

Sibyls Service 25 January 2024

[Lord of the Dance](#)

So let us quieten our minds and hearts and let our souls be still and open to God's presence in us and among us.

Our help is in the name of the Lord

All who made heaven and earth.

All Most merciful God,

we confess to you,

before the whole company of heaven and one another,

that we have sinned in thought, word and deed

and in what we have failed to do.

Forgive us our sins,

heal us by your Spirit

and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen.

O God, make speed to save us.





All O Lord, make haste to help us.









**All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.
Alleluia.**





Before the ending of the day,
Creator of the world, we pray
That you, with steadfast love, would keep
Your watch around us while we sleep.
From evil dreams defend our sight,
From fears and terrors of the night;
Tread underfoot our deadly foe

That we no sinful thought may know.
O Father, that we ask be done
Through Jesus Christ, your only Son;
And Holy Spirit, by whose breath
Our souls are raised to life from death.

Psalm 91

- 1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High 
and abides under the shadow of the Almighty,
- 2 Shall say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my stronghold, 
my God, in whom I put my trust.'
- 3 For he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler 
and from the deadly pestilence.
- 4 He shall cover you with his wings
and you shall be safe under his feathers; 
his faithfulness shall be your shield and buckler.

- 5 You shall not be afraid of any terror by night, 
nor of the arrow that flies by day;
- 6 Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, 
nor of the sickness that destroys at noonday.
- 7 Though a thousand fall at your side
and ten thousand at your right hand, 
yet it shall not come near you.
- 8 Your eyes have only to behold 
to see the reward of the wicked.
- 9 Because you have made the Lord your refuge 
and the Most High your stronghold,
- 10 There shall no evil happen to you, 
neither shall any plague come near your tent.
- 11 For he shall give his angels charge over you, 
to keep you in all your ways.
- 12 They shall bear you in their hands, 
lest you dash your foot against a stone.

- 13 You shall tread upon the lion and adder; 
the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.
- 14 Because they have set their love upon me,
therefore will I deliver them; 
I will lift them up, because they know my name.
- 15 They will call upon me and I will answer them; 
I am with them in trouble,
I will deliver them and bring them to honour.
- 16 With long life will I satisfy them 
and show them my salvation.

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

All Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

For you have redeemed me, Lord God of truth.

All Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.

All Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

**All Save us, O Lord, while waking,
and guard us while sleeping,
that awake we may watch with Christ
and asleep may rest in peace.**

- 1 Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: ◇
your word has been fulfilled.
- 2 My own eyes have seen the salvation ◇
which you have prepared in the sight of every people;
- 3 A light to reveal you to the nations ◇
and the glory of your people Israel.

Luke 2.29-32

All **Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

All **Save us, O Lord, while waking,
and guard us while sleeping,
that awake we may watch with Christ
and asleep may rest in peace.**

Reflection

I recently read a book called "Him" by Geoff Ryman. It imagines a Jesus assigned female at birth but identifying as a boy. So a trans masc Jesus. His family dynamics are quite complicated by virtue not only of being trans but of being conceived by the Holy Spirit and therefore having two fathers as well as a mother. It's suggested, not very convincingly, that a child born by parthenogenesis is bound to be female, a sort of clone of the mother. Be that as it may, Maryam the mother struggles to accept that her daughter is actually her son. He refuses to wear female clothes or to conform to the strict code governing gendered behaviour. Maryam understands that her child has some special destiny but not that he has to transition to achieve it. It becomes clear as he grows up that he is subverting not only gender norms but the entire system of law and belief on which the Jewish society in which he lives is built. He begins his public ministry and his mother and brother and sister follow him as he gathers followers and heads for Jerusalem. The story has him performing many of the parables and miracles recorded in the Gospels. He is duly arrested and brought before Caiaphas, Herod and Pilate, all of whom in this telling are keen to release him. They just want him to shut up, stop causing trouble and return quietly to exile in Nazareth. He refuses to be quiet or renounce any part of his teaching. He is sentenced to death by crucifixion. But there is a way out for him. Women cannot be crucified. His mother, in anguish, says: "Crucify a man if you like but this person is a woman...she calls herself

Yehush but she was born Avigayil.” To prove this one way or the other soldiers start to cut off his clothing. The book says: “The swords cut the cloth. The ground rocked. The sky blinked. People cried, seizing each other’s hands, felt giddy. Then the shadow that has passed over the sky cleared and Maryam felt a gathering sense of dread.” Herod’s face creases with amusement as he says “Behold the man.” By a miracle the body of Yehush has been transformed. It was necessary for the crucifixion to happen, for God to learn pain.

Does having a trans Jesus help in our understanding of Jesus or of ourselves? Well it is one answer to the question Susannah Cornwall grappled with at length in her book “Constructive Theology and Gender Variance”, the question whether it is possible to have an identity in Christ and a transgender identity. The idea of Jesus being trans himself, in an alternate reality, is not at all incoherent or implausible. After all, the Jesus of our world, of the Gospels, clearly had a gender identity different to that which was assigned at birth, since God both includes and transcends all genders. And Jesus was at pains to keep his actual identity hidden, revealing himself, as at the Transfiguration, only to a chosen few. Many trans people, including some Sibyls, including perhaps some present amongst us now, are having to live lives of painful secrecy and repression. May they take comfort from the example of Jesus who kept his glory concealed or revealed only in glimpses; who suffered an

agonising death in human and masculine form before being fully revealed in his glorified and imperishable body.....and even after his resurrection, some doubted his authenticity or failed to recognise him. Of course the life of Christ is the paradigm or archetype of all human life but I sometimes feel that his life has a pattern and meaning to which trans people are able more easily than others to relate. Maybe that is a part of the gift of being trans.....the blessing of letting go of the status and privilege that cis people enjoy, and of the false self that has maybe dominated our lives for many years....it places us firmly on the path of descent where we share the pain of God and also the glory of God as we wait in joyful hope for our final transition, our transformation into perfect forms where body and spirit are perfectly united and there is an end to all pain, all suffering and all tears. Amen.

Prayers

Dear Lord, we thank you for bringing us together in this act of worship and loving unity. We ask for your blessing on all our fellow Sibyls, their families and all trans people especially those experiencing persecution, exclusion and rejection.

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

Dear Lord, we bring to you in prayer the needs of all who are sick or in distress in mind, body or spirit, especially those known to us - let us pray now silently or aloud for their needs.

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

Dear Lord, we pray for all who are trapped in closets of various kinds that you may give us grace and courage to emerge and grow into fuller flourishing as your blessed and beloved children.

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

Dear Lord, we pray for our government and all governments that they may exercise power with wisdom and compassion and understanding of the needs of all who are oppressed, marginalised and scapegoated.

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

Dear Lord, we pray for our churches, especially those where trans people are not affirmed and fully included. We pray also for trans people who are ordained or in positions of leadership in the churches that you may strengthen them and inspire them to continue their faithful witness to your inclusive, unconditional love.

Lord in your mercy

All Hear our prayer

Visit this place, O Lord, we pray,
and drive far from it the snares of the enemy;
may your holy angels dwell with us and guard us in peace,
and may your blessing be always upon us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Conclusion

In peace we will lie down and sleep;

All for you alone, Lord, make us dwell in safety.

Abide with us, Lord Jesus,

All for the night is at hand and the day is now past.

As the night watch looks for the morning,

All so do we look for you, O Christ.

The Lord bless us and watch over us;

the Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us;

the Lord look kindly on us and give us peace.

All Amen.

[The Day Thou Gavest Lord is Ended](#)