

Address for Mothering Sunday's All Age Service (March 14<sup>th</sup>)

'LIVING IN THE WOMB OF GOD'

I have yet to fully appreciate the enormity of the task I have set myself and will be setting you, this morning in developing this theme. I feel as though I am in a final session of "Ready, Steady, Cook", now back on our TV screens. I have little more than 10 mins to create a new, nourishing and divine dish from two biblical ingredients, with help from Alan Cameron and Hannah Haynes.

I began by asking the children a simple but basic question

"Where do babies come from?"

not knowing if any were watching but knowing that any listening were all muted and I would have to imagine them giving me the answer I hoped to hear---

"from mummies tummy"

It's actually a special part of mummies 'tummy' of course, called the WOMB.

Long, long ago, before the bible was written (indeed before ANY history was written) primaeval folk asked a much bigger question.

"Where did EVERYTHING come from?"

Because folk knew that THEY had come from their mother's womb and newborn animals also came from tummies and were nursed by mummies, they thought the source of every other living thing, precious to them, must be FEMALE.

Adults made models of God out of stone, not playdough or Lego, like children today, and these indicated how they saw God. Here's one that was made some 6000 years earlier:

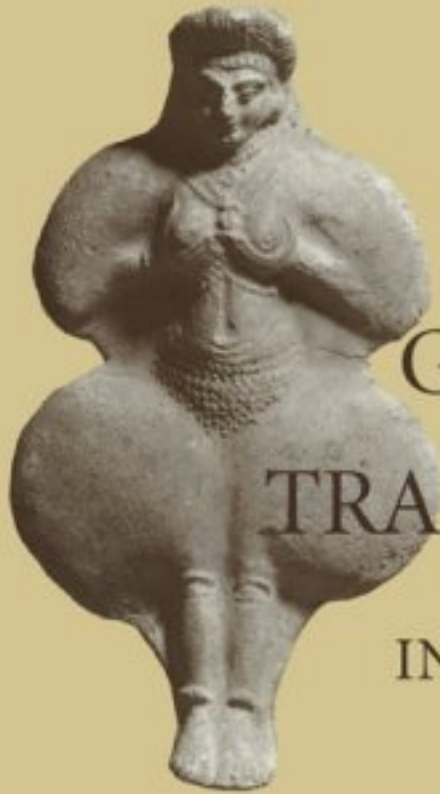
brace yourself;

its not a pretty sight;

meet Mrs God!



STUDIES IN ANTIQUITY & CHRISTIANITY



WOMEN  
AND  
GODDESS  
TRADITIONS  
IN ANTIQUITY  
AND TODAY

Edited by Karen L. King

Fast forwarding c. 3000 years, to when the Old Testament (OT) was written, we find men in control, making all important family decisions. With such an ingredient in the mixing bowl, God emerged on the plate (or rather page) as a male, father figure, with occasional bitter tastes (emotions), anger and aggression. A softer, female side of God began to appear in later parts of the OT and is found in the first biblical ingredient for our Mothering Sunday pudding, verses 13-18 of Ps 139 (which Alan read from the Tree of Life 'translation).

13. For You have created my conscience. You knit me together in my mother's womb.

14. I praise You, for I am awesomely, wonderfully made! Wonderful are Your works— and my soul knows that very well.

15. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

16. Your eyes saw me when I was unformed, and in Your book were written the days that were formed— when not one of them had come to be.

17. How precious are Your thoughts, O God! How great is the sum of them!

18. Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand! When I awake, I am still with You.

The picture created here is drawn by someone who feels God has been deeply involved not only during their journey through life, starting in the womb, but long before.



It is a beautiful, reassuring relationship that many of us love to hear and embrace: far prettier images in are created in our minds, like the one shown. But how can it be true for everyone that has ever lived, lives or who has yet to be born: a number so vast it outnumbers the grains of sand?

Perhaps God shares the burden of care through a relationship that still resembles babies held in the womb. In Hebrew, the language of the Israelites and in which the OT was written, the word for ‘womb’ has similarities (a shared root) with the Hebrew word ‘compassion’: this is a big word but it simply means being KIND & CARING. Thus, being held in the womb of God is not only to be held in an intimate relationship but one in which we are cared for and loved. The pudding has been spiced up!

This softer image of God as mother still left God’s hands very full but help was at hand in the shape of a little baby, born half a millennium later. That story is second biblical ingredient for our Mothering Sunday pudding and is found in Luke 2 v 28-35, the story of the infant Jesus presented at the temple.

Why does the aged but wise Simeon get so excited and feel that all Israel’s problems are about to be solved in the traditional presentation of a firstborn male child by his parents at the temple? He senses that from Mary’s womb, a new relationship between man, woman and God has been born. Excited as he was, Simeon, still underestimated the scale and impact of what Jesus would achieve: there were implications for all humankind, for all time.

Charles Wesley captured the significance when, in his hymn 'Love divine, all Loves excelling' he wrote of Jesus-

"thou art all compassion-pure, unbounded love thou art"

In presenting Jesus at the temple, Mary was offering limitless love to the world. The image of 'Living in the womb of God' is expanded and our pudding is rising. Compassion and love, the disposition of God towards all that was created and held, womb-like in his hands, was now alive, breathing and at work among us.

Simeon blessed the parents, particularly Mary, recognizing her sacrifice. After birth, it is the mother's compassion that provides most of the support once provided in the womb. If a mother and her baby have to be separated after birth, the mother is anxious until they are re-united. Mary was being asked to pay a high price for the world's salvation. Eventually, God's call on Jesus to restore love at the heart of creation, and Jesus' response, would appear to break the bond between mother and child. But the reward would be infinite and timeless, enabling humankind to not only live IN the womb of God but AS the womb of God.

There you have my dish for Mothering Sunday: it took a tad over 10 minutes. Hannah served it up in the form of a special song, with new words, sung to a familiar tune- Simbayah.

"We are living in the womb of God"

The progression of the image, developed above, is captured in the different verses:

in v.1, "We are living in the womb of God"

in v.2 " We are nurtured in the womb of God" but

in v.3 " Being kind, WE are the womb of God"

Simbaya was played, with Zulu words, at the end of the service: if you have been nourished by the above thoughts, why not try singing it today along with the new words: it could make your day, and someone else's too!

*Neville*