

## **“Enter Jesus” – II Kings 2:1-12**

*The Transfiguration of our Lord – February 19, 2012*

**Pastor Chip Winter**

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon on this Sunday of the Transfiguration of our Lord is the Old Testament Lesson appointed, from II Kings, chapter two.

My dear family in Christ, in William Shakespeare’s play, As You Like It, act II scene 7, we hear **“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts...”**

But the one player featured in our Old Testament lesson made his exit and then waited: waiting for his entrance while in fact many acts came and went. Elijah’s exit in our text had cues galore, with poor Elisha harangued by them. The sons of the prophets in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, **“Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?”** **“Yes, I know it; keep quiet.”** The sons of the prophets in Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, **“Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?”** **“Yes, I know it; keep it to yourself.”** Elisha knew all too well that his master and mentor, the prophet Elijah, must be taken from him, but he was in no mood to hear it.

Surprising to us as all this heralding, the prophesying would be in its accuracy, the nature of Elijah’s departure is even more remarkable. Perhaps only one man had previously left the world’s stage in a similar way before Elijah, and only one since Elijah. Back in history, actually before history as we know it, there was a man named Enoch. Of each of Enoch’s ancestors the book of

Genesis says their days were so many years and then they died. But of Enoch it says, instead, **“Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him”** (Genesis 5:24). All the others died; that was the nature of their exit from life’s stage. That is likely to be our exit, too, if this play still runs at the end of our days.

But Elijah took his bow in a different way. As he and Elisha **“still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. The Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it and he cried, ‘My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!’ and he saw him no more.”** (11-12a).

Elijah did not die. Nor was his part on this stage yet finished. So, while he was waiting in the wings, dozens of generations performed their parts: the monarchy of Israel rose and fell, the kingdom divided and the people were scattered, Assyrians and Babylonians came and went, Greece encroached, Rom overcame, and one prophet after another (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, et al) took center stage to deliver the lines prepared for them. Yet through it all, Elijah was not forgotten. With his leaving recorded early in 2 Kings, still, even in Malachi, the last book of the OT canon, in the last chapter, the second last verse, we find this reminder **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes”** (Mal. 4:5).

There follows such commotion on the stage that we cannot see the play’s plot advancing. The playwright’s words are not heard. The director’s hand is obscure. That is, until way backstage a player takes his place. He enters in the ordinary way, born of a woman. This woman was uncommonly old when she bore him. And even before his birth, he made his first contribution. For while he was still growing in his mother’s womb, he suddenly perceived that the coming of the great Day of the Lord was very near, as near as his mother was to her cousin. And he leaped for joy. Later, he was driven to speak the divine lines which spoke of repentance and the kingdom of

God. Later still, it happened again: that same presence that had made him leap in the womb was passing near him and he called out, **“The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** (John 1:29). He dressed for his part in camel’s hair and leather belt, the unmistakable costume of Elijah. The people asked, “Are you Elijah?” He said no and continued to speak as only a prophet can, and to take his exit as prophets tend to do – prematurely and by violent hands.

And here we must be clear. What that sensitive soul felt from his mother’s womb, what he shouted about the nearby Lamb of God, what everything he ever said and did was preparing was this: the author, Himself, was taking the stage. From the beginning, the production had been ruined by the scandalous improvisations of every actor, their senseless and arrogant departures from the directions in the script. What was so beautifully conceived and written was unfolding as a shambles at the hands of its incompetent performers. **“Get this sorted!”** was the forerunner’s message. **“Straighten it out, because the One who is the Author of life is visiting!”**

Enter the Author of Life, Who played His part with such conviction that He did not simply take the role of a fellow player; He emptied Himself to become one. This He did in every particular, except that He did not share their aberrant disregard of the direction scripted for the entire cast. Now He knows the plot better than any, He who responded at length to the one who came before Him, the one who leaped for joy to feel his presence, who declared Him to be the Lamb of God, who prepared His way and died at the hand of a weak and incontinent wretch taking the part of a king. That one who came before, whom we know as John the Baptist, **“That one,”** said the Author of life, **“if you are prepared to accept it, that one is Elijah who is to come.”** It’s not so much the Elijah called in from the wings of the stage, to reprise his act. No, that will wait for a few more months. But this one’s role was clear: he came to cue the final act and to announce the arrival of the King and Lord and Savior in the costume of humanity and humility.

And finally, the wait was over. On a mountain we find Simon Peter, James, John and Jesus. Enter Moses – the Lawgiver of old, who led his people from slavery as guide and mediator with God. Enter Elijah: at last comes the prophet of old, the one who will be sent before the final act. And now Jesus is seen for Who He is, seen without the costume of his humility, outshining the sun, overshadowed by the cloud of the divine presence and the voice of His Father saying **“This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.”**

And then, the most important thing of all: **“And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.”** (Mk 9:8). IF the entrance of Moses and Elijah were important, their exit symbolized even more. For their departure means that Law is over and prophesying is past, and truly God is doing a new thing. These were only temporary. **“As for prophecies,”** said St. Paul, **“They will pass away”** (1 Cor. 13:8), and with Elijah we see their passing. As for the Law, **“the law,”** he says, **“was our guardian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith”** (Galatians 3:24). The Law was never going to be the decisive thing on this great stage. So the guardian went, and with Moses we see its passing. Neither the prophetic words of the script, nor the directions of the Law instructing our performance, are the decisive twist in the plot. But the new thing is announced on the mountain of the transfiguration. As Law and prophet depart, **“This is my beloved Son.”**

And from there, the beloved Son, the Author of Life, engaged in the great scene, as it happens, enacted on the hill called the Place of the Skull, where he took his exit in grotesque suffering and abject humiliation, made infinitely more bitter because he carried no deficiency in His own performance, but shouldered that of every other twisted soul, right down to mine.

But the transfiguration hinted at something more. There we saw Jesus in His glory – at least Peter, James and John did, just for a moment. But it was a glimpse of what was to come. I

mentioned earlier that we know only of the enigmatic character of Enoch' leaving the world apparently without death before Elijah, but that there was one after Elijah. Elijah waited for centuries before he was called back on Stage; Jesus, only days. And before long, Peter, James and John saw Him again, having been killed in agony and shame, rising in triumph and in glory. And so He remains, never to die again, and although He had to leave this stage again, as did Elijah, ascending to His Father, He will return for us.

So if it is that **“all the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players,”** as we have made our entrance on the same stage after all these things, what is our part, what are our roles? Our role, our purpose, is this: **“He has made known to us the mystery of His will according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.”** (Eph 1:9-10). Jesus’ entrance brings onstage all that the Law and the prophets anticipated. And when our roles are complete, having witnessed to His mercy and worked for His righteousness on the earth, there will be a place for us in His continued purpose and will. It will not be like Elijah, to walk again on this plane and in this life, but to live for the praise of His glory, where He is, forever. Amen.