

II. Advent in Biblical Perspective
From Christophanies to Epiphanies
“Christophany #1—The Angel of the Lord in the Burning Bush”
Exodus 3
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
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Our main passage for this study will be in Exodus 3 but I want to start by reading a few verses from Hebrews 12. This is the Word of God. It’s the truth. Hebrews 12:28–29 which says [28] *Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, [29] for our God is a consuming fire.* The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of the Lord abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This is the Christmas season and the series is Christophanies to Epiphanies. A Christophany is a theophany. A theophany and is identified as a Christophany whenever the text shows it is the Second Person of the Trinity that is speaking from the Christophany usually by the phrase, ‘the angel of the Lord.’ Those are pre-incarnate appearances of Christ. At Christmas we celebrate the incarnate appearance of Christ or the epiphany of Christ. In the Old Testament that coming of the Messiah – the incarnation, the epiphany – was predicted by types of Christ. Jesus said “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets He explained Himself in all the Scriptures” and the Old Testament is pointing to the coming of Christ the Messiah in which the Promised One will fulfill two promises. He will save His people from their sins and defeat of their enemies and His enemies. The second promise is that He will deliver His people into a new heavens and a new earth and He will destroy those enemies that He has defeated.

What we don’t know from the Old Testament that we find out when Jesus comes is that the two promises are fulfilled with two advents. The first advent fulfills the first promise to save His people from their sins and to defeat all of His and our enemies. Then He returns in that same incarnate body, the one He received through the virgin birth, lived a righteous and rejected life and bore our sins on the cross with, to bring everything to a consummation. The believer has a new heart and that heart is rested and restless. The new heart rests in the joy of His first coming when He saves us and defeats our enemies but the reason Christmas looks at both advents is because the new heart is also restless, anticipating ‘Come quickly Lord Jesus.’

People tell me how they would love to rescue Christmas from the secularization of our society and one way to rescue it is to get back to the way it was historically initiated. Its origins weren’t just about the virgin birth. The origins of the advent season are to celebrate both advents. That would make it very distinctive if our celebrations of the advent season is to not only rejoice that He has come but to rejoice that He is coming again and that becomes another message we give to the world as well. Let me give you an introductory review statement about our last study on the incarnation.

The Incarnation is a work of God’s grace whereby God Himself has come to us, to be among us and become one of us in order to save us from our sins and will come again for us to be with us forever. By a Man came death and by a man must come the resurrection of the dead. This Incarnation is the epiphany but in the Old Testament there were not only types that pointed to Christ – Moses, Aaron, David, Melchizedek – but there were also sixty plus prophecies. You will find eight of them in the first two chapters of Matthew around the birth of Christ. There were also Christophanies. There were 14 pre-incarnation appearances of Christ and they’re

almost always identified by the phrase ‘the angel of the Lord.’ Those appearances are temporary. It is not like the Incarnation for that is forever. Jesus has that body forever. Those appearances were for a purpose. That same miraculous appearance becomes a miraculous disappearance as well but these Christophanies are anticipating and communicating something to us about His epiphany, His Incarnation, His coming to fulfill the promises of God. We won’t be able to look at all 14 but we will look at three of them.

The first one I want you to see is right here in Exodus 3. Exodus is the second book in the Pentateuch and the first author of these five books has a biographical subject of the book of Exodus. His name is Moses. The 40 chapters in the book of Exodus cover 401 years. Exodus 1 and 2 cover 400 years so that means that chapters 3 through 40 cover one year which is the year of deliverance, the exodus and the Israelites into the wilderness anticipating the ultimate deliverance into the land of Promise. When you read this you find that Moses had three epochs or eras of his life. Moses is 80 years old when Exodus 3 begins. The first era of his life was when Moses was 1 to 40 years of age. He was fished out of a river and grew up in Pharaoh’s house and stayed for 40 years.

The reason he left was because he killed someone and now he was a wanted man by Pharaoh himself. Moses said of himself that he was an alien and a stranger and he is now in the land of Midian. For the next 40 years of his life he will remain in the land of Midian and have a wife, children and he’ll have a father in law that is rather well known whose name is Jethro, a priest of God in the land of Midian. This last era of his life starts at 80 years of age as the God-empowered, God-ordained, God-called mediator and deliverer of God’s people from the bondage of slavery to the tyranny of Pharaoh into the land of Promise. Moses will be with the people in the wilderness and the one he is to train, Joshua, will lead them into the land of Promise. Exodus 3 is where we pick up the beginning of the third era of Moses’s life where he is transformed by the very appearance of God in a burning bush. So let’s start in the text.

Exodus 3:1–4 says [1] *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 (Also known as Mount Sinai where God delivers His law to Moses), the mountain of God. [2] 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. [3] And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.” [4] 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.”*

The reason we know this is a Christophany is because it says ‘the angel of the Lord’ appeared to him. It is not an angel but the angel, a definite article. The angel, the messenger is an anticipation of a title for Christ – the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. So we know it’s Christ not only by this title but by the divine name attached to it – the angel of the Lord. It means the Lord is the possessor for that angel is the Lord Himself. Then He commands him to do what only God is to receive and that is worship. So this can’t just be a regular angel. In the book of Revelation John falls on his face two times and starts worshipping an angel and the angel tells him not to do that because he is just a fellow servant and says ‘Worship God!’ So if this angel tells Moses to worship Him then that tells you it is God. We see in verse 4 that God is the One calling him from the burning bush. So what happens next?

Exodus 3:5–6 says [5] *Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” [6] 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. Where God is, is holy ground. Moses realizes this is God Himself and so he won't even look at Him.

Later when Moses gets back to Mount Sinai and God gives him the law Moses will ask God for a request. He asks God to see the back side of His glory. When God says "I Am" the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it tells us two things. Number one He is eternal and secondly it is telling us that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not dead. Absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. If they weren't with the Lord He would have had to say "I was the God of Abraham..." They are now immortal and with Him so "I Am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and I am your God, Moses and the God of the people where I have come through you to deliver." How will He do that? Let's look back at the text.

Exodus 3:7-12 says [7] *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, [8] 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. [9] 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. [10] Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." [11] But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" [12] 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."*

Having informed Moses of who He is, receiving worship, He then tells Moses He is the God of His people. God is fully aware of the afflictions of Israel and what they have been through. He has now come to deliver them and respond to them. He has heard their cry. Think a minute. How long have they been crying out? They have been crying out for 400 years. We get pretty upset when God doesn't answer our prayer in 4 minutes or 4 days. God always answers prayers and sometimes His answers are yes, no and keep praying for it's not the right time. God's timing is always right. God multi-tasks for He is not only going to minister to His people, know His people, deliver His people but He'll deliver His people at the right time for them and for His glory. He will give them a land but He doesn't give them that land until He prepares them while they are in Egypt. He will not give them that land until sexual sins, immorality, pagan idolatry and their iniquities are full because He will bring them out to cast judgment upon them because of their sins. So when the right time for judgment and deliverance comes then He will answer the prayers. So they have been crying out for 400 years. God knows the right time.

This text of the call of Moses starts in Exodus 3:1 and doesn't end until Exodus 4:17. In those verses Moses will make four objections to God as to why he is not the right man. We won't cover all four of those objections but here is Moses' first objection. We have gone from Moses saying 'here am I' to 'who am I.' God doesn't say that Moses is a lot better than he thinks he is. God's assurance to Moses is that God will be with him. God is not calling Moses because He is capable but He is calling Moses because He is capable to use Moses. Moses doesn't take his courage from who he is but from who God is and God tells him He will be with him. There is how he knows what he is going to do.

Exodus 3:13 says [13] *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?"* Here is Moses second objection. So Moses has been assured that

God will be with him but now Moses wants to know who God is so he can tell the people. The next verse answers this.

Exodus 3:14 says [14] *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.'*" This is a name for God in your Bible that is Yahweh. It is translated in some versions as Jehovah. Two popular names in the Bible for God are Adonai (the Sovereign One) which shows up as Lord in your Bible and then Yahweh (the Everlasting One) which shows up as LORD in your Bible. I AM that I AM. This name shows up in your Bible over 5,000 times.

Exodus 3:15 says [15] *God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.* The word remembered here means to take knowledge for understanding with appropriate action to the knowledge. Remember the Sabbath. Remember me when you get into His Kingdom. If this is the everlasting God of glory who came to save us, bring us and deliver us then remember My Name. What is the appropriate action? It is reverence, rejoicing and surrender. That is the way you remember His Name. Moses is worshipping God and is now going to submit to what God has called him to do.

Exodus 3:16–22 says [16] *Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, '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, [17] 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.'"* [18] *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.'* [19] *But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. [20] 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. [21] And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, [22] but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."*

God tells Moses how this will play out. Pharaoh will strike back at him and then God will strike back with His miracles which are called the ten plagues with the last one being the death of the first born. Then Pharaoh will let you go. Do you see the sovereign hand of God here? You will give praise to God when you are let go because God is the One who made him let you go. God says, I will win this victory for you. When you go they are not only going to let you go but they will pay you to go. All you have to do is ask them and they will hand it over to let you go. Here you thought they had you in slavery for all those 400 years and yet they are about to pay you all the wages they owe you. They will pay you to go and now you'll have something to build that tabernacle with and you'll have something to sustain yourselves for forty years. My hand will be upon you and will take you out for My glory.

Whenever there is a Christophany there is a message and a manifestation and the two are complimentary to each other. We just walked through the message and that message is 'I Am that I Am.' God said in the text, I have seen you, I have heard you, I know you, I have come to you, I will be with you, I have promised, I have observed, I will stretch out my hand, I will give

you, I will bring you up, I will..., I will... The great I Am says He will because of His sovereign grace upon you. This message tells me five things about God.

First, God is self-sufficient. He is self-existent, self-dependent and self-sufficient. I am that I am. When you look at creation there are only two faith commitments. One is the faith commitment of the materialist with the three confessions of space, time and matter. If I give space and matter enough time you get all these laws, designs, consistency, beauty, grandeur, stability and majesty and you even get the ability to appreciate it and it just kind of happened. That's what the materialist believes. It is best said by Carl Sagan when he said "That's all there is, that's all there was and that's all there ever will be." That is a faith commitment and sorry I don't have enough faith.

I will take the theistic view of the Trinity that is revealed where God authored it, the Son accomplished it and the Holy Spirit superintended it. It is the same as in salvation where God authored it, the Son accomplished it and the Holy Spirit applied it. It is just like providence where God has authored my good care. The Son intercedes for me and the Holy Spirit upholds me. I believe that it's the God of glory that sets my world and life view when I look at creation or redemption. The angel of the Lord said 'it's not the bush that makes Me for I made the bush. I Am and it wasn't.' I AM that I AM.

Someone sent me a Facebook tag of two snowmen. The snow is falling and one turns to the other and says "How did you get here?" The other said "I don't know. The snow just started falling and here I am." If you see a snowman, what do you know? You know that somebody made the snowman. You creation, there is a Creator. You see laws, there is a Law Giver. He is beyond me but He has revealed Himself to me. It didn't just happen.

God is self-sufficient therefore secondly this God has said to you I will save you. I will save you from the bondage of slavery, the tyranny of Pharaoh and I will deliver you from your enemies.

Thirdly, God will sustain you. He will bring you up. He will give to you. He will use the Egyptians to give to you. He will give to you His presence.

Fourthly, God will secure you. He will protect you. He will guide you. He will guard you. He will remove your enemies. He will give you the land.

Fifthly, God will stay with you. He says "I will be with you." God will stay with His people for all of His glory in a tabernacle, in a burning bush, in a tent of meeting, in a pillar of fire and cloud. God will be with you. He will stay.

Notice how the manifestation supports this message. Nine times in the Bible God shows up with the symbol of fire. Our God is a jealous God, a consuming fire. Here is one of those times in Exodus 3 through a burning bush that is really an unburning, burning bush because it doesn't burn up. The fire is in the bush but the fire is not dependent upon the bush. Therefore the bush is secured and it's unburned. Who is the fire? It is the angel of the Lord and that is Christ Himself the eternal God, I AM that I AM. There was a time that the bush wasn't but the Lord of glory always has been. The Lord is not dependent upon what He has made, in this case the bush. The Lord is not dependent upon what He indwells. The Lord speaks from the bush but is not dependent upon it. That is the bush affirming the message.

Here is the takeaway. What is the Christophany telling us as we come to the epiphany, the Incarnation of Christ? How is this pointing to it? Here is the message. The Son of God who called Moses to deliver His people from the bondage of slavery and the tyranny of Pharaoh to dwell in the Land of Promise, has now come Himself to deliver His people from the bondage of sin and the tyranny of Satan, to dwell with them in the new heavens and the new earth forever.

This is what we celebrate at Christmas. This majestic and transcendent God whom the world cannot contain – I Am that I Am that made it – is no prisoner to His transcendence for He has the power, grace and ability to come to you, as one of you, to be among you, to deliver you and to save you.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote the following poem;
*"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."*

In paraphrasing what she said here and about this text we've just covered, God's people have been crammed with the presence of God on the earth from heaven. God's people on the earth have been crammed with the presence of God from heaven and His glory, presence and power now indwells them yet they are not consumed. God's presence and power came in Christ at Bethlehem. He was on this earth for 33 years and goes to a cross but His presence did not consume the world. His presence saved sinners out of the world. God Himself has now come to dwell in you and has crammed His presence into us. His presence and His glory does not consume us. It transforms us.

This Christophany anticipates that epiphany. This Christophany shouts out, 'Don't draw near' in millennial after millennial and now that command from this Christophany has been dismissed because now is the epiphany and God Himself has drawn near to us. So no longer does He say 'don't draw near' for 'I have drawn near to you, I have saved you and I not only allow you to draw near to Me but now I dwell within you. I am in you, the Hope of glory.' This Son of God has come to near to us, for us, to save us and He has become one of us and yet He did not consume us but redeemed us. Now with His redeemed by the Holy Spirit, He comes to dwell in us and yet we are not consumed for we are being changed by grace for His glory.

There the angel of the Lord says to Moses 'come, see, now go.' There comes Jesus Himself and says from His Incarnate body, "Come, see, now go and make disciples of all the nations." In this Christophany we are instructed to take off your shoes for you are on holy ground. Wherever God is, is sacred ground but now the Christophany has given way to the epiphany. Now Christ Himself has come and when He came He was holy ground. This Christ who dwelt among you was not dependent upon you but He came to save you. This Christ who was not dependent upon that bush was not dependent and is not dependent upon us but He is one of us and has come to save us in all of His deity undiminished and now with His humility taking our humanity but in His coming He does not consume us but now comes and is holy ground.

Now this risen Savior comes to you and He dwells within you. You now are the bush and the bush should have been consumed but it was not consumed. We should be consumed but we are not consumed for we have received a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. Yet He dwells within us. You are holy ground. Christ chose to come to you and He set you free to come to Him to see and now go for Him and He goes with you in you, filling you and you are holy ground. When He comes in that Incarnation the angels are around Him shouting out His glory, "Hark the herald angels sing" but who came was the angel of the Lord. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Now this risen Savior comes to you and His angels surround you and minister to you but those angels, while you thank God for them, what you rejoice in is the Lord Himself who dwells within you. You are not just on holy ground, you are holy ground. He is in you.

My friend, don't leave here and be standing ground for this world to destroy you with sin and its penalty and then stand before God as a consuming fire. Come to Christ today. He drank that judgment for you. He will be in you. He is not dependent on you. He will save you and will not consume you. He will change you. Come, see and go with the presence of the Lord. You are not just standing on holy ground. You are holy ground. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much that we could be together in Your Word, kind Jesus and glorious Savior. Anyone reading this today that the world is standing on as common ground, may they come by seeing Jesus and hearing Jesus from His people whom He indwells and may their curiosity give way to their conversion and may their curiosity be changed to doxology and may their life now be one that goes as burning bushes that are never burned up but burning with Christ in them. Holy, Holy, Holy ground, for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW

The Incarnation is a work of God's grace whereby God Himself has come to us, to be among us and become one of us in order to save us from our sins, and will come again for us to be with us forever.

THE CHRISTOPHANY

The Angel of the Lord in the Burning Bush

THE MESSAGE

"I Am that I Am"

- God is Self-sufficient
- God Will Save
- God Will Sustain
- God Will Secure
- God Will Stay

THE CHRISTOPHANY

The Angel of the Lord in the Burning Bush

THE MANIFESTATION

"The Unburning Burning Bush"

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The Son of God, who called Moses to deliver His people from the bondage of slavery and the tyranny of Pharaoh to dwell in the Land of Promise, has now come Himself to deliver His people from the bondage of sin and the tyranny of Satan, to dwell with them in the New Heavens and the New Earth forever.