

Transfiguration



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February 10, 2002

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. Amen

Exodus 24:12-18

{12} The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." {13} So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. {14} To the elders he had said, "Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them." {15} Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. {16} The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. {17} Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. {18} Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

The separation between heaven and earth collapses in this passage and in others like it. God's voice and his handiwork enter the world of the ordinary. His glory covers the mountain, and Moses enters it, and remains for forty days and nights. Yahweh describes the Tabernacle, its appointments and vestments, its offerings, the ordination of priests and the Sabbath law. When he finished he gives Moses the tablets of the covenant (31:18). Moses breaks the tablets when he sees the apostasy of the people and has to go up on the mountain again to receive replacements. When he returns *the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God* (34:29).

Psalms 2

{1} Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? {2} The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and his anointed, saying, {3} "Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us." {4} He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD has them in derision. {5} Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, {6} "I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill." {7} I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my son; today I have begotten you." {8} Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. {9} You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." {10} Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. {11} Serve the LORD with fear, with trembling {12} kiss his feet, or he will be angry, and you will perish in the way; for his wrath is quickly kindled. Happy are all who take refuge in him.

1-3: "The singer is astonished and surprised that the foreign nations, which (so we presuppose, according to v. 3) up to now had been subject to the king of Jerusalem, are risking a revolt.... The question introduced by [*lmh* = the word "why" in Hebrew] is thus not accompanied by worried anxiety but by a surprised certainty concerning the presumptuousness of the foreign nations.... It is from the very beginning 'vain' and 'useless'...." [1]

anointed: Messiah, Christ.

7. *He said to me, "You are my son*: This is the declaration of Yahweh, who confirms that the King is his son. It is the language of Jesus' baptismal audition as well as the audition at the transfiguration.

8. *I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession:* See Matthew 4:8-9: all the kingdoms of the world..."All these I will give you...." Yahweh gives his king what the devil can only promise to give Jesus.

10-12: The kings and judges are warned to honor the son of Yahweh, lest he destroy them.

"The aim of the message of Psalm 2 could be summarized thus: The revolt of the nations and kings against the universal lordship of God and his anointed one is a senseless undertaking—this rebellion is viewed here only with amazement." [2]

Or 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." [3]

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...." [4]

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 1st 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.

5. *worship at his footstool:* The ark of the covenant of Yahweh (1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalm 132:7).

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." [5]

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." [6]

2 Peter 1:16-21

{16} For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. {17} For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." {18} We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. {19} So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. {20} First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, {21} because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

16. *cleverly devised myths*: "...he has in mind especially the 'myths' spun by gnostic teachers such as are mentioned in i Tim. 1:4 and 4:7...." [7]

16, 18. *eyewitnesses of his majesty*: We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven: See Luke 1:4; 1 John 1:3 for other examples of a claim of personal witness.

17. *honor and glory from God the Father*: Jesus' honor comes from God who calls him Son and Beloved, and declares his pleasure in him.

the holy mountain: Although the mountain of the Transfiguration is not identified, Mount Sinai is the metaphor for God's revelation of his will and purpose. "From early times the 'high mountain' was identified with Mount Tabor, ten miles south-west of the Sea of Galilee, but this hill is not more than 1000 feet high, and most modern commentators mention Mount Hermon, which rises to a height of 9200 feet and is about twelve miles to the north-east of Caesarea Philippi." [8]

19. *the morning star*: "In almost all instances of the use of the word meaning morning star in antiquity, the planet Venus is meant. Jesus at his coming is compared to this herald of the new day. Another and perhaps more likely explanation is that Num. 24:17...was considered in both Judaism and Christianity as a text about the Messiah; it is therefore natural that Jesus should be called a star here and in Rev. 22:16 ('the bright morning star')." [9]

20-21. *no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation*: Not a claim for an ecclesiastically sanctioned interpretation scripture, but for a spirit-inspired interpretation.

"...the author deals with...the hope of Christ's return and of the consummation. He knows that some Christians have begun to waver in their faith in Christ's second advent and in the destruction and re-creation of the earth.... According to Vs 16 the message of Christ's return in power is no slyly invented myth. It is rather a revealed truth, attested for the reader by Peter's own experience with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt xvii 1-8 and parallels). At that time God himself expressly declared Jesus to be his Son, his Beloved one, vs. 17." [10]

Matthew 17:1-9

{1} Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. {2} And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. {3} Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. {4} Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." {5} While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" {6} When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. {7} But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." {8} And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. {9} As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

"It is...possible that this passage may be connected with the foregoing, '...there are those standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power,' because of the reference to Elijah, the forerunner of the kingdom, and his appearance in the Transfiguration." [11] "II Peter i 16-18 is not without relevance here. It is quite clear that the writer of the letter sees the transfiguration as the fulfillment of Jesus' saying in this [Matthew 16:28] verse." [12]

1. *Six days later*: Mark, six days; Luke, about eight days *after these sayings*. Yahweh's

glory covered Mt. Sinai for six days, after which Moses went up on the mountain (Exodus 24:16). He was there for forty days and nights.

Peter and James and his brother John: The inner circle of the twelve.

a high mountain: "The recollection of 4:8-10 is clear, when on a high mountain Satan offered world rule to the Son of God. Jesus has gone not the Satanic way of world dominance but the way of obedience laid out for him by God.... At this point in his story Matthew designs a positive counterimage to 4:8-10." [13]

2. *he was transfigured before them:* As on Mt. Sinai the boundary between the human and the divine is breached. Both Jesus and Moses are changed. The transfiguration is described: *his face shone like the sun...his clothes became dazzling white.* After a second time on the mountain (Exodus 34:1-4), Moses' face "shone because he had been talking with God" (34:29). We will be *transformed* into the likeness of Christ, from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). In Romans 12:2 Paul encourages Roman Christians not to be conformed to the world, but to be *transformed* by the renewing of their minds. What happened to Christ on the mountain will be our lot as well.

3. *Moses and Elijah:* Representatives of the law (Torah) and the prophets. Both of them were thought to have been taken into heaven without dying.

talking with him: Luke says they talked about his departure which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem (9:31).

4: Peter's suggestion to set up three tents is ignored.

5. *a bright cloud overshadowed them:* The same verb 9 [*episkiadzo*] is used by the angel Gabriel to describe Mary's encounter with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). It denotes contact between the earthly world and the realm of God, as during the Exodus and on Mt. Sinai.

a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" The voice identifies Jesus as it did at his baptism (Matthew 3:17). The command, "listen to him," ascribes God's authority to Jesus' words. See Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 42:1; Deuteronomy 18:15.

7. *touched them:* "Every other occurrence of the word 'touch' (*hapto*) in Matthew is connected with healing. So here, the worship of the church...is an experience of healing. We rise from it to resume the way to the cross in a world full of suffering. But we have seen who Jesus really is and he has shown us that we do not need to be afraid." [14]

Reflections

Jesus' transfiguration is advanced as a confirmation of the office and favor he has from the Father, so we may, in the words of the first collect, "behold the king in all his glory." God is great; he shows his greatness, and everyone is duly impressed. But in the end nothing is changed: Jesus is still on his way to Jerusalem where he will die. In the Incarnation we Christians have found great comfort in the notion that God has come to share our lives. In our Lord's crucifixion we have found both comfort for the troubles of the world and a reason for self-sacrifice in imitation of Him. From the Gospel perhaps all we can learn is not to put much weight on appearances, either the appearance of the transfiguration or the appearances of the world. Only after the resurrection can we know which is reality.

The Prayers of the People suggest that transformation should be our focus as we reflect on Jesus transfiguration, that we pray that God will transform us by his love, that we seek to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others.

Hymns [15]

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

265 --E--Christ, Whose Glory
80 --D--Oh, Wondrous
89 --D--How Good, Lord,

518 --G--Beautiful Saviour
653v --G--Jesus on the (735s)
51v --G--Shine, Jesus

654v --D--Alleluia, Song of
800v --II--Each Morning
Brings
628v --II--Each Winter As
(722s)

76, 526, 536,
233, 782s

Prayers of the People [\[16\]](#)

P or A: Those who accept the love of God are transformed by that love. Let us open ourselves to transformation as we pray for the mercy and love of God, saying, "Transfiguring God," and responding, "The glory is yours."

A: O Jesus, your disciples followed you closely, even to the top of a mountain. May all the members of your Church find peace and assurance, being close to you and letting you take the lead. Transfiguring God, The glory is yours.

A: We live in a world where men and women glorify themselves, loving material wealth and media attention. Bring down the haughty and the proud. Give us and our children leaders and examples who sacrifice for the sake of others. Transfiguring God, The glory is yours.

A: Lord Jesus, you brought your disciples down from the mountaintop and continued your journey. When we begin to desire permanence, sustain, comfort and transform us through the permanence of your love. Transfiguring God, The glory is yours.

A: Let those who are bowed down and overshadowed by sickness or trouble in their lives, especially we remember _____, raise their eyes to see only Jesus, the healer of our illness and bearer of our sins. Transfiguring God, The glory is yours.

A: Give us a hunger to know and understand your word, O God, so that in Sunday Schools and Bible study groups, confirmation classes and adult preparation for affirmation and baptism, your message may be like a lamp shining in a dark place. Until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts, Transfiguring God, The glory is yours.

P: Hear the prayers of your followers, teach us your Word and nourish us at your holy table that we may continue our journey close to you. Amen.

Or [\[17\]](#)

Presider or deacon

Let us offer prayers to God whose glory is a devouring fire, a light shining out of darkness.

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 share in the divinity of Christ.

Presider

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

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Notes

[1] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing

House, 1988, pp. 126-127.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 133.

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

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

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

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

[7] A.R.C. Leaney, *The Letters of Peter and Jude: A Commentary on the First Letter of Peter, A Letter of Jude and the Second Letter of Peter*. Cambridge: University Press, 1967, p. 112.

[8] Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*. London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1955, p. 388.

[9] Leaney, *Ibid.*, p. 115.

[10] Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964, p. 156.

[11] Samuel Tobias Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke*. Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1987, pp. 259 f.

[12] W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971, p. 201.

[13] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, p. 398.

[14] Albert Curry Winn, "Worship As A Healing Experience: An Exposition of Matthew 17:1-9," *Interpretation* 29(1975)72.

[15] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rcla9899.txt>.

[16] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_a2.txt.

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