

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Lutheranism is part of what has been called the Magisterial Reformation (as opposed to the Radical Reformation). The Magisterial Reformation was more conservative, focusing truly on reform and not revolution. And so, as Lutherans we received much of what the Church through the ages passed down to us, changing those things that needed changing, and removing those things that were contrary to the Scripture.

This is so regarding ceremonies, too, that is, the way we worship. C.F.W. Walther wrote, “true Lutherans know that although one does not have to have these [outward ceremonial forms] (because there is no divine command to have them), one may nevertheless have them because good ceremonies are lovely and beautiful and are not forbidden in the Word of God. Therefore the Lutheran church has not abolished ‘outward ornaments, candles, altar cloths, statues and similar ornaments,’ [AP XXIV] but has left them free” (C. F. W. Walther, *Essays for the Church*, 1:193, quoted in Jon Vieker, “Unity and Diversity in Irenaeus as Paradigm for Contemporary Lutheran Ceremonial Consensus,” CTQ 62:2, April 2000, p. 102).

Therefore, when Lutherans change something, we should consider it significant — like changing when we celebrate the Transfiguration of Our Lord. Roman Catholics and Anglicans celebrate it on August 6<sup>th</sup>, according to a papal dictate (Pope Callixtus III, 1455-58). Most Lutherans celebrate it on the last Sunday after the Epiphany right before we enter into the sober, penitential season of Lent. I’m not sure who made the change, but I think it is brilliant. It’s a shot in the arm as we enter the season, a perfect bookend to match the glory of Easter at the end of it. As we just sang, “With shining face and bright array Christ deigns to manifest today What glory shall be theirs above Who joy in God with perfect love” (LSB413:3). St. Paul, too, speaks of believers being “*glorified with [Christ],*” saying, “*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us*” (Rom. 8:17-18). This glory is manifest in Jesus’ transfiguration.

In our Gospel today, Jesus goes up a mountain with Peter, James, and John. In the Bible, big things happen on mountains. “*Come up to me on the mountain and wait there,*” “*the LORD said to Moses,*” “*that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.*” You know the name of that mountain ... Mount Sinai.

Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal on another mountain ... Mount Carmel. Elijah defeated and destroyed those idolatrous prophets there.

Here on this mountain of transfiguration — maybe Mount Tabor — the three disciples became “*eyewitnesses of [Jesus’] majesty, ... honor and glory*” and heard

*“the voice [of] the Majestic Glory,”* saying, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”*

And on another mountain ... Mount Zion, the Savior of the world mounted a cross to effect the salvation of the world.

On this holy mountain in our Gospel today, Jesus was transfigured before the three disciples. Today, we're probably more familiar with the Greek word — μεταμορφώθη, like metamorphosis, used in science class when talking about creatures going through various stages of development. Here, we see Jesus change in appearance, His face shining *“like the sun,”* His clothes as *“white as light.”* Here was a glimpse of *“our God ... the sunrise ... from on high”* (Luke 1:78). Here a bit of the veil was stripped away, a veil that hid Jesus' divine glory, *“glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14).

Moses and Elijah appear! They hold “converse high” with the One who came to bring us *“grace upon grace,”* as St. John proclaims: *“grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”* (John 1:16-17). These two Old Testament representatives of the Law and Prophets, however, appeared not that the Law and the Prophets might compete for a place alongside Jesus' New Testament grace. Rather, they appeared acknowledging the preeminence of Jesus and His Gospel, for you recall what Jesus preached as He began His ministry: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished”* (Matt. 5:17-18). Now, three years later, at His transfiguration, Jesus is not long from His full-throated, glorious proclamation from the cross that *“It is finished”* (John 19:30).

Truly, Jesus' cross, the culmination of His ministry, is His glory, a glory that far exceeds that of Moses, for if Moses' face shone with Divine glory when he came down the mountain with the tablets of stone, how much greater shone the glory of Him who would bring Moses' ministry to an end, writing His Spirit onto the tablets of our hearts (2 Cor. 3:3, 7). How much greater glory is the ministry of the Spirit to the ministry of death! How much greater the ministry of righteousness to the ministry of condemnation (2 Cor. 3:7-9)! As St. Paul wrote to the Romans: *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death”* (Rom. 8:1-2).

Moses knew it already when he foretold of Jesus' coming: *“it is to him you shall listen”* (Deut. 18:15). Like John the Baptist, the Elijah who was to come, the one who would prepare the way of the Lord, who would decrease as Jesus increased (John 3:30), so Moses would decrease in the coming of the Prophet whom Moses prefigured.

Now, Peter, James, and John are seeing all this take place on the mountain. Peter speaks up, perhaps not wanting Jesus to forget that they were there with Him, or perhaps he was just dazed. Luke says he didn't know what he was saying (Luke 9:33). "*Lord, it is good that we are here,*" Peter said, understating the obvious — the disciples weren't yet terrified. "*If you wish,*" he continued, "*I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.*" I'm not sure exactly where he planned to get the material for these tents.

Oh well. It didn't matter. As St. Augustine proclaimed, God provided the "tent," not three tents, for he said, Peter was trying to divide into three what is, in fact, one. Jesus, Moses, Elijah? They're one! The Word of God is Jesus in the flesh. The word of God is in the law; and the word of God is in the prophets, for this is what "*the Law and the Prophets bear witness to*" ... "*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ,*" the righteousness that comes "*by [God's] grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*" won by the sacrifice of His blood on a cross (Rom. 3:21-22, 24-25). When the veil is taken away, this is what we see, not two, not three ways of salvation, but one way, through the beloved Son.

Thus, God supplied the tent, Augustine said, in the cloud that overshadowed them — all of them, I think: Jesus, Moses and Elijah, and the three disciples. They all heard the voice of the Majestic Glory speak His Divine pleasure in the beloved Son. They all heard the Divine command: "*Listen to him.*" It is a reminder to us that they are not divided; their proclamation is one. They all point us to Jesus, as Jesus told the Jews: "*the Scriptures ... bear witness about me*" (John 5:39), and as we heard St. Paul proclaim recently: "*I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified*" (1 Cor. 2:2).

We also are one in Christ Jesus ... "one, holy, Christian, and apostolic church" (Nicene Creed), for we, too, are overshadowed by a cloud as the writer to the Hebrews proclaims ... "*a great cloud of witnesses*" (Heb. 12:1), saints of old and saints today gathered around Christ. Therefore, we do not fear but rejoice with them as we enter into the holy season of Lent. We are surrounded by them, by apostles and prophets and saints, as we are being built "*into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit,*" the church, "*a holy temple in the Lord,*" "*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone*" (Eph. 2:20-22). Therefore, not just in Lent, but year round, as we wait patiently for Jesus' transfiguration glory to be revealed in us, "*let us ... lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God*" (Heb. 12:1-2). May this be our Lenten discipline ... for life.

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