

St. Peter Lutheran Church
January 25, 2026
The Transfiguration
Matthew 17:1-9

In Peter's second epistle he writes, **We did not follow cunningly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.** When Peter and the apostles made known the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, they were not relaying made up stories—they were relaying what that they heard, saw, and touched for themselves. They were **eyewitnesses of His majesty.**

They were eyewitnesses of many events, many miracles, many proofs, even the proof of Christ's resurrection from the dead. But the event to which Peter refers here is when **Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them.** Peter was there for this—he saw it. He saw when Jesus' **face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.** He was an eyewitness that day of Jesus' majesty—a majesty which He possessed with the Father and the Spirit from all eternity, but a majesty which He had not revealed yet in this magnitude in His human body. But there on the holy mountain, Peter, James, and John saw not the form of a servant, not a man in frail flesh. Rather, they saw God from God, Light from Light, very God of very God. They saw this in the flesh of Jesus. His human face shone with His divine glory. The Creator of Light radiated in the flesh of Jesus. They saw the majesty of the Word who had become flesh.

And not only did Peter see with his own eyes the majesty of God in Jesus Christ, but he heard with his own ears the voice of the Father. **For [Jesus] received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."** Peter writes, **And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.** Again, no tall tale or fable, but an eyewitness report. A report Peter ultimately is willing to die for in order to confirm its trustworthiness.

And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, Peter continues. Truly, Christ fulfills the words of the prophets. The Virgin did conceive and bear a Son, and as Peter, James, and John see and hear, this Son is God with us. And those prophets who spoke beforehand of Jesus, appeared to Peter, James, and John on the holy mountain, talking with Jesus in His glory. Moses who had said, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear." Elijah—who raised people from the dead—who miraculously fed people—and who ascended into heaven—whose life and miracles bore witness of Jesus. These two—Moses and Elijah—appear to Peter, James, and John on the mountain, talking with Jesus who has been transfigured before them.

Peter, seeing these things, eagerly says to Jesus, **"Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."**

But of course, Peter's offer is no good. This heavenly glory and the presence of saints who have died and yet are alive to God—these things cannot be contained here in this world. These things must wait for the age that is coming—they must wait for the resurrection of all the dead, for this corrupt world to perish, and for God to make all things new. This glory is reserved for the age that is coming—when the wicked shall be thrown into the fire and the righteous shall shine like the sun. When the heavenly Jerusalem will descend and the dwelling place of God will be with His people. But these things are not yet. There will be no tabernacle built on the holy mountain. Jesus will resume his slave appearance and Moses and Elijah will vanish. Not that these things aren't real—they are very real indeed, as these eyewitnesses can attest. But these things are not yet consummated.

So Peter does not build the three tabernacles. Instead, **while he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”** Hear Him, because in Him the prophetic word is confirmed—He is the Lord, come to Shepherd His people, God with us. **When the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, “Arise, and do not be afraid.” When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.** No longer shining with His glory, but again veiled in our appearance. But being found in our likeness, He who is invisible has been made manifest to us. He who is a consuming fire can reach His hand out and touch us. He who all Israel trembled and quaked over at the base of Mt. Sinai says comfortingly, “Arise, and do not be afraid.” The prophetic word is confirmed in Him, and the apostles hear Him and receive His words. The same Holy Spirit who moved holy men to speak prophecies before Christ, brought later to the apostles' remembrance all things that Jesus said to them. And the apostles committed these things to Scripture for us, that we who have not heard, seen, and touched may still come to know Him.

Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.” The preview of Jesus' glory was just that—a preview—a taste of things to come. Jesus still has business to accomplish before He enters that glory. He has first the cross to face. For He came to cast out all fear with His perfect love. God who is a consuming fire was found in our frail flesh to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, to turn away God's wrath from us forever, and to leave us eternally in God's favor, loved and forgiven. He did this that even as He is already glorified, we too will rise again to be like He is.

Jesus accomplished this by suffering and dying and rising again. And it is after His suffering of death that He will be crowned with glory and honor. It is after God raises Him from the dead who tasted death for everyone that He will be given the name that is above all names. It is after His Holy Passion for our salvation that Jesus Christ will be seated at the right hand of the Father with all authority given to Him. He who died to reconcile us to God is He who will return at the end of the age to be our Judge. He who is the atoning sacrifice for our sins will come again in glory. He who left his heavenly glory and humbled himself and died, did this to share His glory

with us. Having taken our human nature and laying down His life for us, His human body is raised in glory.

So we have not only the prophetic word concerning Christ, but the apostolic word too—the eyewitness accounts, written as the Spirit brought all things to their remembrance. No myths or fables, but facts. God became man, died for our sins, and rose again for our justification. We have baptism, which unites us to Christ in a death like His and which raises us to new life through faith in Him by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Even as Peter, James, and John were able to go back down that mountain and await the glory that is to come—even as the cross stood waiting for Jesus in Jerusalem—we are able too to await the glory that is coming. We too are given a foretaste of that glory. We too come to a holy mountain, even here on earth, a glimmer and vision of what it is to come, and what already is in Christ. We **come to Mt. Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and** to the sprinkling of His blood. We enter now, even as we are still here on earth, through the veil that is His flesh, into the Most Holy Place—we recline at table with Moses and Elijah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the whole host of heaven.

So when this service is ended, we go down from the mountain with joy and confidence, having a clear picture of what lies ahead—no matter the suffering that is still before us, the eternal joy of heaven is ours in Christ. And since Christ has already accomplished our salvation and has already risen from the dead, this news is ours to proclaim openly to the ends of the earth. We bring the Word of God to all, **as a light that shines in a dark place**, that many hearts would have the day dawn and the morning star of Jesus arise within them, preparing them too for the glory which is to come. Amen.