



TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. C. Brian Bucklew

Collect of the Day:

O God, in the glorious transfiguration of Your beloved Son You confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of Moses and Elijah. In the voice that came from the bright cloud You wonderfully foreshadowed our adoption by grace. Mercifully make us co-heirs with the King in His glory and bring us to the fullness of our inheritance in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Introit:

Psalm 84:1-2a, 4, 1-11 (antiphon: Psalm 77:18b)
— *His lightnings lighted up the world*

Psalm:

Psalm 85 (antiphon: v. 9) — *Salvation is near to those who fear Him*

Old Testament Reading:

Exodus 34:29-35 — *Moses' veiled face*

Gradual:

Psalm 45:2a; 110:1 — *You are the most handsome of the sons of men*

Epistle:

2 Peter 1:16-21 — *We were eyewitnesses of his majesty*

Verse:

Psalm 96:2-3 — *Sing to the LORD; tell of his salvation from day to day*

Matthew 17:1-9 ESV

Author and Date:

Matthew Levi the apostle around AD 50. This is the Transfiguration of our Lord, who is revealed to be the Son of God, and who foreshadows our adoption by grace. By faith in Christ we are granted to become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3). On account of Christ, the Father has qualified the Christian to share in the inheritance of the saints of light (Colossians 1:11).

¹ **And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.**

- Jesus has just taught six days earlier about His coming (Matthew 16:27-28). The transfiguration is a foreshadowing of Christ's coming on the last day in glory. Even here on the mountain of transfiguration Peter, James, and John see the Son of Man (Jesus) coming in His kingdom. "Before we taste of death, we see Thy kingdom come; we long to hold the vision bright and make this hill our home." (LSB 414 "Tis Good, Lord, to Be Here")

² **And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.**

- Jesus is the radiance of the glory of the Father of lights and the exact imprint of his nature (Hebrews 1:3, James 1:17). He is one substance with the Father of lights. Jesus is "God of God, *Light of Light*, very God of very God", as we confess in the Nicene Creed.

³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

- Moses and Elijah appear to Peter, James and John. How are they recognized? This is a miraculous work of God. Moses and Elijah are the testimony of the Law and the Prophets, and their talking with Jesus bears witness that Jesus is the Christ. All the Law and the Prophets bear witness to Christ (Luke 24:27).
- They talk with Jesus. Luke 9:31 tells us that they speak to Christ about His departure, His *exodus*, as it says in the Greek. The Moses that led the Israelites in the exodus out of Egypt by the blood of the Passover Lamb is now speaking to the Lamb of God. Elijah who was taken up into heaven is now speaking to Christ who would ascend into heaven.

⁴ And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

- Peter speaks first as he was often known to do, but in ignorance as he was often known to do. He wants to tent or tabernacle the great men he beholds. Peter wishes to show them hospitality and to have them stay. But this was not the time for speaking, but for listening.
- Peter is still obviously confused, for he proposes to tent all three; Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. But the true tent / tabernacle of God is in the Body of Christ. This is where Moses, Elijah and himself are to have there dwelling in the presence of God. Christ is the tent made without hands (Hebrews 9:11).

⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

- Overshadowed = tabernacled / tented. Peter proposed to tabernacle / tent Christ, Moses, and Elijah, but now the majestic cloud of the Lord’s presence tabernacles / tents Peter, James and John. This is like the glory cloud of God’s presence that we see in Exodus 40:34.
- The Father speaks something similar to what was said by Him at Jesus’ baptism. He is well pleased with His Son. But He adds this: “Listen to him.” Our baptism into Christ connects us to the transfiguring work of Christ. In baptism we are clothed with this Christ who is clothed in light (Galatians 3:27).

⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.

- Peter, James and John know that they are not worthy to be in God’s holy presence. They fall on their faces and are terrified because God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Even the seraphim with six wings cover their faces before the Lord and Isaiah says when seeing the Lord sitting upon His throne: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” (Isaiah 6:5)

⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.”

- Isaiah says after beholding the Lord sitting upon His throne, “Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.’” (Isaiah 6:6-7). But Peter, James, and John do not have a seraphim come to them, but the Son of God Himself, touching them, raising them and casting away all fear. Jesus is what the burning coal on the altar for Isaiah foreshadowed. He is the one who takes the guilt of our sin away, atoning for our sins.

⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

- Jesus alone remains. The disciples trust is not to be in Moses, or Elijah, but in Jesus. He is their true intercessor before the Father.

⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

- The disciples did not fully understand Jesus’ riding on a donkey into Jerusalem, as a fulfillment of the Zechariah prophecy of the Christ. Likewise, they would not understand transfiguration until Jesus rose from the dead (John 12:16). They were not ready to speak of this vision until after the resurrection. But Peter would speak of transfiguration vision after the resurrection, as seen in the epistle lesson in 2 Peter 1:16-21.

