

Աւետիս • The Good News

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THE TRANSFIGURATION

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as dazzling as light. And suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus, "Lord," he said, "it is wonderful for us to be here; if you want me to, I will make three shelters here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with a shadow, and suddenly from the cloud there came a voice which said, "This is my Son, the Beloved: he enjoys my

favour. Listen to him." When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them, saying, "Stand up, do not be afraid." And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but Jesus.

Matthew 17: 1-8 (JB)

The description of this awesome revelation of our Lord's divinity follows on the heels of the experience he had with his disciples six days earlier, and revealed in the previous chapter. The opening reference to the other event binds the vision of the Transfiguration to Peter's confession (Mt. 16:13-20), and to Jesus's prediction of his fate in Jerusalem. Each of these episodes concentrates on the identity of Jesus and its implication for the disciples.

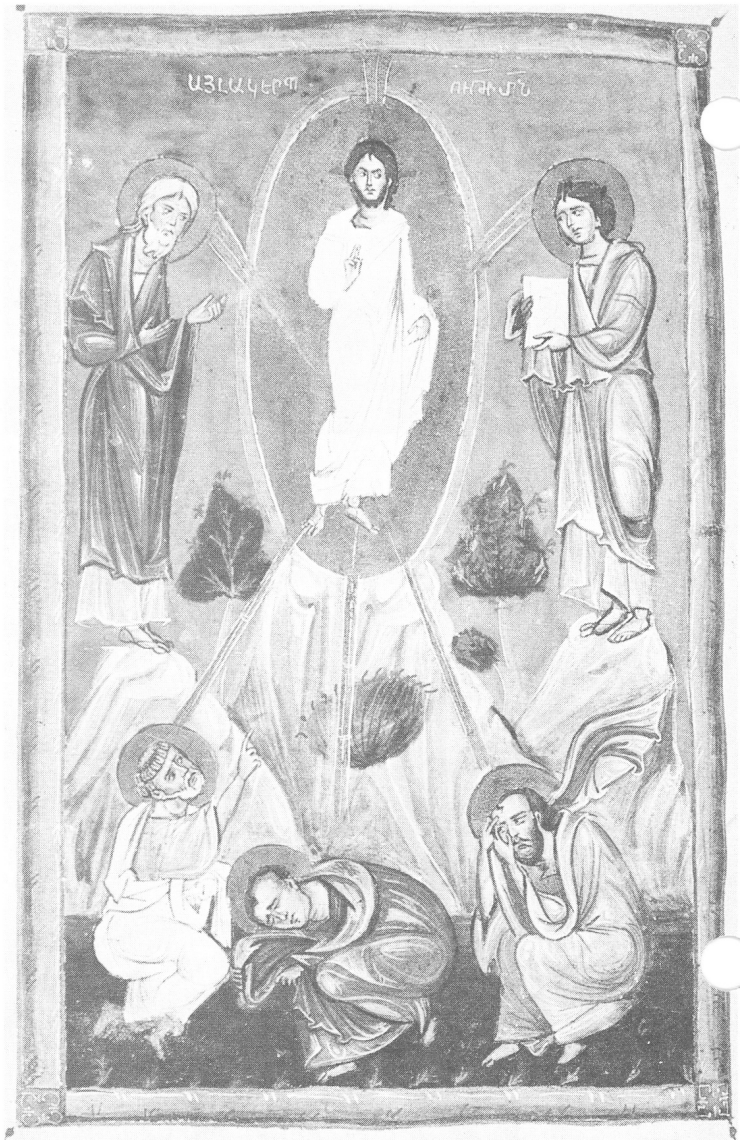
Revelations of God, *theophanies*, frequently happen on mountaintops: the Sinai experience, in which God spoke to Moses (Ex. 34:1-6), the Crucifixion on Golgotha, and this. This Gospel account portrays the majesty of the event, and seems to reinforce the image of Jesus as the "new Moses." As Moses (Ex. 34:29-35), Jesus' transfigured face, shines "like the sun." The presence of Moses and Elijah symbolically represents the Law and the Prophets. These two words refer to the entire collection of Old Testament books, and therefore the total revelation of God to the Israelite people. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, of the Law and the Prophets. (Mt. 5:17).

Peter's remark "it is wonderful for us to be here... I will make three shelters here..." conveys his awed response to what has taken place before his eyes. The "three shelters" refer to the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles which celebrates the giving of the Law through Moses. But what Peter has witnessed is greater than

the giving of the Law; this is *God Himself* who has shown his divinity to them. And then they hear the same words that were spoken at Jesus' baptism: "this is my son... listen to him."

The sound of the voice from heaven prostrates the disciple in reverential fear and adoration. Are we ever gripped with such awe as they must have experienced that day? The disciples fell on their faces; if there had been any doubt about the *divinity* of their leader and Teacher, it was dispelled by this moment. The man with whom they had spent so much time, from whom they had learned, with whom they had eaten and drunk, had laughed and cried; this was God-in-our-midst (Emmanuel). Now they were certain; but how should they react? Jesus himself answered their question before they articulated it by touching them, soothing their terror and offering a healing touch: "Stand up; do not be afraid." In Jesus, divine majesty and gentle compassion were merged.

Many of us have had similar "transfiguration" experiences in our own lives, times when we have known God's presence and touch and majesty, and have reacted exactly as the disciples did. We would have built tabernacles, if we could, and remained there on the mountaintop. But whether the experience lasted a few minutes or whether it continued over several days (as some young people liken the St. Nersess conferences to), the end result is the same, as it was for the disciples: we must leave the mountaintop and return to the world to carry on our work. Such mountaintop experiences cannot be sought, for they just *happen*. And they cannot be prolonged, as Peter would have liked. But they can be utilized and can serve as a source of strength and sustenance for all of us who must do Christ's will and work in the world.



HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS

Feast of the Transfiguration

On Sunday, July 6, the Armenian Church celebrates one of the five major feast days, the Transfiguration of Our Lord, *Baydzaragerbootyoon Dyarn*. It always falls on the 14th Sunday after Easter, in the middle of summer. It provides us with the opportunity to answer for ourselves Jesus' question to Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt. 16:15). It provides the opportunity to recognize for ourselves that Jesus is indeed God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who came to earth for our salvation.

Another name for the feast is *Vartavar*, or 'rose-garland' festival. In the early days of the fourth century, after the conversion of King Drtad and the establishment of Christianity as the national religion of the Armenian people, St. Gregory the Enlightener found that the Armenian people were reluctant to give

up their pagan celebrations. St. Gregory therefore grafted the celebration of *Navasart*, or New Year, onto the Feast of the Transfiguration. The custom of adorning themselves with flowers and throwing water on one another were remnants of the *Navasart* festivities. Today our priests frequently sprinkle water on the congregation during a special procession after the Divine Liturgy.

The text of the Introit for Transfiguration, which follows below, expresses succinctly the Church's understanding of the meaning of the feast: Jesus' revelation of himself as God. Here we find the faith of the Church, "Send down upon us the light of thy grace... and save us."

On this day, O Lord, thou dost manifest thyself to the disciples on Mount Tabor. And thy disciples being sore afraid, cried aloud saying: Let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, Lord, and one for Moses and one for Elijah. And now we also, thy reasonable flock, sing together with thy true witnesses: Send down

upon us the light of thy grace at thy second coming, and save us.

Երեւի Տէրդ այսօր աշակերտացն ի թափօրական լերինն եւ աշակերտացդ գարհուրեալ աղաղակէին ասելով. Արասցուք երիս տաղարս, մի Տեառնդ եւ մի Մովսիսի եւ մի Եղեայի: Արդ, եւ մեք բանաւոր հօտքս երգեմք ընդ քո ճշմարիտ վկայիցդ, Առաքես ի մեզ զլոյս քո միւսանգամ գալստեանդ եւ կեցո:

Our continual mistake is that we do not concentrate upon the present day, the actual hour, of our life; we live in the past or in the future; we are continually expecting the coming of some special moment when our life will unfold itself in its full significance. And we do not notice that life is flowing like water through our fingers, sifting like precious grain from a loosely fastened bag.

Constantly, each day, each hour, God is sending us people, circumstances, tasks, which should mark the beginning of our renewal; yet we pay them no attention, and thus continually resist God's will for us. Indeed, how can God help us? Only by sending us in our daily life certain people, and certain coincidences of circumstance. If we accepted every hour of our life as the hour of God's will for us, as the decisive, most important, unique hour of our life—what sources of joy, love, strength, as yet hidden from us, would spring from the depths of our soul!

Let us then be serious in our attitude towards each person we meet in our life, towards every opportunity of performing a good deed; be sure that you will then fulfill God's will for you in these very circumstances, on that very day, in that very hour.

From *THE DIARY OF A RUSSIAN PRIEST*
by Alexander Elchaninov