

Feast of the Transfiguration

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Preacher: Seminarian Ian Jarrells

[0 : 00] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Please be seated. Since we did not hear a gospel text this morning on the transfiguration of our Lord, I would like to read the gospel account so that we may keep it in mind this morning. The transfiguration is found in the gospel of St. Luke, chapter 9, verses 28 through 36. Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that he took Peter, John, and James, and went up on the mountains to pray.

As he prayed, the appearance of his face was altered, and his robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his decease, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep. And when they were fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Then it happened, as they were parting from him, that Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here, and let us make three tabernacles, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, not knowing what he said.

[1 : 23] While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, hear him.

When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen. This event is one of the greatest revelations that was given to the apostles, and is rich with meaning to a people who were formed and shaped by what was revealed in the Old Testament.

When we read this today, it may strike us as odd, and we may wonder how we can understand the meaning behind what was written about this event. We may say, surely this had great meaning for the apostles, and I can tell you that if I was there, it would have probably had good meaning for me as well.

But what exactly is the importance of this event? How do I understand it? And how do I find meaning in this passage for myself? This is a good question, and there is great practical relevance for us, both in how we understand Jesus and how we understand our own destiny, both here and after we pass on from this earth.

Think back to when God gave the Israelites the law. Moses was instructed to go up the mountain of Sinai and to talk with God. He talked with God, and he received the commandments of the Lord, and he came down and instructed the people about the commandments of God.

[2 : 54] When Moses came down from the mountain with the tablets of the law, his face was shining. His encounter with God was something incredible. Because he was talking with the God who had created all things.

The sight to see was apparently incredible, because the people were afraid to even approach Moses and talk to him. The glory of God was so great that it was shining brightly on a created being to the degree that even that itself was terrifying.

Could you imagine seeing such a thing? Would we not be afraid as well, even as the shepherds who saw the angel coming to reveal to them the birth of their Savior? Moses, in this way, is a type or a figure of Christ.

Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. The covenant that was established with Abraham, was renewed with Isaac and Jacob, and was expanded upon by Moses. The glory of God shining from the face of Moses makes clear that the old covenant, as is said in our epistle text today, was a

good and a glorious thing that was revealed to God's people, because it was the way to experience God's love and favor, both as individuals and also as a group.

So how does this make Moses like Christ, then? Remember when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan. Moses was their leader, the one who, by the power of God, brought Pharaoh down from his high place and humbled him for the death of his firstborn.

[4 : 23] Moses was the one who, by the power of God, parted the Red Sea and led the Israelites out of their bondage. When it is said that Moses is a Messiah figure or a type of Christ, this is what that means.

Moving back to what the gospel says about the transfiguration, notice the similarities between the transfiguration of our Lord and Moses receiving the covenant of the law.

Moses went up to the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments, and his face shone as he came down from the mountain and talked with the people. When Christ was on the mountain with Peter, James, and John, not only his face, but his entire appearance was shining brightly like a star. Why not just his face? Is there significance to the fact that it was his whole body that was shining like a star, and not just his face like it was in the case of Moses? Well, the ancient Christians said that there is a reason why there was a difference.

You see, Moses' face was shining because the glory of God was given to him from the outside to him, from his interaction with God on the mountain. Jesus, however, was shining because the glory of God was being revealed from within.

[5 : 39] Jesus, the man who was born of the Virgin Mary, was being shown to be the very God of heaven and earth. As our epistle text today said, the glory of the old covenant is nothing compared to the glory of what was revealed in Christ.

As Christ was shining like a star, he was talking with Moses and Elijah about the departure he was going to make from the earth. They were speaking of the exodus that he was going to experience and take his people through.

His exodus, the departure of death, was being discussed while he was radiating the glory of God from his own body. Does this not mean that God's very nature is one who is able to radiate glory through even something as humiliating as the cross?

Our gospel text seems to indicate that. For the rest of the time, I'd like to make an attempt to draw two personal applications, ways that we can apply the meaning of the transfiguration in our own lives.

One of those applications focuses on our eternal destiny, and the other one focuses on our personal lives as we await our final destiny. First, let's orient ourselves towards the reality of our destiny.

[6 : 51] Well, it's a good question to ask. Why do we want to talk about that? Aren't we busy with the things of today? First, everyone is going to die, the only exception being those who are alive when Christ returns, so it's very likely that we'll all pass from this earth before he returns.

Since we don't know when that will be, we should assume that we are going to pass on before that happens. But it is important to think about that time after we pass on, because the glory that awaits is far greater than any glory that we can receive now.

For those of us who are baptized, we have already begun a journey towards God. We are pilgrims on this earth, journeying towards our own promised land, just as the Israelites were journeying towards their promised land after the exodus from Egypt.

We know what it's like to live this life. We experience it every day. We know the pains, the tribulations, the joys, the happiness, and whatever else comes our way on earth.

We know so many things about this life compared to what we know about what our lives will be like after we die. For many of us, this can be startling. It's easy to be afraid of the unknown in this life.

[8 : 01] So any thought about our life after death can be even scarier, for if we don't know things in this life, the one that we're currently living in, there are even more unknowns but the life to come.

However, we do know a few things about our experience after this life, and those few things can provide us with great comfort over any unknown thing about our life after death.

One thing we do know is that we will be made like Christ when he returns. So what does this practically look like? Remember the shining of Christ's body at the Transfiguration?

This is the shining of God's glory emanating from the body of Jesus, showing that his human nature is fully participating in the life of God. Jesus is the God-man, both his human and divine natures

fully united but not confused with each other, distinct but not separated into two persons. Our relationship to God will be analogous or similar to what is going on in the Incarnation. We will never be like Christ as he is by the nature of his Incarnation, but we are destined for an eternity of experiencing the divine life of the Holy Trinity.

[9 : 16] Ancient Christians describe it as the day that we will see God, not with our eyes because he is a spirit, but rather that our experience with him will be so intimate that it will be a glory that is incomparable to the glory that was revealed in the Old Covenant.

Our hope is not in the things of this world, but rather in us being drawn into the life of God for all eternity. Lastly, I would suggest that we have stages in our life where we are like Peter, James, and John at the Transfiguration, sleeping while the glory of God is shining so brightly in front of us. We are asleep in the presence of Christ, not awake to the glory that is shining. Our flesh is weak and our rational souls will succumb to the will of the flesh.

When we feel tired of the spiritual life that we are called to, when we are tempted to not be aware or looking for Christ in the midst of our world, let us wake up and remember what we are truly destined for.

We actually have a tangible promise for our deification, which is one of the names that we use for our eternal growth in the life of God. This promise is our baptism.

[10 : 30] In our baptism, we are united to Christ because we share a commonality. God became man so that our humanity could be united to his.

This is why we can say that we are the body of Christ, because Christ actually does have a human nature. In our baptism, we experience the exodus of Christ, the departure that Christ spoke about with Moses and Elijah during the Transfiguration.

Our baptism was not just the end of our bondage with sin, but it was the beginning of our deification, the beginning of us entering into the divine life of the Trinity.

So our eternal destiny doesn't wait for us after we die. It's already begun. Let us continue in what God has started, instead of falling behind and sleeping in front of the glory of Christ.

When we are told in the epistle of Philippians that we are to think upon whatever is good, whatever is true, and whatever is beautiful, we should be thinking of Christ, because his life with God is what we will eternally grow towards for all eternity.

[11 : 36] O God, who on the mount didst reveal to chosen witnesses thine only begotten Son, wonderfully transfigured, in raiment white and glistening, mercifully grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may be permitted to behold the King in his beauty, who with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth one God, world without end.

Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.