

We Are ALL The Children of God
by Rev. Durrell Watkins , M.A., M.Div.
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Luke 1.26-38

What a magical time of year this is...80 degree days and 60 degree nights. Nothing says Christmas a like palm tree waving in the breeze on a sunny day.

I do remember the Christmases of my childhood. Wassail. Eggnog. Ham. Collard greens. Football games on the television, though I never knew who was playing or who won, and I still don't. But the best part of Christmas was the family standing around the piano singing our favorite Christmas songs.

We'd all sing together, "Venite adoremus, venite adoremus, venite adoremus, dominum."
Then we'd each sing our favorite song.
My dad would belt out, "Joy to the world the Lord is come..."

My mother would always sing the Virgin Slumber Song: "Amid the roses Mary sits and rocks her Jesus child while among the tree tops blows the wind so warm and mild, and soft and sweetly sings a bird upon the bow – a baby, dear one, slumber now."

Then it was Grandma's turn. She was too shy to sing, really, so in a very breathy voice, she'd sing, "Silent night, holy night, all is calm all is bright..."

When she was done, it was time for my great-aunt Gladys to sing. She was not shy. And so she would belt out a carol that truly captures the spirit of the season: "Put the loot in the boot, Santa, you've got to be good to me. Another jewel would be cool, big daddy, they've got a sale going on at Tiffany's. Last year's mink was fine for a while, but Santa, honey, it's now out of style; so, put the loot in the boot, Santa if you want to share my company."
Isn't that beautiful. Get's me right here (the heart) even still.

Finally, it would be my turn. My song wasn't as profound as Aunt Gladys' but it is one that she taught me and it remains my favorite Christmas song to this day:

"I want a hippopotamus for Christmas, only a hippopotamus will do. I don't want a doll, no dinky tinker toy, I want a hippopotamus to play with and enjoy. I want a hippopotamus for Christmas. I don't think Santa Claus will mind, do you? He won't have to use the dirty chimney flue, just bring him through the front door that's the easy thing to do. I can see me now on Christmas morning creeping down the stairs. Oh what joy and what surprise when I open up my eyes and see a Hippo Hero standing there. I want a hippopotamus for Christmas, only a hippopotamus will do. No crocodiles, no rhinoceroses, I only like hippopotamuses and hippopotamuses like me too (I am their favorite) and hippopotamuses like me too!"

Good times.

Well, good food and silly songs aren't really what the season is about, but they are symbols of what the season is about. They demonstrate the playful, joyful, unfettered experience of love. They remind us that love freely shared enhances life and even makes miracles possible for us.

We heard a very familiar story today from Luke's gospel. Luke wrote that story sometime between the late first century and the early 2nd century, some 60 to 90 years AFTER Jesus' execution. The story, then, isn't an eye witness account of events as they unfold, but rather a story about the community that is telling it, that is looking to it for hope in their own circumstances.

We live in the 21st century. We have National Geographic, and the Discovery Channel, and PBS, and colleges, any book on any subject available through Amazon.com. In such a world, miraculous births and angelic visitations may seem a little naïve, or we may view such tales as having a mythic quality, or we may see them as the poetry of religion.

Of course some of us have no trouble accepting the story at face value, but others of us do, and yet for those who take it literally as well as for those who can't the story remains a very valuable tool in our religious formation.

You see, this story isn't about chromosomes, DNA, or the human reproduction system. This story is about people who have been oppressed daring to love themselves enough to hope out loud for justice in their lives. And therefore, we may disagree with one another about whether or not this story is factual, but we can all agree that this story is absolutely true.

The truth of the story isn't limited to boring facts; the truth of this story is found in the lived experience of those who shared the story and in the lived experience of those of us who continue to share the story.

The biblical narratives repeatedly show us a people who call out for justice in the face of oppression. One empire after another dominates them: the Egyptian Empire, the Assyrian Empire, the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire, the Roman Empire...and yet they continue to dream of a day when things will get better.

They dare to believe they deserve better. Divine Love flowing through them and expressing as them insists that they deserve hope, and healing, and justice. And so even if it should take centuries, they will not give up hope. They will not be silenced. They will not deny that they are as divinely favored as those who hold and often abuse power.

In this world, after Jesus has been executed, after Jerusalem has been destroyed, Luke shows a poor, unwed, pregnant, peasant girl in an occupied land and insists that she is innocent. Her life is full of suffering but not because she deserves it; she is, in fact, divinely favored. Luke imagines a messenger from God affirming her and announcing that her child, born in such difficult circumstances will live a life in which people will encounter the very presence of God.

Luke is remembering the life of Jesus as he has heard about it and as he has imagined it. He is affirming that Jesus' life was important to the course of history, was important to people who had been left in the margins of society. An unwed teenage mother, poor shepherds in a field, animals in a barn...these are the witnesses to Jesus' beginnings as Luke imagines it.

The point isn't whether or not it happened exactly that way; the point is that Jesus' life so expressed the Love of God that people who were told they were unlovable and untouchable were empowered and filled with hope and renewal because they encountered or heard about this Jesus. His life was an expression of God's love, and Luke chooses to make that point by imagining a very spectacular beginning to Jesus' life.

This first century story isn't meant to confound the science of the 18th century and beyond; this story is meant to suggest that no one gets left out of God's love and Jesus is the symbol that reminds us of this life-changing and life-giving truth.

The message of God's all-inclusive and unconditional love is continued after this story when Mary goes to visit her friend and relative, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth is also unexpectedly pregnant, and so Mary goes to her and they share the ordinary experience of pregnancy as well as the individual experiences of touching divine reality in the midst of the ordinary. A miracle is a change of perception... whenever the marginalized claim their own voice, a miracle occurs!

Mary and Elizabeth support each other. They stand together in solidarity. They love each other, and their sons grow up in the power of love to do amazing things. Rome doesn't empower them. The religious institution doesn't empower them.

These oppressed, pregnant, women find God in the midst of their own circumstances, their lived experiences; they share their hope, their joy, their courage, and their love with each other, and they find they can affirm their own dignity, their own sacred value even in the midst of uncertainty and hardship.

That's what Luke is saying.

That's what the angel is saying.

That's what we can say today.

When health, the economy, the government, the family, the relationship, religion, when the whole world seems to betray us, our story isn't over.

We can dare to embrace the Sacred in the midst of our lives. We can share our hope and our love with one another, and we may just find that we are miraculously empowered by love that can't be regulated, or legislated, or ignored.

We may find right in the midst of our own lives, in the midst of OUR lived experience that "the holy Spirit is upon us and the power of the Most High is overshadowing us and we are ALL the children of God."

This is the good news. Amen.

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**Divine Love flows through me.
Divine Love expresses as me.
The Power of Love blesses my life.
I am a child of God.
I expect miracles in my life.
And so it is!**

"Our strength is in harmony with our innocence. Our gentleness and our power are not at odds."
Marianne Williamson