

The Sacred Oneness

By Linda Rex

January 14, 2024, 2nd Sunday | Epiphany—During this season of Epiphany, we rehearse the journey of the magi who followed a star to find the infant born to be king. When they reached Bethlehem, Jesus was probably about two years old and was living in a home with his parents. These men from the east were gifted people who studied the stars, and were curious enough to follow a particular star to the home of Jesus, where they presented the child with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. All of these gifts became very helpful, no doubt, when Jesus and his parents had to flee Judea, going to Egypt to avoid having the child killed by the vengeful King Herod.

It is significant that the magi recognized and worshiped Jesus as a king, when the king of Judea sought instead to have him killed. The magi had an “epiphany” that King Herod did not have, and allowed it to guide them to Jesus’ feet to worship and honor him. In the gospel passage for today, John 1:43–51, Nathanael had an epiphany as well, recognizing who Jesus was as the Son of God in human flesh. In the Psalm for this Sunday, Psalm 139:1–6, 13–18, we learn how the Spirit is ever present and near to each of us in every moment and circumstance. So, as Nathanael learned, there is no deep secret Jesus doesn’t already know and no hidden motive Jesus isn’t already aware of.

Our New Testament passage today gives us insight about who Jesus is and what this says about our human bodies, and what it means to be united with Christ by the Spirit. The apostle Paul says to the Corinthians, “Do you not realize that your body by design is the sacred shrine of the spirit of God; he echoes God within you. Your body does not even belong to you in the first place” (1 Cor. 6:19, *Mirror Bible*). When we come to faith in Christ, we are united with Christ, and we find that we already live in our resurrection bodies, in the sense of the already-not-yet of God’s kingdom. We’re not glorified yet, but we do live “in Christ” even now, by faith.

Being united with Christ, sharing in his risen, glorified body, has great significance for us even today. It teaches us the great value God places on our human body:

- ❖ The Son of God/Word of God left the dignities of heaven to take on a human body in Jesus Christ, forging within us the capacity for God to dwell within man.
- ❖ The Son of God/Word of God/Jesus allowed himself while he was in a body to be beaten, abused, and crucified and killed for our sake.
- ❖ God raised the dead body of the Son of God/Word of God/Jesus and in Jesus Christ, our human flesh united with Christ’s body, stands in face-to-face oneness with his Father in the Spirit.
- ❖ Jesus sent the Spirit from the Father to indwell in our human body here on earth, so that, as we put our trust in him, we can be united with God in Christ by the Spirit. As we receive his gift of the indwelling Spirit, our body becomes the sacred dwelling of the Triune God. Together with other believers, we are bound together in sacred oneness as the Body of Christ, the Church.

Because God values our bodies this much, we ought to value them as well, using them as God intended, as the place of oneness with God through Jesus in the Spirit, oneness in covenant relationship with God and our spouse, and not for any other purpose.

We are embodied spirits. Our body is a sacred space for the Spirit to indwell, and we are meant to indwell God through Jesus by the Spirit. Our body was created to enjoy and take pleasure in many things (including sex, alcohol, and food), but was not designed by God for self-indulgence or self-pleasure, for gluttony, drunkenness, or immorality, but for oneness with God and others through Christ in the Spirit. Our volition or decision-making is meant to be governed by the

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Spirit and the Word of God, Jesus Christ. In regard to things such as sex, as well as food or intoxicants, our union with Christ means we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit, with God's presence guiding and directing us enabling us to follow Christ's lead, and we are not meant to be controlled by a substance, an intoxicant, an evil influence, or other people.

When we focus on the spiritual realities Paul reveals in this text, we see that anything we do with the human body needs to be seen through the lens of union with Christ. Uniquely, though, when it comes to sex, our union with God in Christ by the Spirit means that our body is a sacred shrine designed for intimate communion with God and with our covenant partner. Any animal being can have sex or commit sexual actions, but not every one of them can have a spiritual/physical/emotional union with God in which they are joined with another person and made one, as was intended in the covenant love God ordained for us to have with him and between spouses.

Whatever we do with the human body, then, must be evaluated within the context of our union with Christ, thus making any sexual encounter other than covenant union between spouses an extreme violation of that union. This is especially horrifically true in cases of objectifying women and children in pornography, or violating another human being through rape or molestation. Even though all is forgiven and reconciled in Christ, certain things were never meant to be and so they have painful, difficult, and even deadly consequences—they are not God's best for us and cause great suffering for ourselves and for others. And we see and experience these consequences throughout our lives, whether they are due to our own choices or the choices of others.

Awakening to a realization of who Jesus is for us as our Lord and Savior enables us to begin to enjoy all the benefits of God's indwelling presence by his Spirit. We begin to hear Jesus' own "Abba, Father" in our souls, and we experience a closeness to God as part of our everyday lives. Our ability to experience this oneness with God through Jesus in the Spirit grows as we come to a deeper epiphany of the indwelling presence of God, and begin to participate in the union of Father, Son, and Spirit by offering our bodies up to be temples of the Spirit they are meant to be, all for God's glory. And together, as members of the body of Christ, the Church, we become a more beautiful temple of the Spirit, joined together in the sacred oneness we were always meant to be a part of since before time began.

Father, Son, Spirit, thank you for valuing our human bodies so much that you would go to such extremes to heal, restore, renew them, and unite our flesh with your own in Jesus. Grant us the grace to offer our bodies up to you again as the sacred spaces they were meant to be, through Jesus and by your Spirit. Amen.

"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, 'The two shall become one flesh.' But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 NASB