

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Every year, the season of Epiphany ends with the account of the transfiguration of our Lord.

The season of Epiphany starts with light - as the star revealed the Christ-child's location to the Magi; and it ends with light, as light shines through Jesus' humanity, revealing His divine nature.

The transfiguration also makes a good transition as next week we set our faces toward Jesus' exodus, stepping into PreLent, then Lent and Holy Week, observing Jesus' suffering and crucifixion.

And while we contemplate both Jesus' transfiguration and His journey to the cross,

we will learn once again to listen to Jesus as He speaks to you also, **"Rise, and have no fear."**

We read as follows in Jesus' name:

[Peter] was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him."

When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Like many other times, Jesus was spending the night in prayer away from the crowds.

He needed His own respite. He needed to rest in conversation with His heavenly Father.

You see, not only did Jesus have the present work of preaching and teaching that He was doing, but He also knew what was yet to be accomplished.

He was the Messiah, the anointed sacrificial Lamb to take away the sins of the world.

If anyone was ever to have fear, it should have been Him who would endure hell for all sinners.

...

Towards the end of the conversation between Jesus and His heavenly Father, as morning came, the Father sent Moses and Elijah to Jesus to strengthen Him for His work of redemption.

Now, one might imagine that with such a difficult task before Him,

they would want to lighten the mood or avoid the topic, as if to distract and not tempt Him to fear.

But they don't ignore the upcoming Passover. Far from it! That was THE topic of their conversation.

And this to strengthen and encourage Jesus?! To talk about His suffering and death?

Yes! A thousand times "Yes."

You see, that is the work of the Gospel: to strengthen and encourage in the face of our fears.

The Gospel does this by casting out fear; it doesn't ignore the source of our fears but answers them.

Jesus was speaking to men who, during their earthly life,

had struggled with themselves and a nation that struggled with fearing everything else but God.

On a different mountain, Mt. Sinai, Moses witnessed as the Lord spoke directly to Israel.

He gave them His 10 Words, or as we usually call it, the 10 Commandments,

and as He did so, thunder and lightning and fire burned before the Lord on the top of the mountain.

The people trembled from fear and asked Moses to go and speak to the Lord on their behalf.

Now, one would think that after such a display of power and might they would set straight,

teaching them who they should correctly fear,

but only 40 days later, they were worshipping a golden calf and “rising up to play.”
You see, the Law has no power to enable us rebellious sinners to obey it.

Elijah, too, had struggled with Israel, at a time when there were only 7,000 who feared the Lord.
40 days earlier, he had contended with Ahab and his 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah.
At the beginning of the contest, Elijah asked them, “How long will you limp between two opinions?”
In essence telling them to decide between the Lord and these other gods. You can’t have both.
But the people said nothing. ...
That is, until the Lord rained down fire that burned up the sacrifice, altar, and water completely.
Then they cried out in fear, “**The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God.**”^{2Kings18:39}

Elijah himself had run to Mt. Sinai — in fear — as Jezebel threatened to kill him.
The Lord appeared to Elijah on Mt. Sinai also and spoke directly to him.
And there were similar displays of fire and earthquake, along with a great rock-splitting wind,
but the Lord was not in those.
Instead, He came in a still, small voice to His servant who needed to be comforted and encouraged.

And how did the Lord deal with both of these men? He forgave their sins and gave them promises.
He did not take them out of the fray, but strengthened and encouraged them and sent them back in.
The work that they were doing was not their own, but His.
Therefore, they were not to try to draw on their own strength to get them through the difficulties,
but they were first to hear His promises and fear Him,
not fear as in be terrified of Him, but fear as in hold Him in deep and reverent awe and respect,
loving and trusting Him to do as He had promised.

...
As Jesus now stood on the mountain with Moses and Elijah,
they could strengthen and encourage Him, not by telling Him simply to buck up,
but by repeating to Him the promises that He had spoken to each of them so many years prior.
You see, it was God’s own word and promises that they had trusted with which they encouraged Him.
It was His gift of forgiveness through the promised sacrifice of the Messiah that caused them
to fear the Lord (that is, hold Him in reverent awe) and continue faith-fully in His labors.

What an encouragement it must have been to see and hear these two servants... and brothers
who themselves had trusted in Him, in His word and in His work as their Redeemer!
His love for them and all people growing as He hears how vitally important and necessary
His sacrifice is to all the souls that He had created, including yours.
What a joy to hear His people repeat back to Him His own words - a true sign of their trust.

...
But then their conversation was interrupted... by Peter.
Instead of listening and learning from the Lord and these great prophets,
He wanted to insert himself and do something.
Ultimately, his spur-of-the-moment plan would have kept Jesus from Jerusalem and the cross.
Peter wanted to build the tents so that Israel and the world could come to Jesus
and see His glory as Peter himself was seeing it at that moment.

Peter's plan actually would have distracted Jesus from His redemptive work,
and so the Father spoke from the bright cloud and interrupted Peter,
"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him."

At this, Peter and the others **fell on their faces and were terrified.**

The same holy God who thundered on Sinai in Moses' day, spoke to them now.

And who were they but sinners before a holy Judge. That is what their consciences told them.

And their consciences were right.

But then they heard a still, small voice, a familiar voice speak to them, **"Rise, and have no fear."**

And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

The correction that Peter needed had been given.

There would indeed be time for him to work and labor, but that time would be

after Jesus' death and resurrection, after His exodus, after His work of redemption was completed.

Then Peter would have a better understanding and knowledge of Jesus' words & work,

of his own salvation — and be ready to take Jesus to the people in Word and Sacrament.

But for now, Peter's job was to listen and receive.

To hear the words of Jesus, **"Rise, and have no fear,"** and believe;

Believe that his sins and his guilty conscience have an answer in Jesus only

and, therefore, he need not be terrified of the Father who sent His beloved Son to suffer and die.

Would we be surprised that this also strengthened and emboldened Jesus in His redemptive work

as He sees the deep need for salvation of one of His close friends?

People loved by God,

We consider men like Moses, Elijah and Peter to be great men, great prophets.

But their greatness was not found in themselves.

They were not fearless in the face fear because they had an inner strength.

They sinned and struggled with fearing things other than God just like you do.

But their greatness is found in the Lord.

He strengthened and encouraged them through the same Gospel,

the same forgiveness that was won for you by Christ Jesus;

the same righteousness earned and lived by Jesus,

the same perfect fear, love and trust given to them, is given to you as well in your Baptism;

the same blood that covered their sins, covers yours;

the same light that revealed Jesus' holiness, glory, and divine nature, reveals Him to you.

the same word that comforted their consciences, is the same word given to you.

And when you fall and fear anything other than the one true God,

do not quickly offer up your plans to Him,

but instead, be quick to listen to Him when He says to you,

"Rise, and have no fear," your sins are forgiven.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be forevermore. Amen*
Soli Deo Gloria