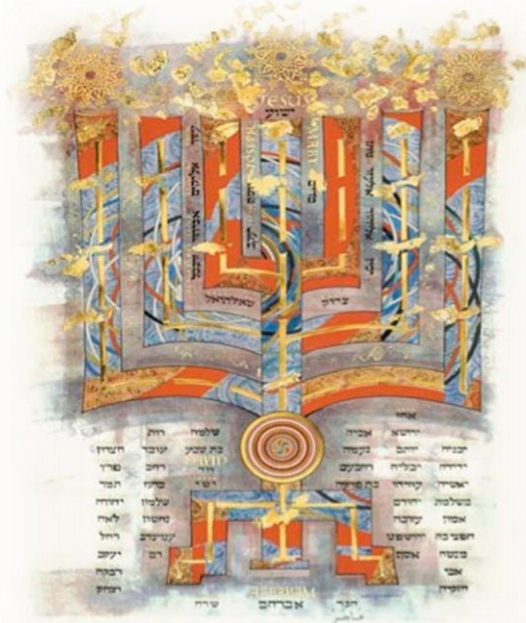


Sunday, December 16 – Third Week of Advent

As we begin this third week of Advent, we are presented with a double blessing: the O Antiphons, which give us titles and images of the One who is the Christ, and Jesus' family tree, as sketched by Matthew in the genealogy that begins his gospel.



While I have always loved the O Antiphons, I've found it difficult to get very excited by the long list of Jesus' ancestors, reaching all the way back to Abraham, except for the fact that Matthew breaks with genealogical tradition and includes four women in his listing, all outsiders, foreigners, people on the margins.

This year my appreciation for Matthew's genealogy is deepened by reflecting on the illumination from the St. John's Bible. This illumination is a family tree structured as both a tree of life and a menorah, the Jewish seven-branched candlestick. Placed at the beginning of the first gospel in the Christian Scriptures, the menorah serves as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments.

The ancestral names flank the base of the menorah/tree and march up between the innermost branches. Abraham's name appears in English and Hebrew, with that of his wife, Sarah, from whom these generations arose. Named in both Arabic and English is Hagar, Sarah's handmaiden, with whom Abraham fathered Ishmael, the ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad, founder of Islam. At the very top is the name of Jesus, in the same lettering style as Abraham, David, Mary, and Joseph. The illumination is not just linear, rising in a straight path to Jesus. Behind the menorah are the swirling chaotic waters of creation, reminding us that Providence is with us in both order and disorder.

A mandala-like cosmic image near the base is common to several religions and implies the universality of the search for God. The intricate gold medallions above the menorah were inspired by illuminations from the Koran. Reflecting our own time, patterns of DNA double helixes between the outer branches emphasize the connectedness of all humanity.

Advent calls us to the margins and the marginalized. From the margins, may we discover our family roots with the people of all generations who yearn for justice, peace, and the fullness of life. Come, O Provident One. In our scarcity, You provide all that we need. You are the God of Abundant Life. You are enough.

Michele Bisbey, CDP