

# O Wondrous Type! O Vision Fair

Lutheran Service Book 413 | study by Bernard J. Schey

## Introduction

We could use strobe lights, halogen headlamps and staring at the sun at midday (not a good idea!) to help us imagine just what Peter, James and John saw on the mountain of transfiguration. The point is that Jesus was seen in His heavenly glory. Also, prophets Moses and Elijah met with Him to discuss what would soon happen at Jerusalem. We

have the promise by the grace and mercy of Christ Jesus that we will one day see God's glory *unendingly*.

- Why were the sainted prophets Moses and Elijah chosen and not two others?
- How is it that “the Church may share” (stanza 1) this glory even now in this world?

## Exploring the Scriptures

One of the Old Testament readings for this Sunday in the church year is all of Deuteronomy 34, wherein we read how Moses was taken to the summits of Mount Nebo and Mount Pisgah. From there he saw the Promised Land to which he'd led the Israelites over the last 40 years.

- Why was Moses not allowed to enter the Promised Land of Canaan? Did this mean that the Lord had not forgiven him?
- How is God's mercy shown in sending Moses to the mountain of transfiguration?

St. Luke the Evangelist gives us a detailed description in the ninth chapter of his Gospel of what happened before the eyes of Peter, James, and John on that incredible day.

- Note that Luke begins the episode (9:28–36) by writing: “Now about eight days after these sayings.” Why does Luke make a point of saying this?
- In verse 30, Luke tells us that the topic of discussion between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah was Jesus' own “departure.” What does this refer to?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

This hymn comes to us in Latin written by an unknown author in 1495, just before the dawn of the Reformation. The first examples of it were found in Salisbury, England. The Englishman John Mason Neale (1818–1866) gave us a fine translation of this hymn. His brilliance as a Greek and Latin scholar served us well, since he translated over 200 hymns from those two languages into our own. Two of his best-known translations are “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” for Advent, and “All Glory, Laud, and Honor” for Palm Sunday. Our *Lutheran Service Book* contains hymns from many languages, providing a varied treasury of praise.

- Is there someone in your congregation skilled at writing Christian verse?
- How can writing a hymn be a clear confession of the Christian faith?

The bold tune used for this hymn makes it a bit difficult to remain seated to sing it properly! One might be moved to make it a genuine “carol,” a hymn designed to be sung while walking around. Hence, there would not only be “Christmas carols,” but also “Epiphany carols.”

- How could such caroling long before or after the Christmas season serve to spread the message of the forgiveness of sins in Christ?

### Text

The joyous melody of this hymn and the clearly told facts of the transfiguration make it memorable. The very title of the hymn gives us a word that must be understood in its biblical sense — “type.” A type is a preview of what was fulfilled in Christ Jesus. So, Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17–24; Ps. 110:4) was a type of Christ. In the transfiguration, the radiant glory of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah was a type (again, preview) of heaven.

- What about the straight reporting of the facts? Is this a good thing?

In stanza 2, Neale translates for us that “the incarnate Lord holds converse high.” “Incarnate” means to have flesh, just as we do, and this flesh Jesus shares with us. See John 1 on this.

- What is the main difference between His flesh and ours?

- What are the similarities?

In stanza 3, we have the promise of heavenly glory, where the writer indicates we shall all not only witness but also be a part of heavenly glory when we steadfastly “joy in God with perfect love.”

- How is it possible to have perfect love? See John 3:16 and 1 John 1:7.

Stanza 4 is written to give us hope, we who walk so often in “the valley of the shadow of death” (Ps. 23:4). Despite life’s

tragedies, we sing hymns like this to spite Satan and the troubles he sends us.

- Describe some situations wherein you have found joy in Christ and His promises even though tears have flowed freely.

Finally, stanza 5 is our closing prayer that our Triune God might bring us to the reality of eternal life.

- In what sense do we already have this gift? See John 5:24.

## Making the Connection

This grand hymn anticipates the joy of heaven even as it looks forward to the imminent shame of the cross. Both are manifestations of the glory of God. St. Peter referred to this extraordinary transfiguration event to show that the facts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were not myths. See 2 Peter 1:16–18.

- What are some modern-day myths that need to be discredited?
- How can the truth of the facts of the life of Jesus bring comfort to despairing people?

## In Closing

Jesus gave a preview, a type, of glory before the face of Peter, James, and John so that we might realize that He is indeed the Chosen One, the Messiah, the King of the Jews. He then bore our sins on the cross with the approval of the Father and the Holy Spirit in order to fulfill the prophetic witness of Moses and Elijah.

- Sing or read together *LSB* 413.

### Prayer

O God, in the glorious transfiguration of Your beloved Son You confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of Moses and Elijah. In the voice that came from the bright cloud You wonderfully foreshadowed our adoption by grace. Mercifully make us co-heirs with the King in His glory and bring us to the fullness of our inheritance in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for the Transfiguration of Our Lord).