



Birthing Jesus

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There is no faith story that tugs at the strings of our hearts than the story of Christmas recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Once a year we read about the baby born in a manger, angels singing, stars shining, magi wandering... and our hearts are warmed with this seemingly cozy, innocent, sweet story. We forget that the first Christmas happened in a very chaotic, messy and politically charged world. Life was not easy. Domination and oppression were the norm. Suffering and injustice defined life itself, and religions born out of those times boasted Savior Messiahs, Incarnate Divinities who would come and save the people from their misery.

Following that tradition, the people of Israel waited for their own Savior Messiah, Incarnate Divinity, who some believed, would come with force and might, conquer the ruling Roman Empire and establish a Jewish political kingdom.

At the time Israel lived under Roman rule where the political atmosphere was brutal, the economic tax burden excessive, with eroding poverty while the empire amassed more wealth and power. Caesar Augustus was the winner of the Roman civil war and as such was called “the savior of the world.” Religion and politics were deeply intertwined. Divinity was implied for the Roman emperor, as the Caesar claimed the titles Lord, Son of God, Bearer of Peace, and Savior of the World, while Jews would only recognize God as Lord and Savior, the Bearer of Peace, the Light of the World, etc.

It is in this charged political context that Jesus was born. 2000 years later we can find the parallels in our own context. The world, even in the midst of a pandemic, runs by unjust political and economic power. Coercive

force is valued over shared power, tyrant bravery over deep courage, rampant greed over generous sharing. Might makes things right, and winning at any cost is prized. Injustice and poverty, hunger and war, hatred and violence often go unquestioned and unchallenged.

So yes, we still need our Savior Messiah, Jesus the Christ, our Incarnate Divinity to save us from ourselves. Yet, this salvation is not about our individual souls but about all creation, our communal life together. This salvation is about healing, for the word salve is the root of the word salvation. This salvation is about liberation, freedom from the oppression we humans impose on one another. For, what good is it if you experience healing and liberation while your neighbor’s heart is broken and their body is in shackles? Your personal healing and liberation cannot come at the expense of another. Until everyone is experiencing healing and liberation none of us can know salvation.

Throughout history, the incarnation of the divine in human form has given humans the promise and the hope, that the earth can be touched by heaven, that the universe can be redeemed by divine presence, that we humans can discover the sacred and the holy in our lives, hence a different world is possible.

Yet it seems the world is not going to change until we change it – until we give birth to Jesus. For, the manger really is in our hearts, and it is we who incarnate the divine and embody Love to one another. We birth Jesus as we walk in the path of healing and liberation, and as we do so we discover that we are one humanity and salvation means healing and liberation for ALL and not just for some.