

Hey! Baby Face. What does that mean? If someone says that to you, it means that your skin is really smooth. No wrinkles. You look much younger than your age. Of course no one would say that about me. I still remember a man named Dick Clark from American Bandstand. The guy looked like he was in his early 30's when he was in his late 50's. Dick Clark had a baby face. The human face. If you study it carefully, it tells you a lot about what is going on with the person. Over the years at Trinity, I have seen the distant look on the faces of husbands and wives. On a Sunday morning these couples are not sitting close together, nor are they looking with love at each other. They are like strangers, doing the church thing, to save face with their family and friends. I have looked out over the years and seen sad faces. Faces that are dealing with a spouse or other family member that is gravely ill, or dealing with a physical disability that isn't getting any better. I have seen tired faces on many of you, not just getting up early on a Sunday, but tired from the hours that work is requiring of you, or tired from the stresses of day to day living. On my own face today, you can probably sense a troubled face. Troubled with what to do with the divine call I have received from a church in Florida. .

Today I would like to help you change that fear face, that sad face, that troubled face, that moody face into a special face that no plastic surgeon can create. It is a Fantastic looking face where there will be a special glow resonating out from you. It is a face that portrays confidence and strength. It is a face that has a joyfulness and peace that can be seen in the eyes, the mouth and the cheeks. It is a face that is not fearful or filled with anxiety. Today God's Word is offering a face lift for everyone here. No charge. No tip needed. And the first one in line at God's beauty parlor today is a man named named Stephen. So Lord, Please "Give me An Angel Face!"

After Pentecost, 50 days after Easter, the congregation in Jerusalem grew rapidly. From 3000 it grew to 5000 and daily others were added. Even though all 12 apostles were serving this one congregation, it became impossible for them to take care of all the matters which needed attention in this large congregation. The Greek-speaking members began complaining because they felt their widows were being neglected. They thought that the members who spoke Hebrew were receiving the greater share of the food and funds distributed to the poor in the congregation.

"We are misusing our time" said the apostles. We should be spending our time in prayer and in teaching and spreading the Word. So they called the congregation together and suggested that they elect seven from their membership who would take care of the funds for the needy. Stephen was one of the men elected. His specific duty was to look after the poor, the widows, and orphans and to administer food and funds from the congregation's treasury according to need.

So if we are playing detective in order to find someone with the angel face, they would be someone who is humbly serving in some capacity in the church. In addition, the person with the angel face would be spending considerable time in prayer and in studying God's Word. Further, the person knows his Bible and is bold and willing to speak up for the truth of God's Word. When false teachers arose in the congregation, Stephen corrected them. The Bible says, "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke."

The group that opposed him was from the synagogue of the freedmen. This was a special congregation made up of Jewish believers from the Roman provinces. They were freedmen, which indicates that they had once been slaves, and now that they were free, they had migrated to Jerusalem. Because they were from areas we now call Turkey and Libya and Egypt, they probably all spoke the common language, Greek. Because Stephen is also a Greek name, many think that Stephen was part of this congregation before he became a Christian. Perhaps he

had attended their services and spoke up about Jesus being the fulfillment of God's promise of a Messiah. Whether in the synagogue or out of it, he spoke up to those who had much in common with him, and he suffered for it.

Isn't that still true that the fiercest attacks of your Christian faith come from those who are most like you? You and I don't need to worry about the fanatical Muslims or the militant atheists of China. When we try to let our lights shine in the darkness, those who oppose it are right around us, often in our own families. Perhaps it's that uncle who mocks anyone who goes to church regularly and "wastes their money" on a bunch of hypocrites. Or it's the neighbor who may be looking for a church "as long as they don't talk about this sin stuff." Only talk about God's love, don't mention his commandments. Perhaps it's the professors or teachers, especially on the college level, who ridicule Christians or other truths such as God creating the world in six days. Then there are fellow workers who consider it a bit strange that you don't join in on their dirty jokes or drinking parties. A person with an angel face tends to take flack from people that they encounter on a regular basis.

When the Freedmen couldn't win the battle of words with Stephen, they decided to use treachery and force. They actually hired false witnesses who for a little money were willing to say that Stephen claimed that Jesus would destroy the temple of the Jews and would change the customs of Moses. They brought Stephen in front of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of 71. As Stephen looked around there wasn't a sympathizing face among them. Most of them were angry, ugly faces. But when they looked at Stephen, says out text, they saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

The angel face. In the midst of their hatred, his face reflected nothing but love. Even though they accused him of disturbing the peace, his face reflected only peace. Even though it was obvious that they would condemn him-perhaps to death-instead of panic his face reflected security and confidence. Stephen realized that the servant is not above his Master and that, like Christ, Christians frequently suffer persecution. But he also knew that the cross leads to the crown, that the gracious God who gave him His only Son would never let him down, and that the end of the Christian life is always eternal victory and glory. Peace, calm, security, confidence in the midst of persecution-that's behind the angel face.

Maybe, by this time someone is saying, I wish I had an angel face. When others hate me, I'm inclined to hate them. When I'm in trouble, I'm inclined to panic. When others rip into me, I'm tempted to do the same to them. I even get nervous speaking to a friend. I wish I had an angel face. The basis of the angel face is found in Acts 6:5, where we are told Stephen was a man full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit.

Full of faith! Stephen had heard the angel's song, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord." And he believed that. He had been told of a certain Friday when they condemned Christ without cause and nailed him to a cross. He had heard that this was in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, "He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him and with His stripes we are healed, and he believed that. Stephen had heard the Easter angel who told the women at the empty tomb, "I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen as He said, and he believed that. He heard the apostles speak of Christ's promise to all his followers, "Come unto me all you labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, and Stephen believed that. HE was full of faith-that was the basis for his angel face.

Full of the Holy Spirit. This was the second great gift from God. He wasn't like some frightened and insecure people of today who try to get their courage up by drinking alcohol or

smoking a joint. Instead of filling himself with wine, he was filled with the Spirit of God. How come Stephen had such courage, confidence, joy, gentleness, peace and Love? Because these are gifts of the Holy Spirit. Full of the Spirit –that’s what gave him the angel face.

Do you want an angel face and the inner blessings which go with it? No, you can’t buy the angel face. You can’t create it with lipstick, rouge, cosmetics, by coloring your hair or adding a wig. Selfishness, lovelessness, hatred, jealousy, bitterness, pessimism, a feeling of worthlessness, guilt or insecurity-any of these put frowns on our faces and will kill the angel face. The angel face comes from the angel heart. And the angel heart is a gift of God. For us, the angel face comes through the Holy Spirit’s work in our heart. You’ve had his work in your heart ever since baptism, and he continues to work through his Word. I may sound like a broken record, repeating over and over again, but God’s Holy Word and Holy Communion are the means to a Christian full of faith and the Holy Spirit. So, if you want an angel face then read, hear, and meditate on God’s Word. God Word will give you the face lift you really need.

Sin and sinners always want company. That’s why they make every effort to destroy the angel face or the man who wears it. But no one could destroy the angel face of Stephen. Chapter 7 in Acts tells us of his defense before the council. Read the chapter at home and notice the mixture of love, courage, frankness, and kindness in Stephen and on the other hand the cowardice, lovelessness, and hatred of those on the council. In a rather long speech Stephen reminded them of God’s goodness: how God chose Abraham and multiplied his seed, how he chose Moses and delivered Israel from bondage; how He gave them the tabernacle and the temple and all the promises of salvation that went with them; yes, how God gave them everything which they needed for body and soul, for this life and eternity. But having reminded them of God’s grace and goodness, he kindly but boldly pointed out their basic problem: “You do always resist the Holy Spirit, as your fathers did, so do you. Furthermore, he adds, that’s why you have murdered Christ, the very one whom God promised and sent to deliver you. He said it all with an angel face.

They were cut to the heart by this message but instead of repenting they gnashed their teeth, shouted at the top of their voices, stopped their ears, ran up to him, and dragged him out to stone him to death. Yet, even in death they couldn’t destroy the angel face. Christ had promised to stand by those who are His and He did. The heavens opened and Stephen could see his loving eternal Savior standing on the right hand of the Father waiting to receive him in heaven.

Stephen, saved and empowered by his Savior, spoke even as our Savior spoke when He was crucified. Kneeling amidst the flying stones of those who hated both him and Christ, Stephen did what only those with an angel face and angel heart can do, He prayed, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. His enemies could slander him, kick him, stone him, and crush his body, but they could not destroy the angel face.

Once more lifting his eyes to heaven where he saw the waiting arms of Jesus, he pleaded, even as Christ pleaded on Calvary: “Lord, receive my Spirit, and the Lord did.

I like the way the story ends. In Acts 7 it says, “He fell asleep. Stephen didn’t die. He fell asleep. When Lazarus died you recall what Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life, he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die”. Our Savior meant these words. He that believes in me shall never die. Stephen didn’t die. He fell asleep only to awake in heaven at his Savior’s side-forever wearing the angel face. Lord, my face is tired and haggard at times. I need your grace and power. Do to me what you did to Stephen. Give me an Angel Face!