In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

But when one turns to the lord, the veil is removed. Now the lord is the spirit, and where the spirit of the lord is, there is freedom. And all of us with unveiled faces, see the glory of the lord as though reflected in a mirror, and are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the lord, the spirit. (II Corinthians 3:16-18)

You will have noticed that the Old Testament lesson and the Gospel for Transfiguration Sunday reveal glimpses of the majestic glory of God, glory that appeared centuries apart. There is a profound difference between these revelations. In the first the people of Israel were frightened to death, and the glory mirrored in the face of Moses had to be veiled. In the second revelation the followers of Christ look upon that glory with great awe and fear but without the terror of death.

In the Gospel our Divine Lord invites us to join Him, Peter, James and John in climbing the Mount of Transfiguration. There is reason for this visit to the mountain top for He is about to begin His passion and sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world. Lent and Holy Week show us our Lord’s state of humiliation in the most vivid and moving manner. As we join Him on His journey to the cross of sacrifice it is essential that we bear in our hearts the image of His glorious exaltation as He joined the Father and the Holy Spirit on the Holy Mountain, the traditional place of divine epiphanies.

As is his custom, St. Mark describes the transfiguration with restrained brevity. On the mountaintop Christ was transfigured before the three disciples. His clothes became dazzlingly white. Elijah and Moses appeared and spoke with Him. Peter declared that it was good for them to be there and he thought it would be well to erect three tabernacles in honor of Moses, Elijah and the Lord Jesus. As usual he had no notion of what he was saying. The cloud of the divine presence overshadowed them, and a voice spoke from the
cloud and identified Jesus as God’s beloved Son, to whom the disciples were to listen. The cloud vanished and Jesus remained alone. The transfiguration party descended back to the valley. But what does the historic transfiguration mean for us today?

St. Paul answers this question, and in II Corinthians he reminds us of the reason for the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament visions of divine glory. The Children of Israel beheld the glory of the Lord God of Israel, but they saw it from the point of view of the Law of Moses. As always, the Law condemned them and reminded them that they had sinned mightily against the will of God, and had often done so without the slightest degree of lasting remorse. They were not free to see even the mirrored image of God’s glory! They felt what the prophet would make clear that no one can look upon the face of God and live. The Christians of Corinth saw the glory of the transfiguration from the point of view of the Gospel. Because Christ had redeemed them and they had been forgiven, the splendor and glory of the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus had a new and different significance for His followers.

St. Paul wrote about his understanding of Christ’s transfiguration well after the miraculous, historic event described by St. Mark. He had had time to meditate and consider the timeless meaning of the transfiguration for the Christians of first-century Corinth and for twenty-first century Manhattan Christians. He makes a point that is of infinite importance for our faith and sanctification. The transfiguration is an historic event that keeps happening over and over again in the lives of the followers of our Divine Lord. Listen again to his inspired words: 

"(We) are being transformed into the same image from one glory to another"

When we were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the light of transfiguration began to shine in us. Through the Sacrament we were reborn, and became the Children of the Heavenly Father and joint heirs with His Son, our Divine Lord Jesus Christ. That is glory indeed! But glory does not end with the moment of our Baptism. It is then that we begin in earnest the transfiguration into the image of the glorified Christ, and by the grace of God move from one glory to another. That is the promise that the inspired Apostle received from the Holy Spirit and handed down to us. St. John takes us still further and reminds us that at the end of this age we shall be as He is!

The question that confronts us on this holy day celebrating the foundation of Immanuel Church is, “Do you come Sunday after Sunday expecting a miracle to take place in your life?” Or do you imagine that your will leave the service
in roughly the same spiritual condition in which you arrived? If we do not anticipate a miracle happening it is not likely that it will! Consider well our Sunday worship experience! In keeping with His promise, God is lovingly present. Holy absolution is pronounced in the name of the Blessed Trinity! The redeeming and sanctifying Word of God is read and proclaimed with great reverence. We join in confessing our holy catholic faith. The Blessed Sacrament is celebrated, and we eat and drink the life-giving Body and Blood of our Divine Lord. Hymns and anthems of faith and praise are sung. This is the stuff of which miracles are made! But how well do we make use of this stuff?

Let there be no mistake, the kind of worship that transfigures our lives is hard work! It requires us to focus on what we are doing. It requires us to welcome the Holy Spirit into our hearts and to banish from them any and every thought or concern that would interfere with the work of the Holy Spirit. In short it requires us to believe that miracles do happen, happen also to us. Finally, it requires us allow the Holy Spirit to have His way with us and through Him experience the transforming power that enables us to move from glory unto glory until at the last day we reach the perfect image of Christ.

This worship does not end with the close of our holy day services. It continues as we move out into the world and make use of prayer and praise and meditation. We come together on holy days to welcome anew the presence of God through our corporate worship. We leave together with the determination to practice the presence of God in our daily lives. It is when we faithfully invoke the presence of God in our daily activities and experiences that we begin more and more to be transfigured and become the image of Christ in this world. The less of self that appears in our daily life and the more of Christ that appears in it, the more we become what the Blessed Trinity would have us be. Paradoxically, when we become more like Christ we do not lose our personalities. No! Our personalities remain, but they are sanctified.

Please do not imagine that such miraculous changes took place only in the apostolic age! They will keep happening as long as believers join the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification and transfiguration. On this holy day prepare for a miracle in your life. Let the Holy Spirit bless you with transfiguration light and holiness! That will indeed be a miracle that will change your life.

The Pastor and lay founders of Immanuel Church understood very well the way in which God works to enlarge His Holy Catholic Church. The name they chose reveals their faith in God who is always present with His people. The
date chosen for the official founding of the congregation reveals their faith in God’s desire that His people make use of Word and Sacrament to grow in faith and holiness and to move from one glory unto another. We are well into the second century of our history, and by the grace of God we are one in faith and purpose with our founding fathers. May this continue to remain so, and may we with the help of God move from glory to glory until we stand before our Divine Lord on the day of His second coming. Amen!