

## The Baptism of the Christ

Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup> 2011

### G \_ D

A very dear old friend, an 89-year old holocaust survivor, died a few days ago. Her son and daughter and I had been keeping vigil with her in the hospital around the clock since Christmas night.

When I cancelled a dentist appointment so I could help to bury her, our kind Jewish dentist wrote back to send his condolences. "G\_d was with her", he said – and went on to explain that he, as a devout Jewish lad, was taught never to say or write the name of God as that would be blasphemous, taking God's name in vain. Instead, G\_d always is called by a "nickname", a title rather than a name. Yahweh. The Almighty. The Just One. Lord. King of Kings.

With such deference, every religious tradition has its rituals. Rituals both bring us into the aura of God and separate us subtly from God.

Historically, most of the horrors for which persons and nations blame God are caused by our small, narrow expectations of who and what God is, and how God should perform, and a simplistic conviction that G\_d has enlightened *us* more than anyone else.

We draw near to G\_d in prayer and sacred music and study. Yet, we presume that *we personally* are essentially, fundamentally different and separate from God. We don't hold ourselves to the same standard to which we hold God.

This is SO-ooooo *not* true.

*This* is the message of today's Baptism story.

G\_d is SO-oooo *not* what we expect. And we are so much more than we expect, so much more able and accountable

## The Baptism of the Christ

Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup> 2011

to be the only experience of G\_d that those around us may ever have. Incarnation. This is it. This is US.

And until we get past our primitive, childish sense of right and wrong, of justice and injustice, of good and evil, of who we are and who we think others should think we are – until we finally “get it”, that the God of our expectations is a pale inky caricature of our own small likeness, we miss the cloud-opening, mind-opening discoveries of our own seminal godliness.

Seed-Gods, we miss the life-changing energizing grace to live as God. To be the living affirmation of God in the patch of earth on which we stand. To be sacred music ourselves.

And our whole world misses that rendition of the incarnation that is US.

Oh, how we need the clouds to open so that we can see so much more than what we have expected of God, of the Christ, of ourselves. How we need to discover, in bright light and in disillusionment, the seed-God who is in our world more or less recognizably, in **us!**

Who knows what our world could be if each of us believed, as Jesus did, that “**I am God’s beloved** in whom God is well pleased. Look at *me*. Listen to *me*. **I am what God makes of his beloved.** I am God’s beloved, in whom God is affirmed.

**GOD. G\_D. ALLAH. THE ALMIGHTY. God of Many Names, and None. Abba. Papa. Our Father**

*Reverence for the sacred should not ever separate the sacred from the earth.*

My dentist’s tradition is right. God should never be etched in stone. But neither should our expectations of God be etched in stone and stubbornness and complacency and superiority

**The Baptism of the Christ**  
Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup> 2011

What I expect is what drives me. Drives my hopes. Drives my choices. Drives where I make time to show up, and where I don't. Drives my sense of need.

What I expect is seen in the shape and color and texture of my days and nights.

What you see is the translation of what I expect – of Life, of God, of myself.

**“I have grasped you by the hand. I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations”,**

Expect more of ourselves. Expect differently. “The things that I do, you also can do, He told them”.

**The Lord WILL bless his people with Peace.**

**En-sharm-allah.**

**Shalom.**

**May it be so.**

**Amen.**

**The Baptism of the Christ**  
Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup> 2011

**Our** moral traditions and understanding and culture are not, by divine gift, superior to anyone else's. Religions, traditions, cultures -- they are all human insights. Religions and cultures and traditions are of *our* making, not God's.

Nor should we tolerate as benign the distortions of God that are allowed to be perpetrated in God's name on the premise that God is God and we are we, and we simply shouldn't be held to the same standard.

Why not? “Love one another as I have loved [cherished] you”. God looked at all that had been made and said, “It is good”.

We, each, are God's beloved – in whom God is affirmed – or distorted; still in process..

So is the beloved we live with. So is the shuffling stranger we sprint past on the subway stairs. So is the co-worker who ruffles our feathers. So is the foreigner who becomes a naturalized citizen and struggles to earn a living far from his loved ones back home until he is able to get clearance from our immigration laws – if ever – to bring them here to make one home together again.

We, all of us, **are** the seminal G\_d in our own unique incarnations. We should, indeed, hold ourselves to the same standard. “Love one another as I have loved you”.

Religious traditions and cultures, poverty and riches, power and impotence, prestige and voicelessness – these do not make us either godly or ungodly. In whatever shape our own incarnation is at this moment, *we* each – right now -- are God's beloveds. We are the only God that most of those around us will ever experience.

*“God shows no partiality. In every nation, whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him”.*

## The Baptism of the Christ

Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup> 2011

Our Islamic brothers and sisters. Our struggling immigrant laborers. The poor who have more children than some people think they should have. Those imprisoned unjustly for crimes they did not commit. Those who were justly imprisoned but unjustly abused in prison. Those who survived imprisonment but find it impossible to survive when released because nobody will let them back into our trust, our workplaces, our homes.

Should we expect ourselves to be, truly, the incarnation of God?

Why not?

Every time I am called to add one more charity, or board leadership, or financial commitment to my life, I size up my “can” and “can’t” ratio. One thing I’ve learned in 71 years – every time I am ready to say, “I’m sorry. I simply can’t fit one more thing into my life”, **G-d** kicks me in the butt and shows me how I most certainly can fit someone else’s needs into my life if I will just rearrange how I do what I do; rearrange what I expect of myself.

It’s amazing how much we can do when we stop saying we can’t.

We find this out for ourselves, not just in the things we make time for, but in the times we make patience for.

Ancient east-west conflicts ... migrations ... competitions for food, water, trade routes, commerce, power -- these are the rivers that ran through the Jordan in which the Christ, God’s beloved, stood. There is little different today.

**Who do people say that WE are ? Who do WE believe that we are?** “As far as the east is from the west, so far are my thoughts from yours”, God still tells us.

## The Baptism of the Christ

Sunday, January 9<sup>th</sup> 2011

Do we get it?

“I have called **you** my friends. The things that I do, you also can do”.

**We can** hold close the bruised reed and not break it.

**We can** live with and cherish the broken-spirited, and the fretful, and the chronic negative thinkers, and the morose, and not slice through them with sarcasm or crush them under our rational alternatives.

**We can** fan the barely smoldering light of hope that our nations will ever get it – that we already are part of each other, from eternity -- so let’s stop quibbling about who owns what and stop excluding each other from our borders and cultures, our waters and food sources and our comfort zones, and get on with the magnificent life of recognizing and enjoying each other, each of us an incarnation of **G\_d** to be discovered and cherished.

When did we last bring a moment of light to someone else’s darkness?

When did the way **we** live give someone else hope that there **is** another whole dimension of living that is found only by those who steadfastly give themselves away, who look at unfamiliarity with reverence and welcome, who discover vast new meaningfulness – yea, Godliness -- in each other’s faces.

We can reverence the incarnation that each of us **is**.

**NOT what we expected?**

**As far as the east is from the west, so far are my thoughts from yours.**