

The Burning Bush



A truly mystical event occurred when God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush (Exodus 3). The encounter began when an angel called to Moses and beckoned him to come close to the bush. From the midst of it, God revealed His Name to Moses and His desire to save the People of Israel from their slavery in Egypt.

An event of such significance makes the ground where God appeared truly holy. That mountain was also the place of encounter for the holy prophet Elijah who journeyed forty days and night from Israel to get there (1 Kgs 19).

Background

In the earliest centuries of the Church, Christians identified a place in the Sinai desert where they believed this event took place, and they built a monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai to commemorate the mystical event. The formal name of that monastery is the “Sacred Monastery of the God-Trodden Mount Sinai,” but it is more commonly known as the Monastery of St. Catherine in reference to the early Christian martyr from Alexandria, Egypt. According to ancient tradition, she was transported to that holy place by the angels after she was killed by the Emperor Maxentius in 312 AD. It was in this monastery that the ancient biblical manuscript called the Codex Sinaiticus was discovered in 1859. Its library contains the largest collection of ancient documents outside the Vatican.



The Miraculous Bush

The bush story seems to be more than a myth. On the grounds of the monastery, there is a unique plant that many believe to be either the Burning Bush itself or a descendant. It is miraculous, not in the sense that it performs miracles but in the sense that it exists at all! When the mother of the Emperor Constantine, St. Helena, visited the monastery in 326 AD, workers actually uprooted the plant to build a bigger church! Yet the original place where it grew is still marked and venerated, and the ancient plant now lives and grows in a separate area of the monastery grounds *without roots*. Modern science has

identified the plant as a member of the species *Rubus sanctus*.

Mystical Plant Facts

- The plant is used to this day for medicinal purposes such as healing minor burns, rashes, insect bites, and irritations;
- Even the most capable botanists have never been able to transplant a shoot of this plant to grow anywhere else;
- There is no other plant of its kind on the *entire* Sinai Peninsula.