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“The Scripture cannot be broken.” John 10:35.

“Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path.” Psalm 119:105.

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“In this was
manifested the
love of God”

—1 John 4:9



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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

To set forth in simple and plain language the pure doctrine of God's Word as taught by the true Lutheran Church in full accordance with the **Book of Concord of 1580** and the **Brief Statement of 1932.**

To show, **on the basis of Scripture**, what true Christians are to believe and how, out of love for their Savior Jesus Christ, they are to lead Godly lives.

To furnish aids for Bible study and articles for Scriptural devotion and meditation.

To demonstrate, by our Scriptural stand, that our **Concordia Lutheran Conference** is not a sect or false church body, but that the congregations which form it confess, teach, and practice the Word of God in its full truth and purity and use the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. All who do this are the true visible Church on earth.

To seek out all who truly share our Scriptural position in doctrine and practice, and to urge the mutual public acknowledgment of such God-given unity. Thus we shall be able thereafter to practice a God-pleasing fellowship with them.

To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are "*perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*"

To set forth pertinent historical information which has a bearing upon the Church and to expose modern philosophical thought and the so-called scientific theories which contradict the Word of God.

To expose particularly the false teaching and practice of the various so-called "Lutheran" church bodies by comparing their teachings and practices with what is plainly recorded in the Word of God, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the old orthodox Lutheran writings.

To expose false teaching and practice wherever it makes its appearance and to keep abreast of the current happenings in the church and among the nations as signs of the times.

To be truthful and factual in our reporting and freely to correct any misinformation of which we are not aware and which has been called to our attention. Also to clarify any information or statement of doctrine or practice which may be unclear to our readers or which may create a wrong impression.

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Remembering Our Confirmation Vow as Our New Year's Resolution



“Behold, I come quickly! Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

Revelation 3:11

As the New Year approaches we often hear of individuals making New Year's resolutions as a person resolves to change an undesired trait or habit or to accomplish a specific personal goal in the days and months ahead. This is a long-standing tradition illustrated by a postcard from 1909: “Your New Year's Resolution: Resolve to renew all your old resolves, and add a few that are new. Resolve to keep them as long as you can, what more can a poor man do.” On the reverse side of the card is “A Resolve for Every Morning of the New Year by Bishop John H. Vincent: I will this day try to live a simple, sincere and serene life, repelling promptly every thought of discontent, anxiety, discouragement, impurity and self-seeking, cultivating cheerfulness, magnanimity, charity and the habit of holy silence, exercising economy in expenditure, carefulness in conversation, diligence in appointed service, fidelity to every trust, and a childlike trust in God.”

In reading over this extensive daily vow, one is struck by a glaring omission: **How** this vow is to be **accomplished**. As true believers in Christ, we know the answer. First of all, we know that, in and of ourselves, we have no power to accomplish anything good. For our Lord has told us: “*Without Me ye can do nothing*” (John 15:5). With the Apostle Paul we affirm our total insufficiency: “*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God*” (II Corinthians 3:5). Any good thing we accomplish is the result of God's grace working through His Word, “*for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13).

The theological principle that only God's grace, coming to us through the means of grace in Word and Sacraments, works any good thought, desire, word or deed is confessed in the *Rite of Confirmation* in the answers: “I do so intend, with the help of God” and “I do so intend, by the grace of God.”

What better New Year's resolution could there be than to renew your confirmation vow? On your Confirmation day, you heard the pastor declare the purpose of the rite:

DEARLY BELOVED: When you were little children, you were received into God's covenant of grace in Holy Baptism. And now, having learned the meaning of this covenant from your instruction in the Word of God, you stand here before God and this Christian congregation publicly to make profession of your faith in the Triune God and to confirm your covenant with Him, to dedicate yourselves body and soul for time and for eternity to your God and Lord. Lift up your hearts with me, therefore, to the God of all grace, and cheerfully give answer to what, in the name of the Lord, as the undershepherd of Jesus Christ in this place and overseer of His flock, I now shall ask you.

DO YOU THIS DAY, in the presence of God and of this Christian congregation, confirm the solemn covenant which at your Baptism you made with the Triune God?

Thereupon you were moved in heart by God's grace given you in Holy Baptism and by the Word of the Gospel, which you thereafter heard and learned, to respond with the answer: "I do." After you renounced the devil and all his works and ways, you then confessed your Baptismal Faith in the words of the *Apostles' Creed*. There the chief parts of Christian Doctrine are declared in short, summary form. You professed your sincere faith before God and your Christian congregation, faith in the Triune God as proclaimed in Holy Scripture, having learned, with true spiritual understanding, the doctrine of God and especially the meaning of the Baptismal Covenant. You publicly confirmed your Baptismal Covenant by giving cheerful answer to the questions put to you by the Lord's servant, His undershepherd, your pastor acting in Christ's Name as overseer of the flock. Never forget that your Confirmation Vow was made to God Himself. God holds us to our vows: "*When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools. Pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay*" (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). "*If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth*" (Numbers 30:2).

With the Psalmist we should exclaim with firm, God-wrought resolve:

“What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people” (Psalm 116:12-14). Our life should be the living embodiment of Psalm 61:8: *“So will I sing praise unto Thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.”* We are continually renewed in our resolve, by God’s gracious Word, to say with Jonah: *“But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord”* (2:9).

Our Confirmation Vow includes very specific, lifelong commitments. Consider *this* question: “Do you desire to be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and of this Christian congregation?” A positive answer commits you to being a lifelong active member of the *orthodox* Christian Church, the *true evangelical* Christian Church, as a member of a particular Christian *congregation*, with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of such active membership. Chiefly, this means regular and consistently to attend to the Means of Grace: *“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil”* (Ecclesiastes 5:1). *“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for He is faithful that promised). And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching”* (Hebrews 10:22-25). It is only through the use of the Means of Grace that you will remain a member of the *Invisible* Church by sincere faith in the Redeemer: *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”* (II Corinthians 13:5). *“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, ‘If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’”* (John 8:31-32).

Your Confirmation Vow includes adhering to an orthodox *visible* congregation, a local church which teaches and practices God’s Word in all its purity (Acts 2:42), a church in which your faith can be nurtured and strengthened by *“the sincere,”* that is, *“pure milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby”* (I Peter 2:2). In this congregation you are to maintain, promote and extend it by prayer, personal service and financial

support (Acts 8:4; Matthew 28:19; I Corinthians 9:14). At the same time, you should avoid all *heterodox* (false-teaching) churches and all false religious organizations (Matthew 7:15; I John 4:1; Romans 16:17; II Corinthians 6:14-18). All these obligations are included in the simple “I do” in answer to this membership question!

The next question deals with the only source and norm of faith and life: “Do you hold all the canonical books of the Bible to be verbally-inspired Word of God, and the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from the Bible, as you have learned to know it from your diligent study of the Holy Scriptures, to be the true and correct doctrine?” During the time you were instructed in the doctrines of Holy Writ, you were constantly reminded that the *true* doctrine is declared to you by the clear passages of God’s Word alone: “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (II Timothy 3:16-17). God Himself has wrought in you a convicted conscience so that you know what the Bible says, accept it as true, and correct and rely on it with firm, God-wrought confidence and trust: “*So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God*” (Romans 10:17). At your Confirmation you affirmed this fundamental fact, as the basis for everything you believe and confess: God’s Word alone! In the active, concrete application of this, you follow the example of the Berean believers: “*These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11).

The final two questions asked during the *Rite of Confirmation* include the phrase “even death” or “even unto death.” The first of these is a question of your intended continued steadfastness: “Do you also, as a member of this Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, and suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?” The intention to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, the orthodox, evangelical Church, obviously must flow from genuine, God-wrought, God-preserved, faith. As a true believer confesses the True Faith, he is opposed by the world, Satan and his own sinful flesh. Scripture warns: “*Yea, and all that will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (II Timothy 3:12). The Lord comforts those in such persecution: “*Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days.*”

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Our title-text includes the Lord’s exhortation “*Hold that fast which thou hast that no man take thy crown*” (Revelation 3:11).

We have a “*crown of life*” bestowed upon us as a sheer gift of grace, dearly-bought for us by Him who, as our Substitute, wore a “*crown of thorns*” (Matthew 27:29). Upon His sacred head the curse of the entire fallen race rested (Galatians 3:10), as He bore the sins of all men in His own body on the tree (I Peter 2:23). Christ “*once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God*” (I Peter 3:18a). The one “*who knew no sin*” was made to be sin for the entire ungodly world, as the Father imputed everyone’s sins to Him (II Corinthians 5:21a). He paid for them all to reconcile the world to God (II Corinthians 5:19, 21). Moreover, His righteousness is imputed to the entire world so that the entire world stands as righteous, justified from all things under the Law (II Corinthians 5:21; Acts 13:39; Romans 5:18-19). The benefit of His work is received by the individual by God-wrought faith in the Gospel (Romans 3:26, 28). This benefit is symbolized by the crown a believer already has! “*We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us*” (Romans 8:37) and “*gave Himself for [us]*” (Galatians 2:20b). It is called “*the crown of life*” (James 1:12) and “*a crown of glory*” (I Peter 5:4), “*an incorruptible [crown]*” (I Corinthians 9:25). We have it **now by faith**, but its full manifestation and enjoyment will come **after death**, in everlasting life, glory and bliss (cf. I John 3:2 with I Corinthians 15:53).

Death cannot separate us from our crown; only *unbelief* can — falling away from saving faith in the Gospel. Therefore, we are moved by God’s grace to reply to the question of steadfast confession with this answer: “I do so intend, with the help of God.” We have abundant assurances from our faithful God regarding His help: “*God is in the midst of her [His true Church]; she shall not be moved. God shall help her, and that right early*” (Psalm 46:5). “*For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, ‘Fear not; I will help thee’*” (Isaiah 41:13). “*For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded. Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed*” (Isaiah 50:7). “*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*” (Romans 8:31-32). We promise to seek help from God where He manifests such help, namely, in and

through His Word: “*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4).

Now on to the final question in the *Rite of Confirmation*: “Finally, do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the rule of the divine Word, to be diligent in the use of the Means of Grace, to walk as it becometh the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to the Triune God and to His precious Word even unto death?” Here we find the *confirmation* of conformation! You state your firm resolve faithfully to conform your entire life, inside and out, to God’s own rule, the rule of God’s Word, the “norm” or standard of good works, namely, His Law in its third usage! Both the motivation and the power to do this is the Gospel, as you are “*constrained*” by “*the love of Christ*” (II Corinthians 5:14; cf. I John 4:19) “*both to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13). This requires your diligent use of the Means of Grace, the Gospel and the Sacraments, administered by the pastor of your congregation in his faithful preaching, teaching and practice of God’s Word, in the administration of the Lord’s Supper, and in his efforts to keep you ever mindful of your Baptism. This is your life-long privilege and responsibility, “even unto death.” So is your Christian “*walk*” (Galatians 5:16, 25) or Godly manner of living which glorifies the Gospel of Christ “even unto death.”

The vow concludes with a commitment from inside-out, from faith in the heart to word and deed, to “remain true to the Triune God and to His precious Word even unto death.” What *was* your answer *then*? What *is* your answer *now*? “I do so intend, by the grace of God.” The same grace of Christ which saved us (Acts 15:11), justifying us freely through His redemptive work (Romans 3:24), the grace that brings salvation (Titus 2:11) and forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7), is the grace needed for you to keep your intentions and fulfill your vow. The Apostle assures us: “*But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:19). As ever, this grace comes to us through the means God ordained, the Word of the Gospel and His holy Sacraments.

This grace was first bestowed upon you in Holy Baptism: “*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost*” (Titus 3:5). Granting you the new birth by working true faith in your heart, our gracious God moved you to desire more: “As

newborn babes, desire the sincere [pure] milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (I Peter 2:2-3). Having being fed His gracious Word “from a child” (II Timothy 3:15), you were brought up in His nurture and admonition, as God intended, by your parents (Ephesians 6:4). Such grace is still active in your heart and life today, entirely due to God’s preservation of your faith through the Means of Grace, in you “who are kept by the power of God (cf. Romans 1:16) through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Peter 1:5). “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (I Thessalonians 2:13).

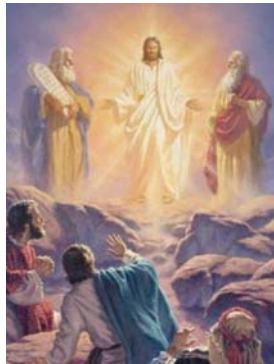
Renewing your Confirmation Vow as your New Year’s resolution is genuine Godliness: *“For bodily exercise profiteth little; but Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (I Timothy 4:8).* To that end we pray with the hymnwriter in that treasured Confirmation hymn:

Let me be Thine forever,
Thou faithful God and Lord.
Let me forsake Thee never
nor wander from Thy Word.
Lord, do not let me waver,
but give me steadfastness.
And for such grace forever
Thy holy name I’ll bless.

(TLH 334, 1)

— E. J. W.

Anticipating Jesus' "Decease" as His Great Accomplishment



“Behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.” — Luke 9:30-31

As the appropriate culmination and close of the holy **Epiphany** [lit., “manifestation,” “appearing”] season, we Christians recognize and celebrate *The Transfiguration of our Lord* on the last Sunday after Epiphany, which this year occurred on January 21st. Both the Epistle Lesson (II Peter 1:16-21) and the Gospel Lesson (Matthew 17:1-9) on that Sunday relate the narrative and importance of Jesus’ transfiguration as the miraculous *manifestation* of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Redeemer of the world, the manifestation proving conclusively that the apostles and evangelists “[had] not followed cunningly devised fables when [they] made known unto [us] the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (II Peter 1:16). They saw what they saw and heard what they heard; and, uncontradicted by other testimony, their witness stands as *a priori* evidence of what transpired on the “*holy mount*” that day (v. 18).

Jesus manifested forth His own glory when He “*was transfigured before them*” (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2) in shining brightness. Moses and Elijah, renowned prophets of God in the Old Testament, whom the Lord enabled Peter, James and John to recognize and identify, contributed to His manifestation by their glorious presence (Luke 9:30-31a), not only standing with Him as iconic symbols but carrying on a protracted, timely conversation with Him (Matthew 17:3b; Mark 9:4b; Luke 9:31). And God the Father manifested Him by the testimony of His own voice “*out of the cloud*” (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35), a voice “*which came from heaven*” (II Peter 1:18) and identified Jesus as His “*beloved Son*” (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35) “*in whom [He was] well pleased*” (Matthew 17:5; II Peter 1:17) and whose voice they were directed to “*hear*” as their divine Prophet (all the accounts referring to this injunction).

However, it was not merely “the moment,” as it were, the event about which they were speaking, the miracle of Christ’s transfiguration that

they were cherishing in their minds, that made it so *significant*, so *memorable*, and so perpetually *enlightening* to their faith (II Peter 1:19). It was the **message** of the transfiguration, the **light** of the knowledge of “*the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (II Corinthians 4:6), the **Gospel** of God’s love, *manifested* toward us and all mankind, in that “*He sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him*” (I John 4:9).

As we focus upon this extraordinary manifestation of the Lord Jesus before the onset of His *great passion*, let us examine the various facets of His glorious **transfiguration** and how each of them contributed to the **Gospel-message** in which we confess with Luther our abiding faith for our comfort and salvation: “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me...”

● John, one of the “*eyewitnesses of His majesty*” with Peter and James (II Peter 1:16), wrote in the prologue of his Gospel account: “*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). While indeed ALL of Jesus’ miracles testified to the disciples that He was “*the Christ, the Son of God*” (John 20:31) to the intent that they (and we also) should believe on Him, the miracle of His **transfiguration** was no doubt the most *intense*, so that the Lord Jesus asked them not to share it with anyone until after He was risen from the dead (Matthew 17:9), the miracle that was to eclipse all others. “*His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light*” (Matthew 17:2). Though in His *state of humiliation*, wherein, according to His human nature, He did not always and not fully use the divine attributes communicated to His human nature (Cat. Q/A 134), Christ in this miracle “*manifested forth His glory*” (cf. John 2:11) more than in any other miracle prior to His death. Shortly before this, Peter had confessed that Jesus was “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:16), and Jesus had given the disciples a verbal foretaste of His impending suffering and death (v. 21); but even Peter did not at the time fully understand it, and his fleshly mind could not reckon with it (v. 23). Yet the Lord Jesus was already then beginning to lift the veil of ignorance from the eyes of His disciples.

● Why “*Moses and Elijah*”? **Moses** was God’s first prophet to His people — the first one to prophesy the coming of God’s Messiah (Deuteronomy 18:15) as our *Divine Prophet* (“*unto Him ye shall hearken*” — cf. “*Hear ye Him,*” Matthew 17:5b); the first of the holy writers of the Old Testament (Acts 10:43) who recorded, at the instance and by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the promises of that Savior to Adam and Eve and to the patriarchs; who was God’s chosen mediator between Himself and His people (Exodus 20:19; Deuteronomy 5:5; Ga-

latians 3:19) — His mediator of the Law (John 1:17a; Exodus 34) and of the Gospel (Exodus 34:6; Luke 24:44; Acts 10:43; etc.); who knew God face-to-face (Exodus 33:11; Deuteronomy 34:10), yet not as intimately as did His only-begotten Son (John 1:18). Moses was in certain respects a type of Christ in that, having been chosen by God for the purpose (cf. Matthew 12:18-19), he delivered God's people from slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt (cf. Hebrews 2:14-15); he brought them through the parted waters of the Red Sea to safety on the other side (cf. Isaiah 43:2-3a); he interceded for them with God, holding Him to His gracious promises and merciful forgiveness (cf. Luke 23:34); and he led them through the wilderness of Sinai on a journey of forty years through trials and tribulations (cf. II Thessalonians 1:1-8; Romans 8:35-39), so that by faith they might enter the Promised Land of Canaan (Hebrews 4:1-11).

Elijah (“*the Tishbite*,” I Kings 17:1) was also a preeminent prophet of God in the time of the kings of Israel and Judah, particularly God's messenger to Israel suffering under wicked King Ahab and the prophets of Baal. He, like John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner, had been endowed by the Lord with a faithful and enduring “*spirit*” to testify unflinchingly concerning the only true and living God, and with “*power*” to stand up to the enemies of the truth in the face of unrelenting persecution (Luke 1:17). And, in a special miracle of unprecedented grace and favor (with the single exception of Enoch recorded in Genesis 5:24), God received Elijah *alive*, body and soul, transported in a chariot of fire, into the mansions of heaven without causing him first to suffer temporal death (II Kings 2:11).

It was, of course, not only expedient but also significant for their faith that the disciples saw the “connection” between God's prophets of the Old Testament and His *Divine* Prophet of the New Testament, between those whose mission it was to proclaim in advance, as did the disciples themselves after the fact, “*the power and coming of [the] Lord Jesus Christ*” (II Peter 1:16) and the One who, by word and deed, proclaimed HIMSELF to be the Christ, the Son of God, and the Redeemer of the world (cf. Luke 4:17-21). For in spite of the vision of Christ's transfiguration and the God-created manifestation of the divine connection between prophecy and fulfillment, the disciples were, even after Christ's passion, death and resurrection, still “*fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets [had] spoken*” (Luke 24:25) until the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost “*[brought] all things to their remembrance*” (John 14:26) so that they were able to declare, as Peter did to Cornelius and his house, Acts 10:43, “*To [Christ] give all the prophets witness.*”

- But what far exceeded the miraculous light and glory and the appearance of personages which “*manifested forth [Christ's] glory*” on the

holy mount that night was the *content of the conversation* between Jesus and Moses and Elijah and the *ratification* of that content by the Father in heaven! Only Luke records the *subject matter* of their discussion, while all three evangelists plus the Apostle Peter in his epistle record the heavenly Father's voice approving it (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35; II Peter 1:17-18). It was in confirmation of "*the prophets' witness*" in the Scriptures that Jesus and His guests were discussing "*His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.*"

It was not merely "*the glory*" of Christ's **person** that was *manifested* to the disciples in this miraculous vision, "*the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14), who partook of our human nature and "*dwelt among us*" as True God and True Man in one undivided and indivisible person. For that glory was "*manifested forth*" in all His miracles, beginning with His creation of wine from water at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2:11), so that Peter, with the agreement of all the disciples, confidently declared: "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16). However, since the Jews generally — including Jesus' own disciples — had lost sight of the prophecies of Scripture concerning the **true nature** of the Messiah's *office* and the **true** and **overriding purpose** of His coming (cf. Luke 24:25-27) and looked forward (as do the Millennialists of our day and time) to an earthly reign of "*the Christ*" as the one who would "*restore again the kingdom to Israel*" (Acts 1:6), Jesus charged them NOT yet to put out the word "*that He was Jesus the Christ*" (Matthew 16:20). In His *state of humiliation*, He "*made Himself of no reputation*" (Philippians 2:7) among men since "*[His] kingdom is not of this world*" (John 18:36); and He, as "*the King of the Jews*" (v. 33), wanted no part in the people's desire to make Him a "bread king" (John 6:14-15) who would minister to their temporal needs, deliver them from the oppression of the Romans, and restore to them the scepter that had departed from Judah according to God's will (Genesis 49:10).

No, it was chiefly the nature and glory of Christ's **work** that was manifested to the disciples in His transfiguration, intended to underscore and confirm the prophetic words of the Savior just a week earlier concerning His impending *suffering and death* at the hands of the Jewish *Sanhedrin* and of His subsequent *resurrection* from the dead on the third day: "*From that time forth [from the time of Peter's bold confession of Him] began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day*" (Matthew 16:21). They desperately needed that confirmation in view of their steadfast rejection of the notion that Jesus would have to suffer and die, expressed by the vociferous Peter at Satan's prompting as he "*rebuked*" Jesus for expressing the preposterous idea of His **great passion** (v. 22). At that time, Jesus sharply re-

buked Peter for his opposition (v. 23) as being “*an offense*” to Him and demonstrating Peter’s woeful lack of understanding of “*the things that be of God*” and his preference for things that agreed with human reason — including no doubt the myth of the Messiah’s earthly reign. On several other occasions Jesus prophesied His great passion in clear and certain terms (Matthew 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:2); but the disciples remained “*fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets [had] spoken*” (Luke 24:25-27) and even the testimony of Jesus Himself. And here, in Luke’s account of the transfiguration, their hearing the discussion between Jesus and the prophets concerning “*His decease,*” His *death* in Jerusalem, apparently was lost on them as they were caught up in utter amazement at the astounding vision and, in a kind of daze, exhibited no reaction to the wonderful assurance and comfort that the testimony of Moses and Elijah served up to them. What a missed opportunity!

Notice, however, that Moses and Elijah recognized the impending death of God’s Messiah to be a distinctive *accomplishment* on His part, literally, that which would be “*completed,*” as the culmination of His ministry here on earth; for, as Jesus Himself would later shout from His cross of agony as He was about to depart this life in death, “*It is finished!*” or, more literally, “*It is accomplished!*” Jesus told His disciples: “*The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:28). This concept was, of course, “nothing new” to Moses and Elijah; and it was “nothing new” to anyone who knew and believed “*all that the prophets [had] spoken.*” For the **Psalmist David** and the **Prophet Isaiah** in particular spoke in clear and precise terms about the suffering *and death* of God’s Messiah in His *vicarious atonement* for the sins of the world — especially in **Psalm 22** and **Isaiah 53** (which your writer would heartily commend to your Bible reading during this holy season of Lent). According to God’s eternal decree of redemption, His only-begotten Son was “*delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God ...[to be] crucified and slain*” (Acts 2:23) by the unbelieving Jews. Christ “*poured out His soul unto death; and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors*” (Isaiah 53:12). What made Christ’s *passive obedience* “*unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Philippians 2:8) the *propitiatory* sacrifice that atoned for the sins of all (I John 2:2; Romans 3:24-25a; Romans 5:10; etc.) is that **GOD died** in the person of Jesus Christ — the *accomplishment* in which Moses and Elijah rejoiced at its anticipated fulfillment in time! In the words of the hymnwriter [Johann Heermann, 1630]: “His *death*, that **perfect sacrifice**, has paid **the all-sufficient price**. In Him my hope is anchored” (*TLH* 375, 4).

In this blessed truth of Christ's *passive obedience* unto "**death**" as being the efficient cause of God's forgiveness of the world's trespasses lies the chief difference between the true *Christian* religion and the religions of the world, all of which teach salvation by works, by the individual sinner's efforts to appease the wrath of his god and to merit the deity's favor. However, because of his total depravity and his inability to do anything good in God's sight, either to remediate his situation or to propitiate divine justice, "*no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God*" (Galatians 3:11). Therefore it was "*in Christ*," because of Christ's *vicarious atonement* — the attainment of perfect righteousness for imputation to every "*ungodly*" (Romans 4:56) soul of man and the expiation of the guilt of sin "*for the unjust*" (I Peter 3:18) by His innocent suffering and **death** for God's "*enemies*" (Romans 5:10) — that "*God...reconcil[ed] the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*" (II Corinthians 5:19). God's gracious unilateral **objective justification** of "*the world*" on the basis of Christ's **propitiation** for the sins of "*the whole world*" (I John 2:2), which completely satisfied divine justice (Romans 5:9-10, 18-19; Galatians 3:13, etc.), is **unique** to the true Christian faith and redounds "*to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*" (Ephesians 1:6-7).

Then, for the second time since the beginning of Christ's public ministry here on earth, God the Father, in His "*voice which came from heaven*" (II Peter 1:18), "went on record," as it were, to validate His Son's work of redemption. After Jesus' baptism, whereby it became Him "*to fulfill all righteousness*" in His *active obedience* (Matthew 3:15), His heavenly Father audibly expressed His great pleasure in Him who, in fulfillment of the eternal decree of redemption, was, in the place of sinners, as their Substitute under the Law (Galatians 4:4), perfectly keeping the will and Law of God to earn righteousness for every soul of man (Romans 5:19). "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*," He declared "*from heaven*" (Matthew 3:17). — Now, not long before He laid down His life in death in His *passive obedience*, "*to redeem them that were under the Law*" (Galatians 4:5), to redeem them "*from the curse of the Law*" (Galatians 3:13) on the tree of the cross, the Father again expressed great pleasure in Him in the very same words, saying in "*a voice out of the cloud*" (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35; cf. II Peter 1:18): "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" — well-pleased, perfectly satisfied, and fully propitiated with regard to poor sinners by "*His [impending] decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem*" (Luke 9:31).

And, as if in echo of Moses' words to the Children of Israel regarding Christ as God's Divine Prophet-to-come, "*unto Him ye shall hearken*" (Deuteronomy 18:15), the Father added: "*Hear ye Him!*" Listen to His prophetic words about His impending *suffering and death*, that thus it *must* be (cf. Matthew 16:21; 26:54; Mark 8:31; 9:12; 14:49; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 44; John 3:14; 12:34).

Indeed, what an amazing *accomplishment* would be Jesus' "*decease*" at Jerusalem! What an amazing testimony on the part of Moses and Elijah as they discussed with Him His suffering and death! What an amazing ratification by the heavenly Father in a voice that the disciples "*heard when [they] were with Him in the holy mount*" (II Peter 1:19). Yea, what an amazing culmination *in time* of the **vicarious atonement** wrought by "*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*" (Revelation 13:8) to be our Savior!

If Thy beloved Son, O God,
had not to earth descended
and in our mortal flesh and blood
had not sin's power ended,
then this poor wretched soul of mine
in hell eternally would pine
because of its transgression.

But now I find sweet peace and rest;
despair no more reigns o'er me.
No more am I by sin oppressed,
for Christ has borne sin for me.
Upon the cross for me He died
that, reconciled, I might abide
with Thee, my God, forever!

All righteousness by works is vain;
the Law brings condemnation.
True righteousness by faith I gain;
Christ's work is my salvation.
His death, that perfect sacrifice,
has paid the all-sufficient price.
In Him my hope is anchored!

(TLH 375, 1-2 and 4)

— D. T. M.

Fighting Fleshly Fatigue as We Meditate Anew upon Christ's Passion

*He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep,
and saith unto Peter, "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?"*

—Matthew 26:40

The historical context of the verse quoted above is the night of our Savior's betrayal, the evening in which His intense suffering (passion) as the Sin-bearer for the world began — less than 24 hours before His crucifixion and death. It was through that substitutionary suffering of the punishment we all deserve by our sins that the Lord Jesus Christ satisfied God's justice, appeased His wrath, and purchased for us and for all mankind complete forgiveness for all our transgressions (I John 2:1–2). This part of His redemptive work is known as His *passive obedience* and is crucial for our salvation (Romans 5:9). It is, therefore, very appropriate for us during the seven weeks of Lent to spend extra time pondering with grateful hearts the boundless love of God for us in Christ, as this is so pointedly demonstrated in the atoning suffering and death of the God-Man. "*God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ... When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son*" (Romans 5:8–10). "*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us*" (I John 3:16). "*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*" (I John 4:9–10).

It might seem incomprehensible that a person who clearly understands that he is a sinner who deserves to suffer eternally in hell could ever grow weary of hearing about how he was saved from the wages of his sins through the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus. And yet that very thing *does* happen because even those who have been brought to saving faith in Christ still have the sinful flesh and are plagued with much spiritual weakness. During the season of Lent, the congregations in our Conference hold special Wednesday evening services properly focused upon our Savior's passion. At those services we find ourselves in a similar position as Peter, James and John when they were with the Savior in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37–46); we are called upon by Jesus to watch with Him for an hour as we meditate upon His passion, and to fight against the spiritual drowsiness that the devil encourages, by which he seeks to becloud the minds of Christians. And it is important for us not only to *attend* those Lenten services (Hebrews 10:25),

but also to be *active listeners* to the Word as it is being preached (Ecclesiastes 5:1) for the strengthening of our faith (Acts 20:32), and also join with our fellow Christians in the singing of edifying hymns (Colossians 3:16). If we allow the devil to discourage our attendance or to distract us from attentively listening and meditating upon all that Christ suffered for our redemption, then the Lord's question, "*What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?*" should certainly cause us to repent most humbly with heartfelt sorrow and shame. Thankfully, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us also from all of those sins (I John 1:7); but we dare not let the devil distort that Gospel in our minds and turn it into a pillow upon which our flesh may comfortably rest as the sinful behavior is perpetuated (Romans 6:1–2).

In the verse that comes immediately after Jesus' question about watching with Him for an hour, we find a two-fold command of the Lord, as well as an explanation about why true Christians struggle with sin and so often fail to follow His commands consistently in their lives. Jesus told Peter, James and John: "*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Matthew 26:41). Because there are so many temptations to become spiritually lethargic and sleepy, it is of the utmost importance that we remain vigilant (alert and watchful against attacks from the enemies of our souls) and consistent in prayer (beseeching the Lord's help to strengthen us through His Word in the hour of temptation). "*Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ...Take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and, having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, **praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance***" (Ephesians 6:10–18).

Yes, we must indeed contend against the weakening influence of our sinful flesh, which is completely opposed to the teachings of Scripture and rebels against our Christian desire to serve the Lord (Galatians 5:17). As was the case with Peter, James and John, our "*spirit,*" our New Man, is certainly willing and eager to watch and pray and meditate upon Christ's passion; but our Old Adam wants us to do the exact opposite and sadly often frustrates our best intentions. "*To will is present with me, but how to perform*

that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. ...When I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the Law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:18–23). Thus the devil finds a powerful ally within every child of God—the Old Adam, a part of the Christian that is receptive to his temptations and wars against all that is good.

We should be aware that Satan may also use other people to deliver his temptations, as he did on a different occasion with Peter (Matthew 16:22–23). Family members or coworkers may say that attending worship services every Sunday is more than sufficient to cover a Christian’s obligations to the Lord. “Why must one attend worship services *twice* a week just because it’s Lent?” they may ask. Of course, such a question completely misses the point. A Christian *is not compelled* to attend Wednesday evening Lenten services (as if he will lose his salvation if he does not); but a Christian, according to his New Man of faith, certainly *appreciates* the extra church services and *desires* to benefit from the additional opportunities to be fed with the Gospel of God’s grace for his continued spiritual growth. “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious”* (I Peter 2:2–3).

Another tactic the devil may use to make a Christian weary of hearing about and meditating upon Christ’s *passive obedience* is to implant the thought that it is of little value to hear the exact same Passion History during the season of Lent year after year after year. And it is true that while this year’s sermon texts and themes will likely be different than last year’s, yet the core message of Christ’s bitter suffering and death to atone for the sins of all mankind will be (and most certainly *should* be) the same. The basic applications of Law and Gospel (which are so clearly and powerfully set forth in Christ’s passion) will, no doubt, sound quite similar from one Lenten season to the next. It does not, however, follow that such a message should bore us, put us to sleep, or discourage us from even attending the weekly Lenten services and from being an active listener and participant. If a person has a favorite song, he does not listen to it only one time. And if for some reason he had to wait a whole year in order to hear it again, he would be quite excited and eager to listen to it when the time would finally come to do so. Similarly, we should be excited and eager to join with our brethren every Lenten season for focused meditation upon Christ’s passion. In-

deed, the overarching message of Lent — the message of how our salvation was won for us by Christ — is something that we should cheerfully hear over and over again and never tire of it.

But while the spirit of the Christian is certainly willing to do this, his flesh may seek to weaken his resolve with an objection such as this: “The content of the Lenten services is always so depressing — focusing so heavily upon sin and pain. And it’s difficult to get excited about repeatedly meditating upon the great anguish and suffering of Jesus.” It is true that extremely sad and depressing topics are not pleasant to dwell upon. Great sadness and intense emotional strain can be quite physically draining and lead to fatigue. In fact, this very thing is mentioned as contributing to the disciples’ drowsiness when they were supposed to be watching and praying with Jesus during His intense suffering in Gethsemane (Luke 22:45). The great sadness of that night had worn them down so much that they felt physically depleted; and, because of their fleshly weakness, even their willing spirit did not keep them awake — did not keep them watchful and prayerful in that sorrowful hour.

We should indeed feel great sadness when we contemplate the sufferings of Christ — especially realizing that *we* were a cause of that pain as a result of our sins and iniquities. And yet, attending the weekly Lenten services should not be a sad or depressing experience. Having the Word of God brought to us should cause our hearts to rejoice (Psalm 119:111); and the feelings that should really predominate when we meditate upon the Savior’s passion are feelings of intense *gratitude* to the Lord for all that He endured for us (Colossians 1:12–14), and extreme *joy* for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation that we have only through Christ’s vicarious work of redemption (Romans 5:11; I Peter 1:8–9; Isaiah 61:10). Even the holy angels of God, spirits who are not “*partakers of flesh and blood*” and did not sin, as did Adam and Eve, and who therefore were not themselves redeemed by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 2:14–16), “*desire to look into*” the Gospel of God’s love revealed through “*the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow*” (I Peter 1:11–12). Should we not, therefore — we whose forgiveness is inseparably connected with the shedding of Jesus’ blood (I John 1:7), whose only hope of peace with God and spiritual healing is directly tied to the gory wounds of Christ (Isaiah 53:5), whose reconciliation with God is inextricably linked to Jesus’ death (Romans 5:10) — count it a great joy and privilege to hear about the Savior’s passion again and again!

Rather than producing spiritual fatigue, the additional time spent meditating upon Christ's passion during Lent should *energize* us and fill us with increased *zeal* for the Lord (Titus 2:14). The cross upon which Jesus suffered the pains of hell and laid down His life for our redemption should not depress us but ever be a source of *joy* and *grateful boasting* (Galatians 6:14). Our Savior's bitter suffering, crucifixion, and death are not topics to be avoided, but are found at the center of all true Christian preaching (I Corinthians 1:23; 2:2). For their comfort and edification, the children of God in the *Old Testament* were focused upon the coming passion of the Redeemer, both through direct prophecies (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Luke 18:31–33) as well as through the frequently observed ceremonial foreshadows of animal sacrifices and the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:3–14; 29:38–39; Leviticus 4:32–35). We Christians of the *New Testament*, who have learned about how Christ fulfilled those prophecies and foreshadows by His innocent suffering and death, have been instructed by the Lord to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world (Mark 16:15) — the Gospel that directs man to both the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:1–4) for the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life in heaven (Romans 4:25; 5:9). May we never grow tired of meditating upon this most precious Gospel!

Jesus, I will ponder now
on Thy holy passion;
with Thy Spirit me endow
for such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith
may the image cherish
of Thy suffering, pain, and death
that I may not perish.

If my sins give me alarm
and my conscience grieve me,
let Thy cross my fear disarm,
peace of conscience give me.
Grant that I may trust in Thee
and Thy holy passion.
If His Son so loveth me,
God must have compassion.

(*TLH* 140; 1, 5)

—P. E. B.

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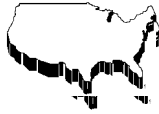
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