

Theotokos

This painting is titled “Theotokos” or God-bearer. It is my version of the Nativity and includes the usual angels, shepherds, kings and a star. The most significant difference is that my baby Jesus is not swaddled and resting in a manger of hay. Instead, we encounter this incredible birthing event as it happens. We are compelled to acknowledge that Jesus was ensconced in the body of a woman. That Divinity, expressed by the light of the star, enveloped both him and his mother, co-mingling the human and holy. God entered into us and into our world which is filled with both beauty and suffering. This is **Incarnation**. Incarnation is why people matter and why stuff matters. I think that the stuff of this earth, such as nature, is imbued with sacredness and that we humans benefit by connecting to it in order to connect to God. Yes, God is spirit, but God is not ethereal. This concept underlies our desire and need for ritual and sacrament as a way to connect. We use the stuff of nature to make art in the making special of objects and movements and sounds (think drumming, dancing, masks, sculpture, instruments, singing, Eucharist, and so on.) All of these things help us integrate our spiritual longing with the unseen Lover of our souls.

Also embedded in this painting is the good news of **Immanuel**. God is with us! We are not left alone as vagrants on this earth journey. Rather, we have assurance of God’s presence. In all of our difficulties and in all of the unanswered questions, God is with us. This is my way of being with suffering. I can’t explain pain or offer answers to the many “Why” questions, but I experience that we are not abandoned to ourselves in all of the hurting, waiting and unknowing. One practical application of this is collaboration. I choose to exercise a spirit of collaboration rather than competition with a goal of providing the most excellent care. People within an organization and “across town” share with one another ideas, lesson plans, procedures and practices that they find most efficacious so that both individuals and the larger field can grow and prosper. We are in this {life} together.

The painting also suggests the concept of **Imago Dei**. Because we are vessels holding the image of God, we have incredible value and potential to the Creator and because of that we can value ourselves and each other. This is one of my spiritual care mantras: “You are loved and you matter.” Because of Imago Dei every person counts and is deserving of the dignity, respect and care which informs ethics. In spiritual care this is the impetus to be inclusive and respectful of others’ autonomy and sense of self. This would also include the practice of confidentiality as a way to honor people.