

## GLIMPING THE FACE OF GOD

Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20

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December 24, 2002

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I'm so *very* glad to see you this evening. You are God's gift to me – the best Christmas *present* you could give me is your *presence* this evening. The Lord, also, delights in your presence. God longs to spend time with his family. Just as parents delight to see their children come home for Christmas – God delights to see you because he considers you family – no matter who you are or what you believe or don't believe. God longs to have you be a part of his family.

I've discovered that many people who come to church on Christmas Eve aren't sure what they believe. Was Jesus really born of a Virgin – or was that belief influenced by the myths of a virgin mother goddess? Did Jesus really walk on water, or did the early Christians get that from pagan sources? Did he really multiply the loaves and fish – or was that a later addition? Did he really rise from the dead, or was this belief borrowed from the widespread myths of a dying and rising God prevalent in the ancient world? Maybe you're not sure what you believe.

I think the reason so many people aren't sure what they believe is because we can't see God. We can't prove God. At best all we can see is the effect the unseen God has on people. I think of a wonderful little poem by Emily Dickinson entitled, "Of Paradise' Existence". It goes this way:

*Of Paradise' existence  
All we know  
Is the uncertain certainty --  
But its vicinity infer,  
By its Bisecting  
Messenger --*

I love that poem. I believe in the existence of paradise. I believe in heaven. I believe in God – not as a certainty that can be proven with mathematical precision – but as *the uncertain certainty*. I can't *prove* God's existence but I can *infer* his existence by God's bisecting messenger – Jesus Christ.

Let me use an analogy from astronomy. Sir William Herschel discovered the planet Uranus in 1781. The discovery of a new planet was hailed as one of the greatest scientific achievements of the time. But as astronomers studied the new planet they discovered that it didn't behave the way it should according to Sir Isaac Newton's theory of planetary motion. Some scientists concluded that Newton's theory was flawed because it

couldn't explain why the planet moved so erratically. But other scientists thought, "Wait a minute. Maybe Newton's theory is correct. We're not absolutely certain but maybe the erratic behavior of Uranus can be explained by presupposing the existence of an unseen planet beyond Uranus." They carefully plotted the orbit of Uranus over the years and on the basis of their careful investigations they predicted where in the night skies the new planet must be. And on September 23, 1846 the planet Neptune was observed for the first time close to where it had been predicted. The unseen planet was finally made visible and astronomers were able to view its glory. The point I want to make is this: I believe the existence of the unseen, hidden God is revealed in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. I can't see God. I can't prove God. But I believe I can <sup>feel</sup> ~~detect~~ the existence and the reality of the unseen, hidden God in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God's *Bisecting Messenger*.

As men and women observed the life and ministry of Jesus they detected the effects of the unseen God working in him. They came to believe that Jesus revealed the unseen, hidden God. "The people who walked in darkness" *saw* in Jesus "a great light." Increasingly, as years passed, men and women took pilgrimages to Bethlehem, as the shepherds had, to *see* "this thing that had taken place." Saint Paul, one of history's most reluctant converts, became convinced that in Christ "the grace of God *appeared* bringing salvation to all." One Christian living near the end of the first century of the Christian era, wrote, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." Another declared, "We have seen (God's) glory; the glory of the only begotten God."

Christians believe that Jesus reveals God's face -- he is God's bisecting messenger. When you see God in the face of Jesus Christ it may cause you to change your understanding of God. For example, some think of God as a cosmic sadist who consigns people who don't believe in him to an eternal Auschwitz. But far from that, in Jesus *God* humbled himself in order to restore us to fellowship with him. When we see Jesus we glimpse the face of the invisible creator God who willingly enters into his creation to bring us back to him. Martin Luther wrote, "Divinity may terrify us. That's why Christ took on our humanity, that he should not terrify us but rather that with love and favor he should console us." One of the most brilliant Christians who ever lived, Saint Athanasius, writing in the fourth century, said, "the all-holy Son of the Father, who is the

image of the (unseen) God, came to our realms to renew (us) who had been made in his likeness, and, as one lost, to find him through the forgiveness of sins.”

Max Lucado, a popular Christian writer, claims that Christianity is nothing more than *seeing* Jesus. When we see Jesus we catch a glimpse of God’s face. Lucado tells a true story of Bob Edens, a man who’d been blind for fifty-one years. He couldn’t see a thing. His world was like Plato’s dark cave without the shadows. He groped his way through five decades of darkness and then a skilled surgeon performed a complicated operation and, for the first time, Bob Edens could see. He was overwhelmed with the gift of sight. “I never dreamed that yellow is *so* yellow,” he said. “I don’t have the words to express the beauty of *yellow*. But,” he said, “*red* is my favorite color. I just can’t believe *red*.” Now Bob Edens sees what was hidden for over fifty years. “I can see the shape of the moon – and I like nothing better than seeing a jet plane flying across the sky leaving a vapor trail. And sunrises and sunsets. At night,” he said, “I look at the stars and moon and sometimes catch a glimpse of a meteorite streaking across the sky. I’d heard people telling me about all these things but I couldn’t imagine what they meant. I’d heard about comets, but now I’ve actually seen one. I never knew how wonderful everything is.”

He’s absolutely right. Those of us who’ve been blessed by a lifetime with vision can’t know how wonderful it must be to be given sight. But Bob Edens isn’t the only one who spent a lifetime near something without seeing it. There are very few people who don’t suffer from some form of blindness. A man can spend a lifetime with a woman and never see into her soul. A parent may never see beyond the pierced nose and spiked hair of a son or daughter. And none of us can see the hidden, unseen God. We can go through life hearing about the unseen God but have no idea how wonderful He is – until we take a careful look at Jesus. You won’t see God in otherworldly experiences. You see God in Jesus – born in a stable, eating and drinking with friends, welcoming children, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, forgiving, and stretching out his arms on the cross to embrace ~~us~~ and welcome us into his family. We catch a glimpse of God in the face of Jesus. May the Divine Surgeon use the Christmas story as a delicate surgical tool to restore our sight that, like those 18<sup>th</sup> century astronomers, ~~you~~<sup>we</sup> will infer the reality of the hidden God as ~~you~~<sup>we</sup> look at Jesus. *Then our eyes at last shall see him, through His own redeeming love; For that child so dear and gentle is our Lord in heaven above.*