



THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LORD

MARCH 31, 2019

LUKE 1: 26-38

THE FEMININE FACE OF GOD

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born^[c] will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

- This is a statue of Hermes.
- For the Greeks, Hermes is the messenger of the gods. He is the one who crosses over the boundary separating the spiritual and material worlds. Hermes also crosses over the boundary separating the living and the dead.
- His name comes from a word meaning "a heap of stones."
- Why?
In ancient days, a crossroad was marked with a pile of stones and it was Hermes who helped the traveler choose the right way to turn.
- Hermes is the patron saint of psychotherapists because we help people navigate the invisible world, we help people decide which way to travel in life, and how to safely manage the boundaries.

- Hermes is also a trickster. On the day he was born, he stole his brother's cattle. He had them walk backwards out of the field so his brother could not figure out where they went and who took them.
- And he's a musician, having invented the lyre.
- But, centrally, Hermes is an inner voice or inner guide who helps us navigate the soul's journey in life.
- I brought Hermes along because I wanted to point out the importance of the image—the icon—the statue—for the spirit and soul.
- One of the strength of the Roman church is that they retained the image as a focal point. The great cathedrals, like Notre Dame, have beautiful side altars dedicated to various saints. And, consider the fourteen images of the Stations of the Cross where we see the steps of Christ's journey to crucifixion. Just like Hermes, these saints and images have the power to evoke spiritual states of symbolic meaning....
- One of the losses in the reformation is that the reformers removed almost all of the images, except Jesus. And, the emphasis moved from sight to sound.
- Luther's emphasis was no longer on the image, but on the word preached from the pulpit.
- Perhaps the only place where the image was preserved was in the stained-glass windows of Lutheran and other Protestant churches. Today, even those images have disappeared in the sanctuaries of the megachurches.
- Most of our windows depict images from the life of Jesus. So, most of the images are masculine.
- Oh, but let's not forget the dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit, descending from the heavens above the altar.
- How many of us think of the Holy Spirit as masculine? Feminine?
 - Interesting, although both masculine and feminine pronouns are used in the bible, the vast majority are feminine....
 - So is the Holy Spirit.

- It's been hard to let the feminine in, when it comes to God.
- So, let's turn to Mary.
- I don't want to speak about Mary in terms of belief, as if I'm going to tell you to believe something this morning.
- Rather, I want us to reflect and think.
- Why has the Roman church preserved the image of Mary for us on behalf of the world-wide church?
- There's an old story about a workman on a scaffolding high above the nave of a cathedral. He looked down and saw a woman praying before a statue of Mary.
- As a joke, the workman whispered, "Woman, this is Jesus." The woman ignored him.
- The workman whispered again, "Woman, this is Jesus." Again, the woman ignored him.
- Finally, he said aloud, "Woman, this is Jesus."
- At this point, the woman looked up at the crucifix and said, "Be still now Jesus. I'm talking to your mother."
- In an idealized form, Mary, the mother of God, preserves some sense of the feminine as sacred....
- And let's think about masculine and feminine energy for a moment.
- Now I'm not talking about males and females. Whether we are a man or woman, we each require some complimentary inner balance in order to be a healthy human being.
- Masculine energy revolves around **reason, logic, control, efficiency, directness and action.**

- It was most **efficient**—masculine energy—for Pittsburgh steel mills to dump waste by-products into the rivers and into the air. Longterm, though, it created massive problems and damaged mother earth and air quality.
- Feminine energy has more to do with **nurturing, randomness, receptiveness, emotion, and intuition**.
- It is nurture and intuition--feminine energy--that insisted on cleaning up the steel mill industrial waste and caring for mother earth.
- **Healthy** masculine and feminine energy are what the church and world needs now.
- Reminds me....
- A Spanish teacher was explaining to her class that in Spanish, unlike English, nouns are designated as either masculine or feminine. House, for example, is female: “la casa.” Pencil is masculine: “el lapiz.”
- A student asked, “What gender is a computer?”
- In response, the teacher split the class into two groups, asking them to come up with reasons why the computer should be a masculine or feminine noun.
- The men’s group decided that computer should be feminine because:
 - No one but its creator understands their internal logic.
 - The language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else.
 - Even the smallest mistakes are stored in long term memory for later retrieval.
 - As soon as you commit to one, you find yourself spending half your paycheck on accessories for it.
- The women’s group concluded that computers should be masculine because:
 - In order to do anything with it, you have to turn them on.
 - They have a lot of data but still can’t think for themselves.
 - They are supposed to help you solve problems, but half the time they **are** the problem.
 - As soon as you commit to one, you realize that if you had waited, you could have gotten a better model.

- All jokes aside, it is very difficult to value one without devaluing the other. Patriarchal values tend to devalue the feminine. Today, there is a tendency to denigrate masculine energy.
- So, here's where I want us to be theologically because theology does matter.
- In 1950, Pope Pius XII declared "dogmatically and infallibly" that Mary was bodily taken up into heaven.
- There's the theology. The idea is that the mother of God is now equally represented in the heavenly kingdom that is Father, Son, Spirit, and now, Mother.
- Now these elevated spiritual ideas take a long time to come down to earth where they begin to make a difference.
- It's been about seventy years since 1950 and, for the most part, we are only now beginning to experience a seismic shift in the sharing of leadership and power equally among men and women.
- And, as we would expect, there is tremendous resistance and upheaval.
- To put this all together for us, spiritually and psychologically, we can say that the feminine must be held in highest esteem spiritually—the elevation of the mother of God—in order that the feminine is held in highest esteem in earthly terms.
- On earth as it is in heaven....
- As a boy, I had a lot of feminine energy. I was musical, rather than athletic. I was full of emotion in the day when boys were disciplined for crying. I've always been highly intuitive, seeing the big picture and seeing changes coming on the horizon.
- Growing up, not much of that was valued by others. And that makes life difficult.
- It's even harder for our young people today. Bullying occurs around characteristics that appear "out-of-the norm." Today, the boundaries between masculine and feminine are quite fluid. We're being faced with issues around *lgbtqia*: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, asexual. And issues of gender identity.

- The church that hides from these issues or tries to impose “let men be men and women be women” will eventually become irrelevant to our kids and the culture.
- The world is changing because the heaven kingdom has changed.
- Being faithful means becoming a haven where all of us can work out what it means to be fully human as the individuals god created us to be....
- And this is a big and important task in our culture....
- Deb and I have different perspectives. We’re both therapists. Deb taught psychological development to college kids studying to be middle-school teachers. I’m a Pastor.
- To my chagrin, I would have to say I didn’t listen closely to Deb’s voice in the past.
- Lately, I’ve been doing a better job of listening. And I’m surprised how often her perspective is closer to the truth than mine. I’m usually overly optimistic about people and deb is usually a bit darker in viewing peoples’ motivation. Which often turns out to be right.
- And so, I’ve been helped considerably by letting in and valuing her feminine voice. Spiritually speaking, wisdom has been symbolized as feminine, both in the person of Mary, the Holy Spirit, and in the Old Testament image of Sophia.
- And so, in this regard, I’m very optimistic about CLC. Women outnumber men on our Congregational Council. Women are staff members. And another woman will be joining soon.
- Mary, Mother of God, carried Jesus in her body, gave him birth, followed him, held all her feelings about him in her heart, and then stood at the foot of the cross as he died.
- Let us hold Mary, Mother of God, and Jesus, Son of God, in our hearts. Finding balance and spiritual health.
- SONG: **MARY** BY PATTY GRIFFIN