

Kathleen Norris's formative moments

by [Kathleen Norris](#)

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My formal theological training began and ended with a course on the scriptures in eighth grade, leaving me with all the faults of the autodidact and a paper on what, with an adolescent's callow complacency, I termed the "affair" of David and Bathsheba. The foundations of my faith, nurtured by early exposure to the Bible and hymns, lie in song and story.

As a child I was particularly drawn by the tales of the Israelites in the desert, the images of the pillars of cloud and of fire. I was appalled at the people's persistent rejection of God, little knowing that as an adult I would come to know this condition well. Jesus seemed OK, but I much preferred the narrative punch of the Old Testament.

When I was in my thirties, just beginning to rediscover my faith, a well-meaning Benedictine monk mailed me a copy of Hans Küng's *Does God Exist?* That was not the question for me. After reading a few paragraphs, I sent the book back. Fortunately, he had also scribbled a note: "If this doesn't work, try Flannery O'Connor's *The Habit of Being*." And that was exactly what I needed: the letters of a passionate Christian who admits that "most of us come to the church by a means the church does not allow."

It seems that I am always returning to the origins of my faith, the inexhaustible stories of scripture and the poetic imagery of the Psalms. I need a God who created whales to play with and makes hills leap for joy, a God who calls each star by its name. I need those resonances, images and metaphors that, like God, are beyond my understanding. They speak to me in a way that nothing else can.

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