

Exodus 24:8-18 (The Transfiguration of Our Lord—Series A)
“To Behold His Glory”
Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield, CT
February 19, 2023

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

Our text is the Old Testament lesson from Exodus 24

⁸ And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” ⁹ Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, ¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. ¹¹ And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank. ¹² 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.” ¹³ So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. ¹⁴ 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.” ¹⁵ Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

The apostle and evangelist, St. John, was in exile on the island of Patmos because of his steadfast confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. The year was around A.D. 95 and John was an elderly man. Listen to how he describes what happened in Revelation, chapter 1: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, . . .’” Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he

held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades'" (Rev. 1:10–18 ESV).

John saw Jesus Christ, the Crucified, Risen, and Glorified Lord in His heavenly glory and splendor. And this wasn't the first time. As John turned and saw the glorious Christ, he must have thought, "I've seen you like this before!" And just like the previous time on the Mount of Transfiguration, John fell on his face in terror at the sight of the glory of the only true God. Miraculously, John, receiving a dramatic view of Jesus' divine glory, is spared from destruction both times. Jesus on Patmos puts His right hand of power on John and graciously raises him to his feet to be in the glorious presence of his Lord and Savior.

Now why is this such a big deal? Because God Himself explicitly says in Exodus 33:20 that a person shall not see Him and live. No sinful, fallen, mortal human can see the face of God and remain alive. Not only is God holy, but He is a consuming fire to unholy people. As our vision would be destroyed by looking directly into the sun, so would our whole selves be destroyed by an unveiled sight of the brilliancy of the glory of God. And yet, Jesus gave to John (along with Peter and James) on the Mount of Transfiguration a glimpse of that divine glory without bringing about their destruction. Jesus' glory was, I suppose, turned down just enough so that they might see and behold Him in His transfigured, glorious state as the God He is. The same holds true for Jesus' appearance to

John on Patmos as well as for Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses also could have said of Jesus, "I've seen you like this before." Where? On Mt. Sinai, in the cloud, when the Lord revealed His glory to the principal men of Israel at the covenant ratification ceremony in Exodus 24. Here's what happened, "Then [God] said to Moses, 'Come up to [Yahweh], you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. Moses alone shall come near to [Yahweh], but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.' Moses came and told the people all the words of [Yahweh] and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words that [Yahweh] has spoken we will do.' And Moses wrote down all the words of [Yahweh]. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to [Yahweh]. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that [Yahweh] has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient'" (Ex. 24:1-7 ESV).

Then something striking happens as part of the ratification of the promises which God made to Israel. Half of the blood of the sacrificial oxen was thrown on the altar. But what about the other half of the blood? Moses took the blood and threw it on the people! In doing so, He declared, "Behold, the blood of the covenant that [Yahweh] has made with

you in accordance with all these words.” It is after being splashed with blood that the men of Israel meet with God. How is that possible? No one can see God and live.

God makes fellowship with Him possible by means of the sacrificial blood. The blood cleanses or purifies Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel making it possible for them to behold God and to eat and to drink in His presence with Him. It is the blood that protected the sin-ridden people from the legitimate wrath of a holy God. It is the blood that provided a heavenly vision of the heavenly splendor and the glory of God. It is the blood that enabled Moses to approach the glory of Yahweh and enter the cloud so that He might receive the tablets of stone from the hand of the Lord for the people of Israel.

By means of the blood of the covenant, these Israelites were qualified to ascend the mountain and there to behold the God of Israel and celebrate the covenant meal. God was willing that His people should share in this blessedness with Him. The Lord Jesus Christ was willing that Peter, James, and John should behold Him in His glory as the Son of God and Son of Man. “And [Jesus] was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. 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.’ He was still speaking when, 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" (Matt. 17:2–8 ESV).

"Rise, and have no fear." These are Gospel words. In the presence of the Lord of Glory, sinners ought to fear the wrath of God, but something has changed. God the Son in human flesh stands ready to offer Himself as the once for all sacrifice for the sins of the world. Jesus the Christ stands ready on the Mount of Transfiguration in His divine glory so that He might go up on another mountain, Calvary, and there shed His own holy, precious blood for Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, the seventy elders of the people of Israel, Peter, James, and John . . . and for you. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1–4 ESV).

All of the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to this one all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. As true God and true Man with ordinary flesh and blood, Jesus lived a perfect life under the Law and then died the death we deserve. Shedding His own blood on the cross, He offered His life in exchange for the life of the world. His blood is the required blood covering for the world's sins. Now, in Holy Baptism, Jesus splashes us with His most holy blood. He splashes us on the outside to cleanse us and forgive our sin, and to set us apart as holy people. Hebrews 9:11-12, "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the

good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:11–12 ESV).

Cleansed and forgiven by the death of Christ and the shedding of His blood, given new life through His resurrection from the dead, we can approach God without fear of condemnation and death. We can behold His glory in the face of Jesus Christ who invites us to come and eat with Him. The blood of Jesus permits us mere mortals the intimacy of eating and drinking with the Almighty God which we literally do in the Lord's Supper. That is our covenant meal where Jesus gives to us His true Body with the bread and His true Blood with the wine, blessing us with the forgiveness of sins, life, salvation, and the strengthening of our faith. In this blessed Sacrament, we eat and drink with the truly present Lord and God, Jesus Christ. He comes to us with Himself for us to eat and to drink for our salvation. And here at the altar we behold His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14b). The Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Season of Epiphany says it so well when we pray, "As the glory of Your presence once filled Your ancient temple, so in the incarnation of Your Son, Jesus Christ, You manifested the fullness of Your glory in human flesh. We give You thanks that in His most Holy Supper You reveal Your glory to us. Grant us faithfully to eat His body and drink His blood so that we may one day behold Your glory face to face."

As so we shall. In our own flesh and blood, raised from the dead and glorified, we shall behold God face to face in a new creation. Christians from every time and place will

be gathered together at the wedding feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom, which will have no end. On that day, Isaiah 25 will see its fulfillment, "On this mountain [Yahweh] of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord [Yahweh] will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for [Yahweh] has spoken. It will be said on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is [Yahweh]; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation'" (Is. 25:6–9 ESV).

Like Moses on Mt. Sinai, like Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, we shall see our God face to face in glory. "Beloved, . . . we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2 ESV). Today, come and behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in the Supper of His Body and Blood, a foretaste of the heavenly feast to come. Come, covered in the Savior's blood, and dine with the Lord your God, forgiven and redeemed to meet Him without fear. "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen" (Jude 24–25 ESV).