

Things to Consider

- ▶ Perhaps it has ever been, but we humans continually try to reduce God to our own size. There is an old joke that God made us in God's own image and ever since then, we have been trying to return the favour and make Him in *our* image. The tragedy is we very often don't take God seriously. For many, God is simply a name to use in blasphemy.
- ▶ We sit uneasily with a God we don't fully comprehend and who is greater than we can possibly imagine, and so we try to manipulate and control Him; that is, make Him a tame God. But, our God is like Aslan. (See the CS Lewis quote). He is fire! There is great power and strength there. We all need to allow God to be God in our life.
- ▶ God commanded Moses to come no nearer and to take off his shoes, for he was standing on holy ground (Exodus 3.5). Later God also told Moses to tell his brother Aaron that he is not to come into the sanctuary just whenever he felt like it. He needed to be properly prepared, for He, God, is holy (Leviticus 16.2). We need that 'holy fear' that Isaiah experiences, which is to say that we need a reverence and a recognition of just who our God is (Isaiah 6.1-8).
- ▶ So what are we to do? You could begin by rereading the biblical passages mentioned in this brochure and reflecting on the quotation from Catherine of Siena printed elsewhere. Just sit with them and ponder what they may say to you. Imagine yourself present and witnessing those events. What is it that God may wish to say to you through them?
- ▶ You could also go outside tonight and gaze at the night sky. Allow yourself to be filled with wonder at its beauty and size and see it as a small reflection of the Mystery of God who is greater and grander than we can possibly imagine.
- ▶ In short, begin to develop a sense of awe.

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God who is Mystery



I am not a scientist, but I have read that 95% of the universe is completely invisible to the most advanced scientific methods of detection. Yet, that 5% we can see has completely changed our understanding of the universe!

Perhaps a good way to begin approaching an understanding of God is to recognise God as Mystery, like that invisible to us, 95% of the universe. But, just as the 5% we do know of the universe has transformed our understanding of it, so too, that 5% we know of God has transformed our understanding of who He is and our place in God's world.

In some ways we are like small children, who think they know their parents, and in fact do, but their knowledge is so very limited. The paradox is that they can know the truth of their parents and what they are truly like, for good or for bad, and yet at the same time know little of the depth of who they really are. And it is the same with us and God.

With profound insight, Catherine of Siena, a fourteenth century Italian mystic, wrote of God in this way: *'You, O God are a deep ocean, into which the more I penetrate, the more I discover, and the more I discover, the more I see you'*.

In speaking of God, among many words, there are two technical terms that can help us: one is *transcendent* and the other is *immanent*. *Transcendence* refers to that which is over and above, which is beyond and outside this world and universe; otherness in fact. In contrast, *immanence*, refers to that which is within. In this sense God stands both outside His world and also within it and yet also dwells within each of us. God is thus both transcendent and immanent.

It means God is both knowable and unknowable; God is both hidden and can be seen. That 95% of the universe that is hidden from us is a good metaphor for this dimension of God that is transcendent and thus hidden from our view. Our Scriptures and the world around us point to that other 5% that we know of God.

In the Bible there are two mountains that could be seen as metaphors and which may help us in our thinking. They are Mount Tabor and Mount Sinai and though they are separated by a considerable distance, in many ways they belong together.

Mount Sinai towards the bottom tip of the Sinai Peninsula is the traditional site for two stories concerning Moses. As he tends his father-in-law's sheep, he spies the burning bush and as he approaches it with a

mixture of wonder and curiosity, he is told to take off his shoes for he stands on holy ground (Exodus 3.1-6). Moses is very clearly being reminded that he is a mortal human being who is coming into the presence of this great and majestic God. This is almost completely beyond his comprehension.

Later he will return there with the Hebrew people after they have escaped from Egypt and he will climb the mountain and receive the Ten Commandments from God (Exodus 19.16-20.21). Moses and his people are being given rules to live by in community. They are being told to behave in certain ways both with each other and before God.

In both these experiences at Mount Sinai, Moses is confronted by a God who is simply overwhelming and transcendent and for whom words fail. He learns not so much who God is, but what he, Moses, must do.

The other mountain is *Mount Tabor*, near Nazareth in Galilee. Tradition has it that Jesus was transfigured on this mountain and it was witnessed by Peter, James, and John (Mark 9.2-8). Also present were Moses, the great lawgiver, and Elijah, the great prophet, and these two were affirming Jesus in what lay before him, which is the Cross.

Peter, James and John were seeing Jesus in a new and deeper way. They were privileged to witness something of that transcendent glory of God there, in Jesus, under normal circumstances, hidden from view.

In these stories of Moses, Peter, James and John, we are, in a sense, seeing them as peering into the 95% of darkness and some of it, as a gift from God, is being drawn into the 5% visible before their eyes. They are overwhelmed by their experiences and yet strangely drawn.

An illustration from CS Lewis: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* may assist us and the lion, Aslan, symbolises God: *'People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time. The Lion was coming on, always singing, with a slow, heavy pace ... Though its soft pads made no noise, you could feel the earth shake beneath their weight ... The children could not move. They were not even quite sure that they wanted to. The Lion paid no attention to them ... It passed by them so close that they could have touched its mane. They were terribly afraid it would turn and look at them, yet in some queer way they wished it would.'*

We are drawn to God, however sometimes we struggle against Him but wish it were otherwise. Allow God to be God and embrace His Mystery.