

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today, as we prepare to enter the holy season of Lent, we celebrate the Transfiguration of our Lord. It's an especially Lutheran way of doing things, although the option was there in "the ecumenical revisions of the new Roman Lectionary" done in the 70s (Lizette Larson, "The Ecumenical Muddle of Celebrating the Transfiguration of the Lord," praytelligblog.com, Feb. 15, 2021).

It was a brilliant thing to do — no pun intended. Today, before we embark on our Lenten fast — perhaps fasting physically, but certainly liturgically — today, we marvel at Jesus' glory. Today, we get a glimpse of the royal "*majesty*" and divine "*honor and glory*" which Jesus received from "*the Majestic Glory*" (2 Pet. 1:16-17).

What an Epiphany! If the disciples doubted it before, they could no longer deny it! "*Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle! ... Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory*" (Ps. 24:8, 10)!

For what is this glory that we see? Not merely heavenly glory, but divine glory. Not merely the reflected glory shining round about the angel in the night sky, seen by the shepherds — to be sure, that glory was enough to terrify them (Luke 2:9). Not merely the glory of the two men in "*dazzling apparel*" at the empty tomb of Jesus — that glory, too, was enough to frighten the women (Luke 24:4-5). No, the glory that shone from Jesus' altered face was blinding "*like the sun*" (Matt. 17:2). The glory that shone "*dazzling white*" through Jesus' clothing was beyond what the women saw from the angels at Jesus' resurrection. Luke reports both incidents using the same adjective, but with an intensifying prefix here for Jesus.

For Jesus' majesty, though veiled by flesh, is not temporal, but coeternal with the Father. His glory is not reflected, but the "*glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). His glory is not less than but equal to the Father "*who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see*" (1 Tim. 6:16).

Moses, who, we heard today, was on this Holy Mountain holding "converse high" with the Son of God, had to learn this lesson himself. Moses had been accustomed to speaking with the LORD "*as a man speaks to his friend*" (Ex. 33:11). "*When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses*" (Ex. 33:9). But even though his conversations were said to be "*face to face*" (v. 11), that just meant "familiarily," as Luther taught.

For, as St. Paul said, "*no one has ever seen or can see*" God. The evangelist John, too, taught: "*No one has ever seen God*" (John 1:18), not in His unveiled glory. And the LORD Himself told Moses the same thing: "*you cannot see my face, for man shall*

The Transfiguration of Our Lord Pastor Douglas Punke
not see me and live” (Ex. 33:20), for Moses had been bold to ask Him, “*Please show me your glory*” (Ex. 33:18) — well, at least, he said “please.”

But for Moses' sake, the LORD did not permit Moses to see His glory. The LORD put Moses in the cleft of a rock and covered his eyes as His glory passed by, then took away His hand to let Moses “*see [His] back*” (Ex. 33:23), namely, His goodness and grace and mercy.

Moses, the great prophet of Israel, who delivered Israel from their bondage in Egypt with mighty signs and wonders, who received the Law from the LORD's own hands, and who continued to speak intimately with the LORD, would eventually die, not being permitted to enter into the promised land, but surely entering into eternal glory.

This Moses, along with Elijah, appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. The great prophet without peer in the Old Testament met with The Prophet who was promised to Moses, the Prophet like Moses, the Prophet to whom we are to listen, for this Prophet, too, was more than a prophet; He is the Son of God, the Chosen One, greater than Moses, even as a Son is greater than a servant. “*Listen to him,*” commanded the Voice from the cloud.

It was His backside — His goodness and grace and mercy — that was on the mind of Jesus as Moses with Elijah spoke with Him of “*his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.*” “His departure”: I find this translation odd, even if it is a literal translation and popular among many modern English translations. Those following the King James use the word “decease” — perhaps better, but still a bit undecipherable. The Greek word here is ἔξοδος, like the name of the second book of the Bible — “the way out.” But what could it possibly mean here? A few translations do what I think is best, namely, leave the word as it is — untranslated.

Jesus and the two great prophets of old spoke of Jesus' exodus, with all of the Biblical connections that that word fires off in your mind. They spoke of Jesus' exodus, which the Exodus that Moses led, rescuing 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 His disciples about only days before, a rescue that would mean His suffering and death, and His resurrection on the third day.

Greater than Moses, Jesus would effect this rescue not just for Israel, but for the whole world, delivering us from the bondage to sin and from death's dark night by His own blood, a Paschal Lamb sacrificed for us. Greater than Moses who led Israel through the Red Sea waters, Jesus leads His elect through the waters of Holy Baptism into freedom. 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, 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 eternal glory that Moses received.

For this is the thing for which we hope: *“forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [we] press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 3:13-14), being *“found in [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own that comes from [Moses and] the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith”* (Phil. 3:9).

Our salvation is a matter of faith — *“everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day”* (John 6:40). The kingdom of God is a matter of faith. Therefore, baptized into Christ and brought to faith by the Spirit, *“our citizenship is in heaven”* even now, and we are looking forward to the coming again of our *“Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,”* who will raise us up in resurrection glory, and *“will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself”* (Phil. 3:20-21).

What that will be like, Jesus gives us a glimpse in His transfiguration, a glimpse of *“the glory that is to be revealed to us”* (Rom. 8:18) in our resurrection from the dead. Even as Jesus here shone forth in divine glory, so calls *“us to his own glory and excellence”* and grants us, through *“his precious and very great promises”* that we might *“become partakers of the divine nature”* (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

Bathed in the light of Christ, we are reminded today that we *“have received mercy,”* that we *“are God’s people.”* We *“are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.”* We have been called *“out of darkness into his marvelous light”* (1 Pet. 2:9). We have been called to His glory.

Let this Festival of Jesus’ Transfiguration, therefore, prepare us for what lies ahead this these forty days of Lent as we *“share in his sufferings”* and death, but always *“straining forward to what lies ahead”* (Phil. 3:10, 13): Jesus’ Easter victory and our own *“resurrection from the dead”* and the glory of life eternal.

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