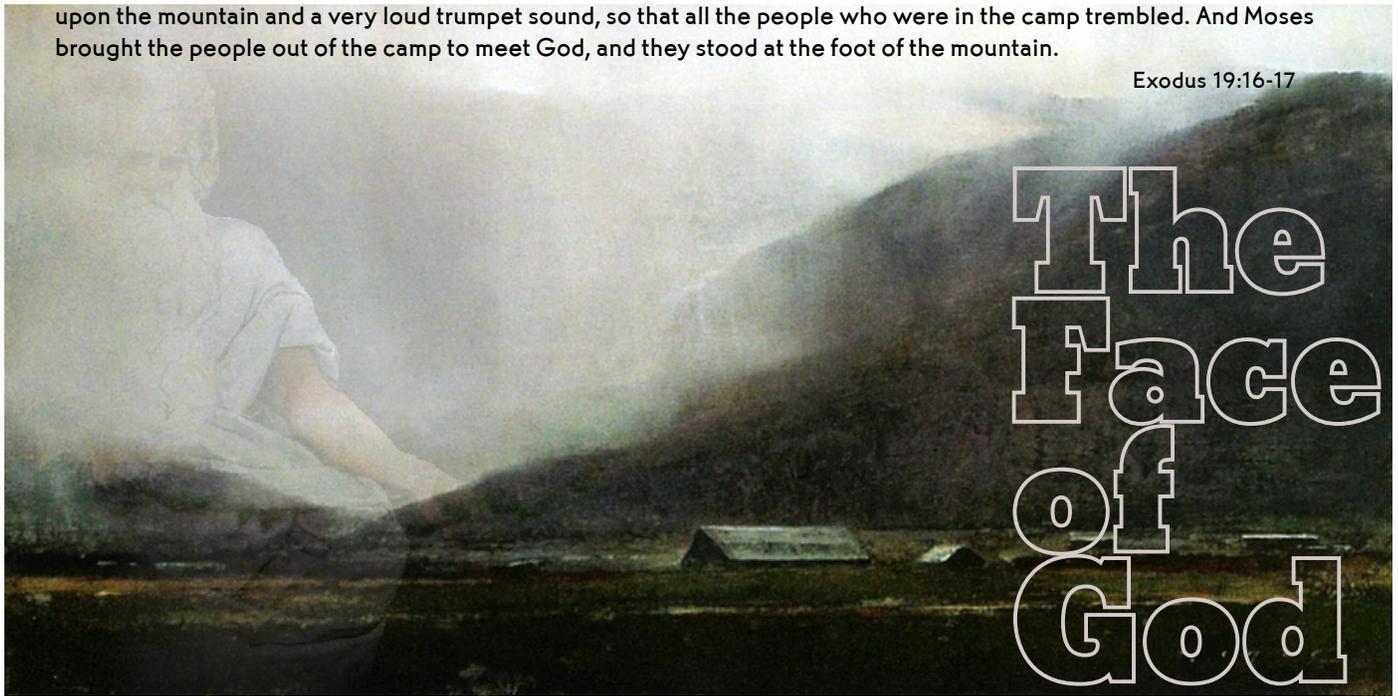


So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

Exodus 19:16-17



WITH THE MORNING'S FIRST CUP OF COFFEE IN HAND, I watched the doe and her new fawn from our west porch. At six-thirty my day was already an hour old. The chorus of birds was at full volume, and the skunk had already made her daily trip across the pond's dike and returned to her home. A young groundhog was inspecting the area around the birdbath outside the library door. The chipmunk living in the wood pile was perched atop her log, inspecting the day's prospects for nourishment. And the new fawn, still speckled with white spots, was dancing with abandon near the northwest corner of the front lawn.

The thunderstorm was just beyond the hills to the west. Though there was sunlight on our home, from the swathe of dark grey clouds in the distance rain sheeted down while frequent shafts of silver-white lightning pierced through to stab the earth. With every explosion of lightning the curtain of rain increased. Sadly, I could see that the track of the small storm would take it north of us. There would be no more rain this morning.

Face to Face

Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!" And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" Then the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you

shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

Exodus 33:18-23

From his earliest days, man has wondered about God's visage. Is He an old man with long, white beard? Is He handsome, stern, inviting, frightening? Or is God a shape-shifter, presenting Himself to each person according to that individual's desires or needs? Is it correct even to think of God as a "Him," some wonder; could He really be a "She," or even an "It"? Or is God something in appearance not yet recognizable to humans, such as a mysterious entity of pure, blinding energy? Is that what would have killed Moses?

It is not good enough to say that such musings are simply academic. For it is in man's heart to desire relationships that are face-to-face—even with his God. Moses wished for it, and so do many of those who have followed after. It is in man's heart to look upon the face of his adored.

What sort of God would leave His adherents bereft of His visage? But our God has not. For His face is there, in the storm.

His Dark, Churning Wrath

In the storm we see the face and hear the voice of our God.

He made darkness His hiding place, His canopy around Him,

Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies.
 From the brightness before Him passed His thick clouds,
 Hailstones and coals of fire.
 The Lord also thundered in the heavens,
 And the Most High uttered His voice,
 Hailstones and coals of fire.
 He sent out His arrows, and scattered them,
 And lightning flashes in abundance, and routed them.
 Then the channels of water appeared,
 And the foundations of the world were laid bare
 At Your rebuke, O Lord,
 At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.

Psalm 18:11-15

He is there, in the storm.

The black, churning clouds are the face of His wrath. The jagged white of the electric pulse is His quick, fearsome might. The thunder echoes His rumbling, intimidating strength. Before His face flies the fierce, gusting wind—the fear of the Lord:

So they will fear the name of the Lord from the west
 And His glory from the rising of the sun,
 For He will come like a rushing stream
 Which the wind of the Lord drives.

Isaiah 59:19

His beard—the angry, pounding downpour of rain—is life, but it bruises along the way. It strips branch and leaf, it beats against window and roof, it flattens the bush.

Were we to leave it there, the face of our God would be yet unfinished. For God's wrath has been assuaged. God remains who He al-

ways has been. He is still power and might, unapproachable holiness, fierce wrath. What has changed is that His wrath was satisfied, and His holiness instantly became approachable, at the cross. In the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, we need no longer fear His wrath or terrible might, for they are not directed at us—we who are His children in Christ.

And there, too, He is in the storm. For the storm finishes not with the dreadful gale, but with the cooling breeze; not with the bruising downpour, but with the gentle, sustaining shower. The wind of the Spirit indeed brings a "fear of the Lord," but it brings as well comfort, consolation, wisdom, and encouragement. It does not drive away, as the gale, but strengthens with His sweet breath.

By the Blood

While there is always the potential for damage from a passing thunderstorm, more often than not we welcome it. Living things require moisture, and nothing can replace rain from the skies. We know that the benefits will usually outweigh the possible liabilities.

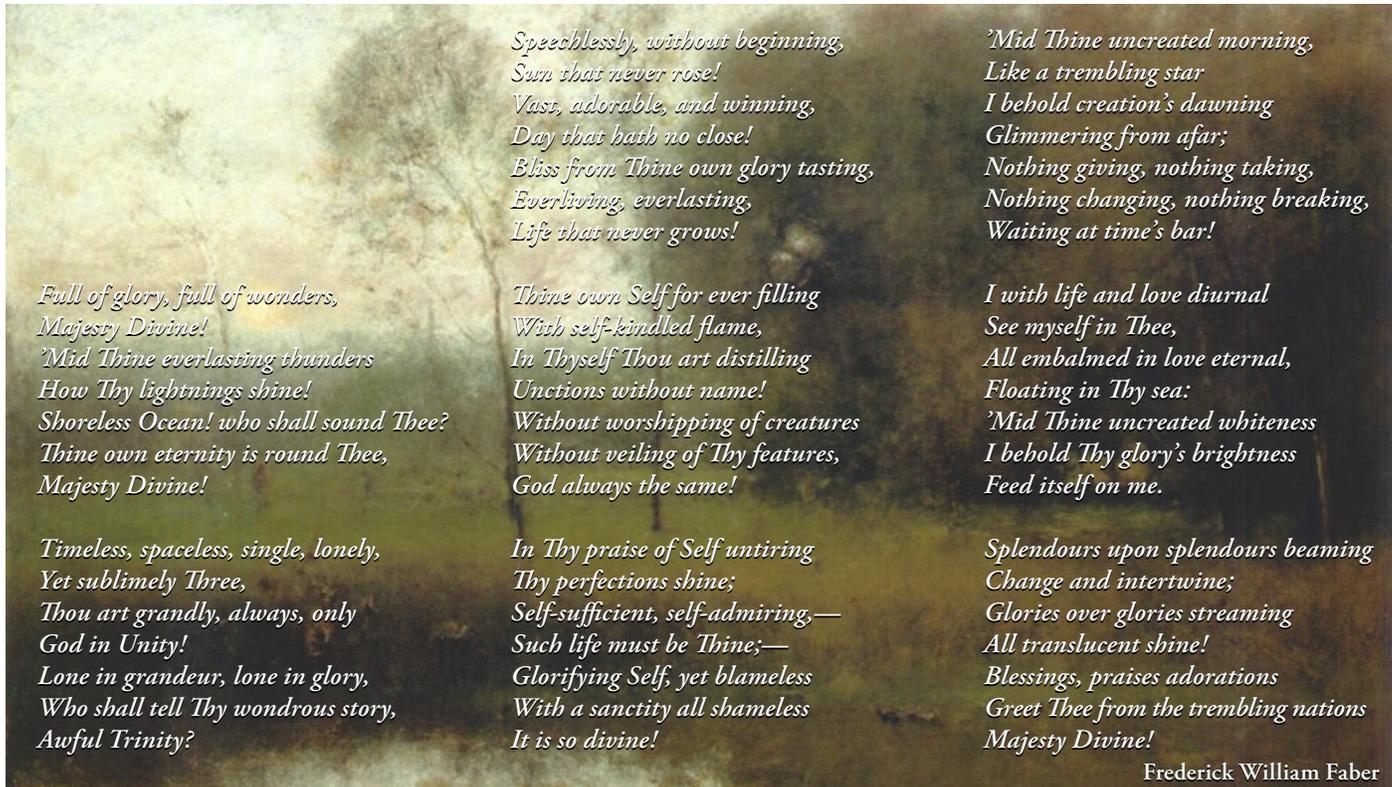
What benefits do we gain by welcoming a supernatural, all-powerful God into our life? Should we not tremble at the prospect of His coming? Should we not quake outside the door to His throne room as we contemplate His terrible might?

No. For we cannot enter His presence—we cannot step inside the storm—save by the blood of Christ shed at the cross. And that same blood has satisfied the enmity between God and man.

We need not fear the storm.

It is power.

It is life. dsj



*Speechlessly, without beginning,
 Sun that never rose!
 Vast, adorable, and winning,
 Day that hath no close!
 Bliss from Thine own glory tasting,
 Everliving, everlasting,
 Life that never grows!*

*'Mid Thine uncreated morning,
 Like a trembling star
 I behold creation's dawning
 Glimmering from afar;
 Nothing giving, nothing taking,
 Nothing changing, nothing breaking,
 Waiting at time's bar!*

*Full of glory, full of wonders,
 Majesty Divine!
 'Mid Thine everlasting thunders
 How Thy lightnings shine!
 Shoreless Ocean! who shall sound Thee?
 Thine own eternity is round Thee,
 Majesty Divine!*

*Thine own Self for ever filling
 With self-kindled flame,
 In Thyself Thou art distilling
 Uncions without name!
 Without worshipping of creatures
 Without veiling of Thy features,
 God always the same!*

*I with life and love diurnal
 See myself in Thee,
 All embalmed in love eternal,
 Floating in Thy sea:
 'Mid Thine uncreated whiteness
 I behold Thy glory's brightness
 Feed itself on me.*

*Timeless, spaceless, single, lonely,
 Yet sublimely Three,
 Thou art grandly, always, only
 God in Unity!
 Lone in grandeur, lone in glory,
 Who shall tell Thy wondrous story,
 Awful Trinity?*

*In Thy praise of Self untiring
 Thy perfections shine;
 Self-sufficient, self-admiring,—
 Such life must be Thine;—
 Glorifying Self, yet blameless
 With a sanctity all shameless
 It is so divine!*

*Splendours upon splendours beaming
 Change and intertwine;
 Glories over glories streaming
 All translucent shine!
 Blessings, praises adorations
 Greet Thee from the trembling nations
 Majesty Divine!*

Frederick William Faber