

Opening the Book of Faith
ELCA Bible Study Initiative – Session #4
John Thebus – St. Luke Lutheran Church in Devon, PA
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Lutherans come to our encounter with the Bible with certain convictions and expectations. We come not only to hear about God but also to experience God directly. We come not only to learn about Jesus but to meet Jesus.

We come convinced, convicted if you will, that this encounter will bear fruit in our lives for the sake of God's world.

Historical Reading – Exodus 3:1-15

- 3:1 – Horeb was another name for Mount Sinai. Biblical scholars are not in agreement as to the exact geographical location of Mount Sinai.
- 3:1-3 – These verses present the circumstances of Moses' call by God.
- 3:1-3 - This communication from God to Moses is given at the same location where God later gave Moses the Law.
- 3:2 – The Angel of the Lord was the Lord Himself. Moses saw a bush actually burning but not consumed.
- 3:2 – Fire was a symbol of God's presence.
- 3:5 – *remove your sandals*. A sign of respect toward a superior. Slaves characteristically went barefoot.
- 3:8 – *So I have come down to deliver them...* an idiom describing divine intervention – God would (a) deliver them from Egypt and (b) take them to a good and spacious land, unlike the Midianite desert..
- 3:8 – The phrase *a land flowing with milk* means that Canaan was ideal for raising goats and cows. Feeding on good pastureland the goats, sheep, and cows were full of milk. Flowing with *honey* means that the bees were busy making honey. Milk and Honey suggested agricultural prosperity. This is the first of numerous references in the Old Testament to the "*land flowing with milk and honey*."
- 3:11 – Moses objected to God's commands because of his lack of ability, and his lack of authority. Moses doubted his ability to confront the new **Pharaoh** (some scholars believe this new Pharaoh to be Amenhotep II, other scholars believe him to be Ramses II) successfully and to lead the nation out. **God** responded to this objection with two promises: the assurance of His personal presence (v. 12); and the promise of Moses' return to Mount Horeb.
- The purpose of the deliverance was that Israel might "worship God."
- 3:13 – In Moses' second objection he felt the Israelites would challenge his assertion that God had sent him to deliver them. **God** told **Moses** to tell them, **I am who I am** and **I am has sent me to you**.
- **AUTHORSHIP**: Biblical scholars are not in agreement as to the authorship of the Book of Exodus. Since the time of Joshua, this book has been attributed to

Moses, a conclusion affirmed by Jesus Christ in Mark 12:26. The Book of Exodus was so named for its central focus – the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. However, the Bible clearly states that Moses had the ability to have undertaken such a task; and the Book of Exodus explicitly verifies Mosaic authorship. And statements in other portions of the Pentateuch also verify Mosaic authorship.

- The Book of Exodus tells the story of God saving Israel, the people God has personally claimed and promised to be with. In Exodus, God frees the people from the slavery in Egypt through the leadership of Moses.
- In this covenant, Israel is asked to respond to God’s gift of saving them by becoming a nation dedicated to God, obeying God’s voice and serving their neighbor.
- Through God’s encounter with Moses, He calls forth the leader who was needed for the task of delivering the Hebrew people out of slavery.
- Moses is living in the desert because he is tending the sheep of his father-in-law “Jethro.”
- The first readers of this story would have been familiar with all these names and places, and they would have been a very important of their “story.”
- God acted to save the Israelite people in and through historic events. Though we cannot always know how much of each story is precise historical fact, we do know that the story of God’s saving action in the Bible includes real people and places.
- Bible commentaries also give helpful background, but keep in mind that commentaries can also disagree over historical details because scholars are trying to piece together the context from very old sources.
- Asking historical questions can also lead you to notice other details in the story.
- Sometimes, you can get answers to historical questions simply by reading more of the story. A quick review of Exodus Chapters 1 and 2 will answer many questions – questions about the oppression of Israel and the preparation of Moses.

Devotional Reading – Exodus 3:1-15

- One place to begin when reading and thinking about this story is to put yourself in Moses’ shoes. Think about how Moses must have felt.
- Have you ever experienced what you might describe as a “call” from God?
- How did Moses seem to feel about his leadership ability?

- Why might God call you? What are your leadership qualities?
- What feelings do you have about what God asks and how Moses responds?

Literary Reading – Exodus 3:1-15

- In the stories leading up to chapter 3 in Exodus, we find out many things about Moses – how he was born to a Hebrew family and put in a basket in the Nile River, where he was discovered and adopted by an Egyptian princess.
- Even though he grew up as part of the Egyptian royal family, Moses still identified with his enslaved people.
- He murdered a cruel Egyptian overseer and became an exile, marrying the daughter of a Midianite priest.
- You learn a tremendous amount about the story in Exodus 3 if you read it very carefully, noticing some of the details, noticing some connections to other stories, and asking the literary questions you might put to any biblical narrative.
- One literary pattern that appears here and in other places in the Bible leads us to label this story as a “prophetic call” narrative. Notice what happens when God calls Moses’ name. How does Moses respond?
- How does hearing about or reading about how God has called others help you recognize your own “call narrative” (story)?
- Another literary detail of the text worth noticing is the relationship of seeing to hearing. Notice how many times these verbs appear. Seeing serves hearing. God hears the cry of the people so that God might act. Hearing serves action.
- A final literary detail worth noticing is how God’s sacred name is revealed. Names are important in the Bible, particularly God’s name.

Lutheran Theological Reading – Exodus 3:1-15

- Theological questions refer to questions that help us think about God and our relationship to God. They also call us into relationship with God.
- What makes a place holy? What happens to Moses, to us, in sacred space?
- How did Moses react to God’s call? How do we react?
- What is the relationship between the call in the text and God’s mission to the world?
- How does this passage show forth Christ?
- How is the vocation of the leader tied to the vocation of the whole people of God?

- What makes this occasion holy is not some abstract standing on holy ground. The holy ground provides a context and a sign. The holy ground is a sign of God's presence, and it provides a context for the holy word that is to be spoken.
- Think of the way we Lutherans define the Word of God in three ways – as Jesus, the living Word; as the written Word in Scripture; and as the spoken or proclaimed word.
- How are worship, Baptism, or even Bible study “sending places” and not simply ending places? How is God present in these places?
- Being holy and being called are not private matters. Being made holy is not the equivalent of being more “spiritual.” Moses’ experience at the burning bush is not a private, spiritual cleansing. Seeing the miraculous creates space for hearing the call. Hearing then leads to action. The holy word given on holy ground is a vocational word, inviting us to take up our various calls in God’s world and for God’s world.
- The word is not an abstract, unchanging word given for all time. This is good news for us. This means that each encounter with the divine is new and personal with its own mission and content. We are not Moses, but our calling is also inescapably tied to God’s mission in the world.

Every time we read and study the Bible we listen for God’s call in our lives.

Closing Prayer:

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, but always to the glory and welfare of your people, through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Resource: Opening the Book of Faith