

# The Transfiguration of Our Lord

**LOOK, MOMMY, A BUTTERFLY!**

**Mark 9:2-9**

## **The Transfiguration of Our Lord Analysis by Ron Starenko**

2Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 6He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" 8Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

9As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

*Author's Note: Children—and adults, too—are fascinated with butterflies, which, by the way, portray in their life cycle not only a miraculous biological phenomenon, but also a theological one as well, a transformation analogous to the teaching of Eastern Orthodoxy and the justification-by-faith theology of Martin Luther (something I learned from Jaroslav Pelikan, one of my seminary teachers).*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: The Climb: Our Rise and Fall “up a high mountain” (vv. 2 and. 6)**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Heading for the Top***

Prior to the success of Apollo in the mid-sixties, Frank Sinatra had a romantic hit song called, “Fly Me to the Moon,” which includes the line, “you are all I long for, all I worship and adore,” a metaphor for whatever gives us a high, like having lots of money, a bigger house, a shiny new car, the latest clothes, inhaling the sweet smell of success. The sky’s the limit here, as we push forward and upward, punishing ourselves and others, against the opposition, even if it kills us. Peter, James, and John loved the feel of being on a mountain top, in the company of Jesus, no less, an experience worth capturing in a frame or a bottle, the ultimate high. Who doesn’t want to have a view from the top? There’s got to be more to life than living every day with the ordinary and the mundane.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Finding Nothing There (v. 8)***

Peter, James, and John were on cloud nine, “shooting the breeze” with the likes of Moses and Elijah, if only for a moment, trying to enshrine the experience. In the blink of an eye, however, the magic was gone, as they, looking around, “saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus,” which seemed to them like a disappointment in their fleeting ecstasy. Not an uncommon experience for any of us too, to be sure, as we find all kinds of ways to set ourselves up for disillusionment, following our heart’s desire, yet never finding enough. How painful is that, to discover that we are not kings or lords or stars or beautiful butterflies! Having bitten on Satan’s false promises, are we not more like scrubby worms, climbing and believing that this is

“really living?” Duped as we are, we are heading instead for a fatal crash, something we did not expect.

**Step3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *Falling to the Bottom “down the mountain” (v. 9)*

Clearly, climbing is the wrong way to get high! Not only do our dreams get shattered which is painful enough, we get crushed in the fall. Sometimes climbing is really falling, like the confused pilot who doesn’t trust his altimeter and goes into a fatal dive when he believes he is climbing. Likewise, how tragic that we spend our time and energy and life to get to the top, only to plunge to the bottom. Our first parents succumbed to the folly, falling when they thought they were climbing, not heeding the One who had said, “...in the day that you sin you will surely die.” The Lord God was speaking not about expiring, which would be bad enough, but rather what would be far worse, theologically speaking, falling into the bottomless pit, to end up without God, a verdict that fills us with hellish fear, having no way out, where the “worm never dies.”

## **PROGNOSIS: The Cocoon (v. 9)**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *Going Down and Then Up*

God’s Butterfly to the rescue! If climbing leads to falling, then, to good-news-speaking, it would take another kind of fall to set the stage for a rising: first a death, then a resurrection. A child asks her mother, “Where do butterflies come from?” The mother replies, “A caterpillar, a fuzzy-like worm with lots of legs, knows that to become a butterfly it must first make an amazing change, weaving a cocoon around itself and die, then breaking out of the cocoon as a new creature, a colorful butterfly, alive and free. Just like Jesus, who comes from God, who is God, who comes down to us, becomes one of us worms, as though he were the only worm that deserved to die,

falls down to the bottom, into the depths of hell, squashed, to save us. Not a pretty sight. But wait! There is beauty in it all! Death and the grave could not hold Jesus. On Easter he would burst out of his cocoon as a butterfly, so that all worms could become butterflies, as alive and free and beautiful as he is. Look how far he goes, down to where we live and die, in order to change us into who he is, to become like God! Wow!

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *Seeing the New*  
The sight of it all is so powerful that it transforms us. It is called faith, a new way of seeing and believing and being. What an incredible transformation we receive by our faith, that, contrary to what seems otherwise, what doesn't even seem possible, what we could never deserve, much less accomplish by ourselves, is nevertheless a reality, how dying worms like us could become living butterflies like Jesus! Even when we struggle with our doubts, as the disciples did when their hopes were dashed, Jesus sent to them the Holy Spirit, as he today sends the same to us: to restore our sight, to see the whole of life through the eyes of a butterfly. Look, Mommy, a butterfly!

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Taking Flight, Blessed with Vision and Mobility (v. 9)*

Now, there's no more holding back. Since Jesus has come down the mountain, having descended to the bottom, to hell, having endured the cross for our sakes and the whole creation, he is now in endless flight to bless the universe. For that, he has chosen us no less, his offspring, to enter the world as butterflies, to flower the world wherever we go. Transfigured, we take our flight as his instruments of love and hope, reaching out to friends and neighbors who are dealing with disillusionment and despair, befriending the lonely and the forgotten, the injured and the weak, feeding the homeless and the hungry, supporting every effort to save the planet, thanking the Creator, blessing the creation, blessing humanity. That's

what beautiful butterflies get to do! Look, Mommy!