

Dear Gulf Coast Leaders,

December 19, 2010 - 4A

God comes to us in visions, nudges and dreams. (Satterlee)



Isaiah 7:10-16 - Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! Stir up your might, and come to save us!

Romans 1:1-7 - Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...

Matthew 1:18-25 - When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'

Foster Family

In this coming Sunday's gospel, an angel tells Joseph his betrothed is going to have a baby. It comes as news to him. He's also informed the baby is

Scholars like to point out that the story of the virgin birth is hardly novel. I like to offer an alternate view.

Zeus/Jupiter impregnates Danaë and out come Perseus, the star of a refer movie: "Percy Jackson



ELCA Bishops, LCMS District Presidents and others gather at LIRS event.

Pictured L-R: Stephen Bouman (former ELCA Bishop of Metropolitan New York Synod, now ELCA Director of Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission), David Benke (LCMS District President of the Atlantic District), Bob Rimbo (current ELCA Bishop of Metropolitan New York Synod).

OF NOTE

- [Got a set of Luther's Works?](#)
- [Immigration Myths and Facts](#)
- [Check out these books](#)
- [Upcoming Lectionary Readings](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

January 24-26 - [TriSynodical Theological Conference](#).

Marcus Borg. Galveston. **Register NOW**. Books to read:

1. [The Heart of Christianity](#).
2. [Toward a Hopeful Future](#).

March 9 - Ash Wednesday

April 24 - Easter

May 20-22 - Synod Assembly in Galveston, Texas.

and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief." Zeus impregnates Maia and Theseus is born, Persephone and Dionysus Zagreus and Demeter are born, Alcmena and Hercules is born, Leda and Helen is born, Leto and Apollo is born. Apollo follows suit several times. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Hermes impregnates a shepherdess and Pan is born. Mars impregnates Aemila and Romulus is born. And on it goes. So, scholars say, the virgin birth was concocted so that the new Christian dirty could compete in the pagan pantheon. It also led to a theology of Jesus as a god/man.

Augustus was said to be Son of Apollo, who impregnated a mortal woman via a snake. So August was the Son of God before Jesus was 14.

However, as Ben Witherington points out (WorkingPreacher.org) mortals being raped by the gods is a far cry from what Isaiah or even Matthew have in mind. In fact, the virgin who conceives in Isaiah 7 isn't necessarily doing so miraculously. Jewish interpreters of that text didn't interpret Isaiah 7 as a miraculous birth, just an important one. The point of the virgin conceiving was that this would be a firstborn child.

"God is coming," says Isaiah to Ahaz, accompanied by his son Shear-jashub, "and he's bringing a kingdom of peace, justice and prosperity." Ahaz is going to trust his alliance with Assyria, thank you, not some flimsy promise of trusting the God who's supposedly coming. But Assyria will use this to destroy Judah in the end. It's just so much easier to trust in arms and alliances than faith, hope and love for our future. Fred Gaiser of Luther Seminary says, "The mice invite the protection of the cat at their peril."

Isaiah's young woman is already pregnant, but there is no reason to assume she's has gotten so in any but the usual way. In fact, עלמה doesn't really mean virgin anyway. The Septuagint translated it παρθένοϛ for obvious reasons. For Isaiah, in spite of the treats on all sides, Israel is pregnant with hope. The world is pregnant with hope. The preacher might play with the slogan "God with us," and a world pregnant with God, hope, peace, and justice.

"God is coming," echoes John the Baptist, through Matthew's pen. Ralph Klein (LSTC) says Matthew

The truth is we prefer to follow the nice Caucasian Sunday School Jesus, rather the prophetic Jesus who made people want to kill him.

-Mark Junkans, LCMS Director of LINC Houston, at the LIRS event this week

uses the exegetical pattern of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are utterly uninterested in the meaning of the text in its original context, but rather its meaning for current events. So, if the original text didn't reflect a miraculous virgin birth, then why does Matthew reinterpret it that way? He's bending it to fit current events. The story arises from a historical incident. Something unusual happened. This explains Joseph's shock. And Mary's.

Of course the first person to doubt the virgin birth was Joseph. Whatever the world may think about a literal virgin birth, no one much doubts that Jesus was adopted, and Joseph was an adoptive parent. Perhaps the greatest miracle was Joseph's decision to accept it, marry Mary, and to raise the child as his firstborn child, in spite of the fact that he was not the biological father. As an adoptive parent myself, I can attest that after a couple years, biology is emotionally irrelevant. You come to love a child you adopt as much as a biological child. I have both. When we adopted I was worried. Could I love another child as much as John? Today the question amuses me. How could I ever have wondered?

Joseph has to overcome feelings of doubt, betrayal, confusion, disappointment, and stigma. At first he decides to dump Mary, because he is "righteous." Later he comes to understand righteousness as trusting God, not rigidly following the law.

God comes, and often shows up unexpectedly, unorthodoxly (is that a word?), to those who listen to their dreams, and look for the divine in the messy, unlikely, outrageous circumstances of life.

Be at peace with God and with one another,

Michael Rinehart, Bishop

bishop@gulfcoastsynod.org

www.bishopmike.com

www.facebook.com/bishoprinehart

www.twitter.com/breadtweet

www.gulfcoastsynod.org



Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

