

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
The Transfiguration of Our Lord C
March 2, 2025
Luke 9:28-36

At the Transfiguration: Moses, a Mountain, and an Exodus

Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. 30 And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:28-31 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

On the last Sunday of the Epiphany season, before we enter Lent on Ash Wednesday, we hear of our Lord's Transfiguration. Through Matthew, Mark, and Luke we see Jesus transfigured, on a mountain, standing with Moses and Elijah, talking with them. Only in Luke, though, do we find out what they were talking about. So, today, we celebrate the Transfiguration considering Moses, a Mountain, and an Exodus.

At our Lord's transfiguration, Moses himself shows up, some 1400 years after he died. God must have brought him back for this event for a reason. So we look back on the life of Moses to see what the significance might be. Second, the transfiguration of Christ is literally a "mountaintop experience." And when we think about the life of Moses, we recall that he also had a number of mountaintop experiences. But where does the "exodus" thing come from? Well, you have to wait to find out.

First, then, there's Moses himself, who is, arguably, the most important person in the Old Testament. You could make a case for Abraham, David, and Elijah, but you wouldn't go wrong in saying that Moses is the key figure in Israel's history. After all, Moses was the great deliverer, the great lawgiver, the great prophet. "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." (Deut. 34:10).

But here at the Transfiguration, there is one greater than Moses. Here is Jesus Christ, receiving the greater glory. The reading from Hebrews puts it like this: "For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses. . . . Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son." (Heb. 3:3, 5-6). You see, Moses' role was to point ahead to Jesus, to prophesy, in word and deed, of the good things to come in Christ. Moses received the word of God from

the Lord Himself and spoke it to the people. Jesus does that in an even greater way, more directly, and with an even greater message. As St. John says: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." (John 1:17-18). Jesus is the very Son of God, and when you see and hear Him, He is making God known in the ultimate way. All of God's grace, all of God's truth, is wrapped up in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Moses had told the people of Israel: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen." (Deut. 18:15). That prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus. The Father's voice from the cloud echoes this prophecy and tells the disciples why Jesus receives the greater glory. He says: "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35). Then the disciples look up, and they no longer see Moses and Elijah. They see Jesus alone.

Then there's the matter of being transfigured, of having your appearance changed. When Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai and came down from the mountain, his face was shining from being with God. But Jesus is God Himself, the Son of God in the flesh—hidden in lowliness, but now at the Transfiguration, revealed in glory. So Jesus' whole appearance is shining with an even more glorious light. "The appearance of his face was altered," transfigured, "and his clothing became dazzling white." (Luke 9:29).

Moses points ahead to Jesus, but in such a way that the prophecy yields to the fulfillment, the lesser gives way to the greater, the servant gladly gives all glory to the Son.

So first, there's the person of Moses. Then, there's the mountain. Moses had a number of mountaintop experiences. Today's Old Testament reading has Moses on top of Mount Nebo, looking out over the Promised Land before he dies. But before that, of course, Moses met with God on Mount Sinai, where he received the Ten Commandments. And even before that, Moses was on a mountain when the Lord told him, from a burning bush, to go and lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. The Lord said: "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. . . . And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." (Ex. 3:7-10).

You see, the children of Israel were trapped in Egypt, groaning in bondage and slavery. The Egyptians were harsh taskmasters, and the Israelites were suffering there in a foreign land. But the Lord had made a promise with their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to settle the people of Israel in their own land, in freedom, in a land flowing with milk and honey. And

the Lord always keeps His promises. So the Lord was making good on His promise. There would be an exodus out of Egypt—an “exodus,” literally, a “way out,” a “departure.” The Israelites would escape Egypt and be brought up to the Promised Land. And the Lord would do that through Moses. That’s what the Lord told Moses at the burning bush on the mountain. That was Moses’ mountaintop experience before the exodus.

Now, at the Transfiguration, God is doing it again, in an even greater way, with Jesus, on a mountain. This is the mountaintop experience before the exodus that Jesus is about to accomplish. Now, we don’t see any “exodus” in our text, in English, but it is there in the Greek. And only Luke has this, in the verse where he mentions what Moses and Elijah and Jesus were discussing: “And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:30-31). “They spoke of his departure”: the word here for “departure” is the Greek word “exodus.” Moses and Elijah and Jesus were talking about Jesus’ exodus, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Because from this point on, Jesus sets His face to go to Jerusalem, where He will accomplish a new and even greater exodus for you and me.

You see, you and I were groaning under the bondage of slavery to sin and Satan. Satan, that old Pharaoh, is a harsh taskmaster. Afflictions are the chains that bind us. Oppression is the whip that lashes our back. Guilt, the burden that weighs us down. Death, the heavy load that drags us to the ground. And there is no way that we could free ourselves from that slavery. We had no way out.

But Jesus comes, and He is the leader of a new exodus, our escape from sin and death and the grave. Jesus tells old Pharaoh, “Let my people go!” But how Jesus will accomplish this exodus at Jerusalem involves an interesting twist.

What was it that led directly to the exodus from Egypt? It was the plague of the death of the firstborn. And that plague would have struck the homes of the Israelites, too, if the Lord had not provided the Passover lamb. The Israelites were told to sacrifice a lamb without spot or blemish and to spread its blood on the doorposts of their homes. The angel of death would see the blood and pass over that house. Their homes were spared. At the same time, the plague hitting Egypt was the tipping point that finally let the people of Israel go. They made their escape out of bondage and started heading toward the Promised Land.

All that is what is fulfilled in the new exodus that Jesus has accomplished at Jerusalem for you and me. He Himself is the perfect Passover Lamb, by whose blood we are spared death. God sees Jesus’ blood, the holy precious blood He shed on the cross, and death passes over us. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, your sin and mine.

As a result, we are free. Satan, that old Pharaoh, is defeated. He no longer has any hold on us. Christ is our exodus. He is our way out, in His person, in His flesh. He leads us out of our bondage. He brings us out and leads us through the wilderness of this world, on our way to the Promised Land of heaven. Our exodus will result in the resurrection from the dead, eternal life with God and with His people, in joy and blessing forevermore.

My friends, all of this is shown to us in the Transfiguration of Our Lord. The Transfiguration was prefigured in Moses on his mountains and in the exodus he led. But that deliverance has been fulfilled in an even greater way in the new exodus that Jesus has accomplished. The Transfiguration of Our Lord is the mountaintop experience before the greatest exodus of all. The Son of God's glory is shining forth, as He is about to go to Jerusalem to set us free. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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