

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
First Sunday in Lent – March 5, 2017 - Communion
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

For Reflection

"Isis was worshipped as the ideal mother and wife as well as the patroness of nature and magic. She was the friend of slaves, sinners, artisans and the downtrodden, but she also listened to the prayers of the wealthy, maidens, aristocrats and rulers. Isis is often depicted as the mother of Horus, the falcon-headed deity associated with king and kingship (although in some traditions Horus's mother was Hathor). Isis is also known as protector of the dead and goddess of children."

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isis>

"I, Isis, am all that has been, that is or shall be; no mortal man hath ever me unveiled."

- The Goddess Isis originated in Egypt and has this inscribed on Her temple in Sais * <http://www.goddess.ws/isis.html>

The Real Isis

Every time I hear the word "ISIS" spoken on the news I cringe. I deeply appreciated Obama's efforts to refer to the terrorist organization (known for kidnapping western journalists and aid workers as part of their tactics) as "Daesh".

ISIS is an acronym for the English words "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria."

DAESH is an acronym for the Arabic "al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham" and is a pejorative term... "Depending on how it is conjugated in Arabic, [Daesh] can mean anything from 'to trample down and crush' to 'a bigot who imposes his view on others.'"

<https://newrepublic.com/minutes/123909/world-leaders-have-taken-to-calling-isis-daesh-a-word-the-islamic-state-hates>

As you can imagine, the group hates the name. They should learn to tweet their displeasure.

The reason I cringe when I hear them referred to as ISIS is that it tars the name of an ancient mythical Egyptian Goddess Iset – known in Greek as Isis. She can be documented as far back as the Fifth Dynasty of pharaohs who reigned from approximately 2494 to 2345 BCE.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifth_Dynasty_of_Egypt

That's **4500** years ago. And documentation doesn't take into account the oral traditions which reach back into the evolution of civilization.

In a nutshell, she is described this way:

Isis was worshipped as the ideal mother and wife as well as the patroness of nature and magic. She was the friend of slaves, sinners, artisans and the downtrodden, but she also listened to the prayers of the wealthy, maidens, aristocrats and rulers. Isis is often depicted as the mother of Horus, the falcon-headed deity associated with king and kingship... Isis is also known as protector of the dead and goddess of children.

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isis>

Even this description does her a disservice. Isis is one of the greatest Gods that has ever been worshipped throughout time, across continents – to this day. She was the: ...first daughter of Geb, god of the Earth, and Nut, goddess of the Sky...

Isis' name was originally written with the signs of a throne seat...a bread loaf and a sitting woman. A second version of the original was also written with the throne seat and the bread loaf, but ended with an egg symbol...

The throne seat sign in her name might point to a functional role as a goddess of kingship, as the maternal protector of the ruling king. Thus, her name could mean "she of the kings' throne". But all other Egyptian deities have names that point to clear cosmological or nature elemental roles (Râ = the sun; Ma'at = justice and world order), thus the name of Isis shouldn't be connected to the king himself. **The throne seat symbol might alternatively point to a meaning as "throne-mother of the gods", making her the highest and most powerful goddess before all other gods. This in turn would supply a very old existence of Isis, long before her first mentioning during the late Old Kingdom...** A third possible meaning might be hidden in the egg-symbol...[which] always represented motherhood, implying a maternal role of Isis. Her name could mean "mother goddess", pointing to her later... role as the mother of Horus.

There are many versions of her story. One of the oldest tells of her marriage to her brother Osiris, the murder and dismemberment of Osiris (representing natural order) by their brother Set (representing violence and chaos), the use of her husband's phallus to impregnate herself post-mortem, the birth of their son Horus - who becomes Set's new rival for the throne. In order to work what is referred to as "magic" in Wikipedia - Isis actually tricks the Great God Ra (Creator of the World who creates by speaking the secret name of each thing) into giving her his secret name so that she then has the powers of life and death – which to me goes beyond magic to elemental awesomeness. She causes a poisonous snake to bite Ra – then refuses to give him the antidote until he reveals his secret. The snake is one of the oldest symbols for Isis.

This myth became very important during the Greco-Roman period...It was believed that the Nile River flooded every year because of the tears of sorrow which Isis wept for Osiris. Osiris's death and rebirth was relived each year through rituals. The worship of Isis eventually spread throughout the Greco-

Roman world, continuing until the suppression of paganism in the Christian era. The popular motif of Isis suckling her son Horus, however, lived on in a Christianized context as the popular image of Mary suckling her infant son Jesus from the fifth century onward.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isis#Origins>

Isis was no mere “ideal mother and wife” or “patroness of nature and magic.” She was a cosmological force to be reckoned with. And she was a powerful god in the pantheon that existed when the Hebrew people came to the conclusion that there was only one G-d who was nameless but went by the initials Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey – YHWH – mistakenly pronounced as a name by later Christians as Yahweh.

Isis was serious competition for YHWH. So it is no surprise that the earlier oral version of the Hebrew Creation Story – recorded in Genesis 2-3 – involves a woman and a snake.

In the Priestly narrative (Genesis 1:1-2:4a), God creates the world in six days, culminating in the creation of humanity, then rests on the seventh day. Here, in the Priestly narrative, the emphasis is on the entirety of the universe and its creation.

In an older Jahwist or Jahwist-Elohism source (tenth-ninth centuries BCE) in Genesis 2:4b-25, also known as the "subordinating (of woman) account", Yahweh fashions a man (Heb. adam, "man" or "mankind", Genesis 2:4–7, from the dust (Heb. adamah) and blows the breath of life into his nostrils. Here, in the Jahwist narrative, the emphasis is on the Earth within the universe, and humankind's residence on the Earth. Contrast, for example, the order of terms in Genesis 1:1 where it says that God made the "heavens and the Earth" with Genesis 2:4 where it says "God made the Earth and the heavens".[2]:15

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_and_Eve

And then there is Eve.

Eve in Hebrew is Ḥawwāh, meaning "living one" or "source of life", and is related to ḥāyâ, "to live". The name derives from the Semitic root ḥyw... The goddess Asherah, wife of El, mother of the elohim from the first millennium BCE was given the title Chawat, from which the name Hawwah in Aramaic was derived, Eve in English.

It has been suggested that the Hebrew name Eve (חַוָּה) also bears resemblance to an Aramaic word for "snake" (Old Aramaic language חוּה)

In the Book of Genesis of the Hebrew Bible, the first human female is called אִשָּׁה, isha (woman) by the first human man, Adam. She is created by Elohim from the man's rib. The origin of this motif is compared to the Sumerian myth in which the goddess Ninhursag created a beautiful garden full of lush vegetation and fruit trees, called Edinu, in Dilmun, the Sumerian earthly Paradise, a place

which the Sumerians believed to exist to the east of their own land, beyond the sea.

Ninhursag charged Enki, **her lover and half brother**, with controlling the wild animals and tending the garden, but Enki became curious about the garden, and his assistant, Adapa, selected seven plants (eight in some version) and offered them to Enki, who ate them.

This enraged Ninhursag, and she caused Enki to fall ill. **Enki felt pain in his rib, which is a pun in Sumerian, as the word "ti" means both "rib" and "life".**

The other deities persuaded Ninhursag to relent.

Ninhursag then **created a new goddess (seven or eight to heal his seven or eight ailing organs, including his rib),**

who was named Ninti, (a name composed of "Nin", or "lady", and "ti", and which may be translated both as "Lady of Living" and "Lady of the Rib"), to cure Enki.

Some scholars suggest that this served as the basis for the story of Eve as "the mother of life" and lady of the rib, created from Adam's rib in the Book of Genesis. Neither Ninhursag nor Ninti are exact parallels of Eve... however, given that the pun with rib is present only in Sumerian, linguistic criticism places the Sumerian account as the more ancient and therefore, a possible narrative influence on the Judeo-Christian story of creation.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eve>

But the snake. Remember the snake. The snake was the means by which Isis stole the secrets of life and death from the Creator Ra. In our Genesis story, the snake is "crafty," tempts Eve with the possibility that she "**will be like God, knowing good and evil.**" And Eve chooses to defy her Creator – steal his wisdom – share it with her partner – only to suffer the cosmic consequences. It is a tale that critiques those who would follow and worship Isis – turns Isis and her symbols into enemies of YHWH – and demands that YHWH be worshipped as the only and One G-d of All. To do otherwise is to suffer great consequences.

The presence of powerful women – in myth and reality – is not new on this planet. The life-giving powers of women have baffled and threatened male humans for millennia. The construction of myths and social structures intended to suppress female humans is as old as the dirt we stand upon. The fight over who controls a woman's body, the un-funding of Planned Parenthood and the silencing of powerful women's voices in government and society as a whole – is rooted in the myths of Isis and Eve – Asherah and Ninhursag.

Isis is no terrorist organization. She is the Throne-Mother-of-the-Gods – the shadow behind Mother Mary suckling her child, Jesus – the power that resurrects the Nile every year – the woman who flies in the face of the Male Creator, impregnates herself, and controls her own destiny.

This is The Real Isis.

May her story give hope to all humans – that ALL of us may control our own destinies.

Blessed Be.

Children's Time "Lilith, the First Woman" from But God Remembered
by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso

Scripture Reading for Sunday March 5, 2017 – First Sunday in Lent – Year A

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."...

3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'"

4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

[://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eve](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eve)