

Bible Study – The Burning Bush

By William Gavin

“Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.” Exodus 3:5

Leader Notes:

Focus: The Burning Bush story from Exodus. The passage that will be our main focus is from the Book of Exodus, Chapter 3, in the Old Testament. We will reflect on what it means to properly worship God, while examining other relevant passages from the Gospels of John and Luke. We will look at the woman at the well story (John 4) and the Canticle of Zechariah (Luke 1).

Instruction: Anything written in italics is a direction or suggestion for the leader. Whatever is written in regular text should be read aloud. When possible, have the young people in your group do these readings.

Preparation: Read through the study ahead of time, familiarizing yourself with its content. Pray with the readings from Sacred Scripture. Have Bibles ready to go (or print out the passages below). Ask your teens to bring their own and have extras available, if possible. We recommend actual Bibles to be used as putting the Bible in the hands of young people is always preferable.

The Burning Bush – Exodus 3

Introduction: Let’s focus on the story of the burning bush from the book of Exodus. In order to better comprehend this story, we have to understand the larger context of this episode in the history of salvation. The Bible is a huge book with many stories, but the entire Bible can, in some respect, be summed up with the following short sentence: “The Bible is the story of God’s people moving from slavery to the freedom of the children of God.”

Before we begin, let us begin in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds and our hearts to understand His word.

Opening Prayer:

[Begin with sign of the cross]

Holy Spirit, teach us how to pray. Open the eyes of our heart. Free us from the blindness caused by our sin. Free us from the slavery of sin that conceals your word. Give us a heart aflame with Your love and Your truth. Help us to see and to understand Your word as living and true. Come, Holy Spirit, enkindle in us the fire of Your word. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Amen.

[End with sign of the cross]

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Before we begin with the passage, a few fun facts about fire:

- The ancient Greeks started fire with concentrated sunlight. A parabolic mirror that focuses solar rays is still used to ignite the Olympic torch.
- Candle flames are blue at the bottom because that's where they take up fresh air, and yellow at the top because the rising fumes from below partly suffocate the upper part of the flame.
- Deep red fire is about 1100-1800° Fahrenheit, orange-yellow is around 2000° Fahrenheit, and a white flame is hotter still, ranging from 2400-2700° Fahrenheit. A blue flame is the hottest one of all, ranging from 2700-3000° Fahrenheit.

Question: Who can share one of their most memorable campfires?

Share (allow for a few moments of silence, if no one is talking)

We are now going to read an episode from the Book of Exodus, chapter 3

Read the following passage from Exodus 3: 1-15

1 Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock beyond the wilderness, he came to the mountain of God, Horeb.

2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him as fire flaming out of a bush. When he looked, although the bush was on fire, it was not being consumed.

3 So Moses decided, "I must turn aside to look at this remarkable sight. Why does the bush not burn up?"

4 When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to look, God called out to him from the bush: Moses! Moses! He answered, "Here I am."

5 God said: Do not come near! Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.

6 I am the God of your father, he continued, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 But the LORD said: I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry against their taskmasters, so I know well what they are suffering.

8 Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them up from that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...

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9 Now indeed the outcry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 Now, go! I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

12 God answered: I will be with you; and this will be your sign that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will serve God at this mountain.

13 “But,” said Moses to God, “if I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what do I tell them?”

14 God replied to Moses: I am who I am. Then he added: This is what you will tell the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you. 15 God spoke further to Moses: This is what you will say to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.

This is my name forever; this is my title for all generations.

Points for understanding:

We are all probably familiar with the story of slavery in Egypt. The background is that Abraham had come from Haran, which is in modern day Iraq. Abraham was called out of his land to a ‘foreign land’ -- he travelled up through Syria and then down into modern day Israel – many believe this happened roughly 1800 years before the birth of Christ. Joseph, one of the sons of Jacob (a descendent of Abraham), was sold into slavery by his brothers and brought to Egypt. An important note for understand is that Jacob’s name was changed to ‘Israel’, which is where we get the name ‘Israelites’.

A severe famine struck the land of Israel and the brothers ended up traveling to Egypt to find food and rediscovering their brother Joseph whom they thought was dead. There is much more to the story, but this is how the descendants of Abraham ended up in Egypt.

These descendants of Abraham eventually became known as ‘Hebrews’. Scholars are not certain of the origin of the name ‘Hebrew’, but they are clearly connected to the descendants of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph.

The beginning of Exodus says that a ‘new king’ (Exodus 1:8) came to power who did not care for the Hebrews, enslaving them through hard physical labor. Moses, the man who encountered the burning bush, was both a Hebrew and an Egyptian (through the famous scene of being saved during a mass killing of Hebrew boys when he was an infant and then growing up in the house of the Pharaoh).

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God has now chosen Moses to be the instrument through which He will save His people and set them free.

There are many elements to the story, but something of great interest and that is often overlooked is the reason why God wanted to set them free – and what will be our focus tonight.

Question: Why did God want to set His people free? Free for what?

(Wait to see how the youth answer).

The answer is so that they will be free to worship – worship God Himself. The one true God.

Let us read now together a few passages from the Gospels:

The first one is when Jesus meets the woman of Samaria at the well in the Gospel of John: (4:19-23)

19 The woman said to him, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.

20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain;^{*} but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”

21 Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

22 You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews.

23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him.

Jesus here focuses on the Father’s desire for ‘true worshipers’ who will worship Him in spirit and truth. Jesus will say in the Gospel of Luke chapter 12 that he ‘came to bring fire to earth and how he wished it was already burning’.

Question: What does Jesus want burning?

Wait for answers

He wants our hearts to burn with love and worship for our Father in Heaven.

The disciples in the story of the Road to Emmaus after Christ had opened the meaning of the Scriptures to them and shared in the Eucharist with them, they said, ‘Were not our hearts ‘burning’ within us!’ Namely, a heart aflame with love.

Another related story is from the Gospel of Luke: (1:74)

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In the Canticle (or Song) of Zechariah from the Gospel of Luke, Zechariah prays that they will be ‘free to worship’ God without fear all the days of his life.

This prayer is rooted in our opening story from Exodus – the vital importance of the freedom to worship God. Once again, the main purpose of being set free from slavery, was to be free to worship God.

This, again, is the key to life. We are by nature, worshipping beings--we will worship whether we want to or not.

Question: What are some things that people ‘worship’ today that are not God?

Answers - some might say athletes, movie stars, etc.

We might worship a sports team, a video game, another person or even ourselves. It is in our nature to worship and to serve something or someone else. God knows this and also knows that only by worshipping Him will we find true and lasting peace.

Question: How do all these worldly things eventually let us down? How do they not completely suffice?

Questions for discussion:

What is worship? What does it mean to worship God?

What does it mean to worship God in spirit and in the truth?

What is the primary way that Catholics worship God? (*Wait for answers, then share: Answer: in the Mass and through the Eucharist*)

There is an argument that Catholic culture needs to be rebuilt as we have fallen into a number of traps in our world today (through the media, consumerism, evil images through the internet, etc.). The argument follows that it will only be possible to ‘rebuild’ a Catholic culture if it is centered around the Mass and the Eucharist and proper worship of God. Why do you think this is?

What are some examples of ‘improper worship’ in the Bible? (*Wait for answers, then share that answers might include: worshipping in pride, worshipping robotically, neglecting mercy and justice in our worship, making it about ourselves and not God, etc.*).

We are supposed to approach our salvation ‘in fear and trembling’ (Philippians 2); we are supposed to humble ourselves ‘before the mighty hand of God’ (1 Peter 5:6); and, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10) – with all this said, God doesn’t want us to live in a spirit of fear – St. Paul says in Timothy: “For God has not given us a spirit of

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fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.” How do we tie all of this together and properly worship God? How can we err on one side or the other?

(Wait for answers then share that possible answers might be that we can fear God so much that we never approach, rather we avoid, etc. Or we can be overly casual with God and treat God like one of our pals).

Final Question: What is one thing you learned in this study? Or, one thing you want to hold onto?

Closing Prayer:

From St. Paul’s first letter to Timothy: (2 Timothy 1:6)

Let us pray:

⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. ⁸So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. ⁹He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Lord, we thank you for this evening and for the fire of Your love. Give us your grace and your life so that we will be a people aflame with Your love. We ask all this through Christ your son. Amen.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.