
DOMINICANA

Vol. XXII

DECEMBER, 1937

No. 4

CHILD OF BETHLEHEM

EDWARD DOMINIC FENWICK, O.P.

ONG before the birth of the Infant Christ in Bethlehem, Isaias the prophet had cried in exultant joy: "A child is born to us, a son is given to us."¹ The holy Prophet had called to great joy in hope those who were sick of that world grown old in sin. The world was dark because men's hearts were dark. There was needed a Light. This Light was to come in the form of a little child in Whom was life and His life the light of men, the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world. So the Church of Christ has cried down through the years: "A child is born to us." A mysterious cry, coming from the lips of a prophet, but not quite so mysterious is the truth that only children hear this cry. Only children see the Light, children of God, in whose hearts there shines the Light of innocence. "Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God."²

Truly is Christmas the Feast of children. It is a spiritual feast of spiritual children. The eternal Son of God becomes a little child that He might make men children of His Father. "A son is given to us." The Son of God becomes a little baby that children might be able to fondle Him. A mystery, indeed, but children do not mind mysteries. They would be sad without them. They alone can really grasp them. Children always believe their father. We believe even though we wonder as all children wonder. We rejoice as only chil-

¹ Isaias, ix, 6.

² Matt., v, 8.

dren can rejoice. Our hearts almost burst with joy because: "A child is born to us and a son is given to us."

Christ is born in Bethlehem. Celestial voices are heard on high. Angels sing: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will."³ In the little town of Bethlehem, hidden among the hills of Judea, where shepherds watch their flocks, the Saviour of the world is born. "This day is born to you a Saviour Who is Christ the Lord."⁴ The shepherds wonder, but they do not doubt. They do not stop to reason whether or not this thing could have come to pass. Had not the Father promised a Saviour? Children never mistrust their Father, nor do they place any limits to His power or His goodness. The shepherds simply go over to see and to adore.

Glory to God and peace on earth, peace to children. Only children can enjoy peace, children of God. What harm can come to children of God? Who is more powerful than their Father? What is there that their Father cannot and will not give them if they but ask? Only children know the meaning of that Peace which the world cannot give. The Prince of Peace is the Gift of Christmas, given by the Father to His children. The holy prophet who sang of the Christmas Babe could also sing of peace: "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord: and great shall be the peace of thy children."⁵ And later the Child of Bethlehem would say to those little ones who had followed Him: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, do I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid."⁶ Is not this the language of children? What more simple and yet more sublime! The Feast of Children is indeed the Feast of Peace. The Child of Bethlehem brings peace, for in Him is life. War brings death. Death means separation, but life means union. Peace is union. The greatest union is in simplicity, hence in simplicity is the greatest peace. The great secret of Christianity is revealed to little hearts as they gaze into the eyes of the simple little Babe of Bethlehem. Eternal Wisdom lies there on His simple bed of straw. This little Babe, the Light of the world, offers infinite riches to those who can be little enough to receive them.

Bethlehem is not something of the past, something of two thousand years ago. Bethlehem is ever present. Simple shepherds still go there to see and to adore. Angels are still singing. Dumb animals still keep the Infant Babe warm with their breath. Christmas is still

³ Luke, II, 14.

⁴ Luke, II, 11.

⁵ Isaias, LIV, 13.

⁶ John, XIV, 27.

the Feast of children, but perhaps some of us are growing up, getting old along with the world, breathing its breath of sin. Christ's Church never ceases to cry: "A child is born to us and a son is given to us. Come, let us adore, It is Christ the Lord," but men go their way. Christian littleness, Christian simplicity, children themselves, all these are simply annoying. In our materialistic world has not our concept of greatness been altered? That things must be big in order to be great seems to be the idea today. Infinite Greatness became a tiny Babe in order to teach men the greatness of littleness, the truth of humility. Must we not learn this lesson anew? Greatness in littleness! This is the secret of Bethlehem as indeed it is the secret, the mystery of Christianity.

The Saviour of the world—a little Baby born of a humble mother—His foster father a poor carpenter—His crib a manger—His garments swaddling clothes! A little child comes to renew the face of the earth, to free men from the bondage of sin, to establish peace in truth. God uses the weak things, the little things of this world to confound the strong. Does not Bethlehem teach us this? God loves the poor in spirit and theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Does not Bethlehem teach us that the poor little ones of God are the truly rich? Worldly wisdom is foolishness to God. How eloquently does the reality of Bethlehem preach this. Infinite Wisdom chooses Bethlehem. Littleness is the greatness God would have us learn. "I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father; for so hath it seemed good in thy sight."⁷

Hardly can we learn of Christ, hardly can we know His meek and humble Heart unless we meet Him first in Bethlehem. Hardly can we receive the treasures of His Sacred Heart unless we first kneel in the simplicity of faith at His lowly manger crib. There it is that the mystery of sacrifice will be revealed in a language we can understand. "He emptied Himself taking on the form of a servant."⁸ Eternal Wisdom—a helpless Babe! From what heights Thou hast descended, O Babe of Bethlehem! Why hast Thou come? What dost Thou seek? What can we give Thee which Thou dost not already possess? From the tiny lips comes the simple answer: "Love." What else does a child seek but love? This is wisdom and who can teach it better than a child? Who is more capable of love than a child? Loving is giving. A child gives himself. He has nothing else to give. Sacrifice through love is the mystery shining in the eyes of

⁷ Matt., XI, 25-26.

⁸ Philippians, II, 7.

Bethlehem's Babe. He emptied Himself. Losing is to find, giving is to receive, dying is to live. We must lose ourselves in littleness; we must give our hearts in love; we must die to sin. The Christian mystery: we must lose ourselves in Christ. There is no other way to Peace. There is no other way to Life.

The Feast of little ones indeed! This Little One of Bethlehem, as He lay on His little crib of straw that first Christmas night, did He not see the span of the years ahead? So may we, gazing into those innocent eyes, see Him thirty or more years later at Capharnaum. His disciples, not yet having learned the greatness of littleness, came to Him, saying: "Who thinkest Thou is the greater in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus, calling unto him a little child, set him in the midst of them, and said: Amen I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven and he that shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me."⁹ And again, to His disciples thinking the little children might annoy Jesus and attempting to put them aside, Jesus said: "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not to come to me: for the kingdom of heaven is for such."¹⁰ Are there any more beautiful passages in the Gospels than these? The Babe of Bethlehem came to establish a kingdom of little children. St. John, the beloved disciple, who as a little child leaned on the sacred breast of the Master that he might feel the throbs of His Sacred Heart, could simply say: "Little children, love one another."¹¹

Lost in simple adoration at the feet of our Little Master, warmed in the sunshine of His smile, drinking at the fountain of Incarnate Wisdom, we have followed Him in the vision of the coming years. It is all merely a prolongation of Bethlehem. The Master can never cease to be the Child of Bethlehem. Divine Wisdom can never leave the path of littleness. Mystic childhood is merely the life of grace the Child of Bethlehem gives to those who can be little enough to appreciate the Gift of a child. O Babe of Bethlehem, Son of God Who became a son of man that the sons of men might become sons of God, grant that the children of men might learn the wisdom of littleness and return to You in Bethlehem. Draw them by Thy grace so that, in great simplicity of faith and love, they might hear the song of the angels and follow the simple shepherds. Drawing nigh to your hum-

⁹ Matt., xviii, 1-5.

¹⁰ Matt., xix, 14.

¹¹ St. Jerome, *Comm. in Gal.*, vi, 10.

ble abode they will see the Light, know true Peace and find Life. This we beg of You, O Child of Bethlehem, for nothing so saddens us as to see children wandering from their Father's house, not knowing the Way, ignorant of the Truth, dwelling in the shadows of death. O Light of the world, shine upon their hearts, direct their steps, lead them to Bethlehem.

The Child of Bethlehem will hear us if we pray with the true simplicity of littleness. Thank God there are still some little ones in the hidden places of the world, some little ones living the life of grace. Bethlehem has not lost its life. As we kneel in humble adoration before the little white Host, Bethlehem and its mystery is unveiled before our eyes. Nothing can harm Him. The world may continue in its attempts to rob Christmas of its riches as did Herod to seek its very Life. Herod failed and so will the world of today fail, for not even the gates of hell can prevail against the Child of Bethlehem.