

## “God has a Face”

Date: November 27, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Hebrews 4:14-16; John 1:1-14

Theme: God with us

Occasion: Advent 1, Max Lucado series

I love Christmas. I love the lights and the decorations. I love the gift-giving, both getting and watching others open theirs on Christmas morning. I love the TV shows and the movies. My new personal favorite is *Polar Express*. I love Christmas cards, especially hearing from friends I haven't heard from in a long time. I love Christmas.

I love it, because somewhere someone will ask the question: What's the big deal about the baby in the manger? Who was he? What does his birth have to do with me?

Maybe it's someone looking at a front-yard crèche, or a soldier stationed far from home, or maybe a mother holding a newborn infant on Christmas Eve. The Christmas season prompts questions. And I love the answers I have found. Like this one:

God knows what it is like to be a human. When I talk to God about deadlines or long lines or tough times, he understands. He's been there. He's been *here*. Because of Bethlehem, I have a friend in Heaven.

Because of Bethlehem, I have a *Savior* in Heaven. Christmas begins what Easter celebrates. The child in the cradle became the King on the cross. And because he hung there, there are no marks on my record. Just grace. His offer has no fine print.

He didn't tell me, "Clean up before you come in." He offered, "Come in, and I'll clean you up." It's not *my* grip on him that matters

but *his* grip on me. And his grip is sure. So is His presence in my life. Christmas presents from Santa? They're nice. But the perpetual presence of Christ? That's life changing.

God is always near us. Always *for* us. Always *in* us. We may forget Him, but God will never forget us. We are forever on his mind and in his plans. God called himself "Immanuel," which means God with us."

Not just "God made us." Not just "God thinks of us." Not just "God above us." But "God *with* us." God where we are – at the office, in the kitchen, on the plane, in the school cafeteria, in the classroom finishing up final exams. God breathed our air and walked this earth. God.. with...us!

And it all began with the birth of a baby boy. On a starlit night in the company of sheep, cattle and a bewildered Joseph, Mary's eyes fell upon the face of her just-born son. She was bone-weary, surely. In pain, likely.

Ready to place her head on the straw and sleep the rest of the night away, probably. But first Mary had to see this face. *His* face. To wipe the moisture from his mouth and feel the shape of his chin. To be the first to whisper, "So this is what God looks like."

People have always wondered about the image of God. Societies have speculated. Scholars have cogitated and tribes have imagined. And we've reached a variety of conclusions.

God has been depicted as a golden calf and a violent wind and an angry volcano. He wears wings, breathes fire, eats infants and demands penance. We've fancied God as ferocious, magical and

fickle, a god to be dreaded, and appeased. But never in our wildest dreams did we consider God would enter the world as an infant.

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” John 1:14. The Word became not a whirlwind or a devouring fire, but a single cell, a fertilized egg, an embryo – a baby. Placenta nourished him. An amniotic sac surrounded him. He grew to the size of a fist. His tiny heart divided into chambers. God became flesh.

Jesus entered our world not *like* a human, but *as* a human. He endured puberty, pimples, hot weather and cranky neighbors. God became human down to his very toes. God had suspended the stars in the sky and ladled out the waters of the seas. Yet, as an infant boy he suckled a breast and slept in hay.

Why did God go so far? Why did God leave the glory of heaven to take on the flesh of human life? Why did God go so far? He wants you to know he gets you. He understands how you feel, and he has faced what you face. Listen to how Eugene Peterson describes it in his book *The Message*, a paraphrase of the Bible:

Jesus is “not out of touch with our reality. He’s been through weakness and testing, experienced it all - all but the sin. So let’s walk right up to him and get what he is ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.” (Hebrews 4:15-16)

Listen! Since we know that God gets us, he understands us, you and I can boldly go to Him. Because of Bethlehem’s miracle, we know that God understands what we’re going through, and God can be a help to us.

Does God care if I’m sad? Just look at the tear-streaked face of Jesus, as he stands near the tomb of his friend, Lazarus.

Does God notice when I'm afraid? Remember then, the resolve in the eyes of Jesus, as he marches through the storm to rescue his friends.

Does God know if I am ignored or rejected? Find the answer in the compassionate eyes of Christ, as he stands to defend the woman caught in adultery.

Jesus radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God. Jesus himself said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)

"Anyone who has seen me weep has seen God the Father weep." "Anyone who has seen me laugh has seen the Father laugh." "Anyone who has seen me determined has seen the Father determined.

Would you like to see God? Take a look at Jesus. Everything changes when we see the face of God. He knows the burden of a broken heart, the anxiety of a troubled world, the sorrow that life can bring.

God could have sent his answer as a shining light or voice in the clouds, but He came as a person. Does God understand you? Find the answer in Bethlehem. Gaze where Mary looked. Look into God's face and be assured.

If the Creator of the entire universe was willing to enter the world of animals and shepherds and swaddling clothes, don't you think he's willing to enter yours? He took on *your* face, in the hope that you would see *His*. Amen.

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Because of Heaven – Love is Born, Hope is Here*, by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2016, pp. 3-6, 15-20,.