

Exodus 33:18-23,34:5-7

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." 5 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. 6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

We have seen his glory

1. The appearance of his glory assured Moses of the LORD's faithful love
2. The presence of the Jesus assures us of restored relationship with God

The ability to get together with family and friends is a wonderful blessing of the holidays. The quality time spent with loved ones, seeing them face to face is a priceless thing. Young precious little grandchildren who live far away don't have to buy their grandpa and grandma a fancy present, their grandparents will tell you that their presence is gift enough. Sometimes just seeing a person's face - a son or daughter who lives in a different part of the country or in a completely different country all together - just to see their face is the best gift a person could give. To spend some time with them, to talk with them in person, that's something special. That's something to celebrate. But once in a while we are so excited about this opportunity that we might go a little too far and catch ourselves saying something to the effect that this is "what Christmas is all about". Well, that's not quite true is it?

Spending time with family, seeing friends and relatives and loved ones face to face is wonderful, but there is of course more to the Christmas season. Throughout the year, throughout this holiday season, and especially on Christmas we celebrate that in his love God came to this world. He came to this world to save us. He came

into this world to restore the relationship that mankind had broken with God. In his love God became one of us. He took on human flesh and blood and lived among us, walked upon this earth, turned a compassionate face toward those lost in sin, and then in mercy died in our place. He did this so we might be able to one day see God in all his glory. Jesus came to this earth to reconcile us to God so that we may walk and talk, spend time with God, and be in the presence of the Lord forever.

Adam and Eve were the only human beings to experience that kind of joy of seeing God face to face here on this earth. What joy they must have had as they walked and talked with God in the garden in the cool of the day. But then came the day that they fell into sin and Adam and Eve hid in shame. They hid their faces from their creator and their friend. They hid in shame because they had lost his holy image; they had broken God's command; they had sinned; because of their sin that great privilege of seeing God face to face was lost. Ever since Adam's fall into sin no living human being has been able to look God in the face and live. For what sinner could stand in the presence of the holy God.

Moses did not walk with God and talk with God in the intimate way that Adam and Eve did, but Moses still had a rather unique relationship with God. God had handpicked Moses to be the leader of his people. Moses had seen a special presence of the Lord the great "I Am" in the burning bush. God spoke directly to Moses and Moses spoke directly to God. Earlier in Exodus chapter 33, the Lord tells us that God would speak to Moses like a man speaks to his friend. But even Moses could not see God in all his glory. The curse of sin from Adam and Eve remained. No one could not look into the face of God and live, because like all human beings, Moses was a sinner.

At the time of our lesson for today we see that Moses was in the middle of a difficult and trying time. Moses had gone up to Mt. Sinai and received the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, but when he came down from the mountain and he smashed those tablets in disgust. Thinking that no one was looking the people shamefully constructed an idol, a golden calf, and had given themselves over to despicable sins of idolatry.

Before this horrible act of disobedience it had been God's custom to make his presence known at the entry to the place of worship the tabernacle. His presence made known in the cloud of smoke by day, the pillar of fire by night. God did this to remind them of his loving presence. The same God who lead them out from Egypt was still there among them. But for a time, after this inexcusable act of idolatry the Lord would no longer send his presence to the Tabernacle. The people had broken his trust, and so for a time God would only meet with Moses. He would send his presence not to the Tabernacle, that is the tent of meeting, but he would send his presence to Moses' own tent outside of the camp. And so during this time of chastisement the people would daily stand at the entrance to their own tent

watching Moses walk to his tent; many of them wondering if God would have mercy on them and once again make his presence known among the people.

Moses was saddened by the unfaithfulness of the people. He knew that God had every reason to leave them and forsake them. Moses wanted assurance that the Lord would not leave his people. He needed the assurance that God would have mercy on these people who daily fell into shameful disobedience. And so Moses made a rather bold request. He asked his friend and his faithful Lord, "Now show me your glory."

Displaying a heart of compassion the Lord God assured Moses of his faithful love. He hid Moses in the cleft of a rock. The Lord covered Moses with his protecting hand, and then passed in front of Moses. He fulfilled his friend's bold request. He assured Moses of his faithful love and then proclaimed to him the name of the Lord. The Lord is the covenant name of God, the God of free and faithful love. This is who our God is. Unlike anyone else the Lord is patient and compassionate, and above all he is faithful. Even when his people broke their side of the covenant he would remain faithful. He would not desert them like they deserted him. But he would reach out to them with his word, and through that word he would maintain his love to many. And so he revealed a reflection of his glory to Moses he also proclaimed to Moses the name of the LORD. ***"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.*** In love this is the name of the LORD which is proclaimed to us. In mercy he reaches out to us with his word and this is what his word accomplishes. This is what the word of LORD proclaims and shows us over and over again. The LORD, the LORD, the God of free and faithful love. He is compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love.

In our sin, in our shameful fallings away from God, we might wonder if he would take away his presence from us forever. We might wonder if he would just leave us like our sins and unfaithfulness deserve. Daily we break his trust. We may not bow down to golden calves and images of false gods, but we often bow down to gods that we fashion for ourselves, gods of money, of comforts, of desire, and sinful vices. Daily our God should just leave us. He should not just suspend his presence among us, but abandon us completely. But he won't. He is faithful. He is compassionate. He is slow to anger, abounding in love. And to show us just how much he loves us, to show us that he would never leave us or forsake us he came to this world. His glory veiled in the tiny frame of a newborn baby. The LORD came and lived among us. We needed the assurance that our God would remain with us and his presence in this world was gift enough. That's the comfort and joy that we have and we sing about at Christmas. That is the peace of which the angels announced and we receive by faith. God came to this earth. Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests!

And then because our God is not just compassionate and loving, but also perfectly just and righteous this child born as one of us would grow to become a man and he would die for us. He would pay the price necessary to make atonement for our sins. He would make us right with God. He would restore that relationship with our Father in heaven. We broke it with our sin and our disobedience. He fixed it with his righteousness and his sinless sacrifice. He came to this world so that one day those who believe in him will see the Father in all his glory.

If you ever doubt that you can stand before God; if there is every any doubt in your mind that he would accept you into his presence when judgment comes; if you ever doubt that God could love after you have done some regrettable sin remember that the LORD God Almighty took on flesh for you. He came and lived among us, to restore our broken relationship with God, and assures us all that those who believe in him will live with our Father forever. Our Lord came to this earth with forgiveness and new life. He came so that we could stand before the throne of God and see him in all his glory and walk with and talk with him like Adam and Eve were able to. This is what Christmas is all about. Having and seeing his glory in the Word made flesh. Having the sure and certain hope that one day we will see him in all his glory. That is what Christmas is all about.

This is what God's word is all about as well. It is about a relationship with God that is restored through Christ. The LORD wants us to walk with him in this life through the eyes of faith. The LORD wants us to listen to his word and hear his call to repentance. The LORD wants us to see him and stand in his glorious presence forever in heaven.

Our Savior Jesus came to this earth to restore for us a place in the family of God and we want that for our children and our loved ones too. So in joy we share that message, especially with those we care about. In joy we proclaim the name of our faithful Lord and teach them about his saving word. We pass that joy and peace of Christmas down from generation to generation so that his mercy would not stop with us, but it would continue for generations to come.

As you gather with family and friends today and throughout the holiday season remember what Christmas is really all about. Cherish the relationships that God has given you. Enjoy your time with family and friends, but then also remember how God wanted a relationship with you so badly that he came to this world of sin. The baby placed in a manger is God. The glory of God veiled in human flesh. Through the eyes of faith we know what a glorious gift this is. His presence in this world is gift enough. Through the eyes of faith ***"we have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** (John 1:14) Dear friends you are children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. This is what Christmas is all about. Glory be to God, our faithful Lord our compassionate Savior who in love became our brother! Amen.