

# OpenTheo

## February 23rd: Exodus 3 & Matthew 9:18-34

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Theophany at the burning bush. Raising the dead daughter, healing the woman with the issue of blood.

Some passages referenced:

Deuteronomy 33:16 (reference to the burning bush); Numbers 12:3 (Moses' humility); Genesis 32:30, Judges 13:6, 17-19 (other requests for the divine name); Joseph's prophecy (Genesis 50:24); Genesis 22 (sacrificing at three days' journey).

Numbers 15:37-41 (tassels of the garment); Matthew 11:16-17 (not dancing at the flutes).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Exodus 3. Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and, behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

And Moses said, I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, Moses, Moses! And he said, Here I am. Then he said, Do not come near.

Take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. And he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. But Moses said to God, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? He said, But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.

Then Moses said to God, If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, What is his name? What shall I say to them? God said to Moses, I am who I am. And he said, Say this to the people of Israel, I am has sent me to you. God also said to Moses, Say this to the people of Israel, The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.

And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us, and now, please let us go a three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand, so I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it. After that, he will let you go.

And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. And when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbour and any woman who lives in her house for silver and gold jewellery and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters, so you shall plunder the Egyptians.

In Exodus chapter 3, we arrive at the event that propels the story that follows. We have just been told that God has taken notice of Israel in their distress, which prepares us for the call of Moses in chapter 3. Moses drives the sheep into the wilderness from Midian, towards Horeb. Horeb is typically, but not always, associated with Sinai.

It is described as the mountain of God. But there is no evidence that Moses made such an association. And at this mountain, he sees a theophany.

A theophany is an external manifestation of God's presence. Moses looks at the burning bush, obviously for long enough to notice that it is not being burnt up. God is present in the bush, in the form of the angel.

In Deuteronomy chapter 33 verse 16, we possibly have another reference to this bush, where it says, the favour of him who dwells in the bush. Fire can also represent God's presence. Particularly fire that does not need fuel.

It's a divine fire. It's burning, but it's not burning up the bush that it's within. It might also suggest the state of Israel in Egypt.

Israel is the bush, and God dwells in her. And Israel is experiencing the fire of persecution in Egypt, but they are not being consumed, because God is in her and with her. Some have also suggested that the bush may pun on or relate to the name for Sinai.

A peculiar detail of this event is the fact that God does not call to Moses until God sees that Moses has turned aside to look at the bush. Moses has clearly looked at the bush long enough to notice it's not being consumed, so he's been watching for a little while. And then he goes to the bush to see more closely what's going on with it.

And it's at that point, when God sees that he has turned aside, that God calls to him. This is a peculiar detail, and to me it suggests that it's connected with Moses' relationship with Israel. Israel is the bush, God is in the midst of Israel, Israel is being burnt within Egypt but not consumed.

And Moses has already turned aside to look at Israel, to see their state, to take interest in their condition, and to act on their behalf. And in the same way, he sees this bush that's being burned, but it's not being consumed. And as he goes to inspect it more closely, God speaks to him from the midst of the bush.

God's call to Moses is that typical form of address, Moses, Moses, the response being here I am. God declares that the ground around the bush is holy on account of God's presence. Moses must remove his shoes from his feet.

This is a peculiar detail. We've seen holy times before in the Sabbath, but we've not seen places in quite the same way. There are some similar details in the story of Bethel in chapter 28 of Genesis, but this probably goes some way further.

God declares himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Moses' fathers. Now you can think of the significance of this to Moses. Moses has been raised as an Egyptian, and then after a brief abortive attempt to save his people, he has been driven out of Egypt and dwelt among the Midianites.

And now God declares himself to be the God of Moses' father, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. While Moses may be cut off from his people, God is identifying him as one of the Hebrews at this point. God declares that he has heard their cry and has come down to act on their behalf, to deliver them from Egypt and to bring them into a spacious and fertile land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

The land of Canaan, to this point, seems to have been occupied by a number of different peoples, not just one great power. No single power ruled over the land, presumably simply on account of its internal variety of zones, and very difficult to control. And there were also other external forces making it difficult for any single party to gain dominance within the land.

It would be remarkable that Israel would gain such dominance in time. Moses is called to be a messenger and this is the first prophetic call of its kind, a call to someone to act as an emissary of God to some people. Abraham acts as a prophet in certain ways, he's called out of the land of Ur of the Chaldees, but not in quite the same way with a prophetic call to minister to a people.

Moses responds with uncertainty. Perhaps this is related to his humility that's described in Numbers chapter 12 verse 3, or perhaps it's just a lack of faith, his timidity and that getting in the way of accepting God's power to act in his situation and to use him. To be fair to Moses, I can understand why he would think it was strange that he would be the one called for such a mission.

He was not recognised by his own people, the Hebrews. He was an outcast prince who had fled the country 40 years previously as a result of killing someone. And now he's going to go to Pharaoh to represent the Hebrews, to tell Pharaoh to let his people go? This seems to be a strange calling, one that maybe he's not the most apt to perform.

God responds by assuring him. I will be with you and this shall be the sign for you that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.

The later part of this verse can be interpreted or translated in a number of different ways. Perhaps it's referring to the fact that God's presence with Moses will be the sign to him, that God has called him and sent him and equipped him for what he needs to do. Or perhaps the sign is going to worship God at the Mount Horeb and as he arrives at Mount Horeb with the people, it will be a sign that God has indeed sent him, that that will demonstrate the truth of his mission.

Perhaps. One thing we should notice is that God's statement of assurance to Moses is something that's very similar to the name that he gives later. I will be with you.

I will be. This should be borne in mind as we proceed to the next section. Moses asks what name he shall say is the name of the God who has sent him.

And you can maybe understand Moses' position here. He's not one of the Israelites. How are they going to accept him? How will they know that he has indeed been sent by the God of their fathers? There are many gods claiming to be the gods of people's fathers.

How did he know that this was the God of the Hebrews? Perhaps then he's asking this name in part to prove himself to the people. It's also requested in the context of the foretold worship, that they will worship God on that mountain. To what name will they be calling out? And God gives his name maybe in that context.

Moses, however, as we go through the book of Exodus, seems to have an insistent desire to know God. We see this again in chapter 33. He asks God's name and he asks God's character.

And the answer that God gives here, I am who I am or I will be what I will be, could in some ways be seen as not an answer. God isn't defined by anything other than himself. When we think about naming things, we're typically naming things as a means of getting control of them.

When we give something a name, we feel we have some power over it, some understanding of it. And yet when God gives his name, God is the only one who can pronounce his name truly. And when he pronounces his name, it's not a name that we can define relative to anything else.

God is self-defining. And God's name is also something that speaks of his existence and perhaps also his self-determination. God will be what he will be.

It's not for us to put God within our control. We cannot do that. A further thing to reflect on here might be the other attempts that we see in scripture to ask God's name.

In the book of Judges, chapter 13, verses 6 and 17 to 19, the name of the angel of the Lord is asked by Manoah and his wife. And the response is, why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful. It's a name that is not truly given.

But then Manoah offers sacrifices to the God who works wonders. Playing upon the name. It seems here that maybe there's a giving of a name and a not giving of a name.

In Exodus 3, maybe it's the other way around. Maybe there is a giving of a name, but that name that is given is also in some sense not a name. God has a name, but the name itself describes something of God's ineffability.

That God cannot be captured by any name. That no name actually is adequate to speak of God. God exists beyond all names.

And what names we have that we use to speak of God are all found to be lacking ultimately. God will be who he will be. This giving of the name of God also introduces a sharper form of monotheism.

Some have seen within this name a gesturing towards God's self-existent being. That God exists in and of himself. God does not have any creator above him that has formed him or fashioned him.

God exists purely of himself. We should however, I think, be wary of putting too much weight upon some of those explanations. Expressions that are not too dissimilar are found within descriptions of pagan deities of that day.

And so maybe we should not read too much into it. However, it does seem as this term develops within scripture and its treatment and uses, that there is something greater about God being referred to. There's a veiling but also an unveiling of God in his majesty that exists beyond human understanding.

God's ineffability, God's self-existence and aseity, but also God's commitment to be with his people. Remember, the first time we see I will be is in reference to God's promise, his assuring promise to be with Moses as he goes to the Egyptians. And perhaps one of the things that the name of God describes here is his unchanging and unfaltering commitment to his people.

The fact that he is the same yesterday, today and forever. He's the Alpha and the Omega, he's the beginning and the end. He's the one who does not change.

And as a result, he will be with his people and assure his people of his presence. Not just in their present sufferings, but in whatever sufferings they may face in the future. The statement that follows that God has noticed and will deliver his people is one that draws our attention back to Genesis chapter 50 verse 24, the promise statement of Joseph.

And Joseph said to his brothers, I'm about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. God has taken notice of his people and he will fulfill his promise. Going to go three days journey into the wilderness.

Perhaps this is to be outside the realm of sanctity of the Egyptians, but perhaps it also should make us think of Abraham going three days to the Mount of God, where he prepares to sacrifice Isaac. There is going to be other themes of sacrifice of the firstborn here. And perhaps we should connect these two events.

A question to consider. The chapter ends with the statement that the people will have

favor in the sight of the Egyptians and when they go, they shall not go empty. But each woman shall ask of her neighbor and any woman who lives in her house for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing.

She'll put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians. Where have we seen a promise of this earlier on in the book of Genesis? Matthew chapter nine verses 18 to 34.

While he was saying these things to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him saying my daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and she will live. And Jesus rose and followed him with his disciples. And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for 12 years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment.

For she said to herself, if I only touch his garment, I will be made well. Jesus turned and seeing her, he said, take heart daughter, your faith has made you well. And instantly the woman was made well.

And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, go away for the girl is not dead, but sleeping. And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand and the girl arose.

And the report of this went through all that district. And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, have mercy on us, son of David. When he entered the house, the blind men came to him and Jesus said to them, do you believe that I am able to do this? They said to him, yes, Lord.

Then he touched their eyes saying, according to your faith, be it done to you. And their eyes were opened and Jesus sternly warned them, see that no one knows about it. But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

As they were going away, behold, a demon oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke and the crowds marveled saying never was anything like this seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, he casts out demons by the prince of demons.

In this section of Matthew 9, we reached the conclusion of the series of 10 miracles or signs that Jesus performs. Here we have a number of events hot on the heels of each other, one thing after another. And in the case of the woman with the issue of blood and the girl restored to life, mixed up together.

Jesus has just been identified as the bridegroom. But now there is the healing of two women. These are two entangled events, even more so in Luke, where not only has the woman been suffering from her condition for 12 years, a detail that we have here, but

the girl is 12 years old too.

That number suggests a connection between both characters and Israel. Now both characters connected with Israel being women and Christ having just been identified as the bridegroom, it might suggest that there's something more going on here. Christ is the one that comes to deliver the bride and to raise daughter Jerusalem to new life.

Jesus is asked by the ruler here to come and visit his daughter and lay his hand on her so that she might be delivered from death. This is a grand request. This is not something that Christ has been asked to do to this point, to deliver someone from death itself.

This is a more climactic sign or action. Jesus is going to deliver Israel from its death, daughter Zion, raise her up to new life. But as he's going on the way, he's interrupted.

And he's interrupted by a woman who suffered from this discharge of blood. And she touches the hem of Jesus' garment. Now the hem of the garment was an important part of the garment because it was the part of the garment that had the tassels on.

And those tassels had a symbolic significance given to them within the book of Numbers. And this law connected the garments of Israel with the garments of the high priest. And the garments of the high priest were in turn connected with the tabernacle as a sort of house as garment.

The high priest had these sorts of blue tassels on his garment. And now Israel also have those as well. And those tassels connect their garments to the meaning of the high priest as one who represents Israel's holy status to the Lord.

And every Israelite was supposed to have that represented on their garments. Jesus' garments are significant. They represent his office.

They represent his person. We can see this in the transfiguration where there is a transfiguration of the garments, not just of Christ himself. His garments are taken from him at the crucifixion.

He's stripped of his garments. He's wrapped in linen clothes and laid in the tomb. He's wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger.

And in other occasions we read about his garments. His garments are clearly significant for representing what's happening to him and who he is. Here as life flows into the woman and heals her of her ailment, we see that Christ himself is the source of life.

She has an issue of blood. He has an issue of life. Life flows out of him and it gives life to others.

Could maybe think about the blue tassels as like rivers out of Eden, like the rivers that are connected with the living water in the book of John. Jesus is the one who gives life.



Life flows from him.

There's also the fact that within the Old Testament the wing of the garment was connected with marriage. To take the woman under the wing was to take her as your wife. And Jesus has the wing of his garment touched by this woman, which suggests again that the bridal themes that have been playing just beforehand have not ceased.

They're still important. There's something incongruous within this setting. We have the flute players.

Now why mention the flute players? They're not mentioned in the other Gospel accounts. It's a strange detail to include. And the flute players seem to be out of keeping with the character of the event.

They are playing this music that seems to be more appropriate for a dance than for a funeral. And Christ moves them away. A few chapters further in Matthew I think we might have a clue to the meaning of this.

In Matthew 11 verse 16 Jesus says, But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, We played the flute for you, and you did not dance. We sang a dirge, and you did not mourn. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he has a demon.

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds. Within that passage we have many of the same themes that we've seen in this passage come up again.

And again there is this incongruity that's highlighted. The flute that's being played and people not dancing. The dirge and people not mourning.

And the flute here is connected with dancing, which seems a strange thing to have at a funeral. But in some sense the incongruity is appropriate because Jesus is the bridegroom come to the scene. He's the bridegroom that's released the woman from her ailment when she touched his garment, the hem of his garment.

And now he's the one that's going to raise daughter Israel to life. So these wedding and dirge themes collide. The flute players are acting in a way that's out of keeping with what's taken place, the death of a young girl.

But there's a level of irony here because Jesus is acting in a way that actually is more appropriate to flute playing. Jesus is the one who's bringing in new life. He's the one who's the bridegroom that's come on the scene.

And at the end of this miracle, as in the other ones within this series of miracles, Jesus'

fame spreads. People in the surrounding regions are starting to hear about who this man Jesus is and his fame and reputation is starting to spread. Following this, Jesus heals two blind men.

And once again, this involves persistent faith. Jesus does not heal straight away. He presents obstacles to these blind men to prove their faith.

They stubbornly persist and as they persist, they are healed. Their sight is restored and even though they are instructed not to do so, they spread the fame of Jesus even further throughout that district. Once again, there's a connection between this miracle and the miracle that immediately succeeds.

The miracles come in rapid succession, one thing after another, and often without one thing being finished, the next begins. Jesus is acting in a way that has an urgency and a speed and a suddenness to it. And reading through this section, it's important that we have some sense of the urgency and the speed with which things are happening.

Things are happening with a rapidity that suggests something about the Kingdom of God itself. And as he's going away, behold, a demon-possessed man whose mute is brought to him. Once again, this is someone who's being brought to him for healing.

We've seen a number of cases of this so far. Jesus is often requested to heal someone on behalf of someone else. This is a further reminder that Jesus works with groups of people, not just isolated individuals each having faith for themselves.

Jesus is healing and delivering people as they are brought by others to him. Pray for your friends, pray for people in your family, pray for people in your neighbourhood. Pray for people who may not be able to come to Christ themselves because Christ works through other people bringing people to him.

The condition of the demon-possessed man could perhaps be compared to that of Israel. Israel, wherever Jesus goes, he sees Israel oppressed by demons, even in the synagogues themselves. You could maybe think back to the story of David and Saul.

David is anointed by the Spirit and an evil spirit troubles and oppresses Saul. But then David goes to Saul and brings him relief as he plays for him. Jesus is going throughout Israel and he's bringing relief as the man of the Spirit, as the son of David, to a nation that's oppressed by Satan.

The Pharisees, however, accuse Jesus, accusing him of one of the worst things of all. They say that he is acting by the power of Satan, an accusation that aligns Christ with the one whose very works he is going to give everything to destroy. This is an accusation beyond all accusations.

It's an accusation that declares Christ to be the absolute opposite of what he actually is.

A question to consider. In chapters 8 and 9 of the book of Matthew, Jesus is going through a series of actions.

Actions and healings, exorcisms and miracles. And these actions, as they occur, serve to highlight who Jesus is. They serve to illustrate the character of the kingdom.

They serve to describe the spread of Christ's reputation. And they also serve to highlight the opposition that Jesus is facing. And the accusation that arises at the end of it highlights just how sharp the division between Christ and the Pharisees has become.

Exploring this series of actions on these different fronts, what are some of the things that most stand out to you about the development that Matthew has highlighted between the end of the Sermon on the Mount and the beginning of the sending out of the 12 disciples?