

**+ Matthew 17:1-9 + One More Glimpse of Glory +  
+ Last Sunday after the Epiphany: The Transfiguration of Our Lord +  
+ Cross of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 26 February 2017 +**

At the risk of putting you all to sleep, I'd like you to close your eyes for a moment. Imagine it's not a wintry morning, but early on a summer evening. You're on a hill giving you a good view of the horizon. A warm breeze gently blows by as you look towards the west. The sun is getting low in the sky, and as it does, the heavens are a beautiful canvas of color. The rays of the setting sun light up the sky with brilliant shades of orange and yellow and red. The passing clouds reflect the fading sunshine beneath, while their tops are a dark gray. The background of the sky behind those clouds and farther away from the sun is a gorgeous blue that defies description. The Lord has painted the sky for you and his creation as the sun sets in the west. Yet as the sun dips lower and lower beneath the horizon, the colors fade. The glory slowly disappears, and eventually as the sun disappears beneath the horizon, the world turns from dark blues to the deep darkness of night.

Now open your eyes. Over the years, I've loved watching sunsets. I've seen them on the plains where I grew up and while sitting on mountainsides or beaches or while driving on the highway. Yet as beautiful as those sunsets are, there's always something sad about the setting sun. Every day, the bright, glorious sun that has warmed and given light to the day seems to disappear into darkness. There's something sad about that because the day that was is coming to an end. The joys of that day come to a close as the darkness of night sets in. The sunset is one last glimpse of that glorious day.

You could say that's what the Transfiguration of our Lord was. High on a mountaintop we see one more glimpse of the brilliant glory of Jesus before that glory fades into the deep darkness of a Friday afternoon weeks later, but why did Jesus go up there?

When Jesus took his closest disciples—Peter, James and John—up to the top of a high mountain, he needed to get away. Jesus needed to get some rest away from the gawking crowds. Our Savior had entered his final months of public ministry, but every step along the way, he faced opposition from his enemies, worldly hopes from the crowds, and even attacks from Satan who tried to use Jesus' disciples. A hard journey lay before him that would end in suffering and death. At the same time, Jesus wanted to prepare his disciples for that hard journey to come because it would test them severely too.

So up there on the mountaintop, Jesus revealed something extraordinary to his disciples. He revealed who he truly was. **“He was transfigured in front of them.”** Now Jesus had told his disciples time and again that he was God, often referring to his heavenly Father as **“my Father.”** He had displayed his divine power in small bursts as he performed countless miracles, but here Jesus uncovered his full identity for a brief moment. He wanted his closest disciples to see that he truly was the Light of the world, that he was God.

You can imagine the disciples standing there with mouths wide open and eyes like saucers. Jesus' holy glory was so brilliant even Matthew has difficulty describing it. **“[H]is face shone like the sun; his clothes became as white as the light.”** Jesus revealed himself to be the true God—the only One holy enough to live a perfect life for every one of us who can't get through a day perfectly, the only One powerful enough to actually conquer sin, Satan and death, the only One who can bring light into this dark world.

While the disciples stood in awe of Jesus' brilliance, **“suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him.”** In the Old Testament, no two prophets were greater than Moses and Elijah. Moses was the greatest of all because he had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt through forty years in the wilderness. When Moses died, God himself buried him. Elijah was nearly as great. He stood up for the truth of God's Word in the face of widespread unbelief and unrelenting persecution. Through Elijah God defeated the followers of the fertility god Baal and allowed his Word to flourish once again. By God's amazing grace, Elijah never saw death, but went to heaven body and soul.

Yet why had they appeared? The two prophets had come to speak with Jesus. The Gospel writer Luke tells us, **“They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.”** (Luke 9:31) This **“departure”** was actually Jesus' death only weeks away. Through Moses and Elijah, the Lord had delivered his people, but they simply foreshadowed the great deliverance Jesus was about to carry out for all people.

As Jesus revealed his glory one more time, Moses and Elijah came to speak with him because he was going to fulfill what they and the other prophets had foretold. He was going to be the long-foretold sacrifice for sin, but he was also going to be victorious over death. Like the certainty that the sun sets and will rise again, just as certainly

Jesus was going to carry out God's will. He was going to fulfill God's will by dying on a cross and rising from the dead.

If there was any doubt that Jesus was the only One whom God had chosen for this task, his heavenly Father removed it. **"...Suddenly a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said: 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!'"** By revealing one more glimpse of his glory, Jesus had demonstrated that he was true God and the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy, but he also received clear, divine approval from his heavenly Father. He received approval for the perfect life he had lived and the work he was about to carry out on our behalf. That's why God the Father commanded the disciples to listen to Jesus, who alone had the Word of life for them and all mankind.

When you watch a sunset, there are times when the beauty is overwhelming. You want to freeze that moment in time. Sometimes it's not just the beauty, though, but also the desire to keep a wonderful day going. You don't want it to end. You don't want the glorious sunshine to fade into darkness. I mean, think how sad we feel when the days get shorter and the nights longer and colder.

So you can understand why Peter wanted to freeze that moment in time, that glimpse of glory. He said to Jesus, **"Lord, it's good for us to be here. I will set up three shelters here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."** Peter didn't know what he was saying, but we can't blame him for what he said. You and I probably would've done the same thing. All that holy, divine glory was so amazing, but Jesus' glory needed to fade.

Matthew explains, **"When the disciples heard [the voice of God], they fell facedown and were terrified. Jesus came up, touched them, and said, 'Get up; don't be afraid.' When they looked up they saw no one except Jesus alone."** In terror, those mortal, sinful men dropped to the ground and feared the worst, but Jesus took away their fear of God's holy wrath and appeared to them once again in humble humanity.

What they had seen was simply a glimpse of who Jesus truly was and what he had come to do—to shatter the darkness of sin and Satan and death and hell forever. To do that, Jesus needed to be a humble human being to carry out the improbable task of winning your salvation. He had to live under God's holy Law, which he himself had written. He had to endure everything you have gone through to shatter the darkness of your sin and its temptations, over Satan and his slavery, and over death and its cold, heartless attacks. Jesus even had to endure death to pay for your sins in full.

With that one last glimpse of glory, Jesus prepared his disciples for the difficult journey ahead. From that mountaintop Jesus began making his way to a smaller hilltop outside of Jerusalem. As Jesus' glory diminished, the darkness of his impending death grew. On the way, he endured constant opposition and attack and the darkness grew. He endured betrayal by one of his closest followers. He endured brutal beatings and ridicule at the hands of those who should've recognized him as the Light of the World—and the darkness grew. Jesus found himself betrayed by injustice and convicted to endure the awful punishment of crucifixion. He endured humiliation and anguish and the rejection of his heavenly Father as he bore every sin of every human being, including yours and mine. And the darkness grew.

When Jesus gave up his life to death, it seemed like the darkest moment in human history. It seemed like the darkness would reign forever. Yet even in that darkest hour, Jesus provided one more glimpse of eternal glory. With one simple Greek word, Jesus declared his victory complete. **"It is finished!"** (John 19:30)

The world remained in darkness, but the Son would rise again! The dawn of greater glory was only three days away. Soon the glorious rays of Christ's resurrection from the dead burst forth never again to disappear. By revealing his glory, Jesus prepared his disciples for the coming darkness of his death and the even more glorious dawning of his resurrection. They would never forget that glimpse of glory and would testify about it for the rest of their lives.

For this same reason, Jesus gives you glimpses of his glory. You saw his glory revealed by angels as he lay in a manger bed. You saw his glory revealed by a star to the Magi. You saw his glory revealed by the voice of the Father and the appearance of the Spirit at his Baptism in the Jordan River. You saw his glory revealed in mighty miracles and preaching with divine authority.

You have seen his glory on that lonely mountaintop with Peter, James, and John, and yes, you will see that glory fade. Yet the glory of Christ never completely disappears. In just over forty days, you will see his glory on a cross. You will see Christ's glory in an empty tomb with eternal victory.

Now you see that same glory every time you open the pages of Scripture. You see that glory in Holy Baptism when a mortal enemy of God is transformed into his beloved child through the water and the Word. You see that glory in the Holy Supper as Christ gives the greatest gift of all—himself for the forgiveness of all your sins. Jesus provides these glimpses of glory to make you and me absolutely sure that he is our glorious Savior-God.

As the sun sets on the Mount of Transfiguration and the glory of our Savior fades beneath his humble humanity, don't forget his glory. The glory you see in Jesus is a glimpse of the eternal glory you will one day enjoy because Christ has shattered the darkness of your sin and your guilt and your unbelief. Dear friends, lift up your heads for your redemption, your deliverance, your glory in the cross and empty tomb of Christ is drawing near! Amen.