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Hebrews 1:1-3a, Colossians 2:9, John 1:1-5

The Many Faces of Jesus: “The Face of God”

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The Christian tradition says “God sent Jesus to earth, and that Jesus was the God/Man, fully God and fully human.” We celebrate it every year, the coming of Emmanuel (meaning: God with us) in the birth of Jesus.

I get that part and I know that to be true. Yet, what I have tossed around in my mind time and time again is “why”? Why was God coming to earth as the Divine in human form necessary? What was it meant to accomplish? Why was it needed?

So, here goes my grappling with such questions.

**First, God sent Jesus because up to that point, we didn’t really get what God was all about.** Our ancestors had some ideas about who God was and what God wanted from humanity, yet they were still in some ways in the dark.

In other words, Jesus was a necessary part in the evolution of human consciousness. Before Jesus, people thought of an angry God who had to be appeased, they thought God’s agenda was about turn or burn and they believed in a dog eat dog society, in the survival of the fittest gained through violence, domination and oppression.

The prophets tried to tell the people that the course they were on was all wrong. Yet, they did not listen. God was still having trouble getting through to humanity.

And so we had the Garden of Eden and then the kicking out of the Garden, the Tower of Babel, the Flood, the Exodus, the Ten

Commandments, the Wilderness Wandering, the Prophets and the Captivities and Exiles.

Humanity still seemed clueless about the breadth and depth of God and what we are to do to honor God while we are on this earth. We had yet to understand how to be in relationship with God, and thus each other.

Have you ever been given directions to get somewhere, only to pass by the spot despite being given a large landmark by which to know this is it? We all have and so did our ancestors prior to Jesus. God had given them good directions and yet they drove right by, thus missing their destination. Thus, God sent Jesus, so we would have a landmark we would be sure to see and thus end up in the right place.

**“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,<sup>[SEP]</sup> but in these days he has spoken to us by a Son”... (Hebrews 1)**

In any relationship of any depth (other than acquaintances) we must know and experience that the other person gets us or we remain nothing more than, we know of each other, but we don't have any real connection.

So, secondly, God sent Jesus so we would know God gets us. For Jesus had to wake up every morning and put his shoes on and go to work. He had to deal with difficult family members. He had to deal with people who didn't like him or respect him, but rather tried to do him in. He had to deal with being tempted to do something wrong or self-centered. He had to deal with leaving and being left. He had to deal with being under the thumb of those who were not fair. He had to deal with betrayal, and the massive egos of others. He had to deal with pain and even death.

I don't know about you, but I need this kind of God. I need to have a God who has been in the trenches, been hung out to dry,

been through suffering, and not only lets me know how to get me through all that, but also is willing to be with me when I go through all that! Jesus is God who speaks in a language I can understand. And, whom I not only get, but even more important, who gets me, who gets us!

**“... in Jesus the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...The full content of divine nature lives in Christ, in his humanity. Everything of God gets expressed in Jesus, so you can see and hear him clearly.”** (Colossians 2)

The first feature-length life of Jesus on American screens was “From the Manger to the Cross” in 1912. The many clergymen who attended an invitation only premiere in the auditorium at Wanamaker’s Department Store in Manhattan were apparently pleased with the film, though some feared it would be distributed to common-garden “picture houses.” Those venues featured contamination vaudeville acts along with projected images. As one of the reviewers put it, “it would be both bad taste and artistically ineffective to sandwich from “The Manger to the Cross” between a juggler’s act and a Broadway song and dance, just as it would be absurdly out of place to read Milton’s poems in the subway. Do you think Jesus would have objected? I guess not, for scripture tells us this about Jesus, “For we do not have a one who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15) In other words, we have a Jesus who gets us!

Thirdly, God sent Jesus, so we would not make God in our own image, because that was humanity’s habit to date.

D.W Griffith in his film “The Birth of a Nation” a saga of the Civil War and Reconstruction (and heinous celebration of white supremacy) capped off his rousing finale “The Parade of the Clansmen” set to the tune of “Dixie” with an appearance of a thoroughly feminized, resurrected Christ. The “gentle Prince in

the Hall of Brotherly Love in the City of Peace” was superimposed by double exposure over an idyllic vision of an all-white gathering. The jubilant, energetic crowd stood for Griffith’s hope of reconciliation between white people north and south, and Jesus blessed them with an approvingly raised hand. In “Birth of a Nation” Griffith shrewdly used a feminized Christ’s pacifism as a weapon against northern agitators, armies, or carpetbaggers who preferred conflict to accommodation.

Then, came the blockbuster Jesus film of the silent era, Cecil B. DeMille’s “The King of Kings” in 1927. At first glance H.B. Warner’s Jesus looked like one more feminized Christ, composed, serene, languid. But reviewers at the time had trouble deciding what to make of the tall, stately, and facially chiseled Warner. Variety’s reviewer thought that “Mr. Warner is the accepted likeness of Christ”, but his New York Times counterpart felt that “Mr. Warner’s countenance is not the general conception of that of Jesus.”

DeMille’s “King of Kings” used King James Version captions from the New Testament, and also freely adapted his captions and used them out of their original context. Many captions are merely the opinions of DeMille. The script is especially single-minded about making villains out of Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest and his entourage. The script played to standard anti-Semitic stereotypes by instructing viewers that “Caiaphas cared more for revenue than religion.”

DeMille set a precedent that the later Jesus films would follow, much more weight is assigned to Christ’s miracles than to his teaching. The miracles are far more impressive on film, whether silent or sound, than the often elliptical sayings of Jesus are. The “King of Kings” did not show the pithy Sermon on the Mount fearing it would be a dramatic bore, and later Jesus films followed suit and did not show it as well. DeMille never supplies a crowd listening to Jesus speak and never does Christ utter a parable.

How do we not make God in our own image, but rather see ourselves and others made in the image of God – we read and reflect on the life and teachings of Jesus as they have been given to use in scripture. We don't take anyone else's word for it. That is why I stress over and over again, read scripture, read scripture. For in his words and actions recorded in scripture, we not only see Jesus, we see God, for Jesus himself said, **“if you have seen me, you have seen the Father.** So then, let take a look for our selves, and see, really see Jesus, not see what someone else sees or thinks.

In the many faces of Jesus, may we also see the face of God.  
Amen and Amen.