



C. S. Lewis once said that myths were lies and therefore worthless, even though "breathed through silver." It seems difficult to believe, given that Lewis wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*, one of the most well known fantasy series to date. But, those books were written in the late 1940s and early '50s, a decade after he spoke that ill-fated line to his friend, J. R. R. Tolkien.

Tolkien didn't agree with Lewis and, after their conversation, wrote his defence of myth-making in a poem called "Mythopoeia," dedicated from "Philomythus to Misomythus" (which means "myth lover" to "myth hater"). I recommend [reading the entire poem](#), but I'll pull out a few lines below:

*Though all the crannies of the world we filled
with elves and goblins, though we dared to build
gods and their houses out of dark and light,
and sowed the seed of dragons, 'twas our right
(used or misused). The right has not decayed.
We make still by the law in which we're made.*




Myths are stories humans tell about ourselves. In the Western world, we're most familiar with classical myths – the stories of Olympian gods and tragic heroes. Their stories have become cautionary tales, like that of Icarus, and his wings made of feathers and wax, or the Trojan horse.

Today, while humanity doesn't necessarily believe in Zeus anymore, we have a new pantheon in popular superheroes, like Superman and Wonder Woman. Their stories do the same thing as did the myths of the past: they explore human themes, like love, pain, and death, with super-human characters

in extraordinary circumstances.

And Christians, too, have our own myths. Our lives are marked by the stories of Jesus' birth, life in ministry, death, and resurrection; we tell them season after season, year after year, because they are essential to who we are.

This issue on Myth explores the "why" behind myth-making, with articles by Lorelee Dyck and Matt Civico. And, Hannah Foulger takes us in another direction with her article about Star Wars and the quintessential Hero's Journey.

Tolkien believed it was a human right to make myths and that God created us to do so. When we look at the myths of the past, we see a roadmap through human imagination full of markers that show from where we have come and where we are going. We see the deep cultural roots and identities of our ancestors. And, I think, we see a spark of the Divine working through all of us. 

THE TRUTH OF BIBLICAL MYTHS

Donald Phillips

In 1977, John Hicks wrote a book entitled, *The Myth of God Incarnate*. It caused quite a stir – and probably rightly so – as the book’s title seemed to imply that the notion of God being incarnate in Jesus Christ was mythical as opposed to real. Dictionary sources are always clear that a “myth” is something that cannot, in and of itself, be verified for historical accuracy. It *may* be true in its details, or it may not. However, a myth of any seriousness is intended to convey truth – unlike a fable or fairy tale. It may very well be that some of the incarnation stories in the four Gospels contain mythical material, meaning that the details cannot be verified – did shepherds *really* see and hear angels singing? Those stories may not be historically accurate, but their real truth and value lay in the reality they are trying to convey – that God came into our midst as the human being Jesus who would bring salvation to all people.

But if the Bible is “the Word of God,” why would it contain mythical material? As disciples of Jesus Christ, don’t we believe the Scriptures to be true? Yes, we absolutely do, and that is precisely why they must

contain mythical material. The Scripture writers (and we interpreters) are attempting to describe and explain things about the Divine that are simply beyond both our lived experience and intellectual understanding. So we employ *myth* to explain the truth of something we don’t completely grasp – that is only partly within our lived reality.


We employ myth to explain the truth of something we don’t completely grasp.

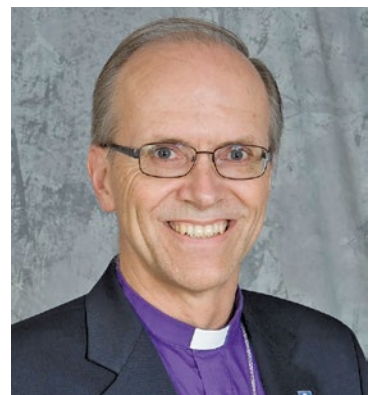
For example, we have just been reading the stories of Jesus’ resurrection. Each Gospel account references Mary Magdalene as an initial and key witness to Jesus’ resurrection. But in Mark’s account, Mary doesn’t actually encounter Jesus initially. In Matthew’s version, Mary doesn’t encounter Jesus at the tomb, but meets the Risen Christ while she is running to tell the other disciples about her experience. Luke’s account has Mary explaining her experience at the tomb to some skeptical disciples. And in John’s Gospel, Mary doesn’t encounter Jesus until after Peter and another disciple inspect the tomb.

So which story is true? They all are! Are they mythical stories? They all may

contain elements that cannot be historically verified. But they also all attempt to convey the truth that Jesus had overcome death and was once again alive; that he saw himself still very much in relationship with his followers; that he was going to continue that relationship forever; and that they should be filled with hope and joy as a result. Everything he

promised and taught about the Kingdom of God would now become fulfilled – especially for them.

Sometimes using myth is the only way we can begin to adequately experience the truth of God and ourselves with God. 



△ *Donald Phillips,
Bishop of Rupert's
Land*