

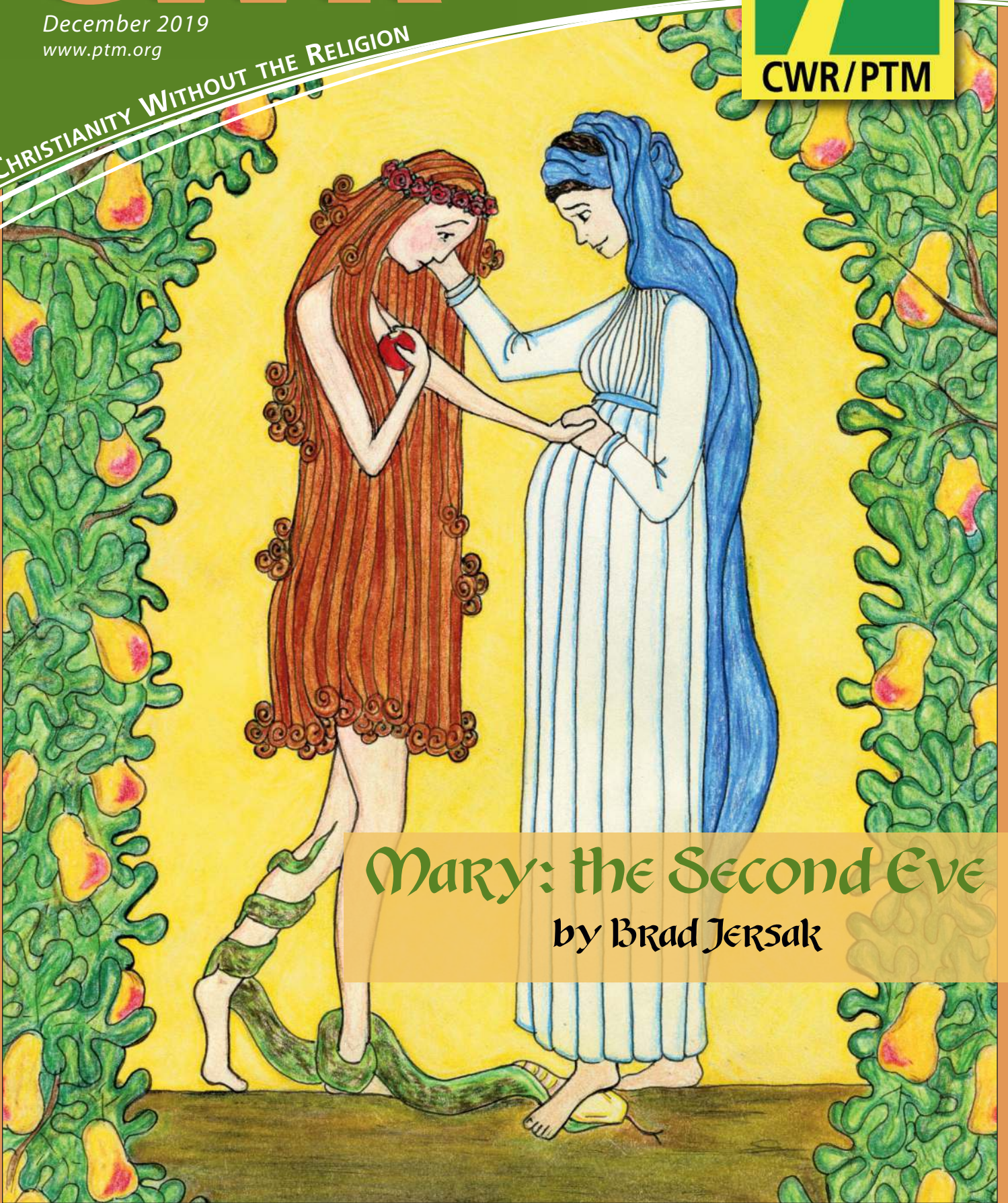
CWRm magazine

December 2019

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION



Mary: the Second Eve

by Brad Jersak

What Our Readers Are Saying...

Volume 10, Number 6
December 2019
www.ptm.org

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

Making Change

Thanks for the article, “Making Change” by Monte Wolverton in the October *CWRm*. I strongly identify with what he wrote. I’ve seen many friends “throw the baby out with the bathwater,” so to speak—abandoning not only the dirty water of Christ-less religion, but also dumping the babe born in Bethlehem as well. Thanks for all the helpful materials you provide!

British Columbia, Canada

“Is Christ in All People or only in Christians?”

Great article in the August 2019 *CWRm*! The way Brad answered this question makes so much sense. I’ve never heard it put this way before. Being a parent and grandparent helps me understand how “the Father’s forgiveness followed him out the door.” Just because our children leave home doesn’t mean they have left our hearts and minds. No matter what they choose to do, we always want to love and forgive them if they’ve gone astray.

Wisconsin

Three Visions of Salvation

I appreciated the perspective by Brad Jersak in “Three Visions of Salvation” (August *CWRm*). As a

former card-carrying legalist and then do-nothing Christian, this message was extremely powerful to me. I can so relate! I am on my way to a healthier reciprocal relationship with God. Your ministry speaks to the multitude of us whose pendulum has swung to one side. God bless you all!

Tennessee

PTM Resources Online

You really get it! You understand why so many of us are alienated from institutionalized religion, yet still want to follow Christ. Thank you for making this urgently needed ministry available around the world.

Australia

My wife and I are so thankful for all of the resources you provide. I don’t know of any ministry or church that is as honest, real and Christ-centered as *CWR/PTM*.

Kansas

Thank you for making your *CWRm* magazine available online. I find the way you teach about seeing Jesus as the Word very helpful in a broken world.

Alberta, Canada

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EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Greg Albrecht

EDITOR / ART DIRECTOR: Brad Jersak

MANAGING EDITOR: Laura Urista

PUBLISHING / CIRCULATION: Dennis Warkentin

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Monte Wolverton

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COVER PHOTO

“Mary and Eve” is used by permission of Sr. Grace Remington and “Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey.”



Mary: the Second Eve by Brad Jersak

Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with thee!
Blessed art thou among
women!—Luke 1:28

When the archangel Gabriel first visited the teen virgin Mary, we catch wind of human destiny implicit in the angelic greeting, “Hail, Mary, full of grace!”

The NIV misses the obvious point, translating the key Greek word [*charitou*] as “highly favored one,” as if to say, “Lucky you!” But as with all of Mary’s honorifics, the point is *always* the identity of the One in her womb. Mary’s womb would be filled with Grace Incarnate—our Lord Jesus Christ!

This Virgin/Son destiny was foretold from the beginning when after the fall of Adam and Eve, God prophesied to the serpent concerning “Eve, mother of all the living” (Genesis 3:20) and her Offspring, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers [Christ]; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

We call this verse the “*protevangeli*um” (lit., first gospel) as it is the Bible’s first messianic prophecy. One day, Eve’s Descendant—a “second Adam”—would come defeat the serpent and undo death’s curse.

Eve’s Offspring

Many English Bibles begin Genesis 4 with Eve’s announcement, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.” Unfortunately, most English Bibles insert the words “the help of.”



Notre Dame, Paris - Portal of the Last Judgment
The Serpent tempts Eve, who shares with Adam.

Far more interesting (to Jewish Rabbis at least) is what the Hebrew actually says, rendered variously:

“I have given birth to a male child—the LORD” (ISV).

“I have gotten a man from the LORD” (KJV)—literally, “with Yahweh.”

The *Palestinian Targum*, an ancient Rabbinical source, gets

more creative: “And Adam knew Eve his wife, who had desired the Angel; and she conceived, and bare Cain; and she said, I have acquired a man, the Angel of the LORD.”

The Aramaic *Jonathan Targum* claims, “Adam knew his wife Eve, who was pregnant by Sammael [the serpent!], and she conceived and bare Cain, and he was like the heavenly beings, and not like earthly beings, and she said, I have gotten a man from the angel of the Lord.”

While these translations sound outrageous, given the ambiguity of the Hebrew text and the creativity of Jewish rabbis, one could

inside

Mary, the Second Eve
—Brad Jersak p3

O Eve!
—Scott Erickson/
Columba Guare p7

Wrapping an Idea
in a Person
—Greg Albrecht p8

The Reason for the Season
—Jim Fowler p10

Advent Poem
—Felicia Murrell p12

Christ in the Face
of the Other
—Richard Rohr p13

Pastoral Perspective
—Greg Albrecht p15

imagine Cain as either *the Lord* (Eve's expected Deliverer) or *with/from the Lord* (a virgin birth with God as Father) or even the murderous offspring of Eve *with the serpent!*

While the latter explanation is the most bizarre, it does beg the question: who is the serpent's offspring that will strike at the Messiah's heel?

Jesus answers that question when he chastises those who plot his death. They are, at least symbolically, "children of the devil," reminiscent of "the murderer from the beginning" (see John 8:37-45). No wonder Jesus' opponents were livid!

My point so far is that Eve may have truly believed Cain was God's promised redeemer, but the second Adam's arrival would await another epoch.

For as in Adam all die,
so in Christ all will be
made alive.
1 Corinthians 15:21-22

The Second Adam

If ever there was a murderous son of the serpent, it was that young rabbi, Saul of Tarsus, licensed to kill in the name of religious zeal. Only after his lightning bolt encounter with the risen Christ would he come to see Jesus as the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15—the long-awaited Seed of Eve and the second Adam. In the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, we read,

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin,

*and in this way death came to **all** people, because all sinned, ...**how much more** did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!*

*Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's [Adam's] sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man [Adam], death reigned through that one man [Adam], **how much more** will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!*

*Consequently, just as one trespass [Adam's] resulted in condemnation for **all** people, so also one righteous [Jesus'] act resulted in justification and life for **all** people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:12, 15-19).*

And again, in Paul's first epistle to the church in Corinth:

*For since death came through a man [Adam], the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man [Jesus]. For as in Adam **all** die, so in Christ **all** will be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).*

The symmetry of these texts is beautiful—even melodic. Imagine Paul's communities singing them, echoing **all** and **how much more** joyously through the dim catacombs

beneath Rome.

The curse of death had visited the whole human race through Adam; **how much more** has Christ's sacrificial grace-gift conquered death for **all**—the whole human race. In Adam, **all** die (temporally) and through Christ **all** are made alive (eternally)! Indeed, these verses powerfully express Paul's bold universal hope in Christ.

The Second Eve

Within a few generations, the early church would identify a similar symmetry between Eve and Mary. In one epistle, sermon and hymn after another, the apostles' spiritual heirs emphasize the corresponding contrast:

- As in Adam, so in Christ...
- As through Adam, so through Christ...
- As through Eve, now through Mary...
- As through the lying words of the Serpent, so through the gospeling words of Gabriel...
- As through the deception and disobedience of a virgin, so through the revelation and obedience of the Virgin...
- As through the Mother of all the living came death, so through the Mother of Life came life to all.

Brilliant! Allow me a few samples from the early Fathers:

Tertullian, the African Latin theologian wrote:

"Into Eve, as yet a virgin, had crept the word that was the framer of death. Equally into a Virgin was introduced the Word of God which was the builder-up of life. Eve had

believed the serpent; Mary believed Gabriel. The fault which the one committed by belief, the other by believing has blotted out."

Irenaeus of Lyons, France (grand-disciple to the apostle John) said,

"The knot of Eve's disobedience received its unloosing through the obedience of Mary; for what Eve, a virgin, bound by unbelief, Mary, a virgin, set free by faith."

And again, later in the same book, Irenaeus adds,

"As Eve was seduced by the speech of an angel, and fled from God, so also by means of the angel's speech, Mary received the good tidings, being obedient to his word, and bore God within her. And, though the one had disobeyed God, yet the other was drawn to obey God."

These themes got around. Back in Jerusalem, **Cyril** taught new believers, "Since through Eve, a

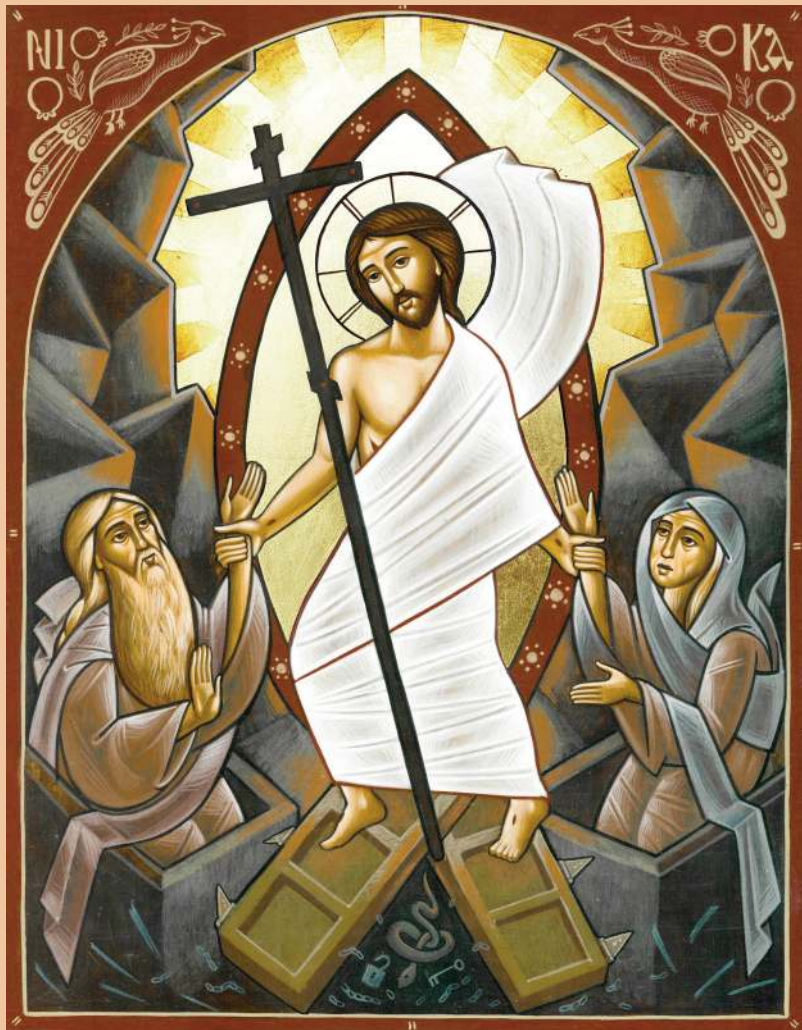
virgin, came death, so from a Virgin should life appear; that, as the serpent had deceived the one, so to the other Gabriel might bring good tidings."

Similarly, **Ephraim** (in Syria) agreed, "Through Eve, the beautiful and desirable glory of men was extinguished; but it has revived through Mary." The old desert saint loved to write these themes into his poetry:

"In the beginning, the serpent filled the ears of Eve, and the poison spread over the whole body; today, Mary from her ears received the champion of eternal happiness: what, therefore, was an instrument of death, is an instrument of life also."

By now, I hope you can see the layers of comparison. I'll list them for you:

- Eve's disobedience is undone by Mary's obedience. But it's more than that:
- Eve's disobedience is as a virgin. Mary's



THE RESURRECTION, ADAM & EVE

The various versions of the ancient *Anastasis* (Resurrection) icon all include common themes. This modern rendition, by Canadian-Egyptian artist, Kirillos Kilada, features all the key elements.

Rather than exiting the empty tomb, Christ stands on the broken gates of Hades (representing the power of death). Its locks and bolts are strewn beneath his feet, where we see the conquered serpent lies prone (sometimes pictured as the bound strongman or defeated dragon).

Most important, the Risen Christ does not rise alone. He has descended to the deepest place in the underworld to raise Adam and Eve (representing humanity) with himself. He has them by the wrists to indicate their salvation is by grace alone. They could not escape their tombs or even take his hand of their own accord. The salvation of humanity is accomplished through Christ's death, descent and resurrection. Their part and ours is simply to surrender to his overcoming Grace, rising in Christ just as we fell in Adam.

obedience is as the Virgin.

- The deceptive words of the first fallen angel (the serpent) are overcome by the good tidings of the first gospel angel (Gabriel).

- The first Eve bears a murderer and the second Eve bears a life-giving Savior.

- Eve's deception is undone by Mary's revelation as the willing mother of God Incarnate.

Mary, the second Eve, bears her own Savior, Christ the second Adam! And not her Savior only—he is the Savior of the world, your Savior and mine! And yes, as we see in the featured artwork of Mary consoling Eve, Mary the mother of Jesus retroactively bears Eve's Savior as well!

We also see how our Second Adam rescues Adam and Eve in the famous Greek icon of the *Anastasis* (Resurrection). It does *not* show Christ leaving his tomb—rather, it depicts Christ standing on the broken gates of *Hades*, drawing

Adam and Eve out of their tombs and thus, raising all humanity up with himself.

I'll conclude with a centuries-old song of the Nativity and Resurrection, addressing the Virgin Mary and her Christ:

• • • • •

[To Mary]: You have repaid Eve's ancient debt, for the new Adam came forth from you.

[To Christ]: As God, you rose from the tomb in glory,

Raising the world with yourself.

Human nature praises you as God, for death has vanished.

Adam exults, Master.

Eve rejoices, for she is freed from bondage and cries to you:

You are the Giver of resurrection to all, O Christ.

[To Mary]: You are most blessed, O Virgin

Mother of God [the Son]

For through the One who was born of you,

Hades has been captured and Adam recalled.

The curse has been annulled and Eve set free.

Death has been slain so we are granted life.

Blessed is Christ our God, whose good will it was.

Glory to you. □

Brad Jersak is the author of A More Christlike God and A More Christlike Way.



"Descent of Jesus into Hell"

A panel from "Passion of Rothenburg" (1494). Reichsstadt Museum Tauber, Bavaria.

Under the banner of the Cross, Christ has shattered the gates of Hades, put his foot on the head of the Death and with his wounded hand, rescues those who had been enslaved there, beginning with Adam and Eve (note the fruit in Eve's hand).

O EVE!

SCOTT ERICKSON

“Advent is about Christ coming in the midst of human living.”

I love this issue’s cover art of “Eve Consoling Mary” by sister Grace Remington. On this page is a painting interpretation I did of her image a few Christmas Eves ago. So many wonderful theological ideas are being displayed in this image. But what I love most about it is the look that Mary and Eve have for each other.

It’s like they were at some cosmic party where they didn’t know each other at first, but when they get introduced, they find out they are deeply connected on so many levels.

They also have one billion mutual friends on Facebook. Eve is experiencing hope and grace from brokenness that she never thought she’d see an end to. And yet her face could also be of unknowing mom bestowing wisdom and compassion on a new mom... as if saying,

“Parenting is one of the greatest and hardest adventures of a lifetime. You’ll love them, and want to have them forever... but you may see one of them die before their time, and that’s the absolute worst...”

Mary takes the hand of Eve and places it on her belly to let her feel the manifestation of restored hope growing in her womb.

And yet the drawing is also of the move of solidarity—accepting the entrance into the great cloud of witnesses as brokenhearted mothers who love their children more than all else.

I can never fully understand the deep connections and conversations in the worldwide society of mothers. But this art invites me into that secret conversation. That Emmanuel is *God with us*—but *he comes to us through one of us*, a blessed and humble teenage woman, and honors and dignifies the sacrificial and (w)holy involved life of being a mom.

Scott Erickson (@scottthepainter) is an artist, author and teacher in Vancouver, WA. His book, Prayer: 40 Days of Practice, and art are featured on scottericksonartshop.com.



O Eve!

poem by Sr. Columba Guare

*My mother, my daughter, life-giving Eve,
Do not be ashamed, do not grieve.
The former things have passed away,
Our God has brought us to a New Day.
See, I am with Child,
Through whom all will be reconciled.
O Eve! My sister, my friend,
We will rejoice together
Forever
Life without end.*

© 2005, Sisters of the Mississippi Abbey

Wrapping an Idea in a Person

Greg Albrecht

Gerard van Honthorst - Adoration of the Shepherds (1622)

The best way to announce, send and share a vision is to encase and enfold that dream in a person. That's what happened when God became a man. Mary "...wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger" (Luke 2:7 KJV).

Sending a message, wrapped up in a person, is at the heart and core of the meaning and significance of the birth of Jesus, and of the celebration of his birth we call Christmas.

Jesus was God in human flesh—the God-man. He brought incredibly profound and wonderful news to our world—

we call it the gospel—and that gospel was wrapped up in his person.

Jesus is the box—he is the wrapping paper, the bow on top, the human container—that envelops the gospel—the gospel of grace and truth.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" Out of his fullness we

have received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:14-17).

There is no greater marvel and mystery—no greater majesty—than the incredible story of how God, in the person of Jesus, out of his unending love for each of us, descended out of eternity into our world and our lives. He became one of us, bringing us the gospel of grace and truth.

The Word—Logos—Dwells With Us

The first verses of the Gospel of John tell us that Jesus was the Word. *Logos* is the Greek term

for “Word.” It means Jesus was and is the force and the reason and the core of all meaning, relevance and power that sustains and holds everything together.

Jesus, the Word—the *Logos*—is the answer to the questions that confound us. Who made us, who made the earth, who made our solar system, our cosmos and our universe—and how does it keep working? How is it all held together—how do all the eco-systems work in such symmetry and harmony? It’s not random!

When John 1:14 says that the Word—the *Logos*—this unifying, eternal divine Being became flesh, and “made his dwelling among us,” the Apostle John used the Greek word for “pitching a tent”—or more literally “tabernacle.”

In the old covenant, God was thought to exist in a holy place like the tabernacle. Their holy place was actually a tent that the nation of Israel folded up and took with them on their travels. Later God was thought to preside in the temple in Jerusalem—a stone building on a piece of real estate.

Jesus transformed the belief that God is present only within a particular building or piece of holy real estate. He embodied this truth and reality in his person as he pitched his divine tent with humanity. As Jesus walked, talked, moved and ministered, he revealed the glory of our heavenly Father.

Among other great realities, the new covenant is a proclamation that God is not limited to any place—God is not somewhere at the expense of

being somewhere else. God is everywhere, by the Spirit, in the person of Jesus.

God is not just for one exclusive group of people. He is for everyone—rich and poor, weak and strong, young and old, male or female, and black, white or brown.

In fact, later on in the New Testament, we read that the new covenant is a covenant wherein God is *not* confined to buildings made by human hands, but that in Christ, God is with us now and forevermore. And more than that, *Christ is in us*. He actually lives within us, so that we Christ-followers are the temple of God—we are his church, his spiritual body.

“The law was given through Moses...” The law was the law God gave—it was not a law that Moses dreamed up one night while he was taking care of sheep in the wilderness of Sinai. The law was God’s law—but God designed the law to only go so far. The law was God’s law, but it was not the full and final purpose of God, nor was it the personification of God.

We read that God is love—we do not read that God is law.

Grace and truth are much closer to the revelation of God’s nature than the law is.

God’s law, given through Moses, had a limited purpose—it could only guide and point us to Jesus, God in the flesh.

“Grace and truth” is God’s central idea, unifying message and core mission, all wrapped up in Jesus.

Full of Grace and Truth

John 1:14 says that Jesus came from Father God, *“full of grace and truth.”*

“Grace and truth” is God’s central idea, unifying message and core mission, all wrapped up in Jesus. John 1:17 tells us, *“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”*

John 1:15 contrasts the Old Testament prophet John the Baptist with Jesus and then verse 17 introduces Moses. While John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets who were commissioned to bring a message, Moses was the one God used to articulate the law.

To this very day, there are people who cannot imagine that there is any greater expression, purpose or definition of God than his law. They say things like “if you break God’s law, he will break you.”

We must understand the law is not the be-all and end-all of God’s message, his proclamation or his good news to you and me.

Of course, God is not lawless—but he is *more* than law. *God is love.* That is the message that came gift-wrapped in the person of Jesus.

Note carefully the contrast between Moses and Jesus. The law was given through Moses. So the law was like a letter delivered by the mail carrier—or “postie” as

they are called in Australia. The law was a package—in a box—it was delivered by Moses.

But, when God sent the gospel, he didn't stuff it in an envelope or squeeze it into a box. He didn't send the gospel as an attachment in an email, nor did the post the gospel on a website.

When God sent the gospel—his eternal grace and truth—he did not entrust its delivery to any third-party human messenger.

When God sent grace and truth, he wrapped it up in himself. He personified the gospel himself in the person of Jesus, the God-man, who revealed

Will we receive God, who took human form, and came to dwell among us as one of us, with us and for us? Will we receive Jesus, who was and is the gospel personified? Will we receive the all-embracing, inclusive message of Jesus, who came not just for one race, gender or denomination, but for us *all*?

Will we receive the little baby—a tiny impoverished alien child—a baby deemed “illegitimate,” a baby born among animals—a dependent baby needing his mother's milk, whose first bed was a feeding trough where animals feed?

When God sent grace and truth, he wrapped it in himself.

all of God's love, his grace and his truth. And we call that message, wrapped up in Jesus, the gospel.

In order to deliver and send us the fullness of the gospel, the fullness of his grace and truth, God in Christ came to us, and he became one of us. He delivered grace and truth personally. Grace and truth were wrapped in those swaddling clothes in the manger and grace and truth poured himself out on the Cross for you and me.

So, which *is* more important—the law or grace and truth? Moses or Jesus? Surely the grace and truth God wrapped in his own person were far more important than the law he sent through Moses.

There is no doubt that this baby is the Prince of peace. There is no doubt that the gospel of grace and truth blankets, surrounds and “swaddles” all that he was and is.

Behold—our Lord and Savior, our Prince of peace—our suffering Servant, who brings us grace and truth. O come let us adore him, O come let us receive him. O come let us embrace him and his wonderful, life-changing gospel, filled with grace and truth, perfectly embodied and personified in him. □

Greg Albrecht is president of Plain Truth Ministries. His weekly sermons are available on Christianity Without the Religion audio (CWRa).

THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

Every year around Christmas we see and hear the cliché, “Jesus is the reason for the season.” While the statement is accurate in recognizing the historical connection between Jesus' birth and the socio-cultural celebration of the Christmas season, and the phrase is an attempt to remind people “the issue is Jesus,” it fails to direct people's attention to the reality of the incarnation of the God-man. Even the predominant religious emphasis on the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem with the accoutrements of the manger, the Magi, the angels, the star, and Herod the villain diverts the attention of the listening public to the sentimental details of an infant's birth, rather than proclaiming the cosmic supernatural reality of the Son of God becoming a man to redeem and restore mankind with the presence of his life in receptive individuals.

When Christians hang banners and send Christmas cards with the phrase “Happy Birthday Jesus,” they perpetuate the misemphasis on a baby's birth and infancy without directing any attention to the divine life vested in the Christ-child who would grow up to give his life for mankind on the cross of Calvary as “the one mediator between God and man” (1 Timothy 2:5), thereby making his divine-human *Life* available to all persons.

Jesus did not come to establish a season of celebration and to be “the reason for the season.” Jesus did not come so we could remember his birth and infancy, and sing “Happy Birthday Jesus” at the end of the calendar year. Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the *LIFE*

The REASON for the SEASON

Jim Fowler

“Fix your eyes on Jesus,
the author and finisher of your faith.” —Hebrews 12:2

(John 14:6); “I came that you might have *life* and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10. Every individual who receives the Spirit of the living Lord Jesus by faith partakes of his *life* (1 John 5:12). The issue is *Jesus*—the living Lord Jesus who comes to be our *Life* (Colossians 3:4), and manifest his *life* in our mortal bodies (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:10-11).

WHAT DID JESUS COME TO BRING?

Did Jesus come to bring hope to mankind? “Christ Jesus is our hope” (1 Timothy 1:1). Jesus said, “I came that you might have life” (John 10:10). He is that *Life* (John 14:6; 1 John 5:12). Christian people often seem to think they need something in addition to Jesus. Having received Jesus, they

pray for patience. But they’ve already received the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23), including patience in their regeneration. Christians pray for wisdom. “Christ is our wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30).

Some Christians pray for righteousness, failing to recognize that Christ is their righteousness (Philippians 1:11).

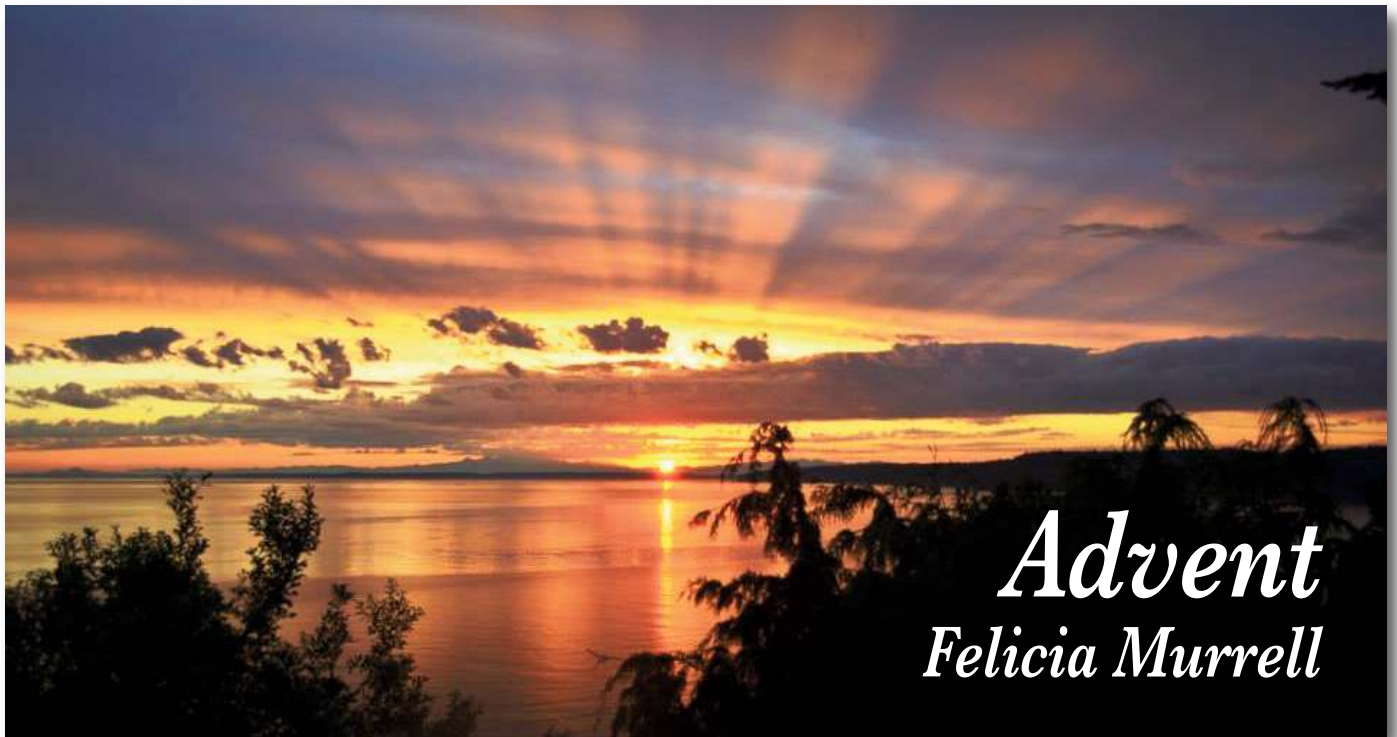
Some pray for divine grace, but God’s grace is in the Son (John 1:17; Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 16:23). Others pray for God’s blessing, forgetting that “God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:3). Still others pray to know the “will of God.” God’s will is always that the life and character of Jesus should be

lived out through us in every circumstance.

We must be careful about placing our attention and focus on something other than Jesus, even upon the blessings and benefits that are all inherent in him. We are advised to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). What Jesus came to bring is *himself*. Everything that mankind needs or ultimately desires is in *him*. Jesus has come to bring to humankind every good gift in *himself*. □

Excerpted from James A. Fowler’s book, The Issue Is Jesus.

For more on this topic, see Jim’s booklet, “Christmas: What It Means for You” on the PTM website.



Advent

Felicia Murrell

Awakening at Advent
At the sea
Before day breaks
Under the cover of night
The sky meets the sea
And you can tell they were
Once one
Like the gong of a tuning fork
The ebb and flow of the waves resonate
Calling us all back to union
Awake, O sleeper
You too were once one
Arise and remember
Your true position in the earth
Separation is an illusion
Your fragmented soul but a myth
In him you live and move
And have your being
The Divine among us
Within us
One with us
His name Immanuel
To remind us of what we have forgotten
To awaken us from our slumber

Peace on earth
You are joined to all
Goodwill toward men
Creation is begging
For us to remember
This moment requires
That we get it right
Even as light nears on the horizon
Through the lens
It still looks dark
Perceived as the end of a thing
Yet we know it to be more
Death
Finality
An invitation
A door
What will you see
When you look upon the darkness
Pause and remember
What is easily forgotten
In the light of day
Immanuel has come
Immanuel has risen
Immanuel is one with us □



Christ in the Face of the Other

Richard Rohr

St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) brought attention to the humanity of Jesus. Prior to St. Francis, Christian paintings largely emphasized Jesus’ divinity, as they still do in most Eastern icons. Francis is said to have created the first live nativity. Before the thirteenth century, Christmas was no big deal. The liturgical emphasis was on the high holy days of Easter.

But for Francis, incarnation was already redemption. For God to become a human being among the poor, born in a stable among the animals, meant that it’s good to be a human being, that flesh is good, and that the world is good—in its most simple and humble forms.

In Jesus, God was given a face and a heart that we could see. God became someone we could love. While God can be described as a moral force, as consciousness, and as high vibrational energy, the truth is, we don’t (or can’t?) really fall in love with

abstractions or concepts. So, God became a person *“that we could hear, see with our eyes, look at, and touch with our hands”* (1 John 1:1).

The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas (1906–1995) said the only thing that really converts people is “the face of the other.” He developed this idea at great length and with great persuasion.

When we receive and empathize with the face of the “other” (especially the suffering face), it leads to transformation of our whole being. It creates a moral demand on our heart that is far more compelling than Ten Commandments written on stone or paper. Just giving people commandments doesn’t change the heart.

In the end, Christianity is not a moral matter until it is first and foremost a mystical matter. Commandments and laws may steel the will, but they do not soften the heart—or create soul—the way one authentic I-Thou encounter will do. Thus, we have

produced an awful lot of “mean” Christians, which we must admit is Christianity’s present public image.

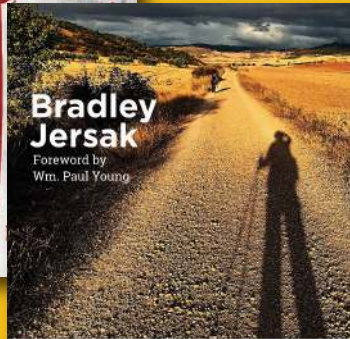
So many Christian mystics talk about seeing the divine face or falling in love with the face of Jesus. I think that’s why St. Clare (1194–1253) used the word “mirroring” so often in her writings. We are mirrored not by concepts, but by faces delighting in us—giving us the face we can’t give to ourselves. It is “the face of the other” that finally creates us and, I am sorry to say, also destroys us. It is the gaze that does us in!

Now surely you see why a positive and loving God-image is absolutely necessary for creating happy and healthy people. Without it, we will continue to create lots of mean Christians who have no way out of their hall of negative mirrors. □

Richard Rohr is the director of the *Centre for Action and Contemplation* in Albuquerque, New Mexico.



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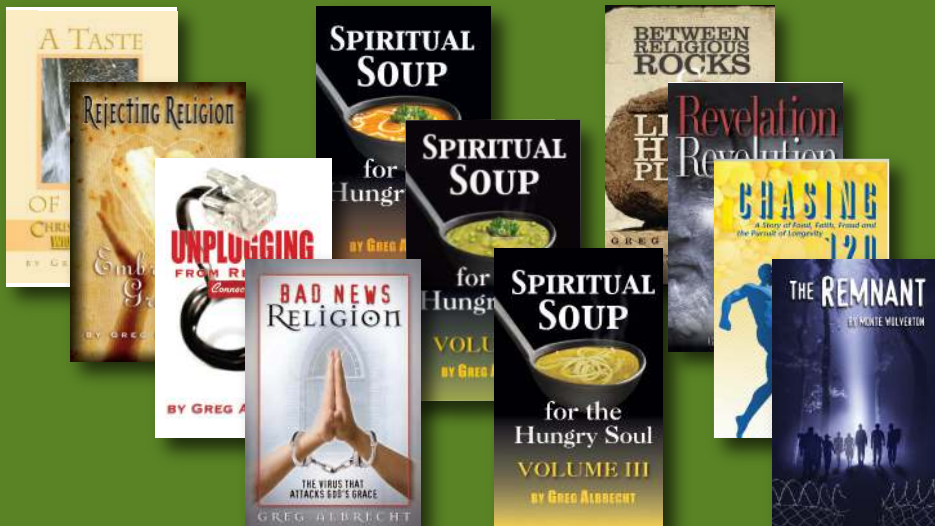
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GREG ALBRECHT

“If Christ was born, does that mean he was a created being?”

Question: What do you believe the Bible says about the birth of Jesus? Some of the biblical terms seem to indicate that he was a created being and that he had a beginning when he was born to Mary.

Response: The New Testament at large offers conclusive proof that Jesus was and is the God-man, that God became incarnate in the person of Jesus, and that God is one—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A few words within any given passage(s) that seem to teach otherwise do not contradict the over-whelming New Testament evidence of the deity of Jesus. Any search to disprove the greater weight of emphasis by alleged minority discrepancies is a fool’s errand.

When reading about the birth of Jesus, specific words are used to describe and define his human birth, but that does not mean Jesus was only human. Scripture speaks of the birth of Jesus as a never-before-or-since event—the Incarnation of God.

God’s Spirit “overshadowed” Mary, so that God the Son became flesh. Jesus Christ, “Incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary” assumed human nature in the flesh, but at no time did God the eternal

Son have a beginning as humans do. He has always eternally existed with his Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus remained divine while being enfleshed, so that Jesus is and was “very man and very God.”

I have no quarrel with the fact that Jesus was *conceived* or *begotten*, for indeed he was, *in his humanity*. But the meaning of one word cannot completely describe the totality of who Jesus was and is, especially if that word is isolated from other words that further explain and define his nature.

Jesus’ birth was unlike any other baby before or since. He was not just a human baby, but he was and is God.

The totality of the New Testament is clear—Jesus’ birth was unlike any other baby before or since. He was not only a human baby, but he was and is the living God.

While one word may describe his humanity, it does not summarily describe his totality.

The Bible is a written revelation of God using human language to accommodate our limited human understanding—perhaps similar to when a parent calls a train a “choo-choo” to a young child. Language is human, and our limited human symbols communicate the highest level of meaning that finite human

minds are capable of grasping.

With that said, a hermeneutic (the methods we use to interpret the Bible) that emphasizes individual meanings of specific words apart from their broader biblical context and theological meaning is flawed. Word meanings have merit of course, but they have limited hermeneutical application on their own.

Any given word must be understood in relation to other words in the immediate context, and beyond that, each word must be understood within the greater body of work of that

author and the themes the author intends to address.

Words have meaning, but they are also fallible symbols, never greater than the revealed intent conveyed by God, who is alone infallible.

Humanly, Jesus of Nazareth had a beginning. But in his divinity, he is without beginning or end. He is the Alpha and Omega. Jesus Christ was and is the incarnate Son of God, the eternal Word of God, who both became one of us in the flesh and was also with God in the beginning.

This one Person indeed was and is both God and man (John 1:1, 14). □

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The Light & the Word is for Everyone!

—Week of December 8

Suffering & Service

—Week of December 15

Can You See Him?

—Week of December 22

Receive or Reject Grace & Truth

—Week of December 29

January 2020

The Treasure of Grace

—Week of January 5

God Loves and Likes You!

—Week of January 12

Dream on with Jesus

—Week of January 19

Set Free from Sins

—Week of January 26

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On the road with **Brad Jersak**

This has been another eventful year for **CWRm** editor **Brad Jersak**.



A More Christlike Way: A More Beautiful Faith, written by Brad and published by **CWRpress**, was our autumn 2019 book release. Like *A More Christlike God* (**CWRpress** 2016), this sequel has already enjoyed a broad readership,

many generous endorsements and a busy audio podcast tour.

Brad continues to travel and speak about the *Jesus Way* in conferences, churches and colleges in the United States and Canada.

In 2020, he is booked to cross the sea again, with conferences in New Zealand, Australia, Finland and the UK. In March, he will co-lead a university study tour through Italy and Greece.

Brad’s ongoing roles at Plain Truth Ministries include editing duties for both magazines (**CWRm** and *The Plain Truth*), writing and art direction for **CWRm**, layout for **CWRpress** books, hosting the **CWR blog** and maintaining our social media presence.