

# The Birthing Spirit, the Childbearing God: Metaphors of Motherhood and their Place in Christian Discipleship

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## Introduction

Within evangelical circles, much discussion is centered on the role of God as Father. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God is depicted frequently with this paternal metaphor.<sup>1</sup> Yet, one should not overlook that God is also depicted with maternal metaphors. Within the Old Testament (OT), these metaphors of God as mother or God as one giving birth are often juxtaposed with traditionally male metaphors such as God as father and God as husband.<sup>2</sup> Within the New Testament (NT), childbearing and mothering metaphors serve an important role in redescribing the spiritual rebirth (Gal 4:29; John 3:3-8), describing the experience of Jesus' death and resurrection for the disciples (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8; John 16:21); describing Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:20; James 1:18), and Paul describing his relationship to the Thessalonian church (1 Thess 2:7).

In this article, we will focus on two of the passages that describe God by using such maternal metaphors. We will examine the language of motherhood in terms of Christian rebirth in John 3 and God's self-description as "like one giving birth" in Isaiah 42 and ask what this language might mean for interpreting the Bible as a whole in terms of gender roles and the implications for Christian discipleship. We will use linguistic/literary analysis of the metaphors of God's motherhood to develop new ways of approaching how we understand these metaphors and apply them.

Towards this end, we will first provide a close reading of the comparison in Isaiah 42 between God as "a mighty warrior" and God as "a woman in childbirth" (more closely translated, "as one giving birth") and note the use of parallel structures in these two lines to create resonance between the two metaphors. We will then discuss the expectations surrounding the typical Divine Warrior metaphor and how the use of childbirth language provides an interesting twist while emphasizing a context of crisis. Second, we will examine the metaphor of birth in the Spirit as presented in John 3:1-21, identifying the linguistic strategies used to emphasize the centrality of birth in this passage and the means of this birth through the Holy Spirit. After our initial linguistic analysis, we will delve into the metaphor of motherhood and its

relationship to the Apostle John's theology more broadly. From the insights gained by our analysis of Isaiah and John, we will suggest several possible theological implications for these passages for gender relations within the Christian community and particularly for Christian discipleship.

## Caveats and clarifications

Whenever one seeks to examine the metaphors (and similes) of God as mother, one must clearly articulate one's position about the significance of such metaphors in terms of their expression of God's overall nature.<sup>3</sup> The metaphor of God as mother is a favorite of feminist theologians as they often try to compare these mother metaphors to the goddess worship of neighboring Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) cultures when discussing the OT and of neighboring Greco-Roman culture when discussing the NT. While such parallels may be helpful at times, they may cause assumptions regarding the purpose of these metaphors in their assertion about God's nature that are not always helpful and can, in more radical forms, lead to pantheism or a form of goddess worship that is inconsistent with orthodox Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, I do not assume that speaking of God in terms of metaphors of motherhood implies that God is thereby to be understood as female.<sup>5</sup> God should not be understood as male or female per se, as God is spirit and therefore without gender. Thus, I am not asserting that God should be understood as a "she" (or "he"),<sup>6</sup> but rather that we should closely examine how feminine metaphors are used in conjunction with male metaphors to describe the full personhood of God. Thus, the theological position I assume follows Stanley Grenz's informative position that God should first be viewed as the basis for sexuality both in terms of marriage and in terms of relationship within community, and that our description of gender in relation to God should flow from this knowledge.

Grenz argues that the social Trinity helps us to understand gender rather than gender helping us to understand the Trinity. In fact, to begin with gender and speak of God is to make God in *our* image rather than seeking to understand better how we are made in God's. Grenz states:

In this manner, God stands as the foundation for human sexual bonding. The triune God is the "self-grounded prototype," of which Barth speaks, to whom this dimension of human life "corresponds" . . . the foundational connection between the triune God and human sexuality does not occur because God is either male or female or because God is both male and female. Rather, God is the foundation of human sexual bonding, insofar as the dynamic that characterizes the social Trinity (unity-in-diversity, mutuality of distinct persons, the interaction of sameness and difference) is reflected in the dy-

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motherhood in biblical and theological perspectives.

dynamic of relationship to which our existence as embodied (and hence sexual) creatures leads.<sup>7</sup>

Grenz argues that this view of the *imago Dei* in our sexuality is also found in Christ and further in the church. Grenz affirms that “in the final analysis, then, the ‘image of God’ is corporate; the nature of the triune God comes to expression through humans-in-community.”<sup>8</sup> Following this theological position allows us (hopefully) to avoid many of the pitfalls of focusing on God’s gender and instead allows us to examine more deeply how the use of maternal metaphors for God<sup>9</sup> helps us learn more about the place of gender within Christian community as “embodied creatures” relating to one another.

### Isaiah 42: Mighty warrior God and childbearing God

We begin our examination of the maternal metaphors for God with the seemingly opposing metaphors of Isaiah 42:13–14, where God is depicted, on one hand, as “like a mighty one . . . like a man of war” in verse 13, and, on the other hand, “like one giving birth” in verse 14. Scholars have struggled with several issues when examining this passage. First, there is the question of how the structure of Isaiah 42 should be read in relation to these verses. Should we read these verses as part of a shared unit or as disparate? If they are a shared unit, what are the implications of the interweaving of the two metaphors?<sup>10</sup> In answering the structural question, many scholars have pointed to the convincing evidence put forward by Katheryn Pfisterer Darr that, while verses 13 and 14 “do not constitute a discrete unit,” they can and should be read in relation to one another in the larger context of verses 10–17.<sup>11</sup> Adopting this view allows the reader to examine the two metaphors of God as “warrior” and God as “one giving birth” as intimately related to one another, while also acknowledging that verses 13–14 represent a shift in the direction of the passage more generally.

Darr’s approach also allows us to see an important overlap between the seemingly inconsistent metaphors of “like a warrior” and “like one giving birth” in verses 13–14. Verses 10–12 begin with calling forth praise to God from all creation, and verse 13 describes God as “like a mighty one” who “goes out/marches out” and “like a man of war/a warrior” who “stirs up” his zeal/anger, “shouts,” “roars,” and “prevails” over his enemies. Verse 14 moves from this image of God as warrior to God as a woman in labor, shifting from a third-person description of God to God speaking in the first person. In verse 14a, God’s silence and reticence are described,<sup>12</sup> and, in verse 14b, God describes himself as “like one giving birth,” saying, “I groan; I pant; I gasp.”<sup>13</sup> Darr notes that what initially seem like inconsistent metaphors in verses 13 and 14b of the masculine figure of a warrior and the feminine figure of a woman giving birth actually are drawn together as they “share both profound intensity and a markedly auditory quality.” Further, “the traveling woman simile—like the warrior similes in v 13—serves to underscore Yahweh’s power.”<sup>14</sup>

Sarah Dille points to Darr’s examination as a helpful example of metaphorical coherence.<sup>15</sup> Dille explains that Darr establishes this coherence by “finding a common entailment of the meta-

phors,” namely, “crying out or noisiness.”<sup>16</sup> Dille suggests other shared “entailments” for these two metaphors, including “danger, courage, blood, pain, the threat of death, the preservation of life.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Claudia Bergmann argues that ANE texts more commonly join these two military and childbirth metaphors more than we might expect because of several perceived overlapping elements:

Ancient Near Eastern examples show . . . that there was a tradition of comparing women giving birth to warriors in battle. Their experience is similar because both warriors in battle and women giving birth can have experiences on a psychological level (the feeling of chaos and loss of control) and on a physiological level (blood, sweat, and stirring movements back and forth).<sup>18</sup>

Bergmann provides a series of examples from ANE texts, including an Akkadian Sargon legend, a Sumerian lament, and a Middle Assyrian medical text, concluding, “war imagery and childbirth imagery can and do fit together, and one need not assume a break between Isa 42:13 and 42:14 on this basis of a shift in imagery.”<sup>19</sup>

Applying these overlapping metaphorical entailments of “warrior” and “childbirth” to God provides a unique perspective on God’s power and intensity within Isaiah 42. Many see in the metaphor of God as divine warrior an evocation of Exodus 15:3, yet one can point to the many uses of this divine-warrior imagery throughout the OT.<sup>20</sup> In Isaiah 42:13, God as divine warrior “acts as a champion on behalf of the oppressed Israelites, as well as the other nations who are oppressed by Babylon.”<sup>21</sup> Much work has been done on the divine-warrior motif in the OT,<sup>22</sup> but especially important for our study is how the divine warrior’s picture of triumphant champion over Israel’s enemies provides the impetus for a change in the childbirth metaphor. The childbirth metaphor, often associated with fear and possible defeat or death, is “turned on its head to describe YHWH’s power.”<sup>23</sup> In this way, God is depicted as a figure of both destructive and creative force, through masculine and feminine imagery, that allows for the picture of destruction and salvation present in the verses of Isaiah 42 that follow. This picture highlights the hope of “the coming of a new age or new life for the exiles and YHWH’s own passion or involvement with the situation of the people.”<sup>24</sup>

Bergmann adds another element to this metaphorical interpretation, suggesting that Isaiah 42:10–17 is also “a variation or reinterpretation of the Birth Metaphor applied to situations of personal crisis.” Bergmann argues that the crisis in the passage is God’s inactivity and its resolution is giving birth. As Bergmann explains, “[N]ow labor can progress and newness, a new beginning, a radically different world, can begin.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the depiction of God as both warrior and a woman giving birth in Isaiah 42 allows for a focus on the power and intensity of God in both destructive and life-bearing ways; the overlap of feminine and masculine metaphors allows these metaphors to interact in new ways that create space for the metaphors to be re-envisioned in a new light that leads to universal and personal hope for all of God’s people.

### John 3: The birthing Spirit

Just as Isaiah 42 provides a helpful look at the metaphors of childbirth in the OT, John 3 allows us to examine the metaphor of childbirth in the NT. First, we will identify the linguistic strategies used to emphasize the centrality of birth in this passage and the means of this birth through the Holy Spirit, focusing specifically on elements of prominence and cohesion in John 3:1–15 surrounding the childbirth metaphor. We will then examine the metaphor of childbirth briefly elsewhere in John's theology. In order to analyze the elements of cohesion and prominence in John 3:1–15 in brief, we will be following the recommended categories for cohesion and prominence suggested by Stanley E. Porter.<sup>26</sup> The goal will be to identify which of these factors play a key role in promoting cohesion and prominence with specific reference to the metaphor of childbirth.

First, in terms of cohesion, the passage demonstrates an interesting shift from Jesus referring to Nicodemus in the second person singular in verses 1–10 to Jesus using the second person plural in verse 11 and following. Scholars have often noted that this is also the place where Nicodemus begins to disappear from the narrative and a greater sense of universalization occurs in the passage. Accompanying these movements from second person singular to plural, we also can note Jesus' frequent use of the third person to create an imagined person, similar to our use of the term "one" in English. This imagined third person is repeated in verses 3–6, 8, and 13–15. This use of the third person joins the first verses to the latter sections of Jesus' speech. It is noteworthy that employing the imagined third person frequently coincides with Jesus' use of childbirth metaphors. Verses 3, 5, and 11 are further joined to one another and to the surrounding passage by the use of several key connectives: first, the repeated emphatic particle (*amēn, amēn*) in the phrase "truly, truly I say to you"<sup>27</sup> and, second, the cohesive use of conjunctions in verses 11–15.<sup>28</sup>

These cohesive elements work in tandem with elements of prominence. For example, the repeated use of the particle *amēn* in these three verses (3, 5, 11) not only creates cohesion among the various parts of the passage, but makes these particular verses prominent. Each of the verses relates to the concept of the Spirit's birthing and its importance to Christian life. Verse 3 explains that, for one to see the kingdom of God, one must be born again. Verse 5 tells us that, to enter the kingdom of God, this birth must be by the Spirit and water. These lead to the highly prominent verse 6, which speaks of two kinds of birth: of Spirit and of flesh.

The prominence of verse 6 comes from the repeated use of the perfect participle of "one who is born" (*gegennēmenon*) as, according to verbal aspect theory,<sup>29</sup> the perfect participle is used to bring verbs to the front of the discourse, thus making them most marked and prominent. In verse 6, this use of the perfect focuses the attention of the reader/hearer on the metaphor of childbirth in the Spirit. This use of the perfect participle "one who is born" (*gegennēmenon*) is repeated again in verse 8, where we are given another discussion of what birth from the Spirit means. In this

case, being born of the Spirit creates a particular kind of experience, with the Spirit's unexpected movement compared to that of the wind. Verse 11 follows up on the ideas of seeing and believing and leads into a discussion regarding eternal life. The concept of eternal life and birth in the Spirit are intimately linked by the use of these cohesive phrases and the concept of knowledge in relationship to new life (new life in birth, new life in eternal life).

These features of prominence and cohesion demonstrate the centrality of the metaphor of childbirth for this passage. The important message that Jesus wishes to share with Nicodemus (and with his

more universal audience) is the necessity of birth from the Spirit. This passage depicts the Spirit as a giver of a second birth. This rebirth leads to seeing and entering the kingdom of God. This spiritual birth is set in contrast to our physical birth through two elements in the passage: first, Nicodemus's question to Jesus about returning as an old person to one's mother's womb, and, second, Jesus' differentiation between spiritual birth and birth of the flesh. This differentiation between spirit and flesh is consistent with John's theology elsewhere, and, as is typical of John, this is more than a simple differentiation between spiritual and physical birth. It is clarifying our need to be born anew through cleansing. Linda Belleville convincingly argues that this is the meaning of the use of "from water and spirit" in verse 5, which she, in turn, connects to the eschatological hope associated with the presence of the Spirit and the cleansing of the people.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, how is this new birth given by the Spirit to be understood in its metaphorical extent? What is included in this second birth? Here, the root metaphor of childbirth that we established above with Isaiah 42 helps us to consider a new way of considering this passage. We have already noted that, within the OT, the metaphor of childbirth is associated with universal and personal crisis and includes the possibility of pain and death.<sup>31</sup> As Bergmann demonstrates in her study from ANE texts to the Hebrew Bible and through to writings in the Second Temple period, the childbirth metaphor continues across time to represent crisis.<sup>32</sup>

Scholars often overlook this element of the childbirth metaphor when reading John 3, yet this understanding of childbirth as a metaphor for crisis is present elsewhere in John's gospel. John 16:21 represents an example of this. Jesus depicts the disciples' experience of his death and resurrection as like "a woman . . . giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come [a phrase that echoes Jesus' references to his own death as 'his hour had come'] but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world." The disciples experience the anguish—the crisis—of Jesus' death<sup>33</sup> like the anguish and crisis of a birthing woman, but they also experience the subsequent joy like that of new birth at Jesus' resurrection.

The language used in John 16:21 mirrors the language used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) of Isaiah 42:14 by the use of the same verb "to give birth." In the same way that God is pictured like "one giving birth" in Isaiah 42:14, the experience

of Jesus' death will be for the disciples like a woman who "gives birth."<sup>34</sup> John 16:21 also uses language that echoes John 3's discussion of "birth from the Spirit," with its use of the verb "born." As the birth in the Spirit is described repeatedly with the perfect participle (a verbal adjective indicating completed action) or the aorist passive subjunctive (indicating possibility and the subject being acted upon), so here in John 16:21 we have the aorist active subjunctive form of the same verb (indicating possibility and the subject taking the action) to compare the experience of the joy following the resurrection to the joy felt when a child is born.

Understanding the resonances in John 16 of both Isaiah 42 and John 3 suggests that a correction is necessary in our general conception of the birth metaphor in John 3. Many commentaries speak of the childbirth in John 3 as simple and painless because it is spiritual rather than physical, as though a spiritual stork dropped the child off in a nice, neat package.<sup>35</sup> Yet, it is unlikely an ancient reader would have read the metaphor of birth apart from its original implications of crisis. Within the passage, Nicodemus's response gives us a clue to a partial ancient response. Jesus' clarification that this birth is spiritual and not physical does not necessarily remove the metaphorical implications of possible pain and/or crisis. As the metaphor theories of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson suggest, our understanding of metaphor often moves from an original physical referent to its abstraction in metaphor, which provides for the metaphorical entailments of that metaphor.<sup>36</sup> Two suggestive factors in the passage support the view that part of the metaphor of being "born again" of the Spirit involves crisis and pain.

First, Jesus' reference to the unexpected quality of the Holy Spirit's arrival and departure in verse 8<sup>37</sup> may reflect an overlap with the unexpected quality of childbirth. Verses about childbirth in verse 7 and verse 9 surround verse 8's discussion of the unexpected character of the Holy Spirit. Childbirth is a combination of expectancy and uncertainty. In many ways, birth, like the wind and the Holy Spirit, would be seen as a mystery in the ancient world. For those in the first century, the exact timing of birth was unknown. Mothers were aware that birth was coming, but uncertain exactly when this would occur. In their final month of pregnancy, expectant mothers today experience this same feeling. For ancient mothers, this emotion of expectancy of joy at birth would be intertwined with the awareness of the intense pain of childbirth and also the possibility of death for the mother or child. Similarly, the Holy Spirit's timing is uncertain; like a baby, it comes whenever it pleases (v. 8), outside of our control. Thus, joining the element of unexpectedness between the Holy Spirit's arrival and birth in the Spirit allows for this aspect of crisis and a lack of control in birth to be further intensified.

Factors of cohesion and prominence also suggest a link between Jesus' death on the cross with the pain and crisis with childbirth in John 3. As noted above, verses 3–5 and 6–8 are joined through cohesion and prominence to verses 11–15. This means that the metaphor of childbirth in verses 3–8 is linked to the language of the "lifting up" of the Son of Man for the purpose of "eternal life." The "Son of Man" being "lifted up" repeatedly re-

fers to Jesus' death through crucifixion throughout John's gospel. In John 3:15, the purpose of this "lifting up" is so that "everyone who believes will have eternal life in him." Thus, the experience of birth through the Spirit is linked through cohesive language to eternal life via Jesus' death. Birth and life are interwoven metaphors—but necessary for this spiritual rebirth and eternal life is Jesus' death on the cross. It seems likely that the picture of death and resurrection, suffering and exaltation, portrayed in John 16:15 as a woman giving birth who finds pain and joy in the process, should be understood as part of the underlying imagery of the second birth pictured in John 3.

### Implications for Christian community and discipleship

In both Isaiah 42 and John 3, the metaphor of childbirth leads from a moment of crisis to the creation of a new life, a new hope, with eschatological implications. In Isaiah 42, God is like a woman giving birth, struggling, crying out, but for a designated purpose of ultimate restoration and fullness for God's people. In John 3, the Spirit provides us with birth characterized by new life. Thus, John 3's discussion of birth, while spiritual, should not be understood as separate from the crisis, travail, and struggle associated with labor. How does this affect our understanding of spiritual regeneration? Do we think of being "born again" as a happy specific moment? Perhaps this is a misstep in understanding the metaphor presented in John's gospel. Perhaps it is better to understand this as depicting the difficulty of Christian transformation, with its struggle and suffering that lead to ultimate joy.

This means that we need to consider pain and struggle as part of the Christian journey. The journey of second birth and of spiritual regeneration is not painless or without crisis; rather, we journey through the difficulties entailed in this new birth, because we know the hope and joy that exists here as well. Just as Jesus' death and resurrection are pictured in terms of childbirth, so our rebirth entails the experience of death and resurrection. This analogy reminds us that, as Christians living in community, we will be neither without pain nor without hope. We will walk together as female and male through the struggles that are present, and we will grow through this walk. Only together as male and female in community do we fully reflect the *imago Dei*. In this way, we will be like Christ in his journey from death to resurrection. In this way, we will anticipate the final eschatological hope, but also experience it in part through the presence of the Holy Spirit today.

Further, Isaiah 42 reminds us that we have a triune God who is the foundation of our embodied and thus sexual being and the foundation of our understanding of what it means to be "humans-in-community," to borrow Grenz's phrase. As God is depicted in both the metaphor of the warrior and the metaphor of the woman giving birth, we are given a picture of God's ultimate power and his intense love for his people. This echoes forth in his resounding war-cry, demonstrating his divine protection, and in his resounding wail during childbirth, demonstrating the new creation that he provides in the ultimate eschatological hope.

## Notes

1. For a helpful introduction to the theological issues surrounding gender and the naming of God, see Alvin F. Kimel, *This Is My Name Forever: The Trinity and Gender Language for God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

2. Sarah Dille focuses on these specific maternal and paternal metaphors and provides a helpful look at how recent metaphor theory allows for the examination of such metaphors as they interact with one another. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors: God as Mother and Father in Deutero-Isaiah*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004).

3. Kimel demonstrates the need for clarity in this area and provides a forum for such discussion in Kimel, *This Is My Name Forever*.

4. Several scholars in Kimel's book *This Is My Name Forever* provide critiques of this element in feminist theology. Two are particularly helpful. Paul Mankowski gives a critique of certain elements of feminist biblical analysis, including analyses by Phyllis Trible and Elizabeth Johnson. The critique is helpful but unbalanced, with his assumption of the greater value of masculine metaphor over feminine metaphor for God. See Mankowski, "The Gender of Israel's God," in *This Is My Name Forever*, 35–61. For a more balanced approach, one can see the critiques leveled by Stanley Grenz in his essay, "Is God Sexual? Human Embodiment and the Christian Conception of God," in *This Is My Name Forever*, 190–212.

5. These are some of the conclusions reached by some of the more radical feminist scholars such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Starhawk. See Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985); and Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, 10th anniversary ed. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1989). Other feminist scholars have been less extreme in their positions, but nonetheless focus on the feminization of God. Examples include Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1978), esp. ch. 2; and Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1992). Grenz provides a critique of these positions; see Grenz, "Is God Sexual?," 207.

6. Some feminists have encouraged this "she" language for God in reaction to the overwhelming use of masculine pronouns and, thus, masculine gendering of God by other scholars. One example is Johnson, *She Who Is*, esp. 241–43. Many have been influenced by Mary Daly's statement, "If God is male, then the male is god." See Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973), 19.

7. Grenz, "Is God Sexual?," 211–12.

8. Grenz, "Is God Sexual?," 212.

9. This is not to say that speaking of God in paternal terms is less informative for our understanding, but simply that this article focuses on maternal terms rather than paternal ones.

10. For the purpose of this article, I am using metaphor in its more broad sense, which includes examples of simile and metonymy, for the purpose of simplicity. My goal is not to argue a particular theory of metaphor per se, but to use metaphorical analysis to inform other elements of Christian understanding. This is not to argue that metaphor should always be understood as equivalent in all its qualities to these other forms. In fact, much important work has been done on differentiating these different figures of speech in literary and linguistic circles. For example, Anatol Stefanowitsch and Stefan Gries, *Corpus-Based Approaches to Metaphor and Metonymy* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006); Dan Fass, *Processing Metonymy and Metaphor*, Contemporary Studies in Cognitive Science and Technology (New York, NY: Ablex, 1997); and Eva Feder Kittay, *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure*,

Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987).

11. See Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "Like Warrior, Like Woman: Destruction and Deliverance in Isaiah 42:10–17," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (1987): 560–71. As Darr explains, often such divisions are based on assumptions about what scholars take the two similes of "like a warrior" and "like one in labor" to mean. Scholars who agree with Darr's position in terms of seeing vv. 10–17 as a unit include Oswalt, Gressman, Mowinkel, North, McKenzie, Bonnard, and Merendino, Against Darr's view, some scholars argue for other possible divisions, including vv. 10–13 and vv. 14–17 as two separate units. Among the scholars who divide up these verses, see Elliger, Begrich, Westermann, Muilenburg, and Whybray. For a fuller discussion of the reasons for these various positions, see John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 122–24. More recently, Dille has argued for reading the unit as vv. 8–17, arguing that vv. 8–9 form a frame to the larger unit, helping to explain v. 17. Dille points to George Adam Smith as the only scholar who argues for vv. 8–17 as a unit, but Smith does not provide his reasoning. See Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 41–44; George Adam Smith, *The Book of Isaiah ii* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1927), 136–40.

12. In v. 14, there is a transition to verbs of restraint: I was silent (*hehšēšēti*); I kept still (*ahārīs*); I controlled myself (*et'ēpāq*).

13. This verb has the possible dual meaning of "trample or crush." Whereas Darr sees these three verbs as connected to the metaphor of the woman giving birth, scholars such as Oswalt suggest that only the first verb refers to the metaphor of childbirth, while the following two verbs are of judgment. See Darr, "Like Warrior, Like Woman," 568–70; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 125–26. Here, Oswalt follows Paul Joüon, "Notes Philologiques Sur Le Texte Hébreu D'isaïe 11, 13; 42, 14; 50, 11; Jérémie 1, 5; 1, 14; 20, 10; 27, 10; 31, 40; 43, 12," *Biblica* 10, no. 2 (1929): 195–96. Most biblical translations follow Darr's position, associating the three verbs with the woman in labor, including the NIV, TNIV, NRSV, ASV, NET, NKJV, CEV, and NASB, while the KJV and YLT group these latter two verbs with the following section as "destroy and devour" and "desolate and swallow up," respectively.

14. Darr, "Like Warrior, Like Woman," 564. For a fuller discussion of how the auditory elements of this birthing metaphor impact other sensory metaphors in Isaiah 42, see Beth M. Stovell, *Mapping Metaphorical Discourse in the Fourth Gospel: John's Eternal King*, Linguistic Biblical Studies 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 124–27.

15. Though one may note that Dille describes Darr's examination of "the metaphors of 'YHWH is a Warrior' and 'YHWH is a Birthing Woman,'" Darr strongly distinguishes "like a warrior" and "like a traveling woman" as similes rather than as metaphors. Instead, Darr emphasizes that these similes should be seen as ways of describing that God acts like a traveling woman rather than understanding that YHWH is identified as a traveling woman. Dille does not make this distinction between simile and metaphor as clearly and instead argues with Janet Soskice that the difference between the two is "a minor grammatical technicality and should not be overemphasized." See Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 15–6, 48; Darr, "Like Warrior, Like Woman," 564–65.

16. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 16.

17. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 16.

18. Claudia D. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis: Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and 1QH XI, 1–18*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, Bd 382 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2008), 139.

19. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*, 138–39. Gruber points to the activity of childbirth as an important key to seeing these images working together. As Gruber states, "[W]hat these scholars did

not know or forget is that in natural childbirth the woman's role is active rather than passive." Mayer I. Gruber, "The Motherhood of God in Second Isaiah," *Revue biblique* 90, no. 3 (1983): 355.

20. Dille points to Exod 15:3 specifically, but also notes the use of the imagery in Ps 24:5, 8; 78:65; Isa 9:6; 10:21; 26:11; 37:32; Jer 20:11; Zech 14:3; and Neh 9:32. See Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 46.

21. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 47.

22. Examples include Patrick D. Miller, *Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006); and Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

23. Here, Dille begins with Darr's basic argument and fleshes it out with a fuller depiction of the metaphorical coherence between the military and childbirth metaphors in relation to God. See Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 41–73, esp. 68.

24. Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 73. Here, Dille disagrees with John J. Schmitt's suggestion that the image of God as mother is derived from Zion imagery and instead argues, "[T]he imagery here is the product of a very different rhetorical process than what Schmitt suggests." See Schmitt, "The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother," *Revue biblique* 92, no. 4 (1985): 557–69. No doubt, Dille would also argue against Bergmann's comment that the "only direct comparisons to a woman experiencing childbirth are of an auditory nature" (though Bergmann's work follows Dille's work by four years). One is, in fact, surprised that Bergmann does not use Dille's work as a source, as she is focused on many of the same texts as Dille, uses the metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson like Dille (George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980]), and deals with many of the same interacting metaphors generally. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*, 141–42.

25. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*, 141–42.

26. As applicable, these elements include personal reference, verbal aspect, and connectives to analyze cohesion and verbal aspect, and word order, clause structure, and redundant pronouns to analyze prominence. See Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, *Biblical Languages: Greek* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999). Some of the research for this article will also be published in my forthcoming essay, "Seeing the Kingdom of God, Seeing Eternal Life: Cohesion and Prominence in John 3:1–15 and the Gospel of Thomas," in *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History, and Development*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Brill, forthcoming).

27. Whereas, in the Synoptic tradition, Jesus' statement, "Truly I say to you," is always with one *amēn*, the Fourth Evangelist uses two particles to create even greater emphasis.

28. In verses 11–15, the author repeatedly uses conjunctions to create cohesion among these verses. Verse 11 uses a *oti* ("that") clause and an "and" (*kai*) to create cohesion within the verse. The conjunctions *ei* and *ean* create cohesion between vv. 11 and 12 as well as within v. 12 itself. Verse 13 begins with an "and" (*kai*) linking v. 12 to 13 and includes the conjunction *ei* with the particle *mē* to create cohesion within v. 13. The fronted "and" (*kai*) in v. 14 performs a similar function to the fronted "and" (*kai*) in v. 13, joining v. 13 to 14. In v. 14, the conjunction *kathōs* paired with the adverb *houtōs* join the two clauses in v. 14. The use of conjunction *hina* makes v. 15 a subordinate clause dependent on v. 14 and thereby joined to the entire complex of vv. 11–15.

29. Verbal aspect theory holds that the verb form an author chooses to describe an action is key to how the author wants the audience to perceive that action.

30. Linda L. Belleville, "'Born of Water and Spirit': John 3:5," *Trinity Journal* 1, no. 2 (1980): 125–41.

31. I have pointed out this conception of childbirth in my article "A

Perspective on John" in *Global Perspectives on the Bible* edited by Mark Roncace and Joseph Weaver (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, forthcoming 2013).

32. Bergmann's analysis includes a discussion of a thanksgiving psalm from the Dead Sea Scrolls as a means of drawing a picture of the childbirth metaphor across antiquity. Bergmann asserts that "it is a literary convention that runs through texts of the ancient Near East, and the Hebrew Bible, and that continues in postbiblical times." Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*, 218. Here, Bergmann cites Joseph Blenkinsopp's commentary on Isaiah; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., Anchor Bible 19 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 368.

33. This language of "her hour had come" is reminiscent of John's repeated theme of Jesus' knowledge of "his hour," which is also described with the same formulation: form of "come" (*erkomai*) + "time" (*hōra*) + "his/her" possessive pronoun (*autos*). Other scholars have suggested such a connection as well. Anne-Etienne provides a helpful chart demonstrating the structural elements of John 16 that suggest such an interpretation, demonstrating the repeated use of "the hour is coming" in vv. 1–6 and vv. 29–33 mirroring the "hour" of the woman giving birth. See Soeur Anne-Etienne, "Birth [Biblical Images, Esp Jn 16:16–22]," *Eccumenical Review* 34, no. 3 (1982): 233.

34. One can, thereby, compare the description of the "one giving birth" in John 16 to the wider tradition of the "yodelah" described by Bergmann and Dille among others as the "woman giving birth" metaphor in the OT tradition. See Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*, 41–73; and Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis*, 67–79.

35. For example, Leon Morris differentiates the spiritual birth from the physical birth and does not speak of what the metaphor may entail except for its implications for spiritual regeneration and Christian baptism. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 184–96. Jerome Neyrey characterizes Nicodemus's response as "ridicul[ing] Jesus' teaching by reducing it to literal absurdness," but misses what such a literal understanding may entail for the metaphorical understanding of the passage in terms of what he calls "the Johannine double meaning of 'born.'" Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, *New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 78–79. It seems more cogent that to deem John as having a "double meaning" would assume that he is playing a metaphorical meaning off of the literal meaning, an action that, according to Lakoff and Johnson, would include an original physical referent for the metaphorical abstraction. Francis Moloney associates the "water and Spirit" with a "human experience 'of water'" in baptism and "a spiritual experience 'of the Spirit'" in spiritual regeneration. But Moloney does not identify any relationship between the typical human experiences of childbirth that influence the childbirth metaphor within this passage. Francis J. Moloney and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of John*, *Sacra Pagina Series 4* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), 93. Elsewhere, I discuss this squeamishness around birthing in Johannine commentators and provide a further discussion on how this impacts the metaphors of John's Gospel more broadly; see Stovell, *Mapping Metaphorical Discourse*, esp. 217–21, 231–32, 326.

36. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

37. Karl Olav Sandnes suggests this idea of "whence and whither" has epistemological implications of explaining the coming and going of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit that connect John 3 with other important discussions of knowing and believing throughout the Gospel of John. Sandnes also notes the connection between birth and knowledge in John 3 and John 9, which may be an interesting foray for discussion at a later time. Sandnes, "Whence and Whither: A Narrative Perspective on the Birth *Anōthen* (John 3, 3–8)," *Biblica* 86, no. 2 (2005): 153–73.

Metaphors of Motherhood and their Place in Christian Discipleship. The Birthing Spirit, the Childbearing God. by Beth M. Stovell | October 30, 2012. Advanced Search. We will examine the language of motherhood in terms of Christian rebirth in John 3 and God's self-description as "like one giving birth" in Isaiah 42 and ask what this language might mean for interpreting the Bible as a whole in terms of gender roles and the implications for Christian discipleship. We will use linguistic/literary analysis of the metaphors of God's motherhood to develop new ways of approaching how we understand these metaphors and apply them. They are people - not only finding their place in Christian community - and growing in God's Word; they are also learning to express faith with boldness and determination. A disciple is a believer learning to express the will of Jesus in the earth. Over the following sessions, the foundations of Christian discipleship will be explored. Throughout these teachings, the importance of identity, association, and engagement will be discussed. While the God As A Father. One could certainly use a number of different metaphors to describe the nature and attributes of God. For example, the Lord is depicted, in Scripture, as both a husband (Isaiah 54:5, Jeremiah 31:32, Hosea 2:16) and a King (Psalm 47:7, 1 Timothy 6:15-16). Holman Christian Standard Bible Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, International Standard Version Therefore, as you go, disciple people in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, NET Bible Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Aramaic Bible in Plain English "Therefore go disciple all the nations and baptize them in the name of The Father and The Son and The Spirit of Holiness." GOD'S WORD Translation So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations: Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; Isaiah 63:14. Verse Concepts. I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it," declares the Lord. Ezekiel 39:29.