

Loving Awareness

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Food for Thought

Joseph, Walk with Me
Stephen Garnaas-Holmes

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.
Matthew 1:20

Joseph, walk with me
into this darkness, the not knowing.
You have to marry the mystery before everything else.
Surrendering all claim to outcomes or knowledge of them,
you commit to the love at hand, and it is enough.
The very undoing that confounds you
is the love that finds you.
The answer you seek is no answer, but only presence,
this woman who also must not be afraid,
this child who will not be revealed
until after you say yes,
this Emmanuel who is not at the end of the journey
but your companion on the journey
and the dark road itself.
We have to say yes before anything, don't we?
Joseph, walk with me.

Scripture Reading

Matthew 1:18-25 (*Inclusive Text*)

This is how Jesus came to be born. Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being righteous, and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. Joseph had decided to do this when the angel of God appeared in a dream, and said,

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a child whom you must name Jesus, because this is the one who is to save this people from their sins.

Now all this took place to fulfill the words spoken by our God through the prophet: The young woman will conceive and give birth to a child and they will call this child Emmanuel, a name which means "God-is-with-us". When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of God had said and took Mary to their home.

The pathway of the morning's reflection begins with Tom Hunter's song, "A Child of God." The chorus goes like this:

If anybody asks you who I am, who I am, who I am.

If anybody asks you whom I am, you just tell them I'm a child of God.

Imagine pointing at a group of Muslims, Mexicans, unmarried pregnant women asking, "Who are they?" and hearing Tom sing "If anybody asks you who *they* are....you just tell them they are children of God."

In Ram Dass's book *Be Love Now* Ram Dass uses the phrase "I am loving awareness" to describe the intimate relationship between the Divine and the individual. I am loving awareness, and I am loving being aware. In this season of Advent 2016, post the election trauma with its many bigotries and the tragedies in Aleppo, we are particularly aware of the darkness of this season.

A new awareness opened up in me regarding Joseph after doing a little Bible study and after reading "Joseph, Walk with Me" by my seminary companion, Steve Garnaas-Holmes. Joseph had a choice to make when he learned that Mary was pregnant, but not by him. By the custom of the time, he could have made a big scene, shamed Mary, kicked her out of the community, or even had her stoned. His choice to keep things quiet as he prepared to dismiss her was actually a sign of love. He still saw her as a person, not just an unwed mother. And this choice opened up a door to an even greater mystery as Steve so beautifully describes in his poem.

Loving awareness calls us to see human beings in their fullness, not limiting their story to just one aspect of who they are: their religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, or economic status. Two stories came across my computer screen the past week that exemplified current examples of divine messengers inviting us into a deeper story. The first is from Rex Hohlbein, and it's called "Facing Homelessness." You can watch the Youtube video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBNZdGIhSCw>. The second story is that of an Arab-American man named Karim Sulayman, and it's called "I Trust You." Watch the video here: <https://vimeo.com/193125533>. Both of the main characters in these stories could be thought of as angels, as divine messengers.

I close my message today with the following invitation: If anybody asks you who you are, just tell them that you are *loving awareness*, aware of the darkness and the light, the inhumanity and the humanity, and that you are taking a stand next to the Advent wreath of hope, peace, joy, love, and Christ, the Anointed One, who embodied seeing into the heart of humanity.

Let us sing "Light is Returning" by Charlie Murphy. Here's the chorus:

Light is returning, even though this is the darkest hour.
No one can hold, back the dawn.

Listen to the song here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARA-wOaVW0s>.

Amen