

# Hildegard of Bingen and Us The Way of Creative Possibility

October 31, 2021

We've been going back to listen to saints-persons of the church through whom the light of God shines. This is our 4th and last saint to consider in detail and she is one of whom you most likely have never heard. but whose visions speak breathtakingly to our situation today. To the challenge of our planet's survival, she sees it and says we have within us the creativity to meet it. To our COVID world weariness, she instructs us to sing and claim our courage, to the depression and anxiety, she says we are each light-filled. And she was born a thousand years ago. 100 years before St. Francis of Assisi, 200 years before St. Julian of Norwich, at a time when women were uneducated and their lives unrecorded. And would become the earliest known composer in the Western world. A doctor of the healing arts the author of books of mystical theology and consulted by popes and princes. Yet it took till 1987, 800 years after her death for her work was finally translated into English.

She was born Sybil, the 10th child to a noble German family, and, as was the tradition for a 10th child there and then, was considered too much to care for, and so was dedicated at birth to the church. She began having visions of luminous objects at 3 but soon knew that she was unique in this gift and so hid it

At 8 she was placed in the care of an anchoress, like Julian of Norwich, a woman named Jutta who lived her life in the walls of the church Together with other girls sent there, Hildegard was immersed in scripture in Latin and religious music as the Benedictine monks sang their prayers from early morning to evening. Nurturing her mind and spirit in a way most girls never could.

She took her vows at 15, perhaps then taking the name of Hildegard,

and 23 years later, succeeded Jutta as the spiritual leader and head of the community of women. The visions had continued, but then she received a gift that changed her life, **And it came to pass ... when I was 42 years and 7 months old, that the heavens were opened and a blinding light of exceptional brilliance flowed through my entire brain. And so it kindled my whole heart and breast like a flame, not burning but warming... and suddenly I understood of the meaning of the writings in the books. The brightness I see I call *the shadow of living brightness*, and in that same brightness I sometimes see what I call *the living light*, and for the time I do see it, all sadness and all anguish is taken**

**from me. But although I heard and saw these things, because of doubt and low opinion of myself and because of diverse sayings of men, I refused for a long time a call to write, not out of stubbornness but out of humility.**

She trusted in the divine origins of her luminous visions, but she wanted her church, the church of Rome, to approve of them too, She wrote to a holy man, named Bernard, himself later named a saint, who brought her to the attention of Pope Eugenius who exhorted her to continue her work.

Hildegard would later write: **Dare to declare who you are. It is not far from the shores of silence to the boundaries of speech. The path is not long, but the way is deep. You must not only walk there, you must be prepared to leap.**

Hildegard left the church building where she'd lived her life and settled her community of women, in the Benedictine tradition, in a place near Bingen in the Rhineland, of southwest Germany.

She set her visions down in writing. Two Books: Scivias, which means, Know the Ways of the Lord and The Book of Divine Works, illustrated by the women in her community.

**Divinity, all-knowing and all-powerful, is like a wheel, a circle, a whole that can neither be understood, nor divided, nor begun nor ended. It is easier to gaze into the sun, than into the face of the mystery of God. Such is its beauty and radiance. All Living creatures are from the radiation of God's brilliance, emerging from God like the rays of the sun. The Word is Living Being Spirit All Verdant Greening All Creativity. This Word manifests in every creature. The fire has its flame and praises God. The wind blows the flame and praises God. In the voice we hear the word which praises God. And the word, when heard, praises God. So all of creation is a song of praise to God. Good People, most royal greening verdancy, you shine with radiant light.**

The relatedness of all creation is something she saw in her visions and proclaimed **Everything that is in the heavens, on earth and under the earth is penetrated with relatedness. God has arranged all things in the world in consideration of everything else. Glance at the sun. See the moon and the stars. Gaze at the beauty of earth's greenings. Now, think, What delight God gives to humankind with all these things!**

She saw, over a thousand years before the terrible cost of our living unaware of the earth: **Now in the people that were meant to be green there is no more life of**

**any kind. There is only shriveled barrenness. The winds are burdened by the utterly awful stink of evil, selfish goings-on. Thunderstorms menace. The air belches out the uncleanness of the peoples. The earth itself should not be injured. The earth should not be destroyed. As often as the elements of the world are violated by ill treatment, so God will cleanse them through the sufferings, through the hardships of mankind. All nature is at the disposal of humankind. We are to work with it. For without we cannot survive.**

And yet, she did not evoke despair, for she trusted in God's wisdom and work in us. **Humankind, full of all creative possibilities, is God's vessel, built for God's self, and filled with inspiration so that God's works are perfected in us. Humankind alone is called to assist God, to create with God. With nature's help, humankind can set into creation all that is necessary and life-sustaining."** To remember that every creature is a glittering, glistening mirror of Divinity. Her writing, her music, the art all were inspired by her experience of the Divine

## **Hildegard**

**O Beloved, your way of knowing is amazing, the way you recognize every creature before it appears. the way you gaze in to the face of very human being and see all your works gazing back at you. O, what a miracle to be awake inside your breathing**

She prayed: **Holy Spirit, the life that gives life You are the cause of all movement. You are the breath of all creatures. You are the salve that purifies our souls. You are the ointment that heals our wounds. You are the fire that warms our hearts. You are the light that guides our feet. Let all the world praise you. Holy Wisdom, Soaring Power encompass us with wings unfurled, and carry us, encircling all, above, below and through the world.**

And to those who felt despair, who have lost hope who have lost those they have loved. **You are encircled by the arms of the mystery of God. *Even in a world that's being shipwrecked, remain brave and strong.* I, God, am in your midst. Whoever knows me can never fall. Not in the heights, nor in the depths, not in the breadths. For I am Love, which the vast expanses of evil can never still.**

Hildegard, steeped in music nearly all her life, found words alone could not express the divine revelation. The soul's speech is found in music, and we are to sing. **Sometimes , when we hear a song, we breathe deeply and sigh. This**

**reminds the prophet that the soul arises from heavenly harmony. The soul has something in itself of this music. Underneath all the texts, all the sacred psalms and canticle, these watery varieties of sounds and silences, terrifying, mysterious, whirling and sometimes gestating and gentle must somehow be felt in the pulse, ebb and flow of the music that sings in me. My new song must float like a feather on the breath of God. The song of rejoicing softens hard hearts. It makes tears of godly sorrow flow from them. Singing summons the Holy Spirit. Remember, God rewards not only those who never slip, but also those who bend and fall. Don't stop singing.**

She composed, and yet, she recognized that song begins in God's own being. **Every element has a sound, an original sound from the order of God; all those sounds unite like the harmony from harps and zithers**

Year ago, when I was about 42 and a half years old. I was visiting a friend in Germany. I was struggling with a relationship back home that was making me doubt my worth. I was in a guest house, and was awakened by a voice, singing. I looked at the woman in a bed across the room, she was sound asleep. She hadn't been awakened, it seemed she could hear. But it rang out, and I went to the window to see where it was coming from. But as I listened, I realized that the voice was not an earthly voice, it was a sort of angel song - God's voice. And the song that I was hearing was the name by which God called me my true name, that God has called me now, and will call me forever. Hildegard heard that voice, and I believe you have too, in the quiet places, in your innermost soul, as Hildegard would say, God sings your name to you, reminds you of your worth of the creative possibilities of your life of all our lives, in one great song, together.

*Our Chancel Choir, under the direction of Quinton Jones has learned a composition of Hildegard's O Ignee Spiritus: A Hymn to the Holy Spirit, a song which comes to us from a thousand years ago to invite us to take heart as we enter into this time of remembering those we have loved and lost to the infinite beauty of God, and how we are yet connected to them, as all things on heaven and earth are filled, as she said, with relatedness. We will call out the names of those who were members of this congregation or whose memorial services we led. We shall sound a bell, signifying their name as sung by Divine Love itself to those we love now and forever and light a candle, remembering their lives which shine with radiant light.*

**Patricia Wagner, Maple Grove UMC**