

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall

www.stmagnus.org

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation



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Welcome to St Magnus Cathedral this morning. It was founded in 1137 by St Rognvald, in honour of Magnus, his uncle. The Cathedral belongs to the people of Orkney and its doors are open to all. If you are a visitor, we hope this order of service will help you feel part of our worship together.

SUNDAY 14TH March

You can find our Sunday worship here.

<https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation/>

or on YouTube here.

<https://youtu.be/5hBeJ59R42c>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Welcome

We live at mystery's edge watching for a startling luminescence or a word to guide us. All In fragile occurrence the Holy One presents oneself and we must pause...

Daily, there are glimmers, reflections of a seamless mercy revealed in common intricacies. All These circles of grace spill out around us and announce that we are part of this mystery.

Out of waiting comes birth, from the East comes the sunrise

Out of the seed comes new life
Out of winter comes the spring
Out of sleep comes the awakening
Welcome to our worship...

Opening meditation

Throughout history and at present, there have been and are many valiant women,
generous, gifted, who have given of themselves for the benefit of others
with little or no recompense.

Today we celebrate, honour and mourn the role and place of women in this world.

The strength and colour of women, the fragrance and wholeness of women,
the damaged and bleeding women, the relationships between women and men,

the life of women and men we know and don't know.
We come to God, who created women as well as men.

Reading Proverbs 31:10-31 read by Anne Flint

Who shall find a valiant woman?
Look! We are all around you...
unheralded,
invisible,
some say non-existent,
but we know otherwise.

She is in the work rooms of industry and on every functioning enterprise.

Broadminded, her global perspective is a source of nurture for her.

She rises early, before the dawn,
to prepare food for her family
and organise the tasks of the day...
contributing,
setting standards,
changing the course of history.

She considers her options, then makes her move,
investing the experience she already has
or even profits previously earned.

She works diligently, taking pride in her inner resources and strengths.

When her gifts are encouraged and their value affirmed,
she will work well into the night,
entering wholeheartedly into even the menial tasks...

She opens her heart to the needy,
she is generous with the poor,
yet she does not neglect her family's needs
nor priorities of her own...

She often speaks with wisdom, and she teaches in a kindly way...

Her children rise up and call her happy;
her husband too, and he praises her:

'Many women succeed or do outstanding things, but you surpass them all...'

**May we be struck by the wisdom of these words
and marked by hearing them.**

**For within story lies meaning, and
within meaning, the wisdom for which we seek.**

Reflection

There is a little prayer that one of my former parishioners was taught by her mother in the early 1930s. It went like this: "Father Mother God, loving me, guard me while I sleep, guide my little feet up to Thee".

The notion that God can be pictured as a mother is not a creation of the late 20th century feminist movement. The Bible has many feminine references to God. God, of course, is not literally male or female or a human being – these are all metaphors. And yet the Church has curtailed its God language to such an extent that a little 1930s prayer addressed to 'Father Mother God' is somehow still radical.

If each and every human is made in God's image, then a 'face' of God turned towards say a child reflects that child's own face, for the purpose of encouraging, loving, and cultivating the best in that child's unique and precious life. God is a child. So too say for a woman, or man, or someone seriously ill: God's face is female, or male, or suffering. So, today, Mother's Day, we remember God is a mother and is there to encourage, love, and cultivate the best in any mother's unique and precious life.

We need to be expansive, playful even, with our spiritual language. Language at its best opens the door for our imagination to dance with the Spirit of God. Metaphors become invitations. At its worst language becomes fossilised, locking the Spirit of God into the past and out of contemporary need and relevance. Metaphors become idols.

In 1993 there was conference called Re-Imagining held in Minneapolis. It was held at the midway point in the World Council of Churches' Decade in Solidarity with Women, 1988-1998.

The purpose of the Re-imagining Conference was to explore current theology and practice that incorporated feminist methods.

At the conference God was invoked by names different from those commonly used in the churches, including "Father," "Son," "Lord," and "King." The conference explored and presented alternative names and images — from the Bible, from other religious traditions, and from women's religious experience — that depicted God in a feminine frame. Yet it was the name 'Sophia' that critics latched on to. Sophia is found in the Book of Proverbs and is a Greek translation, Hagia Sophia, of Divine or Holy Wisdom.

Sharing those ideas and knowledge with participants, and then sharing those ideas with home parishes, caused an immediate, intense, and lasting backlash, the effects of which are still felt today. It was as if suddenly many of the denominational power-holders realised how threatening the principle of women's equal value could be when it came to expression in religious language and practice. What was being enunciated in Minneapolis was different ways of reading the Bible, doing theology, understanding the role of women in the church, and women in the world.

In Scotland this re-imagining of both God, language, and how we 'do Church' in a way that reflects our values of inclusion and justice was also alive and well. Indeed we would need to go all the way back to 1984 when the Church of Scotland Guild produced a seminal report entitled the "Motherhood of God" to a mixture of acclaim and scorn. Thankfully, there are many more women leaders in our churches now. But still, 30 years, a generation on, in Scottish churches God continues to be almost exclusively referred to in male pronouns, and many church leaders don't

even seem to be aware that they are making a theological and political choice in doing so.

Today we remember mothers – our own mothers, mothers in our society, and the joys and responsibilities and support needed in mothering. Yet I can't help but think what it would be like if our received tradition had been matriarchal rather than patriarchal, that the norm had been 'Mother God' rather than 'Father God', and how would the normative systems and practices be different now? What would it be like to grow up praying to 'Our Mother which art in heaven'? Would it make a difference to how we perceive the world, and how we work for love, justice and compassion among and between all? I would like to think it wouldn't. But I think it'd be wrong. I think the maleness of God permeates the church and more than just the church, and more than just those who purport to believe in any deity.

Prayer

Dear Mother God, your wings are warm around us,
We are enfolded in your love and care,
Safe in the dark, your heartbeat's pulse surround us,
You call to us, for you are always there.
You call to us, for we are in your image.
We wait on you, the nest is cold and bare -
High overhead your wing beats call us onward,
Filled with your power, we ride the empty air.

Let not our freedom scorn the needs of others -
We climb the clouds until our strong heart sings -
May we enfold our sisters and our brothers,
Till all are strong, till all have eagles' wings.

Our Mother who is within us
we celebrate your many names.
Your wisdom come.
Your will be done,
unfolding from the depths within us.
Each day you give us all that we need.
You remind us of our limits
and we let go.
You support us in our power
and we act with courage.
For you are the dwelling place within us

the empowerment around us
and the celebration among us
now and for ever. Amen

blessing

If here, you have found freedom, take it with you into the world.

If you have found comfort, go and share it with others.

If you have dreamed dreams, help one another, that they may come true.

If you have known love and unity, give some back to a bruised and hurting
world.

May you stay safe in the Way of Christ, and may you be blessed by his Spirit
this day and always.