

## Epiphany of the Lord

Images of God

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Start with a Kuder story: a five year old is deeply absorbed drawing a picture with her crayons. Her teacher asks her what she is drawing. "God" she replies. Rather unhelpfully the teacher tells her "but no one knows what God looks like." "They will in a minute."

Its not that nobody knows what God looks like. Its rather that we have so many images of God. So many heirophanies, revelations of what we hold sacred. All are partial, but all can draw us in, bring us into the presence of the sacred. We have the initial flash of lightning across the night sky in the first chapter of Genesis. We have the burning bush of Moses. The impenetrable cloud atop Mt Sinai where Moses meets God face to face and lives. We have the image of an almighty God of Thunder and earthquake to be approached in fear and trembling. And an all encompass serene divinity experienced at sunset looking across a boundless ocean vista.

Today we are presented with two more images of the sacred: a God announced by the rise of a new star in the night sky, and a God incarnate in the birth of a child.

First, the stellar divine. Thanks to electric lighting, we have lost sight of the night sky that first drew our ancestors to thoughts of the transcendent. Up here is better than most places, but even up here, light pollution decimates the starry sky of our ancestors. This week I read of the dimming one of one the brightest stars in our skies, Bettleguese, whose dimming may portend its on the brink of going supernova in the next few tens of thousands of years. When it does it will be visible in the daytime and at night, like moonlight, it may even cast its own shadow.

There is a science fiction short story about a Jesuit who is a chaplain on a starship exploring the ruins of an ancient alien civilization, destroyed by its own sun going supernova. To his horror he correlates the supernova explosion with the star of Bethlehem. It shatters his faith, but it incarnates the same cycle of life and death also revealed by the birth of the Christ-child. Life is ephemeral. But its very transience is part of what makes life itself sacred. Every life form grows and blooms, then ripens and rots to seed and ultimately make room for new life. its beauty is not like that of a diamond that speaks forever, but the beauty of a bouquet of flowers that will wilt in a week.

Technology today is beginning to tease us with the prospect of extending life indefinitely. I have made it a habit to ask people whether they would like to sign up for radical life extension, living with the vim and vigor of a twenty-something for thousands of years. I have learned that while no one wants to die tomorrow, almost everyone is repelled at the prospect of living on indefinitely. Life would lose its urgency, they complain. What would I do with myself? What would be the point of my life after a thousand years? Would I ever really really need to make any decision if I have the time to live out every option?

We Christians believe in eternal life. but we have no more idea what that looks like than we do of God. One thing the transhumanist dream of radical life extension can teach us, is that whatever it may look like it cannot be simply living life as we have been living it on and on and on, like a story that never ends or a TV serial without a final season.

We do have images of eternal life though. And they are rather like the divine as a new born child. We have the image of a reunion with deceased family and friends. And we have the image of finally seeing God, face to face, eye to eye. Our final image of God then is of God seeing us, each of us beholding ourselves in the eyes of the other, like a mother and her new born child.

During this coming year may we too have our own epiphanies, where we catch a glimpse of how God sees us, beholds us as the apple of his eye.