



THE COMPASS

RED HILL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Sermon Series: "Matthew's Messiah." The Gospel of Matthew.

(Epiphany, 2026)

"The Transfiguration."

□ Day #1—Monday, February 16th. Read: Matthew 17:1. –Encounter: God's Word and your life—What do you Hear and/or See?

In Matthew 17, we have the literal "turning point" in Jesus' ministry—His Transfiguration. While up to this point Jesus has been teaching, healing, and ministering in and around Galilee, He now will turn toward Jerusalem and His eventual suffering, death and resurrection. As Jesus prepares for this ultimate encounter between the power of God and the powers of the devil, Jesus takes His disciples up on a mountain and is there transfigured. After the Transfiguration, Jesus will "set His face toward Jerusalem." The Transfiguration was a *glimpse* of the power and glory of Jesus and the kingdom. Below is an artistic rendering of this most holy event in Jesus' life and that of His disciples.



The Transfiguration may have occurred on Mount Hermon near Caesarea Philippi (See *Mark* 8:27), though some say it was Mount Tabor.

Consider/Reflect: "Through the Transfiguration, Jesus allows His disciples to catch a glimpse of the glory that will again be His after His resurrection. Like Peter, we, too, like to prolong "mountaintop experiences," leaving the toil and trouble of the world behind. However, Jesus has not called us out of the world, but rather to overcome it. Accordingly, He lifts us up and strengthens us when we are challenged; reminding us that He has already overcome the world for us."¹

□ **Day #2—Tuesday, February 17th. Read: Matthew 17.2-3. —Examine: The Text and its**

At the Transfiguration, three events occurred:

- Jesus' face and clothes became as **bright as a flash of lightning**. This would have immediately reminded those present of the account of Moses' face shining with bright light when he received the tablets of the Law (*Exodus 34:29-35*). "Christ's human appearance became dazzlingly bright as He displayed His divine glory."²
- Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus. The bodies of Moses and Elijah were never found. God buried Moses' body (*Deuteronomy 34:5-6*), and Elijah did not die but was taken up to heaven (*2 Kings 2:11-12, 15-18*). These two men represent the beginning and the end of Israel...Moses, as the Lawgiver, founded the nation, and Elijah is to come back before the great and terrible day of the Lord (*Malachi 4:5-6*).
- Mathew simply says that Moses and Elijah were "talking with him" (Jesus). In *Luke 9.31*, Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus about *His departure* (Greek: *exodon*, "going out or away") which He was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. "Departure" referred to Jesus' leaving the world through which He would bring salvation—much as Yahweh had brought deliverance to Israel in its Exodus (departure) from Egypt. From this point forward, Jesus 'turned His face toward Jerusalem,' telling His followers repeatedly that Jerusalem was His destination where He would die (*Luke 9:51, 53; 13:33; 17:11; 18:31*), which again, was confirmed by Moses and Elijah themselves!"³

Moses' and Elijah's presence with Jesus was both miraculous and full of meaning. Many scholars believe that Moses and Elijah represent the "Law and the Prophets," essentially a "summary" of the Old Testament. Additionally, "Scripture had promised the coming of Elijah (Mal 4:4–5) and a prophet like Moses (Dt 18:15–19). The disciples experience a divine revelation on the mountain just as Moses and Elijah each did at Mount Sinai."⁴

Consider/Reflect: "[Matthew's mention of Jesus' Transfiguration happening "After six days" is an]...Indication that Peter's confession of faith...[*Matthew 16.13-20*]...and the transfiguration are closely connected. Peter and James, and John...Jesus selected...several times to be with Him at key moments (26:37; Mk 5:37)...God revealed Himself to both Moses and Elijah on Mount Sinai (Horeb; Ex 19:3; 1Ki 19:8)...The great lawgiver and the outstanding prophet were representative of the OT Scriptures, the Law and the Prophets."⁵

□ **Day #3—Wednesday, February 18th. Read: Matthew 17.4-5. —Explore: The background to this text(s).**

Today is Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday begins the sacred season of Lent. The word *Lent* originally meant "spring," ("*spring-time*" for the soul) and was understood as a time to reflect on the Christian life and its foundation in Baptism as a Sacrament of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The description, *Ash Wednesday*, comes from the ancient practice of placing ashes on the forehead as a sign of humility before God, as well as a symbol of mourning and sorrow. Lent provides us an opportunity to deepen our relationship with Jesus so that we can serve Him and others for the glory of God!

As we return to our text this week, Peter felt that they should make three "tents" for Jesus and these "heavenly" visitors. Peter's intention was likely meant to both honor them and provide somewhere for them to *stay on the mountain*. Interestingly, the Greek word translated "shelter" is σκηνή (*skēnē*), meaning literally, a "tent" or "dwelling." In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the *Septuagint* (LXX), σκηνή (*skēnē*) was used to describe the Tabernacle, the "tent" in which the people of Israel worshiped and offered sacrifices. In some way, Peter knew that this was a "holy moment," a literal "supernatural" event! As C.E. Arnold explains, Peter's...

...offer to build three "shelters" may recall the tabernacle, since the same word (*skēnē*) is used in the LXX for the tabernacle (Ex. 25:9), though the same word is also used for the shelters erected during the Old Testament Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:42). Peter, trying to make sense of this overwhelming transfiguration of Jesus and the appearance of these great Old Testament figures, apparently wishes to make some sort of memorial.⁶

As I suggested above, perhaps Peter's desire to erect "tents" reflected his expectation (desire?) that Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, would stay on the mountain(?)! However, they were not going to stay on the mountain! This was not what Jesus had come to do. As the promised Messiah and Son of God, Jesus came to suffer and die for the salvation of the world! Theologian D.A. Carson rightly notes that...

2 Ibid.

3 J.F. Walvoord and R.B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985).

4 C.S. Keener and J.H. Walton, Eds. *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016). *The Lutheran Study Bible*.

6 C.E. Arnold. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Zondervan, 2002).

The real significance was to be found in the *cloud* (a symbol of God's presence) and the heavenly voice which repeated what had been said at the baptism of Jesus (3:22) but this time addressed it to the disciples. The Jesus whom Peter had confessed to be the Messiah was indeed the Son of God—not in spite of his imminent sufferings and death but because of them. Therefore, the disciples were to obey him—and him only....⁷

Consider/Reflect: “Moses and Elijah enjoy close fellowship with God in heaven and so reflect that divine brilliance... [Jesus'] ... departure. Lit, 'exodus'... [means]... Jesus was soon to offer His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world (vv 21–22), thereby freeing His people from slavery to sin and leading them to the promised land of eternal life... this comparison to the OT exodus from Egypt is fitting.”⁸

□ **Day #4--Thursday, February 19th. Read: Matthew 17.6-8.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**

As you would expect, the disciples were terrified! The response of fear in the presence of the divine is a common, Biblical theme and experience. For example, the disciples respond in the same ways that Daniel did (*Daniel 10.7-9*), as well as the shepherds on that first Christmas night when the *angels* proclaimed Jesus' birth! New Testament scholar D.A. Carson comments on the disciples experience of fear as the story unfolds in the Gospel of Matthew and Mark...

The visible glory of Deity brings terror, but Jesus calms his disciples' fears (cf. Mt 14:26–27; cf. Dan 8:18; 10:18). Mark relates fear to Peter's foolish words; Matthew, to the disciples' response to the Voice from the cloud. Both are psychologically convincing; both make different points in the narrative. In Mark fear helps explain Peter's folly. In Matthew it magnifies the greatness of the Transfiguration. Matthew alone tells us that at the divine splendor the disciples “fell facedown to the ground” (Mt 17:6), a prelude to their seeing no one “except Jesus” (v. 8). These words are pregnant with meaning. Compared with God's revelation through him, all other revelations pale... Jesus is God's Son... Therefore all must “listen to him!” (17:7).⁹

The Transfiguration was a *foreshadowing* of Jesus' death and resurrection and would later strengthen the disciples faith and hope when they were doubtful and/or fearful. The Transfiguration would serve as a “symbol-charged self-disclosure of Jesus that would be much better understood (2 Peter 1:16–19) following the Resurrection. For the present, it indelibly confirmed the disciples' conviction that Jesus was the Messiah.”¹⁰ As the disciples respond to Jesus' *touch* and *call* to “rise, and have no fear,” the disciples notice that Moses and Elijah have disappeared. ““They saw no one except Jesus' reads more literally, *They did not see anyone but Jesus only*. The word *only* (*monos*) comes at the end of the sentence for emphasis. The disciples must focus on Christ alone. He will prove sufficient for their needs.”¹¹

The recording of the touch of Jesus here may well have the purpose of showing that it was the real Jesus they had seen transfigured and talking to Moses and Elijah and that they therefore had not simply experienced an illusion. The Jesus of transcendent glory remains the compassionate Master who led them into discipleship. (The three elements of falling down, being touched, and being told not to fear are found in Rev 1:17.)¹²

Consider/Reflect: “God also revealed His presence on Mount Sinai with a cloud (Ex 19:9)... The Father answers the question Jesus had asked His disciples in 16:15. What Peter, James, and John had not heard at the Baptism of Jesus (3:17), they hear now. [“This is my beloved Son...”]... Moses had foretold that God would raise up a prophet to whom the people should listen (Dt 18:15). Jesus was that prophet. He alone knows the Father, who has handed over all things to His Son (11:27).”¹³

□ **Day #5— Friday, February 20th. Read: Matthew 17.9.—Explore: The background to this text(s).**

As Jesus often did throughout His ministry, He instructs His disciples to “*tell no one*” about what they have just witnessed. Referred to in Biblical study as, “*The Messianic Secret*,” most scholars believe Jesus did this to deter those who were only interested in the “show,” the miracles, and the people's insistence that Jesus be and do what they wanted/expected! For example, Peter admonished Jesus when Jesus said that He had to go to Jerusalem and the cross (*Matthew 16.22ff*). Jesus rebuked Peter in turn, telling him to “*Get behind me Satan!*” Not to be deterred, and as we discussed on Wednesday, on the mount of Transfiguration, Peter wanted to build “tents” to stay on the mountain. Jesus' answer: No! Jesus has come to die; and that was simply NOT what

7 New Bible commentary: 21st century edition. 1994 (D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer & G. J. Wenham, Ed.) (4th ed.) (Lk 9:28–36). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

8 The Lutheran Study Bible.

9 F. E. Gaebelin, Ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

10 Ibid.

11 C. Blomberg. *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).

12 D.A. Hagner. *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993).

13 The Lutheran Study Bible.

Peter (the disciples/other people expected). Consequently, Jesus counsels *secrecy*—until He rises from the dead!

The motif of silence appears for the final time in Matthew, and for the first time Jesus suggests the injunction is not permanent. After the resurrection the disciples must tell others about his transfiguration. Here is the most important interpretive key to the messianic secret motif: Christ's mission can be fully understood only after he has completed his ministry of suffering and has subsequently been vindicated. The glimpse of his glory revealed by his transfiguration, like the glimpses given by his other miracles, which generated commands to silence, may not be allowed to hinder his journey to death.¹⁴

As a foreshadowing of Jesus' death and resurrection, the profundity and power of the Transfiguration would be correctly understood and then rightly be added to the witness about Jesus' life and mission. As D.A. Hagner writes, "When the resurrection became the center of the early church's proclamation, then too the story of the transfiguration could be made known. But the disciples surely would have been hard pressed to comprehend at this point Jesus' intent..."¹⁵

Consider/Reflect: "The Transfiguration of Jesus confirms for the disciples that He truly is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, as Peter confessed (16:16). The transfiguration is a foretaste of coming glory: Christ's resurrection and His earthly appearances afterward, His ascension, and finally heaven. Comfort one another with these words. Though we are still troubled by the cares and ills of earthly life, every believer shares in the vision of what is to come (1Jn 3:2). [Pray]: 'Tis good, Lord, to be here! Yet we may not remain; But since Thou bidst us leave the mount, Come with us to the plain. Amen.' (LSB 414:5)"¹⁶

□ Day #6-Saturday, February 21st. Read: Psalm 2.6-12.—Embrace: God and His guiding you through His Word.

Once again, we use the *Daily Order of Prayers* from *Luther's Small Catechism*. Read and mediate on *Psalm 2.6-12* and...:

"[M]ake the sign of the Holy Cross and say: In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, As it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

(Depending on the time of day, pray the prayers below):

(Morning) I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

(Afternoon/Evening) I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands, I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.¹⁷

Consider/Reflect: "Those who plot against God's elect incite God's wrath. The Lord, not human beings, anointed Israel's king and elected this nation for His plan of salvation. Ultimately, the Messiah—the Anointed One—was born from the nation of Israel. God preserved Israel so that through the offspring of one of David's descendants, Mary, the Savior of humankind was born. Those who "take refuge in Him"—i.e., trust in Him for their salvation—are truly blessed. [Pray]: Lord Jesus, despite our miserable and constant rebellion, You rescue us from sin. Lead us to embrace Your gracious rule with joyful hearts. Amen."¹⁸

14 Blomberg, *Matthew*.

15 Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew*.

16 *The Lutheran Study Bible*.

17 Martin Luther. "Luther's Small Catechism." Taken from, *The Lutheran Study Bible*. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009).

18 *The Lutheran Study Bible*.