

Transfiguration Sunday
March 3, 2019
Luke 9:28-36

In Christ Jesus, our Glorified Savior, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

With this morning's worship service the Epiphany season draws to a close. After this we focus our attention on our Savior's passion, His suffering which climaxed with His death by crucifixion and His resurrection from the dead.

The Epiphany season appropriately concludes with a text describing a very rare and amazing appearance of Jesus. Only once in all the 33 years of His life did Jesus ever appear like this--in His full blown glory as God.

Our text tells us, **NOW IT CAME TO PASS, ABOUT EIGHT DAYS AFTER THESE SAYINGS, THAT HE TOOK PETER, JOHN, AND JAMES AND WENT UP ON THE MOUNTAIN TO PRAY. AS HE PRAYED, THE APPEARANCE OF HIS FACE WAS ALTERED, AND HIS ROBE BECAME WHITE AND GLISTENING.**

Jesus took His three closest disciples with Him up the mountain to pray. No doubt the thought of His impending suffering and death was constantly on His mind. This is what He had come into the world to do. Filled with these thoughts Jesus withdrew from the large crowds of people into this solitary mountain place to lay all before His Father in prayer. But while He is praying a remarkable thing happens. Jesus is transfigured; His appearance is changed. Matthew writes, **"His face began to shine like the sun and His clothes became as white as light."** Our text from Luke tells us that Jesus' robe became white and glistening; literally: like a flash of lightening. Mark tells us that **His clothes began to shine, exceedingly white, like snow, whiter than anyone could bleach them.**

What was happening? The dazzling splendor of the glory of God that had been hidden for over 30 years now was fully revealed. As God the Son, Jesus had this divine glory from eternity. The glory also belonged to His human nature because of the communion of attributes. This glory shone through His humanity on that special day.

We heard Peter recount this day in our Epistle lesson this morning. He wrote we **WERE EYEWITNESSES OF HIS MAJESTY. FOR HE RECEIVED FROM GOD THE FATHER HONOR AND GLORY WHEN SUCH A VOICE CAME TO HIM FROM THE EXCELLENT GLORY: THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED. AND WE HEARD THIS VOICE WHICH CAME FROM HEAVEN WHEN WE WERE WITH HIM ON THE HOLY MOUNTAIN.** John also wrote in His Gospel, **AND WE SAW HIS GLORY, THE GLORY AS OF THE ONLY BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH.** Paul tells us **FOR IN HIM (CHRIST) DWELLS ALL THE FULLNESS OF THE GODHEAD BODILY.**

During Jesus' life here on earth, He emptied Himself of the use of His divine glory. His humanity covered over and hid His divine glory. Until this one special day, this one special moment in time when the divine glory shone right through His human flesh, yes, even affecting the very clothes that He was wearing. Why did this happen?

Our theme this morning is:

JESUS WAS TRANSFIGURED TO PREPARE HIM FOR HIS PASSION.

I: He received the confirmation of Old Testament witnesses.

Moses and Elijah were there. We are told that they also shone in the same dazzling glory, not their own, but Christ's which was now theirs by virtue of their faith in Jesus. This is the splendor and glory that they enjoy with God in heaven. How did this prepare Jesus for His passion, His upcoming suffering and death?

In two ways. First of all our text tells us they were talking with Jesus. About what? The weather? No, Luke tells us they were speaking about His upcoming death. No doubt both of these Old Testament prophets referred to the many prophecies that they themselves had proclaimed or that had been written down in the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the Messiah. No doubt they spoke to Jesus about how He had now been sent and was about to fulfill all of these prophecies; that He had

come as the Messiah to carry out God's plan of salvation that was already so wonderfully revealed through the Old Testament writings. This discussion **STRENGTHENED** Jesus and prepared Him for what was to come.

When we speak of death we don't usually describe it as something we accomplish. It is something that happens to us. But Moses and Elijah spoke of Jesus' death as something He would accomplish. In other words, it was part of the plan of salvation from the start. The cup of suffering Jesus would drink, the cross with its accursed nails and bitter pain was His to fulfill, to accomplish.

But so was the empty tomb of Easter with the comfort, peace, and joy it would bring to sinners. Because God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son so that all who would anchor their hopes in Jesus might not perish but enjoy everlasting life in heaven. It was all something the Savior was going to **ACCOMPLISH**. Oh, what a conversation to be able to eavesdrop in on!

Elijah was the mightiest of the Old Testament prophets. Moses was probably the greatest, for He was the founder of the Old Testament covenant Law. Both of these men looked to the Messiah for their salvation. So not only were they encouraging Jesus with the Word, but secondly Christ could see before His own eyes the fruit of His work. How come Moses and Elijah were there? How could they be standing there in dazzling splendor and glory just like Jesus?

Because of their good works? Because of their own righteousness? Because they were such great prophets? **NO!** Only because of the One standing there before them! Only because of what Jesus had done and was about to do for them.

He had kept the Law of God perfectly in thought, word and deed and now He would go to the cross and give His perfect lifeblood as a ransom payment for all of our sins. He would be the atoning sacrifice and the perfect righteousness that we needed. In a very real sense Jesus was seeing the reward, the effects, the fruit of His labor before the fact, before actually fulfilling it. Indeed a **COMFORTING** and **STRENGTHENING** lift for the God-Man Savior.

Our next point may seem strange.

JESUS WAS TRANSFIGURED TO PREPARE HIM FOR HIS PASSION

II: He endured the misunderstanding of earthly disciples.

How could this prepare Jesus for His passion? Remember how Peter expressed vehement disapproval when sometime earlier Jesus told them that He would suffer many things and be rejected and be killed. Peter said, **FAR BE IT FROM YOU, LORD!**

This scene, this event fit in perfectly with Peter's wrong idea of the Messiah. He would crush and expel the Romans and restore Israel to the political glory of David's day. Peter was anxious for the glorious Christ to be unveiled and here it was. Yes, it was good for Peter and the other disciples to be there and see this, but not as Peter imagined it, to build three tents and enjoy this glory on the mountain forever.

These words of Peter were a real temptation to Jesus. As real as the words of Satan at the beginning of Jesus' ministry when he showed Jesus all the wonders of the world and said **ALL THESE THINGS I WILL GIVE YOU IF YOU WILL FALL DOWN AND WORSHIP ME.**

But Jesus endured this temptation and with great fervor He fastened His eyes upon the cross, the real reason for His coming. This prepared Jesus for whatever Satan might throw at Him, even if that temptation came from His dearest and closest friends.

There was one more comfort that we note in our text.

JESUS WAS TRANSFIGURED TO PREPARE HIM FOR HIS PASSION

III: He welcomed the approval of His heavenly Father.

Not only were there words spoken by Moses and Elijah, but reassuring words were spoken from the Father. The same words the Father spoke as Jesus began His ministry at His Baptism some three years earlier, the Father again speaks at the beginning of Jesus' suffering: **THIS IS MY BELOVED SON. HEAR HIM!** Matthew adds the words, **IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED.**

Jesus needed these words of **COMFORT** and **STRENGTHENING** also because He too was true man. He got tired and became weary just like you and I. He was burdened and heavy laden with the cares and concerns of the world. He had a long, lonely road of suffering, pain, humiliation, ridicule, eternal torment and damnation to travel. He would carry on His soul all of your sins, all of my sins, all of the sins of every single person all on His own with no one to help. He would have to drink the cup of suffering and sorrow the Father would give Him as full payment for all sins for all

time. He needed these words of strengthening and comfort to bear this burden and to drink this cup for us.

Yes, this transfiguration was done for Jesus' benefit. This was the divine glory that He had from eternity. Prior to His conception in Mary's womb and birth the Son of God knew nothing else. But now for almost 33 years He had clothed Himself in flesh and blood, only occasionally showing forth His divine glory through miracles. But now it was full blown, just like it was in the presence of the Father in heaven.

This was a reminder to Jesus of the glory and majesty that He would once again enjoy forever, after His mission on earth was accomplished. This act of the Father, transfiguring His Son, gave Jesus the **STRENGTH** and the **COMFORT** for His upcoming arrest, trial, suffering, crucifixion and death. Thank God that He did.

We too must climb back down the mountain into the plains of our lives. We must continue living in this world with its many troubles and problems, sins and suffering. But, just like the disciples, we see our Savior with eyes of faith and we've got the assurance that Jesus will walk with us every step of the way. In the trials we encounter His tender love holds us up and leads us on.

It's down on the plains of life (where our sin litters our path, where laughter and tears often run together) that the tender face of Jesus, beaming with His forgiving love, is so reassuring, so strengthening! We hear Him declare: **Son, Daughter be of good cheer, your sins have been forgiven!**

And we know He will never break His promise: **SURELY, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS... IN ME YOU HAVE PEACE. IN THE WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TRIBULATION; BUT BE OF GOOD CHEER, I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD... I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU. AND IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME AGAIN AND RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF; THAT WHERE I AM, *THERE* YOU MAY BE ALSO.**

Amen.