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“Veiled in Flesh”

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Transfiguration of the Lord (Year C)

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Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36

Veiled in flesh...

We've heard that phrase before, haven't we? Isn't it part of a hymn?

Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord!

Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of a Virgin's womb.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity,

Pleased in flesh with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.

Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Yes, that's it: *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*. I knew it sounded familiar.

Isn't it nice that we sing our theology!

Veiled in flesh...

For Christmas, my husband and I gave each other those DNA tests,

the ones from National Geographic called *GENO 2.0: Next Generation*.

Your story. Our story. The human story.

It claims that with a simple and painless cheek swab,

one can submit a sample of DNA to their lab and discover

the fundamental mystery of one's particular ancestors.

What did Hedge and I want to know?

We're both from North Carolina, but we have very little knowledge of where our people came from before that.

Hedge is from Robeson County in eastern North Carolina.

His name sounds English, but is it? We wanted to know.

My people are from what used to be the super-county known as Rowan.

My names sound English and German.

What truth lies beyond that, we wanted to know? What's in a name?

What true identity does a name belie?

Do we have Jewish ancestors who their changed names for protection?

Do we have African American strains in our DNA that has been denied?

Do we have Cherokee blood in our veins?

I know that I had a great-great grandfather who followed the Cherokee Trail of Tears down to Oklahoma and fathered another family there in addition to the one he already had in North Carolina.

I know because I have met them.

Tinker, tailor, soldier, spy, slave, sharecropper, lint-head, worm-farmer:

just how pure is our blood and do we need to write

a revision of our family history?

We wanted to know what is *veiled in our flesh* and what it reveals about our true identity for our children to know more accurately who they are.

What is the true identity of Jesus?

What is veiled in his flesh, I'm sure the disciples are wondering?

The twelve who have traveled so closely with Jesus day by day

have seen him heal the sick, make the dead alive,

exorcise evil spirits, feed the masses, thwart the stormy tempest.

"Who is this, that even the wind and waves obey him?" the disciples whisper among themselves.

Small town boy, carpenter's son, John's cousin, dove magnet, spirit bearer, healer,
miracle worker, truth teller, rabbi, prophet, priest, or king?

Is he God's anointed, the One for whom the people have waited in darkness?

"Yes, you are The Christ," Peter shouts impetuously, when hard pressed
by Jesus to share his thoughts.

But could he prove it? Was there a DNA test that would have revealed the
true lineage of Jesus as God's son?

What is his Geno 2.0: his story, our story, the human story?

What is the fundamental mystery veiled in his flesh?

And so up the mountain they go, the One and the favored three,

Jesus, Peter, James, and John, retreating to a remote place for prayer.

And there, Jesus' true identity is revealed to them *while they are in prayer*.

Please take note that revelation is a byproduct of prayer!

❖ His dazzling whiteness: not of white privilege, as some might claim,
but rather whiteness as the combination of all colors of the spectrum,
revealing that Jesus is human, yet neither red nor yellow, black nor white;
rather, the sum of all the world's racial and ethnic diversity.

This hopefully will be encoded into the genome of the body of Christ, the church,
in the new world order, when they come off the mountain:

full-spectrum prism lightness.

❖ Jesus' repartee with Moses and Elijah, the prophetic elite,
whose closeness with God is legendary, whose lives and faces
also reflected God's glory.

The story that began in the exodus with Moses

and was projected towards the end of time with Elijah

now comes to fruition in Jesus, as he will set his face towards Jerusalem.

The story of the prophets is our story, the human story,

the story of God's redemptive love for God's beloved world.

Love wins, *that* is what is veiled in the flesh of Jesus.

Love wins, even when slavery seems to imprison and oppress.

Love wins, even when exile and poverty wrest people from their homes.

Love wins, even when the food runs short.

Love wins, even when illness seizes and possesses our spirit.

Love wins, even when persecution punishes those of differing sexual orientations
and gender identities.

Love wins, even when the light of our mental health flickers,

even when our brightness feels as if it were hidden under a basket.

The prophet's story, the human story, our story is that, in the end,

God's redemptive love, veiled in the flesh of Jesus, wins.

This, too, will be encoded into the genome of the body of Christ, the church,
in the new world order, when they come off the mountain: love wins.

❖ The cloud that overshadows Jesus overshadows his disciples, too.

The voice that speaks to Jesus from the cloud is heard by his disciples, too.

The cloud that overshadows Jesus on the mountaintop is linked to the

overshadowing presence of the Holy Spirit at the annunciation to Mary,

which is called by the Angel Gabriel, "the power of the Most High."

This same Greek verb, *episkiazō* (ἐπισκιάζω), to overshadow, marks both episodes
as signs of the Holy Spirit, empowerment from the Most High.

And the voice confirms the true identity of Jesus as God's Son and Chosen One:

the identity conferred at Jesus' baptism, the identity veiled in his flesh,
revealed only to those with hearts of faith.

Listen to him, the voice implores. To be empowered by the Most High,
listen to the beloved Son.

This, lastly, will be imprinted into the genome of the body of Christ, the church,
in the new world order, when they come off the mountain:

empowerment will come through faithful listening to Jesus.

Hedge and I haven't received the results of our DNA tests yet.

But I mention them because even though they may reveal a great deal about us,
previously unknown, hidden influences veiled in our flesh,
we don't expect them to reveal everything about us.

They may tell the physical story of our people, of our human story:
our skin color, hair color, eye color, height and build.

They may tell the geographic story of our people, of our human story
as we have migrated from place to place, and been influence
by nature, nurture and culture.

But these cheek swabs cannot begin to tell the faith story, the faith element,
that is veiled in our flesh.

That factor is not encoded in our DNA, it is not twisted into our double helix,
and yet I think it is at the heart of who we are.

Our faith is the part of our inner essence that we have embraced with all of heart,
soul, mind and strength.

It is the core of our being that we have impressed on our children,
talked about at home, and when we have traveled along the road,
and when we have lain down at night, and when we have risen up to meet the dawn.

This is what has given us strength, courage, motivation, endurance, and purpose.

Our faith story is the fundamental mystery of our particular ancestors.

It is the real element that is veiled in our flesh.

And the true identity of our church?

As we prepare, enthusiastically, to welcome a new Head of Staff,

what can we tell him or her about the true identity of First Presbyterian Church?

Is it about the size of our membership? Is it about average worship attendance?

Is it about the age of our sanctuary? The beauty of our music?

Is it about amount of our budget? Is it about the strength of our programs?

Or is it about the hidden qualities of faith, veiled in our collective flesh,

encoded into the genome of our worshipping community from generation

to generation through Jesus Christ, God's son and Chosen One?
Do we reflect full spectrum prism lightness in our membership?
Do we orient our lives towards love winning?
Are we a listening community, a prayerful community,
empowered by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus up to the mountain top
and then back down into the valleys?
That, to me, is my story, our story, the fundamental mystery of our being church
on the corner of Roxboro and Main since 1871,
downtown by history and by choice.
Glory be to God, and to the Beloved Son, the Chosen One,
and to the empowering Holy Spirit. Amen.