

Transfiguration/ Assumption

II Peter 1:16-18

Transfiguration

At Christmas we celebrate the event of God becoming man with the birth of Christ, and the beginning of Christ's ministry with his baptism. The voice of God was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." At Easter, with his glorious resurrection once again, God reveals who Christ is. At the time of the Transfiguration Jesus was revealed as the Son of God.

Jesus withdrew with Peter, James, and John to the slopes of the mountain a week after telling his disciples about his approaching crucifixion. Jesus wanted to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the way of the cross was his Father's will.

There on the mountain slopes, probably in the evening (Luke 9:32), two great figures appeared to Jesus — Moses and Elijah. They told our Lord that "he was to accomplish his departure in Jerusalem." (Luke 9:31)

The word "departure" in Greek is "exodus" which implies going out into the unknown with complete trust in God. That is exactly what Jesus was going to do. In utter trust in God he was going to journey to Jerusalem. It would be a journey beset with perils, a journey involving a cross, but a journey issuing in glory.



Moses was the greatest of all law-givers; the man who brought God's law to us. Elijah was the greatest of all the prophets; in him the voice of God spoke to us, with unique directness. The appearance of these great figures was the signal for Jesus to go on with his adventurous exodus to Jerusalem and to Calvary. Jesus was the fulfillment of the law and of the prophets.

A change came over the face of Jesus and his garments. He glistened and gleamed with divine light. Indeed Christ is the Light of the World.

And then even greater by far than the appearance of Moses and Elijah, God spoke his approval amidst a cloud, "This is my beloved Son . . . hear ye him." (Matthew 17:5) In the Old Testament the presence of God was regularly connected with a cloud, and the descent of a cloud at this time was an affirmation by God that Jesus was the Messiah.

Although Peter, James, and John had been tired and sleepy, they were fully awakened and marveled at what they saw and heard.

Peter's Reaction

In fact Peter wanted to capture the experience. He wanted to build three shelters and remain on the mountain. He did not want to go down to the everyday and common things so soon.

This was out of character as far as Peter was concerned because he was a man of action. But at this moment he wanted to think, to wonder and to adore with reverence the presence of God. "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)

We, too, are not to keep ourselves too busy. We, too, must have our Mount of Transfiguration, our Mount of Prayer, to be serene, to listen, to wonder, and to adore the presence of God. Then we must leave the "mountain" for our daily tasks, but with a refreshed and renewed determination to do our Father's will.

The Feast of Transfiguration

The Feast of Transfiguration is celebrated in the Armenian Church on one of the Sundays between June 28 and August 1, depending on the date of Easter for the year.

Assumption

The Feast of the Assumption of St. Mary belongs to the teaching given to us by Holy Tradition. The Armenian word for this feast is verapokhoom. It is celebrated in our church on the Sunday nearest to August 15, and it lasts nine days, according to the Order of St. Nersess Shnorhali. Assumption means "taking up." We believe that St. Mary was preserved from corruption after her death and was raised bodily and taken into heaven, by the power of God, and by the ministry of angels.

Early tradition tells us that St. Mary lived in Jerusalem for about 15 years after Christ's ascension. Easter tradition tells us that the apostles with the exception of St. Bartholomew buried her with great reverence in the Garden of Gethsemane. Three days later Bartholomew arrived and wanted to see her for the last time. The apostles took him to her tomb and to their amazement they found it empty. They were convinced that her body was taken up into heaven by the Lord. This belief was sanctioned by the Church as pious tradition, between the 9th and 12th centuries. On the Assumption of St. Mary, following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, the blessing of the grapes takes place.

Prayer for the Blessing of Grapes

O Lord, Almighty God, infinite Father, un-

Session 3—Easter: Resurrection

Key Concepts

1. Christ is risen.
2. Through Christ's Resurrection we also will conquer death.
3. The Easter message is our triumph over anything that separates us from God.
4. The Easter message is hope and trust in Christ's teachings and promises.

Objectives

Students will

1. Summarize and discuss information in text on Easter.
2. Compare and contrast the Easter story as recorded in the Gospels and in I Corinthians.
3. Interview parishioners on "What Easter Means to Me."

Background for Teachers

1. Early Christians carried over the Hebrew Passover into their celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord, whom they regarded as the true Paschal Lamb and first fruits of the dead. The Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) decided that Easter should be observed on a Sunday, and fixed the method of determining its date. Easter always falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon after March 21 (Vernal Equinox). Therefore, the date for Easter changes every year.
2. In such miracles as those of the dead son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), the dead daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:21-24, 35-43), and the dead Lazarus (John 11:1-44), we have the return of the dead to normal conditions of life. Jesus' resurrected body was different. He is the same person, and he bears marks of identification but the body of the risen Christ lends itself to a new mode of existence and to a new set of relationships (Mark 16:12-14; John 20:19-26; Luke 24:51). This is the "image" of the resurrected body of Christians (II Corinthians 4:7 to 5:10).
3. St. Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians twenty years after Christ's Resurrection. Therefore, his account is the earliest written record of the event.

Materials Needed

- Bibles
- Tape recorder(s) and blank tape(s) to record "What Easter Means to Me" comments of parishioners.

Procedure

1. Take time to talk with the students as they arrive. Review homework. Ask a student to read John 11:25-27. (10 min.)
2. Tell students that today they'll be looking at the most important season in the Church calendar,

Easter. Discuss the reading by asking the class to summarize the information. (10 min.)

3. For a comparative study of the Resurrection story from the Gospels and I Corinthians, divide the class into four groups to outline the events as per the activity questions on pages 46 and 47. They will share the results.

Group I—Matthew 28:1-20

Group II—Mark 16:1-8, I Corinthians 15:1-8

Group III—Luke 23:55-24:53

Group IV—John 20:1-31 (20 min.)

After they have made comparisons, ask what is the one fact that is consistent throughout? (Christ is risen!)

4. Assign students "Man-on-the-Street" interviews. With a tape recorder, they will record comments of parishioners on "What Easter Means to Me," to play back in class next Sunday and discuss. If a tape recorder is unavailable, their replies can be simply jotted down. (Students should be released early this week to attend church and then interview adults.) (20 min.)

5. Homework

- a. Share lesson and Bible readings with family.
- b. Journal entry.
- c. Remind students to read and study lesson for next week.

Session 4—Transfiguration/Assumption

Key Concepts

1. Christ is revealed as the Son of God on the Mount of Transfiguration.
2. We also need our Mount of Transfiguration, our Mount of Prayer, to seek God's will for our lives.
3. The Blessing of Grapes is a sacramental in which we ask the Holy Spirit to make the grapes holy and for those who eat them in faith to receive physical healing and spiritual nourishment.

Objectives

Students will

1. Explain the significance of the Transfiguration.
2. Paraphrase the prayer for the Blessing of Grapes.
3. Discuss Holy Tradition regarding St. Mary.

Background for Teacher

1. There is a tradition which connects the Transfiguration with Mount Tabor, but that is unlikely since there was an armed fortress and a castle on Mount Tabor. Some authorities seem to think Mt. Hermon was the mountain of the Transfiguration.

Mt. Hermon is fourteen miles from Caesarea Philip-

pi and 11,000 feet above the Jordan valley. It can actually be seen from the Dead Sea, at the other end of Palestine, more than 100 miles away.

The Transfiguration may have happened at night (Luke 9:32) on the slopes of the beautiful and stately Mt. Hermon.

2. Armenian Vocabulary

Transfiguration—Ay-la-ger-boo-tioon

Glorification—Bai-dzar-ager-boo-tioon.

3. *The Feast of Transfiguration* is also referred to as "Vartavar," which means decoration with roses. "Vartavar" is actually a carry-over from the time Armenians worshipped the goddess Asdghig and decorated her temple with roses and flowers.

On the occasion, people let pigeons fly in the air and threw water on each other. Even today, the custom of sprinkling water on each other is still practiced.

In order to abolish the custom of "Vartavar," Saint Gregory the Illuminator united it with the Feast of Transfiguration.

Materials Needed

- Bible
- Five questions (see Procedure # 5) written on slips of paper.

Procedure

1. Take time to talk to students as they arrive. Begin

Notes

the class with II Peter 1:16-18. Say: "May we have our own moments on the holy mountain."

Review last week's journal entries by discussion, or question and answer. (15 min.)

2. Explain to students that they will be looking at two major feasts which are on our Church calendar as well as on other Orthodox and Roman Catholic calendars. "The synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—have all told the Transfiguration story. We will read the Luke version today, but all three are listed in your readings for the week." (5 min.)

3. Have someone read Luke 9:28-36. Discuss (10 min.)

4. Have students re-read silently or aloud the prayer for the Blessing of Grapes by St. Nersess Shnorhali in their text, page 51. Ask them to write their own paraphrase, being sure to include all the important concepts. (20 min.)

5. Have questions below written on slips of paper. Ask volunteers to pick one and answer the question aloud.

- a. What does Holy Tradition tell us about St. Mary?
 - b. What is the significance of the Blessing of the Grapes ceremony?
 - c. What other feast days are dedicated to St. Mary?
 - d. What is the place of St. Mary in our Church?
 - e. What qualities does St. Mary have that we should try harder to emulate? (10 min.)
6. Assign homework.