

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When we were living in Russia, we got a scare one day when a man came to our apartment door. Now keep in mind that we lived in a town where most lived in poverty. The crime rate was pretty high. It was a drug trafficking region. And it was widely known that Americans were living in this apartment. When the doorbell rang, I looked through the peep hole and I saw a young man who was not dressed in any sort of uniform. But when I asked who it was, the man said he was from the Passport and Visa agency and that he came to check our documents. My heart jumped a bit because such people always wore uniforms. This man did not.

Now, what do you suppose I did? Opened the door immediately? Welcomed in just because he said he was from Passport Control? Not a chance. I asked the man to show me his credentials. I asked him to hold them up to the peep hole. Only after I verified his identity did I trust him enough to open the door and answer his questions. It would have been foolish to do otherwise, right?

I don't think that what I did was unusual. If someone makes unusual demands or makes great claims, we want to see some credentials, don't we? We need some proof.

If you want a situation where someone was making amazing, wild claims, just look at Jesus. I went through the Gospels and picked out a few of the claims he made. Listen to just a few of his statements from John's Gospel:

- "I am the Christ." (Paraphrase from John 4:26).
- "I am the bread of life." (John 6:35)
- "I am from [God the Father] and he sent me. (John 7:29)
- "I am the light of the world. (John 8:12)
- "You are of this world; I am not of this world." (John 8:23)
- "Before Abraham was, I am!" (John 8:58)
- "I am the Good Shepherd." (John 10:11)
- " I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." (John 11:25)
- " I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Bold claims! When we hear such claims, and then see the suffering Christ, our faith stumbles. The following facts may lead a person to doubt that Christ really was who he said he was.

- The one "not of this world" was born in Bethlehem to a woman named Mary.
- The one "from the Father" was forsaken by the Father.
- The "light of the world" hung in darkness on the cross.
- The "bread of life" died.
- The one who claimed to be the "way, the truth and the life" was rejected by the most religious, educated Jews of his time.

As we are about to begin the season of Lent, it is important for us to be reminded of just who Jesus is. With matters of eternal importance such as these, it is critical that we see his credentials. Was this just a man making wild claims who went to Calvary's cross? Or was there much more

to him than met the eye? In our Gospel reading today, God shows us Christ's credentials **before** he accomplishes our salvation.

It is appropriate, then, at the end of the season of Epiphany, and before we begin the season of Lent, to celebrate our Savior's Transfiguration. A few months before his suffering and death on the cross, he proved to us that all his claims about himself were true. Jesus Christ showed his credentials on the mountain where he was transfigured. This event is recorded for us in Luke chapter 9 verses 28-36.

Luke 9:28-36 About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

Our text begins with the words, "About eight days after Jesus said this ...". If we look at the verses preceding our text, we read how Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus then foretold his suffering and death with these words: (Luke 9:22) "**The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**" For about a week, the disciples were pondering what Jesus said. They didn't want to believe that Jesus would be killed. They probably wondered, "So is he the promised Christ, or not? Is he God's Son, or not? What's all this talk about suffering and death?!"

But then Jesus took three of his disciples up a mountain to pray. As would happen later in the Garden of Gethsemane before Jesus' capture, the disciples fell asleep. This fact leads some to think that the transfiguration must have occurred at night, but we don't know for sure. When the disciples woke up, what did they see? "**As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.**" Imagine the brilliance of a flash of lightning on a dark, stormy night. This is what the disciples saw when they looked at Jesus. The veil of Jesus' humanity was lifted, and they received a glimpse of his divine glory.

But this wasn't the only evidence of his divinity. "**Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus.**" Besides the three earthly witnesses who saw Jesus transfigured, there were also two heavenly witnesses – Moses and Elijah. Moses lived almost 1500 years before Christ. You probably remember that God gave the Old Testament law through Moses on Mt. Sinai. Those laws were given to preserve God's people and God's promise of salvation. Those laws helped the people realize their sins, and their need for the Messiah who would save them. God told Moses about his plans to send a Savior to his people when he said, (*Deuteronomy 18:18-19*) "**I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself**

will call him to account.” God the Father told Moses and the Israelites that they should listen to that prophet whom he would send. And in today’s text, which occurred about 1500 years later, God said at Jesus’ transfiguration, **“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”**

Not only was Moses present as the one who received God’s law, but Elijah was also a witness to the Savior’s transfiguration. Elijah lived almost 900 years before the birth of Christ. Elijah was the one who preserved God’s law, and kept Israel from falling into complete paganism. Remember, how the king of Israel, Ahab, worshipped the false god Baal and led Israel to do the same. On Mt. Caramel, Elijah arranged a competition between Baal and God. Two sacrifices were prepared, but the fire was not lit. The God who would answer prayers with fire for the sacrifice would be declared the true God. We all know how things turned out. Baal was a no-show. God turned on the fire-works. God used Elijah to rescue Israel from the brink of spiritual disaster. Therefore it was appropriate for Elijah also to be present at our Lord’s transfiguration.

And what were Moses and Elijah discussing with the Lord Jesus? **“They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”** “His departure” means his suffering, death, and perhaps also his resurrection and ascension. It’s interesting that the word “departure” is used. A departure is planned and intentional. A death is unavoidable. Jesus’ suffering and death were all part of God’s plan. It was a plan Jesus knew well. Our Lord was not a victim of the Jews and unjust Romans. His suffering and death on the cross were not a fate he endured, but a deed which he accomplished for our salvation. Even Moses and Elijah knew what was coming. All would happen as God planned. What else would they talk about with Jesus? This was why Jesus came!

And finally, God the Father himself testified to Jesus’ identity. A cloud surrounded the place where Jesus and his disciples were. Throughout the Old Testament, a cloud symbolized the immediate presence of God. Naturally, the disciples were frightened. Then God the Father himself spoke. **“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.”** The Father spoke almost the same words he spoke at Jesus’ baptism at the beginning of his ministry. At both the beginning and toward the end, God the Father announced that Jesus was no ordinary man. He was his one and only Son. Therefore, we are to listen to all that he says.

How do we respond to this display of Christ’s glory, and what does it mean for us today? Let’s first consider how the disciples responded. When Peter, James and John were supposed to praying with Jesus, instead they were sleeping. They would do the same thing in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus prayed just before he was captured. These men had a weak sinful flesh. And when they did see the glorious, transformed Christ, they didn’t understand what it all meant. Peter would have preferred glory to the cross – the mount of transfiguration to the hill of Golgotha. The disciples didn’t understand that Christ didn’t come to rule as a king, but to serve and offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins. And the story also shows us that the disciples were frightened to be in the presence of God. Aware of their own lack of holiness, God’s presence terrified them.

Is our response to Christ’s suffering and glory any better than that of the disciples? We must always be spiritually alert in this sinful world. How often does it happen that we are sleeping instead of praying... that we are distracted by earthly concerns and fail to see God’s grace and glory which surrounds us? And like Peter, have you ever found yourself desiring Christ’s glory instead of meditating on his cross? Have you put your focus on the money and things of this world instead of seeking the glorious riches that God promises to all who bear Christ’s cross in

this life? Is it possible we follow Christ now, but when the “glory” of the moment passes, we will abandon him? And how would you feel if you were suddenly face to face with the holy, almighty God? Could you stand confidently before him, or would you shrink back in fear?

We must confess that we have sinned against God. “**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**” (Romans 3:23).

Seeing our own true condition... seeing what a great need we have from God for his mercy and forgiveness... the Transfiguration of our Lord ought to bring us immeasurable comfort and joy as we head into the season of Lent. The one who went to the cross on our behalf is God’s very own Son. The blood that was shed on that cross was not that of a mere man. It was the holy, precious blood of the God-Man, Christ Jesus. That blood was not shed for his own guilt, for he was loved by God the Father. The blood was shed for the guilt of your sins and mine. And Jesus did all this for us, not because it was his fate, but because it was his choice. He chose to love us and give his life as an offering and sacrifice for us. He willingly fulfilled the eternal plan of God the Father.

Our sins are removed. We stand holy and perfect before our Father in heaven. And just as Moses and Elijah stood with Jesus in glory, we too shall stand with him in glory. Our Savior is also our brother, and eternity with him is the reward he gives us for the sake of his love. Rejoice, for at his transfiguration, God showed us Christ’s credentials. He made some incredible claims! And he proved they all must be believed. Without a doubt, he is the Christ. He is the bread of life. He is the light of the world. He is the resurrection and the life. He is the way, truth, and the life. Entrust your life to him who indeed came from the Father full of grace and truth. Amen.

The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [Phillipians 4:7]