

## Feast of the Transfiguration

Referred to as *Baydzaragerbootium*, the Feast of the Transfiguration is one of the five principal feasts of the Armenian Church, so named because of Christ's luminous appearance. In Armenia it is also known as *Vartavar* (the Festival of Roses) after the old pagan feast, which it replaced.

The feast marks Christ's appearance with a resplendent countenance to three of His disciples, Peter, John, and James, on the holy mountain of Galilee, also known as Mount Tabor.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus was considering going to Jerusalem, he spoke with his disciples of the torture that was in store for Him and of the end of His life on earth. Jesus wanted His disciples to be prepared for the coming events.

His disciples, however, did not believe that Jesus could possibly face such tribulations and Peter adamantly said none of Jesus' predictions would come true, and Jesus admonished his disciples. About a week later, Jesus had his miraculous Transfiguration.

He went up Tabor Mountain with three of His disciples—Simon Peter, James, and John Zebedee—to pray as the other tired disciples remained at the bottom of the mountain. It was there that Jesus began to assume a new appearance. The three disciples were amazed when they saw His new radiant being.

Though it was nighttime, the disciples saw light coming from the sun in the sky. Among the light they saw two other men—said to be Moses and Elijah—speaking to Jesus about His remaining time left on earth and the sacrifice He would soon make.

Then a cloud came upon the group. The voice of God was heard, saying the same phrase He said when Jesus was baptized, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him!" (Luke 9:35).

After the Transfiguration, Jesus asked His disciples not to talk about it until His coming Resurrection.

This scene can be found in four different places in the New Testament: Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:11-7; Luke 9:29-36; and Peter II 1:17-18.

In the Armenian calendar, the feast takes place on the 14th Sunday after Easter—98 days later—so it is movable within an interval of 35 days, from June 28 to August 1. The Orthodox and Catholic churches observe the feast of Transfiguration on a fixed day, August 6.

The official observance takes three days. Sunday is the principal feast, Monday likewise is an ordained feast day and includes the commemoration of the dead, and Tuesday is a non-festal or weekday dominical.

Besides the fundamental meaning which the event of the Transfiguration has in the context of the life and mission of Christ, and in addition to the theme of the glory of God which is revealed in all of its divine splendor in the face of the Saviour, the presence of **Moses** and **Elijah** is also of great significance for the understanding and celebration of the feast. Many of the hymns refer to these two leading figures of the Old Covenant as do the three scripture readings of Vespers which tell of the manifestation of the glory of God to these holy men of old (*Ex 24:12-18; 33:11-34:8; 1 Kings 19:3-16*).

Moses and Elijah, according to the liturgical verses, are not only the greatest figures of the Old Testament who now come to worship the Son of God in glory, they also are not merely two of the holy men to whom God has revealed himself in the prefigurative theophanies of the Old Covenant of Israel. These two figures actually stand for the Old Testament itself: **Moses for the Law** and **Elijah for the Prophets**. And Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets (*Mt 5:17*).

They also stand for the **living** and **dead**, for Moses died and his burial place is known, while Elijah was taken alive into heaven in order to appear again to announce the time of God's salvation in Christ the Messiah. Thus, in appearing with Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah show that the Messiah Saviour is here, and that he is the Son of God to whom the Father himself bears witness, the Lord of all creation, of the Old and New Testaments, of the living and the dead. The Transfiguration of Christ in itself is the fulfillment of all of the theophanies and manifestations of God, a fulfillment made perfect and complete in the person of Christ. The Transfiguration of Christ reveals to us our ultimate destiny as Christians, the ultimate destiny of all men and all creation to be transformed and glorified by the majestic splendor of God himself.

The feast of the Transfiguration is presently celebrated on the sixth of August, probably for some historical reason. The summer celebration of the feast, however, has lent itself very well to the theme of transfiguration. The blessing of grapes, as well as other fruits and vegetables on this day is the most beautiful and adequate sign of the final transfiguration of all things in Christ. It signifies the ultimate flowering and fruitfulness of all creation in the paradise of God's unending Kingdom of Life where all will be transformed by the glory of the Lord.

## Transfiguration

The **transfiguration** of Christ is one of the central events recorded in the gospels. Immediately after the Lord was recognized by his apostles as "the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the Living God," he told them that "he must go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things ... and be killed and on the third day be raised" (*Mt 16*). The announcement of Christ's approaching passion and death was met with indignation by the disciples. And then, after rebuking them, the Lord took Peter, James, and John "up to a high mountain"—by tradition **Mount Tabor**—and was "transfigured before them."

... and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as snow and behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when lo, 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 with awe. 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. And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead" (*Mt 17:1-9*; see also *Mk 9:1-9*; *Lk 9:28-36*; *2 Peter 1:16-18*).

The Jewish **Festival of Booths** was a feast of the dwelling of God with men, and the transfiguration of Christ reveals how this dwelling takes place in and through the Messiah, the Son of God in human flesh. There is little doubt that Christ's transfiguration took place at the time of the Festival of Booths, and that the celebration of the event in the Christian Church became the New Testamental fulfillment of the Old Testamental feast in a way similar to the feasts of Passover and Pentecost

In the Transfiguration, the apostles see the glory of the Kingdom of God present in majesty in the person of Christ. They see that in him, indeed, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, "that in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily" (*Col 1:19, 2:9*). They see this before the crucifixion so that in the resurrection they might know who it is who has suffered for them, and what it is that this one, who is God, has prepared for those who love him. This is what the Church celebrates in the feast of the Transfiguration.