

The Birth of Jesus

(Rahab at the Museum of Fine Art)

Matthew 1

(Genesis 38, Joshua 3, Ruth, II Samuel 11-12)

September 22, 2002

Peter Hiatt

“What If God Was One of Us”

By Eric Brazilian

[Sung by Joan Osborne]

If God had a name, what would it be
And would you call it to His face
If you were faced with Him in all His glory,
What would you ask if you had just one question

And yeah, yeah, God is great
Yeah, yeah, God is good
Yeah, yeah, yeah yeah yeah
What if God was one of us,
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make His way home

If God had a face, what would it look like
And would you want to see
If seeing meant that you would have to believe
In things like heaven and in Jesus and the saints and all the prophets

And yeah, yeah, God is great
Yeah, yeah, God is good
Yeah, yeah, yeah yeah yeah
What if God was one of us,
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make His way home
Trying to make His way home
Back up to heaven all alone
Nobody calling on the phone
Except for the Pope, maybe, in Rome

And yeah, yeah, God is great
Yeah, yeah, God is good
Yeah, yeah, yeah yeah yeah
What if God was one of us,
Just a slob like one of us

Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make His way home
Just trying to make His way home
Like a holy rolling stone
Back up to heaven all alone
Just trying to make His way home

Nobody calling on the phone
Except for the Pope, maybe, in Rome

What a strange song, a big hit in 1995 by Joan Osborne. Do you think she had a clue about what she was singing?

We really need good, Christian artists. That's why I'm so excited about our new Fine Arts Ministry. The first person in Scripture who was said to be "filled with the Spirit" was an artisan who made the tabernacle, the first temple where the glory of God would dwell. We need art that exhibits His glory and His light. We need painters of light.

In 1989 Andres Serrano, using funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, placed a plastic crucifix in a jar filled with cow blood and his own urine. And he took its picture. If you remember, he entitled the photograph "Piss Christ."

Senator Al D'Amato tore up a reproduction of the picture on the Senate floor. Just this year the National Gallery in Australia shut down the Serrano exhibit because of that picture. In Time magazine Newt Gingrich said, "This is prototypical of the cancer eating away at our civilization." I believe he's right.

I found some web sites on Serrano. Please don't look at his other pictures. Many are evil. They include pornography, harlotry, and corpses. As a church we have something to say about that, for we know our God is holy.

In the Bible the artisans could build the temple, but once the glory descended, they could not enter. Only the High Priest could enter the inner sanctuary once a year, and only after all sorts of ritual cleansing and sacrifice. Otherwise, the light—the glory—the holiness of God would devour them. Holy: the tremendous mystery; what is absolutely *other* than us and all creation.

Jesus Christ is the light and glory (as of the only Son from the Father). And Serrano urinated on His image. That *is* the dark cancer eating our society.

This past week I was reading a popular collection of short stories about women in our society. I read about four women, all back east. They are true stories, and I think the author considered the stories art.

The first story regarded a young woman whose wicked husband died a violent death. This woman then married the man's brother. The story described how they would have sex and he would ejaculate on the floor so as not to have kids by her. This guy died a violent death as well. By now the gal had become so wanton she disguised herself as a hooker, went to a seedy part of town, and seduced her own father-in-law, conning him into having sex with her. (He didn't know it was her.) Months later somebody told him, "Your daughter-in-law is a whore, and not only that, she is pregnant." So the father-in-law tries to kill her by burning her. But before he can, she reveals the child is his. So he lets her live and lets her give birth. She has twins. Can you imagine those kids? In that cancer?

The second woman was immersed in the occult. She was a prostitute by trade. The authorities don't know for sure, but it's probable she was witness to human sacrifice, demonic oppression, and all manner of evil.

The third woman was a foreigner, alone and barren for many years. She is so desperate, she sneaks into this guy's room and lies at his feet, hoping he'll have her.

The fourth woman was maybe the sorriest of all. She was married to a faithful husband but flaunted herself publicly, attracting this famous, religious leader, a musician who is a friend of her husband. They have an affair. She gets pregnant. This famous, religious guy has her husband killed. Well, she gives birth to a baby, and the baby dies. They realize it's their fault, the fruit of their evil. She gives birth to death. But they have another baby soon after.

That's our society. And it makes you wonder, "What's this world coming to? How *do* you fight a cancer like that?" Boycotting the book won't work. It's been tried for a few thousand years.

The woman in the first story is named Tamar. Her husbands were Er and Onan, and her father-in-law was Judah, son of Israel, son of Isaac, son of Abraham.

The second woman was named Rahab. She lived in a town called Jericho.

The third woman was a desolate, hated, Moabite named Ruth.

The fourth woman was a Hittite by marriage. Her name was Bathsheba. Her husband's name was Uriah. Her second husband's name was David—*King David*. We don't know the name of the child who died, taking her curse. But the second child was named Solomon.

The collection of short stories is a big story called the Bible. And this is our society, the people of God. But that only makes the questions bigger.

"God, what are you doing?"
"God, where are you?"
"Why do you even print this filth?"

I imagine Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba had questions too. "If you had just one question,"
Tamar . . .

“God, if there *is* a God, am I utterly forsaken?
I’m reduced to seducing my father-in-law
so I’m not forever alone.”

Maybe you feel desperate like Tamar.

Or maybe you feel like Rahab. You feel dirty, used up, and profane. And you hear that the holy God is coming, the one your demon gods are terrified to mention, the God of Israel, who parts the sea and devours His enemies with pure fire. If He doesn’t destroy you, surely His holy people will.

Maybe even, like Rahab, you feel terror. For God *is* utterly holy, different, pure, and foreign to you.

How about Ruth? Ruth was a pretty good gal. But she didn’t know the lingo or the culture. She didn’t have a Bible cover or a Small Group. She was an outcast. Maybe you feel terribly alone in church.

Maybe you feel like Bathsheba, like you’ve defiled the king and given birth to death. Maybe an abortion is haunting you . . . or an affair is haunting you . . . and you think, “If these people only knew who I am, they’d stone me on the spot. For my life is immersed in blood and piss.”

Maybe you’re wondering, Is there a God? Who *is* God? Does He hate me? Does He even know me? What’s He doing? How does He fight the dark cancer?

This weekend we’re beginning a series of sermons from the Gospel of Matthew, or as Matthew may have intended to title it, The Genesis of Jesus; literally, The Book of Genesis of Jesus Christ (Biblos Geneseos Iesou Chritou).

Chapter 1 verse 1 of the New Testament:

The book of the genealogy [genesis, origin, generation, birth] of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa, and Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of

Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of She-alti-el, and She-alti-el the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, does God even know of you? *Yes!*

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, are you forsaken and barren? *Absolutely not!*

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, where is God? Who is God? What is He doing? God is *in* you, even *of* you, and *through* you. He is “bone of your bones, flesh of your flesh”!

Eve, you’re giving birth to your Savior, the last Adam, Jesus the Christ. And He told you in the garden it would hurt. But just like Adam said, “You are the mother of the living.”

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, what’s this world coming to? *Your baby!*

Now, it’s no accident Matthew lists these four women. He goes out of His way to do so and doesn’t bother listing the four traditional, Jewish matriarchs: Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel, who were Christ’s ancestors too. Matthew is pointing out the *scandalous origin* of the Messiah. Even more, he reverses the traditional order of the genesis, as if to say Jesus is not only the offspring of this list, but the root; not only the offspring of Rahab, but her source.

You know, that final judgment is not our prerogative. However, Scripture does clearly reveal that Rahab will greet us in the New Jerusalem (Hebrews 11). Just think of it! She is born again through giving birth to Jesus. She’s “saved through childbirth” (I Timothy 2:15).

So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

3 x 14 = 42, which is the number of the time of rebellion in The Revelation, when the woman gives birth to the brothers and sisters of Christ in the wilderness. That’s interesting.

However, it appears that Matthew is missing the last generation in the last fourteen. So either he’s bad at math, or he’s telling us that after Jesus there is still a mother giving birth to Jesus *now*.

Verse 18: *Now the birth [genesis] of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the*

Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.

Actually, there weren't *four* women on the list; there were five. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. There is no record of Mary sinning like Tamar, Rahab, or Bathsheba, but she was probably only thirteen years old. We know she was “favored” (graced, that is), and we know she surrendered herself to God, but she was still an unwed, pregnant teenager of low estate, who according to the Torah deserved to be stoned for adultery. Who would believe that God Himself impregnated her with His Spirit?

In that day betrothal was as binding as marriage. So in righteousness Joseph prepares to quietly divorce his bride, I would imagine thinking, “Where is God? Who is God? What is He doing?” An angel tells him, “He’s in Mary. She’s giving birth to Him, to Emmanuel— ‘God with us’— Jesus.”

“And they wrapped Him in swaddling clothes
and laid him in a manger.”

So then, who is Jesus’ mother? Mary, but also the women in the family tree, and also the men. In Hebrew thought, a man carried his lineage with him like seed—seed in his loins. Jesus is the seed of Abraham. Jesus was present like seed in His past. Perhaps all genesis—all creation—is pregnant with Jesus. Yet Mary is impregnated by the Spirit—the holy, uncreated Spirit.

It’s like Jesus’ mother is humanity and His Father is God.
He calls us brothers and sisters, who are born of His Spirit.
It’s like our mother is humanity and our Father is God too.

Remember the woman in Revelation 12, in anguish to deliver. She gives birth to Christ, and then she gives birth to us in the wilderness. She is the Church. She is us, the last mother.

Jesus said it very succinctly in Matthew 12. Mary and His brothers come looking for Him, and Jesus says:

“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

When we “do the will of the Father,” we give birth to Christ in us and Christ in others: the body of Christ.

And what is “the will of the Father”? — To receive the One who is sent: Jesus.

Jesus said He scattered seed. The seed is the Word, and He is the Word. You come to this table and receive Him—receive seed—and He is conceived in you, given birth in you and through you. *You!* So where is He born? In *you*; in a barn.

I know about birth. I’ve watched it four times. And I know about barns. My grandpa had one. And I’ve never seen so much cow blood and urine.

How is He born? He is born out of desperation, terror, loneliness, and shame: anguish. But just because there is a barn doesn’t mean there is a baby. Jesus said, “Whoever does the will of my Father is my mother.” So I would guess that Abraham, Israel, and David, and these four women, surrendered to God the Father.

When desperation is surrendered, it gives birth to hope.
When terror, loneliness, and confusion is surrendered, it
gives birth to faith.
When shame is surrendered, it gives birth to love.
“For she who is forgiven much loves much.”

Solomon is named “Beloved of God,” Jediah. Jesus is the love of God poured out. Bathsheba’s first son took her curse, and her second son was the “love of God.” They are the same son: Jesus. He bears our despair, terror, loneliness, shame . . . our curse. And then He is born in us, beloved of God.

So where does the light shine? In the darkness. Jesus is the light. Who is the painter of light? God the Father. And what is His favorite medium, the genesis of His artwork? Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Gentiles, you.

You ask, “Where is God? What is God doing? Does He even know me?” *Yes.*

Where is God?
“He is not far from each one of us, for
‘In him we live and move and have our being.’”
Oh, Tamar, He’s all around you.

What is He doing?
He’s preparing to be born in you and of you.
And Rahab, don’t be afraid. For the holy God is making Himself “bone of your
bone and flesh of your flesh.”

“Tamar, Rahab, Eve, so filled with shame and hiding in the shadows, the Holy One—the second Adam—is in your womb making Himself entirely familiar to you, so that you would greet Him with joy saying, ‘Bone of my bone; flesh of my flesh.’”

“Eve, you have yet to say it to your true Adam.

He bears your curse, despair, terror, loneliness, and shame. Every time you hope, trust, and love, it’s Him . . . Emmanuel . . . Jesus.”

Do you see what Matthew is doing? He is addressing all humanity and saying, “Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas! Hallelujah!”

Because we’re commissioning our Fine Arts Ministry this week, I did a quick search on Christian art on the internet. I found a web site that carried three or four Christian artists, and I went to the web site for the “Painter of Light” — that’s his moniker. He’s easily the most popular American Christian artist today.

I looked through the on-line gallery . . . hundreds of paintings, wonderful paintings. But I did think it odd that I didn’t see an actual cross or one manger. Mostly there were glowing cottages and gardens. There’s nothing wrong with that.

I looked at some of the other popular Christian artists, and it was the same kind of thing. I did find a manger, but it glowed. It didn’t look a thing like my grandfather’s barn.

Then I thought of Rahab. I pictured Rahab the pagan whore at the Museum of Fine Art. What would grab her eye? What would speak to her heart and fill her with faith, hope, and love? I pictured her walking past rows and rows of “Christian art”—paintings I had just seen.

A glowing building called “Blossom Hill Church.”

A lovely garden entitled “The Garden of Prayer.”

A quaint bridge over a little stream entitled “The Bridge of Faith.”

A glowing cottage entitled “Christmas Eve.”

A lovely path entitled “Pathway to Paradise.”

They are all wonderful and lovely pictures. But I bet Rahab would feel even more desperate, lonely, and ashamed, like she didn’t belong. There is no pain there. If that is the pathway to Paradise, it doesn’t connect to her world.

Then she sees this picture [Exhibit A]. It’s entitled “Piss Christ.” That’s not the best title. A better title would be “Christmas Eve” . . . even better, “Pathway to Paradise.”

And now I know what some of you are thinking. “He’s gone too far! What are you saying, Peter? It’s okay to urinate on a crucifix?”

NO. Absolutely not. NO. Just like it’s not okay to pound nails into the hands and feet of my Lord. But every time you gossip, covet, lust, sin, that’s what you do. What do you think hurts Him more? — nails in His flesh or urine on a picture?

“Well, then, are you saying it’s okay to *look?!?*”

Have you ever really looked at the cross?

“But that picture was made by an evil man!”

Maybe so, like Caiaphas, Pilate, Judas, and the soldier who pounded the nails in Jesus’ flesh. Yet, “what they intended for evil God intended for good.” And after the soldier pounded the nails, he saw his wicked handiwork and said, “Surely this is the Son of God!”

After Andres Serrano put a crucifix in urine, the Evangelical American Church saw his handiwork and demanded he cover it up. It was the one photo we picketed. I think we should have been picketing all the *others*. But at that one photo we should have stopped, dropped to our knees, and said:

My friend, Andres, it’s *Him!* This is the miracle born in your filth. Can you see it? It is a miracle that the Holy God did not devour you with unquenchable fire as you did this. Instead, He bore your despair, fear, loneliness, and shame. He knows and loves you.

And Andres, this is your judgment. Surrender to this love and rise with Him. But defy this love, and you will drown in your own filth. Andres, “you don’t judge great art; great art judges you.” The cross of Christ is the great art. But God is the artist, not you. Despise His love no longer. Surrender.

Then, Andres, this picture will no longer be of your condemnation and shame, but of your salvation and glory, a picture of the light shining in your darkness: your testimony, a masterpiece of the Painter of Light proclaiming to the heavenlies. This is how much God loves Andres Serrano!

Perhaps if we comfortable Americans are too ashamed to paint our Lord’s picture, He will use pagan singers like Joan Osborne, and photographers like Andres Serrano, the way He used the Roman centurion.

“But, Peter, the picture is scandalous and shocking!”

- Is it as shocking as Christ in a manger in a barn: *Christmas?*
- Is it as shocking as Christ nailed naked and bleeding to a tree: *Pathway to Paradise?*
- It’s certainly not as shocking as Christ in you, Rahab, Tamar, Ruth, Matthew, Peter, Paul (“chief of sinners”). *Shocking . . . shockingly beautiful.*

Ephesians 2:4: “But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much, that even while we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by

God's special favor that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ, and we are seated with him in the heavenly realms—all because we are one with Christ Jesus.

“And so God can always point to us [in coming ages] as examples of the incredible wealth of his favor and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us through Christ Jesus. God saved you by his special favor when you believed. [In the RSV, you were “saved by grace through faith.”]

“And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

Your life is His artwork, His masterpiece. You are the artist called to display His work every time you smile; every time you speak or sing or dance or breathe; every time you take a photo or paint a picture. You are His temple of flesh. You surrender the temple, and He fills it with glory.

Don't worry. My wife is on the Fine Arts committee. I guarantee we won't hang anything obscene on the walls of our building. However, I hope we will bear witness to Christ, and that the art on our walls will bear witness to . . .

Hope born out of desperation;
Faith born out of loneliness, confusion, and fear;
Love born out of shame.

Then it will be real. Don't hide that old manger. Don't hide your despair, fear, loneliness, and shame. Surrender it. For if you hide the manger, you hide the glory. Lie about the darkness, and you lie about the most beautiful light. “For the light shines in the darkness.”

A group of visitors at a summer resort had watched the sunset from the gallery of the hotel. A fat, unromantic-looking man had lingered until the last glow faded, and had seemed thrilled through and through by the beauty of it all. One guest, more observant than the rest, wondered about this, and so at supper she said to this man, who sat next to her, “You certainly did enjoy the sunset, Mr. B. Are you an artist?” He smiled. “No, madam, I'm a plumber. But I was blind for five years.”

The light shines in the darkness.

[Song: “Everything Cries Holy”]

I think He is saying to you, “Could you trust me enough to believe that?”

There are dark places, lonely places, desperate places, shameful places, aren't there? And you're afraid to look at them. Maybe they're in your past, maybe they're in your heart, but if you've been to this table and received the living Christ, He is there waiting to cry holy. How holy? Holy

enough to be born in you. He is love. And the greatest light is exhibited in a manger and on a cross and even on the throne, for there you will see a Lamb bleeding.

If you have a place like that, think of that place, and then quietly pray to the Lord, “Jesus, come.” He is there. If you want to be a great painter, you will not paint any better pictures than the paintings you paint out of that place. If you want to be a great singer, you won’t sing any more beautiful songs than the songs you sing out of that place. If you want to preach the Word of God, you’re called to preach from that place.

“You are the light of the world.” Let your light so shine. In Jesus’ name, amen.

There are great artists in our church. God used Neil Armstrong to make the cross on the stage. Rollie DeAnda made the table. A church member painted the painting from The Revelation that hung in our old church building — In the center of all creation was a cute, little bleeding lamb.

Hear me well: It’s good—even great—to paint bridges, flags, and glowing cottages. Paint all creation! Don’t just paint food troughs and crosses of Jesus. Paint all kinds of stuff. But if you really want to paint the light in this world, you must paint with a cross on your back. “Let your light so shine before men.”

In Jesus’ name, amen.

Further Reading

While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother."

-Matthew 12:46-50

And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. . . . And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had borne the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

-Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. . . ." Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

-Genesis 3:15-16a, 20

And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

-Luke 2:7

Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

-1 Timothy 2:15

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. . . . Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

-Hebrews 2:10-11a, 4:14-16

God is closer to everything than anything is to itself.

-Martin Luther

God is a Master Artist. And there are aspects of your life and character—good, quality things—he wants others to notice. So without using blatant tricks or obvious gimmicks, God brings the cool, dark contrast of suffering into your life. That contrast, laid up against the golden character of Christ within you, will draw attention . . . to him. Light against darkness. Beauty against affliction. Joy against sorrow. A sweet, patient spirit against pain and

disappointment—major contrasts that have a way of attracting notice. You are the canvas on which he paints glorious truths, sharing beauty, and inspiring others. So that people might see him.

-Joni Eareckson Tada

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

-Ephesians 2:10

Even when I thought, with most other well-informed, though unscholarly, people, that Buddhism and Christianity were alike, there was one thing about them that always perplexed me; I mean the startling difference in their type of religious art. I do not mean in its technical style of representation, but in the things that it was manifestly meant to represent. No two ideals could be more opposite than a Christian saint in a Gothic cathedral and a Buddhist saint in a Chinese temple. The opposition exists at every point; but perhaps the shortest statement of it is that the Buddhist saint always has his eyes shut, while the Christian saint always has them very wide open. The Buddhist saint has a sleek and harmonious body, but his eyes are heavy and sealed with sleep. The mediaeval saint's body is wasted to its crazy bones, but his eyes are frightfully alive.

-G. K. Chesterton

It is interesting to note how many artists have had physical problems to overcome, deformities, lameness, terrible loneliness. Could Beethoven have written that glorious paean of praise in the Ninth Symphony if he had not had to endure the dark closing in of deafness? As I look through his work chronologically, there's no denying that it deepens and strengthens along with the deafness. Could Milton have seen all that he sees in Paradise Lost if he had not been blind? It is chastening to realize that those who have no physical flaw, who move through life in step with their peers, who are bright and beautiful, seldom become artists. . . . My mother's long life had more than its fair share of pain and tragedy. One time, after something difficult had happened, one of her childhood friends came to give comfort and help. Instead of which, she burst into tears and sobbed out, "I envy you! I envy you! You've had a terrible life, but you've *lived!*"

-Madeline L'Engle

When we look at a painting or hear a symphony or read a book and feel more Named, then, for us, that work is a work of Christian art. But to look at a work of art and then to make a judgment as to whether or not it is art, and whether or not it is Christian, is presumptuous. It is something we cannot know in any conclusive way. We can know only if it speaks within our own hearts and leads us to living more deeply with Christ in God. One of my professors, Dr. Caroline Gordon, a deeply Christian woman, told our class, "We do not judge great art. It judges us."

-Madeline L'Engle

The light shines in the darkness.

-John 1:5a

Exhibit A

