

# Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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## Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):  
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

## Matthew 17:1-9

Year A - Transfiguration Sunday, Text: Matthew 17:1-9  
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**Verse 17:1:** Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with Him up a high mountain. Matthew 17:1 and Mark 9:2 refer to the Transfiguration taking place “after six days.” In Exodus 24:16, we read of a cloud (symbolizing the presence of God) covering Matthew Sinai for six days, and God speaking to Moses on the seventh day. Perhaps Matthew and Mark have in mind a Sabbath day — but Jesus has come to bring endless everyday rest to His brothers and sisters.

Only Luke makes reference to a time-frame of “about eight days.” Some suggest that Luke links eight to the first day of the week (seven plus one), Sunday — the day of Jesus’ resurrection.

Where the transfiguration event took place is not known. Some suggest that it took place on Mount Hermon in present-day Lebanon; others, Mount Tabor in Palestine. However, what matters is not locality, but its implication.

**Verse 17:2:** When they reach the summit of the mountain, Jesus is transfigured before them. His face shines like the sun (see Daniel 10:6; Exodus 34:27–35), and His clothes become dazzling white (see Matthew 28:3; Daniel 7:9; Revelation 1:12–16; 3:4, 5). The radiance of the divine glory that once descended from heaven upon the face of Moses now transforms Jesus’ appearance and reveals His true identity.

**Verse 17:3:** In the Old Testament, we read of God communicating with Moses (Exodus 19:1–8; 24:12–18) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8–18) on Matthew Sinai (Horeb is another name for Sinai). The three disciples now see Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus. The entire worldview of the disciples had been fashioned by what these two key figures from the past represented. The truths that surfaced during the transfiguration event summoned the disciples to rethink those worldviews.

**Verse 17:4:** Peter offers to build three tents (booths, dwellings) — one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah.

Peter’s suggestion reflects wilderness events and personalities. Was Peter suggesting that the messianic celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (or Tents) was at hand? Tabernacles was a word rich in meaning, with links to Moses’ Tabernacle that was filled with God’s glory, of God’s constant presence with, and care for, His people during the wilderness wanderings, of the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s Temple, and of the messianic day (see Exodus 40:35; Leviticus 23:33–43; 1 Kings 8:11f; Zechariah 14:16–19). However, Luke states that Peter did not understand the implications of what he was saying.

**Verse 17:5:** A cloud then overshadows the group; a cloud is associated with Sinai in Exodus 19:16–19; 24:15; Exodus 33:7–11. A voice then declares, “This is My Son, the Beloved; with Him I am well pleased; listen to Him,” repeating and adding to the words heard at His baptism. This designation of Sonship echoes language from the Old Testament, and to Jesus as King, Servant, and a New Moses. Here Jesus is shown to be the glorified Servant of Yahweh.

The statement, “This is My Son, the Beloved” reflects Psalm 2:7 — a coronation Psalm used when a descendant of David was anointed into office as king. (The name David means *beloved*.) Its message in the transfiguration event is: “Although you have been without a king since you were taken into exile in Babylon in 587 BC, you are now getting your kings back. The Davidic line is being restored” (but in a very different way from what you have been expecting!).

“With whom I am well pleased” is taken from Isaiah 42:1–4, a Servant Song; note v. 1a. “Listen to Him” is a quote from Deuteronomy 18:15 — a verse in which God says He will raise up a New Prophet, a New Moses. Jesus is that successor to/replacement of Moses. He speaks and demonstrates the final, authoritative Word of God.

The truths that surface in this three-section statement

are profound. God has shown up in the visible, flesh-and-blood Person of Jesus. Jesus is the long-awaited King — but a King very different from what the Jewish people were waiting for. He is a Servant-King — not One seeking to dominate the nations of the world. Jesus is indeed the final, long-awaited prophet. However, He will teach a way of life very different from that embraced by the Judaism of Jesus' day.

**Verse 17:6-7:** When the disciples hear the message of the voice from the cloud, they fall to the ground and are overcome with fear. Jesus, however, touches them and tells them to stand up and not be afraid.

**Verse 17:8:** When the disciples look up, they see no one but Jesus. This can be simply a statement of fact, or it might be a hint that in matters of faith, we should seek to do the same.

**Verse 17:9:** As they descend from the mountaintop, Jesus orders them not to tell anyone about the vision “until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” Only Matthew refers to the event as a “vision.”

The disciples do not even begin to understand the message of the voice from the cloud until after Jesus’ resurrection. However, in Mark 15:39, a Roman centurion (a Gentile!) who stood at the foot of Jesus’ cross declared, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

In Luke’s transfiguration narrative (9:28–36), Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about His coming “exodus” (not “departure”) that He will “complete” (not “accomplish”) in Jerusalem. Jesus’ entire ministry is understood as a rescue mission that He will complete in His crucifixion (coronation) — a mission that His Father will endorse by raising His Son from the dead (vindication).