

The Word Made Flesh

A Sermon by Rev Brian W. Keith

“And 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.” (John 1:14)

Night; a time of quiet when the bustle of the day dies down; a time of weariness when we make ready for a restful sleep; also a time of darkness and cold; our vision is limited and we seek the warmth of fires and homes.

Nighttime plays a prominent role in the birth of the Lord. It was at night in a dream that the angel appeared to Joseph giving him reasons to marry Mary. Later at night he warned him of the danger of Herod, and eventually informed him that it was time to return to the land of Israel. It was in the night that the Lord was born and the shepherds found their way to the manger. And it was in the night that the wise men saw the star in the east, and then had the star lead them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem where it stood over the house where the young Child lay.

The nighttime scenes surrounding the birth and early years of the Lord's life depict the shroud that had descended upon the world. Their God, Jehovah, had not been seen nor heard from in hundreds of years. They were lost and rudderless without Him. Other than maintaining the ancient rituals, they had little sense of who He was and how they were to live. Hearts were growing colder from the confusion and distortion of everything good.

Even with the few descendants of the ancient churches, some of whose knowledge resided with the wise men, there were but scant glimmers of light. Perhaps those wise men alone among the ancients saw the star. Certainly its light was not overpowering. So even with the ancients there was but little understanding of who the Lord is. What minimal truth remained was heavily shaded because all they had ever seen of the Lord was a representative not the Divine in its glory (see Doctrine Concerning the Sacred Scripture 99).

But our images and memories of the birth of the Lord are not focused upon the darkened states. Rather we remember the multitude of heavenly hosts shining upon the shepherds, the star guiding the wise men, and the light of day in which Simeon lifted up the infant Lord, blessed God, and Anna proclaimed His glory to all. For the Lord's coming is a coming with light and with life. "And 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."

One of the wonders of Christmas is the fact that the Lord is born with light in the midst of confused and dark states of life. When we see little but gloom and hopelessness, He comes to us. He holds us in His hands, nourishing an inner sense of hope that we might endure and overcome. Then His full presence with us is in the light of the morning, enabling us to recognize who He is and how we might walk in His ways. This is why the morning with its light and warmth corresponds to the Lord's coming. (see Arcana Coelestia 22, 4240e; Doctrine Concerning the Sacred Scripture 99)

For the Lord came as the light of the world. This is His glory. We can see it shining upon us in the truth His advent brought. For until the Lord took on a physical form as a tender infant, all the earlier concepts of Him were vague at best. (see Doctrine Concerning the Sacred Scripture 99)

All of the true ideas that had existed with the ancients about marriage, life continuing past the veil of this world, and how His providence guides us were only misty images of what they might be. For all truth had been filtered through the heavens. Dependent upon the finite grasp of the angels, the glory of the Lord had shone dimmer and dimmer into this world, until at last the vision of Him was nearly lost.

By His birth the Lord acquired a natural degree of life. As He put it on and gradually made it Divine, the warmth of His love and the light of His wisdom became immediately present with all. This is the light of the new day the Lord's coming heralded for mankind, a light shining in the darkness, leading to the brilliance of day. We can sense this when we reflect upon our awakening states not those

mornings which come after too little sleep, or when we are rudely awakened by alarms and the bustle of hurriedly preparing to rush off to work. But we feel it in the quiet mornings when we awake refreshed and revived when we listen to the singing of the birds and know the dazzling sunlight portends the warming of the earth. The light has a special quality then. With clarity we see beauty in even the simplest things around us. And we can sense the closeness of heaven, the closeness of the Lord's Advent as our spirits are lifted up to the new day. (see Arcana Coelestia 7844:2)

As the Word made flesh, the glory of the Lord can bring us a peacefulness unlike any other. Not a peace like the quiet of evening when we are preparing to rest. Rather it is a peace of contentment and confidence. As the Heavenly Doctrines note, this peace is "the very Divine truth in heaven from the Lord which universally affects all who are there and makes heaven to be heaven; for peace has in it confidence in the Lord, that He directs all things and provides all things, and that He leads to a good end. When a person is in this state, he is in peace, for he then fears nothing, and no worry about things to come disturbs him." (Arcana Coelestia 8455) The glory of the Lord's Word shines upon us when we have such assurance that He is in charge, carefully guiding every one of our steps.

This is the state of the angels. Their unpleasant memories of this earth have been set aside. They have no desire to leap into the future. Rather they fully enjoy the present, sensing all the goodness that the Lord is giving them now. For they trust in Him, knowing that He is leading and caring for them no matter what happens.

We may taste some of this angelic peace as we celebrate the Lord's advent or awaken in the morning. But we enter into it more and more as we set aside the things of this world: worry about the future, too great a focus on natural toys and conveniences, our selfish drives and desires. To the extent that we can enjoy earthly delights without making them all important, that we can serve others without always thinking about what we will get out of it, so far peace can enter our lives. It is then that we become convinced that the Lord's light is the true light and most of the problems and troubles we experience can fall away. It is then that we can glimpse the Lord and experience His peace, His Advent into our lives.

In one sense there is nothing startlingly new or different about this idea. Indeed, it is so simple, so fundamental, that it hardly needs to be said. So we are affected by the Word made flesh as the Divine flows into some of the simple truths we already know. This is one of the reasons the Lord was born on earth that the Divine goodness might be joined with our common sense and simple ideas of Him that we have. (see Arcana Coelestia 2554)

The Lord's birth itself did not reveal any radical new information that had not been available before. In fact there would be no real instruction until thirty years later when the Lord began His public ministry. But His birth signaled a beginning of salvation for all because His presence, His love for us all, was proclaimed by His coming down among us, filling us with His good.

For us now, the Christmas story reveals His glory, the brilliance of His Divine Human in which we may know and love Him. The Divine as it is in Itself is far beyond our comprehension and affection, even as it was for the ancients. So the Lord was born that we might see His nature and have it shed light on our lives, giving us the confidence and trust that He is always with us, always leading us in paths of peace.

The Lord then becomes flesh and dwells among us when even our limited, simple ideas of truth can be filled with His presence, showing us something of His love. For the Lord's coming into our life is not simply to make us feel good. Yes, the Lord would have us experience states of happiness and joy regularly, and eventually in heaven constantly. While He may be born in our states of darkness, His full Advent is to us in light the truth of His Word which can fill our minds. Every time we recognize a concept as Divine, as coming from Him and leading our minds back to His love and mercy, His advent has occurred. Then the Word is made flesh, living, for us. We are touched by it, we are enlightened by it, and we are strengthened by it. (see Arcana Coelestia 8792)

This is our sight of the Lord, His birth among us. It brings us light, and it will bring us warmth. We can embrace this light, this new

vision of the Divine, and use it to recognize and follow His teachings. (see True Christian Religion 774) Then the truth of peace will be ours.

So let this Christmas day affect us with the joys of morning. As its light brings a new brightness to our day, as its warmth stirs a renewed heat in our lives, let us feel the Lord's closeness to us. His birth on earth was the taking on of a natural form of life that we might know Him, see Him, and love Him. As we put off an excessive focus on the things of this world and upon our concerns, He can come closer to us, bringing us the peace of dawn—a peace that has within it complete confidence in His truth, in His guidance, a complete confidence that a heaven shall be made from this human race.

This was the reason for His coming to touch our hearts and enlighten our minds, that He might become the Word made flesh for us eternally. Let us behold His glory, full of grace and truth.

Amen.

Lessons: Luke 2:1-7; John 1:1-18; Arcana Coelestia 8455