

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Today, as we prepare to enter the holy season of Lent, we celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord, although you didn't hear the word in today's reading. Unlike Matthew and Mark that tell us that Jesus "*was transfigured before them*" (Matt. 17:2) — that word comes from the Latin *transfiguratus est*; the Greek word may actually sound more familiar — μεταμορφώθη, Luke merely describes the event. He tells us that "*the appearance of [Jesus'] face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white*" before Peter, John, and James, Jesus' closest disciples.

But that's not the only difference between Luke's account of the transfiguration and the other two synoptic gospels' account. There are several distinctions that we'll consider today, not that they should trouble us. Far from making the event doubtful, these differences give the accounts an air of authenticity.

You already heard one difference, perhaps not too significant, after all Art Just, in his commentary, doesn't take notice. But Luke tells us that Jesus took "*Peter and John and James*" up the mountain with Him. Lenski lists the disciples in the usual order — Peter, James, and John, perhaps indicating that he was using a different source text — some texts had them in this order. No problem, though. Nothing of substance is changed and the difference reminds us that Luke wrote this Gospel. He didn't just copy from Matthew or Mark.

Luke tells us that Jesus climbed the Mount of Transfiguration *about* eight days after Jesus had called for the disciples' confession of who He was, *about* eight days after He had told them of His impending suffering, death, and resurrection, *about* eight days after He had told His disciples that they were going to have to "*deny [themselves] and take up [their] cross daily*" in order to follow Him. Matthew and Mark said it was six days after all this. Here Art Just suggests that Luke's looseness with regard to chronology was because he was speaking theologically, using the number eight so that hearers would think of Jesus' transfiguration as "a proleptic of the resurrection" of Jesus (Just, *Concordia Commentary: Luke 1:1–9:50*, p. 399) and of their own eternal Sabbath rest into which Christians are born from above in the waters of Holy Baptism. It's the reason the church's baptismal fonts are generally eight-sided.

This hope of our eternal rest is, in large measure, what our celebration of the Transfiguration of our Lord is about. It's why, unlike most of the church who celebrates this feast in August, we celebrate it on the Sunday before we enter into somber Lent, being called to repentance, walking with Jesus the way of the cross. As Luther reminds us who "see Moses clearly, without a veil," we "understand the intention of the law, and how it demands impossible things." In Moses and his law, we see "sin [come] to power"; "there death is mighty."

Were it not for Christ, we would be moved to despair. Luther continues, “For if Christ’s glory did not come alongside this splendor of Moses, no one could bear the brightness of the law, the terror of sin and death.” But by His transfiguration, “*we have seen [the] glory [of this Word made flesh], glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). And so, we use this season looming ahead and its penitential focus “to recognize sin and to yearn for Christ” (*Luther’s Works*, 35:246).

Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke tells us that Jesus took the three disciples up the mountain to pray. And unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke tells us that just like they would later do in the Garden as Jesus prayed, the three disciples slept. As Jesus was preparing to set his face toward Jerusalem where He would be taken up and killed, He turned to prayer. We’re preparing to walk the path with Him to cross and death. I want to encourage you also to prayer, not on a mountain, but during Lent on Wednesdays. Come and pray Vespers with your brothers and sisters who have also set their faces with Jesus toward Jerusalem.

Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke tells us what Moses and Elijah were discussing with Jesus. They “*spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*” Now, the word of interest here is that which the ESV and many other English translations translate “*departure.*” The King James and older versions translate the word as “*decease,*” making one perhaps think of Jesus’ death. The Greek word here is ἔξοδος, which I think is best left untranslated, or transliterated.

They spoke of Jesus’ exodus, with all of the Biblical connections that fires off in your mind. They spoke of Jesus’ exodus, which the Exodus wherein Moses led Israel out of bondage to the Egyptians was but a type. They spoke of Jesus’ exodus, the rescue that Jesus Himself was about to accomplish in Jerusalem, which Jesus had told the disciples only days before about: His suffering, His death, His resurrection on the third day.

Jesus would effect this rescue not just for Israel, but for the whole world, delivering them by the blood of this Lamb from the bondage to sin and from death’s dark night. Greater than Moses who led Israel through the Red Sea waters, Jesus leads His elect through the waters of Holy Baptism. Greater than Moses who fed Israel in the wilderness with manna from heaven, Jesus feeds us in this life’s wilderness with the Bread from Heaven, with Jesus’ Himself, His flesh and His blood. Greater than Moses who led Israel to the border of the promised land, Jesus leads us through this vale of tears into the promised land itself.

Moses, surely entered His promised rest and a glory greater than he received in this life, but he had to wait for death. Elijah went there without tasting death. The disciples saw a bit of the glory of their eternal rest. Jesus promises this rest to us, too, who “*hold fast our confidence*” and who boast “*in our hope*” in Christ Jesus, Christ the crucified, Christ risen from the dead. As He Himself told us, “*In*

*my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also”* (John 14:2-3).

Finally, Luke is the only one that records the Father's words from the cloud to include “*the Chosen One,*” the elect. Matthew and Mark both record the Father's relationship with His Son — He is the beloved Son of the Father. Matthew records more: Jesus is the Son “*with whom [the Father] is well pleased*” (Matt. 17:5). But Luke tells us why the Father is so pleased: God's own Son, whom the Father chose to send into our flesh and be the paschal sacrifice for our sins, answered the call and went willingly to cross and death for us.

Luther captures this truth in his “A Mighty Fortress”: “for us fights the valiant One, whom God Himself elected. Ask ye, ‘Who is this?’ Jesus Christ it is” (LSB656:2). Even more, Paul Gerhardt speaks of this in his great hymn of Lent, “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth” (LSB438). I want to close with his words of hope:

2. This Lamb is Christ, the soul's great friend,  
The Lamb of God, our Savior,  
Whom God the Father chose to send  
To gain for us His favor.

“Go forth, My Son,” the Father said,

“And free My children from their dread  
Of guilt and condemnation.

The wrath and stripes are hard to bear,

But by Your passion they will share  
The fruit of Your salvation.”

The Son responds ...

3. “Yes, Father, yes, most willingly I'll bear what You command Me.  
My will conforms to Your decree, I'll do what You have asked Me.”

O wondrous Love, what have You done!

The Father offers up His Son, Desiring our salvation.

O Love, how strong You are to save!

You lay the One into the grave Who built the earth's foundation.

And Gerhardt concludes ...

4. Lord, when Your glory I shall see  
And taste Your kingdom's pleasure,  
Your blood my royal robe shall be,  
My joy beyond all measure!

When I appear before Your throne,

Your righteousness shall be my crown;  
With these I need not hide me.

And there, in garments richly wrought,

As Your own bride shall we be brought  
To stand in joy beside You.

This is the glory that awaits us! Jesus' transfiguration is but a hopeful glimpse by which we may hope in Christ with confidence in the upcoming season and always.

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