



**THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 20, 2020
LUKE 1: 26-38
“THE FEMININE FACE OF GOD”**

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

SERMON

A patient’s family gathered around the medical specialist to hear what he had to say.

“things don’t look good. The only chance is a brain transplant. This is an experimental procedure. It might work. However, the bad news is that brains are quite expensive and there is no insurance coverage.”

“how much?” Asked the head of the family.

“a male brain is \$500,000 and a female brain is \$200,000.”

The men all looked at the ground and tried not to smirk or laugh aloud.

Then the patient’s daughter asked, “why the difference in price?”

“a standard pricing practice,” said the head of the medical team, “female brains have to be marked down because they’ve been used....”



In 1950, Pope Pius XII declared infallibly that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was bodily taken up into heaven. Meaning that the image of god, the reality of god now included the feminine as well as the masculine.

This is considered psychologically crucial for the acceptance of the feminine within the church universal and the popular culture.

Although in the last seventy years there has not been much follow through on this milestone in any practical way.

Instead, in the last four years, we are experiencing a rise in hypermasculinity, which is dangerous for the church and the culture.

We have seen organized groups of men, like the proud boys, receive some level of public acceptance, as if these values are to be tolerated. These hypermasculine groups, on the right and left, are steeped in physical expressions of aggression and violence, the denigration of women, intense homophobia, and emotional deadness.

For example, maybe I have missed it, but I can't point to one hypermasculine male in national leadership who has offered any expression of empathy, word of comfort, or acknowledgement of grief over the death of 305,000 deaths due to the pandemic.

Hypermasculinity sees such expressions as signs of weak or, even worse, feminine characteristics.

No, be stoic. Be disconnected emotionally. Be a real man.

The proud boys are truly boys—immature, undeveloped, without self-reflection or emotional depth.

In this regard, we might re-consider why Jesus chose twelve men as his closest disciples. Not because men have some superior spiritual maturity, but perhaps because Jesus knew that women more naturally understand spiritual reality. Maybe he figured his real work was trying to get men to acknowledge that they needed spiritual instruction and transformation.

And there's lots of biblical evidence to support such a notion:

Peter is dumber than a box of rocks. Judas betrays Jesus. Thomas doubts him. James and John are just interested in cabinet positions when Jesus becomes king. And they all have trouble understanding what Jesus is teaching. Jesus has to pull the disciples aside time and time again and explain things to them because they don't understand his parables. The twelve stooges.

In passing, we could reference the ongoing revelations of sexual abuse by catholic clergy. They make a strong case that male celibacy—an odd form of masculinity—hasn't worked for a long time....



Today we are witnessing an immense longing for relational, mutually empowering feminine qualities at every level of our society—from our politics, to our economics, in our psyche, our cultures, our patterns of leadership, and our theologies, all of which have become far too warlike, competitive, individualistic, mechanistic, and non-contemplative. We are terribly imbalanced.

Recently, Carl Lentz, pastor of the megachurch Hillsong East Coast, was fired because of multiple affairs. But he was famous as a pastor because he was cool: skinny jeans, cutting edge haircuts, tattoos, fashion eye-glasses and—gasp—Justin Bieber’s pastor.

So what about feminine energy as expressed by mother Mary?

We have done with Mary what we did with Jesus: put her on a pedestal and worshipped her from afar rather than understanding that all of us, men and women alike, are meant to incarnate the feminine characteristics she embodies.

When I was in Switzerland, I went to a small town where there is a cathedral that dominates the landscape. The cathedral is dedicated to what is known as the black Madonna.

On a normal weekday, I stood in line to kneel before the altar and statue of the black Madonna.

Where the image of mother Mary is all light: kindness, motherly love, purity, nurture and comfort, the black Madonna is a more earthly, strong, imposing, nature loving feminine image, pointing to the balance between light and dark in the feminine image.

But where is this supposedly highly valued feminine energy in our country’s leadership?.

The largely hypermasculine energy in congress—and remember we all bear masculine and feminine characteristics—have been unable and or unwilling to pass legislation that would rescue and support the poor, the marginalized, owners of small businesses, the unemployed, and the underemployed.

Where is compassion among our leaders?

Where is empathy among our leaders?

Where is concern for the common good among our leaders?

Where is any semblance of love and care among our leaders?

Mother Mary may reside in full glory in heaven, but she has been kicked to the curb by our culture, our politics, and by some of our churches....

Carl Jung believed that we produce in art and story the inner images the soul needs in order to see itself and to allow its own transformation. Perhaps this is why the Madonna is still the most painted subject in western art.



Do you get this?

We must put the image out there, so we can grasp it imaginably and then internalize its value. This is the ancient practice of adoration.

We adore mother Mary to make her essence part of ours. The catholic practice of adoring the sacrament—the body of Christ—is a soulful method of internalizing the suffering and risen Christ.

Before it is too late, all of us need to take Mary down from the art museum walls and let her enter our hearts and minds....

It's amazing how many churches are dedicated to Mary. Here in the US and throughout Mexico, our lady of Guadalupe is found everywhere: in tattoos, murals, bathtubs converted to garden shrines, and gilt statues. Why did the first fourteen hundred years of Christianity, in both the eastern and western churches, fall head over heels in love with this seemingly quite ordinary woman? After all, the new testament speaks very little of Mary.

We are clearly dealing with not just a single woman here but a foundational symbol—or, to borrow the language of Carl Jung, an “archetype”—an image that constellates a whole host of meanings that cannot be communicated logically but is grounded in our collective human unconscious.

In some ways, many humans can identify with Mary more than they can with Jesus precisely because she was not god! The gospels attribute no miraculous works or heroic acts to her, simply trust and being more than doing. From her first yes to the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:38), to Jesus' birth itself (Luke 2:7), to her yes at the foot of the cross (John 19:25), and her presence at fire and wind of Pentecost (see Acts 1:14, where she is the only woman named at the first outpouring of the spirit), Mary appears on cue at key moments of the gospel narratives. She is everywoman and everyman, and that is why we call her the feminine symbol for the universal incarnation.

The incarnation of the first Mary is actually mother earth, symbolized by the image of Sophia—a beautiful, feminine, multicolored, graceful Mary.

She is mother earth.

And how have we treated this first Mary?

Like a dumping ground for our chemicals, our poisons, our byproducts of material goods. We recklessly kill her children—the animals—for fun and sport—for our fur coats and our ivory trinkets, for our all you can eat buffets and our lab experiments.

Who is the most dangerous animal on mother earth?

The human animal, of course.



If Christ and Jesus are the archetypes of what god is doing, Mary is the archetype of how to receive what god is doing and hand it on to others. In art, she is invariably offering Jesus to the observer or inviting us to come to him.

In Mary, humanity has said our eternal yes to god. A yes that cannot be undone. A corporate yes that overrides our many noes. This is why Mary was commonly called the “new eve” who undid the corporate no of the first eve and is often pictured in art stepping on the snake that tempted eve (genesis 3:15).

As you have undoubtedly noticed, the feminine is rising at last, overflowing the banks of every landscape, from politics to religion, from the world of entertainment to the fields of peace and justice. She is unconditionally loving, and she is deliciously irreverent. She is shifting the global paradigm from one of dominance and individualized salvation to one of collective awakening and service to all beings.

Her wisdom has been hidden in the heart of each of the great spiritual traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and all indigenous wisdom ways. Access to these jewels has required excavation, but the treasures that have emerged are transfiguring the soul of the world, offering medicine for the broken heart of humanity and the materials needed to mend the torn fabric of the earth....

One of my analyst’s favorite expressions was “we are all in this struggle together.”

A hypermasculinity denies this truth: it shouts that we are all individuals, responsible for our life, called to pull ourselves up by our boot straps, taking as much of the world as we can for ourselves. To show vulnerability is an unforgivable weakness. To express empathy is to get too dangerously intimate with another person and his or her pain.

But if there were ever a time when we need Mother Mary and her compassion, her empathy, her kindness and protection it is now.

If we haven’t learned through this experience of the pandemic that we need one another, I don’t know if we will ever learn.

This congregation does not stand alone. We continue to feed hungry individuals and families for ten months now because we are joined in love and care.

In her various incarnations throughout the world, Mary has made it clear that she is the mother of all people. Her task and her delight is to love us, give us shelter, comfort our hearts, and protect our souls.

Whereas Jesus expresses both human and divine realities, Mary is solely one of us. Residing as a poor single woman in Millvale, now pregnant by an unknown father.

Do you get it?



SERMON SONG

Mary (Patti Griffin)