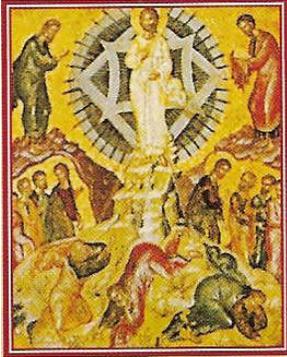


August 6

B *Holy Transfiguration of Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ*



This feast is tied to the commemoration of the event on Mount Tabor¹, written about by the evangelists (Mt. 17:1-13; Lk. 9:28-36). Jesus Christ Himself, in view of the approach of His suffering and death (Lk. 9:22) and for the strengthening of His disciples in faith, willed to reveal corporally and visibly to them all the glory of His Divinity and by that to show them that His suffering and death will be voluntary and that He is that very Deliverer of Israel promised by the prophets. For this purpose having taken Peter, James and John², He led them up on Mount Tabor and made them witnesses of His transfiguration³. Corresponding to this the Holy Church also glorifies the event in the present feast as actually a Theophany, as proof that Jesus Christ is truly the Paternal Radiance. St. Ephraim the Syrian teaches that the Lord showed His Apostles "in the glory of His transfiguration His Kingdom before His suffering, His power before His death, His glory before His desecration and His honor before His dishonor so that when He will be seized and crucified by the Judeans, they would know that they crucify without a cause, but according to His voluntary good will for the salvation of the world". Besides this, the glory of transfiguration serves beforehand the image the bright and glorious resurrection of the Lord. But according to the commentary of St. Proclus, with the pre-indication of that glory in which the Lord, Judge of the living and the dead, will once come, and in that transformed state in which we will be at the end of the world. In the pre-indication in the transfiguration of Jesus Christ in heavenly glory prepared by Him for His faithful followers, the Holy Church morally calms all her true children, inspiring them, that behind short-term sorrows, afflictions and losses, which fill their earthly life, the glory of eternal blessings will be sent up, in which the body of the righteous will also participate. Those worthy will be participants of the future eternal glory, namely those who in the present life will be transformed in spirit according to the paradigm of the Transfiguration on Tabor⁴. Sinners do not have a place on the heavenly Tabor. That is why the Holy Church now also raises up "the thoughts of our lazy souls", "which are always falling down to the earth", to raise them "to the height of divine ascension", and inspires in us the need to change ourselves "with the good change", "conforming ourselves to Christ, piously and joyfully, raising us up to the height of virtues".

The feast of Transfiguration of the Lord existed in 4th century as is evident from the many homilies delivered on this day in the 4th century. Such homilies are those of St. Ephraim the Syrian and St. Chrysostom. Accordingly the existence of the feast in the 4th century shows that its beginning is hidden in the prior centuries of Christianity⁵. In the 8th century St. John of Damascus and Cosmas of Maium

composed many hymns for this feast, with which the Orthodox Church glorifies the event even at the present time⁶.

Troparion, tone 7

**Thou wast transfigured on the Mount, O Christ God,
Revealing Thy glory to Thy disciples, as far as they could bear it:
Let Thine everlasting light shine upon us sinners,
Through the prayers of the Theotokos,
O Giver of Light, glory to Thee.**

Kontakion, tone 7

**On the mountain wast Thou transfigured,
And Thy disciples beheld Thy glory as far as they could see it, O Christ God:
That when they would behold Thee crucified,
They would understand that Thy suffering was voluntary,
And would proclaim to the world:
That Thou art truly the Radiance of the Father.**

Magnification

We magnify Thee, O Life-giver Christ, and we venerate the most glorious Transfiguration of Thy most pure flesh.

The feast of Transfiguration belongs to the Twelve Major Feasts. It is celebrated for 9 days from August 5 until August 13.

Paramoëa: 1) Ex. 24:12-18. 2) Ex. 33:11-23; 34: 4-6, 8; 3) 3 Kg. 19:3-9, 11-13, 15-16. **Matins Gospel:** Lk. 9:28-36; sel. 45. **Epistle** 2 Pet. 1:10-19; sel. 65. **Gospel:** Mt. 17:1-9; sel. 70.

Katabasia: *Moses, having traced the Cross.*

On the feast of Transfiguration grapes are blessed, and in those places in Russia where grapes do not grow apples are blessed⁷. The custom to offer fruit at an appropriate time is undoubtedly ancient, and in the Christian Church is partly the continuation of a similar custom in the Old Testament Church (Gen. 4:2-4; Ex. 13:23; Num. 15:19-21; Deut.8:14) and partly an apostolic establishment (1 Cor. 16:27). Writing concerning this custom is already mentioned in canon 3 of the Apostolic Canons (compare canon 46 of Carthage and canon 28 of the 6th Ecumenical Council)⁸. The simple establishment of the custom to offer fruit (grapes) on August 6 is that in Greece fruit are ripe by this time, most of which are new ears of grain and grapes, which are offered for blessing as a sign of thanksgiving for the acceptance of these fruits in the livelihood of man. St. John Chrysostom teaches: "the farmer receives fruits from the earth not so much from his labor and diligence but as much from the grace of God returning these; for "it is neither the planting nor the watering, but that God nurtures". Besides grapes are brought to the church for blessing because it is directly connected to the Mystery of the Eucharist. According to the Rudder [Book of Canons], "clusters of grapes

more any other vegetable are more tolerably brought into church; inasmuch as wine is made from them, the fulfillment of the bloodless sacrifice is understandable". Similarly and in the prayer "in the partaking of clusters of grapes" the priest prays: "Bless, O Lord, this new fruit of the vine, through the healthfulness of the air, by rain showers and temperate weather, Thou art well-pleased to attain ripeness at this time. May our partaking of this birth of the vine be for gladness and for offering Thee a gift for the cleansing of sins through the sacred and holy Body of Thy Christ". Apples, itself substituting for grapes, are blessed with another prayer as only the first fruits of vegetables. A more special meaning of the sanctification of fruit on the 6th day of August can be deduced by the general reasoning of the Church that the event of the transfiguration pleasing to the Lord was to show the new situation in which human flesh enters into the resurrection of the Lord and enters into the general resurrection of all believers. But as all nature became subject to God together with man for the last sin, so together with him she also waits for her renewal from the blessing of God. From here the church blessing of fruit makes man worthy of faith in this hope⁹.

The blessing of fruit is done either at the end of a liturgy after the Prayer before the Ambo and the distribution of the Antidoron or after the dismissal of the liturgy. After the dismissal of the liturgy the singers sing the Troparion of the Feast and after the "Glory, both now and ever" the Kontakion. The priest at that time censes around the table with the fruit, says the prayer over them, then, usually, sprinkles the fruit with holy water and, finally, distributes them to the people. The prayer for the Blessing of Clusters of Grapes, on the 6th day of August, is published in the August Monthly Menaion and in the Great and Small Book of Needs. In the Small Book of Needs (part 2, chapter 9) it says: "And let it be known that this prayer ("Bless, O Lord") is said over clusters of grapes where there are vineyards, and these are brought into this temple for blessing on the 6th day of August. But here in Great Russia, where vineyards are not found, apples are brought on this day into the temple, and the Prayer for them that offer First-Fruits that begins: "O Master, Lord our God", will be said over them. **This prayer is in the Small Book of Needs (part 2, chapter 10).**

"If any of the brethren eats clusters of grapes before this feast, let him receive a disobedience of its prohibition, and let him not taste of the cluster of grapes throughout all of August, as ordered by the Ustav [Typikon]; but let him who refrained from this and the rest obey the Ustav [Typikon] of the holy fathers. This prohibition is active and observed in the vineyards of the brethren. It is necessary that clusters of grapes be offered to the brethren at meals three times a week. Let the brethren partake on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. This Ustav [Typikon] is active for both figs and other vegetables, clearly for their appropriate times" (Ustav [Typikon] Aug. 6).

On Transfiguration we may eat fish, olive oil and wine, even if this feast falls on Wednesday or Friday.

See the Ustav [Typikon]: If Transfiguration falls on a Sunday, nothing from the Sunday but the entire service of the feast is sung.

Repose of St. Theoctistus, Bishop of Chernigov

Until his episcopate St. Theoctistus practiced asceticism as a monk in the Kievan Monastery of the Caves and there become so well known for his asceticism that in 1103, after the death of the Hegumen of the Monastery John, he was elected in his place. In 1113, Theoctistus beloved by all was installed as Bishop of Chernigov. In this dignity he much labored for the building of temples of God and the spiritual education of his flock. He died at the beginning of the 12th century.

¹ The Transfiguration of the Lord happened in February and not in August as it is now celebrated in our Orthodox Church. The Church of Christ transferred this feast from February to August because, without transferring it to the other month, the majestic feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord would occur during the days of the Holy Forty Day Fast. That would be not congruent with the Great Lenten services, the sadness of the fast and of repentance which represents in itself the present multi-calamitous life; whereas the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord will presage the future age in itself. The Transfiguration of the Lord is celebrated on the sixth of August instead of another time because the Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord is celebrated on September 14 in which the commemoration and memory of the passions of Christ is again made. And as the Transfiguration was 40 days prior to the crucifixion of the Savior, the Holy Fathers, having counted forty days back from the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord, established that Transfiguration would be celebrated on August 6, because from August 6 to September 14 is exactly 40 days. (Rukovodstvo dlia Selskikh Pastyrei [Manual for Rural Pastors] 1893, 11).

² According to the explanation of St. John of Damascus, "the Lord took Peter in order to show that His testimony truly given to him will be affirmed by the testimony of the Father and that one should believe him in His words, that the heavenly Father revealed this testimony to him (Mt. 16:17). He took James as the one who before all the Apostles would die for Christ, to drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism (Acts 12:2). Finally, He took John, as the virgin and purest organ of Theology so that He, after having beheld the eternal glory of the Son of God, has thundered these words: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"* (Jn. 1:1). Besides this on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter who hadn't yet spread the ideas about the suffering and death of his Teacher and Lord (Mt. 16:22), might mature in the truth of His glory, which forever remains inviolable despite all hostile efforts; James and John, awaiting the opening of the earthly kingdom of the Messiah and pursued the first places in this kingdom (Mk. 10:37), might behold the true majesty of Christ the Savior, surpassing every terrestrial power. The three disciples were under the law (Deut. 19:15) sufficient witnesses of the revelation of the glory of God and, according to the expression of St. Proclus, "in spirit personally represented all the others".

³ Together with the Apostles two of the greatest men of the Old Covenant appeared before the transfigured Lord, Moses and Elijah, "one died", in the expression of St. John Chrysostom, "and the other still had not tested death", appeared to show that "Christ has authority over life and death and rules over Heaven and earth". Their appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration likewise bore witness that the transfigured Master is the God of the living and the dead, the Creator and Fulfiller of the law and the prophets. "The Prophets and the Apostles gathered on the mount were filled with joy," observes St. Ephraim the Syrian, "the Prophets rejoiced for they have beheld here His humanity which they did not see before; the Apostles rejoiced for they beheld here the glory of His Divinity which before they had not understood. They stood before the Lord as ministers, and looked at one another, Prophets at Apostles and Apostles at Prophets. There they mutually extended to themselves the sights of the prototypes of the Old and New Covenants. Thus, the mount represents the Church itself because Jesus united in it the two covenants accepted by the Church and has shown that He is the Giver of both".

⁴ These are the things that transform the mind with unshakeable faith, so that he acquires the mind of Christ, how he thinks and reasons, as he studies the Holy Gospel, to firmly stand in truth and turn away from every lie and iniquity; these are the things that transform the will so that it becomes obedient to the one Holy Gospel and none, and equally nothing can cause it to reject the fulfillment of the Lord's commandments; these are the things that transform the heart so that in it reigns the sincere flaming love for God and neighbor, and it lives and breathes in the one Lord and Hope of eternal life; these are the things that transform even the very external senses so that they be not slaves to sin and iniquity, but slaves to the truth in holiness.

⁵ Up to the time of Pope Callistus III, Roman Catholics did not have a feast of Transfiguration in the sense of a generally accepted and solemn feast. This feast was established in the Latin Church only in 1457 by Pope Callistus III and for the occasion that the following circumstance served. The Sultan Muhammed II, after capturing Constantinople, intended to conquer Belgrade, where Commander Hunyadi of the Hungarian King Ladislas V was becoming stronger. The forces were unequal but the Christians won full victory on August 6, 1456. Pope Callistus III, having founded the feast, established a special order of worship service for it, which is prescribed even up to the present day.

⁶ Already in the 4th century the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Empress Helena built a temple in honor of the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor. At the end of the 11th century the Crusaders, having seized Palestine, have found a few temples and monasteries on Tabor and converted them to Roman Catholic. During the victory of the Saracens over Palestine at the end of the 12th century, the Taborite holy places were destroyed. For a long time the holy mount remained uninhabited and only on the day of Transfiguration the Orthodox and Catholics performed church services on the ruins of the former temples. In 1849 the Patriarch of Jerusalem Cyril II started to strive for permission from the Turkish government to construct a temple on Tabor. The decision was implemented only in 1860 when a temple was built on the ruins of an ancient Greek church. Above the door of the temple is an inscription in Greek: "On the ancient ruins on Mount Tabor a sacred temple of our Divine Lord and Savior of the Transfiguration is providentially constructed under the auspices of the Most Blessed Patriarch of Jerusalem Cyril II at the expense of the Brotherhood of the All-Holy Sepulcher".

In Russia there is also a memorial of the glorious Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor. In the Moscow All Sorrows Church and in the church in the village of Novospassky (Dedenevo, Moscow Province) where stones from Mount Tabor brought there a very long time ago are kept. There is a basis for thinking that these memorials on the sacred mount for Christians are not unique in our temples.

⁷ Among the people this feast is known by the names: the "Second Feast of the Savior", "Feast of the Savior on the Mount", "the Apple Feast of the Savior" (consequently the custom to bless apples on this day in the church).

⁸ In the priority of the Christian Church all first fruits in general from the earth has been brought by the faithful to the temple for blessing: breads of various kinds and sorts, wine, olive oil, incense, wax, honey, milk, etc. From these offerings only bread, wine, incense, olive oil and wax were presented for the altar, but other offerings were made either for a church meal, or given directly to the homes of the church clergy. Being a Christian priority, as in Orthodox Russian Church in ancient times, these gifts were both numerous and various. Then it may be said that the first fruits of every good thing belonging to Christians were dedicated in sacrifice to God, for service to God, for the nurturing of the servers of God and for the maintenance of all the needs of the brethren. But now, with the degeneration of the ancient spirit of piety, few fragments of the plenitude and variety of ancient gifts remained, which are not so tightly held by the gathering crowds about the unique, main, essential and indestructible bloodless sacrifice in the Mystery of the Eucharist, in the raising up of bread and wine to God, realized in the true flesh and blood of Christ God. So the blessing of bread and wine, eggs and milk, various meats and generally food was kept in the sanctification of the Paschal Artos in the temple and of paschal foods in homes. The blessing of flowers and wooden branches even now is done on the feasts of the Palms and the Holy Trinity, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross of the Lord and on the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross. Gifts of honey and kutiya [koliva] were kept for Panakhidas and generally for the commemoration of the departed. Offerings of wax, incense and olive oil are kept continually even up to now. The raising of Proskhophora for use in the Proskomedie by parishioners, equally with wine, is done even now, although, unfortunately, in many places it is already dropped. Finally, the blessing of the fruits of the earth is done in the Christian Church on the feast of Transfiguration. Obviously, in this latter blessing of earthly fruits to God one should still see that blessing which was commanded by Moses in the Old Covenant which in the Old Testament Church also fell just in that same season of gathering garden fruits, of the enclosed gardens and fields, for them as well for us. It is the season which, for the Palestinian Jews, began on the feast of Pentecost and ended with the end of the year that is the end of our August. Therefore the ancient New Year was not only in ancient times but also in Christian and even in the Russian Orthodox Church up to the reign of Emperor Peter I was celebrated at the beginning of our month of September. The restoration of the ancient pious custom of blessing the offerings of first fruits out of earthly prosperity taking priority by the Christian Church would be rather desirable. In the Small Book of Needs, besides bringing grapes and apples into the temple on August 6th, it is directly commanded: "and likewise let other fruits be brought in their season into the temple for a blessing". It would even be better if at the same time in the feeding and in the natural need for Christians to allot a portion of the gifts sent down from God to the benefit of the temple and the clergy who serve in it be awakened and strengthened.

⁹ This custom also has similar instructive value. When fruits are still sprouting in Spring, they are small, green and ugly. Then, with the assistance of sun light, warmth and moisture they become mature, in completeness and beauty and thus are completely transfigured. It is the same in the mortal life of a human also, that the season of

blossoming for the fruits in the person itself is impure and sinful and consequently is not comely; but, if one uses the light of the word of God, is warmed with warm tender religious rites, and is irrigated also with the Holy Mysteries, then one spiritually ripens as "a shock of grain comes up to the threshing floor in its season (Job 5:26), one is accepted in the heavenly barn, in the high abodes of the Heavenly Father.

*S. V. Bulgakov, **Handbook for Church Servers**, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 0271-0275
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