Have you ever received a postcard in the mail from a friend on vacation. You know, one of those postcards with a picture of a sunny beach or gorgeous scenery from their trip. You turn the card over and at the bottom of their note says: **Weather is great. wish you were here!**

Do you wish that you were with them? Maybe. Maybe you are even a little envious of the fact that they are on vacation while you are back home, going about your daily routine.

But what if, even though the picture on the front is full of sunshine, their note on the back tells you that it has been rainy and cold for the whole trip. Maybe they tell you about the food poisoning they got from one of the local restaurants and how the airline still has not found their luggage? Do you still wish you were there? Probably not.

Jesus and his disciples were not on vacation when they climbed the mountain in our Gospel lesson. But it certainly was an exciting trip. What sights they saw! They saw Jesus transfigured before them. They saw Moses and Elijah. They even heard the voice of God speaking from the cloud. Peter said: **It is good for us to be here!**

But I wonder whether you and I would have wanted to be there. I wonder the same thing about the events on Mt Sinai recorded here in Exodus. Was it really good to be there? Would I want to see what they saw? Or would I rather stay home and read about it on a postcard?

You see, in both of these cases, the people of God saw a glimpse of God in his glory. And the question we might have is this: Do I really want to see that? Do I really want to see God’s glory there on the mountain?

Of course, none of us really have that option, but on this festival of the Transfiguration of our Lord, we all have the opportunity to go up to these mountains and with the eyes of faith see what they saw - to **SEE GOD’S GLORY ON THE MOUNTAIN.**

Our text begins: **The Lord said to Moses, Come up to me on the mountain. Wait there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commands that I have written, so that you can teach them.**

You get the sense that the people of Israel were not sure they wanted to see God’s glory. This event takes place after God had led them out of Egypt and now they were camped out at the base of Mt Sinai. That is where they were to meet with God. God came to the mountain and the mountain was covered with fire and smoke. It says that the glory of the Lord settled on the mountain. And from the mountain God thundered the 10 Commandments. But the people said: **Stop. If God keeps talking directly to us, we are going to die. It is too much for us. Moses, you go and get the commands from God and you speak them to us. You just tell us what we need to do and we will do it.** They were afraid of God’s glory.

God used fire and smoke and a cloud to visibly show his presence among the people of Israel. God is a spirit who does not have a body, but in order for the people to see that he was with them and acting in power and majesty among them, he used the cloud and fire to show himself. The Bible calls this the **Glory of the Lord.** And so when the people of Israel left Egypt, this is the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night that went ahead of them to lead them. This is the same pillar that blocked the Egyptians from attacking them when they were pinned against the Red Sea. The Glory of the Lord was his majesty power to deliver his people and destroy his enemies.

So why were they afraid of it? Why did the glory of the Lord appear to them like a consuming fire? Why could they not stand to hear God - the same God who rescued them from
slavery - tell them what he wanted, namely, his law? Could it be that the laws and commands of God already condemned them? Could it be that they realized that their nature was to rebel against God and grumble and complain to him? Could it be that they realized that their own sinful nature already exposed them as God’s true enemies, and they if God was just, they belonged at the bottom of the Red Sea with the Egyptian army and even worse?

Why should anyone be afraid of God’s majesty glory and power? After all, this is the same God who created each one of us and who lovingly preserves us and provides for us day by day. Why should we be afraid to see him in his glory? Why do people so often avoid God like the plague? Why do they view him only as an agent of wrath and punishment? Why would they rather listen to the voice of anyone else; but the powerful and glorious voice of God they ignore and avoid?

Could it be that our guilty conscience is afraid of what God will say? Could it be that we are afraid that God will use the same power and majesty to turn against us and destroy us? Do we avoid listening to his commands because we have already broken them? Does a part of us bristle at the notion of hearing again and again how we are to love and trust in God above all things - because we have not? Would we rather not hear again those words about honoring people in authority over us, even if they are not fair to us or we just do not like them, about protecting the lives of others, about honoring God’s gift of marriage, and his gifts of possessions, and about taking the words and actions of others in the kindest possible way? Do we hate to hear those words because they condemn us already? Would we rather not see God’s glory because he should turn his glory against us?

If any of that is true, even in the slightest, I think that gives us all the more reason to watch as Moses goes up the mountain. It gives us reason to see God’s glory there - not just in his majesty, but also in his mercy.

We are told: Moses went up onto the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mt Sinai, and the cloud covered the mountain for six days. On the seventh day the Lord called to Moses out of the middle of the cloud. The appearance of the glory of the Lord looked like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered into the middle of the cloud and climbed up the mountain. Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

The Israelites must have thought that Moses was a goner. Earlier, God had specifically warned the Israelites not to touch the mountain. If they or even one of their animals did, they would die. But it was not Moses’ idea to go up to the mountain. In fact, none of this was Moses’ idea. God was the one who came to Israel. It was not like the people of Israel were wandering around the Sinai peninsula looking for God. God brought them to this place and God came to them. In fact, when it says here that the glory of the Lord settled on Mt Sinai that word is always used for when God comes to dwell with people. God’s glory is that he wanted be with this people.

And it was the Lord who called Moses to come up the mountain. God wanted to speak with Moses, that is, he wanted to speak to his people through Moses. God shows his glory to his people, not because he wants to destroy them, but because he wants to dwell with them and speak with them. The reason he gave his law to the people was so that they would not throw away and destroy their relationship with him by their sinning. He did not give his law to them so that they could win their way into his heart. No, they already had his heart. And God would do anything to protect and save his people that he had redeemed and saved.

This is what makes the Transfiguration of Jesus so amazing. Even though Peter, James and John trembled at God’s voice, he did not show his glory to them to condemn them. God’s glory is in his Son, who came to save. God’s glory is in the Word made flesh, who made his
dwelling among us, as John wrote many years later: **We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.** God’s glory is in his mercy, in his desire to save.

We read that Moses stayed on the mountain for forty days and nights. There God gave to Moses all the details for the covenant between God and the people he loved. We are about to enter a different forty day period that we call Lent. As we enter Lent we are not standing on Mt Sinai or the Mt of Transfiguration. But as we enter this time, we travel as one of Jesus’ disciples as he makes his way to Jerusalem, to the cross and to the empty tomb. As we travel this way, as we go down from the mountain into the valley of Lent, let us never lose sight of what we have seen during this season of Epiphany. We have seen his glory. In these past weeks we’ve seen glimpses of Jesus as the true Son of God. We have seen the glory of our Savior in the star that shone in the east. We saw his glory at his baptism in the Jordan. We’ve seen his glory in his miracles and in his power. But we know that our Lord’s true glory is his desire to go to the cross to save us.

The hymn we sang before the sermon captures this thought quite well. It speaks of the double-glory that the disciples witnessed on the mountain. They saw the glory of God’s majesty in brilliant light and cloud. But they saw even greater glory when Jesus came down from the mountain. He could have stayed there - basking in the glory that was his. But he did not do that. He showed his true glory by walking down this mountain and making his way to another mountain - Mt Calvary. And there by faith we too shall behold him - as Redeemer, yours and mine. Amen.

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