

Peace on Earth, Good Will

“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, good will toward men.”

S O DOES LUKE describe the opening of the heavens unto shepherds who were watching over their flock on Nativity night. The birth of the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the world, was made known to a few simple shepherds, perhaps still endowed with involuntary clairvoyance. Anyone else? Matthew mentions three wise men, seers adept in reading the stellar script. Three foreigners and several humble shepherds are the only human witnesses to the birth of the most advanced Individuality in earth evolution, the future bearer of the Christ.

Should we be surprised by the anonymity of this occurrence? Somehow it seems strangely fitting, in character with the Person and mission of Christ Jesus. The circumstances of His birth prefigure and are of like nature with the tone of His life, for He came not to overwhelm with power and glory but to bear the sins of the world, to know the abject state of human helplessness—He, the Son of God. This is ever a scandal for the material mind. Indeed, as the 16th century Spanish clairvoyant Mary of Agreda observes, by the very humbleness of its setting, Jesus’ birth went unnoticed by the infernal powers. It was inconceivable



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Oil and gold leaf on wood, Sister Marie Paul. Adapted from original with permission of the Printery House

The Nativity

This icon, painted in the traditional manner, is a pictorial composite of events relating to the birth of Jesus, including: his birth in a cave; the journey of the wise men; the angelic annunciation to the shepherds; Joseph’s temptation by the devil, disguised as an old shepherd, to disbelieve the virgin birth; and the washing of the infant by two midwives brought by Joseph to attend Mary. Some of these details are described in the apocryphal Gospels of pseudo-Matthew and pseudo-James.

that the Messiah, whose advent they surmised and whose mission they were resolved to oppose, would not be born as highest royalty and His name trumpeted far and wide. Nor, for the same reason, was the Messiah’s mother known to the Prince of Darkness. She was too pure and selfless to be

detected. Also, we are told, the spiritual effulgence of Mary and Jesus was cloaked by angels, even as the twelve Elder Brothers shield or form a sheath for the presence of Christian Rose Cross.

Consider the extraordinary conditions under which Jesus is born. His mother, great with child, nevertheless consents to travel by donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Joseph intends to pay tax to Caesar. What pregnant woman today would undertake such a journey? Nor, when Mary is about to deliver, can Joseph find lodging in the town but is compelled to seek shelter in a sheep's cave.

Isaiah's prophecy hits the mark: "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Jesus is rejected even before He is born. Is chance operating here, or was this incident foreseen and intended? Later, Christ Jesus remarked that the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay his head. Truly, there is no place in the material world where the divine Spirit is at home. A bed in an inn or an animal's eating trough (manger) may serve equally well to hold a baby, since a mother's love is its real cradle.

Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes, a practice common in His day, meant to insure regular growth of the limbs, as splints are now used to straighten broken bones. But for the Spirit this enclosure in tight strips of cloth was equivalent to being mummified. It prefigures the absolute restriction of the cross and is a dress rehearsal for the burial shroud.

Regarding the anonymity of Jesus' birth, we additionally note that the ox and ass depicted in iconic orthodox and medieval Nativity scenes are also witnesses of this pivotal event, fulfilling another prophecy by Isaiah (1:3) "The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." This poignant passage has its cosmic echo in the prologue to John's Gospel: "And the light

shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.... He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own and his own received him not." (1:5, 10-11)

Precisely because Christ is not of this world did he require Jesus' body to be "born" into. Though he had nothing less than a cosmic mission to fulfill, and though he endured agony, He lived in and left the earth plane quietly, forging the drama that the worldly self will ever improvise, as expressed in the phrase "making a scene." He, without

Whom the world would have no history, is not recorded in so-called objective history.

He was born in a cave and laid on straw. The King of the Heavens, declining an earthly throne, was mounted on a cross. Refusing the crown of kings, He was crowned with thorns.

He rejected the spoils of power that spoil the soul. He spurned the physical lures that are

cold comfort to the immaterial spirit. Bruce Barton's popular account of the life of Christ Jesus might more correctly be titled *The Man Who Would not be King*.

The Logos, the creative Principle by which all that is was "spoken" into existence from mental archetype—as in "Let there be"—this same Logos, Christ, lived and died as a human. No more humbling thought can be conceived, unless it be that God the Father so loved the world that He gave Himself through His Son to sinning humanity to be crucified. He showed His inordinate good will, God's will, by infusing His divine Being in human being. While Lucifer would be God, God freely abdicated His throne of light to adopt mortal consciousness. While Lucifer is filled with a vanity of divine illusions, Christ emptied Himself of real Divinity.

The Redeemer, the incarnation of God's goodness, took human form to vanquish death. As the glory of celestial hosts shone about the shepherds on Holy Night, in their hearts resounded the words



Detail from The Nativity, Piero della Francesca

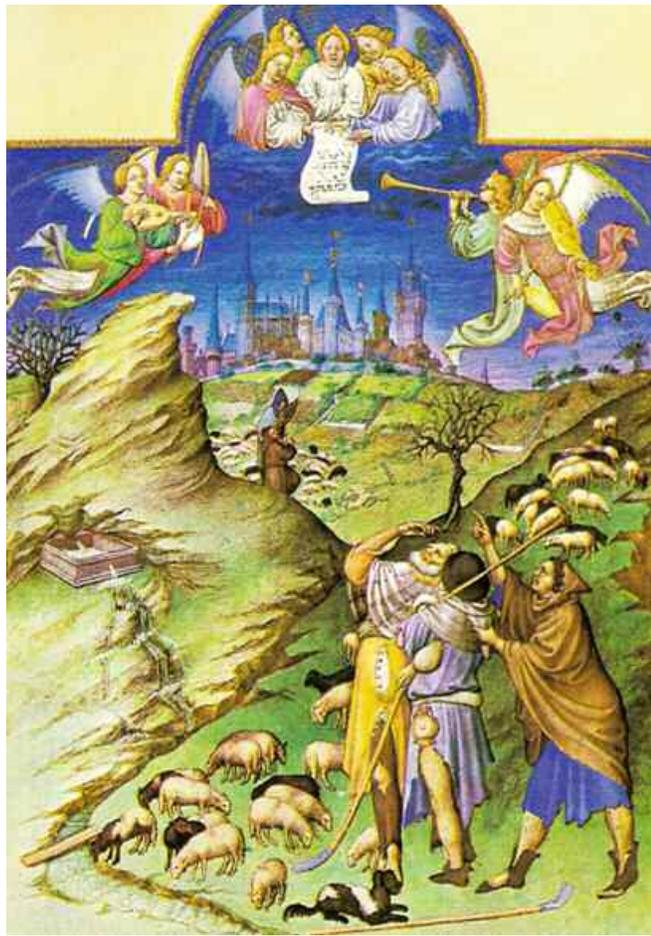
“the Godhead is revealing Himself in the heights of the Cosmos, and peace will spring forth on earth in humans who are of good will.”

How will this happen? Through the Christ impulse vouchsafed the world in the total Self-giving of the Lord of Love. This giving was outwardly initiated at the first Christmas. It was advanced with the Christing of Jesus by John’s Jordan baptism, and was furthered by the hallowing of the earth through Christ’s shed blood and His birth into the earth sphere as His planetary body, which, since Golgotha, the Resurrection, and Ascension, is annually revived as the sun’s Regent descends from the throne of His heavenly Father into the earth, reaching its heart each Christmas.

What can we learn from the Nativity, from that event which we now celebrate as Christmas? Clement, a disciple of Peter, asks in his first epistle to the Corinthians, “If the Lord thus humbled himself, what should we do who are brought by him under the yoke of his grace?” (8:16) The continuous denial of all outward claims to privilege and personal rights by the world’s Creator surely has something to teach our self-indulgent age.

Not only is this the midnight time of the year; there is ample reason to regard the present time as the dark night of our civilization’s soul, a time when materialism—the breathless, unappeasable fascination with things: getting and spending, tracking down and trashing, flitting at full tilt from novelty to high-tech novelty—dazes the senses and deludes the Spirit. The Christ Child is ever born anew at this time of year, but is the inn of worldly consciousness still too full of virtual images to discern and receive a transforming truth? Does the daily fusillade of physical perceptions blind us to the Christ star which can guide us to the good that has no price, to the peace that no dividend of earthly investment can secure?

Why was Christ “born” in an earthly body? He tells Pilate, “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth,” the very truth which He incarnates in Jesus, for He says, “I am the truth.” That Pilate needs to ask, “What is truth?” shows his ignorance of the Spirit of truth. Distance in time and space permit us to patronize Pilate. But do we know the truth? It can



From the *Très Riches Heures* of Jean, Duke of Berry, Bibliothèque, Musée Condé, Chantilly

The Annunciation to the Shepherds

Choirng Angels appear in the heavens above marveling shepherds. Bethlehem becomes a medieval French castle and the spring suggests the One Who gives the waters of eternal life.

set us free. Are we freeing ourselves? Is the pursuit of things freeing? Is contention with our neighbor freeing? Is seeking special favor, or, disingenuously, seeking merely what we think is due us (and we’ll die trying to get it!), is this freeing?

The incarnation of Truth didn’t make Truth visible. It was still occult, but remarkable effects were produced by an apparently unremarkable human, by Him who was but a Nazarene, whose brothers and parents were known. Be it Bethlehem or Jordan, the message is the same: Bring occult truth to birth here in the physical world. Occult truth is eminently practical because it is in possession of the larger picture. If the only universe we know is material, we know but a cemetery and humanity’s future is grave indeed. We do not really know the Teachings until we bring them to bear on daily cir-

cumstance, because their value and relevance for daily living demand it and are confirmed in the impulse this knowledge gives to enlightened action. Truth is dynamic, living. Brainbound concepts are abstract and static. Our work is to enliven these concepts with genuine warmth and good will, to transform the unleavened bread of text and terms into the living nutriment of spiritual understanding and healing deeds.

As the man Jesus was born in a cave, subterranean earth, so was the Archangel Christ born in the cave of Jesus' body. In the Garden of Gethsemane and then on the Cross, He plumbed the world of physical being to its uttermost depths, stripping death of its power over the human Spirit. By this victory Christ was able to enter the earth through the blood shed by His Jesus-body. He broke down the doors of Hades and freed the spiritually benumbed souls in limbo.

While His incarnation in human sheathes created for Christ the most restricting kind of spiritual winter, shearing the flower of His glory by the ice of flesh, the incommensurable Word compressed in the vise of human physical form, for humanity the advent of the solar Christ brought the dawn of a spiritual springtime that had not been known since prelapsarian Eden.

The heavenly host that appeared to the shepherds knew of Christ Jesus' mission. In great jubilation they glorified God as His love was embodied in the physical being of the Jesus child. What else did the angels proclaim? "On earth peace, good will toward men." Was this a prayer, a blessing, or a prediction? It was the annunciation of an aborning reality. The solar Prince of Peace had touched down on earth. At an earlier time the apostate angels, the hosts of Lucifer, had been cast out of heaven by the archangel Michael. Those once supernal angels became infernal demons. And they resolved to wreck God's plans for His newly formed humans. That the Creator should favor

these callow creatures over Lucifer rankled the Proud One. His strategy was to foment ill will and war amongst the children of earth.

There will be no peace on earth as long as humans regard themselves as self-existing entities, as implied in the concept of the self-made man, man created in his own image—which is what? Absent God, man has no image but of chaos. No God, no man. Giving glory to God in the highest—this is Mary's way, as natural and necessary to her as breathing: "My soul doth magnify the Lord." Would she elect amniocentesis, ultrasound, or fetal biopsy to make sure God's miraculous work was up to snuff? Not only "glory to God" but "Behold the

handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me as thou wouldst." Isn't this luminous obedience the substance of peace, the same substance that was fleshed in her womb as Jesus?

But what of the sword of the Word, doesn't it disturb the peace? Yes, the shallow peace of the status quo that caters to selfish interests and is maintained by divisive law. This sword sunders that individuals may join in a

higher and more inclusive order. It cuts through loveless legalisms and liberates the life of the Spirit to freely work toward global amity.

Peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives. Not Jerusalem, the old City of Peace that kills its prophets, but New Jerusalem, the New City of Peace, the etheric kingdom, where the lamb shall lie down with the lion. It is peace on earth, but a new earth, for the old earth shall be passed away, by virtue of God's will becoming man's whole desire and goal, becoming his highest good (summum bonum).

When the Kingdom of God is with men as manifest reality, then shall each be a Melchizadec, a king of Salem or Peace, in whom worldly and spiritual concerns are wholly integrated and harmonized.

Peace I give unto you, not as the world gives give I unto you. What kind of giving is this? Permanent, certain, unconditional. Not in effect one day and canceled the next. Not the paper peace

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Tempera on panel, 1490. Fiorenzo di Lorenzo. Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia

Adoration of the Magi

of political treaties, or the peace of good intentions that are not good enough because the intenders are yet double-minded and not wholly about their heavenly Father's business.

The contemplation of Self that is especially appropriate at this time of year, in resonance with the Earth's withdrawal from the universe in maximum contraction, is not a navel-gazing. It is a penetration, through willed, heart-infused thinking, into the inner nature of man; it is vividly experiencing the action of cosmic forces on the formation, development, and future becoming of the Spirit of man.

There can be no peace on earth if we are not present now. While will works in many ways, none is more vital than the committed consciousness that does not desert the living moment for fixed regrets, past glories, or future fears. If we have not put

grievances and disruptive memories to rest, if we have not learned to live free from worry about what the future may bring, real peace is impossible. Peace on earth is peace in one's mind, being at peace with one's self. Peace on earth is a consciousness ordered and founded on the conviction and knowledge that God ceaselessly surrounds and sustains us. Peace grows in the soil of patience, in the patient acceptance of whatever is or seems to be. We can accept, even embrace, whatever is because we are living in God's creation. It is He that made us and not we ourselves. Acceptance, then, is based on knowledge, and applied knowledge, as Max Heindel says, is the only salvation.

Christmas season is the time for Spirit quickening, for the awakening in heightened awareness of spiritual being. It is only secondarily a hearkening back, a memorial festival. The historical Bethlehem Nativity, the birth of Jesus, and the Jordan nativity, the entrance of Christ into the Jesus body thirty years later, that double Christmas makes possible the real Christ birth in the individual soul. God in Christ now most clearly seeks a home in us, however outwardly homely it may appear. Now is the time for a sunrise of the Spirit in the darkness of the

material world—a world lit by the sham brilliance of strobe lights and strip lights and spot lights; an electrified midnight world that would dazzle us into a capitulation to the eye's homeless spaces, where nativity can be but the the ephemeral progeny of our senses, the fireworks and shooting stars of physical consciousness.

The light we seek is not found by pushing darkness back to the borders of consciousness, where fear holds it at bay as a dam holds back water. The light we seek lies in, through, and beyond all that darkness can muster as a barrier to our efforts. Whatever our personal Gethsemane, our resolve stays intact. We persevere. We drain the cup of its bitter contents, not as martyrs but as faith-fortified servants of an unfathomable Mercy.

Christ cannot be born in us unless something in us dies. Christ was born into the world to make vital connection with a planet and its people who were careering away from the orbit of God's inten-

tion for them. Humanity follows Christ, takes Him to its soul as did Mary, by dying to the world of seeming. The cross or its equivalent is the womb of Christian birth.

The *Arabian Gospel of the Childhood of Jesus* speaks of the supreme Christmas gift, the Gift of God in Christ Jesus:

He it is to whom our humble prayer rises.
He gave us substance and life; he brought us to light from our mother's womb. For our salvation he chose the human body as a sheath. He made us free and wishes to envelop us with eternal love. He wishes to prove his goodness to us in openness, in good work, in creativity, in good will. To him belong all revelation, all sense of the good, all world power and all kingdoms now and in all cycles of time.

A modern initiate refers to the Nativity in the following words that may well serve as a subject for fruitful meditation:

At the turning-point of Time
The Spirit-Light of the World
Entered the stream of Earthly Being.
Darkness of Night had held its sway;
Day-radiant Light
Poured into the souls of men;
Light that gives Warmth
To simple Shepherds' Hearts,
Light that enlightens
The wise Heads of Kings.

O Light Divine, O Sun of Christ!
Warm Thou Our Hearts
Enlighten Thou Our Heads,
That good may become
What from our Hearts we would found
And from our Heads direct
With single purpose.

As the Christ light is born on the darkest night of the year, may we use this time and meditate on this fact to seek in our own densest darkness the star of our new being, the Christ Being. Let us faithfully journey toward the light of renewal in these midnight times by bringing spiritual understanding to



Fresco, 59 x 35 in., Fra Angelico (c. 1400-1455) and workshop, Monastery of San Marco, Florence

The Nativity

One of thirty-two scenes in the corridors and cells of Fra Angelico's monastery, from the Annunciation to the Coronation of Mary, "the series embraces the whole catena of the mystery of Christ's love."

all our earthly endeavors so that we may hasten a Christmas awakening, when the skies of world understanding will open and humanity will know peace throughout the planet and will be able to will the good by knowing the truth that radiates from the everpresent Christ.

We each, modern Magi journeying in material darkness, seek the Light of the World, the Light that lighteth every man. We are led by this Light, at times clear and bright, at times dim or seemingly disappeared. And we shall come at length, in time, to the holy now, to the cave of our heart where the Christ Child even now is, to behold and adore and glorify God the Father for the love that has Personed in us, a love and a light which shall be with us, even until the end of the days of earth. □

—C.W.