

**THANK GOD WE “SEE” JESUS THROUGH HIS WORD**

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Hear again the Word of the Lord for this Feast of the Transfiguration of our

Lord:

*[Then], we have more certain the prophetic Word, which all of you do good to continue holding your mind to as (a) lamp (that) shines in (a dry, dirty, murky) dark place, until when (the) day shines through (dawns), and (the) morning star (Light Bringing One (Venus)) may have risen in your hearts...<sup>1</sup>*

The confessions of the Evangelical Church, this congregation's, and my, public witness state: *we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament.*<sup>2</sup> That confession cites today's theme verse for its basis. That truth should lead us hearers of today's Word to understand that all the readings we have had placed into our ears declare that the power, glory, majesty, and light of God comes to us through His inspired Word. We Christians see our Light Bringing Lord, transfigured into glory, and believe that Jesus is the Beloved Son of the Father because the Word of God declares that truth.

The reality that God has chosen to reveal His Son to those who are not eyewitnesses of either the Transfiguration of Moses or the Transfiguration of Jesus, is an indicator of His grace and mercy toward us. While it might be wonderful to think about what it would be like to see Moses with his face shining from speaking with God face-to-Face, or Jesus' visage and clothing radiant with His internal light of life, one needs to remember how people who actually witnessed those events reacted. Hear again the eye-

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<sup>1</sup> *II Peter 1:19.*

<sup>2</sup> Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church.* Fortress Press: Philadelphia

witness reports of the reaction of those who were once so privileged to see the radiance of God with their own eyes, while they heard His Word:

*And Aaron and all the sons of Israel beheld (that the) skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near to him.<sup>3</sup>*

*And hearing, the disciples fell upon their faces and they feared greatly.<sup>4</sup>*

Moses, the LawGiver, simply reflected the glory of God in his face, even as he proclaimed God's Word – and the eyewitnesses feared. They continued fearing God on account of Moses' word, God's Word. Those tablets hanging there reflect the true Word of God: they record His Covenant of death. Their words stand for all time. They hold meanings that begin, *we should fear and love God so that...* Only one Man in all history could, would, and did keep them perfectly. For all others, for you, they show only that which you cannot of yourself do. Without that One Man, Jesus the Christ, you would remain lost, despairing, crushed under the weight of your sins and trespasses.

As you have heard repeated today, Jesus, the LawFulfiller, radiated the glory of God in His face and through His garments. His glory is part of His divine essence and thus emanates from Him. His glory is given to be reflected by others. When the soon-to-be apostles beheld this light of God's glory shining out of Jesus they wanted to worship. That was, until they witnessed the His full glory in the shining Cloud of His Presence and heard the Voice from heaven. Then, they feared.

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus 34:30.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 17:6.

It was not until the transfigured Jesus touched them and called them to “fear not” that they were able to rise from the dust and remain with Him. God’s grace and mercy for them was to veil the light of His eternal glory. He allowed them to remember and tell of the glory they witnessed that day. Yet their record of the events on the Mount of Transfiguration was declared only after Jesus had died in their sins and rose to new life for their justification with the Father. The reality that God came in our flesh, veiling His glory so that He could effect our salvation, shows His mercy and grace for us sinners.

Thank God He comes to us now through means, and not in His full radiant glory. God uses earthly things such as His spoken word through pastors’ mouths; and tangible elements of water, bread, and wine connected to His Word. God’s mediated Presence through the elemental things of this world helps to keep us from falling on our faces in His sight. God’s mercy keeps us from attempting to crawl back into the dirt from which we were made, the dirt to which we will return should life depart our mortal bodies, whenever we find ourselves in the Presence of the Living God. Thank God we have been freed to “see” Jesus through His Word and Sacraments. Here, where God comes to us veiled, He declares Himself to us, touches us, heals us from sin and all its effects, brings us forgiveness, salvation, and His eternal Light of Life.

You know and believe those things to be true because you have God’s Word made sure in you through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, who began His life-giving work on your behalf as He hovered over the waters at Creation, commenced His

life giving work in you at the very instant of your human conception. That you were able to live until you heard and believed God's eternal life-giving Word of forgiveness is on account of the Holy Spirit's work. The Spirit whom the Father and the Son poured out into this fallen creation in full measure after Jesus died and rose from the dead worked Jesus' life, God's Light in you, through those who brought God's Word to you. The Holy Spirit, through the means of the Water and the Word, caused you to die with Christ and rise to new life in Him, almost twenty centuries after Jesus participated in those realities for you. The Spirit, working through God's means, brings you to sorrow over and turn from your sins, and brings you Jesus' blood-bought forgiveness. These treasures you hold dear because you believe the eye-witness testimony you heard today, which began:

*For we (did) not follow after cleverly contrived myths (when) we made known to all of you the power and coming of the Lord of us Jesus Christ, but we became eyewitnesses of that One's great majesty.<sup>5</sup>*

That, dear sinner-saints, is a declaration of eye-witness status. You may think of that statement as if St. Peter and the other writers of the true events concerning God's coming in our flesh, were being sworn in before a judge in a court of law. Think of how the old movies used to portray the swearing in of court witnesses: "Place your left hand on the Bible. Raise your right hand and say, 'I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.'"

What you are hearing from the Word of God are not mere stories. They are not fables meant to inspire good in you, or to control you. They are not "myths," a word

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<sup>5</sup> II Peter 1:16.

St. Peter chose that was used in ancient times almost exclusively for stories about the pagan gods. The Word of God which you are hearing today, and every time you hear God's Word from the Bible, or its cuttings contained in the Lectionary, comes from those whom God allowed, caused, and inspired to record His on behalf of His people. The eyewitness testimonies you hear are so important for all generations of the Faith that the message bearers often suffered brutal death on account of their unwavering testimony.

The New Testament record was inspired and preserved by the Holy Spirit so that it may be declared into your ears. In the words God moved Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, James, Peter, Paul and others to record, the witness of New Testament Scripture, is given to show, if you will, Jesus completing a Divine Checklist for your salvation. That is to say, the records which have been preserved in your Bibles stand to show you how Jesus enacted, fulfilled, and completed all things necessary for your salvation. To that end, Peter declares: *we became eyewitnesses of that One's great majesty*. In that truth, he continues declaring of Jesus, the Christ:

*For receiving from God (the) Father honor and glory, a Voice having brought to Him such as this by the Majestic Glory, "My Beloved Son this One remains, in Whom I am well-pleased," and this Voice we heard from heaven (when we) were led up with Him on the Holy Mountain.<sup>6</sup>*

The hearer is drawn to the testimony of God the Father in the Transfiguration accounts. The Voice from heaven, declaring Jesus to be His Beloved Son – which words God used at Jesus Baptism recalled a few weeks ago – are here today. But, in the

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<sup>6</sup> II Peter 1:17--18.

Transfiguration, God adds to their truth through St. Matthew's account: "hear Him."

What this means is that when you hear Jesus, you hear the Father, God Almighty. Not only were Peter, James, and John eyewitnesses to Jesus' change into the Light He is, but they were ear-witnesses to His authority, declared by the Voice from heaven. Peter and the Sons of Thunder – James and John – recorded their visions and the Word which they heard, so that all generations of the Faith would have an accurate, true, and confirmed record – for our salvation and strengthening to life everlasting. To plant those realities deep into the life of the Church, the Holy Spirit led Peter to continue:

*[Then], we have more certain the prophetic Word, which all of you do good to continue holding your mind to as (a) lamp (that) shines in (a dry, dirty, murky) dark place, until when (the) day shines through (dawns), and (the) morning star (Light Bringing One (Venus)) may have risen in your hearts; this all of you first knowing always that all prophecy does not become written by anyone's own interpretation, for not of will of man was prophecy born, but by (the) Spirit Holy continually being carried along men spoke from God.<sup>7</sup>*

That is one long sentence full of treasures for the Church for all time. It begins with the declaration that we, believers, have the prophetic Word -- the Old Testament – more sure and certain than ever before. How? Because we have verified personal testimonies of those who witnessed the fulfillment of the prophecies proclaimed through the thousands of years of the Old Testament era read into the eternal Court records. When the Holy Spirit moved Peter to write his words as the Word of God, the Old Testament prophecies of which he spoke were read regularly in the Lord's services. For centuries, in the congregations of the faithful, the Old Testament was read, at the

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<sup>7</sup> II Peter 1:19-- 21.

beginning as we have it now, Psalms and Old Testament readings. Since that Word is made more certain for the New Testament Church through eyewitness accounts of its fulfillment in Christ, the Holy Spirit continues to advocate its continued proclamation in our era. II Peter declares the Old Covenant prophecies to be a light shining a dirty, murky, dark place – this fallen creation.

It is true, for a period of time, continuing through many of our lifetimes, even as late as the early 1980's, the Lord's Services only held the light of the Psalms as Old Testament witnesses. Yet, by God's grace, the other readings re-entered God's services. The Holy Spirit moved the Church to put again the prophecies before the Body of Christ, so that the people could hear, in the services, their fulfillment through the New Testament readings. Prophecy and fulfillment in Christ is the pattern which Jesus Himself used amongst His closest followers, those who would become the eyewitnesses of all He said and did for all future generations of the faithful. The Old Testament prepares the way – in your hearts – for the completion of the New Testament; that the Spirit declares.

The Holy Spirit means for the proclamation of the prophecies of the Old to continue until that which has been fulfilled in the New comes to final completion. That will happen on the Day when the Light Bringing One – Jesus, crucified, glorified, risen, and ascended -- returns on the clouds to establish the New Heavens and Earth. Then,

His light will fill all creation. Then, with a new, pure, perfect, and glorified body, you will reflect His light forever! That is part of what the Word is preparing you for today.

With that reality planted in us through the Word of God, the Apostle's words for today end with the Spirit's testimony and affirmation that the Word we have received is God's Word. It is not open to human interpretation, in the manner our current culture likes to declare: "That is true for you, but not for me." Such thinking is sinful. Opposite truths, when tested against God's revealed Word, cannot be true. The teachings, doctrines, of the Scripture are not open for human interpretation. They are guided and sustained by the Holy Spirit. Only when we in the Church hold firm to God's methods of scriptural interpretation, by holding our reason and traditions captive to the Word, may we find the fullness of God's light shining in our midst. May God keep us ever faithful to His Word in its entirety, in this place, and in the congregations with whom we are, or will be, in altar and pulpit fellowship. To quote a hymn still sung in the fifth century after its composition: *Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word.*<sup>8</sup> Let us always pray that we continue to "see" Jesus through God's Word rightly divided.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Transfiguration (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 2; Exodus 34:29-35; II Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

January 29, 2012

*Pastor Michael H. Merhouse*

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

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<sup>8</sup> Luther, Martin. *Lutheran Service Book*, "Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word," St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006. #655.

TRANSLATION, ROUGH DRAFT

*For not cleverly contrived myths having followed after we made known to you all the One the Lord of us Jesus Christ power and coming but eyewitnesses we may become of the One that great majesty.<sup>9</sup>*

*For receiving from God Father honor and glory a Voice having brought to Him such as this by the Majestic Glory, "The Son of Me the Beloved of Me this One remains, in Whom I am well-pleased,"<sup>10</sup>*

*And this Voice we heard from heaven bearing with Him being in the Holy Mountain.<sup>11</sup>*

*[Then], we have more certain the prophetic Word, which all of you do good to continue holding your mind to as (a) lamp shines in (a dry, dirty, murky) dark place, until when (the) day shines through (dawns), and (the) morning star (Light Bringing One (Venus)) may have risen in your hearts...<sup>12</sup>*

*This first all of you continually knowing that all prophecy (is) written by one's own interpreting not becomes,<sup>13</sup>*

*for not of will of man was born prophecy formerly, but by Spirit Holy continually being carried along they spoke from God men.<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> *II Peter 1:16.*

<sup>10</sup> *II Peter 1:17.*

<sup>11</sup> *II Peter 1:18.*

<sup>12</sup> *II Peter 1:19.*

<sup>13</sup> *II Peter 1:20.*

<sup>14</sup> *II Peter 1:21.*