

## Miracle of Life, Love and Light

Mother was raised Methodist and my father was raised Catholic but neither were religious when they were married. They were married by the Justice of the Peace and by God's grace my sister and I were baptized in a American-Danish Lutheran Church in Minneapolis Minnesota as infants.

My guess is the decision was more about my grandparents since my great grandfather was from Denmark and my great grand mother was an American Lutheran. My parents divorced when I was young. I do recall going to Church a few times before the divorce as a child but I had no idea what it was. I recall drawing pictures on a piece of paper from the pew and passing them to my sister.

When my parents divorced I had to live with my father who was atheist. I had very little to no contact on a yearly basis with my mother until after I had my own children. Not long after my parents divorce my dad remarried to my step-mom. She was raised Episcopalian. However, the cross of having a severely handicapped child and her first husband abandoning them had reduced her faith to, Why would a "God" who's loving do this to me?. Now my dad was not only atheist he was rather resentful and hateful towards Catholics as I recall.

My religious education growing up consisted of one day when I was around the ages of 10 to 13 years old I recall watching TV and my dad walked in, wanted to talk to me and he even turned off the TV. He said to me that Jesus was a man who lived a long time ago who gave a lot of people hope. Then he walked off. I was curious about this person though and even took the effort to get up to go find my dad to learn more about this man. All my dad said to me was that some people thought he was the son of God and then my dad left the house immediately to go somewhere. I remember standing there alone pondering "Who's God?". Details, right?

I had two friends who invited me to church a few times and I went but had no idea what they were talking about. My dad was often gone on trips as a pilot and I spent much of my free time drawing. I recall one of my favorite pictures to draw and paint was a painting I had seen at a friends home of a women wearing a veil, the sun shining brightly behind her and standing above the Earth on clouds with her arm out stretched and a dove taking flight from her hand. Now I know that this could have only been the Blessed Mother Mary praying over me, as though God wanted me to know that he always wanted me to be Catholic.

When my grandmother passed away I attended her funeral with my dad. I recall as soon as we parked the car in the parking lot of the Church he started to bad mouth the Catholic Church, through the parking lot and into a reception area where he continued his berating the Catholic Church. Despite my agnosticism his lack of kindness had become so bad that I was becoming embarrassed by his speaking so plainly mean about these people who are so kind to host this reception and have a

ceremony for my grandmother. I had become so distressed that I could not even look at him anymore and my eyes were filling with tears and finally he walked away. One of the church volunteers saw me immediately and he came to ask me if I was ok. Of course I said that I was as I admired his kindness.

Through my youth and college years I generally admired Christians. I remember telling a friend that it would be great if there really was a heaven! But I did not believe. I had learned that Christmas Santa was a lie, the Easter bunny was a lie, Halloween ghosts and monsters were not real....at one point I had even passed off reindeers as a lie too...yes, that was embarrassing.

Why would I believe in the existence of a "God" from people who made up lies about Santa, Easter bunnies, and goblins and gools to celebrate their "faith"? However, I could not argue one way or the other about the existence of God. I had no proof that God did exist neither could I prove that he did not exist. Science was more believable, measurable and tangible explanation for me to understand. Although, I found most Christians exceptionally kind and friendly and I thought their faith was kind of sweet.

So, I remained respectful and I kept to myself what I thought of Christian beliefs unless someone tried to evangelize me. I even recall attempting to be supporting to a friend who I worked and was questioning his faith. This young man was a fundamentalist Baptist who had gone to a debate about evolution.

I was the only one who did not go being agnostic, and it did not matter to me what the debtors said because I was agnostic and I believed in evolution anyways. However, when the Christian came back his faith had been shaken and I didn't know what came over me but I turned to him (who was a programmer) and I said if you were an almighty, all powerful all knowing God would you sit around saying blue hair brown eyes tall or would you write a program and then tweak it as you needed?

He smiled big and said thanks. He tried to convert me but I would not have it. I could not understand why Christians were not united and it bothered me. I had also my father's atheist teachings in me like why would a loving God pit one person's faith against another and that was one question that the few Christians who tried to evangelize me never answered...Although, funny as it may sound, if they would have just invited me to Church with them, I probably would have gone.

When I was ready to get married I insisted that my atheist fiancé and I be married in a Church service by a priest or a pastor. My fiancé was raised Catholic although he had never been practicing as far as I knew. I first called the Catholic Church to marry us but they refused a beach ceremony. So, I called around Lutheran pastors until I found one who would marry us on the beach. He requested that we have marriage counseling before hand. He either forgot to ask us if we even believed in God or we lied and said we did so we could get married; there wasn't a quiz. We smiled and nodded to whatever he had to say, then we were married on the beach. I don't recall anything form the classes except if I would let my fiancé be head of the

house. I think my fiancé was kind of surprised I said yes being that I was more of a gentleman loving feminist for equal rights kind of a gal.

My husband and I had a lot of marital problems after a couple of years. I wanted to start a family and he still wanted to live the college party life. He became increasingly abusive and after he became physically abusive I asked him to get help or I would leave. He refused and I left. After a few months he went and got help and we got back together. There were still problems though. Not long after we got back together I found out that I was pregnant. I was so excited. I was confronted with the decision of whether to have the child baptized or not.

After reviewing my own childhood and the awkwardness of feeling left out on conversations when people were talking about religion because my parents said I could decide about religion for myself but never taught me about Christianity. How am I suppose to make a decision about something I know nothing about, kind of hard to make a decision like that without being educated. I also wanted to respect those in our family who were Christian and I did not feel like just because I was not that was something that I should decide for my children.

I decided that I wanted the children baptized. To honor both my husband's baptism and mine I decided we would visit a Catholic Church and a Lutheran Church. Because I was baptized Lutheran and my husband seemed indifferent to the whole idea we went to a Lutheran Church first. The people seemed kind, it was nice and I liked it. Then I went to the Catholic Church and I was so taken by the reverence and devout nature. I recall seeing people bowing before their God and I thought if there really is a God that is what I would expect people would be doing. Almighty...and I am so little, I bow before you...it just made sense.

I also noticed that because I could not follow what the priest was saying because I had no idea what he was talking about my eyes tended to wander. I was impressed that where ever my eyes and thoughts seemed to wander there was something that pointed me back to God, whether stained glass, statues, or pictures. My husband was not impressed but I was. We signed up for baptism classes so we would be ready once the baby came. The baptism classes were over my head and I don't recall much except there was going to be a candle, white garment and water involved.

The day my son was born was a difficult labor. The epidural made me nauseous and the nausea medicine made me sleep. To make matters worse bats had infested the delivery and nursery so I could hear people screaming. I remember the Dr looking at me and saying don't worry it is just bats and I thought surely he gave me too way too much medicine because I think he just said bats. However, as soon as I held my baby in my arms for the first time everything, the pain, the nausea, the sleep, the bats seemed to fade away and I was just filled with love like I had never known before, it was the light pushing back the darkness in my life.

I immediately knew that this baby in my arms is not a random chance, that this is the miracle of life. I immediately believed that God existed and that this love must be from God.

Our son was baptized and we moved to Dallas. I soon found out that I was pregnant again and wanted to have my baby baptized. Objectively I thought perhaps it was just that one Catholic Church in College Station that had been so devout. So, I again wanted to visit the churches in the area. I visited the Lutheran and felt about the same. I visited the Catholic and was impressed that they were still bowing down on their knees and had that beautiful reverence. This time I considered visiting even more denominations but my husband had ended his patience visiting churches so he said no.

When I soon became pregnant with our 3<sup>rd</sup> child our marriage was going downhill fast and I finally felt like I really needed to become confirmed a Christian and learn how to ask God for help. By the time I was confirmed it was already too late for my marriage. God got the children and I out of what had become a very bad situation. I never intended to marry more than one man and the Church taught only one marriage so I was afraid to leave. Three young children no career or family in the area to help, I didn't know what I would do. A priest, a counselor and the Holy Spirit counseled me to leave so I did.

I would pray but I could not discern what I was supposed to do. In Church I would kneel and offer my self and these children to God for His assistance. The amount of abuse I had endured before I left had become somewhat traumatic and it was very difficult to talk about. I recall seeing an intake counselor for some help at Serenity Counseling. It was so difficult to tell her what happened without crying that I just focused on praying for strength.

I noticed that the counselor was wearing a necklace that looked like it had religious markings that resembled the Blessed Mother. So, I focused on this image and prayed for strength. The image on the necklace looked as though the appearance changed and I could see the Blessed Mother Mary and then the baby Jesus appeared and I recall a bright crescent reflection over their heads. I was very taken by how bright the reflection was because I noticed there was no outside light source. I was so amazed by the appearance that I thought perhaps it might be a figment of my imagination so I looked away and looked back but the Blessed Mother and baby Jesus were still there.

I felt stronger and continued to pray even more earnestly that I needed her to believe and everyone to believe and then I heard God's voice say "Good.". Then there was a flash of light in the room and again I noted that was odd because there was no outside light source. However, I decided to ignore it and continue to talk. The counselor I noticed mouthed the word "Wow" and stood up. She motioned for me to look up and the light fixture above me had fallen open and I realized that was what created the flash of light in the room. I stood up in astonishment and moved

toward the counselor. She looked at me and asked me “Did you see the blessed Mother?”.

I was so shocked that she asked that...like who asks that kind of a question...in all my years never did anyone ask me that. How could she have known to ask me because I did see the blessed Mother! In my lack of spiritual knowledge (being that I had only been Catholic for about 6 months) I was reluctant to tell her because in the home I grew up in if you saw a vision or heard a voice then you must be crazy and Lord knows I did not want the counselor to think I was crazy.

I told her that I did see the Blessed Mother and the baby Jesus. She started to speak in another language and then she looked at me and said I believe you. And I got it! I realized that was my prayer! Oh, how I believed! God had answered my prayer so amazingly despite me being just a mom who knew so little about the faith. Then I realized that God hears everyone, even those who feel like next to nothing.

Really this was a miracle for such an unworthy person as me I felt called to go to church more, read the Bible and really learn the faith. I met a nice group of older ladies who with the Holy Sprit helped me learn about the faith more. I learned that my birthday is the same as the Blessed Mother’s birthday. I was so humbled to learn that my first son’s birthday is the feast day of the annunciation.

The day that God announced to me his presence through the birth of a child is the same day that God announce his presence through a baby to the Blessed Mother. I learned that the vision that I saw at the counselor’s office with the Blessed Mother and the baby Jesus is the Mother of Good Council. And now the more I open myself up to God the more he makes His presence known in me. I believe that all this time He had wanted me to be Catholic. Now he pours his love in me like I never knew possible and I have witnessed so many miracles that I am in awe most every day. Oh, how I believe, God is amazing!

While I grow in my love of the Catholic teachings I still struggle with the lack of unity in Christ and the wide spread dissension of Christians from the teachings of Christ even among our own Catholic parishners. Please pray for the Holy Catholic Church. I pray that my three children (who I give to the Lord), all Christians and I be guided and united in the Holy Spirit of truth. God bless you!