

*It is good for us to be here*

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Peter, James and John saw the light! These three disciples literally saw the light of Christ, *the light that shined in the darkness*, and still managed to miss the point. We must not blame them though, because the Transfiguration is a mystery of faith, it is so profound that it cannot be easily understood, not because it is complex but because it reveals to us a truth of God's nature. The Transfiguration of Christ is also called a Theophany. More simply put, the Transfiguration of Christ reveals Christ's glory, it is a foretaste of Christ's resurrection and ascension. It is the ultimate mountain-top experience for Peter, James and John, but it is short lived, and they follow Jesus back down the mountain into the world, and eventually to His crucifixion and death. Jesus brought these three disciples along to strengthen them for His coming death and burial, so that when that day came they would have hope and think back on all the signs and wonders that He had worked. Yet we find in the Gospels that when the day of crucifixion came, they forgot all about His wonders and miracles and deserted our Lord out of fear.

In their defense, the disciples were totally overwhelmed by the transfiguration, not only was it such a sensory overload that they were consumed with fear, but it was also symbolically overwhelming. Up to this point in the Gospels we have had a few revelations and confessions from the disciples that Jesus is the Christ, but the Transfiguration pointed to something more. The Transfiguration is a greater revelation of who Jesus is. To Peter, James and John who are witness to this incredible event, there is no doubt that something Divine is going on. Maybe it is at this point that the revelation that Jesus is God in the flesh begins to solidify in their minds.

What exactly did these disciples see though? They went up a mountain with Jesus to pray, and there His appearance was altered and His clothes became dazzling white. St. Mark records that His clothes became *intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them (Mk 9:3 RSV CE)*. And suddenly there appeared two men who talked with Jesus, Moses and Elijah. They also appeared with Jesus in glory and spoke of Jesus' death and resurrection. Moses and Elijah appear beside Jesus for a reason. Moses represents the Law, which he received on Mt. Sinai, when God came down and touched the mountain accompanied with thunder, lightning, and hail. Moses's face glowed so after his encounter with God that he veiled his face when he spoke to the people. This was an Old Testament foreshadowing of Jesus' Transfiguration. Moses also represents the dead, as the scriptures record that he was buried by the hand of God and his burial place unknown. Elijah represents the prophets, he is the greatest prophet after John the Baptist. He too experiences a type of Transfiguration when he is

taken up into heaven by the chariot of fire. Elijah also represents the living, because he is believed to have never died. Jesus is transfigured between these two men, because He is the fulfillment of Moses and Elijah, of the Law and the Prophets, and He is Lord of the living and the dead.

The three disciples, Peter, James and John, represent imperfect humanity. They are totally overthrown by the revelation of God. Peter is so overcome by the vision that he wants to build three booths to commemorate the spot. The disciples are depicted in Icons of the Transfiguration as having fallen on their faces. They are so overwhelmed by this revelation of God that they appear to be falling down the mountain and off the icon.

Yet after this awesome revelation of who Jesus is, Jesus comes down to the apostles and ministers to them, telling them not to be afraid, picking them up and dusting them off, telling them to *rise and have no fear (Mt. 17:7)*. The Transfiguration is meant to encourage the disciples and not to strike terror into their hearts. The disciples needed a mountaintop experience to help them through the coming days, through the gathering storm that will be Jesus' crucifixion and burial.

Jesus knows too that we will need a mountain top experience to get us through the hard times in our lives. We are not usually lucky enough to share in a mountain top experience like the disciples did, complete with saints of old, intense white light, and a voice from heaven. But God speaks to us in other ways, the major events of our lives like weddings, births, and baptisms, and even the small events; the still small voice, out of the blue phone calls, cards, or letters, the lessons at Holy Communion or the line from a sermon that ministers directly to our current situation. These are all revelations of God, the glory of God shining through the darkness of our world, showing us that God is indeed listening and aware of our lives and that He is encouraging us when we need encouragement most.

God breaks into the darkness of our lives because He desires to transfigure us, to manifest His glory in us and through us. We have been made participants in His death, burial and resurrection through the waters of Baptism, but we forget that we are intended to be mirrors of His glory, God wants us to reflect His light and love. This is our lesson from the Transfiguration. It is not only a revelation of the glory of God, but it is a revelation of God's desire to share His glory with His children. He desires us to grow up to be like our heavenly Father and we begin this process by coming to His House, to His Church. St. Anastasius writes *Therefore, since each of us possesses God in our heart and is being transformed into the divine image, we also should cry out with joy; "It is good for us to be here" - here where all things shine with divine radiance, where there is joy and gladness and exultation; where there is nothing in our hearts but peace,*

*serenity and stillness; where God is Father, saying as he enters: "Today salvation has come to this house." With Christ, our hearts receive all the wealth of his eternal blessings, and there where they are stored up for us in him, we see reflected as in a mirror both the first fruits and the whole of the world to come.*

*With these things in mind let us pray, O God, who on the mount didst reveal to chosen witnesses thine only-begotten Son wonderfully transfigured, in raiment white and glistening; Mercifully grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may be permitted to behold the King in his beauty, who with thee, O Father, and thee, O Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth, One God, world without end. Amen.*