



GRASPING THE NETTLE

NEWSLETTER

Winter 2021

The Word Became A Human Being!

The awesome implications of that simple sentence—likely penned between 80 and 100 AD—should never lose its sense of drama! It is the theology of the Incarnation, originally in just four words.

The Wonder of New Life

Anyone gazing upon a new born child cannot do other than wonder at the reproduction process which, in normal circumstances, creates that compact face, the intricacies of those tiny ears, the cuteness of little fingers—enhanced with fingernails—and so much more. Although the process has taken place billions of times, usually successfully, across the history of life, the science of biology has opened our eyes to see more of what an astonishing phenomenon reproduction and embryonic development actually is.



The Wonder of the Incarnation



Visitors to the Church of the Nativity crowd around the crypt where it is said the new-born child lay.

Now transfer that sense of wonder to the Incarnation and marvel at how the ‘fullness of God’ could somehow become integrated within a human embryo. With any new life, the starting point is a single cell—a fertile dot around the size of a full stop at the end of a sentence. By the time of birth, that cell has resulted in the emergence of five trillion cells which are involved in the building of each tiny body. Each of those cells

contains the DNA code used to construct all the complex elements of the new person: from the nervous system to the brain and from the respiratory and digestive mechanisms to the operation of the senses; all combined into one functioning whole! Yes we are ‘fearfully and wonderfully made’! Having a biological explanation does not in any sense diminish the marvel. The wonder of the Incarnation is that such a tiny frame as that of a new born child was used, and was able to house, the fullness of the Godhead! At this point we go beyond the limits of science to explain and enter the courts of worship.

May your Christmas be blessed by a new sense of wonder!



The wonder of a human embryo



O Little? Town Of Bethlehem

A rooftop view of modern day Bethlehem



There are several adjectives that spring to mind to describe contemporary Bethlehem but 'little' is not one of them. Situated on the west bank its sprawling mass of middle eastern buildings is home mainly to an Arab population that lives in a permanent state of tension with their Israeli neighbours.

Part of the town is dominated by a tall and imposing wall designed to separate Palestinians from Israelis. It has become an open canvas on which those opposed to it can scroll their messages of resistance. The town is not only tense, it is economically challenged. Although the Arab population scarcely accepts the doctrine of the incarnation, the fact that Jesus was born here has considerable economic value. There are stores aplenty selling Christian icons and memorabilia.



The wall erected by the Israeli Government



Manger Square and the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

Visitors will be hard pressed to identify the shepherds' field. Pasture can be hard to find around 21st century Bethlehem with many previously green spaces having been built upon. Yet the alleged birth place of Jesus cloistered in the Church of the Nativity in Manger Square remains like a tiny oasis of calm in the midst of a society besieged by conflict and the anger arising from a sense, on both sides, of injustice. The angel promise of 'peace on earth' is

not centred, it seems, on modern Bethlehem. But where in the world does it apply? Peace is conspicuous by its absence.

So is God's peace a failed promise? One could argue so, but it would be perhaps to miss the point. The peace of God can be present in the most tempestuous of circumstances. Little wonder Paul the Apostle described it as *"the peace that passes understanding"*.



A barbed comment on the dividing wall

An Angel of the Lord Appeared to Them!

Before social media, God favoured angelic hosts as a means of communication.



With the rise of fake news the shepherds travelled to Bethlehem to fact check the message.

With no direct access to angelic hosts, GTN is restricted to contemporary forms of social media. Do follow us on the platforms below!



<https://www.instagram.com/graspingthenettle/>



[Grasping The Nettle - YouTube](#)



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/grasping-the-nettle>



<https://www.facebook.com/graspingthenettle/>

In Partnership with Premier Radio...

Kharis Productions, Producers of Against the Tide, and Pensmore Films, owners of the documentary are working in partnership with Premier Radio in the first of a new series of live webinars. The principal guest in the first event is Professor John Lennox. During the programme he will be joined by producer/director of Against the Tide, Iain Morris, to discuss the film.

Learn more [here](#) in a brief but informative video promotion by host Justin Brierley.

Premier.
Unbelievable?
LIVE

PROF. JOHN LENNOX
ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS ON
**GOD, SCIENCE
AND FAITH**

TUE 7 DEC 2021

HOSTED BY
JUSTIN BRIERLEY

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
AGAINST THE TIDE
The award-winning film of John Lennox's life and work

ON **ZOOM** AT 7PM UK / 2PM EASTERN / 11AM PACIFIC

REGISTRATION FREE • WWW.UNBELIEVABLE.LIVE

To register to attend the webinar, which takes place at 7pm GMT on **Tuesday 7th December**, and participate in the live Q&A visit www.unbelievable.live.

Alternatively, catch the webinar on the Unbelievable? Podcast on **Friday 17th December** or listen to it on the Unbelievable radio show on **Saturday 18th December** at 3pm.

"... A MUST-SEE DOCUMENTARY!
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JOHN LENNOX + KEVIN SORBO
AGAINST THE TIDE
FINDING GOD IN AN AGE OF SCIENCE

To buy, or web-stream, a copy of Against the Tide, please visit www.againstthetidemovie.org.

GTN Online—*The Recent Past*

WOW! Invisible Warriors: Viruses and Bacteria

with Dr Neil Ritchie



Taking us into the ‘underworld’ of viruses and bacteria invisible to the naked eye, Neil Ritchie gave a fascinating insight into how we co-exist with—and even depend on—they. Although some viruses have devastating consequences on life and health the majority live peaceably with human beings. Without them, we may not exist!

As I See It: Science, God, the Virus and Me

with Professor Jason Leitch

Jason Leitch was described by one of the participants as “*clearly one of the busiest people in the country*”. Yet in this session he took time to share with the GTN audience what is involved in his role as Director of Public Health for Scotland, the latest information and advice on the pandemic, his Christian faith that frames all that he does, and his views on a proper relationship between science and God.



Both of the above events—and more—are available to view at www.graspingthenettle.org/watch

GTN Online: *Coming Up!*

Wednesday 19th January 2022

Exploring Further: With One Eye on the Future

with Professor John Lennox



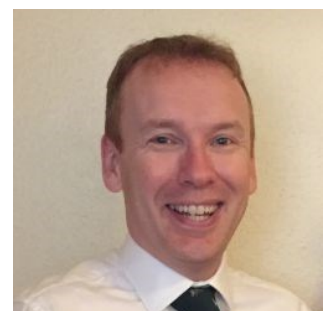
Renowned for his contributions to the science/God debate, more recently John Lennox has turned his attention to how science is shaping our future and the implications. Basing his presentation on his book 2084, Professor Lennox will help us anticipate moral and religious challenges that might lie ahead and whether or not it seems likely that we are heading for an earthly utopia in which even the problem of mortality is solved by science.

Thursday 10th February 2022

WOW! Wonders of the Brain

With Dr Ian Morrison

Having trained in Glasgow, John Hopkins Hospital and the University of Texas, Austin, Dr Morrison is a consultant neurologist in NHS Tayside, and Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Join us for this fascinating session in which we will experience wow factors associated with our cerebral control centre!



Archaeology: Footprints of God?

With this title as his starting point, Archaeologist John Sode-Woodhead addressed the question in the December 2021 GTN Online Exploring Further session.



The ancient site of Lachish, a city south of Jerusalem



John Sode-Woodhead

With Scottish family connections, John is resident in Israel, having studied archaeology in Edinburgh and in Tel Aviv. As well as being an archaeologist, he is now an accredited tour guide in Israel.

Given that the Bible contains an historical record it is

reasonable to ask if the accuracy of that record is, or is not, confirmed by archaeology. John Sode-Woodhead is wary of the question! *“Just as we ought not to ask if science can prove the Bible correct, so we should be cautious about asking a similar question of archaeology,”* says John. *“Nevertheless where archaeological discoveries are consistent with the Biblical record, it demonstrates that the writers were familiar with the geographical and historical contexts and facts as far as they were known.”*

Some of John’s most important work has been based at the ancient city of Lachish which features, for example, in Joshua 10:3, 2 Chronicles 11:9 and 2 Kings 18:17. Once a royal Canaanite city, the Bible relates that it was destroyed by the Israelites (Joshua 10:31), probably around 1340 BCE, and afterwards, under King Rehoboam became one of the strongest fortresses of Judah. It was besieged in 701 BCE by the Assyrian Sennacherib during the reign of Hezekiah when he invaded the kingdom of Judah. Assyrian records, including the Lachish stone reliefs, describe the battle in detail—historical information John was able to substantiate through his excavation of the siege ramp.

On the other hand, there are significant challenges and puzzles. For example why is there so little in the secular history and archaeological records to point to the existence of Moses, David or even Solomon?

“Archaeology can be compared to a complex jigsaw puzzle in which many pieces are missing and others are open to many different types of interpretation,” says John. *“My belief in the truth of Scripture does not depend on archaeology confirming it. It is too insubstantial a basis on which to found one’s faith. It nevertheless brings the world of Scripture to life and is a fascinating discipline which I find utterly absorbing.”*

Visit www.graspingthenettle.org/watch to experience John’s GTN Online talk on Archaeology: Footprints of God?

Christianity and Daoism Compared



Could Christianity and the traditional Chinese religion Daoism have more in common than you think?

Following on from the success of The God Question series Kharis Productions has released a new series of three programmes entitled *God and Science: The Search for Meaning and Truth* which explores how Christianity, Daoism, Buddhism and Atheism address some of the big questions of life. The series was created principally with a Far Eastern audience in mind but is highly relevant in the West and elsewhere too. “For that reason we tend to refer to this production as our ‘global’ series,” says Professor John Spence, Chairman of Search for Truth Charitable Trust which commissioned the series.

How did everything start? This is a question that all religions compulsorily try to answer. In programme one of the series, Ge Yonghua provides the Daoist answer “*There is this one transcendent One that is beyond description and all*



Rev Dr Carver Yu

the things that we now see all the way to matter came out of One. So it's kind of a fountainhead and all things flew out of this fountainhead”. Christian theologians themselves might be happy to ‘own’ some of this language. But as Carver Yu, President Emeritus of the Chinese Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong explains “*All philosophers eventually face the reality of the incomprehensibility of the ultimate, unless the ultimate speaks to us. And, of course, in the Christian belief, we believe in God who reveals himself*”.



Professor Ge Yonghua

The incarnation, especially celebrated at this time of year, is the distinguishing feature between Christianity and its rival competitors for truth. That Jesus of Nazareth was God in human flesh is the dramatic claim that makes Christianity so utterly unique. As interviewee Professor Alister McGrath comments at the end of programme one “*If that's true it makes Christianity a game changer*”.

Comparative religion is a fascinating study. Professor Keith Ward, Emeritus Professor of Divinity at Oxford University, claims that world religions have more in common than separates them. Among their common beliefs is that life continues after death. However within belief systems there can be considerable diversity on the subject. Take for example the Ching Ming festival, which is part of the Daoist religious tradition.

In March and October, the many who subscribe to the tradition not only visit the graves of their forebears in order to tidy and decorate them, they also perform a ritual act whereby material goods are purchased, packaged, and dispatched to their ancestors via a furnace. How many really believe that the goods arrive at their planned destination and are used and valued by recipients? In answering that question, Dr David Palmer, an anthropologist at the University of Hong Kong, comments *“Many people do it because it’s a tradition. Do they believe it? Some do. But others think I’ll do it just in case it’s true”*.



Crowds gather to participate in the Chinese festival of Ching Ming



Sending the goods to the afterlife via a furnace

It surely would not be hard to find evidence also in Christendom of those who practise the faith just in case it’s true! But with its focus on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christianity offers its own distinctive evidential basis for belief. But is it truly reliable evidence? That topic will be the focus of a forthcoming programme in The God Question series.



Joss sticks are used in Asian religions to produce incense as part of worship.

They are believed to aid spiritual communication and are associated with asking favours from the deity.

Meantime we hope that many associated with GTN will access and benefit from viewing Science and God: The Search for Meaning and Truth. Access details for online viewing will be available soon. The programmes are available in Simplified and Traditional Mandarin, as well as English.

Meantime you can view the trailer [here](#).

A View from the Chair

By Very Rev Dr Martin Fair

Before the onset of the pandemic, I don't suppose it had occurred to those of us who serve on the GTN Steering Board that there were untapped opportunities to further our work in the digital sphere. Of course from the outset we've produced physical resources - with the idea that these would be used locally in 'in person' settings - and hand in hand with these, we organised events, to which people were invited to travel. But that our resources might be used online and that our events might be hosted on 'Zoom'... well who among us had even heard of Zoom?!



Very Rev Dr Martin Fair, Chair of GTN



A GTN Zoom session in full swing.

And yet, here we are nearing the end of 2021 and the idea of NOT being present digitally seems farcical. It's unquestionably true that GTN has engaged with wider audiences than has ever been the case before. When you can make a couple of clicks on your tablet and be in an event, attendance becomes possible where otherwise a long car journey might make attending prohibitive.

But here's the thing: GTN is not proposing to put the 'digital toys' back in the box once the pandemic restrictions have eased sufficiently to make routine 'in person' gatherings more feasible again. On the contrary, we see that our future growth will largely depend on our ability to be effective online. And when we say 'effective,' we mean furthering the causes of the Kingdom by continuing to make the case for a Creator God and His salvific purposes in what can be an unsympathetic context that suspects scientific advances have done away with the need for 'the other.'



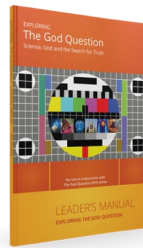
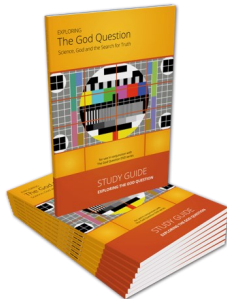
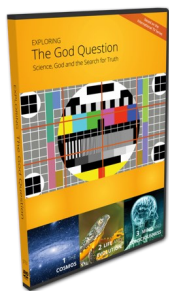
Scotland's National Clinical Director, Professor Jason Leitch delivers a recent GTN Online session.

I want to take this opportunity to wish all GTN supporters a Happy Christmas and a Blessed New Year - and, with regard to 2022, to say 'watch this space!' We're going to be on the lookout for lots more people to get involved as we progress with our digital interaction - maybe it will be you, maybe someone you know who possesses the right skill set?

Where might we be by the year 2025? Let's journey together as we seek to follow where God is leading.

To view previous GTN Online events visit www.graspingthenettle.org/watch

Nourish the Mind and the Soul with a Gift that has a Lasting Legacy this Christmas!

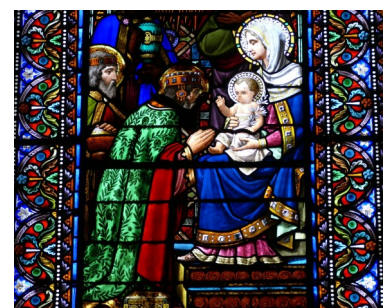


You can purchase Exploring the God Question and a Study Guide at www.thegodquestion.tv/explore and go to the 'store'.

Or why not gift wrap award-winning Against the Tide and learn more about God and the science question as well as Jesus and the history question. You can make your purchase from Re-vived.com or Amazon.com.



And is it true? And is it true,
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue
A Baby in an ox's stall?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Became a Child on earth for me?
And is it true? For if it is...
Not all the steeple shaking bells
Can with this single Truth compare
That God was Man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine



Nativity scene in a stained-glass window

John Betjeman

Bursary Offer from The Faraday Institute

Grasping the Nettle is pleased to be associated with the work of the well established Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge. GTN has received information about a new bursary scheme being offered by the Institute, to be used to bring national or regional leaders to Cambridge for one of the Faraday short courses (usually 1-2 days) but also the week long summer course in 2022.



Ruth Bancewicz, Church Engagement Director for the Institute writes: *"The aim is to give leaders of groups of churches, or those in other national or regional leadership roles, an opportunity to get to know us and find out how we might resource them and those they serve in the longer term."* Enigmatically she adds "no long forms involved!". Anyone interested in applying should do so via the following link:

<https://www.faraday.cam.ac.uk/event/course-bursaries-churches/>

It's Been Ages



As we prepare to enter the last month of another year, attention focuses once more on how quickly time passes. But how much time? And since when? Science has provided us with good evidence that the universe started 13.8 billion years ago with a sudden expansion. One second after the big bang, it had a diameter of 100 trillion miles. For about 400,000 years, the universe would have been glowing like a red giant heat lamp, but as the universe became bigger and colder, everything faded to black. Then due to gravity tiny areas of gas

clumped together and became the seeds for the eventual formation of stars, galaxies and everything else in the universe.

It brings a new perspective to 'looking back from the end of the year'. Let us appreciate how far science allows us to see!

Grasping the Nettle wishes you a happy and blessed New Year!



Supporting GTN



Finally... Thanks to all who support GTN with your participation in events, general promotion of its activities and, not least of all, with your financial support. Donations to GTN can be given at www.graspingthenettle.org/donate.