

Christmas Eve Meditation, Dec. 24, 2009

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Swaddling Clothes of God

Babies are such wonderful little creatures aren't they? I've had the privilege and joy in seeing both my sons, who are now 34 and 32 years of age come into the world and to hold them in my arms and cradle them during their first few moments of life on earth. There is not much that this world gives us that is better than to hold your own child in your arms in those amazing moments. Maybe the only thing that can equal that is to hold your first born grandchild in your arms in their first few days of life! I've been so blessed to do both. I hope that all of you, in whatever form your family takes, have or will sometime experience this amazing thing called birth and cradling.

⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7) Does that blow your mind or what? Does it blow your mind that a long time ago in a place far away that some blessed and fortunate young peasant woman got to hold the little baby boy in his first few moments of life who would one day be talked about here in this church in Almaden Valley and, indeed, all over the world so many years and miles away? No matter what you believe about the divinity of Jesus or

the story of the virgin birth you have to admit that this creative cosmic force and presence that we call “God” did something pretty amazing on that day so long ago. The birth of that little peasant child has brought us all together tonight.

Mary “wrapped him in bands of cloth.” Sometimes I think I’m pretty old fashioned. I like the way the old King James Version of the bible said it better: *And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger.* Rather than the pedestrian and dry description (“bands of cloth”), the KJV says she “wrapped him in swaddling clothes.” I like the idea of a little swaddling bundle of joy coming into our world to guide us, challenge us, comfort us, be LIKE US with all our sufferings, joys, laughter, tears, and shenanigans that we pull! I like the idea of an accessible deity that meets us where we are and in whom we are and what we want to be and be part of this amazing gift of life each one of us is given.

There is another use of this term, “swaddling” in the Bible. Remember when God and Job were having a little spat about all the bad stuff that had happened to good old Job and his family recently? Well, God got the dander up a little bit, if you remember, and asked Job who he thought (and let me read the passage to you): *laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding (Job).⁵ Who determined its measurements—*

surely you know(Job)! Or who stretched the line upon it? ⁶On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone ⁷when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy(Job)? ⁸“Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?— ⁹when I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, ¹⁰and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, ¹¹and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped’? (Job 38:4-11)

This amazing creative force, this incredible wellspring of life and creativity, this mysterious thing many of us call “God” wrapped the earth globe, the Gaia, in “swaddling cloths” of thick darkness. We can all rest tonight in the thick darkness of the night to heal our bodies and our souls, to rest from the weariness of our labors, to once again be held in the loving arms of our God. This night is our swaddling clothes; in the night shines a star reminding us of the birth of one who drew us closer to our maker, who knows our lives and living because he lived our same kind of days and experiences we do. Whether our swaddling cloth is the night filled with stars, or the soft blanket our Moms and Dads wrapped us in during our first few moments of life, or the act of prayer that is available to us 24/7, or the knowledge that there is something out there, more transcendent than the troubles of our life and that loves you unconditionally through amazing grace and hopes for us the ability to transcend the small stuff of life we know and can

rest in safety that we are loved and held throughout eternity.

Merry Christmas to you and yours! Amen.