

The LORD Himself Comes Down
Exodus 3:1-15

March 23, 2025 (Lent 3-C)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.... So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation." (Ex. 3:1-15, NIV84)

In the name of the LORD, the only true God, dear friends in Christ:

"I'm all washed up," Moses might have been thinking to himself. The 80-year-old shepherd had taken his father-in-law's flock beyond the desert to a distant mountain range. His life had once held such promise. At a time when Israelite male baby boys were ordered by the cruel Egyptian king to be killed, baby Moses was placed in a basket on the Nile River, spotted and rescued by Pharaoh's own daughter, raised by her, and given such privileges. But at the age of 40, Moses thought he could play the hero, killing an Egyptian slave master who was tormenting one of his fellow Israelites. When it was found out, Moses fled into self-imposed exile to the land of Midian. For forty years he had been cut off from his people, a nobody in the middle of nowhere.

Then out of the blue, Moses saw an unexpected sight, received an unexpected visitor, and heard from him an unexpected message. The LORD himself had come down from heaven! Let us learn from this amazing incident how, and why, **The LORD Himself Comes Down**—and still for us today.

The "angel of the LORD appeared to [Moses] in flames of fire from within a bush." Even more unusual, the thorn-bush, though burning and burning, didn't get consumed by the fire. In such a glorious way the LORD himself came down, with a glowing fire that normally would destroy, but didn't.

When Moses tried approaching the bush, the LORD called out to him, “Stop! Don’t come any closer! Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” And he identified himself as “the God of your father, the God of Abraham,” Isaac, and Jacob, the great patriarchs of the Israelite nation. No wonder Moses hid his face when he heard that this was none other than the God of their nation appearing to him, for Moses knew he was a sinner, and he was in the presence of the holy God!

Kids who are playing outside are told by Mom, “Take your shoes off when you come inside! I don’t want you tracking mud into the house, I just cleaned the floors!” When we’re in the LORD’s presence, we too need to take off the dirt—to take off sin, and hide our faces. For we are sinful, and the LORD our God is holy. That is why, on entering church, we pray, confessing our sins, and admitting that we deserve God’s anger and punishment for our sins.

But then the good news. The LORD has not come down to condemn sinners, but to save them.

This was why the LORD had come to Moses. For generations the Israelites had been suffering under the Egyptians’ cruelty and slavery. The LORD God saw their misery. He heard their cries. He was filled with concern. And so the LORD came down, determined to rescue these Israelites from their slavery and cruel bondage. He had remembered his promise to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and now he was going to fulfill that promise, to “bring them up out of [Egypt] into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

The book of Exodus relates how the LORD carried out that deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt and guided them on the way to the Promised Land. But that was eclipsed by an even greater rescue that happened over 1400 years after Moses. In the town of Bethlehem, the angel announced to shepherds, “A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord!” (Luke 2:11). Thirty-three years later, Jesus staggered up the hill called Calvary, a condemned man, crucified and put to death. But on the third day he was declared with power to be the LORD, the Son of God, when he rose from the dead. Jesus proved that he was the LORD who had come to deliver the world from sin and death.

You and I need to remember that we were once held in bondage by Satan, and enslaved to sin. Jesus himself put it: “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). Jesus has delivered us from our cruel slave master, Satan; he has broken the chains that held us enslaved to sin, death and hell; Jesus has given us freedom! By his gospel message our Lord is now bringing us to a special land, heaven, a place of everlasting joy. We are free, free indeed!

Yet in our text the LORD did not come down to announce this deliverance to the whole nation. He came to just one person, Moses. He informed Moses, “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

You can imagine how overwhelmed Moses felt to hear that. His first reaction: “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” But the LORD assured him: “I will be with you.” It wouldn’t be by Moses’ persuasiveness, but by the LORD’s power, that the Israelites would get rescued.

Then Moses’ second objection: “But what will I say, if the Israelites ask me, ‘What is his name?’” God answered, “I AM WHO I AM.” Just tell them that, “I AM has sent me to you.” The name LORD (all capital letters) is derived from that phrase I AM. It tells us that the LORD is a personal being (“I”) and one who is unchanging (“AM”). He is the transcendent God, the LORD, “the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”

Down to our generation! It is by that name LORD that we know that our God is present among us, our Lord Jesus is with us today. That same LORD who sent Moses is sending you, to share this name with your family, your friends, a co-worker. “Who am I?” you may think, “I’m just a sinner.” But the Lord has forgiven you in Christ, and he is sending you. And you know what to say. Just share his name: Jesus is the name, meaning, “The LORD saves.” The LORD himself came down to save everyone, and he now comes down to save even you and me. Amen.