

## Advent and Mothers

Forty years ago in early December I was in England, Stratford Upon Avon, studying Shakespeare. Semester abroad at Furman. It was a big deal. First time I'd flown commercially. First time I'd been more than 500 miles from Greenville SC. First time away from home more than six weeks.

What a trip.

Whirlwind tour of England, Scotland & Ireland. Lots of great new friends—and lots of time to get to know these new friends. Glorious museums, architecture, idyllic villages, great food (no, that must have been somewhere else). Perfect weather. Really. Right up till those last 4 weeks in Stratford (from the middle of November to middle of December) when it was cold, foggy, drizzly, windy, dank and the sun set at 3:36.

I almost hadn't taken that semester abroad. My dad had died two years before. My mom didn't drive. I lived at home and commuted to Furman. My brothers didn't live nearby. I hated to leave Mom. I was her driver. And almost didn't even mention to her the possibility of that trip.

But at some point I did. And she said immediately, "I think you should go. It's a wonderful opportunity. I'll be fine."

I, who hated writing letters, wrote my mother a long letter every week that semester. Mom was my patron—or matron. She funded that trip. And in trying to be a faithful letter writer I became more than that. I came to love writing those letters. Recalling and describing each week's special places, experiences and encounters. The combination of experiencing something so wonderful and of realizing, maybe for the first time, how grateful I was to my parents, now my parent, for giving me life and sustenance and opportunities.

I who completely did not GET Shakespeare before, after seeing maybe eight amazing productions, understood—how much wisdom and wit is held and passed down in those plays. *Something* shifted in me.

And I who had given up on church. And God, for all I knew, one day standing at the altar rail in Durham Cathedral—looking down and seeing knee prints: stone cupped deeply by nothing else but centuries of human knees kneeling. Something shifted.

One night in Yorkshire, for some reason I went by myself to evensong. And when those 22 little boys began singing, once again I felt a strange, unbidden onslaught of ‘sacredness’. I think it’s safe to say I was MARKED by it. Somehow, the Church of England gave me a vexing yet irresistible experience of the Sacred.

It’s terribly ironic and sad that a couple of weeks ago the C of E voted NOT to allow women to be bishops in England. Missed by 7 votes.

I’m writing about that semester and my MOM because I tend to think of Advent and women together. Advent as TheoTAHkos Time. Theo TAHkos – God Bearer. In Advent it’s so natural to think about and celebrate mothering, carrying LIFE—bearing babies...a mother bearing even the Son of God. Women, for the love of God, surely have what it takes to be bishops.

Really, for the love of God. Evolutionary psychologists are thinking more and more that empathy, compassion, selfless love, God-love, came into this world through mother-love. The bond that kept mothers and babies close, kept them safe—and passed down DNA that favors safeness and closeness and caring.

God is patient. The first mammals appeared 200 million years ago. We began to get solid evidence of *agape*, God-love, the milk of human kindness, maybe 3000 year ago. No one knows exactly when mother birds and mother mammals began being tender and loving to their young. But at some point it led to something like the God-gene.

This is the love that 2000 years ago begat and permeated Jesus. It spills out in his actions and calling. And words: Oh Jerusalem— how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

God is patient. TheoTAHkos, the God-bearer came 2000 years ago—bearing the One for whom the Magi, the wise men, came bearing gifts.

“The milk of human kindness”—is a quote from King Lear. I saw King Lear in Stratford 40 years ago. It was fabulous. But I walked back to my B&B cold and wet and homesick. I missed my mom. Who loved me, if not exactly unconditionally, loved me with fewer conditions than anybody else has ever has—except God.

God is patient. God waited a long time for the impulse of that kind of love to jump out of and beyond mothers’ DNA and into any human soul.

It continues to jump, to pour, to seep into our hearts. Welcome, welcome, welcome the waiting, the hoping, the carrying—Welcome, Another Advent.