



Surrogacy

by Hannah Garrity

Inspired by Luke 2:1-20

Oil paint, charcoal, and copper leaf on canvas

Dr. Christena Cleveland published a book in 2023 called, *God is a Black Woman*.⁵ In it, she shares her powerful testimony describing her journey to meet the Black Madonnas carved centuries ago from lava rock. This resonates with my lifelong yearning for Mother God.

Male language for God has always been a wall to my ability to connect in worship. Now, it is a wall that I break through every week—changing words, rewriting liturgy in the moment, saying “Mother” where “Father” is printed, trying “Lady” where “Lord” is printed. In this case, “Yahweh” is actually best. Who are we to squash God into patriarchy so perpetually?

But when someone else joins me in this necessary work, that is when the barrier is removed. I hear it sometimes: “She,” “Mother.” Almost

always, the liturgist feels the need to explain themselves. In liturgy discussion, gaslighting is common. “We should be more inclusive.” All of a sudden?

Recently, I was standing at The Dwelling at Richmond Hill.⁶ The former slave quarters are open and offered for visitation. After our tour, the idea that one should remove their shoes before entering this holy haven came up. Our tour group was all white people and we discussed this idea from a theoretical standpoint. But earlier, before we entered, I felt it. I was holding a seltzer water can from lunch and felt incredibly rude entering the space with it, so, without understanding, I backtracked and placed my purse and the can outside. I knew not why. After the tour, in our discussion about shoes, our white tour guide mentioned that Black members of the staff felt a great reverence, a holy presence at The Dwelling. The space held the presence of God; it was like entering a sanctuary.

I remember the same feeling when I was young, touring the slave quarters at Monticello.⁷ But now, listening to the Richmond Hill staff testimony, I understood these spaces in a new way, with a reverence for the God-like presence of the Black mother in the depths of oppression.

“Listen to Black women.” This cry has become a mantra over the last few years. I saw in that moment what Cleveland so eloquently explains in her book. In the pigmentocracy we inhabit, the Black mother is the closest figure to God, and “whitemalegod” is the very farthest. He promotes oppression; She is the savior of the most oppressed. And so I listen.

In this painting, Black Mother God has asked her daughter Mary to hold the role of surrogate for the pregnancy of infant Creator. Mary has carried the child to term. She has given birth. God embraces Mary as well as the Holy Infant in gratitude. For without Mary’s surrogacy, the incarnation could not be. —**Hannah Garrity**

⁵ *God is a Black Woman*, by Christena Cleveland. (New York: HarperOne, 2022).

⁶ Richmond Hill is an ecumenical fellowship, residence and urban retreat center in Richmond, VA. On its campus lie the remains of a historic enslaved dwelling. The remains are currently undergoing restoration efforts in order to become a place of learning, reflection, and prayer. Learn more here: richmond.com/opinion/columnists/williams-richmond-hill-seeks-to-uncover-buried-truths-of-enslavement-at-its-site-as-a/article_7b21c63f-3e00-5c86-9e2d-0197ab4deee1.html

⁷ Monticello, VA, was the primary plantation of Thomas Jefferson, a Founding Father and the third president of the United States.



About the artists



Rev. Nicolette (Faison) Peñaranda

Rev. Nicolette “Nic” (*she/her*) is a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America serving as the Program Director for African Descent Ministries. Nic is the creator of MONadvocacy, a racial justice resource grounded in play, as well as the “Talks at the Desk” series which celebrates the voices of leaders in the ELCA African descent community: livinglutheran.org/2022/02/a-love-letter-to-african-descent-communities.

She is passionate about queer Black liberation, cultivating diverse leadership in faith spaces, and the art of creation. She is also the illustrator of *God’s Holy Darkness*, written by Sharei Green and Beckah Selnick (Beaming Books, 2022). The book deconstructs anti-Blackness in Christian theology by celebrating instances in the story of God’s people when darkness, blackness, and night are beautiful, good, and holy.



Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Lisle Gwynn Garrity (*she/her*) is a Pastorist (pastor + artist), retreat leader, and creative entrepreneur seeking to fill the church with more color, paint, mystery, and creativity. She founded A Sanctified Art with the conviction that, in order to thrive, the church needs more creative expression and art-filled freedom.



Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Lauren (*she/her*) is an artist, graphic designer, and theologian. She uses paint, metallic inks, and Apple pencil to image the layered complexity she experiences in scripture texts. She also helps faith communities share their vibrant stories through branding & design services.



Hannah Garrity

Hannah (*she/her*) is an artist and an athlete, a daughter and a mother, a facilitator and a producer, a leader and a teammate. She is the Director of Christian Faith, Life, and Arts at Second Presbyterian Church in Richmond, Va, an art in worship workshop leader wherever she is called, and a liturgical installation artist at the Montreat Conference Center, Montreat, NC.