

Transfiguration and Metamorphosis

Thou hast been transfigured, O Saviour, on Mount Tabor, indicating the transformation of mankind which shall take place at Thy dreadful Second Coming.

—From the Kathismata of the Transfiguration sung in Orthros

The Greek word for *transfiguration* is *metamorphosis*, as seen on the inscription of the icon. Both words mean a change in form. The transfiguration of Christ shows both his divinity and his humanity. We who are united to Christ, enveloped with the Holy Spirit, are restored to the divine image in Christ's humanity. This restorative transformation unfolds throughout our Christian journey in this life and will be completed at his dread Second Coming.

To better understand the transfiguration in Christ, let us first contrast it with the metamorphosis the world offers. Franz Kafka's short story *Metamorphosis* tells the tale of modern man. Gregor Samsa wakes up to find that he has become a loathsome insect. His family reacts in horror and disgust, increasing his isolation and despair. Even his sister, who initially cared for him, comes to despise him. She herself undergoes a bleak metamorphosis. Through this story, Kafka relates that modern life, especially our fractured relationships exacerbated by industrialization, deforms us from humans into monstrous vermin.

The culmination of this worldly metamorphosis—death and dehumanization—was starkly shown on August 6, 1945. The first nuclear weapon was dropped, plunging the world into the Atomic Age. That terrifying nuclear flash briefly outshone the sun. It mocked divine transfiguration by destroying human lives and fracturing cities; the mushroom cloud spread radiation causing illness and disfigurement. Yet God is not mocked (Galatians 6.7). To those with eyes to see, it unveiled the powers of the fallen world, lucidly illuminating St Paul's words that this evil age is ruled by cosmic powers of darkness (Ephesians 6.11–13).

But thanks be to God, Christ offers us a better metamorphosis. For the faithful have been transferred from the domain of darkness into his own kingdom (Colossians 1.13). Whereas we once walked in darkness, enslaved to our passions and the devils, Christ raised us up with him in his Resurrection, and seated us with him in the heavenly places in his Ascension. He is creating us anew, showing us the path of righteousness and inviting us to participate with him in the restoration of ourselves and the world (Ephesians 2.1–10, 2 Corinthians 6.1, 1 Thessalonians 3.2).

Having been set free from the powers of darkness, let us not return to enslavement to them. Rather by God's grace, let us ascend Mount Tabor walking in the Holy Spirit, by doing good works, loving all with our actions. To the extent that we do so, we shall see Christ shining with the uncreated light in as far as we are able to receive it. We shall be drawn into the cloud and hear the Father speaking. We ourselves will be transfigured in God's glory.

Thou hast smitten me with yearning, O Christ, and by Thy divine love hast Thou changed me. But with Thine immaterial fire, consume my sins and count me worthy to be filled with delight in Thee, that leaping for joy, O Good One, I may magnify Thy two comings.

—From the Ninth Ode of the Second Transfiguration Canon sung in Orthros

O Son of God, Who wast transfigured on Mount Tabor, save us who sing unto Thee. Alleluia!