

The Burning Bush That Was Not Consumed

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On September 4 the Church honors an icon, in addition to the saints commemorated that day. It is called "The Icon of the Mother of God, the Unburnt Bush."

The title refers to Moses' meeting with the Lord, described in Exodus 3. Having fled from Egypt to Midian, Moses is tending the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro. He has led the animals into the wilderness near Mount Horeb, which is known as the mountain of God. He sees a bush that has a flame of fire coming out of its midst. But the bush is not being consumed by the flames. The verses tell us that the flame is an angel of God appearing to Moses.

Moses reacts to this unusual event as most people would. He says, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." As he does so, God calls out to him and instructs him to remove his shoes, because the place where he stands is holy ground. Then God identifies Himself as "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." He reveals His name: "I AM

WHO I AM."

God makes a great promise to Moses. He will deliver His people out of the hand of the Egyptians, and will bring them to "a land flowing with milk and honey..." Moses expresses considerable apprehension about his ability to be the person who carries out God's will and lead the people out of Egypt. But in the end he obeys.

The Church sees the burning bush as a "type" or foreshadowing of the Mother of God. She bore the Son of God, yet her body was unchanged—she remained a virgin. All motherhood is honorable, but only the Mother who bore Jesus Christ remained as she was, a virgin. It is a miracle like that of a bush aflame, yet not being burned up. That Old Testament event prepares us for the Virgin Birth of Our Lord.

The icon shows the Virgin with her Son, sitting in the midst of the enflamed bush. Moses is shown removing his shoes, to remind us of the meeting with God, on holy ground, that foreshadows the divine birth.

In one of today's readings (2 Corinthians 3: 4-11), Saint Paul compares God's temporary revelation in the Old Testament to the permanent one in the New Testament. He calls the Old Testament revelation the "dispensation of death" because it doesn't lead to everlasting life. He writes, "Now if the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such splendor that the Israelites could not look at Moses' face because of its brightness, will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendor?...For if what faded away came with splendor, what is permanent must have much more splendor." The law of the Ten Commandments given to Moses was splendid; the new law of love is even moreso. Moses' meeting with God at Mount Horeb was a great event, and it foreshadows an even greater one: the coming of God in the flesh.

Troparion — Tone 1

The miracle that Moses witnessed on Sinai in the burning bush
Foretold your virgin childbearing, O pure Mother.

We the faithful cry to you:

Rejoice, O truly living bush!

Rejoice, O holy mountain!

Rejoice, O sanctified expanse and most holy Theotokos!

Kontakion — Tone 4

You showed Moses, O Christ God,

An image of your most pure Mother

In the bush that burned yet was not consumed,

For she herself was not consumed,

When she received in her womb the fire of divinity!

She remained incorrupt after her pure childbearing!

By her prayers, O greatly merciful One,

Deliver us from the flame of passions,

And preserve your people from all harm!