

## **We Are All Mothers of God**

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24 December 2013

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Frederick, Maryland

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Christmas Eve is one of those unusual times, when a Unitarian Universalist minister is expected, even required, to “Drop the J-bomb” — to talk about Jesus. As many of you know, I am a relatively recent convert to Unitarian Universalism from a liberal Christian denomination. And although there is immense power in digging deeply into one religious tradition, I’m grateful for the ways that Unitarian Universalism invites us to draw from the best of all the world’s religions as well as the best of modern science.

There is an old Christian hymn whose refrain is “I love to tell the story, / ’Twill be my theme in glory, / To tell the old, old story / Of Jesus and His love.” And part of me does love the old, old stories — whether Christian stories or otherwise. I intentionally chose to have the biblical passage we heard earlier read from the King James Version. For academic purposes, this 1611 translation is four centuries out of date. But for poetic resonance, the King James rendering of the Bible remains a timeless classic.

At the same time, as much as I sometimes love to hear the old, old story, **if we are to continue to grow and mature as a species, we also need to hear the new, new story of current events and cutting-edge research.** Many Christian traditions follow a three-year set of readings in which Advent (the four weeks preceding Christmas) marks a time of beginning to retelling the old, old story — starting again each year with the story of Jesus’ birth. And I’ve attended many beautiful Christmas Eve Candlelight services that focused exclusively on biblical

readings about that old, old story of what happened in one small corner of the world in the first-century. I love that story, and there is a subversively transformative power in the story of that first-century Jewish peasant named Jesus.

But this evening in addition to hearing part of that old, old story, you were invited to hear three more recent readings. First, in the Middle Ages, more than a millennia after Jesus' birth, Meister Eckhart, reflecting on the insufficiency of simply rehearsing the old, old story wrote: "What good is it to me that Mary gave birth to the son of God fourteen hundred years ago [if] I do not also give birth to the Son of God in my time and in my culture? We are all meant to be mothers of God. God is always needing to be born."<sup>1</sup> Since Meister Eckhart is male (*meister* means "master" in German), he is speaking metaphorically about every human being becoming a mother of God. And whatever we mean by the word God — from the ground of all being, to the Spirit of Life, to the interdependent web of all existence — Meister Eckhart's words challenge us that there is a sense in which **it matters less what happened in first-century Galilee than whether we take up the challenge today of birthing the best of what we are uniquely capable of making manifest in this world, both individually and collectively as a congregation.**

As Marianne Williamson has said in a quote that seems particularly appropriate in a Christmas Eve candlelight service,

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Fox, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, 65.

Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. **There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.** We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And **as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.**<sup>2</sup>

*We are all meant to be mothers of God. God is always needing to be born.*

In our second reading, we heard from Jan Richardson about how we need not only to be mothers of God, we also need midwives to help us. And we need to midwife others:

We need companions who will breathe with us, groan with us, hold us in the struggle, and celebrate with us even when the birthing does not go as planned. We need sisters and brothers who will encourage us to rest when we are tired, eat when we are hungry, and weep when we are grieving, that we may be strengthened to encourage and labor with others when the occasion arises.<sup>3</sup>

That's a large part of what continues to draw many of us together in this place. As one famous definition of Unitarian Universalist goes, from Laila Ibrahim:

It's a blessing you were born.

It matters what you do with your life.

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<sup>2</sup> Marianne Williamson, [\*A Return To Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles\*](#), 190-191.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Richardson, [\*Night Visions: Searching the Shadows of Advent and Christmas\*](#), 74-75.

What you know about god is a piece of the truth.

You do not have to do it alone.

And in a few moments we will each light our individual candles, but **our collective light will shine brighter than any of our candles could alone.** And there may be times in the coming year when your light dims, flickers, or threatens to go out. May the memory of this candlelighting ritual remind you of the support this community and others like it can provide.

In our final reading, Bruce Sanguin reminds us that the “Great Story” we need to tell is not limited to the past 2,000 years. Indeed, our ongoing 13.7 *billion* year Universe Story culminates in each new present moment. This moment right now could not happen without the 13.7 billion year history that preceded it. And when considered from an evolutionary perspective, Brian Swimme has written, that we human beings are,

**Stardust now evolved to the place that the stardust can think about itself! ...**

We are the universe becoming conscious of itself. We are stardust that has begun to contemplate the stars. We have arisen out of the dynamics of the Earth. Four billion years ago, our planet was molten rock, and now it sings opera. Let me tell you, this is good news!

So, yes, the story of Jesus is an incredible, inspiring story. But Jesus’ birth is not the center of history. It’s not even close. It is only one of countless turning points in *human* history. “And on this holy night, no less, does the cosmos coalesce in us as we take our place on the stage of sacred mystery....”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Sanguin, *If Darwin Prayed: Prayers for Evolutionary Mystics*, 19.

I'm grateful to be with you tonight to tell and sing the old, old story. But I'm also grateful for the opportunity to partner with you this night and in the days and years to come in co-creating a new and more hopeful future for us and for future generations. May we continue to work together in the new year to bring about more peace, more justice, more equity on this earth. May we support each other, sharing our light or leaning on the light of others, when our candle flickers or dims. And *may we learn to be mothers of God. For God is always needing to be born.*