

## **Transfiguration of Our Lord February 19, 2023**

### Exodus 24:12-18

<sup>12</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." <sup>13</sup> So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. <sup>14</sup> And he said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them."

<sup>15</sup> Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. <sup>16</sup> The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

### Psalm 2 or Ps 99

<sup>1</sup> Why are the nations | in an uproar?\*

Why do the peoples mutter | empty threats?

<sup>2</sup> Why do the kings of the earth rise up in revolt, and the princes | plot together,\*

against the LORD and against | his anointed?

<sup>3</sup> "Let us break their | yoke," they say;\*

"let us cast off their | bonds from us."

<sup>4</sup> He whose throne is in heav- | en is laughing;\*

the Lord has them | in derision.

<sup>5</sup> Then he speaks to them | in his wrath,\*

and his rage fills | them with terror.

<sup>6</sup> "I myself have | set my king\*

upon my holy | hill of Zion."

<sup>7</sup> Let me announce the decree | of the LORD:\*

He said to me, "You are my son; this day have I be- | gotten you.

<sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for | your inheritance\*

and the ends of the earth for | your possession.  
9 You shall crush them with an | iron rod\*  
and shatter them like a | piece of pottery."  
10 And now, you | kings, be wise;\*  
be warned, you rulers | of the earth.  
11 Submit to the | LORD with fear,\*  
and with trembling | bow before him;  
12 lest he be angry, | and you perish;\*  
for his wrath is | quickly kindled.  
13 Happy | are they all\*  
who take ref- | uge in him!

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 were eyewitnesses of his majesty. **17** For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son,<sup>[1]</sup> with whom I am well pleased," **18** we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. **19** And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, **20** knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. **21** For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

#### Matthew 17:1-9

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, 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 white as light. **3** And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. **4** And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." **5** He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my

beloved Son,<sup>[a]</sup> with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”<sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified.<sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.”<sup>8</sup> And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

<sup>9</sup> And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

### Message: Listen to His Word

Make no mistake about it: Peter, James, and John had quite an encounter! It would be safe to say that no one – before or since – has had an experience quite like theirs! Imagine if you can being face to face with this awesome group: Jesus himself, transfigured into what was perhaps his post-resurrection identity, joined by the greatest Prophet – Elijah – and Moses, the Law-Giver himself!

Peter recognized at least on some level the significance of the event. His bright idea was to capture it somehow; hang on to it, remain in the moment for as long as possible. It was undoubtedly an unforgettable experience, because years later, Peter recalls it in his second letter to the church that we just heard: “We were eyewitnesses to this! We saw Jesus in his majesty; we heard the very voice of the Majestic Glory!” It must have been a humbling if not humiliating experience for Peter to have God himself interrupt him with – “Stop talking!”

But here’s the thing: if that event on the mountain top was so important, so life-changing, why were only those three invited to experience it? Why not all the disciples? Were the rest of the group now somehow second-rate disciples because they lacked this experience? Was perhaps even their status as disciples now questionable because they had not shared this miraculous event?

Clues and answers to questions like these begin to emerge as Jesus and his little trepid trio begin their descent from the mountain. Jesus commands them – he doesn’t suggest, he commands them – not to say anything to the others about it. Why is that? Is Jesus afraid that the Peter and the Thunder Boys will get all snarky and conceited about their special moment? Maybe, and given human nature they probably would have!

But that’s not it. Because Jesus doesn’t say to never talk about it. He says to tell no one until he’s risen from the dead! The problem is that that experience – like any other – taken out of context will be misunderstood.

The context is the whole passion narrative: its about Jesus: his birth, his life, his ministry, his betrayal, his death, and ultimately his resurrection and ascension. It's about the Word himself, the whole Word.

It's not about experiences, regardless of how powerfully emotional or sensational they may be. Sooner or later, they'll fade away, lost to the frailty of the human mind or crumbled under the weight of skeptical scrutiny. In the height of the moment with the dazzling light all around them, with the patriarchs of the faith before their eyes and the voice of the Majestic Glory ringing in their ears, the three disciples fall to the ground in terror! Pretty impressive to be sure!

And yet, when Jesus raises them to their feet, its all gone... There's no clothing white as light, no prophets of old, no audible divine voice, no light emanating from Jesus' face. The world has bone back to what it was. When they lift up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. Nothing but Jesus!

This is because in that supernaturally climactic moment, their focus and ours is redirected. The Father does not say, "Look who's here, now! Look at the bright white light, now would ya!" The Triune Father directs our attention away from the divine conversation to the earthy. He places the attention where it must be: on the Word; "Listen to him!" Suddenly, our focus is shifted away from distractions and to the Word himself: *Listen. To him!* Hear what he is saying.

Peter himself says as much years later in his letter to the church. For after recalling briefly that spectacular moment, he practically dismisses the event saying in effect, "Sure, we saw that amazing gathering! Yes, we heard the voice of Majestic Glory echoing the words from Jesus' baptism! But we have something more! We have the prophetic Word himself, fully confirmed! Pay attention to it! Listen to him. The Word of God was not produced by the will of man, but by God himself by the Holy Spirit!"

As Peter, James, and John descended the mountain with Jesus, having been commanded by the Majestic Glory to listen to the Beloved Son, they undoubtedly reflected on those things that he had most recently spoken to them. In the days leading up to their mountain-top experience, Jesus had just announced that he must go to Jerusalem where he would confront the elite rulers allied with Rome. Jesus had just announced that they would kill him and that on the third day, God would raise him from the dead.

From their perspective and vantage point, as they descend into the valley below, it didn't make any sense. That's why he told them not to tell anyone until he had risen.

We now see him in another light, a new dimension. We see Jesus from that perspective that still awaited the Twelve. God speaks to us amid the experiences that we often seek to distract us from Him as well. In a culture that seeks an ever-increasing level of sensual stimulation and experiences in an effort to achieve some validation, God would interrupt us in our babbling with the call for us to listen to his Beloved Son, listen to his Word.

This Wednesday we begin our decent down the mountain into the Lenten valley below. And as we go, we'll reflect on what Jesus has told *us*: "This is my body, this is my blood given and shed for you."