

What If God Was One of Us?

“If god had a name what would it be? If god had a face, what would it look like? And would you want to see? If seeing meant that you would have to believe? What if god was one of us?” These questions were asked by Eric Brazilian and Joan Osborne in their hit song, *One of Us*. During Easter, the Christian Church answers these questions.

We declare that God was indeed one of us. We say God had a name: Jesus, a Hebrew name that means God’s salvation. We declare that God had a face—the face of a baby boy. A face that was adored, caressed and kissed by His mother. She saw His face and she had to believe.

Some nine months before, the angel Gabriel had come to Mary, and in God’s name, asked her to become the mother of God’s Son. The child she would bear would not be conceived in the normal way, from relations between a man and a woman, but would be conceived in her by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this way the child would be truly human and truly God! All the angel had promised came true on the first Christmas Eve. Mary had to believe the child she bore was the Son of God.

Mary saw Jesus with her eyes. However, we see with more than our eyes. Who among us has not said: “I can see that,” when we come to understand something new. To “see” also means to understand. We can “see” with our minds. Therefore, when we read the Bible we can see Jesus, and we believe that in Him, God was one of us.

The third chapter of Genesis lets us see and believe that in the beginning Adam and Eve wanted to be, “like God, knowing good and evil.” They were tempted and deceived by the Devil to see and believe they could achieve divinity by eating the forbidden fruit. The Devil promised them that they would not die (as God said), but instead their eyes would be opened and they would see as God does. We see and believe that after Adam and Eve ate the fruit they did change, they lost their innocence. They saw they were naked, felt shame and sewed fig leaves together to cover their bodies. Instead of walking with God, they hid from Him. Adam and Eve were tainted by this Fall from God’s grace. They were banished from God’s presence. God had to impose the death sentence that He had decreed as punishment for the sin they had committed.

As we read on we see, and have to believe, that this fallen state was passed on from generation to generation. As the earth was filled with humankind, we see, and have to believe, that while we may know good—and may even want to do good—we mostly do what is evil in God’s sight.

Holy Scripture lets us see and believe that in the edict sentencing Adam and Eve to a life of toil and pain and eventual death, God had a plan to rescue us from sin, death and the power of the Devil. This plan was to become one of us, and really live a human life.

The Bible allows us to see and believe that Jesus was conceived and born in this miraculous way for a reason. King David declared that the curse of the Fall taints us all: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me,” Psalm 51:5 NIV. We can see and believe that, by His immaculate conception and virgin birth, Jesus redeemed human conception and birth from the power of sin.

As we read the Gospels we see Jesus mature into manhood. When we see Him, we have to believe He was truly human and experienced all that it means to be one of us. He had to eat, drink and sleep like one of us. He worked, walked, got tired and slept like one of us. He experienced joy, love, anger, frustration, sorrow and grief like one of us. However, His emotions were holy expressions of these emotions. His anger and frustration were brought on by unholy human behavior and emotions, including pride, prejudice, intolerance, self-righteousness and cruelty; therefore, Jesus’ emotional responses were pure, justified and holy.

When we see Jesus preach, teach and live in the words of Holy Scripture, we have to believe that He fulfilled the Ten Commandments and all of God’s commandments written down in the Book of Genesis through the Book of Deuteronomy. We have to believe Jesus when He said: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17 NIV). The Gospels permit us to see the Devil inflict all the temptations known to humankind on Jesus, and we see Jesus resist these temptations. By His obedience to God’s laws and His resistance of all temptation, Jesus redeemed human life from the power of sin and the wiles of the Devil.

The words of the Gospels make us see and believe that while Jesus' perfect life redeemed human life from the power of sin and the Devil, Jesus also became one of us in order to redeem us from our sin, our death and the power of the Devil over our lives.

While the Gospels let us see and believe that Jesus was just like one of us in many and various ways, their words also let us see and believe in Jesus' divinity. We see and have to believe that Jesus exercised authority over the wind and the waves, and fed thousands from five loaves and some fish. He cured diseases, drove out demons and raised the dead. Some disciples saw His divinity shine through when Jesus was transfigured before them.

In the pages of the Gospels we hear Jesus declare openly that He is the Son of God, has the authority to forgive and atone for sin by His innocent suffering and death on the cross and will rise on the third day following His death. Jesus declares that His death and resurrection are necessary for the reconciliation of God and humanity, and for eternal life with God.

In order for Jesus to die for our sins, He became a "scapegoat." We have all heard that term referring to a person who is forced to bear blame or take punishment for others. In Old Testament Scriptures the scapegoat was a real goat over which a priest confessed certain sins, then banished the goat to the wilderness. These sins were symbolically driven away with the goat, and the sins were atoned for when the scapegoat died.

The Gospels reveal that Jesus was arrested and accused of a crime. The Jewish authorities declared Jesus was a liar. They declared that despite all the supposed miracles, He could not possibly be the Son of God. Therefore, Jesus could not possibly forgive or atone for the sins of others. Jesus was thus found guilty for the crime of blasphemy and befouling God's name by declaring He was God's Son and deserved to die for presuming to be the Son of God, and thereby, having the power to forgive and atone for the sins of others. Roman authorities begrudgingly agreed to find Jesus guilty, labeled Him as a threat to Roman rule in Jerusalem and sentenced Him to be crucified.

The Gospel according to St. Luke reveals that Jesus was crucified between two criminals who had been sentenced to the same punishment. Jewish religious authorities and the crowd hurled insults at Jesus. They mocked Him and challenged Him to show His divinity by saving Himself by coming down off the cross, and one of the criminals crucified with Jesus hurled the same insults at him.

However, the other criminal saw Jesus in a different light. He saw and believed that, while he deserved to die that day, Jesus did not, therefore, His suffering was innocent. This criminal believed Jesus was a King and was going to establish a Kingdom that was not of this earth. This repentant criminal said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise," Luke 23:43-43. The Gospels declare that Jesus died on the Good Friday and rose from the dead on the first Easter Sunday.

Jesus' most passionate desire is for you to see Him the way the repentant criminal saw Him: as the King of a kingdom that was not of this earth, but an eternal kingdom that Jesus' death would bring in; and that He is the one who can grant citizenship in the new Kingdom. He wants you to see Him suffer and die with you and suffer and die for you. The repentant criminal knew that he could not presume to ask Jesus for citizenship, but had to rely upon Jesus' sovereign grace. He heard Jesus grant his request, and believed.

Do you want to see Jesus and believe? Take a risk, go to a church near you on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. See and believe!

In Christ

Pastor Ed Skutshek

Easter Services at Grace Lutheran Church

7:00PM Maundy Thursday (Choir); 10:30AM Good Friday (Choir); 10:30AM Easter Sunday (Choir)

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