

## **Christ Mystery and Divine Feminine**

Isaiah 42:14, 16; Proverbs 8:1-3, 22; Luke 1:26-31, 46-49

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*“For a long time I have kept silent, I have been quiet and held myself back. But now, like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I gasp and pant....I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.”*

Isaiah 42:14,16

*Do you hear Lady Wisdom calling?*

*Can you hear Madame Insight raising her voice?*

*She’s taken her stand at First and Main,  
at the busiest intersection.*

*Right in the city square*

*where the traffic is thickest, she shouts,*

*“You—I’m talking to all of you,  
everyone out here on the streets!*

*“God sovereignly made me—the first, the basic—  
before God did anything else.*

*I was brought into being a long time ago,  
well before Earth got its start.*

Proverbs 8:1-3, 33 *The Message*

*In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a young woman 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.*

*And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for God has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is God’s name.*

Luke 1:26-31, 46-49 NRSV

We continue our all-church exploration of themes in Richard Rohr’s book *The Universal Christ*. He continues to invite us to read with our hearts and not as much with our analytical minds. He is helping us reflect on how we have seen Jesus and the larger deeper reality of the Christ, which eternal, universal, and is present in us and all creation. In our small groups each week, we are invited to reflect on what we have thought or believed, how that has been limiting or

how it has been life-giving. Sometimes we may be reading and think, “Yes, I changed my mind or heart about that years ago,” or “That is new to me. I need to let that sit for while” or there are the “Aha” moments.

Rohr, a Franciscan priest, reminds us that of two things. For the most part, the Christian tradition has taught that God is male. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – a dove or wind. And that the Christian household, primarily the Catholic Church, has embraced Mary as the primary female symbol, with both positive and negative associations. What if we can see the feminine aspects of the Holy, both in the Bible and in our experience and what if that enables us to more fully experience the presence and power of this Universal Christ?

### **Chochma – Lady Wisdom in Hebrew and Sophia on Greek**

In the Isaiah passage, which is a poem, God, the Holy One, is giving birth. She is in the midst of labor. In chapter 49, the metaphor is God is like a nursing mother who never forgets her children. These are qualities of the Creator. Feminine images of the Holy.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro is a Jewish contemplative and interfaith teacher. He describes how the Divine Feminine has been present all along as Wisdom, God’s essential partner in the creation of the cosmos:

It is no small thing to note that Wisdom is feminine. The original language of the texts, both Hebrew and Greek, make this very clear: Hebrew Chochma and Greek Sophia are both feminine nouns. The authors of the Wisdom books [such as Proverbs, Wisdom, Ecclesiastes, and more] took this gender specificity seriously and envisioned Wisdom as Mother, God’s consort and bride, the Divine Feminine through which the masculine God fashioned all creation. . . .

Chochma was not simply the first of God’s creations; She was the means through which all the others came forth. This is what it means to be the master builder. Chochma is both created and creative. She is the ordering principle of creation.

This is how Mother Wisdom works. .... She is the ordering principle of the universe. What you see when you see Her is analogous to seeing the grain in wood, the current of wind and oceans, and the laws of nature, both the macrocosmic and the microcosmic . . . . She is the Way things are. . . . She is the Way God is manifest in the world. To know Her is to know God as well. [1]

Here is more of Proverbs 8 about Lady Wisdom from The Message

I arrived on the scene before Ocean,  
yes, even before Springs and Rivers and Lakes.  
Before Mountains were sculpted and Hills took shape,  
I was already there, newborn;  
Long before God stretched out Earth’s Horizons,

and tended to the minute details of Soil and Weather,  
And set Sky firmly in place, I was there.

“So, my dear friends, listen carefully;  
those who embrace these my ways are most blessed.  
Mark a life of discipline and live wisely;  
don’t squander your precious life.

“Lady Wisdom Calls Out” Proverbs 8:22-24, 32-33 (The Message)

So the Bible has a feminine archetype for the Christ Mystery. This archetype shows herself Lady Wisdom, Chochkma in Hebrew and as Sophia in Greek, including in the Book of Revelation (12:1–17) in the cosmic symbol of “a woman clothed with the sun and standing on the moon.” In concert with other theologians, Rohr says that the Logos, Word in John 1 is Sophia, is Divine Wisdom, is Universal Christ.

### **Mary**

Although Jesus was a man, the Christ is beyond gender, so it should be expected that the Christian Tradition would have found feminine ways, consciously or unconsciously, to symbolize the full Divine Incarnation and to give God a more feminine character—as the Bible itself often does.

If that is true, Rohr wonders, then why did Christianity, in both the East and West, seem to fall head over heels in love with this seemingly ordinary woman Mary, mother of Jesus, who is a minor figure in the New Testament? We gave her names like Theotokos, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, Notre Dame, Our Mother of Sorrows, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and Our Lady of just about every village or shrine in Europe. We are clearly dealing not just with 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 unconscious. Mary is one way to symbolize the Divine Feminine and maybe reimagine. What other images might we use?

### **God as Grandmother**

Steven Charleston is an elder of the Choctaw Nation and a retired Episcopal bishop. His way of knowing God and the Gospel reflect both his Christian and Choctaw heritage and his contemplative practice. He writes - One of my images of God is that of Grandmother, the wise old Native woman with gray hair and eyes as ancient as the Earth. She takes my face gently in her hands and holds me in Her gaze as She tells me what She thinks I need to know, forming the words slowly so I can remember them and let them sink in. I embrace this feminine image in the same way Hebrew tradition refers to the voice of God, the daughter of the voice. It is that mysterious presence that comes from some source beyond, a communication that defies our ability to categorize. Therefore, like the theologians of ancient Israel, I give the voice a female personification because I experience it in that way. (2)

## **Ways God Comes to Us – the joy and the risk**

I don't remember exactly when feminine images of the Holy became real for me. I do remember exploring the biblical foundations in seminary and changing my vocabulary as I prayed, led worship, and experienced the presence of the Divine Love. It was important. But it was also risky and powerful and to some threatening. Jeffrey and I went to Re-Imagining Conference in Minneapolis in Nov. 1993. It was an Christian and ecumenical conference of clergy, laypeople, and feminist theologians that stirred controversy in U.S. Mainline Protestant denominations partly because we used images of the Divine Feminine in all worship services. It brought together 2,200 people. 83 men men were there.

All presenters were women. The conference aimed to encourage churches to address injustices to women worldwide and promote equal partnership with men at all levels of religious life. In recognition that traditional Christianity's male-centered language and images have often stifled and hurt women, organizers chose "re-imagining" as the theme. After four days of community and freedom of discussion, hearing internationally recognized feminist theologians advance new ways of thinking about Christianity, and hearing the Holy One referred to with female pronouns, it was a transforming event for many, including me. (3)

Rohr writes that our images of God become more fluid as we grow in spiritual maturity. He writes:

God comes to each of us in unique ways throughout our lives. It may be good if God comes to us as a Father, but sometimes God must come as a friend and other times as a lover. Yet as we continue on our spiritual journeys, I promise that sometimes God will reveal himself in feminine form: himself as herself. For some of us, this may be the first time that we fall in love with God. I know many such people myself.

We have to break through our ideas about God to find out who God really is. Our early and spontaneous images of God are typically a mixture of our experiences with our own mothers and fathers. If our mother was harshly critical, so is our God. If our father was domineering or authoritative, likewise our God. It's almost tragic to witness how many people are afraid of God, experience God as cold and absent...There is a different way. Incarnational and Trinitarian.

In a Trinitarian Universe, reality can be pictured as an Infinite, Loving Outpouring that empowers and generates an Eternal, Loving Infolding. This eternal flow outward is echoed in history by every animal, fish, flower, bird, and planet you have ever seen. All we have to lose are the false images of God that do not serve us and are too small. (4)

Close with a new image of Divine Feminine. It is an Advent icon made by Kelly Latimore and she was inspired by this poem by Sr. Ilia Delio.

## Mary: Love Forever Being Born

What do the stars say?

The light that meets our eyes after millions of years summons us to look beyond.

The dark that hovers over us is filled with light.

That underneath the appearance of the stable heavens  
is the bubbling energy of the universe.

We are forming, forming, forming and nothing can stop us.

There is a palpable power of attraction, pulling us toward we-no-not-where.

Love alone is the guide of the universe and the whole universe is in the human heart.

Tend to the heart and the power of love will name itself as God. (5)

Amen.

### **Primary source**

Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe* (Convergent: 2019), pp. 121-128

- 1) Rabbi Rami Shapiro, "God the Mother," CAC Daily Meditations, March 14, 2022  
<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/god-the-mother-2022-03-14/>
- 2) Steven Charleston, "Grandmother God," CAC Daily Meditations, Feb. 12, 2020  
<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/grandmother-god-2020-02-12/>
- 3) The Reimagining Community website <https://re-imaginingcommunity.org/>
- 4) Richard Rohr, "The Circle Dance of God," CAC Daily Meditations, March 16, 2022  
<https://cac.org/daily-meditations/the-circle-dance-of-god-2022-03-16/>
- 5) Kelly Latimore, "Advent Icon: Mary: Love Forever Being," Downloaded image purchased  
<https://kellylatimoreicons.com/blogs/news/mary-love-forever-being>