

3 March 2019
The Transfiguration of Our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“From Glory to Glory”

Text: Luke 9:28-36 (Deuteronomy 34:1-12; Hebrews 3:1-6)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Now Peter and those who were with him, James and John, were heavy with sleep.

You know what that’s like. When you want to stay awake, but you just can’t. When your normally weightless eyelids seem to weigh a hundred pounds. Like when you’re trying to stay up and watch the ball drop on New Year’s Eve, or pull an all-nighter to finish that assignment that’s due tomorrow. But it’s no use. The harder you fight it, the heavier they get, and the more tired you become. And you don’t even notice yourself drifting off to sleep . . .

. . . until you wake up and the clock says it’s been two hours since the New Year began, or the sun announces the bad news that your assignment is now due. There’s panic. Or disappointment. Or both. You blew it. You missed it. It’s over.

So it was for Peter, James, and John. Jesus had chosen them for this special assignment, leaving the other nine disciples at the foot of the mountain they had just climbed with Jesus. Jesus began praying, and the three, well, they began struggling. They wanted to pray with Jesus - He had chosen them specially for this, after all! But the harder they fought off sleep, the sleepier they became . . .

. . . and sometime during this struggle, Jesus was transfigured, changed. *The appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.* Had they seen some of this before they fell asleep? That’s hard to imagine - drifting off in the middle of that! More likely, they fell asleep before this all began . . .

. . . and then they woke up. Some time later. How long had it been? And Moses and Elijah are leaving. And there was panic. Or disappointment. Or both. They blew it. They missed it. It’s over.

But what had they even missed? We heard of Moses on Mount Nebo in the Old Testament reading today, getting a glimpse of the Promised Land. *Had they missed that?*

A vision of heaven and Jesus in His glory there? Or maybe something with Elijah - Elijah had a famous contest with prophets of the false god Baal on Mount Carmel. 450 of them against just 1 of him. And yet God won a stirring victory for Elijah that day. *Had they missed something like that?* Or what about Moses on Mount Horeb and the burning bush and the holy ground? Or Moses on Mount Sinai, when God came down and spoke with him. Oh! So many thoughts must have filled their heads. *What had they missed?* And there was panic and disappointment. They blew it. They missed it. They're leaving . . .

So *wait!* Peter calls out. I'll set up three tents. Don't leave. Not yet. Please. Stay.

But when you fall asleep, the clock keeps ticking and you can't go back. When the sun comes up your assignment is due. Peter couldn't stop them.

But the truth is . . . they *hadn't* missed it. Not at all. Because they were going to see something even more glorious than this. The glory Jesus would show them on the Mount called Calvary. That's what Moses and Elijah were talking to Jesus about: ***His departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*** Where Jesus wouldn't just give a glimpse of the Promised Land, but where He would win it for us. Where He would defeat more than 450 false prophets - He would atone for the sin of all the world and disarm the hordes of hell. Where it wouldn't be the glory of His divinity lighting up the night, but the glory of His love lighting up the darkness of the sin in our hearts. They *didn't* miss that. That's now what they were going to see.

Which is what Jesus had been telling them - they just didn't understand. Yet.

So next, a cloud descends and overshadows them . . . what would they see now? Now that they were ***fully awake?*** Well, nothing. Instead, they hear. Which is far more important. For faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17), not seeing. And so the cloud descends and the voice of the Father tells them: ***This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!*** And then they see ***Jesus alone.*** Regular Jesus. Normal Jesus.

Or is it? Is *this* regular Jesus, normal Jesus? Or is the Jesus shining and gloriously bright the regular Jesus, normal Jesus? A pastor friend of mine said that the amazing thing isn't that Jesus' glory is shining through that night, but that it ISN'T at other times - that He keeps it concealed. That's the amazing thing, he said. For imagine if Jesus didn't. If His glory shone through when Judas and his mob showed up to arrest him! Or when Jesus was on trial before Pilate He started glowing. Or when the soldiers were whipping him or while they were nailing him to the cross He started dazzling their eyes! How quickly they all would have fled in fear! And there would have been no crucifixion, no atonement, no sacrifice, no forgiveness, no resurrection . . . no hope for us. For us there would be just panic because of our sins, and the punishment and condemnation we deserve because of them. Because heaven? Nope. We missed it. We blew it. On the Last Day we'd be trying to *hide* from glorious Jesus . . .

So Jesus tells them to keep silent and tell no one of anything they had seen. He doesn't want to be known and seen as shining Jesus, but as crucified Jesus, bloody Jesus, dead Jesus. *Our Jesus*. The Jesus who came to be with us. The Jesus who came to save us. The Jesus who came to die for us. That's the Jesus Moses and Elijah were talking to, and talking about. And that's the Jesus that Peter, James, John, the other nine disciples, and His Church ever since, would talk about. The Jesus we need.

The Jesus we need . . . because who is the regular you, the normal you?

Well, who is the regular Peter, the normal Peter? Is it the guy who confessed that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Matthew 16:16)? Or is it the one who sank in the water and denied even knowing Jesus? Or, who is the regular, the normal Thomas? The one who doubted Jesus' resurrection, or the one who said: *Let us go and die with Jesus* (John 11:16)? And what of the others, who all had their moments of good, but who also all doubted and questioned and failed?

So who is the regular, the normal, you? The one who forgives, who does good, who loves, who prays? Or the one who holds a grudge, who doubts, who sins, who fails, who . . . falls asleep?

Well, the regular, normal Jesus; the glorious Son of God, Jesus; the God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, Jesus, became like un-glorious us . . . so that regular, normal us, sinful us, failures us, sinful-from-birth-and-adding-to-that-burden-every-day us, might become like Him - glorious sons of God. And you see it, that glorious you, that baptized-into-Jesus you, shining through with His love and forgiveness and good. Or as one of those other apostles there on the mountain that night would later say: *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is* (1 John 3:2).

We will see Him as he is, in His glory. Your eyes are going to fall shut in the sleep of death, but when they open, when Jesus opens them in your resurrection, you won't have missed it - you'll see Jesus, along with Moses and Elijah and the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. No panic, just peace.

And then John says even more: *And we shall be like Him.* Fully and completely sons of God. Not our son-of-Godness shining through once and again, but *we shall be like Him.* Your sin gone forever. No disappointment. Only holy ground, holy people, with your holy God.

So maybe there's something for us to learn here, about glory. True glory. For when Jesus was all shining and brilliant, with Moses and Elijah, at exactly that glorious moment . . . they weren't talking about that kind of glory, they talking about His crucifixion. For, you

see, regular Jesus is glorious Jesus is crucified Jesus. It all goes together.

And for you too. At those times when our son-of-Godness shines forth, we shouldn't be talking about how glorious we are or how good we are doing, but about our crucifixion with Jesus and our resurrection with Him, our baptism, the source of anything good that is in us. For as we heard today from Hebrews: *the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself*. He gets the honor, not we.

And in those times of failure, when our sin gets the best of us, we shouldn't be talking in woe or despair, but about our Lord's crucifixion and the forgiveness He won for us there. For He is *the builder* of our lives, of our salvation. So no matter whether things are glorious and bright, or sinful and tough, we *listen to Jesus*. We listen to His Word of forgiveness. We listen to His Word of life. We listen. He builds. His Word does what it says. In you. Forgiveness. Life. And one day, glory.

So now in just three days, not eight days, we'll begin *our* journey to the glory of the cross, the season of Lent. So we'll sing our good-bye to alleluias in the closing hymn today, and look forward to shouting it again on Easter. We'll repent of our sin, we'll receive His forgiveness, and we'll marvel at His love. And we'll listen to these words, too: *This is My Body, This is My Blood, for the forgiveness of your sins*. And know that it's true. The one who gave Himself for you on the cross, is the one who gives Himself to you at the altar. The regular, glorious, crucified Jesus for you, that you be His.

And when you stand here, before the altar, and receive Jesus' Body and Blood, you know you haven't missed a thing. All that you need, you have, in Him. And so as Peter said, it really *is good that we are here*. Here, not on Mount Nebo, or Mount Horeb, or Mount Sinai, or Mount Carmel, or the Mount of Transfiguration, or even Mount Calvary - but here, at Mount Zion (Hebrews 12:22). Here, where Jesus is graciously present for you. Here, where we join together with Moses and Elijah and the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven around Jesus. Here, where it is not Jesus who is transfigured - you are.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.