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The Transfiguration of our Lord  
February 14, 2010  
Luke 9:28-36

*“Jesus on the Mountain Peak”*  
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

As I was preparing for this week’s message, I remembered a sermon I heard many years ago while on vacation in Seattle in a Lutheran Church of a different synod. The pastor’s message was about Moses and if my recollection is correct, the Old Testament lesson for this day was the text or at least referred to. But it was a depressing message. It was intended to talk about older people and the work and service that they are still capable of doing. It was to encourage such service by using as an example Moses who remained vigorous and active all the way to his death at 120 years of age. But it ended with Moses dying and being buried on Mount Nebo, Moses on the mountain peak—the end. I remember thinking to myself that a major event in Moses’ life had been forgotten. It was an event that would if you will crown all the rest of Moses’ work. For the last record of Moses in the Scripture is not his death, but rather of Moses on another mountaintop with Elijah and with Jesus in glory. As I thought on that day many years ago that should have been the final word of that sermon—a word of hope and victory in Jesus Christ.

So this day we should not dwell on Mount Nebo, overlooking the Holy Land, where the Lord buried Moses. But rather on this Transfiguration Day, we should look to another mountain, most likely Mount Hermon in the far north of the Holy Land, where we see “Jesus on the Mountain Peak”.

I. The Transfiguration

The observance of the Transfiguration is a fitting conclusion to the Epiphany season. We have remembered the words and works of Jesus as he is revealed as the Son of God. As we have said, Epiphany means to shine out or show forth. What occurs in the Gospel lesson for this day is most certainly an Epiphany. Jesus takes Peter and James and John with Him up the mountain to pray. Luke’s account simply states that as he was praying the appearance of his face was altered and his clothes became dazzling white. He was glorified on the mountain. And there is more, Moses and Elijah appear with him as well in glory. These two saints of the Old Testament times share in this moment. First there is Moses, the leader of the people of Israel out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and the journey in the wilderness, who received the Ten Commandments from the Lord himself on Mount Sinai, who as the writer to the Hebrews recounts it in the Epistle for today “was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later.” Second there is Elijah, in the view of many the greatest of the prophets, who had contended with the prophets of Baal upon Mount Carmel and by the power of the Lord won a great victory, and who also had then fled to Mount Sinai in fear of Queen Jezebel only to be strengthened by the word of the Lord. So

these two great men of the Old Testament, both powerful and fearless and also at times weak and fearful, representatives of the two great divisions of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Law and the prophets, stand together with Jesus upon another mountain.

The disciples, who had fallen asleep, are awakened and view this overwhelming sight. And Peter speaks: “Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”—not knowing what he said. It was clear that Peter did not fully comprehend what was going on, for Jesus and Moses and Elijah needed no earthly tent to dwell in. Moses and Elijah had already by God’s grace attained to the heavenly dwelling, and Jesus was the Son of God come down from heaven. Indeed, shortly after Peter spoke, another voice clearly stated that point. A cloud overshadowed them all and they were afraid—and the voice came from the cloud, the voice of the Father, “This is my Son, my chosen one, listen to him!” As the voice had come from heaven at Jesus’ baptism, the voice speaks again. The Father speaks of his Son and of their eternal relationship as well as attesting to the truth of Jesus’ words. So again as the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us: Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ... Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. Jesus on the Mountain peak is proclaimed the Son of God in glory by the word of the Father from heaven.

## II. Exodus

But there is another aspect to the Transfiguration that we must consider. Moses and Elijah and Jesus have a conversation. St. Luke writes that they spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. This is one place where none of the current English translations do a very good job in expressing the full meaning of this text. For the Greek word used by the evangelist is “exodus” – the very same word used for the second book of the Old Testament and for the event described there. How remarkable, Jesus, Moses and Elijah are talking about Jesus’ exodus.

Now this exodus of Jesus is of course different from the Exodus of Israel. But in another sense, the Exodus of Israel was filled with prophetic imagery of the saving work of our Lord. Think of the Passover lamb and the blood of the lamb on the doorposts. The angel of death in the tenth plague will “pass over” those who have sprinkled the blood of the lamb. Think of the saving work of God for his people who pass through the waters of the Red Sea as their enemies are overwhelmed and drowned by the waters. And Jesus’ journey will take him to another mountain outside of Jerusalem where he will give up his life for us. He will walk the road, the way of sorrows to the cross for us. And so he and Peter and James and John cannot stay upon the mountain. Jesus must return to his journey, his exodus that will lead him to death and to glory.

### III. Our Journey

We too cannot stay here. The seasons of the church year remind us of that. But we can be comforted and strengthened in the events that we have heard here. The Lord Jesus Christ has walked the road for us. He has been on the mountain peak and he will offer up his life upon another mountain. There is also in these words the hope of glory. Think of Moses and Elijah. They are in glory. We can say the same of all of our loved ones who have died in the Lord—they are with him in glory. The journey of our lives leads us toward glory as well in Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Chosen One. In the midst of all the troubles and pains and sorrows of this life, the word of comfort leads us. The Lord has made the journey for us.

In the coming weeks, beginning next Wednesday we enter upon our annual Lenten journey. We walk with Jesus. We follow him to the cross. As we do so this year we will be instructed by the hymns of Lent in our midweek services. We will hear the message emphasized that Christ suffered for us that we might be his own and live under him in his kingdom. That is the promise of our Lenten walk.

Finally, it is interesting that the first lesson today talks about the burial of Moses. We will bury something else at the end of this service in a ceremony in which we lay to rest the Alleluia banner. We forgo the singing of Alleluia for the coming days of Lent. We wait in anticipation for the day when it shall ring out again in the victory of the Resurrection. The Lord did not remain upon the mount of Transfiguration but he reigns forever as the Son of God in the glory of the Father and we shall be with him.

Jesus, Lead thou on,  
'Til our rest is won  
And although the way be cheerless  
We will follow, calm and fearless  
'Till we safely stand,  
In our fatherland.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.