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Moses and the Burning Bush

Exodus 3:1–15 · Bud · Ages 9–12

When Exodus 3 begins, the Israelites have been slaves in Egypt for generations, and they are crying out under their forced labor (Ex 2:23–25). Moses, raised in Pharaoh's palace, had killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew and then fled. Now, decades later, he is a shepherd in Midian, tending his father-in-law Jethro's flock. He has gone from prince to fugitive to herdsman.

He leads the flock to the far side of the wilderness and comes to Horeb, called the mountain of God (also called Sinai). There the angel of the Lord appears to him as fire blazing inside a bush. The bush is burning, but it doesn't burn up. Moses decides to go over and look at this strange sight.

When God sees him come over, God calls his name twice from the bush. Moses answers that he is ready. God warns him not to come closer and to take off his sandals, because the ground he is on is holy. Then God identifies himself: the God of his father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses hides his face, overwhelmed by God's holiness.

God has seen. God has heard. God knows his people's pain, and God is stepping in to rescue them from Egypt and bring them to a rich land of their own. And God is sending Moses to Pharaoh to bring them out.

Moses protests: who is he to do that? God's answer isn't a list of Moses' strengths. It's a promise that God himself will go with him. And a sign: after the people are freed, they will worship God on this very mountain.

Moses asks for God's name. In the ancient world a name told you who someone was. God answers with a name built on the Hebrew verb to be. It means that God simply is: he has always existed, always will, and will always be there for his people. God isn't one god among many with a limited job. He simply is. Then God gives the name Moses is to use: the Lord, the God of their ancestors. By this name his people are to call on him in every generation.

Out of respect, Jewish people do not say this holy name aloud, and Catholic Bibles and prayers usually write it as the LORD. Christians also notice that Jesus, in John's Gospel, speaks of himself using the same divine name (Jn 8:58), a claim to be God.

Talk about it

1. Moses had once been a prince and was now a shepherd. Why do you think God chose him?
2. What three things does God say he has done for his suffering people?
3. What does God's name tell us about who God is?

Key verse: Ex 3:14. Look it up in your Bible.