

Transfiguration

The vision of Jesus Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor was witnessed by three disciples—Peter, James, and [John](#)—in fulfillment of Christ's promise, "Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Mt. 16:28; Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27). This, however, was not the first time that these three disciples were chosen by Christ for a particular grace to be bestowed upon them. We learn from Mark 5:37-40 that when [Jesus Lord](#) was on his way to raise the daughter of Jairus from the dead, "he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James." He also singled them out to be with Him during His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane: "remain here, and watch with me" (Mt. 26:37-39; Mk. 14:33-35).

If we were to suggest possible grounds to justify the special treatment accorded to these three disciples, we might offer the following considerations. Peter was the eldest disciple, and the first of the twelve to proclaim the sonship of our Lord, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16). James was the first disciple to gain the crown of martyrdom. He was killed by Herod [Agrippa](#) I, grandson of Herod the Great (Acts 12:1-2). John, the brother of James, both of whom Jesus surnamed Boanerges (the sons of thunder) because of their notable zeal and fervor, was himself the very personification of purity and chastity, which earned him the special love of Christ.

As regards the number of the disciples who were present at the Transfiguration, it is in keeping with the established precept necessitating two or three for a lawful witness (Dt. 17:6; Mt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1).

According to church tradition, the location of the Transfiguration is Mount Tabor, the same spot that saw the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20). Some scholars, however, dispute this

and suggest Mount Hermon or the Mount of Olives instead. Mention is consistently made in the *Euchologion* and the doxology of Mount Tabor, particularly in the Psalmody of Good Friday, where Christ is described as transfigured on Tabor.

In the Western churches the feast of Transfiguration was recognized only toward the end of the Middle Ages. The Eastern churches, however, started to observe it at a much earlier date, first as a local and unofficial feast, then solemnized some time before the end of the first millennium. There are records that as early as the sixth century three churches had been built on the eastern slope of Mount Tabor, in memory of the three [tabernacles](#) that Peter requested permission to make. The Copts observe this minor feast on 13 Misra.

The special significance of the Transfiguration lies in the fact that, with the appearance of Moses and Elijah next to Christ, it provided testimony of the Jewish law and prophets to the messianic nature of Christ, and gave further divine proclamation of His sonship to [God](#) by these words: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mt. 17:5).

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