

God Between Us
Epiphany 2014
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*We three kings of Orient are. One in a taxi, One in a car.
One on a scooter beeping his hooter, Following yonder star.*

I don't suppose you noticed which character is *missing* from this Epiphany story?

Epiphany, you will recall, means *appearing*, as in the appearance of **God**. There is evidence of God in Matthew's story: a star – a baby – divine dreams. But *where* is God? In fact, Matthew doesn't mention *God* at all in telling Jesus' birth story. And, he uses the term "God" sparingly throughout.

Luke writes, *Kingdom of God*, whereas Matthew writes, *Kingdom of Heaven*.
Luke writes, *Son of God*, whereas Matthew writes, *Son of man*.

Matthew, you see, is a good Jew; he knows better than to use God's name recklessly. To write or utter God's name recklessly would be blasphemous – God is, after all, infinite – and words are finite. Syllables and sounds are finite. And there is no word large enough to contain the meaning of God. The Jews of old respected the infinite nature of God, especially in their communications, but as a rule, we don't. We throw the term, *God*, around as though we own it, carelessly, without respect. *Oh, God*, we say. Or, *GD*, or *God bless it* – Or, *I don't believe in God* – And to *that* person, I might ask, "What makes you think God believes in you?" But mere words cannot contain God, and if not words, then what? Stars? - like the star that led the magi, or perhaps your hopes and dreams? But the star is only evidence – a mere *indication* of God. And your hopes and dreams are prayers, conduits to God, but not God. Where then is God? If you've *never* asked that question in your life, *Where are you, God?* Then you haven't been paying attention.

When I was a teenager, I wanted to find God, and hoped he would appear in my dreams, like Joseph. I remember two dreams I thought might be from God. In the first, I saw my older brother smoking. He had quit a month earlier, so I took the dream to mean he was going to start again – and *he did*. - A couple of weeks later, and he has smoked ever since.

Was that dream in-fact from God? Maybe, but I doubt it. Most likely, I was projecting God into my world – In the second dream, I saw myself enjoying afternoon tea with the Queen of England. Was that dream from God? *Who knows?* I would like to point out that – the Queen has not yet died, nor has she abdicated.

But my question - *Where is God?* – was the wrong question. What I really wanted to know was, *does God see me? Am I important? Do I count?* An adult version of this question might be, - *does my life have relevance?* Which is really what most people want to know when they ask God, *Where are you?* The question is pregnant with teenage angst, and God's apparent answer seems euphemistic, at best.

Like with Matthew – the raw truth of God all at once is too much. He uses media to describe the presence of God. A star, a dream, a baby, But *where* is God? Yet, the entire Christian story – is *the* answer to that question – Where is God? -*With us*. -Immanuel.

God has not left you or me alone, life spinning randomly on a space orb called *earth*. God is immanent, not merely transcendent. - The metaphoric curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple – the place where God lives, from the place you and I live – was split in two at the crucifixion – From top to Bottom, as though God himself ripped it, precisely to end the euphemistic and metaphoric existence of God. -And of us.

God is God with us, and in us, and around us. God appeared not in the form of a star, but in the form of a human being. God appeared not in a dream, but in physical reality. But we keep asking, *Where is God?* And I really do think what we really want to know is what I said earlier: *Am I relevant?*

Edwina Gateley tells a lovely story about a discovering relevance – At the time, Edwina was a volunteer missionary, helping African women escape prostitution – On her way to help some of these women, one day, Edwina ran across a wino. -Literally. She about tripped over him. The man was lying in the street, a bundle of bones and cloths. He stank, in his drunken stupor. At this point, Edwina recalled her Christian upbringing – to look for Christ in every person – But this man challenged that dictum – he hadn't a shred of revelation or glory or Good News. Edwina passed by him, not thinking twice. The next day, she passed him again, and then the next day, and the next. She learned this wino's name, Mark, and as she started seeing him as human, she started talking to him. She began to *know* Mark, and Mark came to know her, too. He learned that she helped prostitutes, and he would walk with her as she worked. On the days Mark knew in advance Edwina would be on the streets, he would take a shower at the Salvation Army, and he wouldn't drink. He acted like Edwina's co-minister.

One day, they passed by a bush and saw a table sticking out from under it. The table had layers of paint, but underneath these layers, the table leg looked like it might be carved. They pulled at the leg, and an entire table came out. Someone had abandoned the table as junk, but they carried it to Edwina's place. Mark found a shard of glass – and began scraping. He spent months scraping that table, layer upon layer of paint peeling off, until finally, - Until finally – all that was left was an exquisitely carved wooden table – Edwina looked at the table, and she looked at Mark, standing next to it, and she practically heard the voice of God, not in a dream, but clearly – *the table is Mark, and Mark is the table*. Where is God?

Years later, when Edwina learned that Mark had died, - still destitute, - she went to the funeral home, and she stood next to his open casket, and prayed. She noticed Mark was wearing an expensive pinstriped suit, one she was sure he didn't own. Edwina asked the funeral director, - To which the funeral director responded, *I put it on him. It is my best suit. I heard he was your brother, and I knew he must be special. So I put my best suit on him*. And as she stood there, Mark the wino now dead and wearing the finest suit, Edwina heard the words, - *This is my beloved Son*

...Where is God? We look in all the wrong places for God, don't we? -And for all the wrong reasons? -Euphemistically to stars, immaturely to dreams. -To validate ourselves. All the while God is found not as static – but as movement. -As you work and give, and in your

relationships. God wasn't in Mark, God wasn't in Edwina – God was in the transaction between them, in the crack, in the space. God with us, and in us and through us. Amen.