

SEEING THE FACE...

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because he was dead" (2 Sam. 13: 39). Absalom had killed his half-brother, Amnon, who had raped Absalom's sister. **Yes, an ugly story.** But this is possibly why King David refused, at first, to let Absalom see his face; that is, to show hatred for his crime and honour for justice. It is a sad note that David's mercy was soon "rewarded" with Absalom's rebellion against his kingly rule and leadership.

But General Joab was crafty in how to get Absalom back home. He made up an imaginary story, and had some "wise woman" tell it to David as if real. **It, too, worked!** The story hits its climax when the "wise woman" makes the point: "God does not take away a life; but He *devises means*, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him" (2 Sam. 14:14).



"CHRISTMAS" IS CRAFTY

This is exactly what "Christmas" is all about. If you prefer, this is what Christ's coming to earth...His "Incarnation" (coming in flesh)... is all about. All mankind is banished from God by sin; self-exiled. Yet, God devised means to bring Man back. Jesus Christ is the "Means" God planned "from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8) **to bring man home to see the King's face!**

Jesus said "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Heb. 12:14 agrees: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." John, the apostle of Love confirms it, saying "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we

shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 Jn. 3: 2,3).



YES, "CHRISTMAS" HAS A FACE...

...and WE need to see it, if we profess to know God. THE WORLD needs to see it, too. At the beginning of Christ's earthly life, "**wise men**" came looking to see the King's face, and found it! Toward the end of Christ's earthly life and ministry, **other "wise men"** came to the disciple, Philip, saying: "Sir, we want to see Jesus!" (Jn. 12:21). This is what today's world needs to see. We need a fresh baptism of fire from heaven, from one end of the church to the other; cleansing, filling, sending. **The obvious and variously-manifested spiritual deficiency of most churches fits hand-in-glove with the world and with the secular, commercialised Faceless Christmas of our day.**

In the same chapter that we find beautiful parts of the Christmas Story (Lk. 2), we hear young Jesus saying to His mother: "Why did you seek Me? Didn't you know that I must be about My Father's business?!" (v. 49).

The Glorified Christ inspected the first century churches to see if they were "about the Father's business." It was their only task; their only reason for existence. Ephesus was "very busy for God" and knew God's truth, but the fire of love for Christ had gone out (Rev. 2:1ff). The last of the seven churches, Laodicea, not only didn't see GOD'S face, they didn't even see their own! (Rev. 3:14ff). Such self-deception plagues both the church and the world. **If we truly desire and expect to see the Face of Christmas**, we had better be ready to see our own faces, too.

"CHRISTMAS" IS NOT arguing over Jesus' birth date. It is a recognised celebration of a Reality, not a fairy tale. **"CHRISTMAS" IS NOT** merely decorating homes or businesses, nor throwing parties nor gift mania, as nice as décor and gifts can be. So, is my "CHRISTMAS" boring? Yes! It is "boring" a hole in the darkness, like the old street-lamp lighters punched holes in the darkness of London's notorious fog, to give light to those who "walk & sit in darkness" (Isa. 9: 1,2; 42:7). **HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!!**

Registered Charity #1092050

DECEMBER
2013

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London Christian Standard ...and Provincial

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421 Watford Way, Hendon London NW4 4TR Phone: 020-8202-0806
Website: www.londonchristianstandard.com

SEEING THE FACE OF CHRISTMAS

GET READY FOR THE UNEXPECTED!

Gabriel L. Mancino



Yes, Christmas has a face. "First gear" of this article may be familiar. "Second gear" brings new bits to consider. Always start in "first gear!"

The shepherds, informed by angels, did not delay acting upon the heavenly information. They said to each other: "Let us go NOW to Bethlehem and see this that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us!" (Lk. 2:15). They were the first set of "wise men!" **The lesson:** Listen and act when God talks.

A week after Jesus' birth, two old people, Simeon and Anna, got to see Him. The Bible repeatedly refers to the presence and activity of God's Holy Spirit in the life and guidance of Simeon. According to God's promise (along with Simeon's good listening and quick obedience), he did not miss seeing the long-promised Saviour of the world. (Lk. 2: 25-35).

THE "Wise Men" actually didn't arrive on the scene until Jesus was more or less a year old. Likely coming all the way from ancient Iran by camel and facing the mad and murderous monarch, Herod, those wise men "strained every nerve" to find the Christ-Child. **Instead of staying in Iran looking for a Nuclear Reactor, they left Iran looking for the Nativity Redeemer.** Oh, that today's world would follow these wise men in life's Supreme search!

The previous paragraphs refer to individuals who "**made a bee-line**" to find, to see and even to hold God's Singular and Sovereign Saviour. Generally, the whole world recognises and, in some degree, celebrates His birth at "Christmas."

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"MIND THE FACE!" A London Underground trademark is its call: Mind the Gap! The "Church" has largely gone down the Tube, as there is a huge Gap where it matters most. Listen: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed INTO THE SAME IMAGE from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord...But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing...For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST" (2 Cor. 3&4). God's Spirit wants to change us into Christ's image to shine to a perishing world.

SEEING THE FACE...

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

One Old Testament prophet, foretelling the Messiah-Saviour's birth stated it this way: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). **Those would be big titles for anyone, especially a baby!** But pay attention to them, for they refer to Jesus Christ, alone.

Another title that applies here is the one in Matt. 1: 22, 23. It refers to Christ's virgin birth and quotes the Isa. 7:14 Messiah prophesy, saying: "and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, 'God with us'" The words of the verses above clearly identify God with Jesus Christ in a unique way.

MOSES WAS TOLD

God had told Moses long before: "You cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me and live!" (Exo. 33: 20). The reference to Moses speaking to God "face to face" as a friend (v.11) is a powerfully-intimate description of their friendship; yet never intended to be taken literally. It is, therefore, not a contradiction nor an error in the text.

NO JOKE, JACOB!

About 200 years before Moses, "Trickster Jacob" faced a sobering, sacred scene. It was in two parts: 1) He "wrestled with an angel," 2) Because of that, he didn't have to wrestle with his brother who had wanted to kill him. Jacob was in fear, and he had it coming. We all do; for different reasons, but the reason is really irrelevant.

Moses appealed to God's grace, when seeking His face. Jacob knew that experience. His brother had forgiven him! That forgiveness removed the threat of his entire family being wiped out in vengeance. The threat, rather than the family, was wiped out!

Listen to Jacob speak to his brother: "No, please, if I have now found grace in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me" (Gen. 33:10). If Jacob had not wrestled with the angel, he would not have seen the face of God. Jacob's wrestling was specific, not abstract. **We must be specific, definite and determined if we seek to see the face of God...and He be pleased with us.**



THE DEMAND OF "THE MAN"

Jacob's son, Joseph, was sold into Egyptian slavery by his own brothers. It's a true story you should read in full. At the end, Joseph becomes second to the king. He is then put in charge of distribution of their purposely stockpiled food to all people plagued by the surrounding famine. Joseph's brother's came needing food, not recognising their brother, Joseph. Joseph cleverly "imprisoned" one brother, sent the others back with food, but required that if they hoped to see his face, they must bring their youngest brother whom Jacob had refused to allow to go on that journey for food. Benjamin was really Joseph's only "full brother;" born from the same mother.

When food ran out again, Jacob sent them back to Egypt. But his son, Judah, protested: "THE MAN" (Joseph!) warned us that we cannot see his face unless we bring the youngest brother." Jacob asked why they had told "THE MAN" they had another brother, but they said that "THE MAN" had asked specific questions. God knows how to ask questions of each of us, too! Jacob said that he would die if anything happened to his youngest son, Benjamin. God often tests us in our most precious things, too! At first, Jacob said of the painful situation, "all these things are against me!" (Gen. 42:36). At last he sent Benjamin, submitting to the demand of "THE MAN," and said, "If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!" (Gen. 43:14). To see God's face, give in!



We meet at Christ Church on the corner of Brent Street and Heriot Road in Hendon (NW4) at 5:45 pm Sundays. Nearest Tube: Hendon Central.



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Please note the following in this historical account of "THE MAN," Joseph: He was elevated by the Egyptian king, who described him as a man in whom the Spirit of God is. He said that all Egypt would be ruled by Joseph's word, and that all were to bow to him. Now, Joseph says to his unsuspecting brothers... and he meant it! ... He HAD to!: "You cannot see my face, UNLESS!" Those brothers were living an enormous lie...a cover-up...and Joseph knew it. They had to face up to the truth about themselves. They had to repent; had to genuinely humble themselves, and Joseph knew that, too, so He set this condition: "You cannot see my face, UNLESS!" The same condition applies to all of us.



THE ROYAL REQUIREMENT!

Christ, Whose birth we remember especially at Christmas, is called "the son of David." That title is linked to prophecies of the coming Messiah-Saviour. King David returned after fleeing from his mad, murderous monarch father-in-law, Saul. Yes, Saul was like Herod, and wanted his competitor killed, whatever the cost. It is amazing how far people go in the attempt to stamp God out of their lives, especially in His power to save from sin. As Gabriel announced, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Having returned after the defeat and death of King Saul (not by David!), David demanded that Abner, Saul's good General, "could not see his face UNLESS" he brought Saul's daughter, Michal, who David had married. She had been given to another man, Paltiel, when David ran for his life.

Yes, King David's wife had been given to someone else, just like most of the professing church has been wedded to the world. The church's ungodly ties to the world need to be cut just as clearly as Paltiel was told by

General Abner: "Go home!" Yes, David had literally risked his life to secure Michal as his wife. But Jesus, "the Son of David," literally GAVE His life to secure His Bride! Therefore Jesus, more than any other, has the eternal right to say, "You cannot see My face UNLESS you are willing to become My Bride, and cut with the world!" This is what Jesus came for. Bethlehem's Baby came for a Bride, but you cannot see His face, UNLESS...!



I MUST SEE THE KING'S FACE!

King David's son, Absalom, turned rebel and tried to overthrow and even kill him. But earlier, in his better days of character (many have had better days of character and conduct!), he put himself in exile after a family tragedy. After three years, he wanted to return home. Eventually, David agreed, but said, "Let him return to his own house, but do not let him see my face" (2 Sam. 14:24).

After two years, he pled to see his father, the king, but his appeals to David's General, Joab, were repeatedly ignored. In his desperate determination, Absalom had someone set fire to Joab's barley fields. It worked. Joab brought Absalom who bowed to David with his face to the ground, "and the king kissed Absalom" (2 Sam. 14: 33).

I certainly do not agree with Absalom setting fire to Joab's field any more than I agree with those who, on various occasions, set fire to buildings and cars, and looted and robbed here in London. Yet, Absalom's action is an excellent illustration of the desperation and action any person should take who truly wants to see the face of God. We must get desperate. Nothing merely casual will work, so forget that!



JOAB'S CRAFTY IDEA

When Absalom had gone into exile, the Bible says "And King David longed to go to Absalom, for he had been comforted concerning Amnon,

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