

Epic Narratives

Two poems,
each one telling a version of
the history-long story

A Beautiful Star

– a Christian story based loosely
on a play by Preston Lane

Midsummer Moon

– a 21st Century story based loosely
on the writings of Thomas Berry

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A Beautiful Star

Long before fish swam in the oceans or birds filled the skies with their outstretched wings,
The Ever-Present All-Knowing One decided to have a creation,
With his deep manly voice he separated the dark from the light;
He commanded the sun to light the day and the moon to light the night.
In a day, He created the Earth with its raging seas and majestic mountains;
The rains watered the land, bringing life to the flowers and filling the rivers.
All the animals were formed by His hands and set free to inhabit the Earth.
From the dirt he shaped a man and blew the breath of life into his nostrils.
On the seventh day, the Creator looked over his handiwork.
Seeing Adam and Eve and the beautiful stars above their garden,
He proclaimed, "This is Good!"

All the angels and archangels served the Creator by keeping peace and harmony;
The one who sought personal power and fame was banished to burn forever.
Adam and Eve enjoyed their care-free life in the Garden of Eden
Facing only one constraint: "Avoid eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge."
The angel who had been thrown into the perpetual fires took the form of a snake
And he encouraged Eve to "take just one bite" of the forbidden fruit.
Eve convinced Adam that he, too, need not really obey the only law they were given
And both shared in partaking in the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
The All-Seeing One spoke to the pair, reprimanding them in an inescapable voice
And dooming them to a life of toil and pain outside the Garden,
Proclaiming "You are Bad".

Descendents of the couple evicted from the idyllic garden were fruitful and multiplied,
They moved into cities and villages where commerce and religion flourished.
Strife and corruption erupted as greed for goods and wealth increased,
Though priests called for restraint from strife and compassion for the poor.
The Voice from the Great Beyond called from the thunder clouds to Noah and his family
Warning them to build an ark so that pairs of animals could survive the flood.
Then 40 days and 40 nights of incessant rains flooded the land leaving nothing dry.
All the wicked people were washed from the face of the planet.
Remembering the dove which returned with the olive branch and the rainbow in the sky,
The descendents of Noah would always remain assured of their God's promise
That the "Good will be saved."

Abraham led his tribes from Ur of the Chaldees and provided both vision and leadership,
But his favorite wife, Sarah, bore him no child to secure his lineage.
Though Sarah's age precluded childbirth, an angel appeared to her in the night
To foretell the arrival of Abraham's long-awaited son.
Abraham prized his son above all else and doted him with favors and attention;
Until the Voice in the Winds called for the child to be sacrificed on the mountain.
Filled with remorse coupled with reluctant obedience, Abraham headed for the summit
Carrying wood for the sacrificial fire and rope to bind his offering.
In the final moments before losing his beloved in the flames, a lamb appeared in the bushes
And the ultimately faithful and obedient Abraham's son was spared –
For the obedient will be rewarded.

... And for centuries beautiful stars filled the nighttime sky.

In Nazareth of Galilee, young Mary became betrothed to Joseph the carpenter
Yet to the disdain of their families, Mary discovered that she was pregnant.
An angel of the Almighty appeared to her to announce that hers would be the Son of God
That was coming to bring Peace to all Nations – she should not be afraid.
Both Joseph and Mary struggled to believe that lowly folk like themselves
Had been chosen to bring such glorious salvation into the world.
Casting aside their doubts and anxieties, and in obedience also to Roman decrees
The couple set off to Bethlehem to be counted in the census for taxation.
Though Mary was ready to deliver her child, they could find no room in the inn.
So Joseph prepared the manger in the stable under the stars and
God's blessing arrived for all people.

Seated under the twinkling stars of the cloudless winter nighttime sky,
Faithful shepherds kept careful watch over their restive flocks.
Though undisturbed for countless nights (except for occasional poachers)
On the night of the Beautiful Star the skies were filled with hosts of angels.
The heavenly chorus proclaimed "Peace on Earth – Good Will to All"
And sent the shepherds to visit the new born baby in the humble manger.
Flocks of sheep and herds of cattle joined the shepherds in paying homage
To the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the long-awaited Messiah.
Mary and Joseph tended their first-born child, received the multitudes of guests,
And held memories of angels and shepherds in their hearts, and
All who believed were filled with Hope.

Three wandering wise men from distant kingdoms beyond the eastern rivers
Also gazed on the Beautiful Star and decided to seek the treasure it proclaimed.
While seeking guidance from the local governor, he requested a report of their findings
But an angel of the night advised them to return by another route.
After nights of fervent quest, the Beautiful Star rested over the manger in Bethlehem
Where the Wise Men joined in the celebration of the beautiful baby's birth.
Their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were worthy of presentation to a noble king
And Mary treasured them along with the shepherd's simple songs.
The stable behind the inn was filled with joy and harmony beyond imagination
As friends and strangers, the poor and the wealthy rejoiced to receive God's Gift
And the powerful bowed down to the Prince of Peace.

And so .. 'neath the light of the Beautiful Star on that first Christmas Night,
God sent his only begotten son to heal the pain of separation.
The promise of the rainbow was fulfilled in the incarnation of hope
And the faithfulness of the Virgin would inspire generations to come.
The children of Abraham remembered the obedience of their ancestors
And rejoiced in the promise of a fulfilled life for to those who followed the law.
The baby born in a manger would grow in stature and in favor with God and man
Eventually sending his disciples to preach the good news in every land.
For more than two millennia, in barrios and villages, in cities and towns
Priests and laity would gather to praise God who sent the Child of the Star
And God said, "This, too, is Good."

Midsummer Moon

The moment arrived that energy could no longer contain matter, nor time subsume space
And Is-ness burst free from the bonds of Nothingness as the Universe became manifest.
Echoes of the searing heat remained for epochs in the vastness of cosmic background noise.
After 14 billion years, countless stars, planets and species carry on the cosmic dance.
Great clouds of elemental gasses congealed then ignited to light the skies with stellar flares.
When the flaming giants collapsed, all the life-essential elements were formed.
The wispy arms of the Milky Way galaxy had witnessed countless of these supernovae and
From the element rich debris burst forth a Sun with planets, comets and moons.
A silvery moon soon sailed around the Blue Marble, observing as it circled
That green plants and multicolored flowers emerged, slowly, from the rolling seas
And the Universe embodied Autopoesis, Communion and Differentiation.

In the verdant boundary between the African savannah and the jungle, a bold experiment began.
Walking upright on their hind legs, forest creatures ventured out under the daylight sun.
This new posture allowed vocal chords to produce primal speech and freed arms to carry food.
Women could birth babies with larger heads through their expanded pelvic bones.
As the exploratory urge mounted, the walkers ventured out of Africa to cover Planet Earth.
They harnessed fire for cooking, domesticated animals and physically adapted to locales.
Along lake shores, rivers and sea coasts groups of families settled into the rhythms particular places.
They created languages, epic myths and social forms appropriate to their environments.
Trade flourished among the settlements as groups perfected ways to enhance existing crops.
Mining minerals allowed concentrated buildings and useful tools for growing societies.
While the silvery moon watched the flourishing of a species.

While most people concentrated on their daily tasks essential for growth and survival,
Some heard the Voice of the Unsynonymous and taught truths from the Depths.
Born of a wealthy noble, Siddhartha first saw death and suffering with an immensely opened heart.
Enlightened under a bo tree, the Buddha returned to guide others on an 8-fold path.
As strife and suffering mounted in kingdoms along the Yellow River, wise Confucius looked around
To see profound harmony, the Yin and Yang, whose balance led to peace within and without.
Jesus, the carpenter's son, studied his God's scriptures and heard the call in his heart,
He beckoned each person to serve God, and in his dying transformed death.
Midsummer Moon watched holy men and women transforming interior vision into social form
As increasingly complex societies were held together by rituals and holy days,
And the Universe's drive for communion became self-conscious.

Generally, societies grew and cared for their inhabitants and the environment that surrounded them;
When social pain abounded, some heard the Voice in the Thunder, and led transformation.
American democracy entered its 2nd century with only ½ of its citizens eligible to vote;
Susan B. Anthony led boycotts and lobbying efforts until the Constitution was amended.
Three centuries of British colonial rule left a nation without control of its own destiny,
Mahatma Gandhi turned interior resolve into political action until a new flag flew in the land.
Nelson Mandela's objections to South African apartheid laws landed him in prison;
But his vision for a better way persisted until he became President under new rules.
Midsummer moon shone over times of calm and times of disruption
Affirming both dynamics of organization and collapse in the on-going dance of creativity,
For the Universe knows radical differentiation.

... and for eons Midsummer Moon slid across a starlit sky.

Midsummer Moon felt an extra warm blast, and knew a gentle touch when the Eagle landed.
The Universe crossed a threshold when one species crossed from planet to moon.
Having tapped millenniums worth of fossilized sunlight to fuel its species-specific economy
Some social visionaries warned of global warming and sought simpler lifestyles.
Though oceans surrounded every land, human population centers taxed potable water supplies.
Peace makers sought creative solutions to festering disputes over the precious liquid.
Mother Earth loved all her children but never had a single species so taxed her finite resources,
Voices from every land began to call for new policies and protections.
When consumption and rampant extraction diminished opportunities for the non-human species,
Cries for patterns of sustainable environmental practices fell on receptive ears
And Hope for every species spread across the land.

Social forms forged by isolated tribes and growing nations
Proved inadequate for highly literate societies in a global village.
Educational patterns that focused only on rote memorization and frequent repetition
Gave way to integrated thinking and exploration as internet connectivity opened new vistas.
Global economic calculations had long discounted all environmental effects
But carbon exchanges and renewable energy sources led to new valuations.
Religious leaders reexamined their ancient sources and heeded modern wisdom
In order to reinstate the natural world as a source of Beauty, Awe and Wonder.
Finally, political leadership reflected the diversity of their constituency
And adopted participatory decision-making patterns at all social levels.
And Planet Earth became self-conscious.

In the foot-print on its dusty surface, Midsummer Moon
Felt both the extreme pride and the internal emptiness of the human species.
Centuries of frantic actions to produce more stuff led only to homes full of clutter
Though compassionate ones were advocating simplified living and meaningful activities.
Scientific rationalism split from religious wisdom left both adrift and shallow
Though conscious ones saw the oneness of the Universe, saw that Matter and Spirit are one.
Ancient religious traditions, adrift from originating lifestyles remained in society as hollow practices
Though contemplative ones gave global forms to historic rituals.
Instead of precipitating ongoing strife over whose religious rites were legitimate,
Contemporary saints and sages were inventing inclusive profound practices
In the light of the Midsummer Moon.

Sixty-five million journeys around the sun earlier, Midsummer Moon saw
Ferns and dinosaurs being replaced by flowers and mammals as the Cenozoic Era began.
Although some backward-looking leaders advocated using exclusively technological fixes,
Ever larger numbers of people decided to live in the Ecozoic Era.
The all-pervasive processes of the Universe flourished on the consciousness-rich Planet
As each species found its unique role on the global stage.
New social forms and cultural patterns enabled inclusion of diverse perspectives
As communication channels bridged chasms of distance in the global village.
The Universe took complexity to a new level on Planet Earth and
Midsummer Moon joined in the Cosmic Dance;
And All knew "It was Good".

Why *Midsummer Moon*

The narrative poem *Midsummer Moon* was written as an outline for a stage play telling the history of the Universe in the context of the transformations underway in the 21st Century. During the holiday season of 2006, an original musical by Preston Lane was presented in Greensboro by Triad Stage. The play, *Beautiful Star*, told the biblical narrative of the creation of the world and the history of the Hebrew people as a prelude to the recounting of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. While *Beautiful Star* drew sell-out crowds to a masterful production of a well-written play, some people thought that the story, itself, was less than adequate for the 21st Century. The preceding poem, *A Beautiful Star*, represents an attempt to capture the essence of the play with a similar name. *Midsummer Moon* is written in the same format and tells a parallel story yet emphasizes quite different themes.

The basic purpose of the biblical revelation seems to have been to alter the primordial sense of continuity throughout the Universe. "Within the biblical context, the continuity of divine presence with the natural world was altered by establishing the divine as a transcendent personality creating a world entirely distinct from itself. In addition, the continuity of the divine with the human was altered by the establishment of a covenant relationship based on a juridic model. The continuity between the human community and the natural world was altered by identifying the human as a spiritual being in contrast to all other beings. Only the human really belonged to the sacred community of the redeemed. The previous sense of a multi-species community was diminished."

Thomas Berry – *Evening Thoughts*

For several decades, Greensboro native Thomas Berry has been writing and speaking of the need for a profoundly new way of conceptualizing the human relationship with the Universe in which they live. *Midsummer Moon* draws on Thomas' writings to tell the story of a Universe constantly in the process of creating itself anew. The Universe is understood as a place in which every particle and creature participates in the on-going process of creation. While *Midsummer Moon* focuses on the human element in the Universe's drama, the action takes place within this larger framework.

Such a new story, a fresh way of understanding how the human species got to where it is in the 21st Century and thus how it can move forward into the coming centuries, provides an important foundation for addressing the complex and intricate social, environmental and spiritual problems facing each individual and society in the coming decades. The previous ways of understanding life and the human role in the on-going drama of existence resonate deeply with people who have heard them told over and over since they were children. However, these same understandings are fostering irresponsible actions in the 21st Century and, in fact, are leading to degradation of the life systems of the planet. Since, as Thomas Berry has observed, these stories suggest a separation of the human from the natural world and describe a static world into which current inhabitants must learn how to behave correctly, people operating from these perspectives are unable to join in the rampant creativity of the present moment and fail to see the deep-seated interrelations among all aspects of the Universe. New self-understandings are required if human society is to be able to continue to inhabit Planet Earth. These stories will tell of the primordial interrelationship of all species and of the perpetual vitality of the life systems at all levels. *Midsummer Moon* contributes to this expanded perspective.

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