



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School  
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**Transfiguration of Our Lord**

**February 23, 2020**

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**“Jesus: The God-Man”**

*(Matthew 17:1-8)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“[Jesus] led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light . . . And behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.’ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear.’ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only” (Mt. 17:1-8).*

*Every day, Everywhere, By Everyone,...sharing  
the grace of the Good Shepherd.*

**Collect:** O God in the glorious transfiguration of Your beloved Son You confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of Moses and Elijah. In the voice that came from the bright cloud You wonderfully foreshowed our adoption by grace. Mercifully make us co-heirs with the King in His glory and bring us to the fullness of our inheritance in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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At times Jesus was so strong, so powerful, so much like how we think God ought to be. At other times, Jesus was so weak, so vulnerable, so tired and spent, so much like we think God ought not be, looking just like any other mortal. In the Gospel lesson we see both the human and divine natures of Jesus; we see God and man in the one person of Jesus. And we need him to be both God and man if he's to save us from sin and death.

Jesus takes three of his disciples, Peter, James and John up a high mountain. There's nothing unusual about the way they go up that mountain. It is a vigorous up-hill hike. They are huffing and puffing, pausing to catch their breath, take in the view, and measure their progress. They are sweating, all of them. Maybe somebody remembered to bring a water skin.

When they finally reach the summit something remarkable happens. Whatever it was, it is difficult for any of them to describe with words. Suddenly, the appearance of Jesus changed . . . dramatically so. Matthew says his face shown like the sun, and his clothes became radiant; not just reflecting the sun's light but emanating light. Jesus is still fully human, but the glory of God is also shining through him. Moses and Elijah, who have been dead for centuries, are also there, talking with Jesus. Peter starts talking some nonsense about building three tents. Then there's a bright cloud that envelops them all and then a voice from within the cloud thunders, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!" The disciples, terrified, fall to the ground and try to hide themselves from God's fearsome glory.

Then, just like that, it's over. Moses and Elijah are gone. The cloud has disappeared. The voice is silent. Nothing is shining brightly anymore, not the face of Jesus, not his clothing. It's just the same old Jesus. He comes to his disciples, touches them, and says, "Rise and have no fear." With that they start hiking back down the mountain. On the way down, he says "Don't tell anyone

about this until I have risen from the dead.”

Well what are we to make of this? There are many things we could talk about, but what I want to focus on today is how this text clearly reveals Jesus as both God and man. That’s what the Bible teaches overall and that’s what this passage from the Bible teaches. Whatever it means to be God, Jesus is. And whatever it means to be man, Jesus is, except without sin and evil. So Jesus is both God and man. The early Christians called Jesus the “God-Man.”

Martin Luther once said that just as the worm covers the fishing hook and hides the hook from the fish’s eye, so the human nature of Jesus covered over the divine nature and usually hid it from our eyes. But now and then that divine nature of Jesus shows through.

For example, it shows through in his miracles of healing. He simply touches them, and the blind receive sight. The deaf can hear. Those with fever are made well. Sometimes he doesn’t even touch them. He speaks simple words and sick people are made well.

There are other miracles where the divine nature of Jesus shows through, as when he expresses his authority over the forces of nature. I’m thinking of the time when he calmed the storm, or when he walked on water, or when he fed the thousands, or turned water into wine.

His divine nature especially shows through when he raises the dead: Jairus’ daughter, the widow’s son at Nain, and Lazarus.

His divine nature shows through also in his teaching, because he teaches with the wisdom and the authority of God. Even as a twelve-year old, his knowledge and application of Scripture astonishes the religious authorities in Jerusalem. And as an adult, large crowds gather around him to listen and learn from him. His parables are timeless and have as much to teach us today as they did 2,000 years ago.

His divine wisdom shows through also when his opponents try to trap him through tough questions, questions for which there are no good answers, except for the answers that Jesus gave (Mt. 22:15ff). In all these ways the divine nature of Jesus becomes evident to those around him. Paul wrote, “In Christ the fullness of the Deity dwells in human form” (Col. 2:9).

But then, there are those other times when he looks just

like any other human being, and not at all like God . . . other times when the worm is mostly covering the hook. When he was born, he was so small and weak and vulnerable. Like other newborn babies he couldn't pick up his head or roll over. He had frail little arms. Like any other baby, he cried for milk, or because he was soiled. Who would dare look at that and say, "Surely, this is God's holy Son!"

As an adult, sometimes he got so tired, so worn out and exhausted that he could sleep through anything . . . like the night when he was sleeping in that little boat in spite of the furious wind and dangerous waves. Just like you he got hungry and thirsty and grimy. And when his friend Lazarus died, he weeps, and when he weeps he looks so very human.

And the worm fully conceals the hook on the night Jesus is arrested. They bind his hands and rough him up a bit. They dress him up like a king and mock him. And when they whip him, the skin on his back is torn and bleeds like any other man's. When they pound nails through his hands, no angels swoop down to stop the travesty. No booming voice from a cloud thunders, "This is my Son!" Instead, on the cross, a dying man cries out to God and there is no answer. On the cross, there's nothing about him that is radiant. Not his clothes, not his face. On the cross his breathing grows shallow and gurgled, his pulse slows, his blood pressure plummets . . . and then he dies. He really dies. His corpse hangs there, held up only by the nails. Where's the power now? Where's the thundering voice from the heavens? Where are the angels? Where are the miracles? For that matter, where are the crowds of his followers? They seem to have evaporated. Those few that remained must have been asking, "Why?" Why didn't he who had so much power, why did he not use it to stop this? In John chapter 10 Jesus tells: "I have come that you may have life," and he's not talking about just life on earth. He's talking about eternal life.

You see, the Bible teaches that because we sin, we die. If we did not sin, we would never die. But each of us is full of sin in what we think, and say and do. John writes, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8).

So we are all sinners and God is holy, which means God is without sin. God will not have sinful people in his perfect

heaven. Revelation 21: “Nothing that is unholy will ever enter into heaven, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false.” That means I’m out. I don’t qualify, and you don’t either.

This winter my garage floor has had a lot of the black, salty slush on it. It’s nasty stuff, right? Would you let your kids walk through that and then into the house on to the brand-new carpet? Of course not! Similarly, no one who is full of the blackness of sin gets into heaven. That means we are all banned and excluded, because we are all sinners. Even the very best person on earth is still full of sin, and therefore disqualified from heaven. And that would have been the end of the story except for the fact that God still loves us in spite of our sin. That love motivated God to send his Son Jesus to save us from our sin. That’s what the cross is about. That’s why Jesus did not use his power to stop his execution. After all, that’s why he came. He came not just to preach and teach and heal. He came to die on a cross and suffer sin’s punishment and save us from our sin. 1 John 2 says, “Jesus is the sacrifice for our sins, and not only ours, but for the sins of the whole world.”

It’s not just the man part of Jesus who died on the cross. It’s the God part of Jesus who died too. Those two natures cannot be separated. And that’s Good News because we need the divine nature on the cross. If it were just the death of a man 2,000 years ago, how could that ever be helpful to us? It would not be helpful, because it would not have been *for* us. It would just be some guy who died. But if the God-Man died on the cross *for you*, that changes everything. If the God-Man took on your sin and guilt as if it were his own and suffered it’s punishment on the cross, then one drop of his blood has the power to save the entire world. If it’s the God-Man who died on the cross, then we have hope for this life and for eternal life too. 1 John 1:7, “The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, purifies us from every sin.”

Once Jesus said, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” No one is excluded from his love. It says, “God so loved the world that he gave his Son.” You are part of the world. You are therefore an object of God’s amazing love.

Universities can be exclusive places if you’re not smart enough. Athletic teams can be exclusive if you’re not big enough, fast enough, strong enough. Musical groups can be exclusive, work places too. These all may exclude you, but Jesus

will never exclude you from his love. No matter who you are, where you were born, what language you speak, or what you've done or failed to do, he still loves you. By faith we receive his death in our place. By faith we receive his forgiveness. By faith we receive the salvation he won for us.

So, in summary, when Jesus was transfigured on top of the mountain, the disciples were given a peak at the divine nature of Jesus. But they also knew he was fully human. Therefore, when they saw Jesus die on the cross, they would eventually remember this death was no accident. It was intentional. It's why Jesus, the God-man, was born . . . so that he could die for you and for your salvation. Thanks be to God. Amen.



