

September 2024

The Trip to Bethlehem, Stage 4

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The Trip to Bethlehem, The Traditional Christmas Story As A Guide to Spiritual Transformation by Hypatia Hasbrouck

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The Foundations:

1. Bible stories have 3 levels of meaning: literal, moral, and metaphysical.
 - a. In Unity we are free to determine for ourselves if we believe the Bible as factual truth.
 - b. We believe in a metaphysical interpretation of the Bible.
 - i. Metaphysical literally translates as “beyond the physical.”
 - c. When we interpret Bible stories metaphysically we find personal meanings beyond the words printed on the page.
 - i. The “hidden” meanings for each of us.
2. In order for the Jesus story to be a myth, untrue, we have to accept that:
 - a. a committee of Jews fabricated a man to be the messiah.
 - b. They created a background for this man out of myths from the Romans, Egyptians, Greeks, Syrians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Chinese.
 - c. They gave this made up messiah character traits that flew in the face of society, such as acceptance of women as equals, tolerance of non-Jews, friendship with “sinners,” and forgiveness of the Romans.
 - d. These men portrayed themselves badly and knowingly risked their own lives, some suffering death, while steadily proclaiming faith in their lie.
3. Truth is more than mere fact. Truth is the invisible, eternal principles which underlie everything that appears in the outer world.

Remember - This is a journey, a very personal journey. We are all in a constant state of moving along and within this journey. Success is not a linear path and neither is travel. We constantly move forward, circle back, and then move on through life. Accept the process and wherever you are in it.

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In Unity we recognize the twelve powers of man. We believe that , when developed, these powers (or faculties) can lead to a life of unspeakable joy and glory.

These powers correlate with specific parts of the body. They are also represented in the twelve months of the year, the twelve disciples of Christ, and by 12 colors.

For example, for the month of September we light the olive, or dark, green candle, as a representation of the power of Order.

As there are 12 stages to this journey it may not come as a surprise that each stage corresponds to one of the 12 powers.

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Stage One: the Power of Renunciation (elimination) - Weakening Egocentricity

This stage of the journey is represented by King Herod. Herod represents the egocentric ego, a self centered person. Herod is the only enemy of the newborn Christ. And, the egocentric ego is the only enemy of our own inner Christ.

So, stage one is to release our self-centered tendencies.

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Stage Two: the Power of Wisdom (Follow the Star)

Wisdom - the ability to discern the best or most God-like way to make use of knowledge and to judge on the basis of principle - righteously and impartially.

In our story, wisdom is represented by the three wise men following the star.

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Stage Three: Grace and Understanding

Stage three starts the actual transformation of consciousness by revealing our potential for embodying grace. Grace, the generous love and mercy of God that are always active.

Grace is represented in our story by the unexpected blessing of Elizabeth and Zecharia's conception of their son John, in their advanced age, after being deemed barren.

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Stage Four: Imagination

This stage centers around the virgin Mary and when Gabriel visited her to tell her that she would bear the child of God, the Messiah, and his name would be Jesus.

It is significant that Gabriel comes to Mary in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. The number six represents perfection and harmony; the pure and purified soul. Gabriel's appearance in the sixth month indicates the soul is now purified and ready to develop Christ consciousness.

Mary's virginity signifies that the inner Christ emerges not from human activity, but solely from the activity of God. Although the emergence of the inner Christ is solely the activity of God, we must still do our part. That is, to permit its development and let it take its rightful place as ruler of the psyche. Centering ourselves in Christ consciousness.

Mary's acceptance of her task, to bear the child of God, symbolizes the soul's willingness to fulfill its destiny, to allow the process to occur, the emergence of the inner Christ, or Christ consciousness.

This stage of the trip to Bethlehem requires us to engage our power of imagination. Imagination gives us the ability to mentally see or visualize what exists only in potential, what has not yet been expressed. The mind

must be able to conceive the idea of the Christ before it can become fully birthed within us.

In this stage, Stage Four, we begin to imagine the transformative effect of the inner Christ upon all aspects of the self, the soul -- the total consciousness.

We may not think we are ready for this transformation. We may not feel worthy of it. We may be stuck in the intellect, trying to figure out intellectually how to find and express the higher self. This is much like Mary saying, "How can this be, since I have no husband?"

It is through the use of our power of imagination that we can begin to conceive of what it means to birth the inner Christ and we come to realize that God's activity in the soul is more powerful than the human intellect. God can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. It is as our intellect, our human mind, is contemplating the power of God within that we are illumined and the new moral nature is coming into being, the idea of grace is established in consciousness. This is where the conditions have been met to make it possible and safe for the imagination to give form to the idea of a transformed consciousness, giving birth to the Christ within.

The faculty of imagination plays a crucial part in any creative endeavor. It is the ability to actually conceive the possibility of any new thing or condition. As we hold to the idea of the new, it gathers more and more mental or spiritual energy, until it impels us to bring it into manifestation. Nothing is more creative than our transformation from being merely human into being human expressions of the Christ. When the imagination conceives and focuses on the Christ idea, the whole activity of God works to bring it into manifestation.

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Scripture: Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment. - Matthew 8:13

Slide 9 - Meditation

Sit comfortably in your space, back straight, arms and legs uncrossed.
Close your eyes.

Take ten breaths, focus on the breathing, just breathing
One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten

Now, focus upon the center of your being and imagine this scene within
you...

In a quiet room just before dawn, a maiden stirs from sleep, wakened by the sense of a presence. Her eyelids flutter open and she pushes herself onto her elbows. An iridescent glow fills her sight. As she watches in wonder, a shimmering form of an angel appears and greets her saying, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" Puzzled and a little fearful, she stares at the vision. It speaks again: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." Listening in amazement, she learns that she is to bear the Son of God, the Messiah who "will reign over the house of Jacob forever." Mary, not yet married, but only betrothed to Joseph, protests, "How can this be, since I have no husband?" The angel replies that only the activity of God within her is responsible for the holy Being. Then the angel tells her that her elderly cousin, though formerly barren, is now six months pregnant and adds, "For with God nothing will be impossible." Assured that God is with her, Mary says, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

As the vision fades, know that Mary is your soul and the words are meant for you. If you are willing, the seed of God's own image in your soul will unfold to govern every aspect of your being and transform you.

Affirm with me: Through imagination, I am God's coworker in my transformation.

Through imagination, I am God's coworker in my transformation.

And one last time as you fully return to this moment, this time, and this space, Through imagination, I am God's coworker in my transformation.

NOTES:

The Trip To Bethlehem by Hypatia Habrouck
Nazareth of Galilee, Mary and Gabriel

When Elizabeth is six months pregnant, Gabriel appears to her kinswoman, Mary, a virgin who lives in Nazareth in Galilee and is betrothed to Joseph, a descendant of David. Gabriel tells Mary that she will conceive a son to be named Jesus who will be given the throne of David and rule over the “house of Jacob” forever. Mary protests that she is not married. Gabriel explains that the Holy Spirit will cause the miracle. Then he tells her about Elizabeth, adding “with God nothing will be impossible.” Mary accepts her task and Gabriel disappears.

Six represents perfection and harmony; the pure and purified soul. Gabriel’s appearance in the sixth month indicates the soul is now purified and ready to develop Christ consciousness.

This stage of the trip requires that the mental faculty of imagination become involved. Imagination gives us the ability to mentally see or visualize what exists only in potential, what has not yet been expressed. The mind must be able to conceive the idea of the Christ before it can become viable within us.

The purified soul is a potential which can be realized by anyone who can grasp the idea of or imagine the omnipresence of Spirit.

Mary’s virginity signifies that the inner Christ emerges not from human activity, but solely from the activity of God. Our part is to permit its development and let it take its rightful place as ruler of the psyche.

Mary’s acceptance of her task symbolizes the soul’s willingness to fulfill its destiny, to allow the process to occur.

During Stage Four, the implications of our Christ potential glimpsed in Stage Two are revealed to the feeling nature. During Stage Two, we see the Christ potential as a spiritual goal for our religious life, but during Stage Four, we begin to imagine its transformative effect upon all aspects of the self or soul -- the total consciousness. Though we may think ourselves unready because we have not yet figured out intellectually how to find and express the higher Self (Mary’s saying, “How can this be, since

I have no husband?”) or how it fits into our existing religious convictions, we realize that God’s activity in the soul undergoing purification is more powerful than the human intellect. God can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Moreover, because the intellect is already being illumined and the new moral nature is coming into being, the idea of grace is established in consciousness. The conditions have been met to make it possible and safe for the imagination to give form to the idea of a transformed consciousness.

The faculty of imagination plays a crucial part in any creative endeavor, for it is the ability to actually conceive the possibility of any new thing or condition. As we hold to the idea of the new, it gathers more and more mental or spiritual energy, until it impels us to bring it into manifestation. Nothing is more creative than our transformation from being merely human into being human expressions of the Christ. When the imagination conceives and focuses on the Christ idea, the whole activity of God (the Holy Spirit) works to bring it into manifestation.

Let There Be Light by Elizabeth Sand Turner

“The third step in creation is the beginning of the formative activity of the mind called imagination. This gathers ‘the waters...together unto one place’ so that the ‘dry land’ appears. Then the imagination begins a great multiplication of forms and shapes in mind” (Mysteries of Genesis 18). When the formative power of mind, imagination, is used rightly, it imagines or images the perfection of God. As the halt, the lame, and the blind came to Jesus, He imagined the wholeness of Spirit, and “it was so”. (Genesis 1:7)

Your Hope of Glory by Elizabeth Sand Turner

Bartholomew, called Nathanael in the Gospel of John, represents imagination. All visible forms have their origin in the imagination, and it is through the activity of this faculty that the formless takes form, thus molding our bodies and the conditions of our lives. The Lord instructed Moses to make all things “after their pattern, which hath been showed thee in the mount” (Exodus 25:40). The mount represents the spiritual

consciousness; therefore, we are to make (image) in accord with our highest realizations. It is our right to call on Bartholomew when things look dark, and through the faculty of the spiritual imagination we see the silver lining of the cloud -- health instead of sickness, opulence instead of lack, peace instead of inharmony.

