

“Where is God?”  
Westminster Presbyterian Church  
December 20, 2020

*Luke 1:26-38, 46-55*

by Rev. Patrick D. Heery

It has often been said that social media will empower the people to bring down tyrants. No longer can despots conduct their tyrannies in secrecy. I’m referring, of course, not only to political dictators, but to those who wield their power over us daily with an iron fist: our children. Parents have taken to Twitter to expose the dominance of these small but mighty creatures. A mom writes, “Hell hath no fury like my four-year-old screaming ‘ALEXA PLAY WHERE ARE YOU CHRISTMAS’ as Alexa plays whatever random Christmas song she thinks my four-year-old said.”

Here are some more tweets from the underground resistance:

“Our Costco delivery came at 8am on a Saturday, and the delivery lady said ‘Oh! Didn’t know if you’d be awake.’ Lol! That’s the joke, friends! I’ve got three kids, a dog, and cat; I’ve been awake since 2006.”

“Hi, my daughter will be late to school because SHE CAN ZIP HER JACKET BY HERSELF.”

“You don’t know fear until you hear your two-year-old flush the toilet and yell “BYE BYE” from the hall bathroom.”

“Four-year-old: ‘Can I have a banana?’ Me: ‘Yes, of course.’ Four-year-old: \*throwing it to the ground\* ‘I HATE BANANAS.’

“Me: ‘Hey, sweetie pie!’ My three-year-old: ‘What’s sweetie pie?’ Me: ‘It can be a name for someone you love!’ My three-year-old: \*silent\*. Me: ‘You can call me sweetie pie!’ My three-year-old: ‘I don’t want to.’ ”

If there are any children watching, please know that, in all truth, we love you more than anything in all the world; you give us great joy and purpose; you also scare us.

As I read these messages, I can’t help but wonder: What would Mary have tweeted? Maybe: “I used to think God was wise. Then God told me he was giving all of his power to a toddler. And I thought to myself: it really is the apocalypse.”

Of course, many of us would give anything to hear God speak to us, as God spoke to Mary, even if it did mean the bequest of God’s power upon a toddler. Just this week, I was speaking with a person who acutely feels God’s absence. This person desires God, but can’t seem to locate God in a world full of hypocrisy and senseless tragedy. Where are you, God? How many of us have asked that question? Why don’t your angels sing to me?

Do you think Mary may have wondered the same question? I mean, before the angel Gabriel appeared to her, before she trekked to Bethlehem and was visited by shepherds and magi. All those years growing up, hearing stories about the Jewish prophets and kings of old, of Abraham and Moses and Hannah, Elijah standing on the mountain, Solomon in the temple, mustn't Mary have wondered: Where is God now? A teenager living in occupied Palestine, an oppressed religious minority, a lonely girl subject to patriarchy and subsistence poverty, mustn't Mary have wondered: Why isn't God speaking to me?

We never talk about Mary before the angel appeared to her, but maybe we should. Maybe that Mary is a lot like us.

It was this Mary the angel Gabriel visited, saying, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." It was this Mary, so like us, who was confused by this greeting. What do you mean the Lord is with me? Where?

The angel's answer must have shocked Mary. The angel said, God is growing in your womb—not in the temple, not in the king's palace, not among the priests, but in you, God is waiting to be born, Savior of the world.

Elizabeth will call her "Mother of the Lord" (Luke 1:43). Early Christians will call her *theotokos*, a Greek word meaning "God-bearer" or she "who gave birth to one was God." Indeed, this became one of the most contentious terms in early Christianity, as people debated who Jesus was and what it meant to say that Jesus was fully God and fully human. Eventually, at the ecumenical council of Ephesus, church leaders embraced Mary as *theotokos*, meaning that when Mary was pregnant, the child in her womb was already God.

At first blush, this seems non-sensical. How could God, an infinite being, be within a single person's mortal body? Early Christians wrestled with this question. It wasn't God the Father that was in Mary, they said; it was God incarnate, Jesus Christ; it was a specific identity or aspect of God that was within her. And really, wouldn't be it non-sensical to assert the opposite? After all, how could God, an infinite being, not be within Mary? If God is infinite, then there can be no place, no moment, where God is not. To birth isn't to create. To birth is to bring into the world what is already alive.

For nine months, Mary carried God within her. An umbilical cord grew between her and the life within. She felt his heartbeat, felt him kick. She endured the discomfort of back pain and morning sickness. And to everyone she met, she told how how God was already beginning to bring, through her, a new world, in which none go hungry and none lack for love.

Once he was born, her work was not finished. She fed him, scolded him, taught him, worried for him, supported him, recruited for him, loved him, and even, years later, stood at the foot of his cross and wept for him.

It's the Christmas story we are about to tell all over again. But, I have to ask: Are we really here to remember something that happened 2,000 years ago? Or are we here because we secretly hope that it will happen again—to us? Are we not here because we long to discover that God is within us too, waiting to be born?

The 13th century German theologian and mystic Meister Eckhart said, “We are all meant to be mothers of God. 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 if 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 my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of Man is begotten in us.”

Eckhart speaks of a God who, out of an overabundance of love, is eternally overflowing into our world, spilling over, birthing hope and salvation in unceasing creation—through whom Jesus Christ every day comes to us. Not just 2,000 years ago, but today, with you.

After all, does the world today need Christ any less than it did then? Do we?

We are called to assert, not that God was, but that God is; not that God spoke, but that God speaks still. As bearers of the divine image, as *theotokoi* ourselves, we are to behold the glory that resides within. When we seek for God, we should ask: What within me is reaching out in love, in beauty, in power, to serve others, to make the world better, to witness to God? What passion, what joy, what truth, calls out of me to be born? That’s where we will find God—in that tiny seed within us. It is our charge, as it was Mary’s, to tend and nurture this seed, to believe in it, to help it come alive into the world and grow into the living Christ.

God is in you, longing to be born. Through your ideas, your words, your art, your service, your justice, your relationships, everything.

Galatians 4:19: “My little children, for you I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” John 14:20: “On that day you will know that I [Jesus] am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

The import is not that we are God, an idea from which great harm can come, but rather that the God we seek is growing in the one place many of us never thought to consult: within. There is the part of us that is broken, which rebels against God, and there is the tiny seed, the child, that is God, asking to be brought out into the world. The question, of course, is: How do we know what is of God and what is not? When Judas asks this question, Jesus says: It’s simple. Does it love? (John 14)

We trust that it is God when it compels us to love. 1 John 4:12: “If we love one another, God lives in us.” Ephesians 3:16-19: “I pray that... Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

This is the true meaning of Christmas, not that God’s Son was born in a stable in Bethlehem, but that Christ is born in us. May you, like Mary, pray this night, and all nights to come: “Christ, be born in me today.” **Amen.**