

The Transfiguration of Our Lord/February 23, 2020
Matthew 17:1-9/True Man and True God
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“And he was transfigured before them...”

Today is the Last Sunday in the season of Epiphany. Every year we read about the Transfiguration of Our Lord as we come to this Sunday in the church year. Since we are in the first year of the three-year series, it is Matthew’s turn to tell us about this event.

Epiphany is all about revealing Jesus. We portray the revelation of Jesus using our experience with dark and light. Just as physical darkness causes us to stumble and get lost, so we are also in eternal darkness if we do not have the revelation of Jesus. Just as light reveals the world around us, so also the revelation of Jesus reveals our eternal salvation to us.

Epiphany begins with a literal light, the star that led the magi to worship Jesus. Today’s Gospel tells us of a different kind of light; the heavenly light of Jesus. This appearance of Jesus at this time was in stark contrast to His everyday appearance to the people of that time.

The Gospel accounts tell us Jesus regularly went into the mountains to pray. Sometimes alone and other times with disciples. I imagine Peter, James, and John were expecting just another ordinary time of prayer with Jesus on the mountain. What occurred was radically different.

The Greek word describing this is metamorphosis. It pretty much means the same thing in Greek that it does in English. Jesus changed His appearance. He shone like the sun and even His clothes glowed.

Then Jesus revealed that the Kingdom of Heaven is really not far away. Moses and Elijah appear and talk with Jesus. Moses is the great law-giver. Elijah is not only a prophet, but he went up by a whirlwind into heaven as recorded in 2 Kings 2:11. He did not experience death before he entered eternity. The law-giver and the singular prophet were right there on the mountain talking with Jesus.

Also, God the Father joins the scene in the form of a bright cloud, and a voice saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” Once again, we hear the words spoken when John baptized Jesus. This is one of those very rare times when God the Father spoke directly to His people.

Naturally, when the disciples saw what was happening, it blew them away. At first, Peter was all set to build altars right there on the mountain for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Then when God the Father revealed His presence, all the disciples could do was cower in fear.

When we read this account, it is a good the revealed heavenly glory impresses us. It is good for us to remember Jesus really is the eternal Son of the Father. However, we should also notice this is not the normal form Jesus presented to the disciples and others who came to see and hear Him. The Bible makes it very clear if you had to judge Jesus by His physical appearance alone, you would say Jesus looked like an ordinary guy. Many pious artists and movie producers give us images of Jesus that is just a little too good to be true. Many show Jesus with a neatly combed beard, every hair in place, and chiseled good looks. Then there are the ones showing Jesus with a halo or some kind of an eerie glow. Such portrayals are fine if they help us think about Jesus and Him crucified, but we should not think of them as accurate depictions. During Jesus’s earthly ministry, you would not be able to pick Him out of a crowd. Remember the guards needed Judas to identify Him with a kiss. He died by crucifixion, a common

method of execution with common criminals. Everything about Jesus was ordinary. The prophet Isaiah said, [Isa 53:2] “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.”

However, this homely, traveling Jewish rabbi was and is the Lord; the Almighty Son of God. Everything that is God resides in this seemingly ordinary man. Why is it important we understand Jesus is the true Son of God who took on humanity in this most humble way? Why is it important to understand Jesus is and forever will be the most ordinary human and the only true God in one person?

Jesus took on ordinary humanity in order to save ordinary humans. Jesus came to save sinners. If you are a sinner, if you struggle with life, if you wonder how in the world a holy, righteous God could be interested in you, then Jesus came to save you. If, on the other hand, you think you are in pretty good shape, you’ve done a pretty good job getting your life in order, if you think, for the most part, you are a pretty good person, then Jesus is not for you. Jesus came for ordinary human beings and that means Jesus came to save sinners. Jesus Himself said, [Mark 2:17] “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Although Jesus never sinned, He became a sinner. He did this by lifting your sin from you and carrying it Himself. He did this for all people and so He became the greatest sinner of them all as the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write, [2 Cor 5:21] “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Jesus carried your sin to a cross. There He endured the full punishment for your sin. His suffering began in Gethsemane where

He sweat drops of blood for you. It continued in the unfair trial, the unjust beatings and floggings, and crucifixion. It continued in the moment of forsakenness on the cross. It continued until Jesus issued that final cry of triumph, "It is finished!" With that cry, He signaled your entire sin-debt is paid in full. You are adopted into His family. You are righteous in God's sight.

Jesus showed us who He truly is with His transfiguration. His ordinary appearance showed He is true man. His transfigured appearance showed He is true God. This will help the disciples survive the upcoming events of Jesus' Passion. This reminds all Christians our sins are truly paid in full. The Transfiguration of Our Lord also serves to remind us there is one more transfiguration in our future. Although Jesus died on the cross, the grave was unable to hold Him. His resurrection is the promise that there will be a day Jesus will return and all people will see Him in all His eternal glory.

On that day, Jesus will raise all the dead and transfigure all who believe in Him. All who hear Christ and His Word, who believed will no longer be mortal, but we shall be clothed in immortality. The corruption of this sinful world will pass away and you shall be a citizen of a new creation where you will see your savior face-to-face. Then you will fully know the inheritance that already belong to you as a son or daughter of the Father.

The Sunday of the Transfiguration of Our Lord is the hinge between Epiphany and Lent. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday which starts the pilgrimage in memory of Jesus carrying your sin on the road to the cross to bring about your final transfiguration into eternal life in the new heavens and new earth.