

The Incarnation of Christ

THE incarnation must, for all who believe it, become the absolutely central truth of their philosophy. Just as the Copernican astronomy and the doctrine of evolution have enlarged and modified our views of the universe, so the incarnation, once accepted, throws a new light upon the entire world.

For, on the one hand, against mere idealism it emphasizes the value and importance of matter as being the agent through which God's spiritual purpose is effected, and, on the other hand, against mere materialism it interprets this value and importance as consisting in the capability to subserve this purpose.

Thus, while rejecting the respective negations of idealism and materialism, it sanctions their positive elements—the supremacy of spirit and the reality of matter—and so, supplementing each by the other, combines both in a concrete whole.

—J. R. Illingworth.

Christmas Gifts

What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise man,
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him—
Give my heart.

—Christina Rossetti.

Christmas gifts for thee,
Grand and free!
Christmas gifts from the King of Love,
Brought from his royal home above,
Brought to thee in the faroff land,
Brought to thee by his own dear hand,
Promises held by Christ for thee,
Peace as a river flowing free,
Joy that in his own joy must live
And love that infinite love can give.
Barely thy heart of hearts uplifts
Carols of praise for such Christmas gifts.

—Frances Ridley Havergal.

The Vision of the Angels

There is love in the will, truth in the understanding, peace on earth, good will among men. The sight of such a glorious vision, even in the dim distance of future ages, kindled the holy affections of the angels; and until their joy burst forth into an anthem of praise that filled the heavens with harmony.

"Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will among men." Let us take up the refrain, and let the earth re-echo the song "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will to men."—Rev. Chalmers Gilles.

Christ the Shepherd

It is certainly significant of the mission of Christ that shepherds should be the particular recipients of the angelic message. In beautiful parable the Master called himself the Good Shepherd. There is not one of the ordinary vocations of our busy life which has not in it ennobling and divine elements. Unswerving fidelity to the secret of honor.

Angels from the Realms of Glory

ANGELS from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth.
Ye who sang creation's story
Now proclaim Messiah's birth.
Come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King.

SHEPHERDS, in the field abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with man is now residing,
Yonder shines the infant light.
Come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King.

Religious Significance of Christmas

CHRISTMAS has new meanings as the years go on. There was a period—say half a century ago and less—when the religious meanings were somewhat enfeebled in the minds of many by the dazzling dominance of scientific discovery and thought.

To many whatever Christmas then had of spiritual meaning was rather in the way of sentiment, of tradition, of natural good fellowship and of the spirit of practical charity.

There was a haunting sense of unreality in the direct message of the pulpit, a feeling that the historic supernatural was much akin to the innocence of the Santa Claus myth itself.

Since then the Christ idea has taken new significance and proportions in those minds which are of the kind called skeptical, even in the minds over which the warrant of the supernatural has little sway or none at all.

In books and sermons one comes upon the preaching of the idea of Christ and the message of Christianity in a tone and in a language which appeal with tremendous force not only to the so-called orthodox, but to all serious minds of whatever training or tendency.—Century Magazine.

The Newborn King

To the superficial skeptic it may seem some ground for doubting the divine character of Jesus Christ that he should be born in a stable and laid in a manger and the first courtiers of the young King of the Jews should be the rude shepherds of Bethlehem. But, to him who thinks, these difficulties become rather evidences of his glorious character and beneficent mission to the human race. Between the stable of Bethlehem and the marble palace of the Caesars in Rome there can be, in the sight of God, only the difference between two little things, for all that is created must be little in the sight of the infinite God. And as the mission of Christ was to elevate the helpless and the poor it was eminently suitable that he should be born among them. For those who are weak enough to be scandalized at his poverty we say, Behold the kings of the east are prostrate at his feet, offering their gold, incense and myrrh. Being wise men, they well understood that the little child of earthly splendor was not essential to such a royalty as his.—Archbishop Ryan.

Christ's Perennial Love

The living green of the holly is suggestive of the perennial love of Jesus and the scarlet of the berry the price that was paid on Calvary, and as the circle is an emblem of eternity the wreath might teach us that—
His mercy flows an endless stream
To all eternity the same.

The Infant Christ In Art



Saint Anthony of Padua with the Infant Christ—Murillo.

AT no season of the year does human thought so circle around the Christ Child as at Christmas. In the manger, when the angel chorus sings again the heavenly message, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good will to men." Of course all lovers of art bow before the pictures which represent the life of Christ from the time of his birth to his crucifixion and resurrection and ascension.

One writer says: "There was an element in Christian art that classic art never admitted—that is, suffering. The central figure that in the splendor of his divine beauty has consecrated art forever, was it not that of the Master?"

It is to the pictures of the Christ Child rather than to man that he attention is especially directed at this season. The holy night, the Nativity, when as a babe he was cradled in a manger; the adoration of the shepherds, the visit of the wise men, the flight into Egypt, the presentation in the temple, besides the holy family and the Madonna, have been subjects of the masterpieces of the world's greatest artists.

These subjects of course have won and held the imagination of a long line of artists whose names would constitute a veritable roll of honor. At random one recalls the names of Giotto, Hans Memling, Mantegna, Ghirlandajo, Durer, Titian, Tintoretto, Rubens, Van Dyck, Raphael, Rembrandt, Murillo, Correggio, Fra Angelico and El Greco.

In modern art the gospel story no longer holds its old place, perhaps, save among the very devout. But on a secondary artistic level the sculpture and paintings sold for use in churches show that the events attending the infancy of Christ have, next to those of the crucifixion, the widest currency in representation. Many of the plaster figures, too, bought for home decoration represent scenes about the manger in Bethlehem, and so it is also with colored prints, paintings and lithographs.



A Chant of Christmas

Oh, holy night, the stars are brightly shining;
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth!
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
Oh, night divine! oh, night when Christ was born!

Truly he taught us to love one another.
His law is love, and his gospel is peace.
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother,
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymn of joy in grateful chorus raise we;
Let all within us praise his holy name.
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we;
His power and glory evermore proclaim!



The Mission of the Christ Child.
Wonderful indeed was the mission of the Christ Child. He gave himself to the world on the first Christmas day, and with him came every other good gift. This is what is typified by every Christmas tree and every gift it bears, by every bulging little stocking that hangs in the chimney corner, by every wreath of holly, by every greeting and merry wish. And this spirit, oh, how much it is needed on the 24th of December and on the 26th, as well as the 25th, and on every day of the round year as well. "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister"—this motto lived out on every day of the year would dispel the sorrows of the world, smooth out its wrinkles, abolish its poverty, soothe its pain, comfort its heartaches, heal its diseases, make it a heaven.—Rev. Dr. Francis E. Clark.

The Birthday of Sympathy.
Christmas day is the birthday of sympathy, human and divine. There was sympathy in the world before Christ was born, but the words, work and personality of Jesus give to it new meaning and make it universal. True sympathy rests upon universal brotherhood and that upon the universal fatherhood of God.—Rev. Charles H. Eaton.

The first Christmas

There were no mother dreams for her
Whose little son was born a king,
Though wise men came with gifts and
And star led shepherds, worshipping,
For she forebore the longing tears,
The heartache and the bitter loss,
That lay beyond the waiting years
Within the shadow of a cross.
And when she held his little form
Against her heart that Christmastide
She knew the hallow of her art,
Would one day should the Crucified,
And thus she held the hopes of old
To which humanity has clung
The story of her life is told.
And at its end a cross is hung.
O mothers, you whose love have known
The sweetness of a child's career,
Yet stand today bereft, alone,
With hearts that ache with emptiness,
Turn to that woman, weary-eyed
And pierced by life's supremest loss,
Whose mother love was crucified,
Whose hopes were shadowed by a cross.
And when the Christmas bells proclaim
The advent of the Saviour's birth
And far and wide his holy name
Goes ringing through the listening earth
Then let new hopes ascend like myrrh
From you whom grief has glorified
And sorrow made akin to her.
The mother of the Crucified!
—Ella Bentley.



"The Man of Sorrows."
The sad have their summons as well as the glad, and the desolate, like the blessed, must answer to the great call of the Christ spirit which rings through the world. He whose sacred birth we celebrate was above all else a man of sorrows. To many a human heart this is the dearest of his titles. Whoever bore trouble as he did? Whoever so grandly lifted the burden? Who so quietly and patiently and pleasantly, if one may say so, accepted the cruellest of lots? Who so flung his own misery out of sight and sound? Who so utterly quenched himself and his personal pang in the happiness and the comfort of others? There he stands, sorrowful and smiling, a spotless mirror.

The Sacred Day.
Thanks be to God for this sacred day, which beholds the family circle again united and makes home the happiest of all places this side of heaven. Thanks be to God for this sacred festival which makes his house fragrant with the trees of the forest and redolent with the incense of grateful hearts. Glory to God for his death and passion and the day of his victorious triumph over the powers of sin and death and hell.—Churchman.

The Children's Christmas

By EUGENE C. DOLSON

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IFTEEN wonder if ever
There are any so glad
as they,
The children hanging their
stockings
On the eve of Christmas day.

AND I wonder, too, if any
Would ever forget to
make
The children happy on Christmas
mas
For the infant Christ
Child's sake.

The Coming of the King

AFTER the shepherds returned to their flocks wise men came, bringing with them gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and coming into the presence of the heaven sent babe they fell down and worshipped him. And forty days after ward, when the virgin mother came into the temple at Jerusalem to offer the sacrifice which Moses had appointed for the birth of a male child, an old man, bending with the burdens and infirmities of years, moved by the Spirit of God, came bowing before the altar and, taking the infant in his withered arms, he lifted up his heart in thankfulness 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 before those words of joy and praise had fairly fallen from the old man's lips a still more aged person, a prophetess, coming into the temple, caught up the lingering strains of thankfulness and spoke of the child to all those that looked for redemption in Israel.

Such in brief were some of the peculiar circumstances of that wondrous advent whose returning anniversary season finds us in the Christian temple offering thanks and song and praise to God. Throughout the ages since then its influence has grown and broadened and deepened until the story of the King's coming is told in every zone and nation.

Christ and the Children

When rulers and titled men questioned him Jesus placed a child in the midst of them and said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Socrates sneered at the grief of a mother weeping for her babe. If Plato suggested that every village should select a distant hilltop and build a pen for the exposure of unwelcome children; if Aristotle urged laws making the death penalty on their parents; if Seneca said, "We stay the woman and her babe, and it is not worth her reason that she should weep a child from her womb"; if Plutarch related his friend for grief because he missed the dead babe, then every lover of childhood must rise up to speak for that Christ who took a child in his arms whose love brooded over the child as the stars looked down upon the little town of Bethlehem and who sent down through the ages this word, "Suffer little children to come unto me." Jesus said, "Take heed that ye offend not one of my little children," and "Their angels do always behold the face of my Father," and hope down d for childhood. From that hour Jesus' disciples began to make life happy for children.—Rev. Newell D. Hills.

Sublimity of Christ's Birth

WE find that some celebrated the Saviour's birth by publishing what they had heard and seen, and truly we may say of them that they had something to rehearse in men's ears well worth the telling. That something had in it the inimitable blending which is the secret sign and royal mark of divine authorship, a peerless marrying of sublimity and simplicity, angelic singing, singing to shepherds; heaven bright with glory, bright at midnight; God, a Babe, the Infinite, an Infant of a span long, the Ancient of Days, born of a woman! What more simple than the inn, the manger, a carpenter, a carpenter's wife, a child? What more sublime than the "multitude of heavenly host" waking the midnight with their joyous chorales and God himself in human flesh made manifest? A child is but an ordinary eight, but what a marvel to see that Word, which was "in the beginning with God, tabernacled among us, that we might behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth!"—Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon.

Christmas Bells

Shout aloud hosanna!
Oh, list the Christmas bells!
Hearken to the story
Their joyous music tells.
In Bethlehem, Judea,
Bathed in heaven's glow,
Lies the Christ, the Saviour,
In a manger low.

Peace, good will, he's bringing
To trusting souls on earth.
Angel hosts are singing
"Glory to God" at his birth.
Lo, the humble shepherds
Join the anthem sweet,
Leave their bleating flocks alone
The infant Christ to greet!

Still the bells are ringing,
Sounding forth his praise.
The wise man from the far east
His grateful homage pays.
And we, O King, thy children,
Humbly bend the knee,
Take our lives, O Saviour,
A Christmas gift to thee!

—Mary Rennick.

The Nativity

The Nativity has found its best treatment in painting. The early painters dealt only with the fundamental theme—the Virgin, in humility and adoration, and without the holy joy that the Christ Child had been born into the world, largely introduced by later artists; St. Joseph, gravely, wonderingly silent, the shepherds and the hymning angels. The chronology of the several events generally grouped under the subject of the Nativity has, of course, sent observance, as a rule, at the hands of the artists. The adoration of the Magi and the annunciation to the shepherds are depicted on the same canvas. An altar piece now in the Metropolitan Art Museum, New York City, makes use of the simultaneous scene in its arrangement. The shepherds are hearing the message of the angels, and the kings come not, however, as commonly shown, with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, but unattended.

