

“Becoming Mothers of God”
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Christmas Eve, 2022, Year A
Is. 9:2-7, Ps. 96, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-20

The birth narratives of Jesus are such wonderful stories! Like most stories rooted in history, they were created backwards. They took shape over time – in hindsight – as Jesus’s followers tried to make sense of his incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. They weren’t written down until decades “after the fact,” and then, only by Matthew and Luke among the early Christian writers.

No one really knows when Jesus was born or much about the circumstances of his birth. And as is true in most good story-telling, facts are not really the heart of the matter. Along with all the other elements of story, like character development and point of view, historical facts simply help us get at deeper and more important truths.

The inspired story from Luke we heard tonight tells not so much the details of Jesus’s birth as it relays Luke’s insights into the promise his birth embodied. The promise of the transformation of humankind and all creation made available through the incarnation of God in Jesus.

I believe Luke’s story of how God entered into human life in a unique and universal way through the person Jesus marks God’s redefinition of what it means to be fully human. And I believe this evolutionary leap for humanity initiated in the birth of Jesus is really what we’re celebrating here tonight. Yes, that’s what I said – the birth of Christ marks an evolutionary breakthrough in our capacity to become truly human that will continue to unfold into eternity. And that’s something to celebrate!

Many of you have heard me quote Dominican priest Timothy Radcliffe, who said he doesn’t believe Jesus was the son of God in the same way he is the son of his own father. But that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, in that he received his full identity from God and invested his life wholly in God in a way that showed him to be “incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,” as we say in our version of the Nicene Creed.

The real miracle of Christmas is that Jesus opened this possibility of divinization to all humankind. We simply had to see the Christ-man to understand what our own human life can be. Seeing, in the deepest sense of that word, is indeed believing. Only through deep, personal encounter can we come to understand and trust God in a way that makes our becoming truly human possible.

Way back in the fourth century, about the time the church first began to celebrate Christmas, St. Athanasius, that great protector of orthodoxy, actually said that God became human so that we could partake of God’s nature; so that we, too, could be divinized.

Hundreds of years later, the Medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart said it like this in one of his sermons:

People think God has only become a human being *there* – in an historical incarnation – but that is not so; for God is here – *in this very place* – just as much incarnate as in a human being long ago. . . .

We are all meant to be mothers of God, for God is always needing to be born. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the Divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace, but I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: when the Son of God is begotten in us. [End quote]

We are all meant to be mothers of God! The son of God is to be begotten in each of us! We are here on this earth to be divinized! Now this is good news! Amazingly good news for each of us personally and for the entire world! For all creation!

What transformative wisdom Luke invites us into through this simple story. When I really ponder it, tonight's sweet, familiar story of Jesus's birth actually blows my mind every bit as much as it opens my heart. Entering into the meaning of the Christmas story and wondering how I might be called to birth and mother God sometimes brings up a visceral memory from my own young motherhood.

Some months after our first child, Tom, was born I became aware of something about being a parent that my husband John said was different for him. I realized our son was absolutely always with me, no matter whether he was physically present or not. Sometimes his absent-presence shaped my conscious thought – imagining what he was doing while I was gone, hoping he was ok, remembering the baby-related errands I needed to do on the way home. At other times, our unbreakable connection was more like a constant undercurrent, a quiet drone in the background, or a very subtle physical sensation that would catch my full attention at odd moments. But his presence was always very real – very, well, present.

While John, who was a very involved dad, thought of baby Tom frequently throughout his workday, it was not quite the same for him. He acknowledged there were times when he was so absorbed in what he was doing that he had no real sense of Tom's presence. That there were spaces in his life where having a child did not define him in the same way it did me.

Perhaps this difference was largely because I'd carried Tom in my belly for nine months and continued to nurse him. There definitely was a strong physical bond between us, no matter how far apart we were. But I suspect it was also a cultural difference passed down over millennia. I had become my child's mother almost more than I was anything else. No matter what I was doing, my child's well-being was paramount to me. In my mind, at least, it depended on me.

Now, what if, in some spiritual/mystical way, Christ's well-being – God's transformative incarnation in the world – really does depend on me? On us? After all, in the Christmas story God chooses to work through people, ordinary people like you and me.

I'm pretty sure that if I were as aware of God moment-to-moment as I was of my infant son; if I were as committed to making sure God's personhood thrived in every way I could no matter what that asked of me; if I were that God-centered, that open to God's grace; then I believe the world -- the world of Dorothy and the wider world -- would be a significantly different and better place. If I were that conscious of and committed to being God's mother, I know I would become more truly human and be better able to do my part in nurturing a Godly world.

As we enjoy beloved Christmas carols and scrumptious special foods, cheerful Christmas lights and gaily wrapped presents, and maybe especially as we delight in the presence of family, if you're blessed with that this year, I pray we'll all also catch glimpses of ways we might bear God into the world. God might come alive for us in our hopes and joy, and even through our loneliness or heartache. God is there, is here, in it all – yearning to be born into our Christmas gladness as well as into the middle of the warfare in Ukraine, among the people starving in Africa, and in the overcrowded prison cells throughout our country. God is yearning to be borne into it all – through you and through me.

Shepherds gathered around a newborn baby nestled in a manger and angels joyfully singing of peace makes for a truly wonderful story. And wouldn't it be even more wonderful if, as our hearts are warmed by its telling, we begin to feel the birth pangs announcing God's readiness to be born in us. Right now, tonight. And on into eternity.

May the Christmas story inspire each of us to discover what it means for us to become mothers of God in our own lives. To join with Jesus the Christ in taking an evolutionary leap into our true humanity, co-creating with God a whole new world. Wouldn't that be the best Christmas present ever?!

A merry and blessed Christmas to all! Amen.