

THE  
GLORY OF THE MANGER

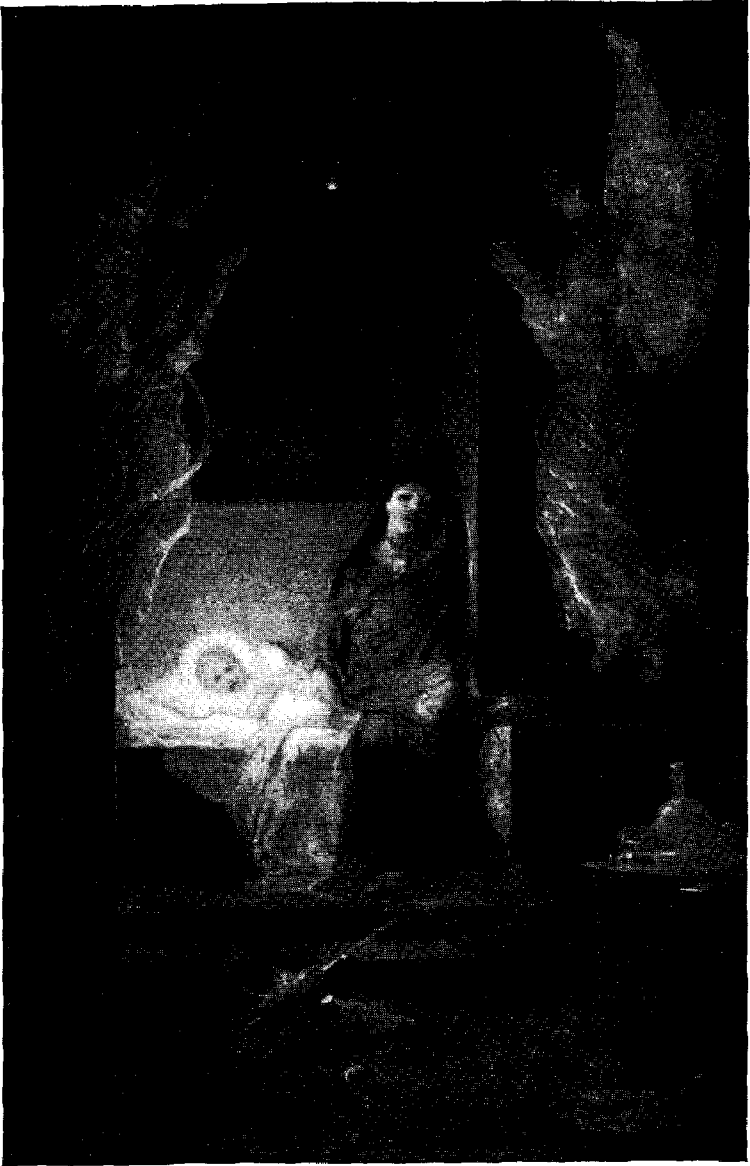
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*Studies on the Incarnation*

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AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY  
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*The frontispiece is a copy of Edwin H. Blashfield's painting, "In the House of the Carpenter," presented to the Church of the Ascension, New York City, in 1935. It is reproduced by permission of Mrs. Blashfield and the Rector of the church.*

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## Dedication

**Thou art the King of Glory: ☉ Christ.**

**Thou art the everlasting Son: of the Father.**

**When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man: Thou didst humble Thyself to be born of a Virgin.**

**When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death: Thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.**

**Thou sittest at the right hand of God: in the glory of the Father.**

**We believe that Thou shalt come: to be our Judge.**

**We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants: whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.**

**Make them to be numbered with Thy Saints: in glory everlasting.**

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## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

THE officers of the AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY have become thoroughly convinced that there is an urgent, wide-spread and imperative need of scholarly, up-to-date, popular treatises of the essential evangelical doctrines. They are equally convinced that there are many conservative Christian leaders with the intellectual acumen and literary ability amply qualified to prepare such treatises with convincing persuasiveness and dynamic efficiency.

The Society therefore recently announced a Prize Book Contest requesting manuscripts, subject to certain conditions, on the fundamental principles of the Christian faith and offering prizes amounting to seventeen hundred and fifty dollars. The results of the contest have absolutely verified and justified the Society's contention for one hundred and sixteen excellent manuscripts were submitted by widely known and distinguished writers.

The officers of the Society are not only highly gratified by the response received, but now feel fully justified in their determination to make the Society the repository of the choicest, most scholarly and popular books on gospel truth. Fortunately this decision has been made at a time when the world's need of an unadulterated and a dynamic gospel is more in evidence than for many centuries.

Thirteen specially selected manuscripts are now being published.

The gospel of Christ is the only force which can save the world.

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## FOREWORD

IN his sumptuous edition of "The Bible in Art" Clifton Harby makes the striking observation that during the middle ages "when the Church played so large a part in the destiny of nations, art was religious because the people were religious, and this goes far to explain why all the museums of Europe are crowded with Madonnas and Crucifixions." The artists felt the pulse not only of their own time in these two great themes—the Incarnation and the Atonement. For these two miracles are the foci of the vast ellipse of New Testament thought and Old Testament prophecy. The Glory of the Cross and the Glory of the Manger are the two-fold revelation of Him who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Being.

Some ten years ago, at Cairo, Egypt, I wrote a little book containing studies on the Passion of our Lord. It found many readers, and translations also appeared in Arabic, Urdu, Persian, and Swedish. *The Glory of the Cross* here finds a companion volume of meditations on some aspects of the mystery of the Incarnation—its historic setting, its implications and its lessons. The first three chapters are introductory, and deal with the cosmic character of the Incarnation and the evidences for the story of the Nativity. Then follow seven chapters on the story itself. The next five are more or less doctrinal and the final chapter sums up

the message and glory of Christmas. And what a story it is!

Our hymnology enshrines it for all the churches and Christmas carols are heard in all lands in many tongues. In 1922, I heard "Silent Night, Holy Night" sung by a large woman's choir of Battak converts at Pearaja, Sumatra. Once fierce cannibals, the Christian believers there now exceed a half million. When in London a few years ago, a book on comparative religion by an Afghan student, Sirdar Ikbal Ali Shah, arrested my attention. His chapter on Christianity (and the writer is still nominally a Mohammedan) has this astounding opening paragraph:

"The birth of Christ is the greatest event in the annals of time. When the dawn of the world broke and the morning stars sang together, man came forth from God; designed for dominion he became a slave; born for life, he fell into the abyss of death; offspring of infinite goodness he stained his spirit with sin. After long millenniums the world lay prostrate under the shadow of universal ruin. Religion had become a burden, but God had not forgotten; in His heart were the purposes of love, and at last He appears among men in the Person of the Eternal Son. The coming of Christ as a Babe in Bethlehem set the Heavenly hosts to singing, because at last the poor had the good news of Eternal life preached unto them: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.'"<sup>1</sup>

Who could better state the glory of the Manger?

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<sup>1</sup> Lights of Asia, London, 1924, page 68.

And yet these are only two among the myriad voices of an ever-increasing and swelling chorus. For wellnigh two thousand years all ages, races and conditions of men have been carried away captive by that Holy child. They have laid their faith, their love, their devotion, their learning, their lives as an offering before the Manger-Throne. For they saw there the Word who was God, and the Light of the World. There the brush of the artist, the imagination of the poet, the mind of the theologian and the emotions of the saint have found their inspiration, so that the glory of the Manger has become the glory of Christian art, architecture, music, poetry and literature. To gather into one compass the glory of the Advent as expressed in all these ways one would have to strip the art-galleries of the world of their most costly treasures, ransack the literature of all nations, and rob the hymnologies of all the churches of their choicest tributes to the Babe of Bethlehem. We have gathered only fragments.

The Incarnation was the greatest miracle of human history. And it is true. God who fills the universe was born a Babe. Christ at Bethlehem brought new life and power into the world. He took hold of the seed of Abraham to redeem it. The Incarnation is a reality, wonderful, glorious and beautiful; but also a mystery so great and so holy that angels veil their faces in its contemplation. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

We hope that the following brief chapters will afford the reader a deeper insight into the significance of these words of John, the beloved disciple, so that each of us may give glory to Jesus Christ our Lord.

SAMUEL M. ZWEMER.

New York City.

# THE GLORY OF THE ETERNAL PURPOSE

"I CANNOT tell why He whom angels worship  
Should set His love upon the sons of men,  
Or why as Shepherd He should seek the wanderers  
And bring them back, I know not how or when.  
But this I know, that He was born of Mary,  
When Bethlehem's stable was his only home,  
And that at Nazareth He lived and laboured,  
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world is come.

"I cannot tell how patiently He suffered  
When with His peace He graced this place of tears,  
Or how upon the Cross His heart was broken,  
The crown of pain to three and thirty years.  
But this I know, He heals the broken-hearted,  
And stays their sin and calms their lurking fear,  
And lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,  
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world is here.

"I cannot tell how He will win the nations,  
How He will claim His earthly heritage,  
And satisfy the needs and aspirations  
Of East and West, of sinner and of sage.  
But this I know, all flesh shall see His glory,  
And He will reap the harvest He has sown.  
And some glad day, His name will shine with splendour,  
When He, the Saviour, Saviour of the world is  
known."

—*Anon.*

## CHAPTER I

### THE GLORY OF THE ETERNAL PURPOSE

THE birth of Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem was not a fortuitous event. It did not just happen. Paul the Apostle speaks of "the eternal purpose which God had in Christ Jesus." He writes in all his epistles of a pre-existing Christ, "who is before all things and by whom all things consist." A Christ who is the first born of every creature, the image of the invisible God, and in whom from endless ages are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 1st Chapter). Where did Paul get his ideas of such a cosmic Christ who came out of eternity into time, out of the glory of heaven to the inn at Bethlehem?

Paul is indeed very bold in that "life of Christ" which we can gather from his letters. Mark begins his Gospel with the baptism at Jordan; Matthew begins with Abraham; Luke goes back to Adam; John tells us that the Word which was made flesh was in the beginning with God. But Paul bridges the chasms of eternity and rises from the time-born son of Mary to the Christ who was in the glory of the Father before creation. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a

servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:9-11.)

Now the answer to those who stumble at these stupendous implications of a Pre-existent Christ, is simply the fact that the earliest records know no other Saviour. The first reference chronologically to the birth of Jesus in the whole New Testament is in one of Paul's earliest epistles, Galatians 4:4. That epistle, everyone knows, was written before Mark and Matthew penned their gospels, and long before John wrote his prologue. "When the fulness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (A.R.V.) This was written centuries before the Christian church began to observe the birthday of Jesus. Yet it tells *when* Christ came, *how* he came, *whence* he came and the *purpose* of his coming.

The church of the first century had no need of any external ceremony to recall the stupendous fact of the incarnation. To Paul the observance of days and months and seasons belonged to Judaism. Every day was



Christmas to him—Christ in him the hope of glory. He required no Christmas card to remind him that God so loved the world. He bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. The only Christmas tree he knew was the tree on Calvary. He was so close to the event that he felt its full and awful significance. In Paul's epistles we have the most ancient documentary evidence of what the birth of Jesus meant to early Christianity. And it is refreshing to go back to those days and to those records. If you would know the length and breadth and height and depth of God's love for the world in sending His son, read Paul's epistles. No one ever packed more meaning into words than this dauntless missionary, writing to his early converts. Here we have "good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over." There is nothing shallow nor superficial in Paul's Christology.

In our day Christmas has degenerated into a day of hilarious mirth or, what is far worse, a certain dullness of understanding. An American college poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay, felt this when she wrote these lines, "To Jesus on His Birthday":

"For this your Mother sweated in the cold,—  
For this you bled upon the bitter tree.  
A yard of tinsel-ribbon bought and sold,  
A paper wreath, a day at home for me.  
The merry bells ring out, the people kneel—  
Up goes the man of God before the crowd  
With voice of honey and with eyes of steel,

He drones your humble Gospel to the proud.  
Nobody listens. Less than the wind that blows  
Are all your words to us! You died to save—  
O Prince of Peace! O Sharon's dewy Rose,  
How mute you lie within your painted grave,  
The stone the Angel rolled away with tears  
Is back upon your mouth these thousand years."

Not so. Christ is alive forevermore. He still speaks to those who will listen. He gave Paul the gospel of the cosmic Christ and John the gospel of the Incarnation. According to both John and Paul the birth of our Saviour at Bethlehem was the one divine event in which all other events culminated. This was the crisis of history, the goal of Old Testament prophecy, the greatest occurrence since the creation and therefore once again "the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy." We shall see in our next chapter that Jesus was born in the fullness of time—when everything was ripe and ready for his manifestation. Paul gives us, in scattered fragments, an outline of the Divine biography revealed to him—the mystery of all the ages, the incarnation of the Son of God:

"He was manifested in the flesh,  
Justified in the spirit,  
Seen of Angels,  
Preached among the nations,  
Believed on in the world,  
Received up into glory."

Such was "the form of sound words" he taught Timothy, perhaps the earliest creed of Christendom. "For," said he, to the Corinthian church, "ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich." "For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell and through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself having made peace through the blood of His cross." The one thought always present to the mind of Paul was the vision he saw on the road to Damascus. Jesus of Nazareth, risen from the dead, to whom all power and glory belonged, and who had this power and glory before He came to earth as our Redeemer. Back of all the genealogies, back of the lowly home at Nazareth, back of Bethlehem's manger, Paul saw one eternal "Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things, and we through Him" (I Cor. 8:6, A.R.V.). The life of Jesus for him had no adequate nor ultimate, conclusive explanation save in the eternities with God Himself. He is the man from heaven who descended, but also ascended again to lead captivity captive and give gifts unto men. A merely human Christ does not fit into Paul's epistles nor into the Gospel of John. The life and death and resurrection of Jesus had relation to the whole universe. Paul leaves Darwin far behind in his glorious realistic philosophy! All nature as well as all humanity share in the fruits of the incarnation and the atonement. A survival even of the unfit

and the unholy by Christ's redemption! "For creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

"We must recognize," says Gwilym O. Griffith," that to make Christ's Bethlehem birth the upspringing out of the unconscious of a life which had no antecedent being and therefore no elective purpose, no will-to-be, until it fashioned that will out of its own infant appetites, would be to take all the colour out of Paul's Gospel; it would muffle the majestic organ-tones of Grace which accompany and interpret the entire recitative of Paul's narration of Christ's earthly ministry; it would deprive us of the glow and rapture of a redemption wrought for us at infinite cost by One who, though He was rich for our sakes became poor."<sup>1</sup>

The deity of Christ makes all the difference in our Christmas joy. He who came to the Manger was God's Son. To deny this is to deny essential Christianity. If the Saviour of men is not identical with their Creator, there are no good-tidings of great joy for the human race and no help in the Cross for the sinner.

"And the Word was made flesh," John says, the very Word which was God and in the beginning was with God. At Bethlehem "we beheld His glory as of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth."

Longfellow in his poem on Martin Luther, puts those words into the mouth of the great Reformer at the Wartburg:

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<sup>1</sup> St. Paul's Life of Christ, p. 91.

"Nothing can vex the devil more  
Than the name of Him whom we adore.  
Therefore doth it delight me best  
To stand in the choir among the rest,  
With the great organ trumpeting,  
Through its metallic notes, and sing:  
*Et verbum caro factum est!*<sup>2</sup>

These words the devil can not endure  
For he knoweth their meaning well!  
Him they trouble and repel  
Us they comfort and allure;  
And happy it were if our delight  
Were as great as his afright!"

"And the Word was made flesh." John had a twofold object in his Gospel and his Epistles, both expressed in the short prologue. He writes to prove the real divinity and the actual suffering of Jesus Christ in his human nature; that he was God and man, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

In our day we are told to look for "the historic Jesus," the man of Galilee, a teacher sent of God, the friend of the outcast and the oppressed, the critic of society and the Jewish church, very like other great reformers even in his limitations. But a merely human Christ, no matter how humane and tender, can not

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<sup>2</sup> And the Word was made flesh.

suffice. We need the Lord of Glory, the Christ of eternal love and eternal redemption, the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world. We need a Saviour who is alive forevermore and who abolished death and brought life and immortality to the world by His Incarnation.

“Shakespeare is dust, and will not come  
To question from his Avon tomb,  
And Socrates and Shelley keep  
An Attic and Italian sleep.

They will not see us, nor again  
Shall indignation light the brain  
Where Lincoln on his woodland height  
Tells out the spring and winter night.

They see not. But, O Christians, who  
Throng Holborn and Fifth Avenue,  
May you not meet, in spite of death,  
A traveler from Nazareth?”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Drinkwater, *To and Fro About the City*.

## **THE FULLNESS OF TIME**

Far, far away is Bethlehem,  
And years are long and dim  
Since Mary held the holy Child  
And angels sang to Him:  
But still to hearts where love and faith  
Make room for Christ in them,  
He comes again, the Child from God,  
To find His Bethlehem.

—*W. Russell Bowie*



## CHAPTER II

### THE FULLNESS OF TIME

THE lesson of astronomy and of geology is the long patience of God. He could have created the whole universe instantaneously but we know now, from the Bible, and from the book of nature, that it was an age-long process. When old Bishop Usher put the date 4004 B. C. in the margin of the first verses in Genesis he betrayed the fact that he had never meditated long on the ninetieth Psalm or on the story of creation in the book of Job. God lives in eternity. A thousand years with Him are as one day and one day as a thousand years. We need to understand that God is patient. He can wait without irritation and He can work without seeing immediate results. The ninety-ninth bead on the Moslem prayer-rosary is the last and they name it, The Patient God. Christ first taught this lesson in many of his parables; and John, who knew Jesus best, speaks of his patience in the Revelation. After all things were ready and countless ages had laid stores of coal and oil and minerals in the bowels of the earth for man's use God created our first parents in His image and gave them dominion.

So also at the coming of the Second Adam, the Saviour of mankind, all things were ready. It was the "fullness of the time." Paul uses this expression twice in his epistles and in both cases the words refer to

Christ's first and second advent. "When *the fulness of the time* was come, God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4). *That* refers to Bethlehem as we saw in the preceding chapter. "He hath purposed in himself that in the dispensation of *the fulness of times* he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth" (Ephes. 1:10). *That* refers to the second Advent and the consummation of God's plan of redemption.

The Greek word used in both cases is *pleroma*, which means filled up to the brim. We know what it means in nature: first the blade, then the ear and after that the fully ripened grain and the harvest. We know what it means in physics: you can saturate a solution up to the fullness of time and then it is no longer fluid but crystalizes. We know what it means in physiology: the growth of the hidden ovum to maturity and birth, or the crisis in a fever. All these are illustrations of what we mean by the nick of time, the critical moment, the final process in a long series of events, all of which have vital relation to each other and to the goal toward which they led.

In this very sense Jesus was born at Bethlehem in the fullness of God's time for that greatest of all events in human history. It was a happy thought of Dionysius, a theologian and astronomer of the sixth century, to introduce a Christian era, dating all events not from the founding of Rome but B. C. and A. D., making the manger at Bethlehem the center of history. Today that era has become almost universal; even in new Turkey

the Angora assembly adopted it together with the Gregorian calendar, a few years ago.

The four hundred years between Malachi and Matthew are not adequately represented in our Bibles by the blank page that divides the Old Testament from the New Testament. On that page we must inscribe the fullness of preparation, the fullness of expectation and the fullness of despair before the coming of the Redeemer.

On that page we must write the names of four great cities that rose to power and influence in God's eternal purpose for the spread of his gospel: Rome, Alexandria, Athens, Jerusalem. As Edersheim remarks: "The reign of Augustus marked not only the climax but the crisis of Roman history. Whatever of good or evil the ancient world contained had become fully ripe. As regards politics, philosophy, religion and society the utmost limits had been reached. Beyond them lay as the only alternatives, ruin or regeneration."<sup>1</sup> Stoicism and Epicureanism had both done their best and their worst. There were three sad and pitiful signs of the times—the treatment of slaves, the callous attitude of the luxurious rich toward the poor, and the public amusements in the arena of cruelty. Five great historic figures were raised up of God as harbingers of a new era and, in a sense, preparatory leaders for the coming of the King of Righteousness and the Prince of Peace. Socrates was a contemporary of Malachi. The former died 399 B. C. and the two lives overlap. The last

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<sup>1</sup> Life of Christ, vol. 1: p. 256.

great spiritual teacher of Israel was succeeded by the first great spiritual teacher of the classic world. There had been many philosophers before Socrates but their teaching landed men in the slough of despond. This philosopher had firm footing on the road to monotheism, taught the dignity of manhood and was assured of the immortality of the soul. He prepared the way for Plato and Paul. Alexander the Great was a pupil of Aristotle and so became more Greek than Macedonian. He carried Greek literature and culture to the bounds of Persia and India until all the near East was Hellenized. The Jews of Alexandria translated their sacred books into Greek and so, by means of the Septuagint, the doors for the proclamation of the Gospel were opened to all Greek-speaking Jews who mediated the message; as we see in the case of Philip, and Stephen and Barnabas. Alexander the Great prepared the way by his conquests and the spread of Greek culture for Christ's messengers throughout Asia Minor.

Judas Maccabeus broke the foreign yoke from the neck of the Jews in Palestine and one hundred and fifty years before Christ was born, kindled the flame of patriotism and freedom. The Jews were to be consolidated, unified, given a better hope and inspired with faith for their future deliverance. The prime agent in this work was Judas Maccabeus. For over a century the Jews paid tribute to no foreign master. Their leader died in 160 B. C. but his soul went marching on. Israel waited for a King.

Julius Caesar's name and greatness are familiar to

all. More than all other Romans put together he made the world-empire what it was. He gave distinctive character to Roman citizenship, built roads across Europe, made travel safe and commerce international. Along Caesar's great highways his legions marched to extend the empire and the apostles went on their mission of peace. As Professor Breed remarks, "Julius Caesar made the 'Acts of the Apostles' possible."

Herod the Great was great in cruelty and profligacy and yet he too had a place in God's plan. Herod cherished the hope of Israel by rebuilding the Temple. Forty-six years, the gospel tells us, he toiled to enrich and embellish Jerusalem, and gave it a sanctuary that rivalled Solomon's Temple. When that building was completed, the Lord of the Temple came suddenly to the Temple of the Lord (Malachi 3:1). Aged Simeon, holding the babe of Bethlehem in his arms, cried: "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace O Lord according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples. A light to lighten the gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel."

All things were ready. The temple-gate Beautiful, and Solomon's porch, and the great court-yard—what were they but Herod's pulpit built for the Teacher sent from God who would abolish the sacrifices because He himself was the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

Three languages were prepared for the word of God and for Pilate's inscription on the Cross. In Hebrew, in

Greek and in Latin the story of the Saviour-King would soon be heard in three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa; three worlds—the world of Roman law, of Greek civilization and of Jewish tradition.

Harnack puts first among the factors that ushered in "the fullness of the time," the Dispersion of the Jews. This was God's providential preparation. Here was a wide field partly tilled in every great city; a preliminary knowledge of the Old Testament promises; the habit of public worship to One true God and superior ethical standards in contrast with paganism; and last but not least an innate urge to win proselytes—the zeal of Zion.

The Jews were inter-racial merchants and traveled everywhere. One in Phrygia is mentioned who made the voyage to Rome seventy-two times in the course of his life. In short we may sum up these preparatory events in the words of the great church historian:

"The narrow world had become a wide world, the rent world had become a unity, the barbarian world had become Greek and Roman; *one* empire, *one* universal language and *one* civilization; a common development toward monotheism and a common yearning for Saviours."<sup>2</sup>

There was a fullness of expectation among Jew and Gentile for the coming of a redeemer. The third book of the Sibylline Oracles (which for the most part dates from the first century before Christ) presents a picture

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<sup>2</sup> Harnack's *Mission and Expansion of Christendom*, vol. 1: p. 22.

of Messianic times which is generally admitted to have formed the basis of Virgil's remarkable description in his Fourth Eclogue of a coming Golden Age, under a Messiah-child sent by the gods. The following portion of this Fourth Eclogue is from the rendering by John Dryden and reminds us of the Spanish saying, The eyes of Virgil were the first to see the Star of Bethlehem:

“The Father banished virtue shall restore,  
And crimes shall threat the guilty World no more,  
The Son shall lead the life of Gods, and be  
By Gods and Heroes seen, and Gods and Heroes see.  
The jarring Nations he in peace shall bind,  
And with paternal virtues rule Mankind.  
Unbidden Earth shall wreathing Ivy bring  
And fragrant Herbs (the promises of Spring)  
As her first offerings to her infant King.”

An even more remarkable indication of this longing for a world-mediator, one who could restore peace and righteousness, is found in Plato. He almost echoes the prophecy of Isaiah regarding the servant of Jehovah who would suffer for the transgressions of His people and by whose stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53). Here are the astonishing words: “The perfectly righteous man, who without doing any wrong may assume the appearance of the grossest injustice; yea who shall be scourged, fettered, tortured, deprived of his eyesight, and after having endured all possible sufferings, fastened to a post, must restore again the beginning and

prototype of righteousness" (Politia 4:74). It is immaterial to ask where Plato got his idea of a just man suffering for the unjust. The idea is there and gave rise to the hope for a redeemer.

Waiting disciples were looking for the Consolation of Israel; Simeon, Anna and Zacharias are only three out of many, whose names are not recorded by Luke. The pious Jew and the Greek Proselytes of the Gate (like the Ethiopian eunuch) read the prophecies of Isaiah and other promises of a golden age yet to be. The exceeding great and precious promises of the Old Testament scriptures were not yet clear but they saw them as from afar and rejoiced with Abraham the father of the faithful "who saw Christ's day and was glad." (John 8:56.)

Not without reason did our Saviour challenge the Scribes and Pharisees to search the Scriptures because they testified to his coming, his character and his mission. The earliest Messianic promise was given at the gates of a lost Paradise to our first parents, "*the seed of the woman*" shall bruise the head of the serpent. That expression occurs nowhere else in the Bible and is deeply significant.

"Praise to the Holiest in the height  
 And in the depth be praise  
 In all His words most wonderful  
 Most sure in all His ways.  
 "O loving Wisdom of our God!  
 When all was sin and shame,



A Second Adam to the fight  
And to the rescue came."

Then the promise was that the coming deliverer would belong to the Semitic Race (Gen. 9:26-27). Afterwards God appeared unto Abraham (Gen. 12) and gave him the promise: "I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing . . . and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This promise was reiterated and made more definite to Isaac and to Jacob. Then on his death-bed Jacob singled out Judah in his prophetic blessing as the ancestor of the coming deliverer: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh (the rest-giver) come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." (Gen. 49:10.)

Later we have the remarkable prophecy of Balaam (Numbers 24:17) when he fell into a trance and saw a vision of the Almighty: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth . . . out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion."

These are Messianic prophecies of the Kingship of Christ. Moses spake of him as the prophet: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken . . . I will raise them up a Prophet

from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him" (Deut. 18:15-18).

When Jesus spake with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, he himself, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27.) And, he said to another group of his disciples after his resurrection, "All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44).

When we search the Old Testament we find the promised Messiah in types and ceremonials in symbols and ritual—a picture-book of the Christ who came at the fullness of the time. Especially in the Psalms (2, 22, 72, 110, etc.) and in Isaiah and Daniel we have pen-pictures of the coming Messiah so distinct and definite that they seem to have been written after the event instead of centuries before Christ's birth. Like a pyramid these prophecies rise from a wide base and become more definite and glorious as they rise higher and higher on the lips of the prophets—the suffering Servant, the Consolation of Israel, the victorious Deliverer, the Prophet, the Priest and the King "who shall have dominion from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth."

In view of such promises and the general expectation of the Jews it is no wonder that the apostles put the question to Jesus, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6.)

Hopes and expectations were also expressed, sometimes wildly and without restraint in the apocalyptic literature of this period, such as the Book of Enoch and the Psalter of Solomon. But we think chiefly of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. These are not only more numerous than the average reader imagines, they are cumulative and together form a full-length pen-portrait of the coming Deliverer that is amazing in its distinctness and glory. Dr. Charles A. Briggs in his great work on *Messianic Prophecy*, after a critical study of all the Old Testament passages gives a synopsis in a final chapter. The Messianic ideal advances through the long centuries from the germ of the protevangelium in Genesis 3:15 to the magnificent chapters of Isaiah and Daniel. The coming of the Redeemer is to be a conflict with evil until he is victorious and returns upon the clouds of heaven to triumph over the Anti-Christ (Daniel). The new Jerusalem is to surpass the glory of the Tabernacle, with its Shekinah, and the Temple. Its gates, open to all nations, are for salvation and praise. The gentiles are to bring their glory and honor as tribute to the Messiah King. "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River unto the ends of the earth." (Psalm 72 A. R. V.). The King comes for judgment as well as for salvation. The great judgment will be a battle, a harvest and a treading of the wine-press. (Zephaniah 1:14-18; 3:1-3.) The great and terrible day of the Lord (Malachi) is also a day of redemption and the outpouring of God's

spirit (Joel). Israel will rise from the dead and her dry bones live (Ezekiel).

The Messiah will come as prophet (Moses) priest (Ezekiel) and King (Isaiah). He will reign on the throne of David in righteousness forever. A twig from the stump of Jesse will fill the whole earth with its fruitfulness (Isaiah). A Ruler will be born in Bethlehem. He will fulfill all the ancient promises and become great to the ends of the earth (Micah 5:1-4). Zechariah tells how the Messiah will build the spiritual temple of Jehovah and become its capstone; combining the priestly and royal offices in his noble crown and become the perpetual channel of the divine grace (Zech. 3:8—4:14). Jeremiah unfolds the doctrine of the New Covenant which the Messiah will introduce—written not on stone but on the heart. What a portrait!

"In Jesus of Nazareth," says Dr. Briggs, "the key of the messianic prophecy of the Old Testament has been found. All its phases find their realization in His unique personality, in His unique work and in His unique kingdom. The Messiah of prophecy appears in the Messiah of history . . . For it was the same divine Being who devised the redemption of the world, who revealed it in prophetic prediction, who prepared for it in the development of history, who accomplished it in time and eternity."<sup>8</sup>

It is inconceivable that the Scribes who made such meticulous study of the Old Testament and the best minds among the Pharisees should have been totally

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<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 497-498.

ignorant of the general import of prophecy and the significance of the symbols and types of their religion. When John the Baptist cried out "Behold the Lamb of God" he spoke a language that was understood because of the temple-sacrifices and the great prophecy of Isaiah. When Jesus called himself the Light of the World or the Bread of Life no Jew could fail to think of the seven-branched candlestick ever-burning in the sanctuary or of the table of shew-bread in the Tabernacle.

The fact is that without the promise of a coming Deliverer (a Prophet like unto Moses, a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and a King whose dominion and power would be greater than that of Solomon) the Old Testament prophecies lack a key and a solution. All of the Old Testament pointed to Christ and some knew it and understood. They were waiting for the consolation of Israel. Close students of Messianic prophecy gathered from the Old Testament that the Messiah would spring from the tribe of Judah and the house of David; that he would be born at Bethlehem of Judea as Micah foretold; that the time of his appearance was dimly but no less surely indicated in the remarkable prophecies of Daniel; and that while the Messiah would somehow exercise the offices of prophet, priest and king he would also be a Servant of Jehovah "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." This paradox of a coming Deliverer who would himself suffer in redeeming Israel is admitted by Jewish writers before the birth

of Jesus and was the stumbling-block of Israel when he came to his own and his own received him not. So "they that feared Jehovah spake one with another; and Jehovah hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared Jehovah, and that thought upon his name" (Mal. 3:16, A. R. V.).

Then, in the fullness of time, to those that were waiting and expecting like Anna, Zacharias, and aged Simeon and many more, the Sun of righteousness arose with healing in his wings. In the power of Elijah the prophet, John the Baptist came as herald of the King to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6). Daniel's dream and vision must have been of great comfort to the generations just before Christ came, an age of confusion and ruthless conquest when men's hearts failed them for fear. "In the days of those Kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44, A. R. V.). This was the ideal kingdom of which David told in the Psalms. It was the coming Messiah who would "judge the people with righteousness and the poor with justice." He would break in pieces the oppressor. His name would endure forever and all nations would call him blessed. Even as God promised to Abraham at the first so would he fulfill it all in the fullness of time. That time had come.

## THE STUMBLING-BLOCK OF THE MANGER

HYMN XXXII

The Nativity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

“Where is this stupendous stranger  
Swains of Solyma, advise  
Lead me to my Master’s Manger  
Shew me where my Saviour lies?

O most Mighty! O most holy  
Far beyond the seraphs thought,  
Art thou then so mean and lowly  
As unheeded prophets taught?

O the magnitude of meekness!  
Worth from worth immortal sprung;  
O the strength of infant weakness  
If eternal is so young!

If so young, and thus eternal,  
Michael tunes the shepherd’s reed  
Where the scenes are ever vernal  
And the loves he loves indeed.

God all-bounteous, all-creative  
Whom no ills from good dissuade  
Is incarnate, and a native  
Of the very world he made.

—*Christopher Smart*

The Psalms of David, London, 1765



## CHAPTER III

### THE STUMBLING-BLOCK OF THE MANGER

THE Manger has always been a stumbling-block to unbelief even as has the Cross. From the days of Celsus to the Modernists of our time the early chapters of Matthew's Gospel and Luke's narrative of the birth of Jesus were put aside as unworthy of acceptance. They were cunningly devised fables and not actual history. Those who repudiate all that is supernatural in the Bible could not of course accept such a record of the origin of Christ. Others esteem the mode by which Jesus is reported to have begun his bodily existence as unessential to faith. In fact, there are those who say they believe in the deity of our Lord and even his pre-existence but who consider the Virgin-birth as of no serious importance. But we should write Ichabod—the glory has departed—over the Manger—if these early records of the birth, the shepherds, the star and the song of the angels were myths.

The historicity of the documents, however, is evident from their very nature. Religious myths are common enough but they were not put into the Gospels. Peter in his epistle writes: "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,

but were eye witnesses of his majesty." (II Peter 1:16.)

And Luke puts as preface to his Gospel words that would stamp him as deliberately untruthful and un-historical if what he tells in his first two chapters is all fable: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed." Ramsay has shown that Luke is an accurate historian in all his geographical and chronological references both in the Gospel and in the Acts. When people write myths or fables they usually begin by saying "Once upon a time." But the Gospel records are anchored in historical references and geographical data. One has only to compare, for example, the first three verses of the third chapter of Luke with the Koran or the Book of Mormon (where chronology and geography are absent or absurd) to recognize the absolute difference. As Dr. A. B. Bruce remarks, Luke's literary plan and methods imply "inquiry, accuracy and vouchers desired for every statement." The things recorded in this gospel "concern the things which have become widely known among us Christians."<sup>1</sup>

One marvels at the credulity of unbelief in such a

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<sup>1</sup> Expositor's Greek Testament, vol. I, p. 459.

statement as that made by the late Nathaniel Schmidt of Cornell University: "It may be affirmed that we have no absolutely contemporary evidence preserved in its original form by which to prove that Jesus of Nazareth ever lived!"<sup>2</sup> The fact is that Scholars of authority, such as Burkitt, Harnack and Barnes, are now upholding the genuineness of the well-known passage in Josephus (A. D. 37-100) which has often been discredited as having suffered from interpolation. The passage is as follows: "Now about this time lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed it be lawful to call Him a man. For He was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of men who received the truth with pleasure; and drew over to Him many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the instigation of the leading men among us, had condemned Him to the cross, those who loved Him at first did not cease to do so. For He appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold this and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning Him, and the tribe of Christians, so named from Him, are not extinct to this day."<sup>3</sup>

Besides we have the witness of Pagan writers of the first century, Tacitus, Pliny the younger, and Lucian of Samosata. These references to the life and death of Jesus are so important that we have quoted them at length in an appendix, to this chapter.

Sir James Frazer, the famous author of *The Golden*

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<sup>2</sup> Problems Concerning the Origin of Religions in J.A.O.S., Sept. 1933.

<sup>3</sup> From *Antiquities*, xxviii. iii. s. 3.

*Bough*, speaks of the folly of those who deny the historicity of the Gospels:

"As my views on this subject appear to have been strangely misunderstood, I desire to point out explicitly that my theory assumes the historical reality of Jesus as a great religious and moral teacher, who founded Christianity and was crucified at Jerusalem under the governorship of Pontius Pilate . . . The doubts which have been cast on the historical reality of Jesus are in my mind unworthy of serious attention. Quite apart from the positive evidence of history and tradition, the origin of a great religious and moral reform is inexplicable without the personal existence of a great reformer. To dissolve the founder of Christianity into a myth, as some would do, is hardly less absurd than it would be to do the same for Mohammed, Luther, and Calvin. Such dissolving views are for the most part the dreams of students who know the great world chiefly through its pale reflexion in books." (*The Golden Bough*, part vi.)

History is not only a part but the peculiar mark of the Apostles Creed. It begins with lofty theism and then anchors the doctrines of the Incarnation and the atonement by declaring them in the realm of history: "born of the Virgin Mary . . . suffered under Pontius Pilate." It integrates Jesus into the very chronology of the Roman Empire. How different are the Sacred records of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam from the New Testament! One may well ask why the Virgin birth has been a stumbling-block to unbelief since the

days of Celsus, the great opponent of early Christianity. What reasons are given for the rejection of this particular article in the Apostles Creed and on what grounds do those who accept the general truthfulness of Luke's gospel reject the story of Bethlehem? There are even those who accept the miracle of the Resurrection and nevertheless stumble at the doctrine of the Virgin birth. Yet the twofold miracles are perfectly congruous. The entrance and the exit of the Son of God into the world of humanity and his assuming human nature are necessarily events that transcend human comprehension. "Supernatural birth," as Dr. John McNaugher remarks, "is a most credible and befitting preface to a life consummated by rising from the dead; nothing could be more intrinsically congruous. As in the resurrection the career of Jesus received its appropriate finale, so in the Virgin birth that career had its appropriate prelude." Trailing clouds of glory he came into our earthly night and clouds of glory received him from the sight of the eleven on the holy mount when he ascended again.

Concerning the Virgin birth and as against the doctrine of the church universal expressed in its creeds and based on the Holy Scriptures, two theories have been proposed.

1. That Jesus was born as the illegitimate child of Mary by some other man than Joseph.

2. That Jesus was born in the ordinary manner as the son of Joseph and Mary.

The first theory was invented by the Jews in the

second century for polemical purposes and appears in the Talmudic literature. According to this abhorrent caricature Mary became pregnant by a Roman soldier Panthera who seduced her. This foul aspersion was adopted by Celsus, a pagan philosopher of the second century. It was rehabilitated by Voltaire and later by Tolstoi and Haeckel, in *The Riddle of the Universe*. Today there are few indeed who give credence to this old but vulgar calumny. The crystal Christ could not have been the bastard son of an unchaste mother.

The second theory is that of anti-supernaturalist Modernism, altho it was first held by the ancient heretical sect of the Ebionites. This view does not always exclude belief in the incarnation. Dr. W. N. Clarke, in his "Outlines of Theology," says: "We must be careful not to say that God could not have become incarnate through an ordinary human birth, for we cannot be sure that this is true." Obviously, that is so. We do not know enough either about God or about an ordinary human birth to make so bold an assertion. There are others who deny the Virgin birth but hold firmly to the other evangelical doctrines. We may well ask therefore on what grounds the Modernists make this denial. The genuineness and authenticity of Matthew's gospel and the gospel of Luke are generally assumed without argument. The objections are to the birth narratives in the first two chapters. But the reply is that these very chapters are found in all the manuscripts (uncials, and cursives), as well as in all the ancient versions. One has only to look at a

critical Greek text of the New Testament to be convinced that all the external evidence is in favor of the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke just as they stand. Moreover, critics are agreed that these stories fit into the narrative and that the two accounts are not contradictory but supplemental and corroborative. Dr. Oscar Holtzmann, himself an advanced critic, states, "A contradiction between these narratives of Matthew and Luke does not exist." Dr. James Orr sums up no less than twelve points in which, by a fair reading of the text, they coincide. The birth-story has a double witness both from the viewpoint of Joseph, as in Matthew, and that of Mary in Luke.<sup>1</sup> Those who desire all the evidence for the integrity of the text as given in the gospels may find it in Dr. J. Gresham Machen's scholarly monograph.<sup>2</sup> No reply was ever written to this massive work. Again the Modernist argues that there is no allusion to the Virgin birth in any other part of the New Testament, and that it had no place in the earliest apostolic preaching. We reply that by implication there are many references to the supernatural origin of "the man Christ Jesus" in the New Testament. When Paul writes to the Galatian church that "God sent forth his Son *born of a woman*, born under the law," what sense can we find in this pleonasm except that it is a clear reference to the birth of Jesus from the Virgin? Paul knew the promise in Genesis with its unique and peculiar emphasis that "the seed of the *woman*" would bruise the head of the serpent. When

<sup>1</sup> The Virgin Birth by John McNaugher, Pittsburgh, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> The Virgin Birth of Christ, New York, 1930, p. 414.

Paul writes to Timothy regarding the subordinate place of women in public assemblies and states that Adam was superior to Eve he closes his exhortation with the remarkable words: "Nevertheless she" (that is believing womanhood) "shall be saved *by the Child-bearing.*" Surely a woman's salvation was not dependent on a numerous offspring but on the one Child of promise the virgin-born Son of God (I Tim. 2:15). Again we find a reference in John's gospel to "the Word" which "became flesh" and "we beheld his glory." Why does not that refer to the glory of the incarnation and the story of Bethlehem? In the thirteenth verse of the first chapter some modern scholars, of widely differing types, find a distinct reference to the Virgin birth. Here those who believe the Word are those "who were begotten not of bloods nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." But according to the express testimony of Tertullian there was an early second century reading of this text which had the singular instead of the plural. It would then read "*He* was begotten not of bloods nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God." If this old reading is correct, John denies any physical human paternity to Christ and asserts the Virgin birth in the clearest possible way.<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine in his Confessions quotes this verse from John's gospel in the singular and takes it to refer to the Virgin birth. "Also I found there that 'God the Word was

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<sup>3</sup> Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, pp. 255-258.



born not of blood nor of the will of a husband nor of the will of the flesh but of God.'"<sup>4</sup>

To these rather obscure references we must add the fact that throughout the whole New Testament Jesus is called the Son of God in a peculiar sense. This title is almost entirely unknown before Christ came. The Encyclopedia Biblica says, "There is no passage in Jewish literature that can be confidently dated as earlier than Christianity in which this name is given to the Messiah." Yet it suddenly takes on supreme importance in the Acts and the Epistles. Luke's gospel gives us the key to this astonishing fact. It is the Virgin birth. (Luke 1:34-35.) In answer to Mary's question, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? the angel replies: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." The word *therefore* is emphatic and decisive.

The word Son of God as applied to Jesus the Christ undoubtedly has a threefold significance, namely, his physical origin, his Messiahship and his Deity. Luke refers to the first, the second psalm and other Old Testament prophecies to the second and Paul in his epistles to the third significance of this title. But the first meaning is fundamental. Dr. Albertus Pieters for many years a missionary in Japan, in a remarkable article on *The Circumstantial Evidence of the*

<sup>4</sup> Bk. VII, Chapter IX.

*Virgin Birth*,<sup>5</sup> concludes: "In the light of this meaning of the words 'Son of God,' what becomes of the alleged silence of the New Testament with regard to the Virgin Birth? If the very words 'Son of God' carry this implication, then the New Testament, so far from being silent, is vocal with the doctrine on almost every page. To prove the alleged silence, one must be able to prove that this meaning, in spite of its being emphatically put forth in Luke 1:35, was unknown or unthought of in the generation immediately after the death of Christ. It would take a good deal of proving to establish that!

"I would like to go one step further, and say that we have here, in my opinion, an explanation of the silence of the New Testament writers so far as explicit discussion or detailed mention of the Virgin Birth story itself is concerned. If I am right, the cruel and revolting accusation that Jesus was of illegitimate birth must have constantly come up in discussions with unbelieving Jews, and it became convenient to use a formula rather than a franker expression. Such controversies frequently crystallize in terse formulas. Once the formula was well understood within the Christian church it would be constantly used, with full consciousness of what it meant, and just for that reason all further description of the event would be superfluous. So understood, the silence of the New Testament results not from lack of knowledge, or from rejection, but from completeness of acceptance."

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<sup>5</sup> The Moslem World, Vol. XIX, pp. 353-368.

The earliest Creed of the church has no other reference to the deity of our Lord than the statement: "His only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." Assume the Virgin birth, and the Christology of Ephesians and Colossians has an adequate starting point. Deny the virgin birth and such Christology is without any adequate explanation. Consider the virgin birth a cunningly devised fable and the whole development of the doctrine of Christ's eternal sonship and his cosmic significance hangs in the air. Where did Paul get his conception of the origin of the person of Christ? Was not Luke the physician his travelling companion? Did they never discuss this matter concerning which Luke was already gathering his material for Theophilus? (Acts 1:1.).

The Virgin birth belongs to that essential and primitive and permanent Christianity which is truly Catholic. Evidence for it can be found in the epistles of Ignatius, in the apologies of Aristides and of Justin, in the writings of Iranaeus, Tertullian, Clement, and Origen. Subsequently we find it in all the great creeds of Christendom. It was believed always by everybody, and everywhere in the Holy Catholic Church. This is overwhelmingly attested by the creeds and hymnologies and liturgies of the Greek, the Roman, and the Protestant churches. The story of the Virgin birth is enshrined in the art and architecture and literature of Christendom. Those who make it a stumbling-block do so through unbelief.

### APPENDIX TO CHAPTER III

#### Witness of Pagan Writers to the Historicity of Jesus Christ:

##### TACITUS

IN the following passage Tacitus is speaking of the burning of Rome (A. D. 64) and commenting upon Nero's method of turning public suspicion from himself. He writes (*Ann. XV. 44*):

“So to stifle the report, Nero put in his own place as culprits, and punished with every refinement of cruelty, the men whom the common people hated for their secret crimes. They called them Christians. Christ, from whom the name was given, had been put to death in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate and the pestilent superstition checked for a while. Afterwards it began to break out afresh not only in Judea where the mischief first arose, but also at Rome, where all sorts of murder and filthy shame meet together and become fashionable. In the first place then some were seized and made to confess, then on their information, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much of arson as of hatred of the human race. And they were not only put to death, but put to death with insults, in that they were dressed up in the skins

of beasts to perish by the worrying of dogs, or else put on crosses to be set on fire, and when the day-light failed, to be burnt for use as lights by night.”<sup>1</sup>

### PLINY THE YOUNGER

OUR second witness was a friend of Tacitus. We possess nine books of Pliny's *Letters*, and a separate book containing his *Correspondence with Trajan*. This *Correspondence* supplies us with many interesting details as to the government of Bithynia, and as to the relations between the governor and the central authority. It reflects the greatest credit on the strict and almost punctilious conscientiousness of the governor, and on the assiduity and the high principles which animated the Emperor.

Of these letters we here quote the famous one to the Emperor Trajan, bearing upon the treatment of Christians. It was written while Pliny was governor of Bithynia, and in the collection is the ninety-seventh of the tenth book.

“It is my custom, Lord Emperor, to refer to you all questions whereof I am in doubt. Who can better guide me when I am at a stand, or enlighten me if I am in ignorance? In the investigation of Christians I have never taken part, hence I do not know what is the crime usually punished or investigated, or what

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<sup>1</sup> Suetonius, writing some years later (A.D. 120), says of this event: ‘The Christians, a kind of name given to a new, and criminal superstition, were put to death with grievous torments.’ *On the Life of the Caesars*, Nero, 16.

allowances are made. So I have had no little uncertainty whether there is any distinction of age, or whether the very weakest offenders are treated like the stronger; whether pardon is given to those who repent, or whether nobody who has ever been a Christian at all, gains anything by having ceased to be such; whether punishment attaches to the mere name, apart from secret crimes, or to the secret crimes connected with the name. Meanwhile this is the course I have taken with those accused before me as Christians. I asked at their own lips whether they were Christians, and if they confessed, I asked them a second and a third time with threats of punishment. If they kept to it, I ordered them to execution; for I held no question that whatever it was that they admitted, in any case, obstinacy and unbending perversity deserve to be punished. There were others of the like insanity, but as these were Roman citizens, I noted them down to be sent to Rome. In the course of the proceedings, as is often the case, the mere fact that the charge was taken notice of made it commoner, and several distinct cases arose. An unsigned paper was presented, which gave the names of many. As for those who said that they neither were nor ever had been Christians, I thought it right to let them go, when they recited a prayer to the gods at my dictation, made supplication with incense and wine to your statue, which I had ordered to be brought into court for the purpose together with the images of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ—not one of which things (so it is said) can those who are really Christians be made to do. Others who were

named by the informer said that they were Christians and then denied it, explaining that they had been, but had ceased to be such, some three years ago, some a good many years, and a few as many as Twenty. All these too not only worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, but cursed Christ. They maintained, however, that the amount of their fault or error had been this, that it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before day-light and sing by turns a hymn to Christ as God (or a God); and that they bound themselves with an oath, not to commit any enormity but to abstain from theft, brigandage or adultery, not to break their word, and not to deny a deposit when demanded. After this was done, their custom was to depart, and meet together again to take food, but ordinary and innocent food; and even this (they said) they had given up doing after the issue of my edict, by which in accordance with your commands, I had forbidden the existence of clubs. On this I considered it the more necessary to find out from two maid-servants who were called ministrae, and that by tortments, how far this was true; but I discovered nothing else than a perverted and extravagant superstition. I therefore adjourned the case and hastened to consult you. The matter seemed to me worth taking counsel on, especially on account of the number of those in danger. For many of every age, of every rank, and moreover of both sexes are already or will be summoned to stand their trial. For this superstition has infected not only the town, but also the villages and

country; yet it seems possible to stop it and set it right. At any rate it is certain enough that the almost deserted temples begin to be resorted to, that long disused ceremonies of religion are restored, and that fodder for victims finds a market, whereas buyers till now were very few. From this it may easily be supposed what a multitude of men may be reformed if they are given a chance of repentance."

The above is a letter from the governor of a province to his Emperor asking for instructions. It was written in A. D. 112 less than ninety years after the appointment of Pontius Pilate as procurator of Judea.

Speaking of the attitude to be taken toward Christians he says:

"They are not to be sought out, but if they are accused and convicted, they must be punished—yet with the proviso, that whoso denies himself to be a Christian, and makes the fact plain by his action, that is by worshipping our gods, shall obtain pardon by his repentance, however suspicious his past conduct may have been."

The next witness was another famous pagan—

#### LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA

In a dialogue by this writer, entitled *The Death of Peregrinus*, we find the following sections XI. and XII.:

"It was about this time that he (Peregrinus) learned the marvellous wisdom of the Christians, having associated with their priests and scribes in Palestine. And what else could you suppose? In a short time he showed



them to be but children, being himself alone prophet, and priest, and convener and all rolled into one. And of their books some he expounded and interpreted, while many he actually wrote himself. They (the Christians), in sooth, still worship that great man who was crucified in Palestine, because he introduced into the world this new religion. For this reason Proteus (Peregrinus) was taken up and put into prison; which very thing was of no small service to him afterwards, for giving reputation to his impostures and gratifying his vanity. The Christians were much grieved for his imprisonment, and tried all ways to procure his liberty. Not being able to effect that, they did him all sorts of kind offices, and that not in a careless manner, but with great assiduity; for even betimes in the morning there would be at the prison aged widows and little orphan children; and some of the chief men, having bribed the gaolers, slept inside with him. Fine dinners were taken in there and their sacred discourses were carried on, and the excellent Peregrinus—for so he was still called—seemed a new Socrates to them. Even from the cities of Asia, some came, sent by the Christian communities to relieve, encourage, and comfort the man. It is incredible what expedition they use, in dealing with any matter that effects their body. In short they spare no expense. And in fact Peregrinus received much money from them, and made no small profit on the score of his imprisonment; for these wretched people have persuaded themselves that they are absolutely deathless, and will live for ever, for which reason

they think slightly of death, and many willingly surrender themselves. And then their first lawgiver has persuaded them that they are all brothers one of another, when once they have transgressed and renounced the gods of the Greeks, and worship that crucified Sophist of theirs, and live according to his laws. Therefore they despise all things alike, holding them merely as common property, and receiving them from one another without giving any particular security; so if anyone come among them, who is a cheat, adroit, and capable of managing affairs; forthwith he may get quite rich by imposing upon the simple folk.”

—Condensed from Samuel E. Stokes’  
The Gospel according to the Jews  
and Pagans. London 1913.

**MARY THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD**

## THE INCARNATION

Yes, and to her, the beautiful and lowly,  
Mary a maiden, separate from men,  
Camest thou nigh and didst possess her wholly,  
Close to thy saints, but thou wast closer then.

Not to the rich he came or to the ruling,  
(Men full of meat, whom wholly he abhors,)  
Not to the fools grown insolent in fooling  
Most, when the lost are dying at the doors;

Nay but to her who with a sweet thanksgiving  
Took in tranquility what God might bring,  
Blessed him and waited, and within her living  
Felt the arousal of a Holy Thing.

Ay for her infinite and endless honour  
Found the Almighty in this flesh a tomb,  
Pouring with power the Holy Ghost upon her,  
Nothing disdainful of the Virgin's womb.

—*Frederick W. H. Meyer's,*  
*St. Paul*

## CHAPTER IV

### MARY THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD

ON the threshold of the New Testament there stands the figure of a mother who has been the admiration and inspiration of all Christian motherhood. Art has immortalized her on canvas. Architecture has built many cathedrals to her memory. The oldest creeds of Christendom and its oldest litanies whisper her name with awe. Nineteen times that name occurs in the New Testament and today the name of Miriam or Mary is one of the most common and most beloved names in the households of Jew, Moslem and Christian. All generations have called her blessed and yet over the mystery of her motherhood, controversy has been carried on for centuries.

Six Marys are mentioned in the New Testament: Mary the wife of Cleopas, Mary of Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, Mary the mother of Mark, and the Unknown Mary of Romans 16:6. But *Mary the Mother of Jesus* is the greatest of them all. Some sixty Marys are found on the pages of secular history. Good Marys, bad Marys, bloody Marys and peaceful Marys, but none approach the Virgin mother in purity or in faith and devotion. No other Mary ever had, or can have, such unique and holy office as the Virgin Mother of our Lord.

The growth of Mariolatry is but a sad chapter in the history of the Church. Like the brazen serpent of Moses (which was worshipped until the time of Hezekiah) Mary was considered the instrumental cause of Salvation and as the Mother of God (*theotokos*) received divine honors, beginning with the second century when some first taught her perpetual virginity.

Jerome insisted on it, and the council of Chalcedon affirmed this dogma in contradiction to the gospel records which speak of the brothers and sisters of Jesus. The worship of Mary reached its climax in 1854 when Pope Leo set his seal on the doctrine of her immaculate conception. The causes of this Mariolatry were not only the general growth of superstition but the influence of an age of chivalry. The splendor of the Madonna in art and the music written in honor of Mary raised her position more and more. We are not surprised, therefore, that at the Reformation the pendulum swung back too far. The iconoclasts destroyed her images in the churches and the Puritans refused to give her a place in the church calendar, although her name remained in the Creed and the Catechisms. Christmas was even considered a heathen festival. In the United States among the grim old Puritans the observance of Christmas was considered a Popish superstition; while the myth of Santa Claus was a poor substitute in Dutch circles, for the beauty and poetry of Christmas Day. The Deity of Christ and the Incarnation are woven together with the Virgin birth so that none can maintain any of these three doctrines without maintaining all.

And the historicity of the greatest of all miracles compels us to ask who Mary was and why she was so highly favored of God.

If we turn to the Scriptures as the only rule of faith, Mary is revealed in the gospels as a woman of deep piety, poetic imagination, constant faith, and spiritual insight. She is above all this, and because of all this, the chosen mother of our Lord and Saviour. We hail her today, as the angel did 1900 years ago. She was present at Bethlehem's manger, at the marriage in Cana, in the temple at Jerusalem, beside the cross on Calvary, in the upper room before Pentecost and on the crest of Olivet. Because she treasured all these experiences in her mother-heart, she may well teach us to honor all motherhood. Her testimony to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is the only witness we have. Why should anyone doubt this article of the Apostle's Creed? We shall see later that only those deny the virgin birth, who stumble at all that is supernatural.

Rationalists outside and inside of the Church, such as Strauss, Renan, Voltaire, Harnack, Schmiedel and many in our day, refuse to believe the story of Luke the physician which he must have heard from Mary herself. Only she and Joseph and Elizabeth knew and knew enough to be silent for many years and to speak only when silence regarding this divine mystery was no longer necessary.

Among modern scholars: Sanday, Ramsay, Garvie, Briggs, Zahn, Bavinck, Orr, and Machen, have written at length and convincingly regarding the virgin birth.

They agree that the gospel records are genuine, that they are corroborative and come from the lips of Joseph and Mary. Mark's gospel and John's do not deny the story of the virgin birth, but take it for granted. Paul presupposes the fact. All the great creeds of Christendom assert the Virgin birth.

The sinlessness of Christ and His headship of believers imply a miracle in his origin. He is the second Adam. The doctrines of the incarnation and pre-existence of the Son demand a miracle in Christ's human origin. It would be incongruous if otherwise. We must not forget that most of those who deny the Virgin Birth of our Lord are not positive about his sinlessness and his Deity. Some have even sought a parallel to the story of the gospel in Greek or Buddhist mythology.

But as Dr. Merrill of New York remarks: "No one should say that the stories about the birth of Jesus are one in kind with the stories of the intercourse of Greek gods with women, or other stories of miraculous birth. It is sufficient to read these stories and catch their tone, and then read the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke, to see that they are as far apart as the stars are from the light of a smouldering garbage heap."

We believe that Jesus our Lord was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. Who can forget this mystery and glory at Advent Season? Blessed are the pure in heart for they see God incarnate at Bethlehem.

We honor Mary also because of her character. She was mother in the first Christian home and gave us the



first Christian song. Although not mentioned in any of the Epistles and once only in the Acts, we learn much of her character from the gospels. What purity of soul, what delicate reserve, what inspired exultation, what lowly obedience, what simple faith are revealed in the chapters of the nativity. What the annunciation meant to Mary (when betrothed to Joseph) we can only understand when we remember how she was misunderstood. Joseph felt justified in his trust, but even he wavered until a dream from Heaven reassured him. Slander began at Bethlehem and drags its way like a slimy serpent in the Jewish Talmud which calls Jesus a bastard. The Pharisees sneered "we were not born of fornication," and asked Jesus with contempt "where is thy father?" Perhaps it was of his own mother Jesus was thinking when he said: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." Mary's answer was: "Be it unto me according to Thy word."

Mary was a poet. The Magnificat in Luke's Gospel is a song of triumph in which there are twenty references to the Old Testament and yet it was a new song on her lips—the best known, and most widely used hymn of Christendom: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my saviour."

Mary was also a mother. Do not forget that she had all the honor and much of the anxiety and care of every mother. Her great task was that of guiding the child Jesus into manhood; to watch his growth and direct it as he increased in wisdom and stature and favor—to

restrain his too eager spirit and preserve his body and soul for their heavenly mission; to help fit the earthen vessel for the heavenly gifts and graces; to keep Jesus from being consumed by his own passion and zeal for God—the restraining hand of his mother!

“Had He not breathed His breath  
Truly at Nazareth;  
Had not His very feet  
Roamed many a hill and street;  
Had Mary’s story gone  
To Time’s oblivion;  
Had the sweet record paled  
And the truth not prevailed;  
Dormant and bleak had been  
This transitory scene,  
And dark, thrice dark our earth  
Unknowing of His birth.”

The silent years at Nazareth were not silent for Mary. “He was subject to Joseph and Mary.” They therefore educated him in all the duties and privileges of a true Israelite. The parables of Jesus reflect the home-life in Nazareth. We can see Mary herself about her household tasks and gazing with Jesus across the sown fields and the blue lake, watching the birds and hearing at night-fall the howl of a wolf near some sheep fold. It was a home of poverty. Mary was the first teacher of Him Who taught as never man taught before or since. The greatness of Mary was that of her soul. She was a real Mahatma (a great soul). Did not

Mary say, "my soul doth magnify the Lord." Mary's soul was like a star and dwelt apart. All the mothers of Israel loved Jesus. They stopped when they saw Him pass; they followed him; they ministered to him of their substance; they blessed him loudly; they touched his garment; they washed his feet; they annointed him with oil. All of them might have cried to Mary's son as one did, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the breasts which thou didst suck!" But Mary loved Jesus more than all others and differently from all the others. The virgin mother suffered for our sakes from the day of the annunciation at Nazareth and the night of birth at Bethlehem to the darkest day and the blackest night that followed Golgotha. She was last at the Cross and if not earliest at the grave she was in the upper room praying when the blessing of Pentecost came. The last we see of her she is on her knees praying to her risen Lord!

Finally, Mary can teach us today how we may share her blessedness. Two Greek adjectives are used of Mary in Luke's narrative, one of which means "compassed about with grace or favor"—highly favored, full of grace. The other, eulogized or blessed. The angel said she was full of grace, and Elizabeth called her "blessed among women." When one of the mothers of Israel, however, cried aloud that Mary was blessed because of her close physical relationship to our Lord, He corrected her and said: (Luke 11:27-28): "Yea rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." Mary did both; and so can we.

John Keble, in his collection of poems called the *Christian Year*, reveals the childhood of Jesus and Mary's motherhood in touching words:

"A son that never did amiss,  
That never shamed His Mother's kiss,  
Nor crossed her fondest prayer:  
E'en from the Tree He deigned to bow  
For her His agonized brow,  
Her, His sole earthly care.

. . . . .

"Ave Maria! Mother blest,  
To whom caressing and caressed  
Clings the Eternal Child;  
Favoured beyond archangels' dream,  
When first on thee with tenderest gleam  
Thy new-born Saviour smiled:—

"Blessed is the womb that bare Him—blessed  
The bosom where His lips were pressed!—  
But rather blessed are they  
Who hear His word and keep it well,  
The living homes where Christ shall dwell,  
And never pass away."

On another occasion when his mother sought to divert him from his God-given mission, Jesus exclaimed: "Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and my mother." Such kinship to Jesus is possible although it is a mystery of His love, revealed to those who wait on the Lord!

“How silently, how silently  
The wondrous gift is given;  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of His heaven.  
No ear may hear His coming  
But in the world of sin  
Where meek souls will receive Him, still  
The dear Christ enters in.”

“The Holy Family” we say when we speak of Joseph and Mary and Jesus! What a home of peace and purity and holiness it must have been! “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and favor.” His only nurse and teacher was Mary; his boyhood ideas of fatherhood and authority came from Joseph. He was subject to his parents.

All that Lemuel, King of Massa, learned from his mother in the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs must have been true of Mary. The beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount were lived and experienced at Nazareth before they were uttered to the multitude. Mary’s portrait appears again and again in the homely parables of our Lord. She took the three measures of meal to make bread; her lamp never lacked oil; to the poor at the door Mary gave good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over; she taught Jesus to read the law and the psalms and the prophets; she taught him to pray! What a mother’s day it must have been to her when Mary and Jesus read for the first time the Old Testament story of the prodigals, Hagar and Ishmael, or the 23rd Psalm, or the 53rd chapter of Isaiah!

Did the shadow of the Cross fall so early in the carpenter's shop as it is shown in a great painting? We may surely use our imagination on such a theme, for it is a healthy climate for the soul. Of one thing we may be sure, Mary and Joseph in the home at Nazareth had love and purity and obedience; faith and hope and prayer. Does this trinity of blessing rest on *your* home? Have you a family altar? Are you anxious as Mary was when your boy is not in the company? Have you ever traced back all you have received to the Incarnation?

The silent years at Nazareth are eloquent to all who have learned the grace of being quiet, the art of meditation; and who, like Mary, lay up in their hearts the mysteries of God's love. Mary indeed could say with deeper understanding than any other believer in Christ:

“Jesus! I am resting, resting  
In the joy of what *Thou* art;  
I am finding out the greatness  
Of Thy loving heart.  
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee,  
And Thy beauty fills my soul,  
For, by Thy transforming power,  
Thou has made me whole.”

For her as for us there was no other name, no other way to be made pure and whole. “My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.”

# JOSEPH THE CARPENTER

“MY YOKE IS EASY”

The yokes He made were true,  
Because the Man who dreamed  
Was too  
An artisan,  
The burdens that the oxen drew  
Were light.  
At night  
He lay upon his bed and knew  
No beast of his stood chafing in a stall  
Made restless by a needless gall.

The tenets of a man  
May be full fine,  
But if he fails with plumb and line,  
Scorns care,  
Smooth planing,  
And precision with the square,  
Some neck will bear  
The scar of blundering!

—*Gladys Latchaw*



## CHAPTER V

### JOSEPH THE CARPENTER

THE Gospel record of Matthew gives the genealogy of "Joseph the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ." The genealogy given by Luke (3:24-38) traces the lineage of Mary. This two-fold record of our Lord's ancestors was not a dry list of names to the medieval church. Workers in stained glass spent their genius in depicting the Jesse-tree. The Christ who sprang from the root of Jesse the father of David had royal ancestors. So in the cathedrals of Chartres, York and St. Denis we have beautiful windows representing at the base the form of David's father and above rise the branches of a vine, within the oval spaces are figures of kings seated accompanied by prophets, above it that of Mary the Virgin mother; highest of all at the terminal branch of the vine is Christ surrounded by seven doves typical of the sevenfold Spirit. So Pope, in his "Messiah," sings:

"From Jesse's root behold a branch arise  
Whose sacred flower with fragrance fills the skies;  
The ethereal spirit o'er its leaves shall move  
And on its top descends the mystic Dove."

The altar-piece in Christ Church priory near Bournemouth has a Jesse-tree of rare beauty. Here Joseph stands by Mary's side while the central figure is the Babe of Bethlehem. The Magi offer their treasures, the ox and ass look on surmounted by shepherds and sheep gazing at a group of angels.

We need to regain the vivid imagination and the holy awe of the artists of the fourteenth century when we read the list of names in the first chapter of the New Testament.

Here is the royal ancestry of Joseph the son of David and of Mary the mother of our Lord—three times fourteen generations from Abraham to the Carpenter of Nazareth.

The first triumph of faith in the fact of the incarnation and all its implications was that of Joseph. He seems a dim figure in the background of the gospel narrative yet his wholehearted devotion, his faith in God and in Mary even in the face of possible slander are indicative of great character. At the beginning of the gospel Joseph of Nazareth guards the honor of Mary and her babe; at the end of the gospel Joseph of Arimathea begs the body of Jesus from Pilate the governor and lays it in his tomb. The earthly life of our Saviour is thus bounded between two Josephs, one poor but of royal blood; the other rich and secretly a disciple.

The facts concerning Joseph and Mary are given with such sublime brevity and chaste reticence by Luke the Physician and by Matthew the publican, that it would be sacrilege to add or subtract from them.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: when as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou (Joseph) shalt call his name *Jesus*: for he shall save his people from their sins.” Some time later, and after the visit of the Magi, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, “Arise, and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt; and be thou there until I bring thee word.” Again he was told in a dream to return with the child and his mother to the land of Israel, and they came and dwelt in Nazareth.

Three times therefore God spake to Joseph in a dream even as he spake to the Old Testament Joseph by dreams. Thomas Mann, the great novelist, has given us the story of this Joseph in three large volumes. But Joseph of the nativity is the forgotten man and at least among Protestants he has been overlooked and neglected among the great Bible characters. Three things we know surely from Scripture. He was Joseph the carpenter of Nazareth; he was the husband of Mary, and the head of the family; and he was the foster-father of Jesus.

The thirty silent years of our Lord were spent at Nazareth and Joseph as well as Mary had deep influence on that life which unfolded from infancy to boyhood and manhood.

Who can fathom the mystery of the Holy Family in their mutual relationships, in their reticence regarding the birth of the youngest member of that family, Jesus, and their faith or unbelief in the significance of his name—Saviour. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus. . . ."

"Mary sat in the corner dreaming  
Dim was the room and low,  
While in the dark, the saw went screaming  
To and fro.

Jesus and Joseph toiled together,  
Mary's thoughts were far—  
Angels sang in the wintry weather  
Under a star."

What sort of a town was Nazareth and what kind of a carpenter's shop was the place where the Christ dignified labor and hallowed poverty? It was a small and despised village of Galilee yet it had natural beauty and was near to one of the great highways of Palestine in the days of Herod. Nature loved Nazareth and had given it many advantages. Men despised it.

"Comes any good from Nazareth?  
The scornful challenge as of old  
Is flung on many a jeering breath  
From cloistered cells and marts of gold."

Joseph and Mary must have known that they lived in a town despised by the Jews in the midst of Galilee of the Gentiles.

Yet here Joseph toiled in poverty and Jesus learned his trade.

“Silent at Joseph’s side He stood,  
And smoothed and trimmed the shapeless wood  
And with firm hand, assured and slow,  
Drove in each nail with measured blow.

Absorbed, He planned a wooden cask,  
Nor asked for any greater task,  
Content to make, with humble tools,  
Tables and little children’s stools.”

The poverty of that humble home became a tradition in the early church so that Paul writing to the disciples to stir them to benevolence appealed to it. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor that ye through his poverty might be rich.” The earliest reference to their poverty we have is the fact that Joseph and Mary, altho living among village-folk and shepherds were too poor to bring a lamb for the feast of purification and brought “a pair of turtle-doves or two pigeons.” (Compare Luke 2:24 with Leviticus 12:8 A. R. V.: “*And if her means suffice not for a lamb then she shall take two turtle-doves or two young pigeons.*”)

It was a fairly large household for Joseph to support. According to early tradition he married his first wife

when forty years of age and had four sons and two daughters. The Gospel record speaks of the brothers and sisters of Jesus and the apostle James was known as "brother of the Lord." His epistle, as Vincent remarks, is a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount and both have many references to poverty in contrast to luxury and wealth (1:9; 2:2-6; 2:15; 5:4). James, perhaps, writes from his own experience of the home at Nazareth. And Jesus must have gone to market himself to buy "two sparrows for a farthing." His first counsel of perfection was "If thou wouldst be perfect go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor." His first beatitude had poverty for its background. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus was born in poverty and with Joseph and Mary felt its hardship but also its hardihood and the humble happiness of simple things.

"They borrowed a bed to lay His head,  
When Christ the Lord came down;  
They borrowed the ass in the mountain pass  
For Him to ride to town;  
He borrowed the bread when the crowd was fed  
On the grassy mountain side;  
He borrowed the dish of broken fish  
With which He satisfied;  
But the crown that He wore and the cross  
that He bore  
Were His own—The Cross was His own.

“He borrowed the ship in which to sit  
To teach the multitude;  
He borrowed a nest in which to rest  
He had never a home so rude;  
He borrowed a room on His way to the tomb  
The passover Lamb to eat;  
They borrowed a cave for Him, a grave,  
They borrowed a winding sheet;  
But the crown that He wore and the cross  
that He bore  
Were His own—The Cross was His own.”

Joseph the Carpenter was not only a son of toil but must have been also a man of remarkable faith. And the object of his faith was Jesus. If it had not been for the dream-vision and the words of the angel he might at the first have doubted Mary. The gospel was first preached to Joseph and he accepted it: “Joseph, thou Son of David, fear not. . . . Mary thy wife shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.” And he believed. The writer to the Hebrews might have said of him, By faith Joseph, thought worthy to become the foster-father of the Christ, accepted the most delicate responsibility ever entrusted to man and performed it with obedience and humility. As a modern writer puts it: “As for Mary, the reward of all mothers was in her heart. Bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, her Child was the recompense which surpasses everything else. But Joseph—this was no child of his. No pa-

ternal pride could come to him. He was either the step-father of illegitimacy or the step-father of deity. And if the first was disgraceful in its implications, the other was fearful in its responsibilities." And so Joseph was a faithful husband and father every day and every hour of his life in Nazareth while the Child "grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and with man." It must also have been from Joseph's heart and life and example that Jesus caught the first glimpse of what an earthly father could be. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father will he give him a stone . . . if ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" The "*how much more*" was the yardstick of Nazareth and Joseph, applied to the Father in heaven who pitieth his children and whose loving kindness is over all his works.

The word father was often on the lips of Jesus. And in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel he explains to the Jews who despised his earthly origin what that word meant to him. They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he saith I came down from heaven?" (Jno. 6:42.)

When Jesus was twelve years old Joseph and Mary took him up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. They had taken him every year (Luke 2:41). The child Jesus tarried when they were returning and Joseph and Mary supposed him to be in their company. "And when



they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem seeking him." After three days' search he was found in the temple sitting in the midst of the learned scribes and they were amazed. Mary reproved him, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold *thy father* and I have sought thee sorrowing." Was there a reproof also in the reply of Jesus, "Wist ye not that I must be about *my Father's* business?" Nevertheless, he went with them to Nazareth and "was subject unto them."

As a son Jesus learned obedience during those long years at Nazareth. He was in all points tempted like as we are yet without sin. And being made perfect even in boyhood and early manhood by suffering he became at the last the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. He learned from Joseph and Mary that it was more blessed to give than to receive. He learned the dignity of labor and saw in Joseph's life an example of scorn to all slothfulness and idleness. In the parables of Jesus the slothful and unprofitable servant is cast into outer darkness but the faithful worker, hired at the eleventh hour, still receives the full wages. Was it from Joseph that Jesus learned "are there not *twelve* hours in the day?" There was no eight-hour day or forty-hour week in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth.

"Carpenter Christ, I know that *you* must understand;  
I prize you most for work.

Surely the hands that stripped the cedar-bough in  
Nazareth must

Be akin to hands that love the homely touch of bread."

So sang Mildred Fowler Field and she voiced the universal sympathy of toiling millions for Him who came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many.

There is another picture of the home of Joseph the Carpenter and Christ's early environment which we cannot forget. Misunderstanding, unbelief and hatred were not absent when the holiest of humanity walked the streets and prayed in the synagogue of Nazareth. We read it between the lines in Matthew's Gospel. "And when he was come into his own country (Nazareth), he taught them in their synagogue insomuch that they were astonished and said, whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him."

"But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house" (13:54-57). No honor had Jesus in Nazareth or in his own family (save from Joseph and Mary) for all those silent years. No honor when he came back as a prophet sent of God and a worker of miracles: His own brethren did not believe in him. He could at the first, and at the last, do no mighty works in Nazareth because of

their unbelief (Matt. 13:58). Here also "he came unto his own and his own received him not."

Coleridge designates the first two chapters of Luke's gospel as the Gospel of Mary. "We can not imagine," he says, "that St. Luke would have recourse to any other person for the materials of his history nor can conceive that she would have refused the aid which she alone of mortals could afford in a matter so highly concerning the honor of her divine Son."<sup>1</sup>

Of Mary we read that, after the Annunciation, after hearing the Song of Zacharias and the greetings of Elizabeth, after the song of the angels and the visit of the shepherds—"she kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." We also read that "Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him." Mary marvelled and wondered and dreamed. But Joseph was a man of action and in the entire narrative he makes decisions and proves his faith in God by obedience. Like Abraham of old he, "called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing whither he went." His obedience was unquestioned and instantaneous in circumstances that try men's souls. "Joseph . . . did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus" (Matt. 1:24, 25). Again when commanded to leave Bethlehem and go the long and lonely journey

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Joseph Schindler's *St. Joseph dargestellt nach der Heiligen Schrift*, p. 59.

to Egypt "he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt" (Matt. 2:14). Then again he left Egypt in obedience to God's command and "turned aside into the parts of Galilee: and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth." These four journeys of Joseph, from Nazareth ninety miles to Bethlehem with a young woman about to become a mother, from Bethlehem to Egypt with the Babe and his mother, then back again to Galilee and Nazareth, surely entitle him to a place among the heroes of the faith. For they that do such things declare plainly by their simple obedience that "they desire a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."

By faith Joseph accepted the high call of God to become the husband of Mary, the foster-father of our divine Saviour and the head of the household where Jesus spent thirty years of his earthly life in obscurity. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" and for all those silent years Joseph, as well as Mary, beheld something of His glory as He (under their care and nurture and admonition) grew in stature and wisdom and favor with God and man.

## **HIS GLORIOUS NAMES**

“O *WISDOM*, that comest out of the Most High, that reachest from one end to another, and dost mightily and sweetly order all things: come to teach us the way of prudence.

O *ADONAI*, who didst appear to Moses in the burning bush, come to redeem us with an outstretched arm.

O *ROOT OF JESSE*, unto Whom the Gentiles seek, come, to deliver us, make no tarrying!

O *KEY OF DAVID* and Sceptre of the House of Israel, that openest and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth, come to bring out the prisoners from the prison!

O *DAY-SPRING*, Brightness of the Everlasting Light, Sun of Righteousness, come to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death!

O *KING OF THE GENTILES*, yea, and Desire thereof, come to save man whom thou hast made of the dust of the earth!

O *EMMANUEL*, our King and our Law-giver, come to save us, O Lord our God!”

—*The Roman Breviary*

by John, Marquess of Bute, p. 138

## CHAPTER VI

### HIS GLORIOUS NAMES

IN the rubric for the public baptism of infants as given in the Book of Common Prayer we read: "Then the priest shall take the child into his hands and shall say to the godfathers and godmothers, *Name this child.*" So all of us, who profess and call ourselves Christians received a name at Baptism. But the child Jesus was so named by the angel *before* his birth. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus for it is he that shall save his people from their sins." And by this personal name he was known in Nazareth from his youth and until the day when Pilate wrote the same name over the Cross. Paul refers to this name Jesus when he writes, "God hath given him a name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9):

"Join all the glorious names  
Of wisdom, love and power  
That ever mortals knew  
That angel ever bore;  
All are too mean to speak his worth  
Too mean to set my Saviour forth."

Among all Orientals but especially among the Jews a deep significance is attached to names. This is evident

from the Old Testament stories of the patriarchs and from the practice among the Arabs today. Names, surnames, and appellatives are bestowed upon men with the intent of expressing the very character of the person named. The names of God are the revelation of his nature and his attributes. They portray in human language the infinite wisdom, power, holiness, goodness and mercy of the Creator. The names of God are holy because *He* is holy. Therefore the commandment reads "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

Both Jews and Mohammedans make much of the names of God and his various attributes; the former in their use on talismans and amulets, the latter especially in the use of their rosary. This Islamic rosary has ninety-nine beads each representing one of the excellent names of Allah as recorded in the Koran; for Mohammed said, "Verily there are ninety-nine names of God and whoever recites them shall enter Paradise." In the book of Job alone, however, one could find as many attributes and names given to Jehovah and in the whole Old Testament many more. Such a list of beautiful names is impressive and rivets attention to the manifold aspects of God's relation to sinful humanity.

But the names of Jesus as recorded in the Old Testament prophecies and in the New Testament are equally impressive and each of his names is a key to his character in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily. Not as a *tour de force* but to deepen



our devotion as we kneel before the Glory of the Manger we transcribe here ninety-nine names of Jesus. Some we have from his own lips in the first person, "I am the Good Shepherd;" others in the second person, from the lips of those who confessed him, "Thou art the Christ;" and still others in the third person, "He is altogether lovely and the Chief among ten thousand." Some of the names are prophetic or symbolic, most of them were historically given to Jesus of Nazareth or applied to him after his resurrection and ascension by his apostles.

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|--|---|--|
| 1. <i>Star</i> . . . . .                         | } | "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: There shall come forth a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" . . . Numbers 24:17. A.R.V.   |
| 2. <i>Sceptre</i> . . . . .                      |   |  |
| 3. <i>Redeemer</i> . . . . .                     | } | "But as for me I know that my Redeemer liveth, And at last he will stand up upon the earth: And after my skin, even this body, is destroyed, Then without my flesh shall I see God" — Job. 19:25. A.R.V.                     |
| 4. <i>Wonderful</i> . . . . .                    |   |  |
| 5. <i>Counsellor</i> . . . . .                   | } | "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"—Isaiah 9:6. A.R.V. |
| 6. <i>Mighty God</i> . . . . .                   |   |  |
| 7. <i>Everlasting</i><br><i>Father</i> . . . . . |   |  |
| 8. <i>Prince of</i><br><i>Peace</i> . . . . .    |   |  |

9. *Immanuel* . . . { "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (God with us) — Isaiah 7:14. A.R.V.
10. *Ruler in Israel* . . . . . { "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting"—Micah 5:2. A.R.V.
11. *Desire of all Nations* . . . . . { "And I will shake all nations; and the Desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts"—Haggai 2:7.
12. *The Branch* . . . . . { "Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: and he shall grow up out of his place; and he shall build the temple of Jehovah" — Zechariah 6:12. A.R.V.
13. *The Good Shepherd* . . . . . { "I am the Good Shepherd"—John 10:11.
14. *Jesus* . . . . . { "Thou shalt call his name *Jesus* for it is he shall save his people from their sins."—Matt. 1:21. A.R.V.

- 15. *King of the Jews* ..... { "Where is he that is born King of the Jews for we saw his star in the East and are come to worship him."—Matt. 2:2. A.R.V.
- 16. *Shepherd of my people Israel* ..... { "For out of thee shall come forth a governor, who shall be shepherd of my people Israel"—Matt 2:6. A.R.V.
- 17. *Nazarene* .. { "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, that he should be called a Nazarene."—Matt. 2:23. A.R.V.
- 18. *Lord* ..... { "What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, the son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord?" . . . —Matt. 22:42, 43. A.R.V.
- 19. *My Beloved Son* ..... { "And lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased"—Matt. 3:17. A.R.V.
- 20. *The Son of Man* .... { "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head"—Matt. 8:20.
- 21. *Son of David* ..... { "Two blind men followed him, crying out, and saying. Have mercy on us, thou Son of David"—Matt. 9:27. A.R.V.

22. *Master*  
(or *Teacher*) } "Ye call me master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am"—John 13:13.
23. *The Christ* . . . } "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"—Matt. 16:16.
24. *Son of Mary* . } "And his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?"—Luke 2:48. A.R.V.
25. *Son of the Most High* . } "And the angel said unto her: . . . thou shalt bring forth a son . . . he shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High" Luke 1:30-32. A.R.V.
26. *Son of God* . . } "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the Holy Thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God" — Luke 1:35. A.R.V.
27. *The Holy Thing* . . . . . } "And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David"—Luke 1:69.
28. *Horn of Salvation* . . . }
29. *Consolation of Israel* . . . } Luke 2:25.
30. *The Day-spring from on High* . . . } Luke 1:78.

31. *The Holy One of God* ..... } "I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God"—Luke 4:34.
32. *A Prophet mighty in deed and word* ..... } "Jesus of Nazareth which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people"—Luke 24:19.
33. *The Word* .. } "In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God"—John 1:1.
34. *The True Light* ..... } "That was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh in to the world"—John 1:9.
35. *The Only begotten from the Father* .. } "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth" — John 1:14. A.R.V.
36. *The Only begotten Son*.. } "The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father"—John 1:18. A.R.V.
37. *The Lamb of God* ..... } "Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"—John 1:29. A.R.V.
38. *The Messiah* ... } "We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, Christ." —John 1:41. A.R.V.

39. *King of Israel . . . . .* { "Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art King of Israel." — John 1:49. A.R.V.
40. *Gift of God.* { "Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the Gift of God . . . thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water"—John 4:10. A.R.V.
41. *The Bread of God. . . . .* { "For the Bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world"—John 6:33. A.R.V.
42. *The Bread of Life . . . . .* { "Jesus said unto them, I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst"—John 6:35.
43. *The Light of the World . .* { "I am the Light of the World: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life"—John 8:12.
44. *The Door. . . . .* { "Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep" — John 10:7. A.R.V.
45. *The Way. . . . .* }  
 46. *The Truth . . . . .* } "I am the Way, and the Truth, and  
 47. *The Life. . . . .* } the Life"—John 14:6. A.R.V.

48. *The True Vine* ..... } "I am the True Vine"—John 15:1.
49. *The Prince of Life* ..... } "The Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead"—Acts 3:15. A.R.V.
50. *The Holy Child* ..... } "Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast annointed"—Acts 4:27.
51. *Prince* ..... } "Him did God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour"
52. *Saviour* ..... } —Acts 5:31. A.R.V.
53. *Lord of all* .. } "Jesus Christ: he is Lord of all"—Acts 10:36.
54. *God blessed* . } "Of whom is Christ as concerning the flesh, who is over all, God blessed for ever" — Romans 9:5. A.R.V.
55. *The Deliverer* ... } "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer; he shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" — Romans 11:26. A.R.V.
56. *The Lord of Glory* ... } "Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory"—I Cor. 2:8.
57. *Our Passover* ... } "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us"—I Cor. 5:7.

58. *The Last Adam* . . . . . } "The first man Adam became a living soul, the Last Adam became a life-giving spirit . . . The first man is of the earth, earthy; the Second Man is of heaven"—I Cor. 15:45-47. A.R.V.
59. *The Second Man* . . . . . }
60. *The Image of God* . . . . } "Christ who is the image of God"—II Cor. 4:4.
61. *The Chief Cornerstone* . } "Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the Chief Cornerstone"—Eph. 2:20. A.R.V.
62. *Head over all Things* .. } "Head over all things to the church, which is his body"—Eph. 1:22.
63. *Image of the Invisible God* } Col. 1:15.
64. *First-born of all Creation.* } Col. 1:16.
65. *Creator of all Things* .. } Col. 1:16.
66. *The Head of the Body.* . . . } Col. 1:18.
67. *First-born from the Dead* . . . . . } Col. 1:18.
68. *The Only Mediator* . . . } "For there is one God, one Mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus"—I Tim. 2:5. A.R.V.



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|---|---|---|
| 69. <i>The Only Potentate ...</i>               | } | These titles are given to God but from the context and by the New Testament usage elsewhere they also belong to Christ Jesus. I Timothy 6:15. |
| 70. <i>The King of Kings .....</i>              |   |   |
| 71. <i>The Lord of Lords .....</i>              |   |   |
| 72. <i>Heir of all things .....</i>             | } | "His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things" — Hebrews 1:2. A.R.V.   |
| 73. <i>Effulgence of God's Glory.</i>           |   |   |
| 74. <i>Image of God's substance ...</i>         | } | Heb. 1:3.   |
| 75. <i>Author of Salvation ...</i>              |   |   |
| 76. <i>Our Great High Priest .</i>              | } | "Having then a Great High Priest who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God"—Heb. 4:14. A.R.V.                                 |
| 77. <i>Author and Finisher of our Faith ...</i> |   |   |
| 78. <i>Mediator of a New Covenant ..</i>        | } | Heb. 12:24.   |
| 79. <i>The Unchangeable .</i>                   |   |   |
|   | } | "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." — Heb. 13:8.  |

80. *The Great Shepherd of the Sheep ..* } Heb. 13:20.
81. *A Living Stone .....* { "Unto whom coming, A Living Stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up" — I Peter 2:4, 5. A.R.V.
82. *Shepherd and Bishop of souls .....* { "Ye . . . are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."—I Peter 2:25.
83. *Advocate with the Father .....* { "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"—I John 2:1.
84. *The Righteous One .....* } I John 2:1.
85. *The Alpha ..* { "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty"—Rev. 1:8.
86. *The Omega ..* {
87. *The Beginning ..* {
88. *The End ...* {
89. *The First ...* { "I am The First and The Last"—
90. *The Last ...* { Rev. 1:17.
91. *The Opener ..* { "He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth"—Rev. 3:8.

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| 92. | <i>The Lion of<br/>the tribe<br/>of Judah . . .</i>      | { | "Behold, the Lion that is of the<br>tribe of Judah . . . hath overcome<br>to open the book and the seven<br>seals thereof"—Rev. 5:5. A.R.V. |
| 93. | <i>The Lord<br/>God<br/>Almighty . . .</i>               | } | Rev. 15:3.  |
| 94. | <i>The Faithful<br/>Witness . . . .</i>                  | } | Rev. 1:5.   |
| 95. | <i>The First<br/>born of<br/>the dead . . .</i>          | } | Rev. 1:5.   |
| 96. | <i>King of<br/>the Ages . . .</i>                        | } | "Righteous and true are thy ways,<br>thou King of the Ages" — Rev.<br>15:3. A.R.V.  |
| 97. | <i>The Root and<br/>Offspring of<br/>David . . . . .</i> | } | Rev. 22:16.   |
| 98. | <i>The Bright<br/>and Morning<br/>Star . . . . .</i>     | } | Rev. 22:16.   |
| 99. | <i>The Amen . .</i>                                      | } | "These things saith the Amen, the<br>faithful and true witness the be-<br>ginning of the creation of God"<br>—Rev. 3:14. A.R.V.             |

As we recall all these glorious names—ninety-nine glimpses in human language of him whom not having seen we love—we realize that even *all* these names together do not suffice to portray the majestic sweetness of the Child who once lay in the Manger.

“No mortal can with Him compare  
 Among the sons of men;  
 Fairer is He than all the fair  
 That fill the heavenly train.”

And we agree with the anonymous poet in his effort to show that Christ remains a mystery and a question still:

“We place Thy sacred name upon our brows;  
 Our cycles from Thy natal day we score;  
 Yet spite of all our songs and all our vows,  
 We thirst and ever thirst to know Thee more.

Still Thou art Question—while rings in our ears  
 Thine outcry to a world discord-beset:  
*Have I been with thee all these many years*  
*O world—dost thou not know me yet?”*

Each of these many names and titles of our Saviour can be used to address Him in prayer. This was done in the early church liturgies and we give an ancient example at the head of this chapter from a Roman Breviary. In the Old Testament story of Jacob wrestling with the angel we have an illustration of how, in these theophanies, God concealed and revealed his name and character. Undoubtedly this wrestling with the angel at Penuel had Messianic import. “And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day . . . And he said, Let me go for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name

shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name? And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there." (Genesis 32:24-29.) Charles Wesley in one of his least known hymns gives us an interpretation:

"Come, O Thou Traveller unknown!  
Whom still I hold but cannot see.  
My company before has gone  
And I am left alone with Thee.  
Alone with Thee I mean to stay  
And wrestle till the break of day.  
I need not tell Thee who I am,—  
My sins, my miseries, declare—  
Thyself hast called me by my name;  
Look on thy hands and read it there.  
But who O Traveller art Thou?  
Tell me Thy name, and tell me now!"



## THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

“From the Eastern mountains,  
Pressing on they come,  
Wise men in their wisdom  
To His humble home;  
Stirr’d by deep devotion,  
Hasting from a-far,  
Ever journeying on-ward,  
Guided by a star.

“There their Lord and Saviour  
Meek and lowly lay,  
Wondrous Light that led them  
Onward on their way,  
Ever now to lighten  
Nations from afar,  
As they journey homeward,  
By that guiding Star.

“Thou Who in a manger  
Once hast lowly lain,  
Who dost now in glory  
O’er all kingdoms reign,  
Gather in the heathen,  
Who in lands afar  
Ne’er have seen the brightness  
Of Thy guiding Star.”

—*G. Thring*



## CHAPTER VII

### THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

EACH of the great religious faiths of mankind has its symbol in art and architecture. The Lotus-blossom and Wheel of Buddhism, the Swastika of Hinduism, the *Yin-Yang* of Taoism, the Crescent of Islam, the Star of Judaism and the Cross of Christianity.

The star was used as a Hebrew symbol long before the birth of Christ. The six-pointed star is very ancient and the Jews say it was placed upon the ark of the covenant, was engraved on David's shield and formed Solomon's seal. To this day it may be seen on Jewish synagogues and tombs throughout the world. The symbol of the star whether six-pointed or five-pointed has received Christian significance because it is associated with the feast of Epiphany and the visit of the Magi. It is far more appropriate as a Christmas symbol than the yule-log, the tree, the holly and mistletoe. All of these have no real Christian significance but were associated with pagan festivals which occurred at about the same time of the year.

The visit of the wise men from the East to the newborn Saviour of the world has kindled the imagination of poet and painter as no other incident in the marvelous story of the advent. Francis Thompson, author of the incomparable poem, *The Hound of Heaven*,

speaks of the naturalness of such a phenomenon as a star to announce the coming of the Redeemer:

“Does the fish soar to find the ocean,  
The eagle plunge to find the air—  
That we ask of the stars in motion  
If they have rumour of Thee there?”

The poet adopts as his text, “The Kingdom of God is within you,” and argues that the divine nearness can be barricaded out by our blindness in spiritual things.

“The angels keep their ancient places;  
Turn but a stone and start a wing!  
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces,  
That miss the many-splendoured thing.”<sup>1</sup>

Poets and artists are our best interpreters of the advent story. Sir Edward Burne-Jones was asked by a young girl who watched him painting “the Star of Bethlehem” whether he believed that the story was true. He replied, “It is too beautiful not to be true.”

In twelve short verses we have the whole story as told by Matthew. But scores of poems, dozens of famous paintings and many volumes record the interpretation of that visit of the Magi and the glory of the star.

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star

<sup>1</sup> Sidney Adamson, *Christ in Modern Poetry (Life and Work*, Edinburgh, July 1939).

in the east, and are come to worship him." The first question in the Old Testament is that put by God to Adam, "Where art *thou*?" The first question of the New Testament is "Where is *He*?" The entire Old Testament answers the question of man's fall and all its tragic consequences. Every book of the New Testament answers the question of the Magi and tells us where *He* is who came to save the lost—in the manger, on the cross, risen from the tomb, ascended, seated at God's right hand and interceding till He comes again in glory.

"Where is He? . . . we have seen his star." The whole human family and all the ages have been asking that question. G. K. Chesterton has knelt with frankincense before the Babe of Bethlehem. In his own robust manner and in the last lines of his *House of Christmas* he writes of Bethlehem as the goal:

"To an open house in the evening  
Home shall men come,  
To an older place than Eden  
And a taller town than Rome.  
To the end of the way of the wandering star,  
To the things that cannot be and that are,  
To the place where God was homeless  
And all men are at home."

Who were the Magi? What was the star? How did it point out the road to Bethlehem? What did their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh signify?

The oldest opinion traces the Magi (perhaps on in-

sufficient grounds) to Arabia. They were priest-sages whose researches led them to study astrology. There is this in favor of the theory that close intercourse existed between Palestine and Arabia, that the kings of Yemen professed the Jewish faith and the gifts presented were all Arabian products from antiquity. Moreover, there was Jewish expectancy of the Messiah with the rising of a star. Edersheim, after rejecting a number of other Talmudic statements and traditions that connect the appearance of the Messiah with sidereal conjunctions, goes on to say, "There is however testimony which seems to us not only reliable but embodies most ancient Jewish tradition. . . . The so-called Messiah-Haggadah opens as follows: 'A star shall come out of Jacob . . . and the star shall shine forth from the East and this is the star of the Messiah. And it will shine from the East for fifteen days, and if it be prolonged it will be for the good of Israel.' " A similar statement, he says, occurs in a collection of three Midrashim where we read that a Star in the East was to appear two years before the birth of the Messiah.<sup>2</sup>

According to another tradition the Magi were three Gentile kings, Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, whose tomb in the cathedral of Cologne has become a costly shrine studded with precious stones and less precious legends. The story is that the bones of the Magi were brought by the Empress Helena to Constantinople, afterwards to Milan and in 1164 removed to Cologne.

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<sup>2</sup> Edersheim's *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. I, pp. 210-213.

This is the origin of the three crowns in the city's arms. The fact is that no one knows who the Magi were or whence they came.

Regarding their guidance by a star, however, there is much to be said. From the days of the great astronomer Kepler who first recorded the fact, it has been held that in the year 747 of the Roman era, two years before the birth of Christ, a most remarkable conjunction of planets occurred possible only once in eight hundred years, namely that of Saturn and Jupiter in the constellation Pisces. It was not only extraordinary but, as astronomers state, it presented a most brilliant spectacle in the clear sky of the orient. In the year following (748 A. U. C.) another planet, Mars, joined this conjunction. This would surely account for the attention of the Magi being aroused even if they had no knowledge of any Jewish expectation or prophecy. We may add that Pingré and other astronomers state that in the astronomical tables of the Chinese the appearance of an evanescent star is recorded at this very time. The evidence has been collected and commented on by a number of writers, Munter, Idler, Wieseler and Goldschmidt.<sup>3</sup>

It is not at all improbable, moreover, that the prophecy of Balaam already referred to and the prognostication of Virgil in his fourth Eclogue were widely known. In his essay on Virgil, F. W. H. Myers speaks of it as follows:

"In every age of Christianity from Augustine to

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<sup>3</sup> Edersheim, Vol. I, pp. 212, 213.

Abelard, from the Christmas sermon of Pope Innocent III to the *Praelectiones Academicæ* of the late Mr. Keble, divines and fathers of the Church have asserted the inspiration, and claimed the prophecies of this marvellous poem. It was on the strength of this poem that Virgil's likeness was set among the carven seers in the Cathedral of Zamora. It was on the strength of this poem that in the Cathedrals of Limoges and Rheims the Christmas appeal was made, 'O Maro, prophet of the Gentiles, bear thou thy witness unto Christ,' and the stately semblance of the Roman gave answer in the words which tell how 'the new progeny has descended from heaven on high.'" "In reality," says Mr. Myers, "the link between Virgil and Christianity depended not on a misapplied prediction but on a moral sequence and spiritual conformity. . . . It is not true, as the Spanish legend tells us, that Virgil's eyes first saw the star of Bethlehem, but it is true that in none more fully than in him is found that temper which offers all worldly wealth, all human learning at the feet of Purity and for the knowledge of Truth."

And so we find the Wise men on their way to Bethlehem and rejoicing with great joy when their guiding star appeared again. Their quest and long journey were at an end. They had reached their goal the sacred spot where was born the King of the Jews. They kneel in eastern fashion and lay their tribute of love and honor at the feet of the Saviour. "When they were come into the house they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and when

they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh."

Prudentius, an early Christian poet interpreted these three-fold gifts symbolically.

"The gift of gold Thee, King, proclaims:  
Thee, God, the fragrant incense names:  
The myrrh proclaims that Death shall thrust  
Within the tomb Thy body's dust."

Not only were their gifts symbolic but the Magi are said to have worshipped the Babe of Bethlehem. Some one has remarked that "as kings of the East they owned Him as sovereign King. Priests of an ancient faith they accept Him as the High priest of a new covenant. Preachers and star-gazers they acknowledge Him as the prophet of the Gospel and the bright and morning Star. As wise-men they see in Him the wisdom of God."

Nor is it mere fancy that sees in this worship of the wise-men a prophecy of the coming of all nations to the King of the Jews and bringing their tribute of spiritual riches into the City of God. Moreover, we have here a beautiful picture of true worship which includes not only obedience and humility but sacrifice. Our gifts to the King must not be trivial or paltry. He is worthy to receive "power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing."

"Shall we not yield Him, in costly devotion,  
Odors of Edom, and offerings divine,  
Gems of the mountain, and pearls of the ocean,  
Myrrh from the forest, and gold from the mine?"

“Vainly we offer each ample oblation,  
Vainly with gifts would His favour secure;  
Richer by far is the heart’s adoration,  
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.”

Because the gifts were in three kinds, some have inferred that there were three Magi; and that they were kings is deduced from the Old Testament passages predicting that kings would bring gifts (Psalm 72:10, and Isa. 60:3). The legend of the three kings dates back as far as Origen, and although beautiful it is historically baseless. Grotius interpreted their gifts as being gold for works of mercy, incense for prayer and myrrh for purity.

But the offerings of the Magi were intended as specimens of the products of their native country and expressive of loyal homage to the new-born king. If they were Gentiles they were the first to bring their glory and honor to the Saviour of the world. In them we see the earliest fulfillment of the promise that the Messiah was to be “a light to lighten the Gentiles” as well as the glory of his people Israel.

The late Dr. James Hope Moulton, the New Testament scholar, offered a new interpretation of the visit of the wise men in his book, *The Treasure of the Magi*. It is a study of modern Zoroastrianism but also tells of the origin of that ancient and pure faith. He believes that the Magi came from Persia and were, like Cyrus, followers of Zoroaster (660-583 B.C.); the center of whose life and teaching was in ancient Media, now



Merv and Rai, south of the Caspian. The Magi were an indigenous priestly tribe much resembling the Brahmans. They worked their way into the Persian religion after the reforms of Zoroaster "who preached a spiritual monotheism" with purer ethics than is found in any other of the non-Christian faiths.

When these Persian Magi came to Bethlehem, Moulton says, "they gave Him gifts of their own country's treasure. But it was not material gold and frankincense and myrrh that the angels saw as the Magi opened their caskets. They saw pure gold of a great Prophet's unshakable faith in God—the fragrant incense of his powerful prayer—the myrrh of self-denial and upward striving, that sought to provide an anodyne for the woes of men. And in this, the purest offering that the Gentile world had to give, they recognized a Divine manifestation that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him." . . . "Nineteen hundred years ago—and still there are Magi ministering before the sacred fire, and chanting the same hymns, that were hoary with antiquity even when their ancestors chanted them every sunrise as they travelled towards Bethlehem. But very few indeed, priests or people, have set foot on that pilgrim road. Like the Jews, though with more excuse, they missed their Saviour when He came, and languidly they look for another who may come some day."

The Parsis of India are the direct descendants in that case of the Magi and they still worship before the ever-burning sacred fire. When they shall turn to the Lord

the veil shall be taken away and then the treasure of the Magi will be poured at His feet.

“So from the blaze wherein Thy glories dwell  
 Once more athwart the sunless gloom a star  
 Shall flash its guiding message, and from far  
 The Sage of Iran answer to the spell,  
 And speed with trophies of a faith long dim  
 To find his Lord and bow the knee to Him.”<sup>4</sup>

It is very clear that in Matthew's account of the visit of the Magi the Young Child Jesus is the center of the picture and of the story. There is no halo for either Joseph or Mary or the Magi. When the Wise men were come into the house at Bethlehem “they saw the Young Child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped *Him*” not them. They presented their treasures not to Joseph the head of the house but, “unto Him.” The chief priests and scribes were agreed that the Bethlehem was the place where the Christ should be born. They appealed to the prophecy of Micah: “Out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.” It was to be a spiritual monarchy, not a triumvirate. Neither Mary nor Joseph were referred to by the prophet. The star went before the Magi “till it came and stood over where the young child was.”

Mariolatry and the worship of St. Joseph as the patron of the working-class may find support in medieval art but not in the gospel-records. The only center of the picture, the only One who is worthy of worship

<sup>4</sup> *The Treasure of the Magi*, pp. 1-2. .

is Jesus. In this very chapter he is by implication called the Son of God; "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son."

The names given to our Saviour in this one brief narrative are very suggestive: King of the Jews, governor and Ruler of Israel, My Son, and, the Nazarene. This last name offers difficulties as it is not clear to what prophecy the words refer "he shall be called a Nazarene." Jerome believed the reference was to Isaiah XI where the Messiah is spoken of as "the branch," (Hebrew, *Natzer*) which shall spring from the root of Jesse. This view is now accepted by many modern scholars. The word is used in a double sense or by a play upon the name of the town Nazareth. "It is with the prophetic references in the Gospels," says Dr. Bruce, "as with songs without words." The composer has a certain state of mind and writes under its inspiration. But you are not in his secret and cannot tell when you hear the music what it means. The prophecies are the music, the key is the history. "Let the key be given and immediately you find new meaning in the music."

Two of the names given to Jesus in this chapter are his very own until the last. Pilate's superscription on the Cross was "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews." Artists have abbreviated this title and on many paintings of the crucifixion you may read the Latin letters, I.N.R.I. The same letters might have been written over the crib of the young child, Jesus, the Nazarene, King of the Jews. But during the thirty hidden years no one

in Nazareth, save perhaps Mary and Joseph dreamed  
of the coming King and Kingdom even after the royal  
tribute by the Magi to

“The Babe whose Birth  
Was the great business both of Heaven and Earth.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Crashaw in Jane T. Stoddart's *New Testament in Life and Literature*.

# THE SONG OF THE ANGELS

## THE GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace,  
good will towards men.

We praise thee, we bless thee, we worship thee,  
we glorify thee, we give thanks to thee  
for thy great glory.

O Lord God, heavenly king, God, the Father  
Almighty.

O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ,  
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,

That takest away the sins of the world, have mercy  
upon us.

Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have  
mercy upon us.

Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive  
our prayer.

Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the  
Father, have mercy upon us.

For thou only art holy, thou only art the Lord.

Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost, art most  
high in the glory of God the Father.

**Amen.**

CHAPTER VIII  
THE SONG OF THE ANGELS

ERNEST RENAN spoke of the Gospel of Luke as "the most beautiful book in the whole world." In the early chapters poets, painters and sculptors have found inspiration for some of their finest and most daring interpretations of the mystery of the Incarnation. Here heaven and earth meet, the holy and the lowly are found very close together; the shepherds with their sheep, the night with its stars, the angel of the annunciation and the heavenly host with celestial music, the lowly manger and its beasts of the stall, and the Christ-child with Mary and Joseph. All this kindled the imagination of devout artists and was then transferred to canvas, portrayed in cathedral windows, carved in stone or put into hymns and carols for the Advent season.

George Herbert in his quaint song, *Christmas*, voices the aspiration of his own day and of us all:

"O Thou, whose glorious, yet contracted light,  
Wrapt in night's mantle, stole into a manger;  
Since my dark soul and brutish, is thy right,  
To Man of all beasts be not thou a stranger:  
Furnish and deck my soul, that thou mayst have  
A better lodging, then a rack, or grave."

"The shepherds sing; and shall I silent be?  
 My God, no hymne for thee?  
 My soul's a shepherd too; a flock it feeds  
 Of thoughts, and words, and deeds.  
 The pasture is thy word: the streams, thy grace  
 Enriching all the place.  
 Shepherd and flock shall sing, and all my powers  
 Out-sing the day-light houres."

There is an old English wood-cut, a broadside printed in London in 1631 and preserved in the collection of the Society of Antiquaries, which illustrates the ancient legend that even dumb animals could not keep silent on the Holy Night. In the center of the picture is the Babe with Joseph and Mary; from above the angels sing *Gloria in Excelsis*; the cock crows, *Christus natus est* (Christ is born); the raven in a tree asks, *Quando?* (when?) and the crow replies, *Hac nocte* (this night); the ox cries out, *Ubi, Ubi* (where, where?), while the sheep near the manger bleats, *Bethlehem*.

This apocryphal addition to the miracles did not blind the engraver to the meaning of it all, for he puts in plain old English around the picture the legend:

"Here's a Wonder never knowne  
 A King a manger makes his throne  
 And for debts which men should pay  
 Downe his life at stake did lay."

"Angels clap Hands, let men forbear to mourne  
 Their saving-Health is come; for Christ is Borne



Harke, what a heavenly Qurre of Angells sing  
Sweet carrols, at the birth of this new King.”

On the margin of the wood-cut we have all the tools of the betrayal and death of our Saviour: Judas' purse, the lanterns, the Roman scourge, the nails, the spear and the crown of thorns. And so the simple artist tells the whole story of God's redeeming love.

The Incarnation is so great a miracle that it is fittingly accompanied by display in the supernatural world. We read:

“And there were shepherds in the same country abiding in the field and keeping watch by night over their flock. And an angel of the Lord stood by them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Be not afraid, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord. And this is the sign unto you. Ye shall find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

Glory to God in the highest  
And on earth peace among men in whom  
he is well pleased.”

An angel to announce to lowly shepherds the birth of a babe in a manger! A multitude of heavenly mes-

sengers singing the *Gloria in Excelsis* to a Saviour who is Christ the Lord! No wonder that scepticism and unbelief have stumbled at this miracle and at the word *angel*. In the latest edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, for example, there are eighteen learned pages on the art of Angling, but in less than two columns two learned theologians tell us all they know about Angels—a mere Jewish superstition taken from the Persians—and there is no Scripture reference whatever to the New Testament in the entire article. Many Christians have ceased to believe in angels although they still paint them and carve them for their churches, sing about them at Christmas-tide and stumble on them in the hymn-book and the liturgies. But, if we believe the Bible we *must* believe in angels. They are mentioned in nearly every important book of the Old Testament, namely: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I Chronicles, Psalms, Isaiah, Hosea, Zechariah, and Daniel; in the New Testament there are frequent references to angels in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, Hebrews, I and II Peter, Jude and Revelation. What does Modernism do with all these proof-texts?

Angels are constantly referred to in the Scriptures and by our Lord and his apostles, as actual created beings. From Hebrews 1:6 and other passages it is inferred that they were created before man. They are immortal spirits (Luke 20:36) intelligent, powerful

and active (Psalm 103:20, I Peter 1:12, Matthew 26:63). They are innumerable (Hebrews 12:22) and their titles indicate different ranks, thrones, dominions and powers. The Archangel is mentioned several times and is distinguished from Christ (I Thess. 4:16). They wait upon God in praise and service both in heaven and on earth (Heb. 1:14). Is it astonishing that some of this host from heaven should be sent to welcome the Redeemer?

"Hark! the herald angels sing  
Glory to the newborn King."

No one can read the gospels attentively and reverently without the conviction that Jesus Christ himself believed in angels, was conscious of their presence, able to call in their help and was ministered to by angels at his birth, in the wilderness after his temptation, and in the garden of Gethsemane. They were present at the empty tomb after his resurrection and they stood on Olivet after his ascension. When he comes again, as he himself told us, it will be in his glory with all his holy angels. (Matt. 25:31.) He bade us beware of the leaven of the Sadducees who believed neither in angels nor in a resurrection from the dead. Paul believed in both. Only Pauline Christianity can understand the glory of that angelic song at Bethlehem and all its import. The echo of that song rang down the ages and John, on lonely Patmos, heard it in the voices of "ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands" round about the throne saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” So the song at Bethlehem was, one might say, the brief libretto to the great Hallelujah Chorus of the redeemed. If we regard the announcement of the angel to the shepherds (Luke 2:10-12) as a song then we may view the *Gloria in Excelsis* as the refrain sung by the multitude of the heavenly host. There are two readings of the Greek text depending on the case ending of the word *eudokia*: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased;” or the more familiar rendering, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.” The former would signify, as Meyer says, that God’s good will or good pleasure rests especially on the elect. In either case it is a message of peace on earth through the advent of the Prince of Peace who is the Saviour from sin.

How little the casual reader appreciates this snatch of angelic song, yet the Greek orthodox church expanded the first Christmas carol to its present form in the year 350 A.D. for use at the Lord’s Supper. And we find it in the Book of Common Prayer and in many other liturgies of the Protestant churches today. It is printed in full facing this chapter. Beginning with the angelic hymn the *Gloria in Excelsis* addresses the Father Almighty and then the Only begotten Son, as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and entreats his mercy with earnest iteration. It is some-

times called the greater doxology as the *Gloria Patri* is the lesser.

The first thought of the angels is that of adoration. Their praise of God precedes the message of peace on earth. God must be worshipped and glorified before man may expect pardon or peace. "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked." (Isaiah 48:22.) The angel's song is God's pattern of praise and his promise of peace and good will, to those who admit the Saviour into their hearts and who are born again through his lowly birth. As someone has remarked, the message of glad tidings was first revealed not to the proud Pharisees in Jerusalem nor to the worldly priests in the Temple, but to the humble shepherds in the field of Bethlehem. Their hearts must have been prepared; for although they were "sore afraid" at the angelic appearance and the light that shone round about them they, like Saul, were not disobedient to the heavenly vision but immediately hastened to the manger. The Authorized Version is too tame "giving no idea of the mental excitement of the shepherds and the demonstrative energy with which they communicated to each other, comrade-fashion, the idea which had seized their minds."<sup>1</sup> With crook in hand they started running out to see their new-born Saviour, Christ the Lord. They reached the inn and beheld the holiest of all holy scenes—the maiden-mother and aged Joseph kneeling in silent love before the Infant flooded in heavenly light. Only those who had eyes to see beheld this glory. Only those who had ears to hear heard the voice of

<sup>1</sup> W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, I, p. 473.

angels. So it was then and so it will always be. The shepherds told their story and Mary believed (while others only wondered) "and kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."

"Still through the cloven skies they come  
With peaceful wings unfurled;  
And still their heavenly music floats  
O'er all the weary world:  
Above its sad and lowly plains  
They bend on hovering wing,  
And ever o'er its Babel sounds  
The blessed angels sing."

"Yet with the woes of sin and strife  
The world has suffered long;  
Beneath the angels' strain have rolled  
Two thousand years of wrong;  
And man at war with man hears not  
The song of love they bring:  
Oh! hush the noise, ye men of strife,  
And hear the angels sing!"

The song of the angels is indeed a reminder that the invisible world is very close to us; and that, as Jesus said, children have their angels "who always behold the face of my Father;" and that they are ministering spirits to us here on earth. Their song of peace on earth is also a prophecy of the time that is to be when peace shall prevail with righteousness. Denis Wortman in his *Reliques of the Christ* voices that Christian hope:

“O Bethlehem! O Bethlehem!  
We'll hear thy choirs again,  
'Glory to God on high! on earth  
Peace and good will to men!'

The countless peoples of the skies  
Shall seize the uplifted song  
And ages over ages pour  
The tidal psalm along.

“Glad city of the angel-song,  
Not *one* star then shall come  
To bow in solitary pause  
O'er thy blest manger-home;  
Lo, then fulfilled the Patriarch's dream,  
And none shall envious be,  
As sun and moon and *all* the stars  
Obeisance make to thee.”





# SONGS ON EARTH

Christopher Smart in 1763 at the close of his remarkable poem *A Song to David* sets forth in quaint but pregnant words the supreme glory of the incarnation:

“Glorious the sun in mid career;  
Glorious the assembled fires appear;  
Glorious the comet’s train;  
Glorious the trumpet and alarm;  
Glorious th’ Almighty stretched-out arm;  
Glorious the enraptured main:

Glorious the northern lights astream;  
Glorious the song when God’s the theme;  
Glorious the thunder’s roar;  
Glorious hosanna from the den;  
Glorious the Catholic amen;  
Glorious the martyr’s gore;

Glorious—more glorious is the crown  
Of Him that brought salvation down  
By meekness, called thy Son;  
Thou at stupendous truth believed  
And now the matchless deed’s achieved,  
*Determined, dared and done.”*

CHAPTER IX  
SONGS ON EARTH

MATTHEW'S account of the Nativity begins with exceeding great joy in the hearts of those who saw the star, but ends in the tragedy of Rachel weeping for her children in the Massacre of the Innocents. Luke's account has no tragedy. In addition to the song of the angels and as an echo of their joy at the birth of our Saviour, Luke mentions five songs on earth in his account of the nativity. Elisabeth's *Benedictus*, Mary's *Magnificat*, the longer *Benedictus* of Zacharias, the *Nunc Dimittis* of aged Simeon and the Song without Words of saintly Anna. All of them followed the *Ave Maria* of the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:28-35); all are on a different key but all unite in the note of joy.

“Good Christian men, rejoice  
With heart, and soul, and voice;  
Now ye hear of endless bliss:  
Joy! Joy!

Jesus Christ was born for this.  
He hath oped the heav'nly door;  
And man is blessed evermore—  
Christ was born for this!”

Luke's gospel rings the Christmas bells at midnight

even as was the custom in medieval Europe. In pre-Reformation days there was a superstition that the tolling of the "Old Lad's Passing Bell" a little before midnight signified the death of the Devil! Then, at the stroke of twelve, lusty lads would man all the ropes and bells and make the welkin ring. The old notion of the demise of the Devil at the hour of the nativity is profoundly suggestive. Christ was born to destroy the works of the Devil. In a moment of tense and luminous hope Jesus exclaimed, "I beheld Satan falling as lightning from heaven," and in the *Magnificat* we read, "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, He hath put down the mighty from their seat." If there was joy in heaven at the birth of Christ there must have been dismay in hell. But believers in the Messiah were filled with joy and burst into song.

1. *The Song of Elisabeth.* When Mary arose with haste after the Annunciation and came to her kinswoman in the home of Zacharias the yet unborn John the Baptist acknowledged the presence of the Master, also yet unborn, while Elisabeth, according to Luke's account, filled with the Holy Spirit gave unrestrained utterance to her irrepressible feeling. A most natural expression from one believing woman of Israel with a high hope to another in similar expectancy. The mother of the Herald greeting the Mother of the King. "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo,

as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." (Luke 1:42-45.)

It is hard to realize the feeling of the Virgin as her own cousin saluted her with such reverence, confirmed the words of the Angel's Annunciation to her and called Mary blessed because she believed God's promise. The word "blessed" in this earliest of the gospel beatitudes, points here, as elsewhere, to rare and high felicity connected with heroic moods and achievements. Mary was indeed blessed among women and blessed in being the mother of her Saviour and ours. She was also most blessed because she heard the word of God and kept it. (Compare the incident in Luke 11:27, 28.) But the song of Elisabeth seems to have been considered too intimately feminine and sacred to be used in the devotional liturgies of the church; although it, like the other three songs, contains in the germ, adoration, thanksgiving and prophecy.

2. *The Magnificat*. Mary's hymn became as it were the triumph song of saints and martyrs and confessors down the centuries. It is found in the very early liturgies and was set to music by Palestrina, Orlando di Lasso, César Franck and many other musicians. A single Anglican publishing house, Novello, lists a thousand settings of the *Magnificat*! "These settings run through the whole range of musical expression, from the simplest harmony up to the most elaborate dramatic

treatment with orchestral accompaniment of the text. Almost every great church composer has worked often and zealously on this theme."<sup>1</sup> Literally, because of her prophetic song, all generations have called her blessed, and a whole library of books on this one song of joy is listed in the encyclopedias and commentaries. In that song we hear Mary rejoicing in the great mystery of the Incarnation and the blessing of salvation. Yet there is not a note of self-exaltation or self-assertion. It is the song of a meek and lowly heart of a broken and a contrite spirit where God makes his dwelling-place. Listen to it:

“My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my spirit  
hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For He hath regarded the lowliness of His hand-  
maiden.

For behold, from henceforth all generations  
shall call me blessed.

For He that is mighty hath magnified me: and  
Holy is His Name.

And His mercy is on them that fear him:  
throughout all generations.

He hath showed strength with His arm: He  
hath scattered the proud in the imagination of  
their hearts.

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<sup>1</sup> The Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. IX, p. 535.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat:  
and hath exalted the humble and the meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things:  
and the rich He hath sent empty away.

He, remembering His mercy, hath holpen His  
servant Israel: as He promised to our fore-  
fathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever.”

The song has close affinities to the Old Testament song of Hannah (I Sam. 2:1-10) with which Mary doubtless was familiar: “My heart exulteth in Jehovah . . . Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let no arrogancy come out of your mouth . . . The bows of the mighty men are broken; and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry have ceased . . . Jehovah maketh poor, and maketh rich . . . He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, he lifteth up the needy from the dunghill, to make them sit with princes.” No one can fail to see the similarity of Hannah’s paeon of joy at the birth of Samuel and Mary’s at the promised birth of the Saviour. Yet the inner difference is greater than the outward resemblance. There is nothing in Mary’s heart of vengeance. She does not say that “the wicked shall be put to silence in darkness” or that Jehovah will “break them” in pieces with “thunder from heaven” (I Sam. 2:9-10).

The *Magnificat* also has a unity lacking in the song of Hannah. The first strophe expresses the singer’s

joy. The second states its cause, while the third is the climax describing the future moral-order of the world as a result of the Incarnation. It is both a song of present joy and a prophecy of future days. The constant tendency of Christ's influence on the world and on the ages is here pictured in poetic language. He will reverse human judgments, overturn systems of oppression and pride while exalting the humble and the meek. From Mary's lips we have a foretaste of the Beatitudes. The pure, the meek, those who mourn and those who hunger will receive blessing and bounty in that day when God remembers his mercy and fulfills his covenant to Abraham and all his spiritual descendants. While the diction is largely that of the Old Testament and the song has the parallelism of Hebrew poetry the thought rises above the bounds of Judaic nationalism and strikes a universal note—"all generations shall call me blessed . . . his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation." In Abraham and his seed all the families of the earth are to be blessed. The author of such a hymn must have lived in the atmosphere of Messianic promise to incorporate without any artificiality so much from the Psalms and the Prophets in a single poem. She lived it before she uttered it.

Many are familiar with the *Stabat Mater dolorosa*, attributed to Jacopone and considered the most poignant of all Latin Passion hymns. But he wrote a contrasting companion hymn entitled *Stabat Mater Spe-*



*ciosa* of which the sentiment is even more tender and it interprets Mary's mother-love for the Saviour:

"Full of beauty stood the Mother  
By the Manger, blest o'er other,  
Where her little One she lays,  
For her inmost soul's elation,  
In its fervid jubilation  
Thrills with ecstasy of praise."<sup>2</sup>

When we hear the *Magnificat* rightly sung, in one of its numerous musical settings, we share in some small degree the ecstasy of Mary's joy in her Saviour.

3. *The Benedictus of Zacharias*. This is the second of the three great canticles in Luke's gospel. It also is Jewish in form but Christian in sentiment. The first half has so much local color and is so nationalistic in character that Loisy and others believe it existed as an earlier Hebrew psalm and was uttered by Zacharias with additions and slight alterations. Other critics offer grave objections to this view. They say it refers distinctly to the promise made to Elisabeth, to the covenant with Zacharias and the mercy shown to Israel by the birth of John the Baptist. Like the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus* contains both praise and prophecy and it also found a permanent place in the liturgies of the Church:

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath  
visited and redeemed His people;  
And hath raised up a mighty salvation for us  
in the house of His servant David:

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<sup>2</sup> J. M. Neale's translation. Cf. Catholic Anthology, p. 73.

As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets,  
which have been since the world began,

That we should be saved from our enemies and  
from the hand of all that hate us.

To perform the mercy promised to our fore-  
fathers, and to remember His holy covenant,

To perform the oath which He sware to our  
forefather, Abraham, that He would give us;

That we, being delivered out of the hand of  
our enemies, might serve Him without fear;

In holiness and righteousness before Him, all  
the days of our life.

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of  
the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face  
of the Lord, to prepare His ways;

To give knowledge of salvation unto His people  
for the remission of their sins.

Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby  
the Day-spring from on high hath visited us;

To give light to them that sit in darkness, and  
in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet  
into the way of peace." (Luke 1:68-79.)

This song is usually divided into five strophes but  
it more obviously consists of two parts, vs. 68-75 and  
76-79. (Briggs, *The Messiah of the Gospels*.) It has

so many points of contact with the Old Testament that Holtz calls it an anthology from the Psalms and the Prophets. The first believers in Christ naturally spoke the language of those who foretold his coming and did not scruple to quote *their* Bible, as we do ours, in prayer and praise.

Critics of the text speak of the lack of originality in the words of Zacharias. On the contrary, as Dr. Machen asserts, the hymns of the first chapter of Luke are spontaneous outpourings of devout and thankful hearts. Who can say that they are the products of a study chamber and not directly inspired by the Spirit of God?<sup>3</sup>

4. *The Nunc Dimittis*. On the eighth day, Jesus, who was born under the law, was circumcised. On the fortieth day after the Saviour's birth Joseph and Mary went to the Temple Court at Jerusalem for the presentation of the holy Child and the ceremony of purification as laid down in the law of Moses (Exodus 12:2 and 22:29). These two rites were distinct but were generally performed together. The Jewish mother presented her first-born and paid the redemption money to the priest. This was called the presentation. The other observance required a blood-sacrifice (in the case of the poor, two turtle-doves or pigeons) together with a prayer and benediction. This was the ceremonial cleansing after child-birth.

Joseph and Mary probably entered by the Court of Women. As they stood to perform the rite, the aged

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<sup>3</sup> *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, pp. 84, 85.

Simeon went directly to meet them. Some think he was the officiating priest. In any case, we are told he was directed by the Holy Spirit who had assured him he would live to see the Messiah:

“Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his Mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

Artists have vied with each other in portraying this striking event in the life of Jesus. Simeon representing the Old Covenant welcoming Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant in the temple. The Law holding aloft the Gospel. The Light of the World above the hoary

head of Simeon. The hope of the ages fulfilled in this moment of joy. "Now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace."

Paul Rubens in executing an order for a picture of St. Christopher departed from the traditional representation of the legend of one who carried the Christ-child on his shoulders. Instead he gave the splendid painting now in the Cathedral at Antwerp, a triptych, of those who were Christ-bearers: Mary on her way to Bethlehem, Simeon holding Christ in his arms at the Presentation and the Disciples taking our Lord's body from the Cross. All were indeed Christophers for they carried the Christ. The *Nunc Dimittis* has become both a hymn of praise and a requiem for the dead.

"And when around our path  
The call of Death is heard  
Lord let Thou us depart in peace  
According to Thy word."<sup>4</sup>

5. *The Song without words*. There were words, there was joy and praise; but the *words* are not recorded for us. Here is the story.

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks

<sup>4</sup> Henry Alford in *The Churchman's Treasury of Song*, p. 415.

likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”

The last on the stage and a most striking figure, known to all in Jerusalem by name and lineage, celebrated for her ascetic devotion and constant prayer, she seized the right moment and joined Simeon with her own *Benedictus*. She was either a widow for eighty-four years (Godet) or, as most think, a widow till the eighty-fourth year of her life. The former rendering would make her very old; married say at sixteen, seven years a wife, eighty-four years a widow that is one hundred and seven years. This is, however, not impossible and is borne out by the expression “advanced in days many.” (Bruce.) The presence of aged Simeon and Anna at the presentation of our Lord in the temple may remind us of the faithfulness of God’s promises to the aged.

“E’en down to old age all my people shall prove  
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love  
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn  
Like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne.”

## THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

“What is there hid in the heart of a rose, asks the child in *The Forest of Wild Thyme*.

A man that died on a lonely hill  
May tell you, perhaps, but none other will,  
answers the mother; and the persistent child goes on,  
What does it take to make a rose?

The God that died to make it knows,  
It takes the world’s eternal wars,  
It takes the moon and all the stars,  
It takes the might of heaven and hell  
And the everlasting Love as well,  
Little child.”

*Windows* by Amy Carmichael.



## CHAPTER X

### THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

"HE came unto his own," we read, "and his own received him not." There was no room for Jesus in the inn. So he was laid in the manger. And no sooner had the angels ceased from singing their *Gloria in Excelsis*, and the Magi followed the star to Bethlehem, than Herod sought to kill Jesus. This was the earliest shadow of that persecution and rejection which were to be his lot throughout the days of his flesh. Once and again at Nazareth and at Capernaum and in Jerusalem the mob sought to kill him, and finally he was condemned at Gabbatha and crucified on Golgotha.

It is a strange and tragic episode in the story of the nativity that Matthew relates in so few words. Here it is as translated by Weymouth: "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, Rise, take the babe and His mother and escape to Egypt and remain there till I bring you word. For Herod is about to make search for the child in order to destroy Him. So Joseph roused himself and took the babe and His mother by night and departed into Egypt. There he remained till Herod's death, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, Out of Egypt I called my Son (Hosea 11:1). Then Herod finding that the Magi

had trifled with him, was furious, and sent and massacred all the boys under two years of age in Bethlehem and all its neighborhood, according to the date he had so carefully ascertained from the Magi." (Math. 2:13-16.) Comparing the account of the nativity in Matthew and Luke the chronological order of events seems to have been as follows. Soon after the birth of Christ, the wise men arrived from the East. This was followed by the flight into Egypt. Then a very brief sojourn there, for the death of Herod occurred 4 B. C. The presentation in the temple must have taken place a little later. According to the law it could not occur *before* the fortieth day, but not necessarily on that day. After the presentation and the songs in the Temple, Joseph and Mary settled at Nazareth, where our Lord spent thirty years.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, although the flight into Egypt was precipitous and brief, it has a deep significance. The supposition of rationalistic commentators that this account was invented for the purpose of fulfilling the alleged prophecy in Hosea is entirely incompatible with the scope and meaning of the narrative. Every detail seems to be corroborated by the character of Herod, the geographical background, and the manner in which Joseph was directed in a dream to take the flight. The prophecy was not verbal but typical. Israel of old was called out of Egypt, and the house of bondage, as the son of God—the Israelites were God's children. But now the Son of God himself was taken into Egypt, and called out of

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<sup>1</sup> Lange's *Leben Jesu*, vol. II:110.

Egypt. This ancient land (to which there are more than two hundred and sixty references in the Bible) became the refuge of the Christ-child that He might once become the refuge of Egypt and of all lands. It is important to bear in mind the historical influence and importance of Egypt at that epoch. Ancient Greek civilization, and through it Imperial Rome, had sprung from Egypt. Out of Egypt Moses led Israel to found a theocracy; and out of that same land God's providence led the Christ to become the head of a new theocracy, His Church.

Egypt was the natural, the nearest and the only possible place of refuge from Herod's domain. Frequented roads led then, as now, through the strip of desert and along the coast to Mataria in the border of the delta near Leontopolos. According to a very ancient tradition, that is where Joseph went. But the exact place of their sojourn is unimportant.

The main question is whether Herod's cruelty and jealousy is credible? If so, then the caution of the Magi, the flight to a strange land, the massacre at Bethlehem and the return to Nazareth after the tyrant's death are all equally credible.<sup>2</sup> Who was Herod the Great? It is a name of evil omen. He was great in energy, in magnificence and in wickedness. His father Antipater was an Edomite, his mother an Arabian; and through the influence of Anthony he was appointed King of Judea by the Roman senate about forty years before the birth of Christ. The events in Matthew's gospel therefore

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bruce in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*.

took place at the close of his long and brilliant reign—a career darkened also by many deeds of cruelty. According to Josephus, the horrors of his home life were in strong contrast to the splendour of his architectural efforts. He was a slave to jealousy and ambition. The demon of domestic discord ruled. He put to death his own sons Aristobulus and Alexander, as well as other rivals. He married ten wives and constantly murdered rivals to stop intrigue.

From such an Edomite ruler, a son of Jacob would expect no favors. The old enmity of Esau reappeared. "I will slay my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:4). So when the Magi gave him the time of Jesus' birth, and the Sanhedrin, the place, he arranged to slay all the young children in the Bethlehem district so that the new-born King of the Jews might not escape. This massacre of the Innocents was the first chapter in the long story of Christian martyrs. Church historians have distinguished a threefold martyrdom: That both in will and deed like Stephen's; that of will though not in fact like John the Evangelist in exile; and that which was martyrdom in fact, though not in will, like the babes of Bethlehem. In the Church calendar the three festivals come closely together, December 26-28. But there is as little historic evidence for these dates as for the fantastic account in the Greek Liturgy which asserts that Herod killed 14,000 boys! Bethlehem was a small town and the total number of babes under two years could not have been more than one hundred.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia, Article, *Holy Innocents*.

Nevertheless these children were martyrs. St. Augustine calls them *flores martyrum* and says, "they died not only for Christ but in his stead." That is, they died, while he escaped death by flight into Egypt.

The massacre was not openly and officially ordered (as we know from the Greek text, says Lange) but secretly perpetrated, probably by hired banditti in the employ of Herod. And then was fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah, "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation and weeping and great mournings, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not" (Jer. 31:15).

The words referred primarily to the deportation of the Jews to Babylon. Rachel the ancestress of Benjamin is introduced because her grave is near Bethlehem. It is therefore a typical prophecy of the sorrow of the mother of a tribe for the tragedy of the massacre. Christ was numbered, at the census, among the children of Bethlehem. They die for him to live with him forever in glory. He lives for them in order to die for them on the Cross. And so the slaughter of the Innocents became a favorite theme in the old English Christmas carols. In one case it is the subject of the Virgin's Cradle Song:

"Lulla, lulla, lullaby;  
My sweet little Babe, what meanest thou to cry?  
Be still my blessed Babe, though cause thou  
hast to mourn  
Whose blood, most innocent, the cruel King has  
sworn.

And lo! alas, behold what slaughter doth  
 he make,  
 Shedding the blood of innocents, sweet Jesus,  
 for Thy sake!  
 'A King is born' they say, which King *this*  
 king would kill!  
 Oh woe, and heavy woeful day, when wretches  
 have their will." <sup>4</sup>

But God's judgment overtook Herod at the last. Josephus gives a full account of his tragic death, as from eye-witnesses. The King died in his seventieth year at Jericho of a horrible, loathsome disease, rotten in body as in soul. At the hot-springs of Callirrhoe, near Jericho, he had sought relief; and when the end drew near he gave orders to have the principal men of the district shut up in the hippodrome at Jericho and slaughtered, as soon as he passed away, in order that there might be universal mourning at his death! But the barbarous command was not carried out.<sup>5</sup>

The flight into Egypt has been interpreted by several great artists. Perhaps the best known painting is that which represents the Holy Family at rest in the shadow of the great Pyramids. The massacre of the children of Bethlehem is commemorated in the Church of England calendar; and in Keble's *The Christian Year* we have a beautiful hymn interpreting the narrative spiritually. Here are three stanzas:

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<sup>4</sup> *Christmas and Christmas Lore*, T. G. Crippen, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* XVII 6, 5. Cf. Catholic Encyclopedia.

"Mindful of these, the first fruits sweet  
Borne by the suffering Church her Lord to greet;  
Blessed Jesus ever loved to trace  
The 'innocent brightness' of an infant's face.

He raised them in His holy arms,  
He blessed them from the world and all its harms:  
Heirs though they were of sin and shame,  
He blessed them in His own and in His Father's  
name.

"Then, as each fond unconscious child  
On the everlasting Parent sweetly smiled,  
(Like infants sporting on the shore,  
That tremble not at Ocean's boundless roar)  
Were they not present to Thy Thought,  
All souls, that in their cradles Thou hast bought?  
But chiefly these, who died for Thee,  
That Thou mightst live for them a sadder death  
to see.

"And next to these, Thy gracious Word  
Was as a pledge of benediction, stored  
For Christian mothers, while they moan  
Their treasured hopes, just born, baptized, and gone.  
O joy for Rachel's broken heart!  
She and her babes shall meet no more to part;  
So dear to Christ her pious haste  
To trust them in His arms, for ever safe embraced."

"Suffer the little children, and forbid them not to  
come unto me: for to such belongeth the Kingdom of  
heaven." These words of Jesus, given in the three

synoptic gospels, are followed in Mark by the very significant words. "He took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them."

Jesus loved little children. They had a large place in his heart and in his teaching. Surely Mary must have told the boy Jesus at some time in Nazareth the story of cruel Herod who, like Pharaoh of old, tried to destroy little children and how God saved Moses, and Jesus himself from death. Is there not an echo of the Master's righteous indignation at the cruelty of man to childhood from the days of Herod, when he exclaimed: "Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast in the depth of the sea." (Matt. 18:6; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2.) Three times we have this terrible warning not to offend "little ones" from the lips of him who is called by Peter, The Holy Child Jesus (Acts 6:27).

When babes-in-arms were brought to him Jesus said "To such belongeth the Kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein" (Luke 18:16-17. A.R.V.).

"I think when I read that sweet story of old  
 When Jesus was here among men.  
 How He called little children as lambs to  
 His fold,  
 I should like to have been with them then."



The Babe of Bethlehem with the magnetism of the manger has drawn all the world's childhood after Him. Christmas is the festival of children. They love its symbolism and the Old, Old Story is ever new to them. Children nestled around Jesus, they sang Hosannas in Passion week when our Saviour rode into Jerusalem, and we read that heaven is to be full of boys and girls playing in the streets (Zech. 8:5). The holy Innocents of Bethlehem were only the first fruits of the great harvest of childhood whose reaper is death. And when we consider the dreadful mortality of infants (especially in non-Christian lands) we find a deeper meaning in Christ's words, "Of *such* is the kingdom of heaven." An exceeding "great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands." (A.R.V.) But Matthew's story does not end with Rachel weeping for her children. Christ is the central figure also in the flight to Egypt.

"When Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life." Then Joseph obeyed and began the long return journey but when he heard that Archelaus, a man of kindred nature, suspicious and truculent, was reigning in Herod's place, he feared to go to "the land of Israel" and settled in Galilee of the Gentiles making his home at Nazareth, "that it might

be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." What this meant we shall see in the next chapter.

**THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH**

“Never a sigh of passion or of pity,  
Never a wail for weakness or for wrong,  
Has not its archive in the angel’s city,  
Finds not its echo in the endless song.

“Not as one blind and deaf to our beseeching,  
Neither forgetful that we are but dust,  
Not as from heavens too high for our up-reaching,  
Coldly sublime, intolerably just:—

“Nay but thou knowest us, Lord Christ thou knowest,  
Well thou rememberest our feeble frame,  
Thou canst conceive our highest and our lowest,  
Pulses of nobleness and aches of shame.”

—F. W. H. Myers’ *Saint Paul*

## CHAPTER XI

### THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH

WHEN John, in his prologue, speaks of Christ as "the Word which was in the beginning with God and was God," the climax is reached in the statement, to which all that precedes is directed, namely the manifestation of the *Logos*, as Incarnation: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The word flesh here expresses human nature as a whole. God became man. The *Logos*, retaining his personality, assumed human flesh and dwelt among men as man.

In his incarnation Christ did not identify himself with a part of the human race or with elect members of that race but with the whole family of humanity. By the incarnation Christ the eternal Word became THE SON OF MAN. That was his own characteristic and favorite title which is used again and again in the gospels. Its origin goes back to the great prophecy of Daniel in the seventh chapter where the final judgment by the Son of Man is contrasted with the Wild-beast kingdoms of worldly history. (vs. 9-14). That this is the origin of the name is evident, as Dr. Charles A. Briggs says, because Jesus "not only uses the term *Son*

of *Man*, of Daniel, with reference to himself but also the term *abomination of desolation* of the same Daniel, and the very language. 'They shall see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.' In other words, he predicts that he will come again in the clouds as the Son of Man of Daniel to judge the world and set up the everlasting kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

But Jesus also represents himself to be the Son of Man in his earthly ministry: "The Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20, Luke 9:58), and uses the same title in his utter identification with the common people: "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a man gluttonous and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." He is the Son of Man because he is the friend of all humanity. Made like unto his brethren in all things, except sin. It was the greatness of his loving heart that expressed itself by saying to Zaccheus, "The Son of man came to seek that which was lost" and to vengeful James and John in rebuke, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Luke 19:10 and 9:55-56.)

"The Word was made flesh"—that is the deepest meaning of the incarnation. Proclus the Patriarch of Constantinople (died 447) beautifully expressed it many centuries ago. "The Same was in the bosom of the Father and in the Virgin's womb. The Same was in his mother's arms and on the wings of the wind. The

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<sup>1</sup> *The Incarnation of the Lord*, p. 7.

Same was worshipped by angels, and sat down with publicans. . . . He was nailed to the Cross and the Throne of glory was not vacated. I see the miracles and I proclaim the Godhead. I see the sufferings and I deny not the Manhood. Immanuel opened the gates of nature as man, but as God he broke not the seal of Virginity.”<sup>2</sup>

This doctrine of the Catholic church was expressed by great theologians and formulated in the creeds. The eternal son of God by personal union assumed human nature, body and soul, from the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. The two natures of Christ do not mix, nor interpenetrate but always remain distinct, each retaining its own peculiar attributes, yet the union is such that what can be predicated of either nature can be predicated of the person of Christ. In our next chapter we deal more fully with this mystery of the God-man. Suffice it here to give the words of Athanasius in the well-known Creed:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds: and Man of the substance of His Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and Perfect Man: of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead: and inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood. Who although He be God and Man, yet He is not two but one Christ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into Flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God; one al-

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in A. C. Knowles' *The Holy Christ-Child*, p. 17.

together, not by confusion of substance, but by Unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one Man, so God and Man is one Christ."

In this chapter we emphasize his real humanity and his consciousness of that humanity in the title, Son of Man, and of his universal mission. He is the Light of all the world. He is the Bread of Life to all who hunger. God is not a God of the Jews only but of the human race, and Jesus the Christ "is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe" (I Tim. 4:10 A.R.V.). The fact of the Incarnation is the only adequate basis for belief in the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The Christmas-spirit cannot exist where there is race-prejudice or class-hatred. John, who leaned on Jesus' bosom, tells us what it all meant to him:

"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. . . . If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? . . . He that loveth God should love his brother also."

Jesus came from heaven to Bethlehem nineteen hundred years ago. Knowing whence He came and whither He was going He not only loved little children, but washed Judas' feet, touched lepers, welcomed strangers, was a friend of sinners and had dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus was the Son of man and had no race-prejudice. He came in the fullness of time. Judaism



itself had grown conscious of a universal mission. Recent historic criticism has emphasized anew the enormous importance of the *diaspora* on the history of early Christianity. The Old Testament, although it was composed by and addressed to the Jews as a chosen race, is universal in its outlook and conceives of humanity as a whole in its origin and its goal. One recalls not only the book of Genesis, the only ancient Scripture that professes to give a world history from the very beginning, but striking passages in the Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Joel, and Jonah.

Out of this background Christ came to destroy race-barriers and race-hatred. He gave womanhood its place, childhood its rights, the slave his freedom, and the barbarian welcome. In the fellowship of Jesus Christ, His love, His mercy, His kingdom, there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free, Roman nor Barbarian. Wherever His followers have disobeyed this law of His kingdom through race-hatred and prejudice they have misrepresented that kingdom which has no frontier, and in which the humble alone receive citizenship. The founder of Christianity is not the Son of any nation or people, but the Son of man, the Perfect Man. Mohammed was an Arab; that is his boast, and the result has been that as long as his religion abides, it is tied hand and foot to a civilization based upon the Arabian institutions of the seventh century. To be a true Moslem one must copy the pattern once for all laid down, and it is an arabesque—without life. Confucius was a Chinese scholar, Buddha an

Indian ascetic, Socrates a Greek philosopher. The systems of thought and philosophy, to which they gave birth, are therefore indelibly national. But Jesus of Nazareth, although a Jew by lineage, was not a Jew in His limitations or ideals or teachings. He was super-national; he was neither an Occidental nor an Oriental in the popular meaning of these words. He combined in Himself all the ideals of East and West, without any of their limitations. In Him we see the Alpha and Omega of ideal manhood (and of ideal womanhood) because He is the Son of Man and the Son of God.

Most of the racial prejudice in the past and some of it today is due to sheer ignorance of the essential unity of the human family—the solidarity of the race which Christ always took for granted in His teaching. He came as the Light of the world; and commissioned His apostles to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. He anticipated no barriers which would prove unsurmountable to those who loved Him. When the Jews accused him of being a Samaritan and having a devil (John 8:48), he passed by in scorn the first accusation because he considered all humanity potentially the family of God. All are lost in sin and He came to seek and to save the lost.

If we have the mind of Christ nothing human can be foreign to us.

“Who is so low that I am not his brother?

Who is so high that I’ve no path to him?

Who is so poor I may not feel his hunger?

Who is so rich I may not pity him?

“May none, then, call on me for understanding,  
May none, then, turn to me for help in pain,  
And drain alone his bitter cup of sorrow,  
Or find he knocks upon my heart in vain.”

The present-day race-myth of Aryan superiority or Nordic supremacy are the very antithesis of Christianity. The term Aryan-race seems to have been first used by the great linguist Max Müller though like a true scientist he repudiated its present-day use. “I have declared again and again that, when I say Aryans, I mean neither blood, nor bones, nor hair, nor skull; I mean simply those who speak an Aryan language. . . . To me an ethnologist who speaks of Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan eyes and hair, is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of a dolichocephalic dictionary or a brachycephalic grammar. It is worse than a Babylonian confusion of tongues—it is downright theft.”

Madison Grant’s “The Passing of a Great Race” and Lothrop Stoddard’s “The Rising Tide of Color” are still fresh in our memory as we read the fulminations of the German press against the Jewish people. The chief trouble with any race-theory is that no one knows just what a race is. “God hath made of one blood all nations.” This statement of Paul on Mars’ hill is confirmed by the latest science, in two volumes that appeared from the press this year.<sup>3</sup> Both writers practically agree that all mankind consists of but one species; that

<sup>3</sup> *Race: A Study in Modern Superstition* by Jacques Barzun, New York, 1939.

*Race: A History of Modern Ethnic Theories* by Louis L. Snyder, New York, 1939.

there are no pure races; that there are no inferior peoples, only inferior individuals; that the differences between various peoples, both physical and psychical, are by no means as great as those between individuals of the same so-called races. Neither shape of skull nor color of eyes or hair are permanent or universal characteristics of any group. Houston Chamberlain, who sincerely believed that Jesus was not a Semite but a Nordic, gave currency to the pseudo-scientific theory of Gobineau. Theodore Roosevelt reviewing this book in *The Outlook*, said: "The author's brilliant lapses into sanity are fixed in a matrix of fairly bedlamite passion and non-sanity!" We in America, as well as those who live in the Germany of Hitler, need to beware of race-antagonism and narrow race-prejudice based on false premises. A great multitude of all racial groups of every nation and tribe and people and tongue have found their ideal of humanity in Jesus of Nazareth. Around his manger they gather at Christmastide and hail him whom Sidney Lanier called the Crystal Christ:

"O perfect life in perfect labor writ,  
 O all men's Comrade, Servant, King, or Priest,—  
 What *if* or *yet*, what mole, what flaw, what lapse,  
 What least defect or shadow of defect,  
 What rumor, tattled by an enemy,  
 Of inference loose, what lack of grace  
 Even in torture's grasp, or sleep's, or death's,—  
 Oh, what amiss may I forgive in Thee,  
 Jesus, good Paragon, thou Crystal Christ?"

Charles Wesley Hill used to play the part of the Angel Gabriel in *Green Pastures* and when he was killed in a traffic accident, one of the New York dailies remarked:

"Hill was a colored man, a great actor and a fine human being. In that section of New York where most of the people of his race live, he was beloved because he played the part of Gabriel both on *and off the stage*. All of his race, and white people, too, are better for his having lived amongst us, because he had religion in him and he was sincere in his wish that, after life, he wanted to go to that city called heaven where there is no color-line."

And there is no color-line in the Gospel. Jesus Christ was the *Pontifex Maximus* for the whole human race. The Romans gave this title to the chief bridge-builder, the highest religious authority in the state. Christ bridges all chasms of race and language and culture and social position because he is the Son of Man.

"Well has the name of *pontifex* been given  
Unto the Church's head as the chief builder  
And architect of the invisible bridge  
That leads from Earth to Heaven." <sup>4</sup>

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews in speaking of the Word that became flesh says: "He giveth help to the seed of Abraham. Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertain-

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<sup>4</sup> Longfellow's *Golden Legend*, V.

ing to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." (A.R.V.) Because the Word became flesh, he shares with us in our temptations and in our victories. He has a fellow-feeling for us all in our infirmities and trials. He went through it all—and did it for our sakes. The incarnation was in order to make atonement. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for the sins of the whole world. The Son of Man lives to intercede.

“Then tho’ our foul and limitless transgression  
Grows with our growing, with our breath began,  
Raise Thou the arms of endless intercession,  
Jesus, divinest when Thou most art man!”

**THE WORD WAS GOD**

“I say, the acknowledgement of God in Christ  
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee  
All questions in the earth and out of it,  
And has so far advanced thee to be wise.  
Wouldst thou unprove this to reprove the proved?  
In life’s mere minute, with power to use that proof,  
Leave knowledge, and revert to how it sprung?  
Thou hast it; use it, and forthwith, or die!

\* \* \* \*

How shall ye help this man, who knows himself  
That he must love and would be loved again,  
Yet owning his own love that proveth Christ,  
Rejecteth Christ through very need of Him?”

—Robert Browning *A Death in the Desert*



## CHAPTER XII

### THE WORD WAS GOD

To the attentive reader of the gospel records He who was born in the Manger is and remains a paradox. He is both God and man, truly human and yet as truly divine. For He who is the Bread of Life began his ministry by suffering hunger in the wilderness. He who succors the tempted was himself tempted. He who is the Water of life ended His ministry thirsting. He hungered as man, He fed the thousands as God. He was weary and yet is our rest. He paid tribute and the Temple tax and yet he was Lord of the Temple and of the sabbath. He was called a devil and cast out devils. He prayed in agony of tears and blood and yet He answers prayer. He wept, and wipes away all tears. He is sold for thirty pieces of silver and redeems the world. He is led as a lamb to the slaughter, and is himself the Good Shepherd. He dies and destroys death. He is buried to bring life and immortality by His resurrection.

It is this very paradox of One who is most divine when He is most human that has been the comfort of the sorrowing, the hope of the hopeless, the haven of the tempest-tossed. Felicia Hemans put it for us all in a beautiful prayer:

“O by His love who, veiling Godhead’s light  
To moments circumscribed the Infinite,  
And Heaven and earth disdained not to ally  
By that dread union—man with Deity;  
Immortal tears o’er mortal woes who shed  
And, ere He raised them wept above the dead;  
Save or we perish! Let Thy word control  
The earthquakes of that universe—the soul.”

The mystery of the Incarnation also sets its seal on the high origin of man and his high destiny. Those who deny the deity of our Lord, frequently also assert that man is the mere product of biological evolution and deny that he was created in God’s image. We Christians believe that in the historic Jesus of Nazareth we see one of whom we can say, *God is like that*. And also say of him, man *should* be like that. Nothing to us today is God-like which is not Christ-like. And nothing to us today is truly human and humane which cannot bear the challenge of Christ’s humanity. Christ is the God-man. Of course there are difficulties in believing this but these difficulties are not due to lack of sufficient evidence in the Scriptures. The difficulties of *not* believing in the deity of our Lord are far greater. Because they are not, as in the former case, subjective but objective. Those who disbelieve must explain the extraordinary personality, influence and power of Jesus during his life on earth and for the past nineteen centuries in human history. They must deal with the self-consciousness and self-assertion of Christ in the Gospel records

and face the dilemma that he was *demented* if not Divine.

In the Gospel of John we have the story of how Jesus himself faced this question when he was talking to the Jews in Solomon's porch (Jno. 10:19-39). "Many of them said, He hath a demon, and is mad. . . . Others said, these are not the sayings of one possessed with a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" (A.R.V.) And when Jesus carried forward his argument, and said, "I and the Father are one" (Greek text, *one* substance), the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works have I showed you from the Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), say ye of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" (A.R.V.) In these words Christ asserts the essential divinity of man by his origin and destiny, and his own essential deity. Nor are we limited to this one outstanding testimony in John's gospel. The deity of our Lord is woven into the very substance, the warp and the woof, of each of the four gospels; it is boldly proclaimed in the book of Acts; it forms the basis of the entire message of the epistles and shines forth as the glory of the risen Redeemer in the book

of the Revelation. More than a hundred years ago Samuel Taylor Coleridge, poet and philosopher spoke of this evidence in his *Table Talk*:

"I think Priestly must be considered the author of modern Unitarianism. I owe, under God, my return to the faith, to my having gone much further than the Unitarians, and so having come round to the other side. I can truly say, I never falsified the Scriptures. I always told them that their interpretations of Scripture were intolerable, on any principles of sound criticism; and that if they were to offer to construe the will of their neighbour, as they did that of their Maker, they would be scouted out of society. I said plainly and openly that it was clear enough John and Paul were not Unitarians. I should deal insincerely if I said that I thought Unitarianism was Christianity. No, as I believe and have faith in the doctrine, it is not the truth in Jesus Christ."

The scriptural evidence to which Coleridge refers can be summarized because, first of all, the *names, attributes, peculiar works, and the worship* due to the Creator are also ascribed to Christ.

1. *Names.* God, John 1:1; Acts 20:28; Heb. 1:8. Mighty God, Isaiah, 9:6; Jehovah, Isaiah 40:3 cf. Mark 1:3. And scores of the names given to Jesus Christ as noted in an earlier chapter of this book.
2. He is called *the Son of God* in a peculiar sense and as eternally begotten. Luke 1:35; John 5:18; Gal. 4:4.

3. He is called *Lord* in more than fifty New Testament passages. John 13:13 and Rev. 19:16 are two examples.
4. He performs the *works* of God. In creating (John 1:3); preserving (Col. 1:17); forgiving sin (Mark 2:5) and (Luke 5:26); bestowing spiritual blessings (Luke 23:43 and John 14th Chapter are examples); in raising the dead (John 5:21; 11:25); and in judging the world (Matt. 25:31; John 5:22; Rom. 2:16).
5. Christ possesses the *attributes* of God: eternity (John 1:2; Rev. 1:17); omnipresence (Matt. 18:20); omniscience (Luke 6:8; John 1:48; John 16:30); omnipotence (Matt. 28:18); immutability (Heb. 13:8); sinlessness and holiness (John 8:29; I Peter 2:22-23).
6. Christ receives the *worship* of men and angels. (Matt. 2:2; Matt. 12:6; Luke 25:52; Acts 7:59; Phil. 2:10; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:13.)

Now these classified references are only a very small portion of the evidence in the New Testament which shows that the writers considered Jesus Christ equal in power and glory to God the Father. From the Manger to the Cross the testimony is the same and after the Resurrection and the Ascension the Apostles and the early church knew no other Saviour than Jesus Christ who was Lord of all and the Lord of Glory. Thomas confessed the faith of the eleven in the upper room

when he saw the print of the nails and the mark of the spear, exclaiming, "My Lord and my God."

Sir John Bowring (1792-1872) was a very distinguished English linguist and diplomat. Most people remember him for his great hymn "In the Cross of Christ I Glory" and some refer to him as a Unitarian. Nevertheless, he expressed his own deeper faith in these Christmas lines:

"Carry me, Babe, to Bethlehem now  
For I would look on Thee, my God!  
Thou art alone my goal—and Thou,  
Thou to that goal my only road."<sup>1</sup>

We have already seen in chapter ten that the earliest Catholic creeds, accepted by all Christendom, emphasized the two natures of Christ as distinct, yet inseparable. "Very God of very God, Begotten not made and of one substance with the Father." But granted that Christ was as truly God as he was man it was inevitable that the mind of the Church should for centuries grapple with the problem of how the Godhead and manhood were combined.

The first attempt to explain began with the *Godhead* of Christ. Hold to the deity of Christ at all cost. He is assuredly God. Then what about the Manhood? It was suggested that this did not consist of body and soul but of body alone. In Christ the ordinary human mind was replaced by the divine mind of the Son of God. This effort was very earnest and sincere but it

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Burns', *The Churchman's Treasury of Song*, p. 37.

did not do justice to the humanity of our Saviour. The humanity was incomplete and the church rejected this view; for if Christ assumed a human body but not a human soul He was not truly man.

A second attempt to explain the Incarnation began with the *Humanity* of Christ. His humanity is perfect and his personality is human. There cannot be, they said, a physical union between his Manhood and his Godhead. Such union would produce confusion. There can only be a moral union. The union of God and Christ is a sort of divine indwelling. This theory, however, involved the coexistence of two distinct persons, The Son of God and the Son of Mary. What took place was the adoption by deity of a human person not a real Incarnation. So the church Catholic also rejected this theory. After these controversies the decree of Nicaea was supplemented by that of Chalcedon which declared our Lord to be perfect in Deity and perfect in humanity, manifested in two natures but one person, the God-Man. This faith was embodied in the creeds and liturgies and hymnologies, both East and West, and prevailed for centuries. It was only challenged by Modernism.<sup>1</sup>

It would be difficult to find a clearer account of the Church's Doctrine of the Incarnation than the famous passage of the great Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker. "There were four points which the Church was compelled to maintain. First, that Jesus was Di-

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<sup>1</sup> W. J. Sparrow Simpson—*Modernism and the Person of Christ*, London, 1923.

vine. Secondly, that He was human. Thirdly, that He was both united; and fourthly, that the two were not confused and merged into something neither human nor divine. The Church, in order to make its meaning clear, adopted the distinction between Nature and Person. In Christ the natures were two, the Person was one, and that Person was Divine. The human nature of Christ had no human personality of its own. The Son of God adopted manhood, though not a man. There are not two Persons in Christ. The Son of God is not one person and the Son of Mary another. The Son of God did not assume a man's person unto His own. He took the very first original element of our nature, before it had come to have any personal human subsistence." <sup>2</sup>

We confess that the Person of Christ remains a mystery. Jesus himself asserted that no man could fully understand it. "No one knoweth the Son, save the Father." (Matt. 11:27. A.R.V.) Yet this mystery is precious beyond all other mysteries of the Bible because it reveals the mystery of God's redeeming love. The Incarnation was in order to the Atonement, as we shall see later.

Meanwhile, it is well to remember, as Coleridge reminds us, that to deny the essential deity of Christ is to throw overboard historical Christianity and to stultify the plain teaching of the New Testament.

Professor Duncan B. Macdonald of Hartford, in a remarkable address on "One Phase of the Doctrine of

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<sup>2</sup> Hooker, V:52:3.



the Unity of God" concluded his comparison of Islam and New England Unitarianism with these words:

"All attempts to simplify the metaphysical basis of our faith have, under the test of time and life, failed. Deists and theists have come and gone. Ethics and natural theology have claimed their own and more, have had, for a time, their claims allowed and then have vanished. In many ways the Christian church has moved; the guidance of the Spirit has not failed it. Its faith has seen many hypotheses, has been enfolded in many garments. But to the seeker in the great space that lies between materialism and Pantheism the presentation that still expresses most adequately the mystery behind our lives is that in the Christian Trinity, and the words that come the nearest are those of the Nicene Creed."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Annual Address, September, 1909 (Hartford Seminary Record).



## WHY CHRIST CAME TO BETHLEHEM

## THE BAG

"Hast thou not heard, what my Lord Jesus did?  
Then let me tell thee a strange storie.  
The God of power, as he did ride  
In his majestick robes of glorie,  
Resolv'd to light; and so one day  
He did descend, undressing all the way.

"The starres his tire of light and rings obtain'd,  
The cloud his bow, the fire his spear,  
The sky his azure mantle gain'd.  
And when they ask'd, what he would wear;  
He smil'd and said as he did go,  
He had new clothes a making here below.

"When he was come, as travellers are wont,  
He did repair unto an inne.  
Both then, and after, many a brunt  
He did endure to cancell sinne:  
And having giv'n the rest before,  
Here he gave up his life to pay our score.

"But as he was returning, there came one  
That ran upon him with a spear.  
He, who came hither all alone,  
Bringing nor man, nor arms, nor fear,  
Receiv'd the blow upon his side,  
And straight he turn'd, and to his brethren cry'd,

"If ye have any thing to send or write,  
(I have no bag, but here is room)  
Unto my fathers hands and sight  
(Believe me) it shall safely come,  
That I shall minde, what you impart;  
Look, you may put it very neare my heart."

180 —George Herbert

## CHAPTER XIII

### WHY CHRIST CAME TO BETHLEHEM

"AT BETHLEHEM," said Leo the Great, "two natures met together in one Redeemer. Nothing is wanting in either; entire majesty and entire littleness; his the infirmity whose is the power. The selfsame person is both capable and conqueror of death. God knit himself to manhood in pity and in power; either nature was in the other; and yet neither in the other lost its own property." What a rebuke such a magnificent theological statement is to the frivolous and superficial words we often use at Advent season when we speak of a Merry Christmas!

The purpose of God in the birth of any babe is a baffling mystery. And yet if we may believe that every man's life is a plan of God how much more was there a holy and eternal purpose in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

When we ask *why* Christ came to earth to be born a babe in the manger we find the answer in the Gospels. John puts it all into a single sentence which has been translated into over a thousand languages, is learned by heart in every Christian home and contains the very marrow of the Gospel: "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever

believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Here we have the purpose, the motive, and the result of the Incarnation in simple words. Christ came that whosoever believeth in him should not perish. The motive that impelled him to come was God's surpassing love for sinners. The result of his coming is everlasting life to those who believe. The Incarnation was in order to the Redemption. The glory of the manger has the dark background "of man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world and all our woe." Christ came to Bethlehem to restore man's lost Paradise. For thousands of years the Old Testament records tell the old, old story of sin and death and judgment. There is no song of the angels. Only there was, as we have seen, the promise of a Deliverer ever growing more distinct and glorious in its progressive revelation. "John three—sixteen" is easily learned by heart, but not so easily do we realize its full meaning *in* our hearts. God so loved the whole world. Dare you love any less? Is your love narrow and parochial? Christmas bells should ring the death-knell to race prejudice and class hatred. God thought the world was lost and that men would perish but for the gift of his Son. Do you believe that too? Is Jesus the only hope of the world? God loved the world enough to give his very best—his only begotten Son. Will you give of your best to carry the message of God's love to other hearts and distant lands?

Even as John in the prologue to his gospel and in

his account of Jesus' talk with Nicodemus gives us the purpose of the Incarnation, so we have it also in the words of the angel to Joseph: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for *he shall save his people from their sins.*" Christ came to save from sin. He came to die, the just for the unjust. He was announced by John the Baptist at the very beginning of his ministry as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." He did not come to be ministered unto but to minister and give his life a ransom for sin. This is the testimony of all the gospels and all the epistles. This is the message of the book of Acts. In the Revelation given to John the early title of our Saviour, occurring again and again, is, the Lamb of God. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." (Rev. 5:12.) Therefore, Bethlehem is not far from Calvary and the Wise Men could have read the answer to their question "where is he that is born King of the Jews?" in Pilate's inscription over the Cross.

The oldest English Christmas carols do not separate the glory of the Manger from the glory of the Cross. They see it even in the symbol of the holly.

"The holly bears a blossom  
As white as lily-flower.  
And Mary bore sweet Jesus  
To be our sweet Saviour.

"The holly bears a berry  
As red as any blood

And Mary bore sweet Jesus  
To do poor sinners good."

George Herbert (1593-1633) the English poet and a friend of Isaak Walton and Francis Bacon, had a small parish near Salisbury where he held services twice daily. He was passionately fond of music and of the common people. We read that the farmers "would let their plough rest when Mr. Herbert's saint's bell rung for prayers." His collection of poems is full of epigrammatic expressions and quaint conceits. He loved to illustrate the spiritual by the homely. Yet in none of his many poems does he strike so deep and poignant a note as in that of "The Bag." We have put it facing this chapter because it tells *why* Christ came to Bethlehem. "He did descend, undressing all the way"—that was his humiliation. Then he put on the form of a Babe and in manhood "gave up his life to pay our score." His broken heart and riven side are the bag in which he carries messages to His Father for us. "Look you may put it very neare my heart"—Was there ever a bolder or more touching interpretation of the Incarnation? Read the whole poem once again thoughtfully—"the strange storie" of God's condescending love.

Jesus came to die. That was his supreme mission. It is true he came to live the perfect life as our example. He came also to teach, as no man ever taught, the things of the Kingdom and the laws of the Kingdom. He came also to heal both body and soul. His healing ministry was not incidental nor casual. It was the expression of his own personality. He had compassion on the



multitudes. But his great commission from the Father was to lay down his life as a ransom. (John 10:17, 18.) His death was the culmination of his life and suffering. He did not die as a martyr but as a Saviour. "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." (A.R.V.)

And Jesus was conscious from the beginning of his public ministry that he would lay down his life for the salvation of the world. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," he said, "even so must the Son of man be lifted up." (John 3:14.) He could not have been ignorant of the great Messianic prophecies in the twenty-second Psalm and in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah regarding the Suffering Servant of Jehovah. He foretold his own death, and its very manner, on several occasions. He saw the approaching shadow. At the outset he defined discipleship as bearing-a-cross after him. From the day when Peter made his bold confession at Caesarea Philippi "he began to show his disciples that he must go up to Jerusalem and be killed." That which characterized the last months of our Lord's earthly life (according to the synoptic gospels) was a deliberate and thrice repeated attempt to teach his dull disciples the certainty and the significance of His approaching violent death. And the *reason* of his death is the heart of the gospel that Paul preached. "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how *that Christ died for our sins* according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried,

and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." (I Cor. 15:3, 4.)

The real joy of Christmas is the joy of sins forgiven, of life eternal through the Saviour. In the earliest Christmas hymn of the Greek Orthodox Church, written by Cosmos of Jerusalem we have this same note. Written in 760 A.D., it was translated by J. M. Neale and sets forth the reason for the Incarnation.

"Christ is born, tell forth His fame,  
 Christ from heaven! His love proclaim.  
 Christ on earth! Exalt His name  
 Sing to the Lord, O world, with exultation,  
 Break forth in glad thanksgiving every nation.  
 For He hath triumphed gloriously."

"Man in God's own image made;  
 Man by Satan's wiles betrayed;  
 Man on whom corruption preyed;  
 Shut out from hope of life and of salvation.  
 Today Christ maketh him a new creation  
 For He hath triumphed gloriously."

"For the Maker, when the foe  
 Wrought His creature death and woe  
 Bowed the heavens, came below;  
 And in the Virgin's womb His dwelling making,  
 Became true man, our very nature taking,  
 For He hath triumphed gloriously."

No one can read the entire account of the nativity in Luke's gospel without being conscious of the note

of coming tragedy in the life of the Babe of Bethlehem. When aged Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary he turned to her and said: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against. (*Yea a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also*), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:34.) That parenthesis is a strange note in a blessing and must have been one of the "sayings" which Mary kept in her perplexed heart until that day when it was filled full of meaning, as she stood beside the Cross. The *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* might well be sung reverently at Christmas-tide for it answers the question why Jesus came at all.

"For her people's sin chastisèd  
She beheld her Son despisèd  
Scourged and crowned with thorns entwined."

The sword that pierced Mary's soul was to see the Innocent suffer for the guilty and the Holy One numbered with sinners as he bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors. Mary's sorrow is compared vividly to the thrust of a sword—a figure strong enough to cover the bitterest experiences of the *Mater Dolorosa* without necessarily implying that Simeon had prevision of the Cross. Nevertheless if he had pondered the prophecies in Isaiah he might well have had a premonition of some coming tragedy in the life of One who was to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

The glory of the Manger is the glory of the Cross; for God so loved the world that he spared not his only begotten Son but delivered him up for us all. He came that by his death we might have life and by his stripes be healed.

A Moslem-convert in Cairo spent a vacation in Palestine and, from Nazareth, he wrote a series of prose-poems on the birth of Jesus. He too finds the shadow of the Cross resting on the Manger. But the shadow gives light:

“My beloved. My little one. How lovely the memories. Let us laugh over them, and weep. Silence. Stillness. Here is Jesus before our eyes in the bosom of the Virgin. The heaven is not rent asunder. No thunder peals out. The silence is not stirred. The stars are not extinguished. The horizon is left unbroken.

Jesus enters silently, without uproar into our clamorous, excited life. In the humble decrepit cottage of a carpenter He wakes and sleeps.

In the bosom of little Nazareth, unknown to the great world he lives. In her forgotten ways he grows.

Why are you weeping my child?

He humbled Himself for thee. For thee He endured. For thee He suffered. They spread before Him sceptre and majesty, a world great, wide and spacious and He the Lord of it. And He refused it that He might carry a cross, with bloodstained

face, with limbs and body torn. All this for thee,  
O man."

The testimony of this Egyptian believer, although he still follows Christ afar off, goes to the very root of faith and hope and love. God sent his Son that we should *believe* in him. (John 3:16.) He is the sole object of faith. If Christ's advent has no relation to our sins we are *hopeless* and of all men most miserable. If Christ's coming is not the supreme manifestation of God's love for the lost and his mercy to the undeserving in Christ we have no adequate motive for love toward our fellow men. "We *love*, because He first loved us," as John puts it.

In his first epistle the same Apostle of love gives three distinct reasons why God sent his Son. "To be the Saviour of the world." (I John 4:14.) That was the first and great reason. His name at birth was Jesus, i.e., Saviour. The second reason given is that "God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." (I John 4:9.) He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. And the third reason given in the same chapter of that epistle is: "God . . . sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (I John 4:10.) As we sing in that beautiful children's hymn:

"There was no other good enough  
To pay the price of sin;  
He only could unlock the gate  
Of heaven and let us in."

In these three verses from John's epistle we have a threefold cord, not easily broken, to bind us to the heart of Jesus. He is our Saviour. He is our Life. He is our Propitiation. He is at once the High-priest and the Altar, and the victim. The Epistle to the Hebrews makes this mystery plain. Bethlehem's Manger held what Paul called "the unspeakable gift" of God to humanity—Incarnate Love.

"O dearly, dearly, has He loved  
And we must love him too  
And trust in his redeeming blood  
And try His works to do."

Because the world was dead in trespasses and sins Christ came to give new life. That life was the light of men. Both life and light came to the world, in the Manger at Bethlehem. Not the star of the Magi but the Holy Child Jesus was the true light that can lighten every man. A new kind of life was manifested in that Babe on Mary's bosom. Not only physical life and soul-life but life eternal. As Mr. A. Lindsay Glegg expressed it so vigorously in one of his Keswick addresses recently:

"The Bible, as you know, speaks about people with plenty of physical life as being dead, dead spiritually. They walk about our streets, they may have a great deal of physical energy, but they are dead in trespasses and sins. 'She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.' There is a graveyard in Ayrshire where once a stranger was buried, and it greatly distressed the folk

in the parish; so much so that they had a notice put up to the effect that 'This graveyard is reserved exclusively for the dead who are living in this parish.' There are a great many folk like that. They are living in a parish all right, but they are dead. Jesus said, 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' "





# THE HUMILIATION AND THE EXALTATION

“Who can forget, never to be forgot,  
The time that all the world in slumber lies:  
When, like the stars, the singing angels shot  
To earth, and Heaven awakened all his eyes,  
To see another Sun at midnight rise  
On earth? Was never sight of pareil fame.  
For God before, man like Himself did frame,  
But God Himself now like a mortal man became.

“A Child He was, and had not learned to speak,  
That with His word the world before did make;  
His Mother’s arms Him bare, He was so weak,  
That with one Hand the vaults of heaven could shake.  
See how small room my Infant Lord doth take,  
Whom all the world is not enough to hold.  
Who of His years, or of His age hath told  
Never such Age so young, never a Child so old!

“He is a path, if any be misled;  
He is a robe, if any naked be;  
If any chance to hunger, He is Bread;  
If any be a bondsman, He is free;  
If any be but weak, how strong is He!  
To dead men life He is, to sick men health;  
To blind men sight, and to the needy wealth;  
A pleasure without loss, a treasure without stealth.”

—*Giles Fletcher (d. 1623)*

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE HUMILIATION AND THE EXALTATION

THE surpassingly beautiful story of Christ washing the feet of his disciples on the night of his passion as told in John's gospel is introduced by these words: "Jesus knowing that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, . . . and . . . knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came forth from God, and goeth unto God, riseth from the supper, and layeth aside his garments; and he took a towel and girded himself . . . and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded." (A.R.V.) The superficial reader of this chapter draws the obvious lesson of the humility of Jesus and his example of lowly service. But the writer of the Gospel calls our attention to a far deeper truth. Namely, the consciousness of Jesus that he came from the glory of heaven and was soon returning thither. His consciousness of his own origin and destiny—of whence he came and why he came and whither he was going. *Then* he took a towel and girded himself. In this episode of our Saviour's life we have an epitome of the doctrine of Christ's humiliation and exaltation as nowhere else in the gospels. He stooped to conquer. "He loved his own unto the end"—in

Greek it reads, "up to the limit." In the words of Shakespeare "love bears it out even to the edge of doom" (Sonnet CXVI). He washed the feet of his disciples who were even then quarrelling for the place of honor. Nay, as George Marion McClennan the Negro poet, reminds us, he even washed the feet of Judas:

"Christ washed the feet of Judas!  
 The dark and evil passions of his soul,  
 His secret plot, and sordidness complete,  
 His hate, his purposing, Christ knew the whole,  
 And still in love he stooped and washed his feet.

Christ washed the feet of Judas!  
 Yet all his lurking sin was bare to him,  
 His bargain with the priest, and more than this,  
 In Olivet, beneath the moonlight dim,  
 Aforehand knew and felt his treacherous kiss.

Christ washed the feet of Judas!  
 And so ineffable his love 'twas meet,  
 That pity fill his great forgiving heart,  
 And tenderly he wash the traitor's feet,  
 Who in his Lord had basely sold his part."

The whole astounding episode made a strong impression on the disciples. John records it in greatest detail and Peter refers to it later in his epistle. In the fifth chapter of his first epistle there are a dozen references to the Gospel story and among them, "Gird yourselves with humility to serve one another." Peter could not forget that night. It "poured contempt on all his pride."

The humiliation of Christ through his Incarnation, his utter condescension in dealing with publicans and sinners, and his consequent and subsequent exaltation and glory in heaven form the theme of one of Paul's prose-poems that so often shine forth in his epistles. He is writing to the Philippian church, beset with the dangers of pride and boastfulness together with censoriousness born of their earnest zeal (Phil. 2:3-5). He advises them to look at the things of others and not to be preoccupied with their own interests. Then comes the great passage on the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. We give it in two parallel translations; the first by Weymouth and the second by Moffatt:

"Let the same disposition be in you which was in Christ Jesus. Although from the beginning He had the nature of God He did not reckon His equality with God a Treasure to be tightly grasped. Nay, He stripped Himself of His glory, and took on Him the nature of a bond-servant by becoming a man like other men. And being recognized as truly human, He humbled Himself and even stooped to die; yes to die on a cross. It is

"Treat one another with the same spirit as you experience in Christ Jesus. Though he was divine by nature, he did not snatch at equality with God but emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant; born in human guise and appearing in human form, he humbly stooped in his obedience even to die and to die upon the cross. Therefore God raised him high and conferred on him a Name above all names, so that before the Name

in consequence of this that God has also so highly exalted Him, and has conferred on Him the Name which is supreme above every other, in order that in the Name of JESUS every knee should bow of beings in Heaven, of those on the earth, and of those in the underworld, and that every tongue should confess that JESUS CHRIST is LORD to the glory of God the Father.”

of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven, on earth and underneath the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”

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A comparison of these two translations with that of the standard authorized English Bible will show how full of meaning is the Greek original—thoughts that cannot be packed into any one translation. Volumes have been written on this short passage in Paul’s letter to the Philippians and all are agreed that altho this is not a discussion in technical theology but a practical admonition, it nevertheless contains some of Paul’s deepest thought regarding the person of Jesus Christ and his twofold state. The careful rhetorical structure (in two strophes of four lines each) shows that the thought has been patiently formulated.

Paul begins with the pre-historic Christ who had the very nature and glory of God. In the words of Jesus

himself, "the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." (John 17:5.) He then draws the unspeakable contrast between that heavenly state and his earthly exile. This constitutes his humiliation, that He who was so rich, for our sakes became so poor (II Cor. 8:9). According to Paul, Christ always shared in the Divine nature, but it is only as the result of His Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, Ascension and Session at the Father's right hand that he appears to men as on an *equality* with God and that he is *worshipped* by them in the way in which Jehovah is worshipped. He is now Lord of all as the reward and crowning-point of his voluntary humiliation.<sup>1</sup>

The humiliation of Christ "consisted in being born and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, the cursed death of the cross; in being buried and continuing under the power of death for a time."<sup>2</sup> This brief statement is a mere skeleton. The Creator took the form of a helpless Babe. The King left his throne and crown of glory to wear a crown of thorns. The possessor of all things became subject to the laws of nature and of man. He endured poverty, obscurity, hunger and thirst. He was tempted by Satan all through his earthly life (Luke 4:13). He was despised and rejected by his own people. One of his own circle betrayed him. All his chosen followers forsook him in the hour of his greatest need. He was betrayed in

<sup>1</sup> Kennedy in *Expositors Greek Testament* III, p. 436.

<sup>2</sup> *Westminster Catechism, Question 27.*

Gethsemane, unjustly condemned at Gabbatha and crucified on Golgotha. After being buffeted, spat upon, scourged, crowned with thorns, he was nailed to the tree as a malefactor to die the most disgraceful death known in his day. He was alone in his agony and his cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" can only be fathomed in such words as Paul uses: "He was made sin for us who knew no sin" for on the cross he made atonement for the sin of the world. On the cross he humbled himself unto the deepest reproach and pains of hell both in body and soul.

"Yea, once Immanuel's orphan-cry His universe hath shaken,

It went up single, echoless, My God I am forsaken  
It went up, from the holy lips amid the lost creation,  
That of the lost no son should use those words of  
desolation."<sup>3</sup>

We must add to the humiliation of such a death, that of his burial in a borrowed sepulchre and his descent into Hades, the invisible world of the dead. While his soul welcomed that of the repentant thief in Paradise (Luke 23:43) his body was laid to rest in the grave.

There are other references in the New Testament which are germane in this connection, altho perhaps not easy to understand or interpret. To the Ephesians, Paul writes "Now this, He ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended far

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Poem on the Grave of Cowper*.



above all the heavens, that he might fill all things" Eph. 4:9, 10. And to Timothy he summarizes this mystery:

"God was manifested in the flesh  
Justified in the spirit,  
Seen of angels,  
Preached among the nations  
Believed on in the world  
Received up into glory."

While Peter in his epistle lifts the veil of the unseen world for a moment when he writes: "Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison." (I Peter 3:18-19, A.R.V.) "For unto this end was the gospel preached even to the dead, that they might be judged indeed according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." (I Peter 4:6, A.R.V.)

There are various interpretations of this preaching in Hades. Some critics say that Peter is dependent on the current Jewish tradition found in the Book of Enoch. According to this story "they were spirits eternal and immortal who transgressed the line of demarcation between men and angels" (Gen. 6:1-4). But Christians believed that Christ came to seek and save the lost. So Peter supplements the old tradition as the greatest proof of Christ's complete victory over sin and the grave.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Expositors' Greek Testament, vol. 5, p. 68.

There are other interpretations. But in any case, Christ's humiliation found its climax in his death and burial and descent into Hades, as we have it in the Apostles' Creed. After that begins the glorious confession of His resurrection and ascension: "On the third day He arose again from the dead, ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead." These are the successive steps in the exaltation of Christ. His Resurrection was the necessary climax to his work as mediator and the seal of God's acceptance of that finished work. It was the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament (Psalm 16:10) and Christ's own promise to his disciples (Matt. 27:63). It was a manifest victory over death and hell and proof of his ability to deliver his people. The angels were present at the Resurrection as they were at the Incarnation. The infallible proofs He gave of His identity during the forty days in his repeated appearances to the disciples and to "more than five hundred brethren" were evidence that He arose from the dead in complete humanity to carry forward His mediatorial work. Best of all, his resurrection is a sure pledge of the resurrection of all his people. (I Cor. 15.) "But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." (A.R.V.) If there had been no Incarnation we would have no hope of a glorious Resurrec-

tion. He that descended also ascended. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." (A.R.V.)

The Ascension of Christ was foretold in his discourses to the eleven on the night before his Crucifixion. "I go away, and I come unto you . . . I go unto the Father: for the Father is greater than I." (John 14:28, A.R.V.) Christ's work as high-priest on earth was ended and he was now to enter within the veil to appear before God. He was to intercede. He was to send the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In the Holy Place, He is the Lamb before the throne, the Redeemer of his church and the center of worship and adoration for all the saints and angels.

The simplicity of the Ascension as recorded in the New Testament (Luke 24:50; Acts 1:9-12) should not blind us to the fact that beyond the cloud, which took him away from the vision of the apostles, there may have been an inconceivably magnificent welcome for the Son of God by the same angels that sang at his birth, Glory unto God in the highest. For "the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." (Psalm 68:17, 18.) "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors: and the King of glory will come in. Who is the King of Glory? Jehovah strong and mighty, Jehovah mighty

in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; Yea, lift them up, ye everlasting doors: and the King of Glory will come in. Who is this King of Glory? Jehovah of hosts, He is the King of Glory." (Psalm 24:7-10, A.R.V.) The earlier words from the Old Testament are applied to Christ by New Testament writers (Eph. 4:8) and we know that when Christ comes again it will be with all his holy angels to sit on the throne of his glory to judge all the nations. (Matt. 25:31.) That will be the manifestation and the consummation of his exaltation before the whole world.

"The head that once was crowned with thorns  
Is crowned with glory now;  
A royal diadem adorns  
The mighty Victor's brow.

"The highest place that heaven affords  
Is His by sovereign right;  
The King of Kings and Lord of Lords  
He reigns in glory bright."

The Ascent into heaven and the Resurrection were, as Paul reminds us, wrought by the exceeding greatness of God's power, "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is His body, the fulness

of Him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:20-23.) All this we should remember at Advent season; for the glory of the Manger is closely linked to the threefold glory of the Cross and the Empty Tomb and the Great White Throne.

"His Mother's arms Him bare, He was so weak,  
That with one Hand the vaults of heaven could  
shake.

See how small room my Infant Lord doth take,  
Whom all the world is not enough to hold." <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> From the poem by Giles Fletcher, facing this chapter.



## THE SECOND ADVENT

“Earth breaks up, time drops away,  
In flows heaven, with its new day  
Of endless life, when he who trod,  
Very man and very God,  
This earth in weakness, shame and pain,  
Dying the death whose signs remain  
Up yonder on the accursed tree,—  
Shall come again, no more to be  
Of captivity the thrall,  
But the one God, All in all,  
King of Kings, Lord of lords,  
As his servant John received the words,  
‘I died, and live for evermore.’ ”

—Robert Browning’s *Christmas Eve*



## CHAPTER XV

### THE SECOND ADVENT

ROBERT BROWNING reminds us in his poem *Christmas Eve* that Christ "who, very man and very God, trod this earth in weakness shall come again." The Advent season indeed has always a double message. It looks backward across the centuries to the coming of the Saviour at Bethlehem and it looks forward, according to his own promise, to the day when he shall come again "in a cloud with power, and great glory" (Luke 21:27). "Ye men of Galilee," said the angels, "why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The second coming of our Lord Jesus is the only article in the Apostles' Creed which has a reason added to it. "He shall come again to judge the quick and the dead." The first coming was for salvation; the second is for judgment. The first was in humility; the second, in glory. The first was to manifest our Saviour's true humanity; the second to show forth His deity. All the events of the future life are connected with the glory of Christ's return to earth. He brings immortality to light and ushers in the Resurrection. His second coming is the triumph of truth over error and the final

victory over the powers of darkness. He is King of the day of Judgment and apportions reward and punishment. (Matt. 25:31 ff.) The second advent of Christ is at "the end of the world;" it is the consummation of human history; it is "the one far off divine event," as Tennyson said, "to which the whole creation moves."

The Old Testament prophets foretold not only the first but also this second coming of the Lord and nearly every book of the New Testament refers to it as the hope of the believer and the comfort of those who look for His appearing.

That coming is to be personal, visible, sudden and yet accompanied as well as preceded by disturbances in the world of nature and in society.

In Matthew's gospel we have the words of Christ himself: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matt. 24: 29-31.) In the following chapter we have the stupendous account of the final judgment of the nations, "when the Son of man shall come in his glory."

Mark and Luke also each devotes an entire chapter

to the signs of the last days and the glorious appearing of the Lord and Saviour at the consummation of human history. In John's gospel these eschatological prophecies are wanting, but in his last discourse to his disciples Jesus refers again and again to his approaching departure from this world and his return after "a little while." "A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father." (John 16:16.) In the Greek text two different verbs are used for "see me," which also emphasize the promise of his real and visible return.

Bernard states that the verse first refers to Christ's forty days on earth, "a little while," and then to his second advent at the resurrection. "The discrimination in the verbs employed affords sufficient guidance and leads us to interpret as follows. A little while (it was but a few hours) and then ye *behold* me no longer. I shall have passed from the visible scene, and from the observation of spectators. Again, a little while (of a little longer duration) and ye shall see me with another kind of seeing, one in which the natural sight becomes spiritual vision."<sup>1</sup>

In the Acts and in nearly all of the epistles there is constant reference to the Second Advent. We note a few of the important passages: Acts 1:11; 3:20; I Cor. 1:7; 4:5; 11:26; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:4; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 9:28, etc. The two earliest epistles, which Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church,

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<sup>1</sup> *Expositors' Greek Testament*, vol. I, p. 836.

are chiefly concerned with the second coming of the Lord.

As for the book of the Revelation it is also largely concerned with the last judgment of doom on the world and the reappearance of our Saviour. "Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen" (Rev. 1:7). The final promise and the final prayer in the New Testament read: "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

In view of all these promises and the teaching of the church universal for nineteen centuries it is indeed surprising that there are some in our day who deny this doctrine and with the rationalists and modernists of Peter's age exclaim, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:4). The apostle calls them scoffers and willingly ignorant of the Scriptures; he solemnly answers them that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." The visible world will be dissolved when the elements melt in fervent heat. "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13).

One of the greatest hymns of the Medieval church is based on the doctrine of our Saviour's return to judge the world in righteousness. The *Dies Irae* was composed by Thomas of Celano in 1250 and there are several English translations but none have the solemn

cadence and rhythm of the original. One must hear it sung in a great cathedral, or read the *whole* hymn carefully and prayerfully to be moved by its poignant message:

“Day of wrath, oh day of mourning!  
 See fulfilled the prophet’s warning,  
 Heaven and earth in ashes burning!  
 O what fear man’s bosom rendeth  
 When from heaven the Judge descendeth  
 On whose sentence all dependeth.”

Charles Kingsley has given us a more modern interpretation of the Day of the Lord, which in these dark hours of international strife and confusion sounds a note of hope as well as of solemn warning:

“The Day of the Lord is at hand, at hand:  
 The storms roll up the sky:  
 The nations sleep starving on heaps of gold;  
 All dreamers toss and sigh;  
 The night is darkest before the morn;  
 When the pain is the sorest, the child is born,  
 And the Day of the Lord is at hand.

“Gather you, gather you, angels of God—  
 Freedom, Mercy and Truth;  
 Come! for the earth is grown coward and old,  
 Come down, and renew us her youth.  
 Wisdom, Self-Sacrifice, Daring and Love,  
 Haste to the battle-field, stoop from above  
 To the Day of the Lord at hand.

“Gather you, gather you, hounds of hell—  
Famine, plague and war;  
Idleness, Bigotry, Cant and Misrule,  
Gather, and fall in the snare!  
Hireling and Mammonite, Bigot and Knave,  
Crawl to the battle-field, sneak to your grave,  
In the Day of the Lord at hand.

“Who would sit down and sigh for a lost age of gold,  
While the Lord of all ages is here?  
True hearts will leap up at the trumpet of God,  
And those who can suffer can dare.  
Each old age of gold was an iron age too,  
And the meekest of saints may find stern work to do,  
In the Day of the Lord at hand.”

Modernists who reject the Virgin birth and stumble at belief in the resurrection of the dead, naturally do not have any faith in the personal and visible return of Christ. For them the spiritual experiences of the disciples who felt Jesus near them was the only resurrection; and at Pentecost Jesus came back by his spirit to cheer and encourage his group of faithful followers! <sup>2</sup> We prefer to hold to the supernatural account in the gospels and to confess, with the Holy Catholic Church of all the centuries, that Christ arose again from the dead, ascended into heaven and shall come

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the teaching of Leslie D. Weatherford in his book *After Death*, pp. 169-173.

again to judge the quick and the dead. As F. W. H. Meyers expressed it,

“Surely He cometh, and a thousand voices  
Shout to the saints, and to the deaf are dumb;  
Surely He cometh, and the earth rejoices  
Glad in His coming, who hath sworn, I come.”

For *Christ is coming* to judge the world in righteousness. The great, white throne of the day of judgment speaks of majesty, integrity and authority. This sublime doctrine of a general judgment of the whole human race is altogether unique. The Greek-Roman world taught a judgment of the dead in the underworld and conducted by inferior gods. Hinduism has its *karma*, the relentless reaping of what was sown of good or evil, in endless reincarnations. Islam tells of a judgment in the grave by the two angels *Munkir* and *Nakir*. But only the Bible reveals a general judgment by the Lord who descends from heaven in the open daylight and in the presence of the whole universe. “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him . . . and before him shall be gathered all nations . . . Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:31-46).

The contemplation of that hour is indeed a most powerful motive to dissuade from sin. It will be a manifestation of the righteousness and mercy of God,

a revelation of the moral order of the universe and of God's purpose in history.

This blessed assurance has kept the church looking upward in the darkest days with an undiscourageable and glad hope of deliverance. This has been the comfort in the hour of martyrdom from the day of Stephen to the present. This was the bow of promise in the darkest periods of church history. "Surely I come quickly . . . even so come Lord Jesus."

The belief in the proximity of Christ's return has, however, led to a twofold interpretation of all the many scripture passages that deal with the subject. His return is connected with his millennial reign. Some hold that this reign—the period of peace and righteousness on earth—will be *after* Christ's return from heaven. These are called Pre-millenarians. Their arguments are based upon a belief in a twofold resurrection. Christ's servants occupy as stewards till he comes. His coming will usher in "the first resurrection" and the "rapture" of those who are living and belong to His own. Wickedness and evil will triumph more and more until after this event and therefore the return of Christ is imminent and sudden.

The other theory is called Post-Millennialism. It, too, is based on Scripture passages, which, to those who hold it, seem to teach that the present dispensation is to be undisturbed except by the increasing conflict of truth against error. The Holy Spirit through the gospel will make righteousness to prevail until finally the millennium is ushered in. This school puts its hope



in the gradual but certain influence of the Word and the Church upon all humanity. They oppose the pre-millennial theory because they believe it is essentially Judaistic and bases its thesis only on certain portions of the Scriptures which professedly deal in symbolism.

Again there are those who reject both of these views and call themselves "a-millennial," that is, they deny the millennium idea and yet hold just as firmly that Christ will return from heaven to judge the world. The greatest danger is not the discordance between these views of the *time* of the Advent but rationalistic unbelief which denies Christ's second coming altogether.

We have seen that the fullness of time for the coming of our Saviour was a fullness of preparation, of expectation and of despair. So doubtless will be the signs of the approaching end of the age and the second appearing of our Lord from heaven.

Were men's hearts ever so expectant of a climax and a crisis in history as now? Was the world ever in greater need of a Deliverer and Judge? Are not the signs of which Jesus spoke in the gospels, and which usher in the day of the Lord, on the front page of our newspapers? Apart from His coming is there hope for this disillusioned, stricken, war-torn world?

Jesus came; Jesus is coming again. To accept these two statements, which are the shortest summary of the New Testament, with all they imply of faith and hope and love, would fill us with the joy of the early Christian church and their devotion.

Dr. Brown's book on the *Second Advent* (Glasgow,

1839), was a reply to those who held the Pre-millennial view. But we may all agree with his concluding paragraph:

“May the Lord keep the eye of his Church on ‘That Day’ when He shall be ‘revealed from heaven in flaming fire,’ to the terror of his enemies and the joy of his waiting people; when ‘from His Face the earth and the heavens shall flee away, and no place shall be found for them’; but instead of them shall be ‘new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,’ and ‘the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.’ *If this be our habitual attitude, it will matter comparatively little ‘whether He shall come in the second watch,’ as one class think, ‘or come in the third or fourth watch,’ as others think; for in either case, ‘when he cometh, we shall open to him immediately!’*”

“How long, O Lord? Our hearts are sad and weary,  
Our voices join the whole creation’s groan;  
With eager gaze we watch for Thine appearing,  
When wilt Thou come again and claim Thine own?

“Return! return! come in Thy power and glory  
With all Thy risen saints and angel throng;  
Bring to a close Time’s strange, mysterious story,  
How long dost Thou delay?—O Lord, how long?”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Bothwick in *The Churchman’s Treasury of Song*, p. 4.

# THE GLORY OF THE MANGER

“BECAUSE of a stall in Bethlehem,  
Where a Prince of Peace was laid,  
I try to fashion a childlike heart,  
For the difference He has made.

“Because of a shop in Nazareth,  
Where a Kingly craftsman wrought,  
I try to follow my simple tasks  
With reverence, care, and thought.

“Because of a cross on Calvary,  
Where hung the crucified One,  
I try to shoulder my load of grief,  
And bear it till set of sun.

“Oh, life it would be a fruitless quest,  
And hope but a lamp grown dim,  
And the fairest joys would bloom in vain,  
If it were not for sake of Him.”

—Barbara Ross M’Intosh.  
In *Life and Work*, Aug., 1939.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE GLORY OF THE MANGER

IN the prologue of John's Gospel he sums up all the glory of the Nativity, because he asserts that in the manger of Bethlehem, where Jesus Christ had his human origin, dwelt all the fullness of Deity. "In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God . . . and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,), full of grace and truth." The whole glory of the Manger is the glory of the Christ who was laid in it. He was and is and always will be the central figure in the Christmas story. All the rest are utterly subordinate—Joseph and Mary, the Shepherds and the Magi, the angelic host and the star of Bethlehem—all worship Him. What the Shekinah was to Israel in Tabernacle and Temple, the token of God's ineffable glory, Christ became by his Incarnation. It is no wonder that Harnack asks in the opening chapters of his *History of Dogma*: "Where in the history of mankind can we find anything resembling this, that men who had eaten and drunk with their Master, should glorify Him not only as the Revealer of God but as the Prince of Life, as the Redeemer and Judge of the world, as the living power of its existence,

and that a choir of Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, wise and foolish, should, along with them, immediately confess that out of the fullness of this One man they have received grace for grace."

The matchless but simple story of the Nativity in Matthew and in Luke must be laid side by side with the prologue of John's Gospel and with Paul's portrait of Jesus Christ in Ephesians and Colossians if we would grasp something of the mystery and the magnetism of the Manger.

Why has this old story such wonderful fascination for old and young? Why has it drawn all men, rich and poor, high and low, until today at Christmas-tide the whole world gathers at Bethlehem's Manger? It is not too much to say that the Nativity affects every soul born into a Christian community and that the coming of the Christ Child has changed the whole world. Unless the Babe in the manger was God manifest in the flesh, one cannot explain the age-long, world-wide, tremendous influence of this event.

The birth of Jesus, we note first of all, became the favorite subject in art wherever the gospel was proclaimed. The art of the Catacombs, the galleries of Europe and America, the more recent work of Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and African artists all bear witness to this fact. To read the story of the Nativity in these sculptures, drawings and paintings is like turning the leaves of some precious ancient parchment, each page illuminated in gold and color, every stroke revealing the devotion of the craftsman. "Great nations," says

Ruskin, "write their autobiographies in three manuscripts,—the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others. But of the three the only quite trustworthy one is the last." All the fine arts, music, painting, sculpture, architecture, have laid their finest tributes at the feet of Jesus. Many of them were tributes to the Babe of Bethlehem. This is true of modern art as well as medieval; it is true of all lands and all peoples who have heard of the Christ.

The earliest representation, perhaps, is a picture in the Catacombs showing Jesus in swaddling clothes on a small bed with outlines of an ox and an ass in the background.<sup>1</sup> All the early religious painters tried to express in colors what the poets and saints had painted in words. The general treatment, Farrar tells us, varied but little. We find always the joyous Mother, the grave, silent, aged Joseph, the shepherds and the angels. The quaint reason why the ox and the ass are also introduced is due to the strange Septuagint rendering of Habakkuk 3:2. "In the midst of *two animals* thou shalt be recognized." ("In the midst of *the years* make it known.") Cf. also Isaiah 1:3.

The paintings of the Nativity are legion. A score of the world's greatest artists have here exercised their vivid imaginations: Angelico, Baldinovetti, Pierodol Franceschi, Botticelli, Lorenzo di Credi, Borgognone, Signorelli, Tintoretto, Albrecht Dürer, Lorenzo Lotto,

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<sup>1</sup> Frederic W. Farrar, *The Life of Christ as represented in Art*, pp. 233.

Titian, Paul Veronese, Correggio, Rembrandt, Velasquez and many others of later date.

In Farrar's book there are examples of sculptures portraying the visit of the Magi from a fourth century sarcophagus, and from the Church of St. Vitalis in Ravenna, which belongs to the sixth century. Here the three Magi are represented dressed in Phrygian caps, tunics and long robes each carrying a gift. The sole object of these very early carvings was to recall the story with absolute simplicity. In later centuries the scenes all became more exotic and magnificent, sometimes with splendid anachronism—transferring the Nativity to Italy or Germany or Spain. Nor can we blame the painters, for they merely expressed *their* joy in their own way, as the Shepherds did "when they found the young child with Mary his mother." "All real art," as Carlyle said, is "the disemprisoned soul of fact." One example, which must suffice us, is that of Albrecht Dürer's *Rest in Egypt*. It is supposed to represent the village of Mataria where the Virgin's fountain is still shown to tourists. But the scene and the persons are all German! "In an open courtyard in which are cocks and hens and from which is seen a hill crowned with towers, Joseph stands at work at his carpentering. The chips of wood are being playfully collected in a basket by boy-angels, one of whom has roguishly set his master's hat upon his little head, and another puts a long splinter to his mouth as though it were a trumpet . . . Joseph is pausing from his toil. He gazes thoughtfully, axe in hand, at the group



formed by the young mother and her Child." <sup>2</sup> The whole picture with its brilliant colors and lively multitude of figures seems a melody on canvas.

"Joy to the world the Lord has come,  
Let earth receive her King.  
Let every heart prepare him room  
And heaven and nature sing."

One year ago I received a Christmas-card from Robert E. Speer. On one side was a beautiful reproduction of Botticelli's *Nativity* from the National Gallery in London. On the other side Dr. Speer expressed his faith that "the Incarnation with its mystery, its glory and its reality holds the answer to all human problems;" and also these lines:

"This night, this hut, all secrets hold.  
Come quickening cup or chastening rod!  
My soul is justly overbold  
Since Christ has brothered us in God."

—*Father John J. Burke, C.S.P.*

Those who are art-critics assert that there is no deeper and more interesting picture of the Nativity than this of Botticelli. Canon Farrar states that it is "one of the sweetest and most far-reaching sermons on the inmost meaning of Christmas Day." Then he goes on to describe its beauty:

"In the upper part of the picture is a sky, of which the exquisite colours melt by dewy graduations from the golden glory of the celestial heavens to the blue of our lower horizon. In this sky is a wreath of twelve

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 273.

angels, joined hand in hand in enraptured dances. They are clad like the angels of Fra Angelico, in robes of the most tender vernal colourings, and their attitudes are full of grace and charm. Their wings, like their robes, are alternately of red, green, and white. Each of them holds a branch of olive and myrtle, and a banderole, with the inscription, *GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO*, from which hangs a light golden crown . . . "Directly underneath them is a dark grove of pines, Dante's symbol of the tangled forest of human life. But, in the midst of the dark wood, on a mass of white rock—symbol of the purity and impregnable strength of the Gospel—rises the stable of Bethlehem. On its pent-house roof, three angels in the crimson robes of Love, the white of Innocence, the green of Hope, chant their new carols. On the ground lies the Holy Babe in all the joyous life of infancy, with finger pointing to His mouth as though to say, 'I am the Word of God.' At His feet kneels Mary worshipping in something of sad bewilderment, and at His head, leaning against a pack-saddle, Joseph bends in deep humility, his face shrouded by his mantle. Behind him are the ox, the ass, and the manger. Thus was indicated the truth that even for the lower animals the Heavenly Father cares."

"On either side of the manger are the three Magi and the three shepherds, representing mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, at each age and of every rank, who are being brought into the presence of Christ by ardent angels, who crown their brows with olive, the symbol of fruitfulness, and gladness . . . At the bottom of the

picture, devils, small, and ugly, and contemptible, strive to hide themselves 'in the clefts of the rocks and the holes of the ragged rocks.' And thus the picture expresses the effects of the Advent on the good and the evil. The inscription, in bad Greek, at the top, shews the tension of feeling under which this picture was painted at the end of A.D. 1500, 'in the troubles of Italy, in the half-time after the time during the fulfillment of John xi, in the Second Woe of the Apocalypse, in the loosing of the devil for three years and a half. Afterwards he shall be chained, and we shall see him trodden down, as in this picture.' "

"Can anyone who has learned to understand this picture look without delight upon its subtle colouring and lovely forms? And when we grasp its mystic symbolism, can we be wholly untouched by the hope and holiness which it breathes into the soul?"

We have quoted this description at length for it illustrates what untold wealth of meaning and mystery and glory the thoughtful observer can find in the paintings that tell the story of the Nativity.

Although Isaac Watts had never seen the paintings of Botticelli or Dürer, the same exuberant joy filled his heart because of the Advent, when he wrote, "Joy to the world the Lord has come!"

The glory of the Manger in the hymnologies of the Greek, the Latin and the Protestant churches is too well known to need emphasis. Advent hymns, carols, Christmas anthems, and Nativity oratorios occupy a larger place in the liturgies and books of public wor-

ship than any other event in the life of our Lord. More than fifty advent hymns are listed in one Church Hymnal. Carols and carol singing go back to the thirteenth century. Here are two in Middle English from the commonplace Book of John Grimestone (1372); the first is entitled, *Christ Weeps in the Cradle for Man's Sin*; the second, *A lullaby to Christ in the Cradle*.

"Lullay, for wo you little thing!  
 You little barun you little King!  
 Mankindde is cause of thy mourning,  
 That thou hast loued so sore."

"Child, it is a weping dale that thou art comen inne  
 Thi pore clutes it prouen wel, thi bed mad in the binne  
 Cold and hunger thu must tholen, as thu were geten  
 in senne

And after deychen on the tre for loue ov all Mankenne.  
 Lullay, lullay litel child! No wonder thou thu care,  
 Thu are comen amongst hem that thi detgh sulen  
 ghare."<sup>3</sup>

We do not translate into modern English as the meaning is fairly clear. (*Detgh* = death; *ghare* = prepare.)

There is nothing wrong with the doctrine of these early poems. They enshrine the creeds of the Church and the piety of the saints. In going over a collection of ancient Christmas carols for use today we were impressed with their quaint interpretation of the old, old story of Jesus' love. His atonement for sin, and the Incarnation as the mystery of Christ's twofold nature.

<sup>3</sup> Nos. 59 and 65 in Carleton Brown's *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*.

Read, for example: the Manger Throne, Good King Wenceslas, The Seven Joys of Mary, T'was in the Winter Cold, The Incarnation, the Cherry-Tree Carol, Emmanuel, and We Three Kings of Orient—nearly all these are as evangelical in their message as Luther's famous Christmas Carol in fifteen stanzas, of which the last reads:

“To God on high all glory be,  
Who gave His only Son for me,  
For which the Angels carol clear  
And sing us such a glad New Year!”<sup>4</sup>

Among Negro spirituels (wrung from their hearts in the days of slavery) two are beautiful nativity songs, *De Newborn Baby* and *Yonder Comes Sister Mary wid de Keys of Bethlehem*. So we find Christmas joy expressed by all nations in their own tongue and swelling the chorus of the *Gloria in Excelsis* first heard at Bethlehem. From the earliest Christmas hymn of Ambrose, *Veni Redemptor Gentium*, and the one better known, by Prudentius, *Of The Father's Love Begotten*, there is an unbroken succession of melodies until we come to Phillips Brooks' *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. The entire story of the Nativity of our Lord is found in the songs of the Church Universal—and the chorus has gone around the earth, through the *Book of a Thousand Tongues*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Christmas Carols New and Old* by Henry R. Bramley.

<sup>5</sup> “Being some Account of the Translation and Publication of all or part of the Holy Scriptures into more than a thousand languages and dialects.” American Bible Society, New York, 1938.

Another glory of the Manger is the fact that it has led to the observance of the day of Christ's birth with all its exuberant joy, and good will toward men. The date we observe as Christmas, December twenty-fifth, is of course without historical basis. No one knows the exact month or day in the Calendar. Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church and before the fifth century there was no general agreement whether it should be held on the sixth of January, the twenty-fifth of March or the twenty-fifth of December. The first certain mention of December 25 is in the calendar of Philocalus in 354. Chrysostom refers to the same date as the correct day in a sermon preached on December 20, 386.<sup>6</sup> The fact is far more important than the date. The joy of the festival, the origin of which is lost in obscurity, is testimony to the glory of the Manger.

The widespread use of evergreens, holly, ivy, mistletoe, and laurel has a symbolic meaning far transcending the origin of the customs connected with their display. As T. G. Crippen points out, the symbol of life is most appropriate at the birth of the Prince of Life:

“The mistletoe bough at our Christmas board  
Shall hang to the honor of Christ our Lord;  
For He is the evergreen Tree of Life,  
Whom the old blind world, amid hate and strife  
Rejected and slew. But He soared above

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<sup>6</sup> For detail see the Articles *Epiphany* and *Christmas* in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Alive from the dead in the power of love:  
And mercy and Truth are assembling now  
With Justice and Peace at the mistletoe bough."

The ringing of bells and the singing of carols, we have already referred to as indicative of great joy that has come to all peoples through our Saviour's birth. We today have church-services or family gatherings, but in the middle ages it was the Mystery play and the Miracle-Play that drew the crowds to the public squares and the churches. These often had the Nativity for theme, especially the visit of the Magi and the adoration by the Shepherds. From such beginnings grew the rich and choice treasury of song and poetry in English literature in praise of the Christ-child and his mission.

The Yule-log and Christmas candles were in use very early in the British Isles, in France, in Germany, and in Scandinavia. These lands of the cold north associated the festival with light and warmth and good-cheer.<sup>7</sup> For them there was also the lavish Christmas feast and the lighted Christmas-tree by which young and old expressed their joy and extended their hospitality and good-cheer. Nor can we forget Christmas gifts to the poor and the beautiful Scandinavian custom of the Christmas Sheaf placed out in the fields of snow and ice for cattle and birds. Saint Francis of Assisi was not the only one to think of sharing with birds and beasts the bounty of his Lord.

One has only to watch the celebration of Christmas

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<sup>7</sup> For these and other customs see, Wm. M. Auld's *Christmas Traditions*, pp. 99-135.

in one of our great cities to become convinced that, although wickedness and worldliness abound, the Christ-child has a universal magnetism and far-reaching influence. Men may deny our Lord's Divinity, they may affect to doubt the miracles connected with his birth, but they are forced to admit that the coming of Christ has stamped an indelible impress on the world and its history, while at the same time they are unable to give any reasonable explanation for a fact so unique and remarkable. One cannot explain it except by the Gospel records and then declare with Pascal in his *Thoughts on Religion*: "Jesus Christ is the center of everything and the object of everything, and he who does not know Him knows nothing of the order of the world and nothing of himself. In Him is all our felicity and virtue, our life, our light, our hope; apart from Him there is nothing but vice, misery, darkness, despair, and we see only obscurity and confusion in the nature of God and in our own."

If we face the *fact* of the Christ we shall observe Christmas and approach the Advent season in the spirit of the poem that faces this chapter. His coming makes all the difference in our hearts and lives and thoughts. This is the glory of the Manger.

"Because of a stall in Bethlehem  
Where a Prince of Peace was laid  
I try to fashion a childlike heart  
For the difference He has made."

FINIS