



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

***Sermon for Transfiguration***  
*February 15, 2026*

# Transfiguration and Transformation

## Matthew 17:1–9

<sup>1</sup> Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; <sup>2</sup> and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. <sup>3</sup> And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. <sup>4</sup> Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

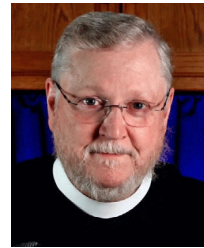
<sup>5</sup> While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” <sup>6</sup> And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus came and touched them and said, “Arise, and do not be afraid.” <sup>8</sup> When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

<sup>9</sup> Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, “Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.”

What does it mean to be trans-figured? It means to change from one shape or appearance to another. The Greek word is metamorphosis, which is what happens to a caterpillar when it becomes a butterfly. It changes form. All the constituent elements are there, but they’ve been rearranged and turned into something new. On account of this, the image of the butterfly has long been used in the Church to represent the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and His followers.

Transformation is a thread that runs through the entire tapestry of the life of Christ. The event on the Mount of Transfiguration was by no means the only such occurrence for the Son of God. He was transfigured when He left His home in glory to take on human flesh and become man. He was transfigured in His suffering, as He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). He was transfigured in death, as the Author of life lay in stillness in the grave of Joseph. He was transfigured in His resurrection, when He took up life again and proclaimed His victory over death and the grave for forty days before ascending through the clouds back to the right hand of His Father.

But what does such transfiguration mean? What does it mean especially in light of Hebrews 13:8, which says that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever? For one thing, it means that whatever form He takes, He is still the same Jesus. It means that the tiny, infant Jesus was still the Ruler of Heaven and earth. It means that the



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suffering and dying Jesus was still the Creator with power over life and death. It means that the resurrected and ascended Jesus is still the omnipresent One who will never leave us nor forsake us. It means that this same Jesus is present with us even now in the Body and Blood of His Holy Supper.

Secondly, it means that it was truly the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who became man and nursed at His mother's breast. It was the omnipotent One who laid down His power and permitted men to abuse Him, violently mistreat Him, and inflict upon Him the cruelty of the cross. He who is God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, the eternal Son of the Father, the Bright and Morning Star, walked among men, taught anyone who would listen, suffered, died, and rose again in payment for the sin of the world. This was not some imposter, some imitator, some simulated deity; this was Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, long foretold, eagerly anticipated, and joyfully received by all who even today do not resist His Spirit working through the means of grace.

That this Jesus, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, has been transfigured, especially in His resurrection from the dead, is tremendously significant for us. Scripture says: "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection" (Romans 6:4-5). What this means, dear friends, is that transfiguration – transformation – is not for Christ alone, but that we share in His transfiguration, and are transformed because of it. Because He has been raised, we shall be raised. Because He was transformed, we shall be transformed. His transfiguration brings about our transformation. And not only *will* we be changed, but we've *already* been changed.

Paul goes on to speak of what this means for us: "Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:6-11).

Oh, that we may grasp and understand the enormity of this! Paul says elsewhere: "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). So many of us live as if we're the same as anyone else, that we can live just like the rest of the world, and fill ourselves so full of unrighteousness, wickedness, greed and evil. We permit our hearts to be full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. We're gossipers, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to our parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving



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and unmerciful (Romans 1:29-31). Oh yes, friends. Though we like to point our fingers at the people down the way, across the street, in certain areas of town, or at the other end of the pew, the fact remains that an honest assessment of our own hearts will give evidence that we need look nowhere but the dark recesses of our own souls to find that we – each and every one of us – are guilty of thoughts, feelings, desires, intentions, and even actions that betray our affinity with the world in which we live. So often the testimony of our lives is that there has been no transformation at all, that nothing has changed, that the new creature in us is either kept on a leash or beaten into submission by the dragons that enslave us.

Believe me, brothers and sisters, I know what a hard saying this is. I know how my own flesh rises up against it. I know how strong temptation is. I know how easy it is to resist the transformation the Spirit of God endeavors to work in your life. How easy it is to turn away from the path He desires us to walk. How easy it is to turn our back on the work to which He calls us because of the busy-ness of our lives or the steepness of the climb. God forgive us. And help us. Help us to know the transforming power of His Spirit and to understand all that it means.

And the point is not that someday we may be able to draw attention to our own life and say: "See! Look what I've done! Look at what a good Christian I am. See how much better I have become than all these other people around here!" The point is not to work our way to higher self-esteem. For if we truly understand the Source of our transformation and the well-spring of our good works, we will comprehend that everything we are, everything we do, everything we have ever accomplished that is truly the work of the kingdom of God, was given to us as pure gift from the Great Transformer Himself. Those who understand this rightly recognize that when they perform a truly good deed, that deed itself was a gift from God. The life of Christian stewardship is not simply a matter of acknowledging that all good gifts come from the Father and belong to Him, but recognizing also that even our returning a portion of these blessings is a gift from God. Your desire to do good works is a gift from God. Your thankfulness for the transformation He continues to work in your life is a gift from God. The moment we start to pat ourselves on the back for doing a good job we have already missed the point.

Have you done good today? What good have you accomplished this week? Did you perform well at your job? Thank God. Were you a loving and faithful spouse or parent? Thank God. Were you an obedient and loving child? Thank God. Did you serve the Lord faithfully this week? Thank God. Have you, in any way, demonstrated the transforming influence of the Spirit of God at work within you? All thanks and praise be to God!

Because it's His work in you that has led you and enabled you to do anything good. What's so reassuring is that even though an honest evaluation of our lives reveals a lot of worldly junk and hard-to-shake sinful inclinations, we do also find evidence that His Spirit is indeed at work in us. His work of transformation continues through the means of grace.



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His Word enlightens us; His Sacraments empower us; His Law challenges us and His Gospel comforts us. We are alive, spiritually alive! And this is the greatest transformation of all. "God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6). Oh, what glory it is to have been transformed from death to life!

But even this is not the end of our transfiguration, though Paul does hint at what yet lies in store for us. When he says: "and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus," he echoes what he says to the Corinthians: "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. And when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 'O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O GRAVE, WHERE IS YOUR STING?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:51-57).

Beloved, Christ's transfiguration was just a small taste of things to come, a tiny fragment of the larger picture, a shard of the hologram. It was a momentary glimpse of the glory of His divinity, a faint hint of what lay ahead for Him and for us. For not only has His glory been restored in its fullness, but we too have been transformed – from slaves of sin to servants of God, from children of this world to sons of the kingdom, from losers without hope to victors in Jesus, from ugly caterpillars to glorious butterflies. And this transformation, assured us by His own victory over sin, death, and the devil, He continues to grant us freely by His grace. Thanks be to God! In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen