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The Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord
10 February 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Lk 9:28-36

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

In the beginning God made man.

*“Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness...
So God created man in His own image,
in the image of God He created him;
male and female He created them.” (Gen 1:26, 27)*

And then that image was lost.

It was marred, stained, obliterated, destroyed—
whatever you want to call it, the image was not the same; no longer recognizable.

God wasn't destroyed.

Man wasn't destroyed.

But the image of God in man—

that's what was lost:
that original righteousness, holiness, love, and peace;
that original joy between man and God and the rest of creation.

It was all gone.

All in one act of disobedience, in one moment of unholy lust and pride.

All gone.

From that sharing of the forbidden fruit man was no longer fully man.

He was no longer the way he was created to be.

He was no longer an image and icon of God Himself.

He was no longer holy.

That image-less man is how we all began.

We came into this world bearing the image not of God, but of sin;

and for that matter, our image reflected the joy of Satan, not God—
that's what we call *original sin*.

It runs through our veins and into our minds;

it pollutes our thoughts and desires, and curves us in on ourselves.

This image is a very dark image.

It's a heavy weight around our necks, pulling us down each day.

Every once in a while we peer in on our own sinful image and we're frightened—

frightened by who we are as sons and daughters of Adam.

We're scared that our sin would be made known,

that our crimes would be revealed,

that our hate, our anger would rear its ugly face.

That's who we were;
 and that's who we are apart from God in Christ:
 dark, without the image of God, unholy, and—as we say to our Catechumens—
 poor, miserable, no good, ugly, filthy, smelly, rotten, lazy bunch of sinners!

That's who you were.
 But something happened to you.
 Something changed you, *transfigured* you.

You are no longer without the image of God.
 No longer are you bound to Satan and his lies.
 You are not an image or icon of that thief and destroyer,
 but you are an image of God.

You reflect His face.
 His glory lights your eyes and fills your soul and now runs through your veins.

That's what the Feast of the Transfiguration is all about.
 It's about restoring who we properly are and who we are meant to be.

And none of that can happen or be worthwhile, if it's not ultimately about Christ.

Now, today marks a major transition in the Church year.
 It's the last day of Epiphany, and what comes next is Lent.

Epiphany is all about revealing who this Jesus is as God and Man together—one flesh;
 and Lent is all about the Cross—that flesh of God and Man dying for you.

But as God would have it, “Jesus’ divinity belongs with the Cross—
 only when we put the two together do we recognize Jesus correctly.”¹

So the Transfiguration is a brilliant transition from Epiphany to Lent,
 from the Magi to the Sanhedrin,
 from the wooden stable to the wooden cross,
 from the golden gift to the silver betrayal,
 from the Jordan water and the Cana wine, to the water and blood pouring from His spear-
 ridden side—
 it's at the mount of Transfiguration that we move from one to the other.

And just as Moses took Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu up the mountain to *behold the Glory of God*,²
 so also our Lord took Peter, James, and John where they beheld *His* glory—
 where *the appearance of His face was altered*,
 His clothing became dazzling white,
 and Moses and Elijah were there in glory, speaking of His Exodus. (Lk 9:29-30)

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 305.

² Exod 24:9ff.

Exodus is what's in the Greek, but our English translates it as *His departure*.

One way or the other, Moses and Elijah, the *Law* and the *Prophets*,
are all talking about the death of Christ.

For them, and for St. Paul, and for us, it's all about Christ, and Him crucified.
That's Lent, that's Epiphany, that's the Transfiguration of Our Lord—that's all there is.

Just notice how the story begins:

"Now about eight days after these sayings..." (Lk 9:28)

You already know what the number 8 is about:

new creation, baptism, death and resurrection—a new first day.

And here its 8 days *after these sayings*—
what sayings?

Well sayings about His cross, of course.

That's what all the sayings are about.

That's Moses and the Exodus.

That's Elijah and the Prophets.

That's Peter.

Right after the great confession, which comes just before this, Jesus says,

*"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests
and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."* (9:22)

Then Jesus makes it clear that if anyone wants to be a disciple of His,

"let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me" (9:23).

And then, after the Transfiguration—*on the next day* (9:37)—Jesus cast out a demon from a boy.
While they marveled at His work, Jesus said,

"Let these words sink into your ears:

The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men" (9:44).

Here we are, on the mount Tabor, where the Transfiguration took place,
with Moses and Elijah, and Peter and James and John,
and the whole thing is about the death of Christ.

Now, Luke doesn't tell us much about Peter and the death of Christ, but Matthew does.

Matthew tells us that when Peter made his great confession,

and Jesus blessed him and explained that it means He must suffer,

Peter said, *"Far be it from You, Lord"* (Mt 16:22).

Luke does tell us that Peter denied the suffering Christ three times before the cock crows (Lk 22:61).

And then here, Peter doesn't want to go down into suffering, but build three tents—
 one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah—
“Tis good, Lord, to be here,” says Peter.

But then God said otherwise.

“A cloud came and overshadowed them...

And a voice came out of the cloud, saying,

‘This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!’ (9:34-35)

And this brings us back to the point of the Transfiguration.

It's about Christ, and therefore also about who we are and who we are intended to be *in Him*.

Our sin, which is always curved in on ourselves, would flee from suffering any chance we get.
 Our sin would have us deny the cross, flee from death, and stay put on that mountain.

But Christ, whose face is now set towards Jerusalem (9:51), where He will

*suffer many things, be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes,
 and be killed, and on the third day be raised* (9:22),

this Christ does not deny His cross, but embraces it.

Because by embracing His cross, He embraces all of humanity.

All of what God has created *in His image, after His likeness*,
 is being restored by way of this cross.

There, the glory of God is fully revealed.

There our lost image is found and restored, our sin is put away, our death is defeated.

Do not listen to the voice of your sin that cringes in the face of the cross.

Listen to *Him*, to Christ, who stands Transfigured before you today.

His face is brighter than the sun, and His clothing, a dazzling white—
 and what goes for Christ goes for you.

As St. Paul says,

*“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,
 are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”*

(2 Cor 3:18)

That's the Transfiguration, the revelation of who this Christ really is:
 the Son of the Father, the Light of the world.

And in Christ, that's you too.

You bear the image of God.

You are made into His likeness.

You will bear the cross, you will suffer, you will die—
 but then, on the third day, you will rise.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit