

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Once again, the sands of time have slipped through the hour glass, and the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany cycle comes to a close and we prepare, in just three short days, to embark on the next cycle of the church year—Lent-Holy Week-Easter. For some, the bills from Christmastime have barely been paid off, and we are moving on to a new time with a new focus for our attention. But, we haven't reached that new season yet, and so we enjoy one more festival day before our attention is drawn to our Lenten devotions.

“In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea.”¹

With the warfare and unrest of the Middle East today, it's hard to see the Holy Land as a place of beauty, a land filled with lilies. However, having been there just a year ago, I can assure you that it is a beautiful place, although I have to admit seeing more palm and olive trees than I saw lilies. Still, in this humble corner of the world, God saw fit to send His only begotten Son into the world. God saw fit to enter into the world as an innocent child, through an unmarried young woman, in a place where children and women were neither seen nor heard. This is the same God whom called Moses onto the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments centuries before, and who called many judges, prophets, and kings to lead the Chosen People. It was God who called men like Elijah in hopes that the Chosen People would listen to the words of the prophet of the Most High, heed the warnings that the prophet proclaimed and rejoiced in the good news that was offered to a faithful people. However, just as Moses found the people inconsistent in their obedience to the Law, so too did Elijah and all the other prophets have to deal with this lack of obedience and even a lack of faith. The glory which changed Moses was one rooted in the Law—and that Law was a harsh one, and the glory was not a comforting one, but more like the glaring eyes of an angry parent toward a misbehaving child. Most certainly, Jesus himself declared his frustration with the lack of faith he found among the Chosen People, too.

¹ “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” stanza 3

“With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me.”¹

Yes, a glory—the presence of the holy—changes all of us. Moses was changed by his coming face-to-face with God, and that change was so dramatic that, in order to not blind the eyes of his own people, Moses lived out his years with a veil covering his face, so that the brilliant light would not affect his people. Elijah, while not transfigured, blazed into heaven on a chariot of fire, leaving behind his successor, Elisha, and a troubled and broken world. Jesus himself, after being in the presence of Moses, Elijah, and God Almighty, was changed as well. His transfiguration was seen by Peter, John, and James, and no doubt by the others later when the four descended the mountain.

I have stood on the Mount of the Transfiguration, and even placed my hands upon the summit. It is a beautiful place, and even in these troubled times, it is one of beauty and, indeed, a place where lives are changed. Our group of sixty pastors from across the United States gathered there late in the day. Our buses were too big for the mountain road, so we piled into taxis and minivans for the ascent. Going up wasn't too bad—by Israeli cab driving standards. We were there for some time, and watched the sun set. At the end of our time, as we waited for the taxis and minivans to take us back down, we sang with Christians from other places—Africa, the Caribbean, and even the Middle East. In the parking lot, we kicked a soccer ball with a couple of children, laughing as they showed us old men and women a thing or two about the game. We didn't all speak the same languages, but we did speak the language of faith, the language of Christ.

Gathered together on the mountaintop, the setting sun placing an orange-red glow around the Church of the Transfiguration, I was transformed—even transfigured, at least on the inside—yet I was still the same person who came up the mountain roads.

“As he died to make men holy, let us live to make men free,”¹

Jesus died on the Cross at the hands of the very people whom he was sent to save. In death, all the sins of the world were redeemed in a single, sacrificial act, and we who are among the Chosen People—indeed, the world—have been redeemed and made holy by our Savior’s death. We, as the Chosen People, adopted by our baptism as children of God and co-heirs with Christ, are called upon to go into the world and proclaim to all nation’s the gift that God has given to us—the promise of salvation and righteousness that comes through Christ Jesus. In doing this, we truly make people free—not just free from slavery or servitude, but free from sin, death, and the devil! In being made free from the Law, and thus living under the Gospel, we are freed from the constant worries about whether or not we have done enough to earn God’s love and salvation, and are able to live within the freedom of the Gospel, the promised Good News.

Having heard the promise of the Gospel, and being made free by the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are able to live in the glory of God, and by living in God’s glory, radiate His love and glory back into the world, so that not only we are transfigured, but we aid in the transfiguration of the world around us.

“While God is marching on.”¹

Living as a Gospel people, we are empowered to live out that Gospel in the world, so that the problems of the world are not problems we leave for others to solve, but become problems and concerns which we are called, as transfigured and transformed members of the Body of Christ, radiating God’s glory and love into the world by our presence and action, to address and, as best we can with the resources and gifts we have received from God, aid in solving and addressing.

Through Baptism, we are transfigured and transformed forever as children of God. We are called to make disciples of all nations and see that all who hear the Word of God and come to believe in it might be baptized, and through their baptism, be transfigured and transformed as well. And, having been baptized, we are constantly reminded to be filled with Christ’s Body and Blood through the regular reception of the Eucharist, the visible sign of God’s grace and love for us and for all people.

And to live as a Gospel people, filled with the light of Christ, is to reflect the glory of God. Glory! Hallelujah!