

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday after Epiphany –Transfiguration, January 24, 2010

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Hymns: 375, 387:5, 135, 9, 644

Lessons: Exodus 34:29-35, 2 Peter 1:16-18, Matthew 17:1-9.

Text: Luke 9:28-36

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Jesus Christ was single-minded about his calling and his work on earth. Everything he did pointed toward that work of redeeming all mankind from their sins. Even as a 12-year old boy he had to be about his heavenly Father's business. But because of the enormity and the weight of that task, he was constantly praying.

I think that praying was the most important way that Jesus received strength for the task, but today you will be reminded of how Jesus, on the mount of transfiguration, received special strengthening from his heavenly Father and from Moses and Elijah. Today you will see Jesus' glory revealed in a special way, his glory which was usually hidden while he was on earth. In the transfiguration, Jesus received help and strength for all that lay ahead of him. Let's look at how

JESUS' TRANSFIGURATION STRENGTHENS HIM FOR HIS CALLING

- 1. The transfiguration.**
- 2. The prophets who appeared with Jesus.**
- 3. The Father is well pleased with his Son: *"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"***

This is recorded in three of the Gospels, each adding to the picture. The exact mountain is unknown. The evangelists also start their history with a different number of days, but are counting from different events. Matthew records that this was 6 days after Jesus' first specific announcement of his coming suffering and death. Matthew tells us *"he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light."* Mark writes: *"he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."* Luke says: *"As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning."*

What Peter, James, and John and we are seeing is that the Glory of Jesus as true God was really revealed here. Jesus went up on this mountain to pray, to talk with His heavenly Father, for the purpose of getting wisdom and strength for His coming difficult work. And God revealed Himself in a remarkable manner. For while Jesus was engaged in prayer, His entire appearance changed. The appearance of His face became brilliant, and all His clothing became white, shining, like a flash of lightning. He was changed, transformed, transfigured before the three disciples. One writer said "His common, mortal body was changed to a spiritual, immortal body. Not only was His body transfigured, but even His clothing showed this remarkable change. It became shining or glittering, charged with light, and so snowy white that no cleaner or clothing whitener on earth would have been able to produce such absolute whiteness. The entire appearance of Christ was one of indescribable splendor", much more so even than that of Moses, as you heard in our Old Testament lesson. This was a most peculiar, miraculous phenomenon: While Jesus was praying, He was transfigured, transformed, before them. His physical body was glorified with spirituality. This was a foretaste of His future glorification. Not only did His face shine like the sun itself, but His clothing became white, pure as snow glistening in the sunlight, like the essence of light itself. All this was visible to the three disciples with him.

His divine glory, which was always present in Himself, but which was usually hidden or revealed only occasionally such as when he performed miracles, here shone through His outward form and person. This was a magnificent revelation of His glory before their eyes. It was an undeniable proof of the fact that He was truly

the Son of God; it was visible evidence of His future coming into His glory through his suffering and death. In this special appearance of Christ we see that he is truly the Son of the living God.

All three evangelists tell us that ***“two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus.”*** But Luke tells us ***“they spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”*** The word “departure” means exit, literally “exodus”. So it refers to the fact that he would be departing this earth after his sufferings and death.

Jesus had this tremendously difficult mission before him: he knew he had to go to Jerusalem and be crucified. He knew that he was going to suffer horribly, and die a horrible death. And these two Old Testament prophets appear to him at this time to strengthen and encourage him for the task he knew lay ahead of him.

Peter, James, and John could see and recognize Elijah and Moses, who then had a conversation with Christ concerning His glorification. Moses, the great teacher of the Law and prophet of Jehovah, and Elijah, the prophet that had been so zealous for the honor of Israel's God, were fitting representatives of the Old Covenant. In addition both of these Old Testament prophets had something most unusual happen at the time they left this earth. Moses had died and been buried by the hand of God, who alone knew where his grave was located, and Elijah had been taken up into heaven by the Lord, without death, as we read in 2 Kings 2:11: ***“As [Elijah and Elisha] were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.”***

How they knew the prophets is not important, just as in heaven we will recognize everyone there. But they recognized them, they knew them at once. Both of these prophets were actually seen by them as they talked with Jesus about His death, which Jesus knew was soon to happen. Because of the circumstances of their death, we could say that both of these prophets bodies' had not seen corruption, that is, they had not decayed, and they were speaking to the Lord Jesus, whose body could not see corruption, whose body would not decay in the grave. They were also witnesses and representatives of the Old Covenant. Now here, in the person of Jesus, was one greater than the Law who, by His perfect fulfillment of the Law, would redeem those that were under the Law. The disciples were dazzled by the brilliance of what they saw.

Luke tells us that ***“Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ (He did not know what he was saying.)”***

This is the impetuous Peter, who was often speaking out, sometimes without thinking carefully. He no doubt voiced the opinion of the others when he cried out: Lord, it is good for us to be in this place. He wanted at once to build three shelters or tabernacles, one for Christ, one for Moses, one for Elijah, so that they might stay there in glory. One writer suggested that his underlying thought may have been that it would be so much more pleasant to stay here, where the glory of heaven had been brought down to them, than to go to Jerusalem and have Jesus enter upon his suffering.

Peter had perhaps been thinking of the great Festival of Tabernacles, when all Israel lived in huts or shelters or “tabernacles” made of branches of trees during the eight days of celebration. Surely this was a very emotional experience for Peter, and so he was ready to stay here indefinitely.

Notice that these followers of Jesus had just a mere peek, a single glance, into the glory beyond the grave which will be given to believers. How much more glorious will the reality be, when Christ Himself will be visible to all believers in eternal transfiguration, and not only Moses and Elijah, but all the myriads of God's elect will be with Him, talk with Him, and praise Him, forever and ever! Peter might have thought that Moses and Elijah had come to stay. His impulsive nature prompted him to say something. He didn't really know what to say in this instance, for he and James and John were no doubt frightened and amazed by what had happened. And the miracle had not yet ended. This miracle of the transfiguration happened in order to direct the attention to these important incidents, first, that a cloud, a bright and shining cloud enfolded the disciples; and secondly, that a voice came out of the cloud, for God the Father was present in the cloud. God's great glory was inside the cloud. Remember the words of our epistle lesson? ***“For [Jesus] received honor and glory from God the***

Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" 2 Peter 1:17.

The message which came out of the cloud was: This is My beloved Son; hear Him, give Him your full obedience. This voice from heaven echoes what was said at Jesus' Baptism. This was such a powerful testimony for the person and work of Christ that the disciples were astonished and fearful. God plainly calls attention to the Word of Jesus, demanding the careful attention and the obedience which God's Word deserves.

Just as quickly as the miraculous appearance had begun, it also ended. ***"Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus."*** The disciples, still half dazed saw no one but Jesus alone with them. Moses and Elijah had been returned to the place of eternal happiness. Jesus, their Master, now was with them again in His usual form and clothing, with no evidence of the glory which had just shone through Him. His reassuring words and touch brought them fully back to their senses. While they were descending from the mountain together, He gave them the command to tell no one of what they had seen until after his resurrection. Many people had an altogether wrong idea as to the work and mission of the Messiah, and it is entirely possible that any news of this miraculous event would only have strengthened this false conception. But at that time, when His death would have removed and disproved all wrong beliefs and hopes in an earthly Messiah with an earthly kingdom, and especially after He would have risen from the dead, then this revelation should be part of their preaching. They should not hesitate about proclaiming the full truth about the transfiguration. The three disciples accepted this command in the proper spirit of meekness and obedience. They kept their secret until the time that Jesus had indicated, even from the other disciples. In the mean time, however, they discussed the question among themselves, talking about the resurrection from the dead. Of course, they believed that there would be a resurrection of the dead on the last day, but perhaps didn't understand yet that Jesus himself would rise from the dead on the third day.

The voice of the Father boomed out almost the same words as at the baptism of Jesus: This is My Son, the Beloved One, in whom is My delight. It was a most solemn proof of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, and would sink into their hearts and minds forever. He is the one they and we should listen to in His Word. They and we should give unquestioned obedience. The time of the reign of the Law, as represented in Moses, and the time of mere prophecy, as represented in Elijah, was past. Now, grace and truth, the Gospel, the Gospel glory, have come with and in Jesus Christ. There is no need to look for further visions and revelations. We have the Word of Jesus, the Word of salvation.

At the voice from the cloud, the disciples ***"fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. 'Get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.'"*** In His touch was a world of understanding and cheering assurance. He urged them to arise and cast aside their fears. Strengthened in this way, they took courage to lift up their eyes, and saw no one but Jesus, just as they had known Him for several years, in His former appearance, in the form of His real body, with no visible signs of the glory which had just been revealed in Him. This was a marvelous vision they had seen. Not all men on earth have been blessed to see such a vision, not even the rest of the 12. But there is one way in which everyone may see Jesus. That is in His Gospel, where we both hear Him speak and see His glory. And seeing, we shall believe, for Jesus told us, too, in John 6:40: ***"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."*** Amen.