

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

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."** (Matthew 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."** (Matthew 17:1-9)

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 fullness of deity dwells bodily."** (Colossians 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.

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.

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 of the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 5:17) They also stand for the living and the 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 manifestation 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 humanity and all creation - to be transformed and glorified by the majestic splendor of God himself.