

Divine Motherhood

By
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“My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother; For they will be a graceful ornament on your head, And chains about your neck.”

-Proverbs 1:8-9

As we celebrate Mother’s day this year, I thought it would be good to focus Biblically on why this is a day that we ought to celebrate as a church as well as a culture. Holidays in general are things that help us slow down and focus, collectively on aspects of our lives that have deep significance, but can be overlooked in the day to day repetition of our lives. This would include Christmas, when we meditate on the incarnation of Christ, or Easter when we focus on the Resurrection, but it would also include lesser days that aren’t overtly Christian such as Valentine’s day or Thanksgiving.

While the basis for these days are not necessarily theological, and they aren't directly contained in Scripture, they are nonetheless wonderful reminders for us to not take the common graces of God such as family or romance for granted and to seek God within these things. Mother’s day fits within this category. But for the Christian, while we can celebrate these days alongside our non-believer friends and family members, we don’t simply celebrate the generalized glory of motherhood, we also see God within this celebration and ought to use this time to grow closer to Him and His heart for creation.

So when I title this paper, “Divine motherhood”, I am not trying to suggest that mothers ought to be honored no matter how they parent, or that being a mom is the only way that someone might reflect God within their lives. Instead, my goal here is to elevate our view of motherhood and reveal the cause and purpose of motherhood contained in the heart and character of our wonderful Father in heaven.

The Feminine Image Of God

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

-Genesis 1:27-28

It might sound odd to say that motherhood is reflective of God since He is exclusively called “Father” and never “Mother”. However, in this passage we see that the overall intent and purpose for mankind is to bear the divine image of God. This doesn’t mean that we in some way “look” like God, since God is spirit and not made of matter as we are. Instead it is to teach us of our overall purpose on this earth which is to reflect the invisible attributes of God to His visible creation. While there are many ways that we can do this, such as through exercising our rational will, being moral agents, operating in love towards others and so on, what we see specifically in this passage is that this image is reflected both in the masculine as well as the feminine.

While God is always described with masculine pronouns in the Bible, as well as becoming incarnate as a man, we don’t believe that God is “gendered” in the same way that a human being or an animal is gendered. The purpose for gender in the current created order, is for sexual procreation. It would sound odd for us to ascribe gender to a book or a floor, since these things are inanimate and don’t procreate. But it would be equally odd to give gender to a bacteria or germ that procreates without sex for the same reasons. It is the specific binary of gender that allows for the act of procreation to occur through sexual activity. This seems to be why, once man is created male and female in the image of God, the first thing that God tells man to do is to “be fruitful and multiply...”

What that means for us, is that God is not below gender like a germ or a book, but He also doesn’t have a gender like a human being, instead God is beyond gender, in such a way that both the masculine and the feminine reflect something unique about God’s nature. This is why the apostle Paul can say in 1 Corinthians 11:3 “...*the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*” The distinctions of gender help us understand the triune nature of our God. In that God’s nature is expressed equally through the Father and the Son, in such a way that if you were to remove a member of the trinity, He would no longer be God. Just as human nature is expressed equally in the nature of male and female in such a way that if you removed either men or women from the species, we would cease to be human.

But, as Paul mentions this dichotomy in the context of hierarchy and submission, we can know that men reflect God the Father in this sense, and women reflect God the Son. Not that one is superior to the other, but that this hierarchy within the trinity is expressed through gender differences in mankind, made most manifest in the marriage relationship. It is for this reason that God is always described as being “male”, since in the distinction between man and God, we reflect the feminine and God the masculine in that particular hierarchy. There is more to be said about this, but for the purposes of this paper, I only wanted to show that there is a particular honor that women have that is

directly glorifying to God. This glory is shown in their gender in general, but also, very specifically, in their role as mothers.

Born Of God

“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.”

-1 John 3:9

Before we talk about motherhood in specific, I think it is important to establish the importance of the family in general. While God doesn't physically bear children, the act of procreation is communicating something divine. Just as the man and the woman participate with one another to create life, so the Trinity participates with one another for us to be born again. The man plants the seed, and the woman cultivates the life within herself that the child, which will bear her image as well as the image of the father, might be born and nursed with her body. In a similar way, in order for man to be “born of God” the Son had to offer up His body on the cross, that we might receive God's “seed”, namely the Holy Spirit, that we might bear, not the physical image, but the moral image, of our Father in heaven.

This centers marriage and family at the core of human existence. It isn't just one act among many, or one lifestyle among many, it is the very picture of God's redemptive act, and therefore it is right that He has made the family the center of all human community and flourishing. This is a concept that has been widely accepted by all human societies throughout time, until our current culture. For pagan cultures, they actually saw the gods as being sexual beings, one's that, in some way or another, literally birthed all of creation and acted as divine parents for the cosmos. This is why in their cultures, the family was seen as so paramount for all that they did. The family was so important to them, that almost all of them had some form of ancestor worship.

The Christian concept mentioned above did not invalidate the ethic of these pagan cultures, but instead elevated them. The pagans gods were flawed, and weren't seen as very good parents by anyone's standards. While our God is perfect in every way. All the beauty that we see in parenting is true, but as wonderful as they are, they are mere reflections of the perfect love and goodness that our Father in heaven has towards His children. We aren't meant to worship the family, but as we learn to honor the family, we are simultaneously learning to worship the perfect image of God that the family is meant to reflect. But, since it is merely a picture, we should expect that the family will have flaws, some of them will be quite severe. For more traditional cultures, it is almost impossible for them to point out problems within their family, because they have a

worshipful attitude towards the family. They have mistaken the picture for the real thing and therefore can't acknowledge when the family falls short.

The mistake that many have made in the west is to believe that since God is the perfect image, we can do away with the shadow. This has led to a denigration of the family and a lack of respect for our ancestry. When we forget that the family is meant to be a picture of God, it is easy for us to see all errors within our family to be the cause of all our problems. This leads people to unfairly criticize their families, to not give their families the proper respect, and therefore not fight to maintain the integrity of their family structures. We think of ourselves as free floating individuals who can live ungrounded from a family structure, but this isn't true. There are some actual instances in which a family will be destroyed, either through abandonment, or some horrendous sin, like physical or sexual abuse. And if you talk to anyone who has undergone a loss of family it is severely traumatic and not to be talked about casually, as many in our culture do.

When we treat the unity of our families casually, we also fail to understand just how important the family is to our own personal development. It is the family that gives us our first hints into the nature of God, and the first affections that we are blessed with. It is this fact that has made the family the target of every authoritarian regime. The family is seen as being a foil to their plans and so they seek above all else to separate children from the family and allow for the state to function in that role. We have seen this in extreme forms in state indoctrination in Soviet Russia, Hitler's youth in Nazi Germany, the cultural revolution in Communist China, and many other examples. These governments target the family specifically to step in to shape the affections and the passions of the youth that they might establish absolute power. When France was falling into a revolution of its own back in the late 1700's, a British politician named Edmund Burke talked about how they were attacking the family in their culture, or as he called it the "little platoons":

"...To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind. The interests of that portion of social arrangement is a trust in the hands of all those who compose it; and as none but bad men would justify it in abuse, none but traitors would barter it away for their own personal advantage."

-Edmund Burke - "Reflections on The Revolution in France"

I believe a lot of the breakdown in our current culture can be traced back to the breakdown of the family. And I can equally say that this breakdown was both the fault of the individualists that denigrated the importance of the family, as well as the societal

revolutionaries who are seeking to establish a different cultural order in the west. Regardless of why this is happening, as Christians we must give proper respect to the family, otherwise we will be undone in the same way our culture is currently being undone.

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

-Ephesians 6:1-4

When Paul quotes the passage from Exodus for children to honor their parents, he notes that this commandment comes with a promise that “it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” What he is insinuating here, is that when a people group, even within the church, fails to give proper respect to the family, it undermines the fundamental longevity of a people to exist long within a given landscape. All the cultures that I mentioned earlier did not last long, they all fell apart.

One of the reasons why the church has remained so strong throughout the centuries is because they have historically honored the family and sought to remind Christians of the divine picture the family is meant to reflect. Once again, we are not supposed to worship the family, but we are to give it its proper respect. Unfortunately there will be legitimate reasons for a family to fall apart, Jesus even tells His followers that they might split up their families through their decision to follow Him. But this should be seen as a tragedy, a horrible outcome to be avoided at all costs. If we as Christians forget this lesson, we too will be just as shaky as our surrounding culture. With that being said, let’s talk about the specific things that mother’s do to glorify God within the family, and next month I will write a separate essay for father’s.

Born For God

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

-Colossians 1:15-18

It is important for us to remember that we weren't merely created by God, we were created *for* Him. That means that the heartbeat of our life, and the place that we will find the most fulfillment is in reflecting the glory of God. While there are many ways that we accomplish this goal, it seems that the prime way that this is accomplished for men and women is in the bonds of marriage through child-bearing. It is here that men and women are able to reflect elements of God's love and care for us, not only as our Creator, but our Sustainer, our Savior, and our Father that are done most fully in our capacity as parents.

For women especially, it is their maternal empathy and comfort that I believe God's divine empathy and comfort are most fully shown. I would even go so far to say that in all of God's creation, these attributes can not be shown more fully than in a mother's love and care for her children. Anyone who has witnessed a mother with a newborn will bear me witness on this. It isn't that empathy and comfort are not seen anywhere else, but when you observe a mother with her infant, the godliness of her behavior is so evident and beautiful, that the only word to describe it is miraculous. I want to elaborate on these attributes more fully, but before I can, I want to say a word of warning.

It is because of how beautiful maternal love is that we must be cautious about making an idol out of it and inverting it into something else entirely. If we are truly made *for* God then that means that every part of our being is for Him, and not for us. When we take something that God has given us in order that we might enjoy Him in His creation, and we turn it into an end unto itself and not a means to glorify Him, then we have perverted it from its intended purpose and turned it into something ugly as opposed to something beautiful.

In C.S. Lewis' excellent book "The Great Divorce" he describes a mother that has made this mistake. One of his characters observes her fate and says this:

"There's something in natural affection which will lead it on to eternal love more easily than natural appetite could be led on. But there's also something in it which makes it easier to stop at the natural level and mistake it for the heavenly. Brass is mistaken for gold more easily than clay is. And if it finally refuses conversion its corruption will be worse than the corruption of what ye call the lower passions. It is a stronger angel, and therefore, when it falls, a fiercer devil."

-C.S. Lewis - "The Great Divorce"

For most of human history, the danger of maternal love gone wrong was spoken about frequently and in many of our most ancient stories. Many fairy tales like "Snow White", "Cinderella", "Hansel and Gretel", and others warn us powerfully of this perversion. For

many years in our culture, we focused exclusively on negative fathers, and we saw only good in the maternal relationships, until recently. Now books like “I’m Glad My Mom Died” by child actress Jenette McCurdy have shown a light on toxic mothering once again.

As Lewis points out above, it isn’t that mothering is bad in itself that makes it toxic, quite the opposite actually. Like Satan, the more glorious something is, the more mighty it will fall. It is because motherhood is so unbelievably good that it can become so monumentally bad. No matter how good something might be, whenever we make anything our god in place of the true and living God, it will consume us and make us miserable. An extreme example of this would be a drug addict. The more they feed their addiction, the more the addiction feeds on them and takes away more and more of their true selves.

The difference here is that since drug abuse is so obviously bad, it is easy for us to see the importance of avoiding a lifestyle given over to addiction. But, since motherhood is so good, it is much harder for us to see the danger and that makes it that much more difficult for a mom to avoid making her maternal life the sum of her identity. When a mother does this it can easily turn bad for both her and her child.

If a mom begins to fixate upon her children for her main source of meaning and identity, she will find that her kids will very quickly devour her sense of self. The reason for this is that kids have not yet learned that there are other things in this world more important than their needs. Because of this, they are essentially black holes of attention. No matter how much attention you give a child, they always demand more, they are never truly satisfied.

Also, most adults have other things going on in their lives outside of their relationship with you. Because of this, they only have a certain amount of time that they can spend with you, and during that time, they can reciprocate with you in the conversation. They ask you how you are doing, they seek to help make your life easier, and they leave before they have overstayed their welcome. Babies on the other hand have no plans or obligations that aren’t given to them by their parents. They don’t know how to reciprocate, nor could they even if they wanted to, and they also have no other priorities in their life outside of their relationship with you. When you put these factors together, you can see how a mother can easily run herself ragged trying to fully satisfy the needs of her children.

Back in the day, there were natural things that stopped this from happening. If you read Proverbs 31 you realize that ancient women had their hands full, to put it mildly. They

had to go out to the farm every day like the husband. There were no real stores or restaurants, and so mothers were responsible for preparing all food for the household and making all clothing and linen for their families. Beyond that there were no truly effective birth control methods, and a heavy expectation on the women to make big families to help share the workload of the family. When you put this together you can see that ancient women were way too busy to make their kids the center of their being. Today, that is no longer the case. A stay at home mother has the ability to actually spend the vast majority of her day focusing only on her child. But by funneling all of her attention into her child, she is actually emptying herself of her identity and her emotional energy.

This is also detrimental for the kids. When people categorize the millennial generation as well as the new generation Z they always talk about how entitled and lazy these generations are. The shocking part of this, is that these two generations have enjoyed more quality time with their parents than any previous generation. You see, in the ancient world, the parents were so busy that they could only really give a small amount of undivided attention to their kids each day.

This immediately taught kids that they weren't the center of the world, and that they needed to help their parents. They also learned very quickly how to entertain themselves and play with other children throughout the day. Many kids in these previous two generations didn't learn these all important lessons. Instead, they were taught that they really were the center of all attention, that boredom was the responsibility of adults to solve, and that they should only be expected to focus on their own studies, and not help their home. So parents, trying to do the best they could for their kids, unintentionally created the attitudes of entitlement, selfishness, and laziness that are afflicting the current generations. But if mothers can remember the center of their identities are not their children, but God Himself, they can give space to their children and in doing so, better shine forth the glory of God in their maternal relationship.

Divine Empathy

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you..."
-Jeremiah 1:5

The truly unique and amazing part of motherhood is how the mother's body becomes the place where the body of the child is formed. Within this process, as uncomfortable and difficult as it might be, women are developing a powerful connection to their child in which they are learning to intuitively respond to their child's needs without verbal communication. When women are pregnant, they go through intense cravings and food

aversions, in which they are actually “communicating” with their unborn children and learning to seek out the foods that their children need, and avoid the foods that they don’t. This form of intuitive bonding is so powerful, that God uses it to assure Jeremiah of His love for him in Jeremiah’s moment of great doubt.

This bonding continues when the child leaves the womb. After the baby is born, God has designed women to be able to nurse the child on her own body. This bonds the woman even further to her child, giving more and more of her body to serve the needs of her child and drawing them into a nearness that is beyond words. This is again reflective of Christ’s relationship to us.

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands...”

-Isaiah 49:15-16

Notice in this passage that God is likening His care and concern for His people to a mother nursing her child. But, He then makes a prophetic statement that a mother giving of her body to her child in birth and nursing, will be symbolic of an act of love that God would do for His people in which He says that He had “inscribed” them on the palms of His hands. This was prophetic for Isaiah, but it is historic for us. Just as a mother sacrifices her body for her child, so Jesus sacrificed His body for His people.

But, in our culture of comfort and ease, the message of self-sacrifice is no longer seen as aspirational. We instead live in a culture that seeks to avoid suffering at all cost, and to see personal inconvenience as a type of evil. This is why it is so easy for our culture to support a mother’s “right” to abort her own children in the womb to protect her own personal convenience. We don’t see this act as being bad anymore because we have glorified personal well-being over the divine purpose of human life, and that is to glorify the God who made us.

Normaphobia

The unique glories of motherhood, and parenthood in general, are unfortunately under attack in our current culture for various reasons. Some I have already mentioned above, but I think that writer and journalist Mary Harrington summed up the other less nefarious reasons really well in her recent article: “Normaphobia”. In it, she talks about members of our current culture that seek to shame the “norms” of society, some to change the order of our society, and others as a misguided attempt to show compassion to less fortunate people.

The ones who are seeking to change the norms would be people like the feminists in the early 1900's who were trying to shift the norm from women ideally becoming mothers and staying home to raise their children to women competing directly with men in the workforce. The fact that motherhood is such a natural desire for women was well understood by these early feminists, and that is why one of the most consequential feminists of all time, Simone Debevoir said in a 1976 interview that:

"No woman should be authorized to stay home to raise her children. Women should not have that choice, because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one."

She is going against the norm, not because she sees the norm as "unnatural" but because she wants to fundamentally change the nature of women so that they would be oriented towards work outside the home as opposed to mothering within the home. Still others are moved, not by an agenda, but by misplaced compassion. For them, they note that many people unfortunately don't fall into the "norms" of society. Many, for instance, are denied a relationship with their biological mothers for various reasons. So, these people see it as a lack of compassion to declare that being raised and cared for by your biological mother is "normal" because saying this alienates and shames those who were denied this home life.

In Mary Harrington's article, she talks about how we see the word "normal" as offensive because it alludes to the existence of the ideal, and when people aren't living in the "ideal" of a given culture it makes them feel ashamed. Therefore, in the name of tolerance, we have jettisoned the concept of normalcy so that we can protect the feelings of those around us. This has had some pretty extreme side effects, but what she focuses on in the article is how it has affected the children in our society by promoting all forms of motherhood as being equally good. She then talks in specific about surrogacy as being a choice that rich celebrities opt into so that they don't have to go through the pain of childbirth:

"Reality TV star Khloé Kardashian acknowledged this cost with startling frankness recently after acquiring a baby boy by means of surrogacy. She described her taking possession of the baby after his birth as "a transactional experience" that was "not about him," and she admitted that she struggled to bond with him. But with the self-excusing moral flaccidity of the committed Hancockist, Kardashian shied from making the clear ethical inference. "It doesn't mean it is bad or good," she said. "It is just very different."

-Mary Harrington - "Normaphobia"

For Kloe Kardashian to admit that her decision to use a surrogate was “bad” or “abnormal” would be to admit that there is an ideal, and even a purpose to the normal process of pregnancy. But in the name of inclusivity, this language has been scrubbed from the vocabulary of many today. For us as Christians, we believe that all things in this universe, both the good and the bad, are designed by God for His glory, and therefore we do believe that there are more and less ideal ways of living. Taking pregnancy as an example, this doesn’t make the pain and discomfort of pregnancy good in itself, but it does mean it is purposeful.

“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

-Romans 5:3-4

Because we live in a world that is fallen and separated from God, moral formation and guidance happens through tribulation and difficulty. Knowing that a mother is bringing her child into a world of pain and death, it makes sense that God would have that process be difficult and full of pain. It is in this discomfort that a mother is bonding to her child and learning to empathize with her child’s discomfort and pain. Remember that when a child is born, the only form of communication available to them is crying. A mother has to be able to discern the cries of her child intuitively, and sacrifice her time, her sleep, her body, and her comfort in order to soothe and nurse the needs of her baby. This doesn’t mean that the father won’t also have a role in this time, but the role of the father is primarily to support his wife during the first few months of the child’s life, the mother is carrying the brunt of that burden. God has uniquely given mothers the ability to nurse their children with their bodies, the ability to bond directly with their children before they are even out in the world, and the innate sense to respond to the needs of the child immediately.

This level of empathy that is developed during this time is so powerful, that the cries of the child aren’t merely heard by the mother, they are felt. It is actually painful for a mother to hear her child crying, and she would do anything to soothe and comfort the pain of her child. This doesn’t mean that a parent who did not go through this process can’t empathize with their child, simply that this is the powerful effect of mothers going through the painful process of child bearing. While, say the father, or an adopted parent can learn this empathy, it is a little like learning a second language for them and requires a learning curve, while the mother is speaking a primary language with the child that is practically developed during this time of birth and nursing.

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

-Acts 9:4

This is the kind of empathy that Christ has for His people. When He confronts Saul on the road to Damascus, even though Saul had never physically persecuted Christ Himself, Jesus empathized so heavily with His followers, that an evil done to them was actually felt by Him.

Divine Comfort

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

-2 Corinthians 1:3-4

But this empathy doesn't just stay there, it moves mothers to perform a very unique and powerful action, to comfort their children. Comfort is a different action than providing aid for someone, which is something that fathers actually excel at. Giving aid to someone means seeking ways to practically help someone within their pain. While this is a necessary act, many of the tears shed by infants can't actually be "fixed". The discomfort that they experience when they first feel lonely, or start getting their first teeth can't be fixed in a practical way, it requires a physical intimacy that produces confidence and consolation.

When a mother picks up a crying newborn and soothes them in an embrace, this is not an attempt to "fix" the problem that the child has, instead it is communicating intimacy to the child that comforts them in their discomfort and pain. Since this is done through the body, and not intellectually, or practically, this act can't be faked. Someone can't just pick up a crying baby and expect this action alone to comfort them, it is only when the baby experiences genuine love, affection, and empathy that they will receive this comfort in their pain. Because the mother has borne the child in their womb and nursed them on their breasts, offering this comfort through bodily embrace and soothing noises is second nature for them. They can also intuitively know when this is what their children need, as opposed to a feeding or a nap.

This is very difficult for most fathers though. Since mothers have attuned their empathy to their children's needs, when they hear their babies cry, they are drawn in, they want to do this. Most men are "fixers" by nature. And so when a baby is crying for a reason that can't be fixed practically, most men are pushed away by crying. They feel innately helpless and so the crying actually makes them want to distance themselves from the crying child and feel awkward to simply hold their crying infant.

Not only is this comforting to children, but since they can only communicate through crying in their first months of life, and because their other senses are not fully developed, this bodily comfort is actually essential to the development of the child. It is through these first maternal embraces that a baby learns that they are wanted, that they are loved and cared for. Before they even understand how to say the word “love” this powerful and divine concept is being communicated to them through their mothers.

There have been numerous studies on things called “mirror neurons” that show the validity of this, but this is a phenomenon that is very obvious to anyone who has seen a child that has been denied this in their infancy. This can even happen for legitimate reasons, like a baby being born underdeveloped and having to spend a long time in the “Neonatal intensive care unit” or (NICU). While this is necessary to save the life of the child, being placed in an area without this comfort and empathy is actually very damaging to the child emotionally. This concept has been spoken about by many profound authors through time, but I think the person who put it most beautifully was the poet William Wordsworth:

*“...blest the Babe,
Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep
Rocked on his Mother's breast; who with his soul
Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!
For him, in one dear Presence, there exists
A virtue which irradiates and exalts
Objects through widest intercourse of sense.
No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:
Along his infant veins are interfused
The gravitation and the filial bond
Of nature that connect him with the world.
Is there a flower, to which he points with hand
Too weak to gather it, already love
Drawn from love's purest earthly fount for him
Hath beautified that flower; already shades
Of pity cast from inward tenderness
Do fall around him upon aught that bears
Unsightly marks of violence or harm.
Emphatically such a Being lives,
Frail creature as he is, helpless as frail,
An inmate of this active universe.
For feeling has to him imparted power*

*That through the growing faculties of sense
Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
Create, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.”*
-William Wordsworth - “The Prelude”

I don't think there is a line more beautiful in English poetry than “*who with his soul drinks in the feelings of his mother's eye!*” Even though Wordsworth was not a Christian, he saw the divine transcendence of motherhood. He knew that the comfort a mother communicates to her child is not merely emotional or physical, it runs all the way down to her child's soul. It is within our mother's bodies that our bodies were formed, but it is in our mother's arms that our souls are formed.

Many in our culture would shy away from using language like this, because we don't want to shame those who were denied this at birth through no fault of their own. But in our attempts to shield the feelings of those who were denied this beautiful thing, we are denigrating one of the most glorious and miraculous things in all of human existence. A child who was denied this can, through other loving relationships, be made whole from this lack, but we can't delude ourselves, being denied this is a genuine lack. It is within these first moments of life that divine love is first experienced.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”
-Matthew 23:37

When Jesus describes His love and care for His people, He doesn't speak at an intellectual level. He doesn't launch into a long treatise on the nation of Israel and how wonderful and illustrious a history they had. Instead, He merely cries out and compares this desire to comfort with the maternal comfort demonstrated by hens to their chicks. Our God is not One who loves merely by words or promises, He is One that loves powerfully and personally. His love truly does penetrate our very souls and is experienced at every level of our being. While maternal love can't fully express the divine love and comfort that is offered by Christ to His people, it in many ways, is one of the closest things that we have, and that makes it worthy of praise and celebration.