from sin, death and the devil through the victory that He won for us on the tree of the holy cross. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!