

**"Moses, Shepherd on the Mountain"**  
**Exodus 3:1-6**

24 December Anno Domini 2001  
Festival of the Nativity of Our Lord -- Christmas Eve  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Emmett, Idaho  
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Dear Baptized,

Certainly characteristic of a beloved shepherd is that of looking at the big picture, as well as noticing the smallest detail ... of watching over the entire flock entrusted to his care, as well as noticing the slightest movement in the surrounding area ... of tending to the many within, as well as being attentive to what might be termed, out of the ordinary without.

On this blessed evening, behold such a shepherd who cares for a flock entrusted to him by another. This man keeps at his call, watching over the flock by night and leading the lambs by day. He is in the hill country and he ascends a little in order to oversee the entire assembly of those who follow him. As he walks, with shepherd's staff in hand, his keen eyes notice something to one side ... it is a fire. Now, a fire is not strange in itself. However, this fire is not "in itself." Behold, it is much more than a fire. The shepherd is curious and resolves to go over and see this thing that has happened which has been made known to him. Please listen to Exodus 3:1-6 as we hear of ...

... "Moses, Shepherd on the Mountain."

"Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, 'I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.' When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here am I.' Then he said, 'Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' And He said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

This is one of the most wonderful and awe-full accounts revealed to mankind in the all of the Holy Scriptures. Moses, the shepherd on the mountain, sees a bush that is burning and yet is not consumed. At first, he doesn't know that it is the Angel of the LORD appearing to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush ... that this is the Word of God manifesting Himself in the unburnt branches of a shrub ... that this is a revelation of the Christ. So, Jethro's son-in-law resolves to turn aside to get a closer look. The LORD, seeing that Moses was approaching, interceded on the

shepherd's behalf. God, in loving mercy, called to the man out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!"

Moses, Shepherd on the Mountain, replies "Here am I." God reveals Himself and His will through His Word, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Notice that the LORD does not want to keep Moses away from His Presence; but rather, God does want him to approach and be in His Presence. However, there are certain preparations before entering this Christ Mass. The dirt of the world must be left behind; the filth clinging to the man-made soles of the shoes must be left at outside the holy place. Then behold sinful man standing in the Presence of the Almighty LORD God.

How can this be? Certainly not because of who Moses was or man is, but only because of who this particular God is and the grace He benevolently bestows. "Moses, 'I am the God of your father.'" Or perhaps, in other words, "Moses, out of the many so-called gods you have encountered during the first forty years of your life in Egypt and during the second forty years of your life in these wanderings, know this: 'I am the God of your father.'" "Moses, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'"

Indeed, this is the LORD, the God of Abraham the father, the God of Isaac the son, and the God of Jacob the creating spirit of the children of Israel, which is the Church of the living, that is, of those who are of the Resurrection. Or "have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.' And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at His [Jesus'] teaching" (Matthew 22:31-33).

Even so, as we return to Horeb, the mountain of God, "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." Even as Moses concealed his face lest he look upon God, still his ears were able to hear the Word. Thus, revealed to Moses, Shepherd on the Mountain, was the Good News that the LORD is come down to deliver a people who are in bondage to man's tyranny and under the heavy yoke of Pharaoh's burden. This would be a physical delivery via judgment ... where one people were drowned in the depths of the Red Sea even as another people were physically delivered through a baptism into Moses in the same water (1 Cor. 10:2).

Here on Horeb, the mountain of God, the LORD called Moses to be the shepherd who would lead the congregation of Israel out of Egypt ... to be the leader of a chosen people from whom the Messiah would come ... from whom the Christ would be born. While being about his vocation as a shepherd of sheep, Moses was called to be a shepherd of God's people. All this took place when the LORD God Almighty manifested Himself to Moses at the holy ground where the bush was burning and was not consumed ... where the Infinite was contained and revealed in, with, under and from the finite ... where the One Whom creation could not contain was locally present in a mountain shrub. It is no wonder that "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God."

Thus far the physical deliverance of a people from whom the Seed of the woman would come to be the Redeemer. What of the Advent of the Christ Who would come for the purpose of being the Savior? "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known" (John 1:17-18). So, what in the world would such a manifestation of God be like?

Behold those shepherds on their way to Bethlehem. They are doing what Moses, Shepherd on the Mountain, did. "Moses said, 'I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.'"

The Bethlehem shepherds, after hearing the "Good News of a great joy" of the Savior's Birth, "said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the LORD has made known to us'" (Luke 2:15).

What did they behold when they found the Incarnate "I AM" ? Not a burning bush from which the LORD spoke and Moses hid his face. No, not a fire, nor an earthquake, nor a wind. Rather, it was a baby with a still, small voice for the shepherds had left their flocks and they "went with hast, and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger" (Luke 2:16). Wrapped in swaddling clothes is Jesus, the firstborn son of the Mary, and the Christ, the Son of God - and these are not two, but One. Lying in a manger is Jesus, begotten of His Father from eternity, and born of the Virgin - and these are not two, but One.

The shepherds have entered this exodus tabernacle in the little town of Bethlehem and are standing on holy ground ... holy only because they are in the Presence of the LORD God Almighty. These sinful shepherds, along with sinful Mary and sinful Joseph, are permitted to be in the Presence of the LORD of Hosts. But such entry into the Sanctuary of God is not because these people have ascended on high, or have come to God; but rather, this little congregation is gathered in the Presence of the Almighty and is not consumed in holy wrath because the great Jehovah has descended and come to them in the tiny Body and the holy Blood of His Son. "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (John 3:17) and therefore, in the fullness of time, "God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4).

For us men and for our salvation was Jesus born and did Jesus live and did the Christ die and did He rise again. How would this be accomplished? Instead of you and me and the world, it would be Jesus substituting Himself and suffering in our place. It would be the Christ Who would be pinned in the breach under the wrath of God and the claims of Satan ... Who would atone for the sins of all people ... Who would die to destroy death, defeat the devil and proclaim forgiveness for all and an accomplished salvation? What in the world would such a manifestation of God be like?

Look at the cross and behold that crude bush planted on Mount Calvary. The great "I AM" - that is, Jehovah Incarnate ... that is, Emmanuel - hangs upon that spindly, mountain bush. Though the LORD God Almighty is surely the single Fruit hanging on that elect shrub planted by the sons men and watered by the Blood of the Son of God. Behold the Creator gives His Life as over completely as the created cross is not consumed and the Word heard from the Savior are ones of grace, mercy and peace. Here is Jesus, the solitary festoon dangling from and draping across the two limbs of Golgotha's Christ Mass tree. Truly Jesus is One from Whom men hid their faces, but for a different reason than Moses hid his face.

The burning bush on Horeb, the Mountain of God, and the manger in Bethlehem are not so far apart as one might think at first. Both demonstrate the mercy and the holiness of God, and both point to the cross where the wrath and the love of God intersect. The burning bush anticipates the Advent of the Deliverer. An artist named Froment\* has a work depicting the scene of the Burning Bush. Moses, Shepherd on the Mountain, is at the base of the bush and the sheep under his care rest under the branches of the bush. The Angel of the LORD is reading the Word to Moses, and there, nesting in the top of the burning bush is Mary and the Baby Jesus in her arms.

Because of God's merciful and gracious presence at the Burning Bush, Moses, Shepherd on the

Mountain, was permitted to be in that holy place and hear the LORD's design to deliver a people. Because of God's merciful and gracious presence in the Bethlehem's manger, the little congregation was permitted to be in that holy place and hear the called shepherds who "made known the saying which had been told them concerning this Child" (Luke 2:17).

This saying has been a part of the liberating dogma confessed "in the Household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the Truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the Mystery of our religion:

He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated in the Spirit,  
seen by angels,  
preached among the nations,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in Glory" (1 Timothy 3:15-16).

Because of God's merciful and gracious presence here, you and I are able to be in the holy place of the LORD and hear of His design to deliver a world and His desire for you to know that you are forgiven in the Name of the Father and the (+) Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.