

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

All throughout the season of Epiphany, we have been looking at the divinity of Jesus being manifested in His flesh, from the star leading the magi to the infant Jesus, to Jesus' baptism with the Father's voice declaring Jesus His "*beloved Son*," and the Spirit descending on Jesus, anointing Him as the Christ (Mark 1:11), from Jesus proclaiming the kingdom of God come in His person (Mark 1:15) to His teaching with authority, with His casting out unclean spirits, healing the sick, and forgiving sins (Mark 1 & 2). This is what Epiphany is about as we sing in the Epiphany hymn: "God in man made manifest" — each stanza of that hymn concludes this way (LSB394).

And today is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of Jesus' divinity. Up He goes onto the mount (perhaps Mount Tabor), bringing with Him Peter and James and John. And there Jesus is transfigured before them in spectacular fashion, with an "other-worldly" appearance — His clothes shining so bright white, that no one could duplicate it here on earth.

That was awesome! Peter would later say that "*[Jesus] received honor and glory from God the Father*," whom he also called "*the Majestic Glory*" (2 Pet. 1:7). And John, who was also there, said of the fleshly Son of God: "*we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). They attest that they saw the Divine glory of Jesus.

The other disciples, however, didn't see it. In fact, they didn't even find out about it until after Jesus' resurrection, for Jesus told these three disciples not to say anything until then.

Why these three? The Bible doesn't say. We know that these three were among the first to be called, and they were close to Jesus. Peter was chief among the disciples, the "first among equals" (Paul Raabe, *Concordia Journal*, 33:1, January 2007, p. 3). John was the disciple "*whom Jesus loved*." Maybe they needed extra encouragement, for remember, Peter was the one who denied Jesus three times, and James was the first apostle to be martyred. Perhaps, with the support of this vision John was able to stay with the women at the foot of the cross and receive Jesus' mother unto himself.

These three were built up, I suggest, by this vision of the transfigured Christ, steeled for their difficult times ahead, and so are we as we enter the season of Lent and as we continue to endure the struggles of this life. As we just sang, they (and we) get to see a glimpse of that "glory [that] shall be theirs above Who joy in God with perfect love" (LSB413), who in faith "*love the Lord [their] God with all [their] heart and with all [their] soul and with all [their] mind and with all [their]*

*strength*” (Mark 12:30), for as John bears witness, there is more that awaits us: “*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). Jesus’ transfiguration is a little glimpse of our own resurrection glory.

Peter and James and John were built up seeing a glory grander than the “*chariots of fire and horses of fire,*” more awesome than the “*whirlwind*” that carried Elijah “*into heaven*” (2 Ki. 2:11). They saw a glory brighter than the glory with which Moses’ face shone when he came down from Mount Sinai, having spoken with God (Ex. 34:29-33). And yet even this glory was muted for their good; it was a glory veiled by Jesus’ own flesh that shone through His clothes. This glory was not the fullness of the Divine glory, for sinful man “*cannot see [the Lord’s uncovered] face, ... [sinful] man shall not see [the Lord] and live*” (Ex. 33:20).

When Moses asked to see God’s glory, God showed Moses His backside instead, even as Jesus’ glory would be on display for the whole world to see, not in His glorious transfiguration, but in His being lifted up on a cross, not in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16), but in the weakness and foolishness of suffering and cross (1 Cor. 1:22-25). And it is in this lifting up, Jesus says, that He “*will draw all people to [Himself]*” (John 12:32). True Christians look to Jesus on a cross. As Luther explains, “it does [a person] no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross. Thus God destroys the wisdom of the wise, as Isa. [45:15] says, ‘Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself.’” Luther continues: “true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ ...” (*Luther’s Works*, 31:52-53).

The hidden nature of God, though, is found not just in God’s Son, concealed within flesh, dwelling among us, nor just in His sacrificial suffering and death. The true nature of the hidden God is found in the pages of Scripture that bear witness to Christ, as St. Augustine once quipped: “The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed” (see Augustine, “On the Spirit and the Letter,” Chapter XXVII).

Let me repeat that without the verse and cadence. St. Augustine said: “The New Testament is concealed within the Old Testament.” As St. Paul said in our Epistle: “*when [the Israelites] read the old covenant, that same veil [that covered Moses’ face] remains unlifted.*” But Christ is there in the Old Testament, in prophecies of incarnation and atonement, in bondage and freedom, in deliverance and promises, in sin and forgiveness. And Christ removes the veil as St. Augustine continued: “The Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament”; that is, we truly come to understand the Old Testament promises only in the light of the New,

or as St. Paul says, “*only through Christ is [the veil] taken away.*” For that’s what the Greek verb for “reveal” means — to remove the veil. And with the veil thus removed, we also believe and are saved through the word of Christ, listening to the word of Christ. Christ’s are the words of eternal life (John 6:68).

Epiphany is a great season of shining the light of Christ’s divinity on His humanity. It is the season of the “great reveal” — today is the climax of that reveal, as the Divine glory of Christ shone through His flesh and clothes in His transfiguration, and “*the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, ... has shone in our hearts [today] to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*” But more, the light of the gospel illumines the wisdom and strength of God in Jesus’ suffering and cross for us sinners and prepares us for a holy Lent

I only imagined it for Scripture doesn’t say for sure why Peter, James, and John were privileged to see Christ’s glory, to overhear Jesus’ conversation with Elijah and Moses, to hear the Father’s commendation to Jesus and His instruction — “*Listen to Him,*” but it comforts me to think that Jesus was caring for these disciples as they neared His passion and death, and He was caring for them by showing them the glory of resurrection and ascension.

Likewise, as we enter into the season of Lent, may this vision of the transfigured Christ be for us one bookend of a penitential season that culminates in glorious death, but a season that is bookended on the other side by resurrection and life. God bless us on this Feast of Christ’s Transfiguration, and God grant us a blessed Lent.

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