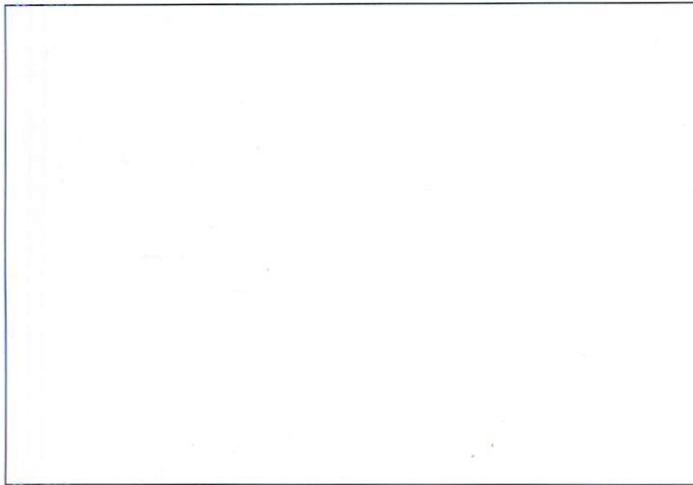


## The Earth is Crammed with Heaven...

### A Poet's Insight...

*Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God,  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit around it and pluck blackberries...*

The verse above is from the long poem by 19th century British poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning called "Aurora Leigh." What images does she present? Draw one of them here (and you don't have to be a Picasso).



### Digging Deeper

1. What does "crammed" imply?
2. Why "common"?
3. What does "afire" suggest?
4. What does it mean here to "see"?

You have probably heard the expression "seeing is believing"

Here's an interesting variation: "believing is seeing"

What might this mean?

### Worship: The Heart's Answer to God

In Galatians 4:6 Paul reminds us that "Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying "Abba, Father!" "Abba" is the word for father in Aramaic, Jesus' language, and has an especially intimate meaning, almost like "daddy."

This word is the same one used by Jesus when he taught

us the special prayer now known as "The Lord's Prayer" or "Our Father" (*Hayr Mer*) after its first two words.

## Ամէն



### Dictionary Definitions

**Amen:** From the Hebrew for "to support" or "to confirm." The general sense of the word is "so be it," "truly," "indeed."

So God has already entered our hearts and given us the ability to know him and love him. This is quite a gift. It is the impulse that makes us want to worship, almost by nature. It is how we are *made*.

This impulse to know God began at the moment humankind was created (see Genesis 1:27). We are the only ones of all God's creatures who are invited into a relationship with God. We *can* communicate with him.

### The Burning Bush (And Other Close Encounters)

Let's turn back to our "earth crammed with heaven." There is another powerful story of a "common bush afire" with God. The story of Moses begins in the Book of Exodus, chapter 2, when the Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt. Most of us remember the story: Pharaoh threatened to kill all baby boys born to Hebrew slaves— out of fear they would rebel as adults - and so his mother placed him in a basket of reeds and set him in the river where Pharaoh's daughter would bathe. You can read the rest to refresh your memory. By the time Moses encounters the burning bush, he has grown up like an Egyptian prince, killed an Egyptian guard for beating a Hebrew slave and fled to Midian where he is tending sheep.

Besides this one, there are countless examples in Scripture of people experiencing God in some personal, powerful way. Too many to summarize; here are only a few. Look them up and be prepared to tell the story:

1. Exodus 3:1-14
2. Isaiah 6:1-8
3. 1 Kings 19:11-13
4. Matthew 17:1-7



## The Armenian Angle



The words “Holy, holy, holy” sung by the angels in Isaiah 6:3 are the basis of our Divine Liturgy hymn “Soorp, soorp” (Holy, holy).

# Սուրբ, Սուրբ

These stories can help us understand what we experience in church: the fact that God reveals himself to us freely – that we are touched with wonder, perhaps even a sense of smallness and inadequacy, and that he has something to say, if we listen.

## Sacrifice, Remembrance, and Atonement

If we are naturally in a state of awe and humility in the presence of God, then it stands to reason that we instinctively want to give something back, to respond. Worship, then, is that instinctive, ritual action that gives thanks, requests mercy, conveys obedience, and praises Almighty God. Noah thanked God for his survival in the flood by placing burnt offerings on the altar (Genesis 8:20). Difficult as it is for modern people to endure (even though we routinely slaughter animals for our high-protein Western diets), animals were used in these sacrifices, their blood a symbol of life and vitality. It was the first and best of one’s flock that was offered, and the best part of the meat that was then burned on the altar (thus “burnt offerings”).



## Passover

If you’ve ever seen “The Ten Commandments” movie – it re-runs on TV at Easter time – you will surely remember Charlton Heston as Moses, leading the Egyptians out of slavery and through the Red Sea. But it took ten plagues sent by God upon the pharaoh until he finally released them, the final plague being the most unbearable – the taking of every first-born son’s life. God instructed the Hebrews to mark their doors with the blood of a lamb so that the angel of death would “pass over” their homes. And so this miracle of liberation and life is celebrated with the Jewish Passover, which is detailed in Exodus 12. The Last Supper Jesus shared with his disciples was probably a Passover meal, where he established a New Covenant in his body (bread) and blood (wine).



## Who’s Who

Aaron, brother of Moses and Miriam, became his brother’s spokesman when Moses claimed he was not articulate enough to convey God’s will to the Pharaoh (Ex 4:14-16). Although Aaron acceded to the people’s desire to build the golden calf while Moses was up on Mt. Sinai, it was still Aaron and his clan who were consecrated as priests for this new people of God, the Israelites.

## ? What Do I Do...

### When I First Take a Seat in the Pew?

Don’t just plop down and look around. Get to your seat and then, still standing, bow to the altar and make the sign of the cross first. It’s almost as if you’re “logging on,” saying, “Lord, I’m here. I love you and I’m ready to pray with the rest of my parish.” Then, say a prayer of your own, even if it’s the line you just read. Then sit, or stand, if liturgy has already begun and everyone else is standing.



## Up Close and Personal

*Think of a time you felt especially close to God. There has to be one! Describe it to the class.*

## Day of Atonement

Another Old Testament ritual that became an important Jewish feast is the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur. Beginning with elaborate instructions (including bathing, special clothing) by God, Aaron gets to the important moment that we read about in Leviticus 16: 21-22.

What happens in these two verses?

Note that this act of atonement was presided over by a priest (Aaron) but was for and shared by the community. When Jesus rose from the dead, he became the final sacrifice and atonement for our sins.



## The Least You Need to Know

- ✓ God created us to know and love him.
- ✓ Our natural response when we encounter God is worship.
- ✓ Worship is about gratitude, praise, and the need for spiritual restoration.
- ✓ The Bible contains many examples of people encountering God.
- ✓ Two Old Testament rituals: Passover – the ritual meal of remembrance – and The Day of Atonement – a day of confession and renewal - will have important echoes in the theology of Christian worship.

## QUICK QUIZ

1. Draw a line between the words on the left and the best connection on the right.

a. Abba	Moses
b. Hayr Mer	So be it
c. Aaron	Daddy
d. Burning Bush	Moses' brother
e. Amen	Our Father
  
2. In what Book of the Bible would you read about Moses, the Ten Commandments, the Burning Bush, and the liberation of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What two Old Testament Jewish Feasts, still commemorated today in that religion, were transformed by the coming of Jesus?  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is the heart's instinctive and natural response to God?  
\_\_\_\_\_

