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THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST  
THE APPEARANCE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

LESSON OBJECTIVES

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1. Able to retell the event, including who was involved, and what took place.
2. Know where the passage is found in the gospels.
3. Understand the purpose of the event, for the Apostles and for us today.
4. List practical ways to encourage personal revelation of Christ.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

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1. True joy is found in communion with the Lord.
2. We are called to be transformed –*By His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor the Lord calls us for a new life, to internal transfiguration which would make us meek out of proud, diligent out of idle, sober out of passionate, temperate out of greedy, concentrated out of absent-minded, God-obedient out of self-willed, compassionate out of heartless.*
3. Divine light is in everyone from Baptism.
4. We can encourage the light within us with certain behaviours - *For a human not to be proud and lazy, God does not give him to feel the shining of internal light all the time. But still this light dwells inside the person's soul, increased by moral perfection, ardent prayer at church and at home, reading of the Holy Scripture, thinking about God, doing good works, and especially by receiving the Holy Communion. It is dangerous to artificially invoke and try to see the shining of spiritual light. This may lead to being caught in the devilish net. Clear vision of this light may be given rarely, when God finds it necessary to give consolation and support to a Christian.*
5. The result of encouraging the light in our lives (being close to God)... *Internal effect of this light is felt in peacefulness of soul, disgust for any sin, love for God and neighbors, desire to live for the good, strongly believe and trust God, long for the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us treasure the Kingdom of God inside us so that God would grant us eternal life in the Kingdom of Never-ending Light.*

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## WHAT IS THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST?

### *REFERENCES*

MATTHEW 17:1-12

This event took place 6 days after Christ spoke of His forthcoming sufferings on the cross. In the minds of the Apostles they thought that the crucifixion was a dishonor and humiliation. They needed to understand that Christ suffered, not because He had to or because of any weakness of Himself, but in all His Glory He endured the suffering for our sake.

The transfiguration was a revelation to the three Apostles present (as well as to all of us who now know of it). It revealed the joy of the kingdom of God, it showed the divinity of Christ (the light was from Him and not a reflection from God as it was for Moses), and it taught many things relating to the journey to salvation and what is to come.

## WHERE DID THE TRANSFIGURATION TAKE PLACE?

Although it is not mentioned in the Gospels, it is agreed upon that the transfiguration took place on Mount Tabor. This is where Christ often went to pray.

## WHY DID MOSES AND ELIJAH APPEAR WITH THE LORD?

Looking at the Saviour in astonishment, the Apostles saw two unfamiliar figures who, as it turned up later, were ancient prophets Moses and Elijah coming to Christ from the world invisible. The Evangelists do not explain why these two prophets came. Supposedly, the coming of the two most authoritative Old Testament righteous people was the evidence of Christ's Divinity for the Apostles and for all Jews. First of all, until that time the rumor had been widespread among common people that Jesus Christ was either Elijah, or another ancient prophet risen. The appearance of Elijah and Moses witnessed the absurdity of this opinion. The prophets were actually talking to Christ as Messiah and Son of God. Moreover, many of the Jews accused Christ of disregarding the Law and even blasphemously and wrongfully assuming the honor of the Son of God (John 9:16; 10:33), and the appearance of these two most ardent champions of the glory of Jehovah had to convince everyone that Christ really was the promised Messiah and that all His statements were true. It was obvious that Moses who had written the Book of the Law, would not have tolerated any infringement of this Law and would not have stood before the infringer in reverence. And Elijah, who had once burnt Jehovah's enemies with fire from heaven, would not have stood humbly before the One Who said He was equal to God Father if He had not been such (Jesus said, "*I and my Father are one*" (John 10:30). The reading on Elijah can be found in 2 Kings 1:10).

## THE APOSTLES DURING THE TRANSFIGURATION

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The special graceful state of the Apostles during the Saviour's Transfiguration was expressed by Saint Peter who said, "*Lord, it is good for us to be here!*" Delighted by the glorious vision, Peter wished that it would last, and last forever, if possible.

As the Evangelists say, at that moment everyone on the mountain was overshadowed by a bright cloud, which indicated the presence of God the Father (a dark cloud is symbol and sign of God the Just Judge (Ex. 24:18; 19:18), while a bright cloud is the symbol and sign of the presence of God Merciful. A similar bright cloud, called shekina in the Bible, was at times seen above the Sanctuary, the main part of the Judean temple (1 Kings 8:10-11; Ezek 1:4; 10:4), and a mysterious voice was heard from the cloud like it was during Theophany, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,*" and also, "*Hear Him.*"

Hearing the voice from the cloud, the disciples fell on the ground in fear. Everything was unusual for them here on the mountain: the seclusion and height of the place, the deep silence of nature, the appearance of the prophets of the past, the light of extreme brightness and finally the voice of God Father Himself.

When they were coming down, Jesus forbade the Apostles to tell anyone what had happened on the mountain until His rising from the dead. The Lord transfigured in order to affirm to His trusted disciples that He indeed was the Messiah. Still it was too early to tell about the Transfiguration to the Jewish public at large whose senses would anticipate the Messiah as a powerful king and conqueror. One of the eye witnesses of this event, Apostle Peter, later recalled it as unquestionably trustworthy and brought it forth as proof of Christ's divine nature (2 Peter 1:16-18).

## THE NATURE OF THE LIGHT AT TABOR

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The light that was witnessed by the Apostles was accompanied with sensation of extraordinary peace and joy. It was a vision of the future bliss of heaven.

The word light in the Holy Scripture is often applied to God and things caused by God: truth, moral commandments and good deeds. In this case the word light might be understood as allegory (symbol) for something kind and life-giving. Indeed, what sunlight is for the physical world, that God is for the world of spirit. Light enables us to see and cognize the world, to move, to develop, to create. Light gives warmth and life to all nature.

In a like way God is the light for spiritual creatures: angels and humans. He enlightens our mind with His truth; He gives us the highest spiritual knowledge; He pours energy and inspiration into us; He warms our hearts with love; He guides our lives to the good goal. We receive all spiritual comforts from God. Moving away from God, our soul sinks in the darkness and perishes.

Light also applies to the very nature of God. *"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"* (1 John 1:5-7).

### HOW THE LIGHT OF GOD BRINGS US INTO THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM

Unlike regular light, the light of Tabor was called by St. Gregory Palama 'unmade divine energy.' The substance of this light was inseparable from the eternal substance of God because God is indivisible. God is not comprehensible in His substance, but still His actions and energy, being inseparable from His divine essence, are comprehensible for us created in His image, after His likeness. And the Son of God became a man in order to associate us into His Divine nature, to deify us. We sense God's presence with our soul, not our fleshly eyes. St. Gregory Palama explains that the ability to see the Divine light is delivered to a human by the Holy Ghost who translates one from the state of flesh to the state of spirit (Homily 34 On Transfiguration).

The nature of the graceful light ("divine energy") is mysterious and inexplicable as well as the substance of the Creator. However it can be distinctly tangible when the Merciful God permits a human to see the divine light. Then the human feels the heavenly bliss, and all worldly joys compared to it are null.

### THE ROLE OF PRAYER IN REVELATION

On Mount Tabor He manifested to the Apostles the glory of His Divinity. He shone while during prayer, and thus taught us what would be for saints the prerequisite for receiving and the manner of seeing God's light (Discussions from Homilies 34 and 35).

In the Holy Scripture and writings of the Holy Fathers the graceful light is described mostly as an internal condition received through prayer, contemplation about God, and particularly Holy Communion. Experienced internally, it is at the same time as real as the visible physical light. External shining of this light is a rarer phenomenon.

### EXPERIENCE WITH THE DIVINE LIGHT

St. Gregory the Theologian describes this state as follows, "I wish to stay all by myself and setting aside flesh and the world, not touching anything corporal without extreme need, talking to myself and God, live above all things visible, and always carry in myself clear divine images unmixed with earthly delusive impressions, be and permanently become an unshadowed mirror of God and divinity, acquire light to light, adding the brightest to the paler; and all this until we rise to the Source of illuminations and reach the blessed end. Beloved God pierces the mind with a beam of light and immediately escapes from fast-moving thought. The more we know Him, the greater grows the distance, because He slips from hands, calls and entails the soul."

Divine light is mysteriously given to every truly believing Orthodox Christian. However, the Holy Fathers warn against attempting to artificially invoke and see the spiritual shining because such attempts conceal the tremendous danger of falling to the devil's

enchantment. A Christian must go the narrow way of repentance, meekness and self-correction. This life is the time of labor; the future life shall be the time of reward.

#### THE DIVINE SERVICE OF THE FEAST OF TRANSFIGURATION

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*THE FEAST:* Based on the writing of the Gospel, the transfiguration took place in February. but the Church found it necessary to move the Feast of Transfiguration from February to August, so that the joyful commemoration of the Saviour's glory would not coincide with Lent when the Christians must grieve and repent. The reason for having the Church celebration of Transfiguration on August 19 (Old Style Calendar August 6) is that this date by forty days precedes the Feast of Exaltation of the Cross, dedicated to the Saviour's Suffering on the Cross (September 14/27). The Feast of Transfiguration is commonly called "The Second Saviour's Day," "Saviour on the Mount Day" or "Saviour's Day of Apples."

*THE HYMNS:* The hymns of the Feast of the Lord's Transfiguration reproduce the circumstances of the event: the Saviour's prayer, the disciples' sleep, the light on the top of the mountain and the shining Saviour, the appearance of prophets Moses and Elijah, the Lord's conversation with them, the Apostles' fear, and the voice of God Father. In line with this, the hymns reveal the inner side of the event and point out the purpose of Lord's Transfiguration. Jesus Christ transfigured in order to convince the Apostles in His Divinity and by this strengthen up their faith before His Suffering; demonstrate the brightness of His resurrection; teach that the virtuous people would be honored with Divine glory; and also to "shine over the blackened Adam's nature."