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Editorial

The Word Became Flesh

MERRIMENT, gift-making, and good cheer are characteristic of Christmastide. But they are not particularly Christian marks. Long before the birthday of Christ was celebrated on the winter solstice, the pagan world of ancient Rome spent the day in carnival and carousal that degenerated into libertinism. They celebrated the turn in the course of the sun when the dark, winter season was half over and the sun would return in increasing strength. The Christians supplanted that idea and its celebration by dedicating the day to the Birth of JESUS CHRIST. Then gifts and merriment took on a new meaning. They spoke not of the sun, but of the Light of Lights that lighteth every man coming into the world, and under His auspices the feast was purged and the merriment was pure.

Some people might just as well be celebrating the winter solstice to-day for all the thought they give to Jesus Christ. For them Christmastide is a time of carnival and carousal. Christmas Day is marked chiefly by the indulgence to repletion in expensive viands. Of the Saviour born to a sinful world there is no thought—indeed, the suggestion of such a thing as sin and the necessity of a Saviour would be laughed from the board.

And some of us Christians do not do a great deal better. How many fathers or mothers snatch a moment from the busy day and tell the children wearied with their play what is the real meaning of Christmas Day? If we have in our minds the thought of Christ's coming, how much deeper the joy is, and how the very greeting, "A Happy Christmas!" is filled with a new world of meaning.

The most stupendous event of all history is what we celebrate. The Word became Flesh. God became Incarnate. The Infinite dwelt in the finite. This is one of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. We have no place for a "low Christology." We do not find that Deity was something ascribed to Jesus only after a long process of years. In the very earliest letter of St. Paul which we have he speaks of "the Lord Jesus Christ, being His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead." There is a full ascription of honours there.

Christianity is Christ, and the central point in the estimate of Christ is that He is super-human. The teaching of His deity is like a watershed. To the one side flow the doctrines which attempt to state His deity, and to the other side, those which do not. As in St. John's day, so in ours. The spirits can be tested by whether they confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh or not. That is a touchstone for all the 'isms and 'asms of the day.

Christ is human. Perfectly so. Any statement regarding Him which obscures that is faulty. Here is where the crudity of some attempts lie. But after we have extolled His virtue, wisdom, courage and love, we have not filled in all the lines of the New Testament picture of Christ. He is human, and something more. Any statements which obscure that something more are faulty. That something more is Deity.

There is no doubt about it. The Gospels teach the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. To say otherwise is inexcusable. Anyone who suggests that because Jesus and His Apostles did not use the Virgin Birth as a proof of His Deity, therefore it may be regarded as an accretion, a later addition, not a fact, but a pious fiction, is getting sadly out of touch with the necessities of the Evangel. Even to-day we do not advance the Virgin Birth as a proof of Christ's Deity. It is the Deity of Christ abundantly proved on other counts that makes for us the Virgin Birth a consistent mode of Incarnation.

What additional thought or inference does the Virgin Birth give us? Not many of us think of the cutting off of a "sinful entail," the inheriting of sinful tendencies. Because we realize that these would come from a mother as well as from a father. Along that line of thought we can see the logicalness of the idea of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary which was invented to cover just that point. But sheer logic would drive us on to a succession of Immaculate Conceptions to prepare a Vessel for the Incarnation. A sinless conception must be *superhuman* even where there be only a mother concerned.

The point brought out by DR. W. E. ORCHARD in a new volume of sermons entitled THE THEOLOGY OF JESUS, is that the Virgin Birth teaches us the inviolability of human personality. When God planned to save humanity He could not begin by destroying a human personality. That is exactly what He would have done if the Word, Who is pre-existent, had come down into an ordinary man. For the ordinary method of generation produces a new person. And we should have had two persons, entailing a dual personality, or else the one person would have had to be destroyed, or suppressed, or absorbed by the other. That is just what Nestorianism was condemned for and that is the doctrine favoured by modern theosophy.

For a real Incarnation the Divine Person must live a truly human life, so that, while the person is absolutely Divine, the life is a truly human achievement. The Virgin Birth, therefore, puts upon human personality the highest possible seal.

Forward Movement Prayer.

ALMIGHTY and Everlasting God, Who hast promised through Thy Son, Jesus Christ, to be with Thy Church to the end of the world, we humbly beseech Thee to prosper the present undertaking of Thy people through the Forward Movement for the good of Thy Church and for the advancement of Thy Kingdom. Strengthen us, we beseech Thee, O Lord, with Thy Holy Spirit, and daily increase in us Thy manifold gifts of grace. Enlarge our faith and fill us with a hearty desire to do Thy will. We beseech Thee to give wisdom to those who are called to lead us, and to all Thy people a ready will to work together with love and zeal. And grant that all that we do may be so ordered by Thy governance that Thy blessing may rest upon our endeavours, to the glory of Thy Holy Name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Christian Year

The Spirit of Christmas

(FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.)

"Christians, awake, salute the happy morn,
Whereon the Saviour of the world was born."

THE spirit of Christmas is felt universally in the Christian world. It has a unique sentiment attached to it. It touches childhood and old age alike. It brightens the lot of the weary and cheers the heart of the sad. It links up the past with the present, and lightens the hope of the future. Old memories crowd back upon us; memories with which were associated the mystery and charm of childhood, and mingling with them in glad confusion are the recollections of later days when the buoyancy of youth reached keenly to the joyous emotion of happy gatherings and reunions. To many there comes a touch of sadness, because life is so different to what it once was. Dear ones who shared our blessed joys are no longer seen amongst us. But the bitter poignancy to which such sense of loss gives rise is toned and hallowed by the sacred associations of Heaven's sweetest gifts and blessings. Memories that bless and burn are shot through with that glorious light that never shone on land or sea, the light of the Eastern Star which, rising in the midst of Heaven's undying glory, floods with celestial light the inner soul of twice-born men.

"To you, in David's town, this day
Is born of David's line
A Saviour who is Christ the Lord;
And this shall be the sign."

THE HEAVENLY BABE.

The old story of God's gift to the world is told at Christmas time, in hut and hovel, in chapel and sanctuary, in fane and castle, from ice-locked land to coral strand, in every language under the sun. It is made intelligible to the child in the immortal mythical visitor whose mystery symbolizes the gracious gift of one who gives out of the abundance of His loving store. It speaks to the heart of philosopher and sage, and of him who is bowed with age, in terms so simple, so natural and so divinely sweet, as to touch the deepest and truest in human nature: the fount of loving tears and holy joy.

"And they who do their souls no wrong,
But keep at eve the faith of morn,
Shall daily hear the Angel's song:
To-day the Prince of Peace is born."

The music of the Christmas season has sounded down the ages, mingled with the far-off strains of many voices. Sights and sounds of mellowed majesty combine to make the glad refrain. The shepherds live again before our eyes. We can hear the voices their flocks have come to know so well. The wise men are following with eager faithfulness the guiding star. The manger cradle, where adoring ones assemble, emerges from the midst of many taxpayers in the little village of Bethlehem. The heavenly host sing again the music song which has thrilled the heart of many generations:—

"Glory to God in the Highest,
And on earth peace, good will among men."

"Like Him be true, like Him be pure,
Like Him be full of love.
Seek not thine own, and so secure
Thine own that is above."