

Worship and Wonder

The third stage of true worship is wonder. Here the mind ceases to understand and goes over to a kind of delightful astonishment. Carlyle said that worship is "transcendent wonder," a degree of wonder without limit and beyond expression. That kind of worship is found throughout the Bible (though it is only fair to say that the lesser degrees of worship are found there also). Abraham fell on his face in holy wonderment as God spoke to him. Moses hid his face before the presence of God in the burning bush. Paul could hardly tell whether he was in or out of the body when he was allowed to see the unspeakable glories of the third heaven. When John saw Jesus walking among His churches, he fell at His feet as dead. We cite these as a few examples; the list is long in the Biblical record. It may be said that such experiences as these are highly unusual and can be no criterion for the plain Christian today. This is true, but only of the external circumstances; the spiritual content of the experiences is unchanging and is found alike wherever true believers are found. It is always true that an encounter with God brings wonderment and awe. The pages of Christian biography are sweet with the testimonies of enraptured worshipers who met God in intimate experience and could find no words to express all they felt and saw and heard. Christian hymnody takes us where the efforts of common prose break down, and brings the wings of poetic feeling to the aid of the wondering saint. Open an old hymnal and turn to the sections on worship and the divine perfections and you will see the part that wonder has played in worship through the centuries. But wonder is not yet the last nor highest element in worship. The soaring saint has one more mountain peak to clear before he has reached the rarefied air of purest worship. He must adore.

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