



Around the Word
Bible Study
 Epiphany, 2017

The Light of Christ
 St. Matthew 17:1-9

On the Transfiguration:

"This was a deliberate sequence of events. For had Moses and Elijah remained with the Lord, it would have appeared uncertain to whom the Voice of the Father had given testimony. For when the cloud had passed they saw Jesus standing there, and that Moses and Elijah had disappeared. For after the shadow of the Law and the Prophets had disappeared (which had covered the Apostles as with a garment) both the one and the other are found in the Gospel."

—St. Jerome

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Introduction: The Light of the World

Concluding the epiphany season, Jesus gives us a peek at the true Morning Star that lights the heavenly city of Israel. No longer are we in need of greater or lesser lights, or lamps and wreaths, or stars, or prophesy. The Light of Light made flesh has changed our bodies into His immortal body and He unveils the true glory or the God-man in His Transfiguration.

Opening: Psalm 77:13-20

¹³Your way, O God, is | holy.*

What god is great | like our God?

¹⁴**You are the God who works | wonders;* you have made known your might among the | peoples.**

¹⁵You with your arm redeemed your | people,* the children of Jacob and | Joseph.

¹⁶**When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they | were afraid;* indeed, the deep | trembled.**

¹⁷The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth | thunder;* your arrows flashed on | every side.

¹⁸**The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted | up the world;* the earth trem- | bled and shook.**

¹⁹Your way was through the sea, your path through the great | waters;* yet your footprints | were unseen.

²⁰**You led your people | like a flock* by the hand of Moses and | Aaron. Glory be to the Father and | to the Son* and to the Holy | Spirit; as it was in the be- | ginning,* is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

Read St. Matthew 17:1-9

v.1: And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.

"And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed and all their hosts." Thus saith the Lord and so the wait begins, for on the seventh day, God rested. Where is the evening and morning for that day?

After Matthew 16:28, you can imagine the disciples chomping at the bit: when, when? See Matthew 24:3; Acts 1:6. It may be that the Transfiguration is a fulfillment of 16:28, but even on that high mountain, they do not receive Christ's glory, only the Christ does. What are the anxious disciples to do? See Psalm 130; Titus 2:13.

Do we have to wait long to receive Christ's glory, or at least its promise? See Acts 22:16.

What other events were only Sts. Peter, James, and John privy to? See Mark 5:37, 14:33.

v.2: And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

"Metamorphosis" is the Greek word translated into "transfigured." Jesus did not change into "spirit mode" or into something other than a man. Jesus metamorphoses into the purified, human form. As metamorphic rock undergoes heat treatment, so also do our God-given bodies. See Deuteronomy 4:20; Isaiah 48:10; Ezekiel 22:20; Malachi 3:2-4.

Do we get "metamorphized," so to speak? See Romans 6:3ff; 1 Corinthians 15:49; 1 John 3:2.

Our Lord's clothes became a white that is not found on earth (cf. Mark 9:3) and His face shone as a "lamp." Granted that "lamp" is compared to the sun, but has God revealed Himself as a lamp before? See Genesis 15:17; 2 Samuel 22:29.

How are we to understand this "light?" See Psalm 119:105, 132:17; John 1:5, 8:12.

Jesus is the Light and we are baptized into this light. We light candles in church that eventually go out (consider Matthew 25:1-13). Does the Church's light ever go out? See Proverbs 31:18.

The promise of light is the promise of the Messiah. See 2 Samuel 7:12-17, 21:17; 1 Kings 11:36; 2 Kings 8:19; Psalm 132:17.

v.3: And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

Light is produced on earth by "burning"; think incandescent light bulbs. Here are Moses and Elijah. What sort of "burning" grants them access to the Transfiguration? See Exodus 3:1-14; 1 Kings 18 [v.38].

In a confluence of the space-time continuum, Jesus

brings together 4 Biblical events. Moses in Exodus, Elijah in 1 Kings, this Gospel reading, and the Last Day where again, Jesus shines as a lamp (cf. Revelation 21:23).

From v.9, however, we get the idea that all these events converge in one place. (cf. Galatians 6:14; Hebrews 12:2; Revelation 13:8). What Moses, Elijah, and the Apostles couldn't make sense of, is completed and revealed to them through the cross of Jesus.

What else does Jesus tell us about Moses and Elijah being there? See Amos 3:7; Matthew 5:17, 22:40; Luke 24:25-27, 44; Acts 3:18.

v.4: And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah."

St. Luke (9:32) describes the Apostles being in a state of "hypnotic sleepiness". Maybe St. Peter was flustering and needed to say something; anything (Luke 19:40).

What is he really asking Jesus to do in this tent, or "tabernacle"? See Exodus 30:36, 33:7-10.

But the Lord has already dwelt in this kind of tent for too long (cf. 2 Samuel 6:17, 7:6; 1 Kings 6:1). The kings had their palaces, but God was in His tent until Solomon's Temple. How should we understand the more perfect tent that St. Peter would never be able to build? See 2 Corinthians 5:1-4; Hebrews 9:11ff.

The "tent" that is the Body of Christ is the medium through which God will accomplish salvation. Like Christ, we, too, will be raised bodily. God created body and soul and raised Jesus bodily. He will not so quickly discard His creation.

v.5: He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

Dwelling in His body, God once again is declared to be the Son of God from heaven (cf. Matthew 3:17) and in the same way, no less. Putting the tent, tabernacle, and body all together, we come up with the picture of God, interacting with His chosen Israel through the Ark of the Covenant. See Exodus 13:21-22, 16:10, 40:34; Numbers 9:15.

Foreshadowing God's salvation through physical interaction, the Ark and the Tent of meeting teach us that salvation is worked in our bodies, by the Body of Christ. When is it that our bodies interact with the Body of God? See Matthew 26:26; LSB 197-199.

v.6: When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.

Falling on your face is common ground for prophets and apostles. From Abraham (Genesis 17:3) to John (Revelation 1:17), they are all terrified at seeing the face of God. See Luke 5:8, 8:41, 17:16; John 11:32.

Simply imitating their Savior, what crucial event are they foreshadowing? See Matthew 26:39.

Bible Study

The Light of Christ St. Matthew 17:1-9

What is the reaction to the Easter message? See Luke 24:5.

v.7: But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear."

Another common, divine response to those in fear with their faces planted in the ground. This indicates that there is more than just a man here. See Genesis 15:1, 21:17, Isaiah 6; Daniel 10:19; Joel 2:21; Zephaniah 3:16.

The touch is important. The words are important. Both point to the saving work Christ will do in Sacrament and Word among us today. Both comfort and assure the Apostles to do exactly as Jesus has told them, to rise and have no fear, anticipating His crucifixion.



v.8: And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

And just to make it clear that neither Moses nor Elijah is the "Son to listen to" (v.5), they make their exit.

The interesting part here is that the same word used for "only" is a part of another, bigger word that is used to describe Jesus. What might that be? See John 1:14, 3:16, 3:18; 1 John 4: 9.

The Only-begotten Son of God will be the Only Way, the Only Truth, and the Only Life. He will not share His glory of going to the cross for the sins of the world. He will not share His majesty of being falsely

condemned. He will not share His light of Him serving you the forgiveness of sins.

v.9: And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

There are no permanent "mountaintop" experiences. All of Jesus' ministry is Him "stepping down". Stepping down the mountain, stepping off the boat, stepping down from heaven (cf. Matthew 3:16; John 3:13), or stepping down towards Jerusalem. The journey is always to the cross.

In quite a few places, Jesus commands that people not reveal what happened to them. See Matthew 12:16, 16:20; Mark 3:12; Luke 8:56. Seems anti-missional, don't you think? There are times when He commands people to go and tell, but what do you suppose is His reason for demanding silence? See John 6:15; Matthew 20:28.

Closing: O Wondrous Type! O Vision Fair (LSB, 413)

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