

Transfiguration / February 11, 2024

Exodus 34:34

“The people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses face was shining.”

Moses’ face reflects, Jesus’ face shines the glory of God

Moses was a reluctant prophet. The Lord called him while he was tending his father-in-law’s sheep on Mount Horeb, also known as Sinai. He identified Himself as the God of his fathers; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He gave Moses a new name to know Him by, “Yahweh, Jehovah, the Lord.” The Lord told Moses He was sending him on a mission, back to Egypt to set His people free. Moses didn’t want to go. He asked for signs. The Lord gave him signs. A staff that turned into a serpent. A hand that became leprous, white as snow, and then returned to normal. He gave him power to turn the Nile River blood red and gave his brother Aaron to be his voice. Moses still didn’t want to go. He said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” The Lord finally just said, “Go!” Moses went.

The Lord affirmed Moses’ ministry with many signs. Ten plagues upon Egypt. The parting of the Red Sea at the exodus, bread from heaven and water from a rock to nourish and sustain the people in the wilderness. Nevertheless, not everyone was convinced. Priests from the tribe of Levi challenged his and Aaron’s leadership. The earth swallowed them up. Aaron and their sister Miriam challenged his leadership, Miriam became leprous until Moses interceded with the Lord to have mercy. Moses had doubts about his leadership and faced opposition throughout his prophetic ministry. But nothing affirmed his ministry from the Lord and leadership over Israel more than his face radiating divine glory when he returned from meeting with the Lord in the Tabernacle.

As He neared the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus took three disciples, Peter, James and John to a high mountain. There, not just His face, but His whole being radiated the glory of God. He engaged in conversation with Moses and Elijah, the greatest Old Testament prophets. A cloud, like the one that overshadowed the Tabernacle in the wilderness and filled Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem, overshadowed them. The divine voice spoke: “This is my Beloved Son; Listen to Him.” Moses was perhaps the greatest servant in God’s house. Jesus is greater as the Son. Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets, affirmed Jesus’ ministry as the Messiah. The divine voice and divine light radiating from His being, show Him to be our God and Saviour. When Moses spoke the law Israel listened. Jesus speaks to us the gospel of forgiveness and salvation. We listen to Him as God and believe in Him as our Saviour.

Moses and Jesus are compared throughout the New Testament. In the gospel of John, the teachers of the law challenge Jesus’ authority with Moses. They bring before Him a woman caught in adultery. They say, “In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women.” They demand, “What do you say?” John in the prologue to his gospel, compared Jesus to Moses saying, “The law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Moses condemned. Jesus forgave. He sent her accusers away in shame and her in peace. In the letter to the Hebrews, it says Moses was faithful over God’s house as a servant in his time. Jesus is faithful forever as God’s Son. God allowed Moses to ask of Him whatever he desired. Moses’ desire was to see God’s face, the fullness of His glory. God denied his request saying, “No human can see my face and live.” On the mount of transfiguration three disciples saw the face of God shining in Christ Jesus and lived. There was something different about Jesus. Something extraordinary.

In the gospel of John, as Jesus prepares the disciples for His arrest and crucifixion, He identifies Himself as the way and the truth and the life, the only way in which we come to the Father in peace. Philip is astounded at Jesus’ claim of giving access to the Father. He asks for proof. He says, “Show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus replies, “Philip, have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” Neither Moses nor any of the prophets would have dared to say such a thing about themselves. What an astounding claim: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” This is what makes Jesus different from Moses and the prophets. This is what makes the Christian faith different than any other religion. In the letter to Colossians, Paul says of Jesus, “In Him dwells the fulness of God.” He is the divine Son of God. Moses was God’s servant in time. Jesus is God’s Son from eternity. Moses revealed God in law. Jesus reveals the fulness of God in love and forgiveness through the sacrifice of His cross. In Jesus we see the face of God in forgiveness, kindness, compassion and love.

A person wonders how anyone could have thought to challenge Moses' leadership after the signs God gave through him. Especially when his face radiated the glory of God upon exiting the Tent of Meeting. Moses' shining face affirmed his leadership over Israel and his office as mediator between God and Israel. Moses had a unique relationship with God. Although he did not see the fulness of the glory of God, scripture says the Lord spoke with Moses as a man speaks with his friend. No other prophet is spoken of as having a radiant face or such an intimate relationship with the Lord, as is Moses. Nevertheless, as soon as Moses departed from the Lord's presence, the glory began to fade. It was a reflected glory. It was the glory of the moon, which reflects the sun's light. Moses had a special relationship with God, but he was a sinful being like all of us. When he departed from the Lord's presence, the glory faded.

Jesus shines the glory of God in a different way. Not as a reflection of light, but as light radiating from within His being. Paul wrote in the letter to the Colossians, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, whether in heaven or on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." What greater difference could there be between Moses and Jesus, or any other prophet and spiritual leader! The difference is greater than between the moon and the sun. Moses was allowed into God's presence to hear His word, so he could relate it to the people. Jesus came from God's presence as the Word of God. Moses taught the people the law, which for all its blessings and benefits always shows us our sin and condemns us to death. The wages of sin is death. Jesus fulfilled the law through His sinless life and sacrificial death. He brings the grace of God in forgiveness. The gift of God is forgiveness and life through Jesus Christ.

Moses was important as the founder of Israel as a nation and as the people of God. The children of the patriarch Jacob, to whom God gave the name Israel, went into Egypt as twelve sons with their families. By the time the Lord sent Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt, their number had grown exponentially. They had grown from families to tribes, each numbering in the tens of thousands. Moses gave them organization and structure. Most importantly, through Moses, the Lord brought Israel into a covenant relationship with Himself. He became their God and they became His people. Moses was the man in the middle. He prayed God for mercy when Israel sinned. He delivered the law and commandments from the Lord to Israel. Moses was a great man, but he was a man. Before his death Moses told the people the Lord would send a prophet greater than he and to Him they must listen. Jesus is the prophet greater than Moses. We listen to Him as our God and Saviour!

Jesus is greater than Moses in His divine being as the Son of God. Jesus is greater than Moses, because His is not a reflected glory. His is the glory as of the only begotten Son of God. Moses sealed the covenant between God and Israel with the blood of bulls. Jesus made a new covenant between God and all people through His own blood shed on the cross, by which He atoned for the sin of the whole world. The law came through Moses. We need the law to guide us in our lives. We need the law to show us our sin. We need to see our sin, because in our sin we see our need for the Saviour. Grace and truth come through Jesus Christ. He speaks a better word than Moses, because He speaks words of forgiveness, peace and healing. Moses led Israel out of Egypt through the wilderness to the border of the Promised Land. Jesus brings His people to a place that neither Moses or any prophet can bring, into the true land of promise, the presence of God in peace.

God open our eyes to see Jesus in faith through the hearing and reading of the word, in the washing our baptism and in the sacrament of His holy body and precious blood. God open our hearts to receive Him as Saviour and believe in His name. Amen