

Christmas Day  
December 25, 2024  
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church  
Jesus Gives Himself as One of Us  
Exodus 33:18-23, 34:5-7 (EHV)

*Then Moses said, "Please show me your glory."*

*<sup>19</sup>The Lord said, "I will make all my goodness pass in front of you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord in your presence. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." <sup>20</sup>He said, "You cannot see my face, for no human may see me and live."*

*<sup>21</sup>The Lord also said, "Look, there is a place next to me, where you shall stand on the rock. <sup>22</sup>It will happen that, while my glory passes by, I will put you in a crevice in the rock. I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. <sup>23</sup>Then I will take away my hand, and you will see my back. But my face will not be seen."*

*<sup>34:4</sup>Moses cut out two stone tablets like the first ones. Moses got up early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and he carried the two stone tablets in his hand. <sup>5</sup>The Lord came down in the cloud. He took his stand there with Moses and proclaimed the name of the Lord. <sup>6</sup>The Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and overflowing with mercy and truth, <sup>7</sup>maintaining mercy for thousands, forgiving guilt and rebellion and sin. He will by no means clear the guilty. He calls their children and their children's children to account for the guilt of the fathers, even to the third and the fourth generation."*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Last night we heard about the glory of the Lord shining around the shepherds when an angel of the Lord appeared to them. The host of angels said, "Glory to God in the highest!" Christmas is the time to see the glory of God.

Some 1,500 years before the angels scared some shepherds near Bethlehem, Moses wanted to see the glory of God. If you think about it, Moses had already seen the glory of God in many ways, maybe more than anyone else would until the birth of Jesus. Moses was involved in the ten plagues that God used to free his people from Egypt. Moses held out his staff as God parted the waters of the Red Sea. All the people saw the glory of God in the cloud that kept the Egyptian soldiers from pursuing them. God's glory was evident when the manna appeared six days every week for food. His glory was shown when water came from a rock. Moses went up Mount Sinai where God kept him forty days to give him the holy law. When Moses came down from the glorious presence of God with the Commandments on tablets of stone, the people had made a golden calf and were worshipping the idol. He threw the tablets to the ground, breaking them.

After the Lord forgave his people, Moses would go back up the mountain to get the commandments from God again. This is where we are in the section of God's Word from Exodus today. Moses had seen God's glory in many ways, but he had never seen all of God's glory. So, he asked: *"Please show me your glory."*

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If the great prophet, Moses, was not allowed to see God's face, what chance do we have? No human may see the face of God and live. The full glory of God is too much for any sinner to handle. God is holy, completely set apart from sin. No sinner can look upon the glorious face of

the holy Lord God and be anything but afraid. For the wages of sin is death. And face to face with the Holy God, our sins would no longer fade into all the other sinners around us. The bright light of the glory of God would show every time we bowed down to the false gods of greed, pleasure and self. The glory of God would reveal every hidden thought of envy, hatred, and rebellion. Face to face with the God who will “by no means clear the guilty,” would terrify us because we have no excuse for our sins, no defense for our guilt. We deserve what our sins have earned – death. Do you want to see the glory of God, to actually see him face to face?

Well, Moses was a sinner too and he still wanted to see God’s glory. And the Holy Lord God, who cannot be seen face to face, graciously provides a way for Moses to see a bit of his glory.

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God made it possible for Moses to see his back. The Holy God protected Moses and revealed to Moses his true nature. Truly, God is holy and apart from sin. He will not leave the guilty unpunished. But he is at the very same time the compassionate God. He is gracious. The Lord is slow to anger. He is overflowing with mercy and truth. The glory of God is shown by forgiving guilt and rebellion and sin.

This is how God revealed himself to Moses and to his people throughout the Old Testament. This is also how God revealed himself through the coming of his one and only Son. John told us in the Christmas Gospel: “The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). God wanted us to see his glory too! Instead of hiding us in a crevice of a rock, God hid his glory in human flesh. The Son of God became flesh, becoming one of us.

What Moses could not do, Mary did as she looked at the beautiful face of Jesus when she held him close after he was born. What no human could do, Joseph did when he smiled at the face of Jesus when he helped Mary place him in the manger. The shepherds, who were so afraid when they saw the glory of the Lord shining around them that night, were no longer afraid when they looked at the face of the newborn Savior. All of these saw the face of God and lived. For God’s glory and holiness was hidden in the person of Jesus Christ. He is true God and yet true Man so that we humans can see him and live.

Surely the glory the Son of God had from eternity would show at times. He received the worship of the shepherds and later the wise men. He would heal the sick, calm storms and raise the dead. But his full glory was hidden so that the poor in spirit could look upon him, believe in him and live now and forever. His glory was hidden so that his enemies would not be literally scared to death at seeing him so that the plan of salvation could be accomplished. For God would not leave the guilty unpunished. The payment for sin would be made by the Word who became flesh and dwelled among us. The face of God would be spit upon, beaten and crowned with thorns to pay for sin. The face of God would be looked upon as he hung on the cross and mocked by many.

In the manger and on the cross, the face of God in Christ reveals the Lord God to us. Our God came to us since we could not go to him. Our God hid himself to live for us and die for us so that we can one day look upon his glorious face in heaven. Jesus is full of grace and truth. He is the

compassionate and gracious God. He is the Lord who forgives guilt, rebellion and sin.

Mary, Joseph and the others got to see the face of the newborn Savior with their own eyes. Unlike the pictures, there was no ring of glory around his face, no halo over his head. Thanks be to the Lord that he did not come in all of his glory for then no one could have seen his face. Instead, he showed his glory to us in the face of a human baby who grew up to take away the sin of the world by his life and death. This is the glory we can see in the Word of God today and every day. This is the glory of God that gives us hope of seeing him face to face forever.

A blessed and glorious Christmas to all!

Amen.