

## SOME THOUGHTS

— ON THE —

## Incarnation and Birth of Christ.

BY HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP OF TORONTO.

"And the word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us, and we saw his glory; the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."—John 1, 14.

The Incarnation of God the Son was the greatest manifestation that even God could make of His infinite goodness, love and mercy for the human race. He had created man through love—He redeemed him through mercy. The creation was a manifestation of Almighty love—the Redemption was a manifestation of infinite and all-pardoning mercy.

Man was originally created and constituted in justice and innocence. He was a child of God and an heir of heaven. By his fall he lost his innocence and justice and forfeited his Sonship of God and his heirship of heaven. He was banished from Paradise, and was driven into exile—a fugitive from the face of God, his offended father. Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, comes down from heaven, to restore to man the Sonship of God and the heirship of heaven, and to bring him back from his exile and his flight from God to an union of friendship and of love with Him. The incarnation of Christ was in principle the redemption of mankind, and their restoration to their place in God's eternal plans and to their own immortal destinies.

In the olden dispensation the fear and dread of an offended God ruled and overpowered the hearts and minds of men. In that dispensation God ruled his people by the manifestation of Almighty power, by the force of stupendous miracles, by signal and tremendous chastisements of guilt, and in the might of His outstretched arm. When Adam sinned he was seized with fear, and he hid himself from the face of God. "I heard Thy voice in Paradise, and was afraid, and because I was naked I hid myself." This unholy fear, which carried away man from God, was transmitted with life to all the posterity of fallen Adam—banished and proscribed and expelled from Paradise by a sword of fire. All antiquity fled and hid itself from the face of an offended and angry God. And that fear which dominated antiquity was different in kind from that holy fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom, and which inspires the sinner at the same time with a dread of divine justice, a hatred of sin and a loving hope in the divine goodness and mercy. The fear of the ancients was a slavish fear that had its origin in hatred of God who punished sin, and in hatred of the penalty inflicted on the sinner and not in repentance for the sin that merited the divine chastisement. And what were the bitter fruits of this unholy fear, that eventuated in the flight of mankind from God? Under its blighting influence the world had become thoroughly corrupt and out of joint with the purposes of its Creator. Men had for the most part lost the knowledge of the true God and of the priceless value of the immortal soul. Paganism, with its degrading rites and superstitions, and its vast system of idolatry, held the world enthralled. A dead sea of moral corruption covered the face of the earth—vice became deified, for each had a God for its author and patron—whilst the great and eternal God was unknown and unacknowledged. He was an outlaw in his own creation. The human family had lost its unity and sanctity, and became disrupted and broken up. Slavery held in its chains two-thirds of the Roman world, and degraded, demoralized and corrupted it. Human life had become a dark and perplexing mystery enshrouded in impenetrable darkness, with all its problems unsolved and its destinies and purposes unexplained; and man, "noble in reason, infinite in faculties, in form admirable, in action like an angel, the beauty of the

world, the paragon of created things," became worthless in his own eyes—the sated slave of his sensual pleasures and ignoble passions. Such is the appalling picture which all sacred and profane writers draw of the moral state of the world in the days of Augustus Cæsar—such was the moral condition of the world the Saviour of mankind came to redeem and save. But how is this to be accomplished? How are justice, peace and mercy to be made to work together in this divine work of human salvation and restoration. "Behold," cries out the prophet, "God himself will come and save you." "Ecco Deus ipse veniet et salvabit vos."—(Isaiah c. xxxv. 4.) God will come down from heaven in the Incarnation to seek his lost children, to dissipate their unholy and destructive fears, to bring them back from their banishment, and to win their confidence and their love. He will not come in great power and majesty as he did on Sinai, when he was clothed with the lightnings of heaven and spoke in a voice which was as the roll of thunder, and when the terrified people cried out to Moses, "O Moses, speak thou to God for us, but let not God speak to us, lest we die." No, God the Saviour



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will veil the splendor of His majesty, the awfulness of His power, the terrors of His justice, and will come gently as the dew of heaven falls on the thirsty earth, silently as the footsteps of the dawn descending the eastern hills. He will become man, He will become our brother; nay, He will come in the sweetness and tenderness and dependence of an infant; and with the pleading outstretched arms and the winsome and irresistible smiles of a child, He will destroy our fears and will bring us back again to faith and hope and love in God our Father who is in heaven. This is the divine philosophy of the Incarnation and birth of Christ, in which "mercy and truth have met each other and justice and peace have embraced each other." *Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi justitia et pax osculata sunt.*—(Ps. lxxxiv. 11.)

The birth of the Incarnate God was the visible manifestation of the divine bounty and goodness. Hence, St. Paul says that in it "the grace of God the Saviour hath appeared to men." (Titus 2 ch.) And again, "the goodness and kindness of God the Saviour appeared." (Titus 3 chap. 4th verse.) Hence, also, St. Bernard commenting on St. Paul's words, asks, "How could God better commend or manifest his goodness than by assuming our flesh? How could He more strongly declare His mercy

than by clothing Himself with our miseries?" As Moses made known to men God the Creator, God the Master and Sovereign Lord, God the All powerful and the infinitely Just and Terrible, so the Incarnation and birth of Christ revealed to the world God the Saviour, the God of love, and tenderness, and mercy—God the Father and the Brother and the Friend of man. "The grace, the goodness and kindness of God the Saviour hath appeared to all men."

The Incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ gave hope of pardon and confidence to the guilty fallen world. He was the day-star from on high that rose above the horizon of time and shed the light of hope and the radiance of pardoning love like the smiles of God on the darkness of human misery and despair. "Fear not," said the angel, announcing the birth of Christ to the shepherds, who on the first Christmas night long ago were guarding their flocks on the hill-sides of Galilee, "fear not, for behold I bring you tidings of great joy that shall be unto all the people. For this day is born unto you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." "His name shall be called Jesus, for He is come to save His people from their sins." (Matt. i. 21.) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army praising God and singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will." (Luke II.) The object and purpose of the Saviour's mission was announced by the angel's voice at the same moment as his birth. He is a Saviour Christ the Lord; He is Jesus because he has come to save the people from their sins, and his birth brings to all humanity glad tidings of great joy; and the angelic hosts of heaven rejoice, and they make the midnight air resound with their heavenly music, and the hills and dales of Galilee re-echo the glad refrain, and the burden of their song is: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will." As Keble has it:

"What sudden blaze of song  
Spreads o'er th' expanse of heav'n?  
In waves of light it thrills along,  
Th' angelic signal given—  
"Glory to God!" from yonder central fire  
Flows out the echoing lay beyond the starry quire."

"Like circles widening round  
Upon a clear blue rivoir,  
Orb after orb, the wondrous sound  
Is echoed on for ever.  
"Glory to God on high, on earth be peace,  
And love towards men of love—salvation and release."

Jesus has come to destroy the kingdom of Satan and the reign of sin on the earth, and establish instead the kingdom of God's peace and love. All power is given to that Divine Child in heaven and on earth, and He will use that divine power to destroy the reign of Satan, to forgive sin, to save man and to restore a fallen guilty world to the friendship of God. The bruised reed He will not break, and the smoking flax He will not extinguish; He will have pity on human sufferings and compassion for human sorrows and afflictions. Under the beneficent exercise of His almighty power, the blind will see, the lame walk, the lepers will be cleansed, the deaf will hear, and the poor will have the Gospel preached to them, and that gospel will bring them hope and comfort. He will bring light to the intellect, love to the heart, strength to the will. He will reveal to the world saving truths till then forever hidden in the mind of God; He will establish His Church, and will empower it to represent Him in the world when He shall have returned to His eternal throne. That Church He will commission to teach all the truths He taught and He will make it the store-house of His sacramental graces. That church will feed the hungry, will clothe the naked, will relieve the poor, will visit the sick, will bring hope and peace into prison cell, will, like another Veronica, wipe the sweat and tears and blood from the face of suffering