
In case you did not make the connection, the beautiful Russian icon on the cover of our bulletin is telling us that today is the feast of the Transfiguration. This festival day has been celebrated in the Orthodox churches since the fourth Century. In the West, it was not embraced by the Catholic Church until the late 1500’s. And since this was the height of the Reformation, the feast of the Transfiguration got left behind by the Protestant world like so many other things Roman. It wasn’t until 1892 that the Anglican Church in this country declared August 6 to be the Feast of the Transfiguration.

We remember and celebrate this event, because it is one of just a handful of moments when we see behind the veil that separates us from heaven. The Transfiguration this was a moment in Jesus’ earthly pilgrimage, filled with symbolism, that ties together a remarkable array of threads in God’s revelation.

Let’s look first at Luke chapter 9 itself and how Jesus began to prepare the disciples for what lay ahead. He had taken them to the region of Caesarea Philippi, where He asked them, “Who do people say that I am?” (Luke 9:19)

“Well,” they said, “some say John the Baptist. Some say Elijah. And some say one of the prophets of old has risen from the dead.”
Jesus pressed them further, “But who do you say that I am?” It was a watershed moment when Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

Right on the heels of that, Jesus told the disciples, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” This was His first prediction of His death. We know from other Gospel passages that the Disciples were perplexed by this.

Then Jesus said another perplexing thing: in verse 27, where our reading began today, He said, “But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.” In fact, people are still perplexed, wondering just what Jesus was referring to. Certainly, He was pointing to His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, which was the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation. He may also have been referring to the event that was about to happen in eight days, the Transfiguration.

On that day, Jesus took the three men of His inner circle of trusted Disciples up on a mountain to pray. And as He was praying, He began to radiate a magnificent light, and His face was altered. And there appeared with Him in conversation Moses and Elijah. Before I explain the meaning of those two men being there, let me just affirm that this was the validation of all that had been said in the watershed moment and thereafter: Jesus was the Messiah; He was going to suffer and die at the hands of sinful men; and He was going to rise from the dead. For out of a cloud came the voice of the Father, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to Him.” (Luke 9:35)

Imagine Peter, James and John trying to process all this. They would have known the scriptures. They would have seen a myriad of things coming
together, and would be trying to sort them out. Peter wanted more time. He wanted desperately to preserve the moment. That is why he wanted to build three tents for Moses, Elijah and Jesus. But the cloud dissipated; the two men of old faded away; and the mountaintop experience was over.

So what were some of these threads of prophecy and revelation that came together in the Transfiguration? The first was the fulfillment of the Messianic expectation. Since at least the days of Isaiah some 750 years before, the Hebrew people had looked forward to the coming of a king from the line of David who would rule forever with justice and righteousness. (Isaiah 9:6–7) We call that one the Messiah, because he would be anointed by God. The word “Messiah” is the Hebrew word for the anointed one. The Greek word for Messiah is? …Christ. That is what Peter realized and proclaimed at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus was the Christ.

There were many expectations that went along with the coming of the Messiah. One was part of the tradition, although nowhere expressed in the Bible: that Elijah would come back as a sign that the Messiah was arriving. That is why many people thought John the Baptist or Jesus Himself was Elijah. They could see that they were extraordinary people who appeared to have been sent by God. And there had been no prophet in Israel for 500 years. When Elijah stood on that mount of Transfiguration with Jesus and Moses, it meant that the Messiah was here.

As for Moses, his presence brought to mind something he said in Deuteronomy 18:15: “The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen....” This had come to be seen as an expectation of the Messiah. And now we hear the Father say, “This is my Son, my chosen one. Listen to Him!” (Luke 9:35)
The message was: yes, Peter, you were right. Jesus is the Messiah.

The second set of threads was the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Moses was the representative of the Law. It was Moses to whom God gave the Ten Commandments.

Elijah was the greatest of all the prophets. His presence on the mount of Transfiguration represented the Prophets. So think about the expression, “the Law and the Prophets.” Where have you heard that before? Jesus used this expression on the road to Emmaus, when He said,

“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Luke 24:44

The Old Covenant was between God and the Hebrew people, in which God said to them:

*If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.* Exodus 19:5

And God gave them detailed instructions on how to worship Him. And He gave them detailed instructions on the sacrifices they must undertake.

But there came a time when God spoke of a New Covenant. We find it in Jeremiah 31:

*Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband.* Jeremiah 31:31–32
When Jesus, the Messiah shared the bread and wine with His disciples at the Last Supper, He took the cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” No longer were the sacrifices needed to appease God for the breaking of His Law. Now the Messiah, the Chosen one, has given His own blood, and washed away the sins of all who give their lives to Him.

And this brings to mind the third set of threads woven together in the Transfiguration, the thread of the Suffering Servant. Embedded in the Hebrew mind was the mysterious concept in the Book of Isaiah of the Suffering Servant, the one chosen by God to suffer for the transgressions of all. They didn’t know to whom it was referring. But they knew (see Isaiah Chapters 49–53)

- That he would be despised and rejected
- That he would be a man of sorrows
- That he would be oppressed and afflicted
- That he would go like a lamb to the slaughter
- And be killed, even though he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth.
- And that he had been chosen by God
- To be the redeemer of God’s people.

Just eight days before the Transfiguration, Jesus said that He must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed. And now, out of the cloud, the Father said, “This is my Son, my Chosen One.”
This is the Transfiguration. Symbolism and revelation abound, but in summary its meaning was this:

For Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, to be standing with Jesus in His glory tells us that Jesus was the fulfillment of all that God had revealed was to come: He was the fulfillment of the Law; and He was the One to whom the Prophets had pointed from the very beginning.

That’s a lot of scriptural theology. Let me leave you with some thoughts for our walk of faith in this Jesus, this Messiah, this redeemer. For me, three things come to mind.

First, all this analysis gives us great comfort that the Bible is the Word of God, a miracle of consistency that could only have been put together by God.¹

The Bible consists of:

- 66 books
- Written over a span of 1500 years
- By over 40 authors
- From every walk of life
- From three continents
- Written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek

And yet it tells a single, detailed, integrated story of what God has done, is doing and is going to do. Those threads that were tied together in that

¹ Some of this discussion is paraphrased from p. 31 of Christianity: A True and Reasonable Faith for a Skeptical World, St. Stephen’s Anglican Church, Heathsville, VA (2013)
vision on the mount of Transfiguration: I could have talked about many other places in the Bible that dealt with these matters, including the Book of Romans, which explains the difference between Old Covenant Law and New Covenant grace; and Hebrews, which speaks of the sacrificial system, and tells us how Jesus is the great high priest of the New Covenant. It is too wonderful for words to appreciate the miracle that is the Bible, God’s Word to us.

My second takeaway from the Transfiguration is that we should be warned of the human tendency to go from mountaintop experiences with God to forgetfulness and falling back into our sinful ways. You would think that after what Peter, James and John experienced on that mountain, they would never be the same. You would think that as they came back down with Jesus, they would have no priority greater than following Him. You would think that they would heed the words He said to them just days before they went up on that mountain to pray. Jesus had said,

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Luke 9:23

And yet, what happened? Within a few days, an argument broke out among the disciples about which of them was the greatest. (Luke 9:46–48) And when things got dangerous on Good Friday, the disciples deserted Jesus. And Peter denied that he even knew Jesus.

This is us, folks. This is what it is to be human.

• Even though we are redeemed,
• even though we have met the risen Savior,
• even though we have made a confession of faith
• and been baptized and
given our lives to Christ,
we fall back into sinful ways and destructive habits and slothful behavior.
Be warned. At every mountaintop, Satan is waiting to walk down with us and draw us back into his false promises and his lies.

God wants so much more for us!

- He has set us free, and He wants us to stay free.
- He has given us the light of Christ, and He wants us to walk in that light.
- He has shown us the truth, and He wants us to live the truth.
- He has given us the privilege of intimacy with Him, and He wants us to be pleased to bring these human hearts and minds and bodies into His holy presence.

That brings to mind the third thing I want to leave with you from today’s scripture. That word “Chosen” carries a lot of meaning. It is an indicator of God’s sovereign will. “Sovereign” means that God is King over all things. All things are His. He has the power and the right to do whatever pleases Him. His will is supreme. When He said from the cloud, “This is my Son, my Chosen One,” God was expressing His supreme will. From before the foundation of the world, it was God’s plan and purpose to redeem the world, which He knew would fall into sin. And it was God’s plan and purpose to do that through the sending of His Son, Jesus, to be born a human being, to live in perfect righteousness, and to die a sacrificial death for the sins of the world. It was God’s plan to raise Jesus from the dead, and restore Him to His place upon the throne of heaven, where He reigns forever. That is what it means when it says, “God chose.”
Now, let me read you something from the first Chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians:

_Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will._ Ephesians 1:3-5

God chose you. God chose the Church established by Jesus Christ. He chose this gathering of believers. What an awesome thing! He chose us to be holy and blameless before Him. That means He chose to count our faith in Jesus Christ as righteousness. (See Romans 4:1–5)

God chose you to **know** Him. Not everyone knows God. Not everyone believes He even exists. And yet because He chose you, you have an open invitation to speak to Him at all times. You have the ability to believe His truth revealed in the Bible. You have the ability to see the things that happen as the miracles they are.

God chose you to **love** Him. Nothing fills you up like loving someone. And to love God with your whole heart and soul and mind and strength is the greatest love there is.

God chose you to **serve** Him. He doesn’t need your help. Whatever God wants to do, He can make it happen any way He wants. But He chose you to be His partner in the most important work in the universe: the redemption of the world, through your love and your witness.

And those who are chosen soon discover that there are other chosen ones, because Jesus has built a community of disciples. And they are our family. The 45 congregations of the Diocese of the Mid Atlantic are our family. The
150,000 members of the Anglican Church in North America are our family. The worldwide fellowship of believers are our family:

- The orthodox,
- The Roman Catholics,
- The Protestants
- The Anglicans
- The Pentecostals
- The Independents
- The Coptic Christians.

God’s sovereign choice has made a family of people from every tribe, language, people and nation, built on love for Him and for one another.

This morning, as we celebrate the Transfiguration, we are filled with joy. We are—

- Joyful to know that God’s Word is a miracle of truth and consistency.
- Joyful to be part of such a large family that God loves.
- Joyful to be chosen by God.

We can almost see the glorified Jesus standing here in our midst in dazzling white. It is a festival day worth celebrating.

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