

Transfiguration



Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, on the mountain you showed your glory in the transfiguration of your Son. Give us the vision to see beyond the turmoil of our world and to behold the king in all his glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Or

O God, in the transfiguration of your Son you confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the witness of Moses and Elijah, and in the voice from the bright cloud you foreshadowed our adoption as your children. Make us with the King heirs of your glory, and bring us to enjoy its fullness, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

The prayer is thought to have been composed by Calixtus III in the fifteenth century. This version is much simpler in its grammatical construction than the Latin original.

Exodus 34:29-35

{29} Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. {30} When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. {31} But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them. {32} Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. {33} When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; {34} but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, {35} the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

29-33: "Moses had acquired a divine glow because of his long speaking with God. Then, the author describes how the discovery of the glow was experienced by those within the story. Moses himself was unaware that his skin shone, but the people... 'looked, and behold the skin of his face shone...'. They were afraid to come near to Moses, so that he had to call them. Then he established the pattern which would be repeated. He gave them in commandment all that God had spoken to him, and only when h had finished speaking did he put on his veil." [1]

34-35: "What is presupposed is that Moses continues to speak with God no longer on the top of the mountain, but in the tent of meeting (Ex. 33:11). Moreover, the same immediacy between God and Moses is present which results in the same after glow of the divine majesty. The veil or mask is removed when Moses speaks with God. It is put on only after he has finished speaking God's words to the people.... the veil covers his face only in the period in which he is not performing his office of receiving or communicating God's word."

[2]

Comment: "...the biblical story is concerned that the divine glow on Moses' face should not be understood as a type of metamorphosis. Moses did not himself become a deity. He was unaware of any transformation. By placing the story in this form in its present position the author has given an interpretation of how he wants the entire Sinai tradition to be

understood. God and the revelation of his will stand at the center. But Sinai is also the story of Moses, the mediator between God and Israel, who continued to function as a mortal man and yet who in his office bridged the enormous gap between the awesome, holy and zealous God of Sinai and the fearful, sinful, and repentant people of the covenant." [3]

Psalm 99

{1} The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! {2} The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. {3} Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he! {4} Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. {5} Extol the LORD our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he! {6} Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called on his name. They cried to the LORD, and he answered them. {7} He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; they kept his decrees, and the statutes that he gave them. {8} O LORD our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. {9} Extol the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy.

"...an extraordinarily agitated psalm that is made up of cries and ejaculations." [4]

1. *The Lord is king*: Psalm 99 is classified among the "Yahweh as King hymns." "Psalm 99 does not describe an event (of enthronement), but it is oriented to prostration before King Yahweh (vv. 5, 9; Pss. 95:6; 96:9)..." in a context of cultic traditions "by which a renewal of God's covenant and a new proclamation of God's law are brought into connection with homage before the God-King Yahweh that must very likely be associated with the Feast of Tabernacles..." [5]

enthroned upon the cherubim: Yahweh is addressed as the one "enthroned above the cherubim" in 2 Kings 19:15 (parallel Isaiah 37:16), "on the cherubim" in 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; (1 Chronicles 13:6), and "upon the cherubim" in Psalm 80:1. Another reference to the cherubim is in Psalm 18:10. Two cherubim were on the "mercy seat" the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, which was conceived as Yahweh's footstool (see verse 5: "worship at his footstool"). When Yahweh appears in the Temple the earth quakes.

3. *Holy is he*: See also verses 5 and 9. In Isaiah's vision the seraphs called "Holy is His name" as they flew in the heavenly Temple.

Lover of justice...equity...righteousness: These are covenant terms and reflect the conviction that the existence of these values in God's people is dependent of the recognition, in worship, that they are native Yahweh, and that he creates them in his people.

6. *Moses...Aaron...Samuel*: "Moses, Aaron, and Samuel...represented prototypes of the transmission of justice. They represent the first 'priests' and mediators between God and people.... the office of intercession is assigned to them. They called upon the name of Yahweh.... They were the 'guardians,' the first transmitters of the statutes of God's justice, which they had received." [6]

7. *He spoke to them in a pillar of cloud*: Not the pillar that led the Israelites out of Egypt, but the "dense cloud" in which Yahweh appeared on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19, 24 and *passim*). The motifs of ark-cherubim and cloud come together in 1 Kings 8:6-11.

8. *you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings*: "It is this co-existence of God's judgment and grace, so incomprehensible to the human mind...which is the innermost core of God's holiness before which the congregation falls down and worships.... The thought of the God who forgives imbues the faithful, whose faith is shaken by sin, with fresh courage and with a new impetus; the thought of the severity of God's judgments, on the other hand, guards the man who relies of God's grace against the danger of unscrupulously evading his responsibility." [7]

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

{12} Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, {13} not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside.

{14} But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. {15} Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; {16} but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. {17} Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. {18} And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. {4:1} Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. {2} We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

12 f. we act with great boldness, not like Moses: Paul compares Moses, who timidly covered his face unfavorably with Christians who place their hope in a new covenant which gives life (verse 6).

13. the glory that was being set aside: See already in verse 7. The fading of the glory has no basis in the Exodus story. Paul does not document his point, which suggests "that the interpretation of the splendor as fading was not a creation of Paul, but was already well known by his readers." [8] However, there is no further mention of the glory on Moses face in the Old Testament, which may be the source of the notion that it disappeared.

14-16. their minds were hardened: The refusal of Paul's compatriots to accept the Gospel is evidence of their hardness of heart, without any indication of whether God hardened their hearts as he did with Pharaoh, or whether this is a deliberate refusal on the part of the Jews. *when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is there:* Moses covered his face so the Israelites could not see the glory, and when they read the scripture their minds are hardened and a veil keeps them from seeing its true meaning. The veil is only removed "in Christ."

17. the Lord is the Spirit: The "Lord" of verse 16 who removes the veil is the Spirit. When Moses went into the Lord he removed the veil (Exodus 34:34), so he saw clearly. The effect is that "Moses is therefore an agent both of the old and the new." [9]

18. seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror: "believers...are not contrasted with Moses, whose countenance radiated (reflected) God's splendor, but with the Israelites who could not look upon it." [10]

transformed into the same image: The verb "transformed" (*metamorphousthai*) is used only of Jesus' transfiguration and in Romans 12:2 where believers are to be "transformed by the renewing of your minds." The connection with the Transfiguration must be significant in the use on this Sunday, though here it is not Christ who is transfigured, but those who believe in him.

4:1. we do not lose heart: A reference back to 3:12, "we act with great boldness."

2. practice cunning...falsify: On one hand Paul claims the high ground for himself as in 1:12, and on the other he implies that his opponents engage in these practices.

Comment: "Paul's interpretation of II Corinthians 3 is a classic example of genuine theological dialectic. He brings to the text the perspective of faith which had learned to hope in Christ (v. 12), but he brings from the text a witness which conversely forms his understanding of God and shapes the Christian life through his Spirit." [11]

Luke 9:28-36 [37-43]

{28} Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. {29} And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. {30} Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. {31} They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. {32} Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. {33} Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--not knowing what he said. {34} While he

was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. {35} Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" {36} When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen. [{37} On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. {38} Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. {39} Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. {40} I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." {41} Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." {42} While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. {43} And all were astounded at the greatness of God.]

28. *About eight days*: Mark and Matthew say six days. Luke counts both the partial days at the beginning and the end of the period as full days and adds them to the six days between Jesus' first announcement of his impending passion (Luke 9:20-28) and the day of the Transfiguration.

29. *the appearance of his face changed*: Many commentators think that Luke avoids the Marcan term (*metemorphothe*, "*metamorphosed*") because of its association with pagan myths of metamorphosis.

30. *two men, Moses and Elijah*: These two were expected to appear on earth as a prelude to the restoration of Yahweh's power over the earth. "There is nothing that really militates against their representing the Law and the Prophets; but in any case, if this is not certain, then the contrast of the heavenly command at the end of the episode strikes home just as well, if they to be regarded merely as two OT prophetic figures." [12]

31. *his departure...in Jerusalem*: "Departure" is *exodos* in Greek, meaning "simply...the 'end,' 'conclusion' of His life and work." [13]

at Jerusalem: Jerusalem is not only the city where prophets are put to death (13:34), but, as this very phrase intimates, the city of destiny for Jesus. It thus foreshadows the travel account of 9:51." [14]

32. *weighed down with sleep*: This detail is only in Luke. The translator tries to protect the disciples' reputation with "since they had stayed awake." The translation "since they had stayed awake" is more than the Greek will bear. King James "when they were awake" suggests that they had been asleep or at least drowsing and had awakened. In Luke 22:45, the disciples' sleep is explained as a consequence of their grief.

33. *not knowing what he was saying*: Peter seems to think that it is important to prevent Moses and Elijah from leaving, and that he can do that by building booths for them and Jesus. But Peter didn't know what he was talking about.

34. *a cloud overshadowed them*: See Acts 1:9, where a cloud takes Jesus out of sight. "The cloud has to be understood in the OT sense of an apocalyptic stage-prop, an instrument of God's presence and glory.... Is there an allusion to Moses' entering the cloud of Exod 24:18?" [15]

35. *"This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him"*: Unlike the voice at Jesus' baptism which spoke only to Jesus, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22), these words are addressed to the disciples. The baptism introduced a period of Jesus' messianic awareness. The transfiguration introduced a new period of Jesus' awareness, directed toward the Passion.

[37-43 The lectionary includes this pericope to the Gospel as an optional addition to the Transfiguration. It describes a chance meeting of Jesus with a father whose son is afflicted with an unclean spirit which Jesus rebuked healing the Son. The passage is closed by a report of the crowd's astonishment at the greatness of God. There probably is a reason the lectionary folks included the addition, but in view of its optional character it is probably just as well to omit it. It does not seem to add anything to the Transfiguration pericope,

which is quite complicated as it is.

38. *he is my only child*: Maybe there is a parallel being drawn between the impending death of God's Son and the possession of this only son.]

Reflection

The festival of the Transfiguration was instituted by Calixtus III in 1457 to commemorate the defeat of the Turks on August 6 of the previous year. Lutheran usage has moved the feast from August 6 to the Sunday before Ash Wednesday.

As the baptism introduced the season of Epiphany the Transfiguration concludes the season. In both we are reminded of Jesus place in the divine economy as Son of God, and of our own place as witnesses to God's wonders. We stand before Moses and tremble at the sight of his glowing face. We worship in the Temple before the God whose holiness expresses itself both in forgiveness of the sinner and in punishment for sin. With Paul, with unveiled faces we see the glory of the Lord in Christ, and with Jesus' disciples we witness his Transfiguration, and know the source of his healing power over the unclean spirits. We glimpse realities beyond our comprehension, and live in the power of his Spirit.

The story of the Transfiguration tells us of the heavenly character of the one who will accomplish his departure at Jerusalem. But it is also the story of those who continue to function as ordinary people and yet people adopted as God's children, transformed by the gospel to know both God's forgiving grace and his terrible righteousness.

Hymns [16]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

76 --E--O Morning Star,
80 --D--Oh, Wondrous
89 --D--How Good, Lord,
654v --D--Alleluia, Song of
102 --II--On My Heart

511 --II--Renew Me, O
518 --G--Beautiful Saviour
653v --G--Jesus on the (735s)
651v --G--Shine, Jesus
77, 536, 782s

Prayers of the People [17]

P or A: Our God transforms our lives with his Word, giving us hope and the courage to share his love with others. We offer our praises and petitions to God, saying "Lord, in your mercy", and responding, "Hear our prayer."

A: O God, source of life and healing, you have united those of every time and every place into one body through baptism. You have transformed our human lives of sin and death into godly lives of grace and salvation. We give you thanks for this most wondrous gift. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: God of glory, we live in a world that values material things and outward appearances over the gifts of the Spirit and the eternal truth of your love. May we not veil the gifts and truths that you have bestowed upon us, but instead walk boldly in our faith, serving others, and professing your story. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: God of comfort, you are able to transform sickness into health and hurt into happiness. We ask you to bestow your healing power upon those whom we name before you, _____, or whom we name in our hearts. Help us to support them in their time of trial. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: God of faithfulness, we pray for those who prepare to affirm their baptism. Keep them diligent in their study of your Word and open to receive the mystery and power of your revelation. May the light of your glory shine in their hearts as they encounter holy scripture.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

A: God of revelation, give us the courage to descend from the mountaintops where we meet you, so that we teach your love and justice to the ends of the earth. Lord, in your mercy. Hear...

P: These prayers here uttered, both spoken and silent, we offer to you, our God, who transforms the hopes of our hearts into living realities. We pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Or [18]

Presider or deacon

Let us offer prayers to the Holy One of Sinai, whose glory shines on the face of all peoples.

Deacon or other leader

For the holy catholic church throughout the world, sharing the death and resurrection of Christ.

For *N* our bishop, for presbyters and deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the people of God.

For all the nations and peoples of the earth, and for justice, mercy, and peace.

For all who are needy, desolate, forgotten, suffering, lonely, and disconsolate.

For the dying and the dead, and for those who mourn.

That all the world may reflect the splendor of God and all peoples share in the divinity of Christ.

Remembering the blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

Blessed are you, God of light eternal. Hear our prayers for all peoples and let your glory shine upon us, that our lives may proclaim your goodness and our works give you honor.

Glory to you for ever and ever.

Notes

[1] Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974, p. 618.

[2] *Loc. cit.*

[3] *Op. cit.*, p. 619.

[4] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-160: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 268.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 269.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 271.

[7] Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962. p. 644.

[8] Childs, *Ibid.*, p. 621.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 624.

[10] Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1984, p. 214.

[11] *Loc. cit.*

[12] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1981, p. 800.

[13] Wilhelm Michaelis, "[way, road]," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (ed. by Gerhard Friedrich). Vol. V. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968, p. 107.

[14] Fitzmyer, *ibid.*, p. 800.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 802.

[16] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

[17] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt

[18] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>