

## Our Lord's shining garments. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 1 September 2010.

As I hope you remember, we are currently looking at seven instances where the New Testament refers to our Lord's garments. You might almost say, as I suggested when we began this series, that we are 'sneaking a look into the King's wardrobe'. And, as I expressed it then, we have, in effect, seven 'hangers' to ponder. In past weeks, we have considered (i) some swaddling bands, and (ii) a garment with a very distinctive hem.

This morning I want us to focus on some garments which once shone with supernatural brightness and whiteness. I have two readings, both from the gospel of Matthew. The first is concerned with an event which took place about a year before our Lord's crucifixion, and the second with the crucifixion itself.

First, then : *'after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah". While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"'*<sup>1</sup>

And then : *'They crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "They divided my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots" ... Two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left ... Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"'*<sup>2</sup>

It is clear from the Gospel of Luke that the so-called 'Mount of Transfiguration' scene occurred during the night. Luke tells us, for instance, that it took place when Jesus had gone up the mountain 'to pray' – which we know from elsewhere He usually did at night.<sup>3</sup> Luke notes also that, and I quote, 'Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His (Jesus') glory'.<sup>4</sup> And, finally, he, Luke, follows his account by recording something which, he says, 'happened on the next day, when they had come down from the mountain'.<sup>5</sup> All the evidence points therefore to this having been a night scene. Which must have rendered the transfiguration of our Lord's countenance and clothes all the more dramatic for the three privileged disciples who had accompanied Him up the mountain.

I say 'our Lord's countenance' because that is how our Bible translates Luke's words – that, 'as he prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered'.<sup>6</sup> As we read, Matthew is a little more explicit, telling us that 'His face shone like the sun'.

But all three gospels which record our Lord's transfiguration speak of His clothes, each telling us that His raiment became white.

Matthew is the briefest, reporting simply they became 'white as the light'.

Mark tells us that 'His raiment became shining, exceedingly white as snow' – suggesting the gleaming, sparkling effect of sun on snow.

For his part, Luke tells us 'His raiment was white and glistening – the word 'glistening' being that used to describe blinding flashes of lightning.

In summary then, the three evangelists tell us that our Lord's clothes became as bright as the light, as sparkling as the snow, and as dazzling as the lightning. And this, please remember, at the dead of night on some isolated mountain.

But there were two other visually striking features to our Lord's transfiguration. For, as we read just now, there was not only of His countenance ... not only His clothes ... but there were His companions and there was the cloud.

I say 'visually striking' because Luke tells us that 'Moses and Elijah ... appeared in glory', and Matthew describes the 'cloud' which 'overshadowed them' as 'bright'. And all this, please, at the dead of night! Small wonder therefore Luke informs us that the disciples 'were afraid as they entered the cloud'.<sup>7</sup>

But we know that the bright cloud held no terror for *the Lord Jesus* Himself – it was the visible symbol of His Father's presence. Truly, heaven bent low that night, and so, when coming down from the mountain, the Lord Jesus, in effect, turned His back for a second time on heaven's glory.

But the time would come when that cloud would return for Him ... when, as we read in Acts 1, 'a cloud received Him out of their sight'. But in the interval He must go to His cross – to the death about which Luke tells us Moses and Elijah had been speaking with the Saviour on the mountain.

And, as we think back to our second reading this morning, what stark contrasts Matthew paints for us then :

For then, His countenance, which on the Mount shone as the sun, would be marred – as men spat in His face, struck Him with their clenched fists and slapped Him – when the One now *transfigured* would be *disfigured*!

Then, His clothing, which on the Mount was radiant and resplendent with His glory, would be stripped from Him to provide the spoil for His execution squad – when, as we read, ‘they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots’.

Then, His companions, who, on the Mount, had been two men of immense moral and spiritual stature (Moses and Elijah), would be two malefactors – two robbers – who ‘were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left’.

Then, finally, the cloud – the bright cloud – which, on the Mount, enveloped Him during the night season would be replaced by a supernatural – an uncanny – darkness which enveloped Him through the early hours of the afternoon – when ‘from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land’. And the well-known and much-loved voice which spoke out of the cloud on the Mount ... ‘This is my beloved *Son*, in whom I am well pleased’ ... would then be silent – awfully silent – offering no answer to His agonising cry, ‘My God, why have you forsaken me?’

But, thinking of our short series of talks, if the swaddling bands spoke particularly of our Lord’s condescending grace, and if the garment with a distinctive hem spoke of His healing power, what can we say that His shining raiment tells us of Him? Surely, we can do no better than ask the only man who was both present at our Lord’s transfiguration and who wrote of it – the apostle Peter. ‘We’, he wrote, ‘were eyewitnesses of His majesty’ – His ‘magnificence’.<sup>8</sup> Thank you, Peter, ‘majesty’ will do fine.

And what a message our Lord’s shining garments have for us this morning – that the very same love which had once brought Him down from ‘the heights of heaven’ now brought Him down from ‘the mountain of majesty’, and led Him on from there to ‘the cross of Calvary’ – and all because He wanted each one of us, through faith in Him, to be saved and to spend eternity in His presence.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 17. 1-8.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 27. 35-46.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 9. 28 with Luke 21. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 9. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 9. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 9. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 9. 34.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Pet. 1. 16.