

“Consumed in Glory”

Transfiguration of Our Lord

Mark 9:2-9

In Kiev, Ukraine along the banks of the Dnieper River and on the edge of a bluff, one will find an impressive cathedral and functioning monastery dating back to the eleventh century. The name of the cathedral and monastery is St. Michael's.

The newly reconstructed building is impressive to look at from the outside as one gazes at its golden domes that contrast the exterior of the building's pristine white color. The interior of the building is also impressive to look at with its many biblically themed mosaics, frescos, and murals. Within the cathedral and monastery one will find this mural depicted in the picture above, behind the Ukrainian couple.

Ukraine (2008) Jeremy Cowart copyright 2008
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The picture was taken by Jeremy Cowart, a designer and professional photographer from Nashville, Tennessee. Jeremy is a Christian professional who uses his platform as a well-known photographer to engage in the creation of social art. He has worked to bring attention to those without a voice throughout Africa as well as Haiti after the devastating 2010 earthquake there. When he took the photo seen above Jeremy was likely photographing the impressive architecture and artwork at St. Michael's. We might imagine

that Jeremy was in the middle of photographing the mural when the young couple unknowingly stepped in front of his shot. We might then conclude that, without hesitation, Jeremy snapped a candid photo.

The mural on the wall behind the couple shows the glories of the heavenly host of angels. The image brings to mind the multitude of angels in Luke 2:13 that appeared to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth to proclaim the good news with the following words: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" The image might also remind us of the voice of the angels in Revelation 5:11ff. when the voice of many angels proclaimed with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" Or we might think of the voice of the great multitude of angels in Revelation 19:6ff. who shout like the roar of many waters: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come."

Yes, the image on the mural reminds us of the magnificent and unmatched glory of God proclaimed by the heavenly host of angels and even the saints triumphant in heaven who have died in the faith before

us. It is impressive glory indeed! Impressive glory that is also displayed and proclaimed for us through the incarnate Son of God in the event of Jesus' transfiguration from the Gospel reading.

But the young Ukrainian couple in the picture does not seem too impressed. Standing in sharp contrast to the impressive image depicted on the mural these the two young Ukrainians look otherwise occupied and very much less than impressed.

In Jeremy's photograph we see an entire wall mural that stands at the entrance of the Church and Monastery of St. Michael's in Kiev, Ukraine. And the tension in the photo's composition is palpable. There are two young people, a man and a woman, who could serve as Ukraine's new Adam and Eve emerging out of years of Soviet oppression, but also perhaps leaving the garden of Eastern Orthodox belief in order to take their place in the modern world. Behind them stands their history as a Christian nation now long abandoned. The glorious God that the Church proclaimed was perhaps declared after all to be unimpressive. And at the entrance to a golden-domed church and monastery, the division between Church and World, much like it is here in America, couldn't be more strongly felt.

When we compare the magnificence of the angels and their glorious proclamation to the lackluster appearance of the couple in our image, we are hit with a striking reality check. The heavenly glories which, though always with us, sometimes leave Christians like us today asking questions about what is "relevant" in our message and proclamation to a modern world that seems equally otherwise occupied and less than impressed. We might even prefer to be otherwise occupied and distracted with the inglorious things of our modern world rather than the things of our glorious God. Or we might be tempted to make God relevant and impressive for the culture in a way that actually seems to strip God of his glory and holiness.

Jesus' transfiguration, however, blurs the lines between heaven and earth; the holy and the secular. In his transfiguration Jesus makes manifest his heavenly glory that is always present, yet hidden most of the time. In this fitting finale to the season of Epiphany Jesus shows forth his glory to three of his disciples. The only fitting response is attested to by the Father who says "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." The only action appropriate for disciples of Jesus is to then descend the mountain back into the World with a message of heavenly glory that is not relevant to the World as it is, but is relevant to the resurrection that would follow. That heavenly glory is also our future. It is the future of those two Ukrainian young people.

Now you are baptized into this resurrected Christ. Now you have put on Christ. You have been crucified with Christ and participate in his resurrection as you have been raised to new life. The old is gone and the new has come. This means you now participate unashamedly in God's glory in this world. You are basking in the glory of God in Christ who is the glorious image of the immortal God.

But in Christ and in this world God's glory is hidden. It is hidden in things like water, bread, wine, and even in the daily struggles and sufferings you and I experience. When the glory of God is hidden in these ways it can be difficult to trust that we now bask in his glory. We can easily become distracted and otherwise occupied. It can be difficult to be faithful. We can easily become unamused and unimpressed.

We can try to find different ways to make God's glory impressive and relevant for an uninterested world.

Therefore, rest assured that the same one who set aside his full glory to descend from the Mount of Transfiguration to ascend Mount Calvary is your Lord. He purchased forgiveness for you. He is with you in your struggles. He is with as you fight your temptations. And he is impressive and full of God's glory. The glorious Son who once fought Sin and Satan and defeated it now fights for you. He lives in you forgiving you, strengthening you, and fighting for you until that day when you will stand before the throne of God in the fullness of his glory. Amen.