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Who Is He?

by Pauline Grimshaw

EXODUS 3

JOHN 6:

TCR 18: The one God is named Jehovah from his Being that is, from the fact that He alone is, was and will be and because He is the First and The Last, the Beginning and the End, Alpha and Omega. first and the last, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. The one God is substance itself and form itself and angels and men are substances and forms derived from Him; to the extent that they are in Him and He is in them, so far are they images and likenesses of him.

During the past month we have read and thought about the physical and historical facts that we know from the gospel accounts of the identity and early life of the Lord. We know who his earthly parents were, who his ancestors were, and we know of the events of his birth and a little about his childhood. He had a natural identity in this world, just as we all

have our individual physical identities in this world, but within his earthly body was an inner spiritual identity.

We too have identities and roles that we have within ourselves, both within our families and outside our families. For example, we have an identity that our family know, an identity that perhaps our friends know, an identity at work and an identity in social situations. Quite often people whose lives impinge on our lives know only one aspect of us in one setting. For example, the children who I used to teach at school knew me only as a teacher. My life outside school was a completely closed book to them. You know me as I am here at Kearsley, but many of the friends I used to work with in Preston knew very little of my life here and vice-versa. I expect it is the same with most of us. We have many different roles that we play and we often keep different sections of our lives in different drawers so to speak.

I once listened to an interviewer on radio doing a series of interviews with celebrities talking about their lives and careers. At the end of the interview he asked each celebrity to think of three adjectives to describe what they considered to be the essence of themselves. It sounds easy but thinking of adjectives to describe one's self is not easy. I think it is highly probable that friends and relatives would describe us in very differing terms from the ones in which we would describe ourselves. For example- I think of myself as being fairly quiet and self-contained but I was quite surprised when someone else described me as being loud and out-going!

Who and what we really are, is very difficult even for ourselves to determine. So it is perhaps almost impossible for us to determine who the Lord God really is and what he is like. If we think from our own experiences we can get totally different answers depending on our backgrounds and the influences we have absorbed in our earthly lives. For example, we might think that God is cruel or vengeful or maybe even a figment of mankind's imagination. Hopefully on the other hand we might think that God is creative, loving and wise. Yet the Old and New Testaments do give us both clues and direct statements as to who and what God really is and the Writings of our church cast deeper light on the nature of God.

In our first reading from the book of Exodus Moses had to confront the question of who is God, when God spoke to him from the burning bush and told him to go to Pharaoh and set the Israelites free. God's answer to the question was 'I AM THAT I AM'. That might sound an enigma rather than a reply, but to me within that simple answer is the infinity of God or to use a trio of adjectives from the Writings his 'omnipotence' his omniscience and his omni- presence' or in simpler English he is 'All powerful', all seeing, all wise.

Perhaps thinking in threes is to a degree a theological thing; for example, there are the three essentials in the Lord Jesus Christ - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There are three parts within us that reflect this pattern in the Lord - we have our soul - the innermost part of us that is representative or corresponds to the Father, our body is

representative of the Lord in the world as Jesus, and our actions, the things that we do and think in the world are representative of the Holy Spirit. Our maker tells us that we are made in his image and likeness and that the whole of mankind is made with this template. The essence of the Lord as we are told in the Writings of our church is Love and Wisdom which work together to produce uses. The essence of us as human beings should be to seek the truth, to love others as ourselves and to try to live our lives accordingly.

In John's gospel there are simple, yet deeply profound statements that the Lord makes about who he is, that reveal his identity in simple statements.

"I am the bread of life" JOHN 6

"I am the Light of the world" JOHN 8

"I am the door of the sheep" JOHN 10

"I am the Good Shepherd " JOHN 10

Every one of these statements is then expanded with parables so that readers and listeners can relate these attributes of the Lord to their own lives and circumstances. Many years ago, I remember the statement 'I am the bread of life' being used as a sermon theme. The preacher said, "God is definitely not a sliced loaf but rather has the attributes of bread." We all know what bread is and what it does-it is a staple food that nourishes and sustains people and is a good source of energy filling us up and satisfying us. Two thousand years ago when the Lord described himself as the bread of life, bread was indeed an essential food, a food that nourished and sustained people. And so in a deeper sense bread corresponds to or represents the deep love from the Lord that satisfies and feeds us spiritually.

The Lord tells us many things about himself and his own identity in the revelations that he has given to us. May we during this coming year find out about him and his identity by reading his Word, and then endeavouring to live according to its precepts and try to live our lives in the ways that he teaches us.

Epiphany: The Last One Standing

by Revd Bruce Jarvis

Many readers will have been aware of Christmas lights and decorations being taken down quite soon after the 25th, some as soon as the day after Boxing Day. For other households, New Year's Day seems to be the time to "forget" Christmas, and start the new year with a clean sweep. On a purely practical note, if your decorations have been up since the beginning of Advent, or even sooner in November, it's not too surprising that there is a desire to take them down, and give the house a good clean. As January

got going, we realised that our house was just about the only one in our street and beyond with decorations and lights still in place. And by the 12th day of Christmas we were definitely alone!

Now we are in the Christian season of Epiphany, a noun derived from a Greek term meaning *manifestation* or *showing forth*. The festival was established in the Eastern church to celebrate the Lord's baptism by John in the River Jordan, but then several centuries later the Western church began using it to commemorate the manifestation of Jesus to the Gentiles through the medium of the Magi or Wise Men. Remember Simeon's words when, drawing on Isaiah 49:6, he praised God for the gift of the Messiah, words known and loved as the Nunc Dimittis ("*Now dismiss...*"):

*For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all people,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.* (Luke 2:30-32)

The account of the Magi's visit to the Christ-child is beloved by all generations, even by many who have no active Christian faith. Why is this? Yes, it's a charming episode, with enough detail given to allow imaginations to work overtime. Throw in the threatening figure of Herod the Great, some dreams, some gifts, and the human mind can get to work. And while nativity plays so delight congregations and audiences, we do need to return to the essential elements recorded in Matthew's Gospel, enabling the Lord to work upon receptive minds and impart eternal truths for our long-term benefit. The pressure of earthly time requires that the story be coalesced into a few minutes and scenes, so that the Magi come to the stable hard on the heels of the Shepherds. The bare elements provided by the Gospel tell us that the Magi had undertaken a long journey to reach Jerusalem, where they stopped to visit Herod before going on to Bethlehem, a further six miles south of the city. When they entered the house to which the star had guided them, they found the child Jesus with his mother. Immediately they worshipped the "king of the Jews", and presented their three gifts. The sequel to their visit had Herod ordering the slaughter of all boys under two years of age in the Bethlehem area, confirming that there was a considerable time delay between the Magi's inner awakening and their arrival in Bethlehem.



We see in the two groups of visitors wonderful representations: the humble shepherds speak of people from within the church who live by the principle of loving and caring for what is good and true in life. At a deeper level, we can sense within ourselves

something of that desire to care and nurture what is good and true within us. The wise men speak of those who are outside the church but yet have within them a recognition that there is something special about life beyond what our natural senses can tell us. Again, more deeply, we can sense that there is this element in us which is as yet not fully active and engaged but which can respond positively when the Lord makes Himself known.

As ever, there are important clues in the story to help us. It was night-time when the shepherds were alerted to the Messiah's arrival; the magi's spiritual sight was opened to see a star, and we can assume this to be a night-time awakening. Both involve darkness, an indication that the church and the world were unable to function as intended, and needed to be redeemed from this lost state. The shepherds responded to what they *heard*, the wise men to what they *saw*. The shepherds were sent directly to the Messiah; the wise men were guided to Jerusalem.

The shepherds, being of the church, had access to teaching about the Lord so could respond to the angels' prompting, and approach Him immediately. The magi needed first to be led to where they could discover the truth they needed to know. Do not forget that those wise men came from the east. In responding to what stirred in their minds, they were led by that loving impulse to move from a somewhat vague or generalised concept of eternal truth and values, what we might call perceptions, to an experience of being in the presence of the Lord Himself.

We might assume that it is part of our Christian calling to make the Lord known to people, and so it is. But we can also come to see that our Lord is, essentially, manifesting Himself to each one of us. The two go together. Our desire to share wonderful truths and insights about life with other people is a proper outcome of developments within us. Luke's gospel tells us that the shepherds' experience led them to go out from the Lord's birthplace and *spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them*. Nothing similar is said about the magi after their visit, but it seems to me that that could not have been other than inspired by their own experience. Would they not have shared it all with those who accompanied them on their journey, and with their families and friends back home?

Christmas 2021 may be several weeks ago now, but let that not stop us from reflecting regularly on what His birth in our own hearts and minds means for us. May that reflecting lead to a real manifestation of His presence with us in the way we live and act. The decorations may be safely packed away, but if those recent celebrations are to mean anything, the reality of the Lord's coming to us will continue to shine brightly from within each one of us as we show forth His goodness and truth in the little everyday things of life.

May the season of Epiphany come to have genuine meaning for us all.

Bruce Jarvis