

**18 Then Moses said, “Now show me your glory.” 19 And the Lord said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 20 But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.” 21 Then the Lord said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. 22 When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”**

Merry Christmas! We're Going Home!

Christmas time is always neat to see family come home. When I was in Norton, KS it was the only time we ever had a full church, when all of the children came home to visit their parents. Sometimes they had to travel quite a ways. Some of our children come from Minnesota. We pray for them to arrive here safely and in one piece. It is a time of joy. Of course, that's why it can be a time of sadness too, when the home is now vacant or someone no longer can return because they've died or they just can't make it back. We associate Christmas with homecoming.

The Israelites wanted to go home - to the Promised Land of Israel - where their forefather Abraham had lived 400 years prior. They had been promised this land flowing with milk and honey. Now they found themselves in the Sinai desert after having escaped from slavery. Moses had been up on top of Mt. Sinai for forty days, and the Israelites decided to make a golden calf and worship it. The LORD was extremely angry with them. He at first threatened to wipe them out and start over with Moses. Even after He subsided from that threat, He still threatened not to go with them. He was only going to send an angel along with them.

So Moses stepped into a special tent, called the Tent of Meeting, where he could walk into the tent and the LORD would descend on it in a cloud and speak to Moses very personally in a one on one way. Moses did a wonderful job of pleading for the Israelites. He said,

**“If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”**

The LORD had been traveling with the Israelites through the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. He was the defining characteristic for the Israelites, letting the world know that the Israelites were God's special chosen people. If He didn't go with them through the desert, then the Israelites might as well give up.

We, too, need the LORD to go with us through this valley of tears. If God does not accompany us, we are susceptible to despair and darkness. Just as God provided light for the Israelites in the desert through the pillar of fire, so we need the light of God's love and protection to accompany us through

the darkness of sin and death. If we don't have the LORD to go with us, we are doomed to destruction and bound for hell.

When the Israelites were in danger of being abandoned in the desert, Moses stepped into the tent to talk with God. Moses is a type of Christ. He foreshadowed Jesus, who would be the go-between for us to God. God listened to Moses' prayers on behalf of the Israelites. God also listens to Jesus' prayers on behalf of us.

Even the tent of meeting was a foreshadowing of Jesus as well. Jesus was the tent, through which we can go and meet with God. John 1 literally says in vs. 14, "**The Word became flesh and tented among us.**" Christmas time is a time that we come and look at the tent of God, the way that God took on that flesh for us. It is in some ways similar to the Exodus. We are in a middle of a desert of sin. We have rebelled against God and deserve to be abandoned and to die. But God chose to come here through the virgin Mary and dwell among us. He came here to take us to the Promised Land of heaven. Without Jesus, we can't get there. This baby was born to take us home to heaven. He is our only hope of getting there. This is what we sing about.

O little town of Bethlehem How still we see thee lie  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth The everlasting Light  
The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight

It's that last line that makes Christmas what it is. We aren't just here to coo over a little baby Jesus and tell Mary how cute He is. We are here because He meets all the hopes and all the fears of all the years. He answers all of the fears of our guilt and sin, along with God's own threats of damnation. He answers all the hopes of salvation that we have for heaven. This is how God is going to get us home, through the death and resurrection of this God in the flesh. This is what He took on flesh for, to die on the cross and pay the price of suffering for our sins. This is the One who came to save the world. All of our salvation is riding in this one baby. He has come to give us light in the darkness, as the pillar of fire gave the Israelites light.

Moses was thrilled with God's answer to his prayer. The Israelites would not be abandoned. God would go with them. He was so thrilled that he asked for something that was totally irrational. He said, "**Now show me your glory.**" This would be like wanting to enter a spaceship and see the sun close up. God couldn't do this, because of Moses' sinful condition. He would have died on the spot. We can't see God's glory and live: not as we are.

But here's the amazing thing, God didn't just say no. He wanted to reveal Himself to Moses, so He found a different way to show himself to Moses, by showing him his back side.

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The LORD revealed Himself by hiding His glory and only showing Moses a glimpse of Himself through a cleft in the rock. He also revealed Himself by describing Himself to Moses. **“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished.”** First and foremost, God is compassionate and gracious, yet also just and punishing. This description of God in Exodus 34 was known as the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. Time and again the Israelites begged for God’s mercy in the midst of their sin, asking God to be who He was - compassionate and gracious.

The hand is over our eyes as well. We can’t see God in His glory. It seems hidden from this world. But isn’t this teaching us to close our eyes at times and just listen to His Word? Listen to the way that He describes Himself, and stop trying to see His glory in the here and the now? When we look around us all we seem to be able to see is darkness and sin. But close your eyes and listen.

God was able to show Moses his backside by covering his eyes. He doesn’t see the glory. But he hears some wonderful things. Isn’t this a foreshadowing and a picture of who Jesus is in the flesh? We couldn’t see God in all His glory. So what did God do? He hid His glory in the humble flesh of a baby. That little baby seems so tiny and so powerless. He is born to a seeming nobody and placed in a cattle stall. He would die the most humiliating and shameful death on the cross. It seems like the darkest place. It looks like hell on earth. Our eyes are hidden from God’s glory.

But listen to what God says about this Jesus! Jesus is God’s love in the flesh, He is the only way God could open heaven to us. He is the way God chose to come to us and rescue us from this desert of sin. John described Jesus as, **“full of grace and truth.”**

What is even more amazing? John 1 lays the backdrop on who this Jesus is! This is the One through whom ALL things were made. This is the One who made our beginning. This is God who has confined Himself to a little baby in a little manger.

God described Himself through words. He made the world through words. Now Jesus is THE Word. He is the defining way that God chose to define Himself to the world, through the words and actions of Jesus, who would live and die for the sins of the world. There is no other way that we could see God except in the face of Jesus, whom the book of Hebrews describes as **“the radiance of God’s glory and the exact imprint of the divine nature.”** The backside of God looks powerless and dark, but the Word? It is beautiful and light!

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see  
Hail the incarnate Deity

Pleased as man with man to dwell

Jesus, our Emmanuel

This is the One we came to see, listen to, and sing to this Christmas. He is our hope.

My parents are getting older. They can't drive around like they used to. A few years ago my brother picked them up and drove them over here so they could be here for a graduation. It was great to see them again.

The Israelites had failed God miserably at the foot of Mt. Sinai through their worship of the Golden Calf. They should have been abandoned. Moses went into the tent to plead for God to accompany them to the Promised Land. God graciously answered his prayer and stayed with the Israelites and take them to the Promised Land.

At Christmas time we stop and take a look at our ride to heaven. This baby doesn't look like He could carry anyone on His back. But as we look into this tent and hear God speak, we see what a beautiful baby this is. Jesus came in the flesh in order to bring us to an eternal reunion of heaven in the Promised Land. Jesus came to take us home to heaven. This is what this baby is here to do. He's come to drive us home. How? Through His own flesh. Through His own death and resurrection. We know we have a free ride to heaven through faith in Him. How do we know? We have His Word on it. He is the Word, made flesh, for us.

If you miss your family, or if you're enjoying your family this Christmas, remember that you aren't home yet. The greater reunion is to come, through the Word made flesh. This is reason to sing. Merry Christmas. Amen.