

## “A Most Glorious Mystery”

Mark 9:2–9 TransfigB 2-11-2018

Today is the Transfiguration of Our Lord, the most wondrous manifestation of our Lord’s glory in all of Holy Scripture. The apostle John connects it to Jesus’ birth: *“The Word became flesh. He pitched his tent among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”* Jn 1:14. Peter refers to it also *“We witnessed his majesty in person. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain”* 2 Pet 1:16–18.

We can only imagine what it must have been like for them to see their friend Jesus glowing from his face and his body and conversing with Moses and Elijah in their glorified state. Moses, the giver of the Law, set the stage for the Savior to come. For His law shows sinners that it can save no one, for none can keep it. We need a savior. Elijah stands in for all the prophets who had pointed to the coming Savior by calling God’s people to repentant and believe. The disciples saw not only the glory of God in the face of Jesus, but the story of God’s salvation. He signified with no uncertain signs that Jesus is His Son, anointed to save His people from their sins. With the glorious splendor and the two revered witnesses is it any wonder that Peter cries out in joy. “Rabbi, it is good that we are here”?

That joy disappears when the cloud covers them and they hear God’s voice say, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him’ ” Matthew notes that they fell on their faces and were terrified”

Why did their joy turn to fear? Who would not tremble in the presence of such glory, hearing the voice of the almighty Himself. We know that in the presence of the holy One, no one can stand. As it did for Adam and Eve, sin drives us to hide from God’s holiness. Even the great disciples feared the voice of God.

But as quickly as the glorious light, cloud, and thunderous voice made them cower in fear, just as quickly it was all over: “Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear.’ They looked and saw no one but Jesus, the man whom they knew as their friend.

Nothing had changed about him from moments before, except that his divine glory and the power of God were hidden by the veil again. Yet, now they knew who is behind the veil as they had not known before: the One who touches them and tells them not to fear.

Had secular reporters written this story, they would have focused on the glory of the supernatural and missed the greater glory at the end. That was when Jesus veiled his glory again, touched the fearful disciples with his humanity, and comforted them by removing their fear. He goes from there directly to the cross, where he will die to take away their reason for being afraid.

We rehearse this transformation in the Divine Service. Although we hear the voice of law the high point is the grace of God coming to His people. It is veiled in the human voice of the shepherd who speaks His forgiveness in His name.

And then again when Jesus veils himself in simple bread and wine, touches you, and says, “Do not be afraid. Take and eat and drink my body and blood given on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins, then depart in peace.”

Paul in our epistle uses the same transfiguration word found in the Gospel to say that we who have God’s spirit are being transformed from glory to glory. The glory of Christ that shown on the mountain will be on us fully in heaven. Our mortal bodies, now racked by disease and aging, will become immortal and glorified.

And yet because God’s Spirit has pitched His tent in us, we have His glory, though stained by our sinful nature. As Christ’s body and ambassadors on earth, we too can speak in Jesus name to those terrified of God’s judgment. To them and to one another we say, “Peace, do not fear.” For it is not ourselves, but Christ we proclaim as Lord. His light shines through us with the Gospel that removes all reasons to fear, including sin, and the fear of death and the devil.

For us today the real glory of the Transfiguration was not in its short lived splendor, but rather in the truth revealed when it was no longer present. That God has truly come to us in peace and mercy. We need not fear.

Amen.