

THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

Text: 2 Peter 1:16-21; St. Matthew 17:1-9

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

“Arise, shine; for your Light has come! And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you!” So writes the prophet Isaiah. Yet, this Light can only be seen by those who believe. Not in some gnostic sense, as though this Light can only be comprehended by those who have obtained to a hidden knowledge. This Light shines upon the nations that all who believe may come to the Light. This “Light” is CHRIST JESUS, our LORD.

If you had tended sheep in the fields around Bethlehem when JESUS was born, you would not have known Him, nor would you have known of Him. It took the angels of Heaven announcing His miraculous birth to shepherds as they kept watch over their flocks by night, to reveal who this Child is, and just where He was to be found. For the Magi, it took a miraculous occurrence of a star to point the way to JESUS.

Herod had to kill every male child two years old and younger in Bethlehem in his attempt to rid himself of what he considered an infant rival. You see, JESUS was not born with a nimbus, that is, a halo around His head identifying Him as the only-begotten SON of God and the divine and true King of Israel. But what did it matter to Herod if there was a little collateral damage as long as the usurper was dead too?

If you had walked pass JESUS in Jerusalem or one of the ten cities of the Decapolis, if you saw Him on the beach of the Sea of Galilee, you probably would have walked by Him without much notice on your part. He looked just like every other young Jewish man in Israel. There was nothing about His appearance to set Him apart from other men.

Again, from the prophet Isaiah, *“He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him.”* Even in death, for most, He was just one more of the countless victims of Roman justice. To see Him as anything else, as anyone else, requires faith, and faith requires the grace of God.

The word, *“transfiguration”* means to transform the figure or appearance of something. Still, it does not mean that a thing becomes something it is not. The substance of a thing transfigured does not change, but only its appearance changes.

Consider then, a child as he or she grows. Outwardly, the child’s appearance transforms from infant, to toddler, to pre-adolescent, to adolescent, to teenager, and

finally adult. Outwardly, the child is transfigured from one stage of growth to the next. Indeed, you might not even recognize the child at all as the same person when they are an adult and fully grown, and especially so when the child grows old, but inwardly, the child does not become something he or she is not. Their DNA remains the same. Their gender remains the same. They are born human and remain human.

So, too, the CHRIST. Most traditional approaches to the transfiguration of our LORD follow one or the other of two categories: the revelation of JESUS as God, and thus, emphasizing His divinity, or JESUS, as man, and thus, emphasizing His humanity and how our bodies will be transfigured just as His upon resurrection.

Yet, how does one separate one from the other? JESUS is fully human and fully God. One cannot separate one from the other, this part flesh and this part God. As we confess in the words of the Athanasian Creed: *“Although He is God and man, He is not two but one CHRIST: One, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the humanity into God; One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one CHRIST.”*

It is this CHRIST whose light and glory Saints Peter, James, and John beheld that day on the mountain. It was His glory that shown forth, the glory St. John describes as *“... the glory as of the only-begotten of the FATHER, full of grace and truth.”* The glory St. Peter calls, *“His majesty... received from God the FATHER.”* It is CHRIST JESUS, true God and true man of whom the FATHER speaks, *“This is My beloved SON, in whom I am well pleased.”* Through His transfiguration on that holy mountain, God invites us to see JESUS as He truly was, is, and always shall be, the veil of His humanity giving way to the glory of His divinity, but without diminishing the Man.

Thus, do we Lutherans rightly celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration of Our LORD during the season of Epiphany, for Epiphany celebrates what cannot be seen with the eyes of flesh, but only through the eyes of faith.

You see, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Nativity of Our LORD as a historical event. Though we cannot know for certain, the Church has set aside the 25th of December as the day for the celebration of our LORD’s birth where we stand admiring the Holy Infant born of Mary. But we cannot know this Infant is God by gazing only at His cherubic face. We cannot know that He is born to save us from ourselves, from Satan, and the grave. We must be made to see that which is hidden. That requires faith, and due to our weakness, faith requires an epiphany.

It is for this reason, as we journey together through the season of Epiphany, that we celebrate, not a single event, but a series of events in the life of JESUS that reveal Him as

the only-begotten SON of God the CHRIST, the MESSIAH, and our SAVIOR and our LORD God. Thus, during our Epiphany meditations we see in the life and actions of our SAVIOR, that *“JESUS is the CHRIST, the SON of God,”* indeed, that JESUS is God, *“and that believing, we may have life in His name.”* If you are willing to accept it, the entire life of JESUS’ is an epiphany.

Thus, we see that JESUS is the embodiment of God made visible, not only to the eyes of flesh, but to our hearts and the eyes of faith. In JESUS, we are given to look upon God’s face without the fear of death. In JESUS, the veil of the temple is torn in two, and the glory of the LORD that spills forth from the Holy of Holies, filling the temple, and tabernacle before it, now shines on His people from the source of all light—JESUS! No longer does God reside in tents made of animal skins or in temples made of stone. He tabernacles among us in the flesh of the God/Man, JESUS CHRIST.

So, we are now blessed, and faith in our SAVIOR, who is indeed, the only-begotten SON of God, has grown, even as we have watched our LORD grow, from the Babe of Bethlehem, to a young Boy in His FATHER’s house doing His FATHER’s business, to a young Man who has entered into His ministry, bringing us the forgiveness of sin through reconciliation to that same FATHER. We praise God, the FATHER, who, through His HOLY SPIRIT, has given us ears to hear and hearts to believe in His SON, to whom we are to listen.

Do you wish to see the glorified JESUS? Here is where He has promised to be for you—in His Holy Church. Here, in this place and thousands more like it, you will find JESUS, exactly where He said He would be, glorified in the Tabernacle of His Flesh, establishing and maintaining His Kingdom among us. In His holy Church, we are given the Words of the New Covenant, we are sprinkled with CHRIST’s holy Covenant Blood and we eat and drink with God without fear as His beloved children.

Here, the voice heard by St. John the Baptist at the Baptism of our LORD, the voice heard by Sts. Peter, James, and John as our LORD was transfigured before them, here, we echo and confess, *“I believe in one God, the Father Almighty ... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God”* JESUS is the FATHER’s beloved SON, in whom you are made a beloved child of the FATHER and through whom our FATHER in Heaven is well pleased with you.

Today, Christians do not see GOD’s glory in signs and wonders, in the miracles JESUS performed, nor do we demand or need them. We see God’s glory in JESUS Himself. Today, we are granted to see the Man who has always been God.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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1/21/24 A✠D