

# CELEBRATE THE TRANSFIGURATION

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ February, 2016

**<sup>2</sup> After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. <sup>3</sup> His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” <sup>6</sup> (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) <sup>7</sup> Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” <sup>8</sup> Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. <sup>9</sup> As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. (Mark 9:2-9)**

This is the day on which our Lord was transfigured, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Today is the big day – Superbowl Sunday. In America, Superbowl Sunday has become an unofficial holiday of sorts – the food, the parties, the excitement. Many football fans will still watch the Superbowl because it has become such a big event – did you know the NFL even trucks in a brand new field for the game? Even many non-football fans have taken to watching the Superbowl, not for the game, but for the commercials, which this year are estimated to cost \$5 million for a 30 second spot. This year, there are a number of other special events surrounding the game itself, since it is the 50<sup>th</sup> Superbowl.

Americans seem to look for any reason to celebrate. The same thing could be said about Christians as well. But I wonder how many Christians could name for me the three biggest holidays in the Christian church year. I’m sure many could name Christmas and Easter as two of the big holidays. But what about the third? Pentecost? Ascension? While those are certainly worthwhile events to remember and celebrate, the argument can be made that Transfiguration deserves to be in the conversation as one of the three biggest holidays in the Christian Church.

Unfortunately it seems that Transfiguration Sunday gets overlooked. Either people forget it altogether whilst getting caught up in popular series, or it just gets lumped as just another one of Jesus’ miracles. But the Transfiguration is more than that. The Transfiguration of Jesus was a majestic event that we can hold onto and treasure for any number of reasons. Today, we get to CELEBRATE THE TRANSFIGURATION

1. For what it meant to Jesus
2. For what it meant to his disciples, and
3. For what it means for us.

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This special day started out like any other, with Jesus and his disciples. But on this particular occasion, Jesus selected three of his twelve disciples to join him – Peter, James and John. This was not the first time, nor would it be the last that these three would be privy to Jesus’ intimate moments. He had invited them to join him

when he raised a young girl from the dead, and he would invite these same three to join him as he prayed in Gethsemane only hours before he was crucified.

Since this was an important event in the life of Jesus, three of the four gospel writers mention it. The gospel writer Luke records why they were going up on this particular mountain on this particular day – it was to pray. Jesus, the Son of God, took time out of his busy schedule to pray, to talk with his Father in heaven. It was during this prayer that Jesus was transfigured. From everything we read in Scripture, Jesus may not have been, humanly speaking, expecting to be transfigured. This looks to be the hand of God the Father, pulling back the veil of Christ's humility, to remind himself, to remind his disciples, and to remind us, who he really was – the majestic Son of God.

Now what was this transfiguration all about? What did it look like? Why should we remember to CELEBRATE THE TRANSFIGURATION? Basically, what it meant for Jesus to be transfigured is that his appearance changed. If we would have lived 2,000 years ago and saw Jesus, we would have seen what looked to be an ordinary looking person – a typical Jewish man, average height, average weight, bushy beard. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah describes him perfectly – **“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”** If we would have seen him walking down the street, he wouldn't have stood out.

But on this day, at this time, that all changed. Because we know Jesus was not normal, Jesus was special. But exactly how special we can't even describe. That's why the three gospel writers who record this account describe Jesus using the best words they can, but even that cannot fully capture the picture. We just heard it described this way, **“His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”** We can reasonably guess that John, the fourth gospel writer, saw Jesus in this way too, in the revelation he was given of the end of the world, **“His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.”** What the disciples saw on this day and time was their Savior in his full glory.

But that's not all they saw. Gathered with Jesus were two figures, each of the gospel writers identifies them as Elijah and Moses. We don't know how the disciples knew, but they did. These were two heavenly witnesses from the Old Testament. These were two of the many whom God used to point his people to the Savior. Through these two men, countless prophecies were uttered about the Messiah. This is the first reason why we should CELEBRATE THE TRANSFIGURATION, for what it meant to Jesus.

So often we get the impression that since Jesus was perfect, he didn't need anything save food and water. But that isn't the case. After Jesus was tempted in the desert by Satan, angels came and strengthened him. In Gethsemane, Jesus confessed **“The soul is willing but the flesh is weak.”** At his Transfiguration, Jesus received the confirmation of two Old Testament witnesses. Even though Jesus knew what he had to do, Moses and Elijah could encourage and comfort him as he began the slow, purposeful plod toward the cross.

Through all of this Jesus also endured the misunderstanding of his disciples, who saw this as the culmination of everything they knew. Peter blurted out, **“Let us set up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah.”** Peter wanted this moment to continue, but not only was he terrified, but he was confused as to the purpose of this event. This moment was not meant to last, but to prepare – to prepare Jesus, to prepare the disciples.

And finally God the Father stepped into view. Through the form of a cloud everything was enveloped. And just like at Jesus' baptism, God the Father broke into history, **“This is my Son whom I love. Listen to him!”**

Yes, this voice primarily served to remind the disciples who exactly Jesus was and what they should do about it. But also think about what that voice sounded like from Jesus' perspective. It started with him coming up on the mountain to pray and it ended with him welcoming the approval of his heavenly Father. This is why we CELEBRATE THE TRANSFIGURATION, for what it meant for Jesus.

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This alone would make Transfiguration Sunday worth celebrating. But there was more to it than that. The disciples were there too, and they got a glimpse of the Savior's glory. Before this, it was probably more difficult to appreciate who Jesus really was. Yes, they knew he was a great teacher, they even knew that he was the Savior of the world. But for the disciples, just like us, we don't always know how God's plan is going to work out. In fact, only a chapter before this, Peter had rebuked Jesus for saying he was going to Jerusalem to die. In Peter's mind, this wasn't a fitting end for the Savior.

What better way to show Peter who Jesus was than by this transfiguration. We CELEBRATE THE TRANSFIGURATION for what it meant for Jesus' disciples. Through this Transfiguration, Jesus exposed his disciples to his deity. **"For in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form."** This is who Jesus is – all the time, not just when he looks like it. And the Jesus who has this kind of a power certainly knows what he is doing, the Jesus with this kind of power certainly can take care of himself, the Jesus with this kind of power certainly can take care of his disciples.

Oh, what it would have been like for his disciples as they were descending down that mountain. Jesus said they shouldn't tell anyone about what they had seen until he rose from the dead. So much must have been going through their minds. But how could they forget what they saw on that mountain? How could they forget Jesus' deity being on full display for them to see? This is what would prepare them for the Savior's death. As they went through the ups and the downs of Holy Week, they could have remembered this moment when Jesus was transfigured before them. Even though it seems like they didn't based on how they acted, they still had that memory etched in their minds.

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Even though we didn't see Jesus' transfiguration with our own eyes, we have seen it with our eyes of faith, we have seen it through the gospel writers – we have seen our Savior shining like the noon-day sun, with his clothes whiter than anyone could bleach. Which is another reason why we can CELEBRATE THE TRANSFIGURATION for what it means for us. We can have that image etched in our minds as well so we can be well reminded of the Savior whom we serve. But this is something that all too often we don't remember.

Consider a few simple examples. You sit down with your family in the middle of a crowded restaurant. The food you ordered comes out and you begin to pray. How much are you thinking about the prayer, and how much are you thinking about what the people around you are thinking about the family who's praying? Or maybe you think twice about putting a Christian window cling on your car or a post on Facebook. Perhaps you think that if you just do it your way things will work out much better than following God. When we think these thoughts, when we act in this way do we remember who our Savior is?

When we sit down to pray in a public restaurant, do we pray to the transfigured Jesus? When we are scared about what people will think when we ask them to church, are we thinking about the transfigured Jesus? When we consider ourselves whether coming to church and following God's "old fashioned" way is worth it, do we consider the transfigured Jesus? That's really who we should be thinking about, because that's the Savior we

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have. A Savior who willingly gave up his heavenly glory. A Savior who humbled himself for all – was crucified, died and buried. But a Savior who also delivered the knockout punch to death, because death couldn't keep its grip on him – the transfigured Savior.

Jesus' transfiguration helps us to understand our Savior, and that makes TRANSFIGURATION WORTH CELEBRATING – for what it means to me, for what it means to you. Because when people think Christians are weak, we are. But we have a Savior who is not. It is this Savior whom we serve and upon whom we rely. In fact, it was our Savior who said, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”** It is our transfigured and glorified Savior who is watching over us and is with us right now. And since he is, we have nothing to fear, and we can boldly go forth and tell others about him.

The Transfiguration is especially important for us to recall for its position in the Church Year. Transfiguration Sunday is celebrated immediately preceding the season of Lent, which is the 6-week lead up to Easter. During these next six weeks, we will descend into a somber valley and consider closely our sin and the reason for a Savior. Lent is not a time of rejoicing, but of reflection. So as Christians make that journey into Lent, there is not complete hopelessness. We can look up at the two peaks on either side of us – looking back to the Transfiguration and looking forward to Easter. This is why the Transfiguration is important. It will sustain us and see us through the somber season of Lent. May we always remember to CELEBRATE THE TRANSFIGURATION. Amen.