

The Transfiguration of Our Lord  
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## THE TRUE NATURE AND GLORY OF CHRIST REVEALED

Matthew 17:1-9

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

**T**his Epiphany season we have seen and heard much about Jesus. We have seen him as a child astounding the rabbis in the temple with his knowledge and insight; we've seen Him turn water into wine, heal a leper and a paralytic, calm rough seas, and preach the parable of the wheat and the tares. All of these events show who He really is: the Divine Son of God become man for us.

The three disciples, Peter, James and John, had been with Jesus for almost three years now. They had seen far more than we. They had already witnessed everything that Jesus had done or said in His public ministry. They had heard His powerful preaching. They had seen Him speak with authority when authority was called for, with compassion when compassion was needed, and always with a surprising candor and with power. For Jesus' Words, they had learned from experience, were not like the words of other people. His words caused miraculous things to happen, both within the hearts of the people, and externally through miraculous signs.

Oh yes they had witnessed signs; things that they had never dreamed they would see. They had tasted water that was made wine. They had seen the lame person pick up his bed and walk. They had been there when the blind were given sight. They had witnessed the first time that a human voice was heard by a person who had been deaf. They had heard demons shriek in fear as Jesus approached and watched as they were cast out and fled from His presence. And they had watched as multitudes were cleansed and made whole by Jesus. They had even seen Him raise people who had been dead back to life. And just six days earlier Jesus had asked them who they said that He was. And Peter had answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Today, on the day of Transfiguration, these three would see more clearly than ever before just how right that statement of faith was. Jesus had brought them up into a high mountain. According to St. Luke Jesus had gone to this mountain to pray. Peter James and John, looking on, had become quite sleepy. Then, suddenly coming fully awake they saw an amazing and fantastic sight. St. Matthew tells us: "His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him."



In that instant their faith in Jesus was confirmed. They could now see with unclouded vision that this man whom they had been following, whom they had watched, and to whom they had listened, was indeed the Son of God. For just a few moments they could see Him as He really was – God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God. For there He stood before them, shining from within with the Divine glory of God Himself and speaking to two of the most important prophets ever to have lived,

prophets who were now long since deceased and residing in heaven. If all that they had seen before was not enough to convince them who Jesus was, this would certainly do it.

But there was more going on in this vision of Christ's glory than the revelation of His Divine nature. Here also was shown His Divine purpose. It would not do the disciples much good to know that Jesus was God in man unless they knew why. The incarnation of the Son of God had a purpose. There was a reason why He came down from heaven, why He was born, and why He walked this world as a man among other men and women. But this the disciples didn't understand that day. Overcome by the vision of our Lord's glory and by the presence of the sainted prophets, they miss the underlying reason for what they were witnessing. And even though it had been explained to them beforehand by Jesus, they didn't understand it.

And so Peter says "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Peter didn't understand that the Lord's purpose, His reason for coming, was not to be on that mountain. The Transfiguration was important as a point of revelation, but it was not the goal of Christ's work. There would be no need for tabernacles to be built there for Jesus would not be staying in that place for long. His destiny would not allow it.

And what was this purpose which was revealed there? It was the very thing that Jesus was speaking about with Moses and Elijah. For Luke tells us: "[Moses and Elijah] spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." This was the reason for God becoming a man. This was the destiny that Jesus was sent to fulfill. He was there to die. Jesus Himself had said so to the disciples right after Peter confessed Him to be the Christ and Son of the Living God. Matthew tells us: "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." And now on the Mount of Transfiguration the same thing is being revealed and proclaimed. Jesus is shown to be the Christ the Son of the Living God, and accompanying this display

of Divine glory is more talk about going to Jerusalem and dying. And on the way down from the mountain, Jesus says to them: "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." Again the purpose for God becoming a man is revealed in Jesus' explanation that He must die and rise again.

The disciples, Peter, James and John, did not understand. They do not like this talk about death and resurrection. And so they immediately engage Jesus in a discussion about Elijah who had appeared with Him. And they ask Him why the scribes say that Elijah must come first. But He is not content to talk with them about Elijah. Elijah is not the point now. And so He says: "Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." Again He turns them to a discussion of His suffering and death. For this is the reason He was sent. This is His destiny as the God-man.

Still the disciples did not understand. It did not make any sense that the One who had just revealed His Divine Glory would be humiliated, mocked, and abused. It didn't make sense that this One whom they had just seen glowing with Heavenly Light on the Mount of Transfiguration would later be lifted up and crucified on Mount Calvary. It didn't make sense that God would come down in order to die. This was not what they expected in their Savior.

But this is exactly what God the Father expected. And it is just what Jesus intended to do. For from that day of Transfiguration He would set His face toward Jerusalem. He was going to go there to die for those disciples and not for them only, but also for you and for Me. He would offer Himself up as the payment and sacrifice for the sins of all mankind and He would literally take the penalty and the weight of our sins upon Himself and die in our place – that we might not be held accountable for them before His Father in heaven.

And we know that this is just what He actually did do. For Jesus did go up to Jerusalem and He was crucified. But He also rose again on the third day, just as He promised. His destiny was fulfilled. And what that meant for the disciples, and for you and me, is that the struggle with sin, death, and the devil is finished. The good tidings have been accomplished and now are proclaimed to us. The day of vengeance of our God is over and past and we who are in Christ no longer need to fear. Our days of mourning are over. We can have joy and praise our God. For He has forgiven us all of our sins. We no longer carry around the spirit of heaviness, but by His grace have been given the Spirit of Life. And now, by grace, by the Lord's planting of it in us, we are made righteous.

Thanks be to Jesus that He didn't do what Peter and the others wanted – that He didn't stay on that Mount of Transfiguration in glory. Thanks be that He went on to Jerusalem to accomplish His purpose and truly reveal Himself to be the Son of God – not by a display of glory, but by an unparalleled display of love and mercy toward you and me. Truly by this we can see that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Amen.

