

# Sermon Series – Matthew 17:1-9

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*Preached on the Transfiguration of Our Lord, January 20, 2013*

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## **The Transfiguration of Our Lord**

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm: Psalm 2

New Testament Reading: 2 Peter 1:16-21

Gospel Reading: Matthew 17:1-9

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### **The transfiguration proved Jesus to be the Messiah so that your faith will be confirmed in Christ**

As one can tell by the gospel text, today is the day in the church in which we celebrate the transfiguration of Our Lord. Whenever I sit down to write a sermon, I read the assigned text and pray to God seeking His wisdom. I wonder, why is this particular text contained within Holy Scriptures? If this text were missing from Holy Scripture, what would the people of Christ miss? The transfiguration of Jesus is mystifying and mysterious. In our text today, Jesus leads His three, closest disciples up a high mountain with Him for a very particular reason. This text is present for us today for the very same reason it was necessary for Peter, James, and John so long ago. The transfiguration proved Jesus to be the Messiah so that your faith will be confirmed in Christ. For Peter, James, and John, the transfiguration confirmed their faith in Christ, too.

The initial confirmation of faith comes from the transfiguration of Jesus while on top of the mountain with His closest disciples: Peter, James, and John. Suddenly, Jesus' face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as light. The Greek word for

transfigured is where we get our word for metamorphosis<sup>1</sup>. What had changed? For a time, a veil had been lifted from our Lord. From the time of Jesus' birth in a lowly manger throughout His youth and ministry, the divine nature of our Lord had been veiled in human flesh. This veil is now being lifted to show the disciples the holy and righteous nature of Christ. In our first lesson for today, when Moses would return from being in the presence of God Almighty, his face shone radiantly<sup>2</sup>. As such, Moses would put on a veil after speaking with the people. Whatever happened to the wearing of veils? Brides used to wear veils on their wedding day. All throughout the wedding ceremony, the groom could only look through the veil at his bride to be and the veil was only lifted after the minister pronounced them, "husband and wife". The veil was a separation between two worlds, the world of the groom and the world of the bride. Once the veil was lifted, the two worlds came together as one. Another example of veil wearing that seems to have gone wayward is during funerals. The widow would wear a funeral veil to cover her face. Again, this veil separates the widow from the rest of those attending the funeral. The veil provided privacy as she mourned the loss of her husband. After she had mourned, the veil was lifted and she once again rejoins the world. In today's Gospel text, the veil of Christ's divinity is lifted for a time for the disciple's sake. Christ has used this veil both as a separation and as privacy. It is not time for His full divinity to be seen by everyone. In addition, His world and our world are about to come together as a bride and groom come together, but these days are only the betrothal period. It is not quite the perfect time in God's redemptive plan for the bride and groom to be wed, but the Day is fast approaching. This transfiguration on the mountain is a preview of the

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<sup>1</sup> μεταμορφώθη – an outwardly perceptible change of form

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 34:29-35

glorified Christ and our faith may use this veil lifting as a sign of confirmation that Jesus is truly God in flesh.

Another confirmation of our faith is in the appearance of the Old Testament saints. As Jesus is transfigured, Moses and Elijah appear with Him and confirm His deity. In the Old Testament, Moses is the law giver and Elijah is the law interpreter. These two saints sum up the entire Old Testament. The Jewish people would often refer to their Scriptures as *The Law of Moses*<sup>3</sup> or *Moses and the prophets*<sup>4</sup>. In the text of the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham is quoted as saying, “They have Moses and the prophets” meaning that the rich man’s family has the Hebrew Scriptures, this alone is enough to confirm their faith. When the resurrected Lord met with His disciples on the road to Emmaus, He began with Moses and the prophets and interpreted to them all the Scriptures concerning Himself.<sup>5</sup> These two saints also represent witnesses of the divinity of Christ. The Law required the testimony of two or three witnesses in order to uphold either a conviction or an acquittal.<sup>6</sup> I am amazed at how we have lost the need for witnesses in our society today. I have always loved reading the news. For me, I receive my updates from the Internet, in particular, the CNN website. CNN has introduced eReporters. eReporters report news that is happening, as it happens. However, they do not appear to have any real credentials behind their reports. Their stories are not checked for accuracy, either grammatical or practical. As such, a story on the front page of CNN’s website may be withdrawn once further information concludes that the report is inaccurate. In other words, in an effort to report information

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<sup>3</sup> Joshua 8:31, 1 Kings 2:3, Ezra 3:2, Luke 2:22 – to name only a few

<sup>4</sup> Luke 16:29, Luke 16:31

<sup>5</sup> Luke 24:13-35

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 17:6

in real time, CNN forgoes the testimony of two or three witnesses. They would rather retract an incorrect story than initially take the time to prove its truthfulness. In speaking for myself, I would much rather read an accurate statement on a story, even a day after the event occurred, than read potentially inaccurate information the moment the event occurred. In our text today, Moses and Elijah witness to the fact that Christ is unveiling His divinity in front of the disciples. In addition to the testimony of their presence, Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah were discussing Jesus' departure which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem. The word departure comes from the word for exodus.<sup>7</sup> In other words, Moses and Elijah were discussing Jesus' exodus. What a wonderful testimony of the gift of forgiveness of sins from our Lord. Moses, through an exodus, led the people out of the bondage of slavery and into the Holy land. Jesus, in a very short time, will lead His people in an exodus out of the bondage of sin and into an even holier land. The saints testify to the truth and as you read the Holy Scriptures you must know that their testimony is true. This too is meant to confirm your faith in Christ.

While on the mountain top, with the Old Testament saints, the disciples looked on and once again their faith was confirmed. This time, the confirmation came from the Father. A bright cloud enveloped them and the voice came from the cloud saying, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased." We heard this at Jesus' Baptism. The Father identified Jesus as His Son – the Son whom He loves. When the disciples heard this voice they fell prostrate on the ground. I must once again point out that the voice from the Father has changed. In the Old Testament, when the Father spoke, lightning and thunder accompanied His voice. When the Father spoke, the ground shook.

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<sup>7</sup> ἔξοδον - literally, going out, exodus, departure; historically, the exodus of Israel from Egypt.

However, He now speaks as a loving Father to His beloved Son. Yet, the Father has more to say at the transfiguration than He did at the Baptism of Jesus. This time the Father says, "Listen to Him!" The Father speaks authoritatively and gives His authority to His Son. Jesus is moving closer to His death and, as such, the disciples are going to watch their Lord suffer great and dreadful atrocities. He will do this willingly as a lamb led to slaughter. It is important that the disciples hear this voice of authority telling them to listen to the Son. Growing up in America, we no longer understand what it means to speak in someone's name. In the days of Kings and kingdoms, a King would send off a trusted knight or member of the court to a far off kingdom. When the person arrived, they would speak to the King of that kingdom "in the name of" the other King. In essence, it was as if the King himself were present and speaking. The Father gives His authority to His Son. In addition, the Son gives the authority to His ministers of the Word to speak in His name. As a pastor I speak as if Christ Himself were here in your presence. This is an awesome responsibility and also why we have elders to make certain that I do not preach to you anything other than the Law and Gospel of Holy Scriptures. As such, I preach to you this day telling you that your faith is confirmed by the authority given to me from Christ and His Holy Word tells us that He is God and His promises are true.

Another confirmation of your faith today comes in the forerunner of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist. The Jewish people knew from the Scriptures that the prophet Elijah would come before the Messiah would appear. The book of Malachi says, "I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD."<sup>8</sup> Now, Elijah stands on

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<sup>8</sup> Malachi 4:5

the mount of transfiguration with Moses, Jesus, the three disciples, and the voice in the cloud. However, if we would have continued this text we would have read that the disciples were wondering about the coming of Elijah. Jesus told them that Elijah had already come and they did not recognize him.<sup>9</sup> Jesus is referring here to the scribes and Pharisees that had John put to death. St. Luke writes that John came in the spirit and power of Elijah.<sup>10</sup> For those Jews looking for Elijah to come before the Messiah, they missed the fulfillment of the prophetic sign as they overlooked John the Baptist. For our faith, seeing these Scripture texts fulfilled helps confirm our faith. They may not have been fulfilled as we would have expected them to be fulfilled, but Jesus tells us that this is exactly the plan of redemption that has been laid out before the foundation of the world. John came in the spirit and power of Elijah and paved the path for the coming Messiah.

The last confirmation of faith found in this text is the reformed faith of the disciples, especially Peter, James, and John. Up through this point, the disciples are not the most fearless band of men. They have many doubts about Jesus and they truly do not understand His prophecies of His impending death. Even after this mountain top experience, Peter continues to deny his Lord. When Jesus was arrested, they asked Peter if he was one of Jesus' followers.<sup>11</sup> Peter flatly denies knowing this man at all. Three times Peter was asked if he knew this man Jesus and three times Peter denies his Lord. Is this the acts of a faithful man? Perhaps. We all have our doubts. Yet it was through this experience of the transfiguration that Peter would look back and have his

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 17:12

<sup>10</sup> Luke 1:17

<sup>11</sup> Luke 22:54-62

faith strengthened. After the resurrection of Christ, the disciples' faith grew tremendously. Peter writes that we did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.<sup>12</sup> Peter saw the glory of His divinity and he is recalling this experience in his letter. Later, Peter will be arrested and executed for his commitment to Christ. All Peter had to do was stop talking about Jesus. However, Peter continued for he knew that better things awaited him after death.<sup>13</sup> When the execution orders came through and Peter was sentenced to death upon a cross, tradition has it that Peter requested to be crucified upside-down because he was not worthy to die in the same way as his Lord. Other disciples faced similar, cruel deaths. Instead of shutting their mouths and ceasing to speak of Jesus, they would rather be flayed, or skinned, alive. Their faith was as solid of a rock as Peter's confession of faith.

The Word changes people's lives. When we read the Holy Scriptures, we must let the Holy Spirit permeate our very soul with the Words of truth. The transfiguration gives us an unveiled look at the divinity of Christ before His death and resurrection. The Old Testament saints, along with the disciples, are eyewitness testimonies to the divinity of Jesus Christ. The Father tells not only the disciples, but also all Christians that Christ is given His authority. The Father tells us, "Listen to Him!" John the Baptist fulfills the Old Testament prophecies of the coming of Elijah to usher in the Messiah. Finally, the reformed faith of the disciples looked back on the transfiguration as a reassurance of what they believed. For this they were willing to die violent deaths for their Lord and King. The Holy Scriptures are filled with many confirmations of Christ's divinity, but the

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<sup>12</sup> 2 Peter 1:16

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 6:9

transfiguration is included specifically to confirm our faith in Christ. May this text solidify your belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and King over all creation.

# SERMON OUTLINE

## INTRODUCTION:

**Homiletical Point:** The transfiguration proved Jesus to be the Messiah so that your faith will be confirmed in Christ

1. Jesus transformed into a preview of the glorified Christ

Explain: Glory veiled; Shekinah glory; radiant light; Moses veiled; Metamorphous

Illustrate: Wedding veil; Funeral veil

Apply: You have read about the preview of the things to come, now prepare for the Day

<sup>NIV</sup> **Matthew 25:31** "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.

2. The Old Testament saints appeared and confirmed the deity of Christ

Explain: Moses (the law-giver); Elijah (the law interpreter); Speaking of Christ's *exodus*  
Testimony of two or three witnesses; feast of tabernacles (commemorating the Exodus)

Illustrate: Newspaper articles or CNN e-Reports

Apply: You must read the Scriptures to know that God has testified to His truth

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 10:4** Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

3. The Father identified Jesus as His Son and verified His love and authority

Explain: Shekinah glory; Voice from heaven; This is My Son – Listen to Him!  
Disciples fell on their faces

Illustrate: Speaking in the King's name – the Father sent the Son

Apply: The Word is given in the name of the Son, sent by the Father, to tell us His good pleasure

<sup>NIV</sup> **Isaiah 6:5** "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

4. Jesus acknowledged John as Elijah, the forerunner of the coming Messiah

Explain: Already came; John

Illustrate: *Scripture texts*

Apply: You can be certain that the promises foretold of old have been fulfilled in Christ

<sup>NIV</sup> **Malachi 4:5** "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Matthew 17:12** But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands."

5. The post-resurrection apostles immediately reformed their faith in Jesus.

Explain: Peter, James, John – Do not tell until after I have risen

Illustrate: The Word changes people

Apply: You must let the Word permeate your very soul and change you as a person

<sup>NIV</sup> **2 Peter 1:17** For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

**CONCLUSION:** The transfiguration proved Jesus to be the Messiah so that your faith will be confirmed in Christ