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The Transfiguration of Our Lord (Series A)

February 26, 2017

Text: Matthew 17:1–9

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Epiphany season comes to a fitting conclusion today with the account of our Lord's Transfiguration from Matthew 17. Since January 6, the Epiphany of Our Lord, I have attempted to follow a unifying theme for most of our Sunday service: the Jesus born in Bethlehem, worshiped by magi from the east, who was baptized by John the Baptist into our sin and death, followed by men called to be disciples, who teaches God's people the way of repentance, salvation by His grace, and good works that glorify God the Father almighty, that Jesus, is the sinner-saving Lord of glory!!!

This morning, we get one final glimpse of who this sinner saving Jesus is. It both amazes and shocks us with the glory, majesty, grandeur, and self-sacrificing love of our Lord Jesus. Let's begin at vs. 1.

Jesus takes with Him Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. Tradition says the high mountain is Mount Tabor in southern Galilee. When this occurs is most fascinating. Matthew indicates that it took place "after after six days." The six days is a verbal, temporal clue to our Lord's teaching where He declared most clearly that He would "go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Matt. 16:21).

Who is this Jesus, who for three years has been teaching, healing, and proclaiming God the Father's eternal kingdom? From all appearances, Jesus was an ordinary looking Jewish man, not much different from so many thousands of Jewish men in His day. Our Lord amazed people with His authoritative teaching. And the miracles certainly testified that Jesus was, at the very least, a mighty prophet, maybe even THE prophet prophesied in Deuteronomy 18, the new Moses who will speak God's Word and commands (Deut. 18:19). Or, maybe He was the new Elijah promised to come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5–6). Otherwise, Jesus is a normal looking man. He is a man, born of the Virgin Mary.

Two things happen that reveal more is going with Jesus than what appears to be happening. On the top of the high mountain, the Lord's visible appearance, that was so ordinary, changes. His face shines with unborrowed light, a light of pure whiteness and holiness. And then Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus and hold conversation about the mighty things of God (vs. 2–3).

This sinner-saving Jesus is also true God. The events on the Mount of Transfiguration give us a glimpse at Jesus' divine identity. Jesus had taught that He is God's eternal Son manifested in human flesh and blood; His authoritative teaching and miracles testified to His divine identity. But the truth of who Jesus is had to be received by faith. Peter, James, and John are now experiencing that truth.

A bright cloud overshadowed the six participants on the Mount of Transfiguration. From that cloud, God the Father speaks, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." Those are words we should forever emblazon on our heart, mind, and soul. Listen to Jesus. Listen to Jesus, the Father's Son. Listen to Jesus, beloved, well-pleasing Son of God the Father Almighty. "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." This is who the Christ is. Fully and completely God revealed in human flesh and blood. This is the Christ we are to follow daily even unto death; the Lord Jesus Christ is God and man in one person. He is the sinner-saving Lord of glory.

The Father, on the Mount of Transfiguration, declared that He is well pleased with His Son (vs. 5). What is it that Jesus has done or is doing or is about to do that pleases the Father? It has everything to do with the conversation that Jesus was having with Moses and Elijah (vs. 3). Luke's gospel provides a little more insight for he records that they were talking about the departure Jesus would accomplish in Jerusalem. This departure or exodus refers to His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, followed by His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension back to the right hand of His Father. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to fulfill this saving will of His Father, and the Father is well pleased with what Jesus is doing and will do.

But we mustn't forget what our Lord has already done that is pleasing to our Father in heaven. Recall, Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. At that great occasion, Jesus submitted to a sinner's baptism. By so doing, Jesus identified Himself with sinful humanity. He became one of us, not only by taking on our human nature, but by taking upon Himself our sin. At that moment, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus and God the Father spoke. What our Father in heaven said will sound most

family, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased” (Matt. 3:17). That baptism in Jordan’s River set our Lord on His path to Jerusalem: triumphal entry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

Jesus willingly accepts the Father’s plan to save His people, to save you and me. And what joy it gave the Son to take up this divine mission. The writer of the book of Hebrews says about Jesus, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...” (Heb 12:2). Jesus is no begrudging Son going through the motions of obedience. Jesus found the Father’s will to save us complete joy even though He would endure the agonies of humanity’s sin and death.

Jesus’ love for His Father and for us transcends human comprehension. Through Jesus’ willing obedience to the Father, we are made sons and daughters of God. Through Jesus, we are heirs of the Father’s eternal kingdom. Is it any wonder then why the Father is pleased with His beloved Son? He is the perfect, obedient Son who accomplishes the impossible for us and our salvation. Thanks be to Jesus.

We must remember that the Father spoke His words of love and commendation originally to Peter, James, and John. Those 3 disciples not only saw the transfigured Jesus but also the glorified Moses and Elijah. This was truly a supernatural moment. Peter wants to make three tents, three shrines, if you will. One for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. It’s not entirely clear what Peter was thinking when he offered to make three tents. But the effect was to place Jesus on an equal footing with Moses and Elijah.

God the Father wouldn’t stand for it. Listen to Jesus. He’s greater than the Law given through Moses. Jesus is greater than the prophetic message pronounced through Elijah and the prophets. Jesus is far superior to the Law and the Prophets for He, and He alone fulfills them. So listen to Jesus. All others must bow to the authority of the Lord Jesus, that includes the exalted Moses, Elijah, and anyone else you might think to mention.

Jesus is the Beloved, well-pleasing Son of God the Father. That’s why we are to listen to Him. That’s why we are to take up our cross and follow Jesus. We can’t follow Moses and the 10 Commandments and hope to be saved. We can’t follow the zealous preaching of Elijah and the prophets and hope to obtain eternal life. Only listening to Jesus fulfills the deepest longings of our hearts and souls. Listen to Jesus, dear saints.

Peter, James, and John are absolutely undone by this experience. Vs. 6 says they fell on their faces terrified. This is a truly transcendent experience of God's divine glory and majesty. Afterwards, Peter reflects upon this experience in his second epistle. He remembers the Majestic Glory who said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (II Pet. 1:17). And yet, Peter concludes that "we have something more sure – more sure than what? the experience of Jesus' transfiguration! – the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place" (II Pet. 1:19). God's inscripturated Word is more sure than any sublime experience of mystic visions or any overwhelming sense awe or myriads and myriads of miracles. What is taking place here today in the reading and preaching of God's Word, in the reception of Christ's body and blood, in the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, in prayers of faith and holy fellowship is more sure than any kind of Transfiguration experience!! The Father Himself says listen to Jesus.

And wouldn't you know it. The three disciples were given an immediate opportunity to listen to Jesus. Vs. 7, "But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and have no fear.'" The first words of Jesus they hear are words of resurrection and absolution. The gloomy shadow of death, sin, and Satan are dispersed. Jesus goes to Jerusalem to die and rise again. The fear of condemnation is over. Jesus bears all sins to Jerusalem, including yours and mine. They are nailed to Jesus' cross never to be removed. Have no fear. Our eternal future is divinely secure in Christ Jesus. For the glory Peter, James, and John saw in Moses and Elijah is our future too! When Christ returns on the Last Day, we shall share in the resurrection glory of Christ our Lord.

The Mount of Transfiguration gives us a glimpse of what is to come. Until then, listen to Jesus. Listen to Jesus, the well-pleasing, beloved Son of the Father. Listen to Jesus, your Lord and Savior.

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.