

THE THREE-FOLD DIMENSION OF THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST'S LIFE
REVEALED IN THE TRANSFIGURATION PERICOPE
IN MATTHEW, MARK, AND LUKE

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INTRODUCTION

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that the life of Christ is steeped in mystery. The three facets of this mystery are revelation, Jesus as the Son of God, redemption, Jesus as the Incarnation, a humble, lowly servant of God, and recapitulation, Jesus as the long awaited Messiah come to redeem Israel from that which was lost through the sin of Adam (CCC 516-518). In the Synoptic Gospels, Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a slightly different emphasis on these aspects. The likely reason for this is twofold: the audience to which each Gospel is directed and the overarching theme each author wished to highlight. A striking example of these different yet complementary dimensions is evidenced in the accounts of Christ's Transfiguration. In the narrative, Jesus takes with him Peter, James, and John and ascends a mountain. There, he is transfigured, becoming radiant and otherworldly. Moses and Elijah appear and the three speak with each other. Peter, either confused or half asleep depending on the narrative, offers to build for them three tents. While he is speaking, a cloud appears and a voice from out of it declares Jesus as his son and commands the disciples to listen to him. After the theophany, Jesus is found alone and charges the disciples to tell no one of what happened.

While all three accounts are considerably similar, there are notable differences in each. This paper argues that each narrative emphasizes one of the components of the threefold mystery of the life of Jesus and how, collectively, the Gospels form a complete picture of this mystery. The first section addresses how Mark, writing to a Gentile audience that has a strong Hellenistic ethos, uses simple vocabulary to illuminate the mystery of revelation: how Jesus Christ, the Son, reveals the Father. Section 2 details how the mystery of redemption, demonstrated in Luke's Gospel with its emphasis prayer, humility, and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, is a message for all people. Finally, Section 3 examines how Matthew's version of the Transfiguration, addressed

to the nation of Israel, illuminates the mystery of recapitulation with motifs such as Jesus as a new and superior Moses and the coming of the Kingdom of God.

SECTION 1 — MARK 9:2-9

Most scholars agree that St. Mark's Gospel is addressed to a largely Gentile audience living in Rome.¹ As such, while there are copious Old Testament motifs in the Transfiguration pericope², there is arguably a subtle Hellenistic influence in the text as well. In an essay titled "The Transfiguration: An Exercise in Markan Accommodation," Candida Moss outlines a compelling case that Mark uses simple vocabulary and unambiguous language in order to appeal to a wide audience such as those who could not read and those who may have difficulty accepting a monotheistic God and the Gospel message.³ Hellenistic hegemony was strong in first century Palestine; as such, Mark had to use subtle literary devices to woo potential Christians. Moss draws many parallels between Greek mythos and the Transfiguration narrative. "A variety of Greek myths recount how the gods often walked amongst humans in disguise and it is certainly possible that, for those readers of the gospel well-versed in these traditions, Greek epiphanies formed a natural backdrop for the Markan transfiguration ..."⁴ She also points out that a recurring theme in Greek mythology is the illumination of the deity⁵ and that many "mortals" cannot behold the divine without experiencing extreme fear.⁶ However, there is a glaring difference between the gods in the Greek pantheon and the Son of the Hebrew God.

¹Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible New Testament*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010, Kindle Edition), loc. 4237.

² This mountaintop vs. Sinai, Jesus's transformation vs. Moses's, the presence of Moses and Elijah to name a few ...

³ Candida R. Moss, "The Transfiguration: An Exercise in Markan Accommodation," *Biblical Interpretation* 12, no. 1 (2004): 76.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

Many Greek deities were known to walk amongst humans, yet their motives were often self-serving and arbitrary. In one instance, Zeus appears as a poor man and, rejecting their human sacrifices, violently kills humans Lycaon and his sons.⁷ In another, Athena appears to Odysseus first as a man and then morphs to a woman in an attempt, presumably, to confuse him.⁸ A grief stricken Demeter roams the world in the form of an old woman. Only when she becomes angry at humans she returns to her true self to punish them.⁹ In stark contrast, during the Transfiguration, Jesus appears to his disciples not as a God disguised as a man but as a God-man, completely divine and completely human. Moreover, the message of the Transfiguration is one of messianic hope revealed in the person of the Son of God. It is unlikely that this comparison would be lost on the early readers of Mark's Gospel.

Mark has thrown open the Gospel message for the Jews and Greeks alike. No individual in the Old Testament, no human figure in Greek mythology claims to be the Son of God. Nowhere in any of the stories do we read that the voice of God claims a human as his progeny. This element is unique to the Gospel story. In a very real way, Mark is confronting Greek mythos head on. We will now examine this revelatory quality of Mark's Gospel.

The sonship of Jesus is a central component to Mark's message. "It could be said, in fact, that recognizing Jesus as the divine Son of God is the goal of Mark's Gospel."¹⁰ This is punctuated by the fact that the Transfiguration is located at the midpoint of the text.¹¹ Moreover, Jesus is named as God's son in only three places in his Gospel: at his baptism, at the Transfiguration, and at his crucifixion, linking the earlier part of his ministry with his passion.¹²

⁷ Ibid., 77.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 77-78.

¹⁰ Hahn and Mitch, *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*, loc. 4278.

¹¹ David J. Lose, "What Does This Mean? A Four-Part Exercise in Reading Mark 9:2-9 (Transfiguration)," *Word & World* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 87.

¹² Ibid.

Thus, the Transfiguration is a focal point of the Gospel and the declaration by God that Jesus is his son is the focal point of the focal point. Mark could not be more clear: the revelation that Jesus is the son of God is a fundamental component to both His nature and His message.

Even more than this, though, the Transfiguration reveals the divinity of Jesus. In *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ*, Brant Pitre quotes David Litwa:

By introducing the voice from the cloud... Mark reveals that the transformed Jesus was more than an angel and higher than glorified saints (i.e., Moses and Elijah). The account indicates that Jesus was revealed specifically as a deity.¹³

The divinity and sonship of Jesus revealed in this pericope begin to bring into focus another mystery: the Trinity.¹⁴ In the Gospels, the voice from heaven (Father), the divine person (Son), and forms of the Paraclete (Holy Spirit) are present together at only one other time, Jesus's baptism. According to Thomas Aquinas, there are several things happening in both instances. At his baptism, which marks the "mystery of the first regeneration,"¹⁵ God the father identifies Jesus as his Son and the Holy Spirit confirms this proclamation as it descends on him like a dove, a symbol of his innocence.¹⁶ During the Transfiguration, the "mystery of the second regeneration,"¹⁷ God the Father again proclaims Jesus as his Son, and the appearance of the cloud marks the "clarity of glory and refreshment from all sorts of evils" he will bestow on his elect.¹⁸ Thus, the Trinity bears witness to the unfolding revelation of Jesus's sonship, first in the acquisition of grace through baptism and again in the clarity that will be bestowed upon us of the glory of the Resurrection. In the words of the great doctor,

Therefore, it is in baptism that we acquire grace, while the clarity of the glory to come was foreshadowed in the transfiguration, therefore both in His baptism and

¹³ Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ* (New York: The Crown Publishing Group, 2016), 134.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The washing away of original sin and being born anew in union with Christ.

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* IIIa, Q. 45, Art. 4.

¹⁷ The glory and rebirth that will be realized in the Resurrection.

¹⁸ Ibid.

in His transfiguration the natural sonship of Christ was fittingly made known by the testimony of the Father: because He alone with the Son and Holy Ghost is perfectly conscious of that perfect generation.¹⁹

A final thought about Mark's Transfiguration. Only in Mark do Jesus's garments become "glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them" (Mk 9:3). In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Ratzinger explains that white garments are used to represent both angels and those who have been saved.²⁰ But, he tells us, more than that, "The garments of the elect are white because they have washed them in the blood of the Lamb."²¹ Jesus's white garments point to his passion and resurrection that will restore us to the state of glory that was lost through the sin of Adam.²² Only by entering into this revelation may we obtain that which it promises, eternal life.

Mark's Transfiguration is thus the harbinger of the resurrection with its focus on Jesus as the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, and the anointed Messiah who will bring salvation to the world. Section 2 will examine St. Luke's account of the Transfiguration and how its themes of prayer and salvation frame and illuminate the mystery of redemption.

SECTION 2 — LUKE 9:28-36

One of the major themes of Luke's Gospel is anchored in salvation: salvation of Israel, salvation of the nations, salvation of the poor and humble.²³ It is a natural custodian of the second facet of the threefold mystery of the life of Christ, redemption. At the beginning of the Transfiguration pericope, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a mountain *to pray*. Prayer, "the raising of one's mind and heart to God" (CCC 2559), is a key element on which the rest of the narrative in Luke's Gospel sits. St. Bonaventure links the act of prayer with the transformation of

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (England: Bloomsbury, 2007), 310.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Hahn and Mitch, *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*, loc. 6339.

Jesus's face and clothes. "Christ's face represents every human 'face,' or mind, which turns toward God and reflects His light."²⁴ For Bonaventure, the Transfiguration is a salvific event made possible by prayer and contemplation.²⁵

For John of Damascus the prayer event that triggered the Transfiguration is an instructional exercise whereby Jesus shows us that he is the way to the Lord.

Servants ... pray in one way; our Lord prayed in another. For the prayer of the servant is offered up by the lifting up of the mind to God, but the holy mind of Christ ... prayed, that He might lead us by the hand to the ascent, whereby we mount up in prayer to God, and teach us that He is not opposed to God, but reverences the Father as His beginning allows.²⁶

Jesus does not need to elevate himself to God's level, he is already joined to the Father through the hypostatic union. His prayer is meant to guide us to a more glorified state of grace. The Venerable Bede echoes this notion of salvific prayer writing that Jesus ascended the mountain to pray in order to show us that if we desire redemption, if we wish to see God, we should be continually in prayer.²⁷

In v. 32 we read that the disciples were "weighed down with sleep" but that they stayed awake and "saw [Jesus's] glory." It is only by staying awake that they were able to witness this theophany. Ambrose, alluding to the words of Jesus as he delivers his beatitude, "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will put on his apron and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them" (Lk 12:37), reminds us that we must remain vigilant if we are to see the glory of God.²⁸

²⁴ Aaron Canty, *Light & Glory: The Transfiguration of Christ in Early Franciscan and Dominican Theology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 182.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected out of the Works of the Fathers: St. Luke*, ed. by John Henry Newman Vol. 3. (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843), 318.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 321.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

Also in this verse, the Greek εἶδον is worth a closer look.²⁹ Most English versions translate this as “saw” but it can also mean “to know, to see and know, to understand, to come to know.”³⁰ In the anemic English, the nuance is missing and “saw” becomes a one-dimensional description of what is actually occurring. In Exodus 33:18-23 Moses asks to see God’s glory, but God replies, “But you cannot see [ἰδεῖν: to see, to know, to understand, inf.] my face; for no one may see [ἰδεῖν: may see know, understand, subj.] me and live.” The glory that Moses is asking the Lord to behold is far deeper than something he may view with his eyes. Unfortunately, this is the main sense that we get when we read the English translation. What Moses will see, indeed, what he will experience, is God’s goodness, his mercy, his benevolence.³¹ Likewise, the disciples awoken to “see” Jesus’s glory, they are experiencing it, tasting its goodness and bearing witness to its salvific grace.

However, this is not an internal or unobservable transformation. On the contrary, Thomas Aquinas painstakingly dissects what happens to Jesus during the Transfiguration, and it is anything but an incorporeal phenomenon. His transformation was most certainly observable and truly manifested, otherwise the reliability of the Gospels is suspect. “If the clarity was not real, although the gospel should assert this, it could be admitted that he did not really eat or that he did not truly suffer—which is heretical.”³² How does this align with Luke’s theme of salvation and redemption? Aquinas contends that although Christ’s transfigured form radiated his glory, he at no time relinquished his humanity or mortality.³³ It follows then that if Christ’s humanity is able

²⁹ δὲ εἶδον τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς δύο ἄνδρας τοὺς συνεστῶτας αὐτῷ and they **saw** his glory and the two men who were together with him. Translated from Michael W. Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Lexham Press; Society of Biblical Literature, 2011–2013).

³⁰Johannes P. Louw, and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 172.

³¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 570.

³² Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, quoted in Canty, *Light & Glory*, 201.

³³ Canty, *Light & Glory*, 206.

to achieve glory, we, too, will be able to achieve glory through participation in his *esse*, his being. Through him we will be saved.

Only Luke's Gospel expounds upon what Moses and Elijah were speaking about with Jesus, namely his "exodus which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem" (Lk 9:31). Clearly, Moses and Elijah are discussing the Cross, the New Exodus that is marked by the blood of Christ.³⁴ However, Donald Luther reminds us that we should view this exodus, this departure, inclusively; it is not just his death, but his death, resurrection, and glorification in heaven.³⁵ They are speaking about the redemption of all of mankind. Ratzinger writes that the Law and the Prophets, which are represented here by Moses and Elijah, are "fundamentally about the hope of Israel" and the Exodus is about the liberation of an enslaved people.³⁶ But the New Exodus being discussed in the Transfiguration pericope opens wide the redemption of all. By speaking with Jesus while he is in a transfigured state of glory, it becomes clear that his exodus, his Passion, will ultimately result in salvation.³⁷

Several church fathers have given *excessus* (Latin: departure) in v. 31 a dual significance. Not only does it refer to Christ's passion, but also "to his 'excess' of humility, poverty, sorrow, and love."³⁸ Cornelius à Lapide tells us that some interpret *excessus* as Christ's departure from himself whereby the Cross was an outpouring, an 'excess', of both love and every Christian virtue.³⁹ In a kind of irony, this excess is manifested through extreme suffering and darkness. Luther aptly writes, "The glory of God is the paradoxical opposite of all human glory: light

³⁴ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 311.

³⁵ Donald Luther, "The Mystery of the Transfiguration: Luke 9:28-36," *Word & World* 21, no. 1 (2001): 98.

³⁶ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 311. Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Canty, *Light & Glory*, 183. Church fathers who have held this belief are St. Bonaventure, John of la Rochelle, Hugh of St. Cher.

³⁹ Cornelius à Lapide, *The Great Commentary of Cornelius à Lapide: S. Luke's Gospel* trans. Thomas W. Mossman, Vol. 4. Fourth Edition. (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1908), 233.

revealed in darkness, triumph through defeat, greatness expressed in lowliness, freedom expressed in obedience, life through death.”⁴⁰ Christ’s exodus is in fact a redemptive act. Typically, acts of redemption are aimed inward, the one performing the act is the receiver of redemption. Yet, Jesus needs no redemption. His act, his *excessus*, of love is a “triumph of darkness” which sets in motion the salvation of humankind.

The Transfiguration pericope in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus as the embodiment of piety, of humility, and of humanity, illuminates the mystery of redemption. In this final section, we will look at how Matthews version of the Transfiguration reveals how Christ, as the new and superior Moses, fulfills Old Testament promises.

SECTION 3 — MATTHEW 17:1-9

Because of its sophisticated Jewish motifs, Matthew was likely writing his gospel to a primarily Jewish, or Jewish Christian, audience in and around Palestine.⁴¹ With an abundance of Old Testament parallels and a structure and message that links the Old Covenant with the New, it provides a rich framework for “what it meant to live as the messianic people of God.”⁴² It is no stretch, then, to connect Matthew’s version of the Transfiguration to the third element of the threefold mystery of the life of Christ, recapitulation.

Although the majority of the Gospel equates Jesus with the New David as ruler of the Kingdom of God,⁴³ in the Transfiguration narrative Jesus is portrayed as the New Moses and, as we will see later, the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel. To wit, in Matthew 17:2, Jesus is transfigured and his face “shone like the sun.” In Exodus 34, Moses ascends Mount Sinai to

⁴⁰ Luther, "The Mystery of the Transfiguration," 96.

⁴¹ Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew: Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 18.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 23.

present himself to the Lord. In vv. 29-30, as he descended, his face was shining because he had been talking to God. Likewise, Jesus, ascending a mountain, is transformed into a shining being. However, while Jesus's metamorphosis is similar to Moses's, it is far superior. Moses's face shone with God's glory, but Jesus's face shone with his own glory, having been transfigured even before the cloud manifested.⁴⁴ Ratzinger notes that the light "that causes him to shine comes upon him from the outside, so to speak. Jesus, however, shines from within; he does not simply receive light, but he himself is light from light."⁴⁵ Aquinas delves deeper saying that Moses's and Jesus's shine are analogous to each other, as "faith is similar to vision" yet they differ in intensity; Christ's soul is glorified and Moses's is not.⁴⁶ It becomes clear that the glory radiating from Moses is a partial glory as it does not come from within. Jesus brings the fullness of glory because he is himself glorious.

There also seems to be an eschatological element to the description of Jesus's face. John Paul Heil connects the shining face of Jesus to Matt 13:43, Jesus's explanation of the Parable of the Weeds: "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." In the Transfiguration pericope, Heil tells us, Jesus is looking ahead to the "final judgment when the righteous 'will shine like the sun...'"⁴⁷ The wording in Matt 13:43 brings to mind Daniel 12:3: "And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament;" Just as in the Parable of the Weeds, in Daniel's apocalyptic vision, the wise will be saved from judgment and will thus receive eternal life.⁴⁸ Returning to the Transfiguration, the shining face of Christ points to an eschatological glory prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 215.

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 309.

⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, quoted in Canty, *Light & Glory*, 207.

⁴⁷ John Paul Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2-8, Matt 17:1-8 and Luke 9:28-36*, Vol. 144 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 2000), 204.

⁴⁸ Hahn and Mitch, *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*, loc. 3550.

The presence of Moses and Elijah are traditionally equated with the Law and the Prophets. In Jesus's time, both were "associated with Jewish eschatological hopes."⁴⁹ The appearance of these two figures, guardians of the Old Covenant, occurs almost immediately after Peter's confession and after Jesus begin speaking about his journey to Jerusalem. In this way, the Old Covenant is bearing witness to and abdicating to the New which will ultimately be fulfilled at Calvary.⁵⁰ Aquinas adds that according to the Law of Moses, in order for something to be affirmed there must be two or three witnesses.⁵¹ Because there are two representatives from the Old Testament and three from the New, the whole of God's economy is experiencing the divine glory of Jesus.

The role of the Apostles in Matthew's pericope bears some reflection. Heil points out Peter's mistake of wanting to build three tents, one for Moses, Jesus, and Elijah. With this suggestion, Peter puts the three figures on an equal plane.⁵² God quickly corrects this error in two ways. Firstly, he interrupts Peter before he can finish speaking. And secondly, Matthew uses the Greek demonstrative pronoun οὗτος to refer to Jesus as God's son: οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς μου. God is clearly stating *not these two but this one is my son*.⁵³ Peter's mistake has been a topic of conversation for millennia. St. Jerome emphasizes that the Law and the Prophets are but one aspect of the entire Gospel of the Lord:

Think not of three tabernacles, when there is but one tabernacle of the Gospel in which both Law and Prophets are to be repeated. But if thou wilt have three tabernacles, set not the servants equal with their Lord, but make three tabernacles, yea make one for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that They whose divinity is one, may have but one tabernacle, in thy bosom.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Mitch and Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 216.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Canty, *Light & Glory*, 238.

⁵² Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 213.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, 603.

And Origen:

Now, I think that God, wishing to dissuade Peter from making three tabernacles, under which so far as it depended on his choice he was going to dwell, shows a tabernacle better, so to speak, and much more excellent, the cloud. For since it is the function.⁵⁵

While Matthew is introducing Jesus as the New Moses in this pericope, he seems to want to point out that this is not entirely understood by everyone yet, nor will it be until the resurrection. Peter, James, and John still have a long way to go before they fully grasp the fullness of the divine nature of Christ.

Yet another element unique to Matthew's Transfiguration narrative is the description of the disciples as they hear the voice of God coming out of the cloud and Jesus's subsequent response. "When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces, and were filled with awe. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Rise, and have no fear'" (Matt 17:6-7). Fear is a common element in epiphanies.⁵⁶ In Gen 17:23, God chastises Abraham for who subsequently falls on his face. In Num 16:20-22, Moses and Aaron "fell on their faces" when they heard the voice of God who was angry with the people. There are numerous examples.⁵⁷

In the Old Testament, the fear of God's anger was not often assuaged by a reassuring touch. But one narrative is unlike the rest. In Dan 10:5-8, Daniel has an apocalyptic vision whereby he falls on his face in fear. Yet, in vv. 10-12, he is comforted when a hand touches him, bids him rise, and tells him not to be afraid. This language is very similar to that in 17:6-7.⁵⁸ The parallel does not end there. Later in the vision (14:13), Daniel sees one "like a son of man" who

⁵⁵ Origen, "Origen's Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1897), 473.

⁵⁶ Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 217.

⁵⁷ In Num 16:45, "And they fell on their faces." And it continues, Balaam in Num 22:31, Mano'ah in Judg 13:20. In the NT: Matt 14:26, the disciples are terrified when they see Jesus walking on the water. In Matt 28:4, the guards "trembled and became like dead men" when they saw the Angel of the Lord sitting upon the stone.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

was given everlasting “dominion and glory and kingdom.” Jesus called himself the Son of Man frequently in Matthew’s Gospel, 30 times in fact.⁵⁹ Seven of these instances are in Chapter 24 and 25, Jesus’s ‘eschatological discourse’ about the final judgment which is filled with “allusions to the Old Testament.”⁶⁰ In 24:30, Jesus prophesies that the Son of Man will “appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see *the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*” (emphasis mine). It is hard not to see the connection between this language and the image of a shining and glorified Jesus in the midst of the cloud on the mountain of the Transfiguration. If, as the similarity between the two events seems to imply, Jesus is in fact this “Son of Man,” the nature of his duality as God-man is brought to the forefront in the Transfiguration linking not only the Old Testament with the New, but also the Son of God with the Son of Man.

Matthew’s Gospel is the champion of the mystery of recapitulation. His Transfiguration narrative is rife with allusions to Old Testament fulfillment in the person of Christ. In it, Jesus is the new and superior Moses as well as the Son of Man come to rule over the Kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION

After taking a closer look at the three versions of the Transfiguration in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it becomes clear that the subtle and sometimes not so subtle differences between them highlight the specific interests of each Evangelist. Mark, wishing to reach a diverse audience, uses simple language and incorporates elements from other contemporary religious traditions to drive his message home, the revelation that Jesus Christ is the son of God. Luke, the champion of the lowly and meek, explores Jesus’s humanity as a model for all Christians seeking redemption.

⁵⁹ Matt 8:20, 9:6, 10:23, 11:19, 12:8, 12:32, 12:40, 13:37, 13:41, 16:13, 16:27, 16:28, 17:9, 17:12, 17:22, 19:28, 20:18, 20:28, 24:27, 24:30 (2x), 24:37, 24:39, 24:44, 25:31, 26:1, 26:24 (x2), 26:45, 26:64

⁶⁰ Mitch and Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 301.

And Matthew, the guardian of how the Old Testament economy reveals New Testament promises, portrays Jesus as the Messiah come to free Israel from the bonds of sin. Collectively, the synoptic Gospels form a complete picture of how the life of Jesus Christ embodies the threefold mystery of revelation, redemption, and recapitulation.

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SYNOPSIS OF THE TRANSFIGURATION[±]

<i>Matthew 17:1-9</i>	<i>Mark 9:2-9</i>	<i>Luke 9:28-36</i>
¹ Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain apart.	² And after Six days, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves.	²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray
² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun , and his garments became white as light. ³ And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him	And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became glistening, intensely white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus	²⁹ And while he was praying the appearance of his countenance was altered , and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah
		³¹ who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep but kept awake, and they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him,
⁴ And Peter said to Jesus, “ Lord , it is well that we are here; if you wish , I will make three booths here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”	⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid.	Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” not knowing what he said.
⁵ While he was still speaking, when behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them,	⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them,	³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.
and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased ; listen to him!”	and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”	³⁵ And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen ; listen to him!”
⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were filled with awe. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise and have no fear.”		
⁸ And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”	⁸ And suddenly looking around they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. ⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one about what they had seen, until the Son of Man should have risen from the dead.	³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

- Elements unique to Matthew
- Elements unique to Mark
- Elements unique to Luke

Abstract

While all three Synoptics describe the Transfiguration with considerable similarity, there are notable differences in each. Matthew's account is the longest of the three. Only he employs the honorific "Lord" and only he says that the face of Jesus "shone like the sun." Most notably, only in Matthew do the disciples become prostrate whereby Jesus touches them to reassure them not to be afraid. Candida R. Moss outlines a compelling argument that Mark's account of the Transfiguration uses simple language in order to reach the widest audience possible. She also notes the strong Hellenistic influence on the Evangelist's writing style. The likely reason for this, she proposes, is the attempt to connect with those more familiar with Greek religious concepts and ideas. Albeit subtly, Luke's version is the most different. Only in Luke do we read that Jesus's Transfiguration happened while he was praying. It is Luke who reveals what Elijah and Moses were speaking about and that the disciples were overcome with sleep. Donald J. Luther points out that Luke seems to distance the disciples from the transfigurative act. Instead, they are witnesses to the result of Jesus's Transfiguration. According to John Paul Heil, determining the literary genre of the transfiguration is a critical element to decoding the narrative meaning of the passage. Collectively, these elements paint a slightly different aspect of the Transfiguration highlighted in each Gospel. This analysis will examine the three synoptic narratives of the Transfiguration and how the slight variances found in them reveal a different dimension of the threefold mystery of the life of Christ, revelation, redemption, and recapitulation.