

THE INCARNATION — A STORY

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CHRISTMAS: what does it mean to us? During this joyous and happy season, we manifest and find manifested everywhere a spirit of good-will toward all. But whence have we inherited this legacy? If we were to judge from the vast majority of people, we would be forced to admit that Christmas is only a secular holiday set aside for the exchange of gifts. From this spirit of giving ensues naturally a spirit of good-will. But not so for the Christian, and above all not so for Catholics—our cause of happiness is that “this day is born to us a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David.” With the Angels we say to all men, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good-will.” So for a deeper, truer appreciation of this Great Mystery, let us reverently contemplate the Incarnation, God made man.

Man, when first created, was so united to his Creator that there was perfect coördination and subordination between them. In this state, man needed no mediator to approach God.¹ Before the fall, all of man's lower faculties were subjected perfectly to his reason, and his reason to God. Man could and did serve and worship God in the highest manner, as was fitting that a creature should.² But by the fall, man lost sanctifying Grace; his faculties and reason were so de-ordinated from God, that of himself he could never again serve his Creator so as to obtain finally his ultimate end, union with God.³ How then, could Creator and creature be again brought together? To span this infinitude of separation, God in His blessed Wisdom ordained the union of these natures, divine and human, in the one Eternal Person of the Word. He, Jesus Christ was to be the bridge that would span the gulf between God and man. Hence was to be accomplished the reunion of earth to heaven.

Our concept of this Mystery of mysteries we find most admirably expressed in St. John's Gospel: “And the Word was made flesh

¹ *De Malo*, q. 4, ad 7; *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 94, a. 1.

² *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 95, a. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, q. 85.

and dwelt among us.”⁴ While pondering these words, we indeed must cry with the Apostle, “O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments and how unsearchable his ways!”⁵ For contained in this unfathomable truth, we will find the source of all the other great mysteries and graces of our redemption; in it we behold the incomprehensible power, wisdom and goodness of our God, displayed in an amazing degree; in it we discover a prodigy of omnipotence, to excite our astonishment, adoration, and praise; and a miracle of love, to kindle in our souls the affections of an ardent love for the Lord our God.

As we contemplate this infinitude of condescension, the question naturally comes to our minds: why did God so deign to honor man? or again, why was this necessary? and what could be the cause that moved God to give such a privilege and honor to man? To conceive of the necessity for a Redeemer is fundamental to the Christian religion.

Recall how Almighty God after creating the first parents of all mankind, assured them that they and their posterity were destined for eternal happiness, provided that they should prove faithful to His precepts. If man had fulfilled his part of the promise, God would have so rewarded him. But as we know, man transgressed God’s command, thereby forfeiting every title to the promise. Adam and Eve and all of their guilty posterity were excluded forever from that promised happiness.⁶ Besides, all were condemned to the severest punishments—to sickness, sufferings and death, and to the evils, vicissitudes and calamities of this life.⁷ Because of their extreme helplessness they would have so remained forever, had not Almighty God in His great Mercy promised them a Redeemer. Through His merits they were to be elevated from that state of degradation and again enjoy the privileges of eternal happiness. Of himself, man had not the power even to begin satisfying for the infinite insult and injury given to his Creator and Benefactor. The injury was so enormous that it could be properly atoned for only by a mediator of infinite merit. Hence it required the interposition of no less than the Son of God to make complete satisfaction—such a satisfaction as God the Father could not refuse to accept.⁸

Let us give “glory to the Lord, because He is good; because His

⁴ *John*, i, 14.

⁵ *Rom.*, xi, 33.

⁶ *Summa Theol.*, q. 81, a. 1-3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, q. 85, a. 3-5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, III, q. 1, a. 2.

mercy endureth forever.”⁹ How truly David had spoken for us. When the Angels fell from their sacred mansions of bliss by their inordinate pride, they were irretrievably lost; no Redeemer was promised to them. But the case was quite different with regard to mankind. Immediately after the fall, a Redeemer was promised.¹⁰ Before His coming, belief in Him constituted the essential and fundamental point of religion. Just as there is no salvation now unless we believe in Jesus and do as He taught, so in the early ages, there was no salvation unless one believed that He was to come and fulfill all things.¹¹ In the words of St. Paul, “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law; that He might redeem them who were under the law; that we might receive the adoption of Sons.”¹²

This fulness of time having arrived, “the Almighty word leapt down from heaven, from His royal throne” and “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”¹³ How can our feeble minds ever conceive the greatness of this truth, the very foundation of our faith? So as to appreciate it to the best of our ability, let us meditate attentively upon the infinite bounty of the Word of God, Who, though infinitely happy in Himself because of His own essential felicity, was pleased to come down from heaven in order to take our nature upon Himself. Thus He would be able to suffer and die; and by suffering and dying on the cross He would reconcile mankind with His Almighty Father and thereby once again entitle us to the possession of heaven, from which we were excluded by our first parent’s sin and transgression.

When we use the title *the Word*, of whom are we speaking? It is He Who was in the beginning with God, Who was God, and Who collaborated with the Father in creating all things; yes, He it is Who became flesh. He took human nature of the substance of His mother, uniting it to His divine Person. Being from all Eternity God, He could not cease to be God; but in Time, He was made perfect man. Two natures were united in the one person of the Son of God, without being intermingled or changed. Each nature was intact; yet their union was indivisible. Thus, God became incarnate, and Jesus Christ was and is perfect God and perfect man. To think of this mystery properly, we must bear in mind the union of the two distinct natures and the perfection of Christ’s manhood.¹⁴

⁹ *Ps.*, cxxxv, 26.

¹⁰ *Genesis*, iii.

¹¹ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 98, a. 2 ad 4.

¹² *Gal.*, iv, 4-5.

¹³ *John*, i, 14.

¹⁴ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 2, ff.

In His divine Nature, He subsisted as the Second Person in the Blessed Trinity, eternally begotten of the Father and consubstantial with Him. His humanity was created in time and formed by the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. Cyril says: "His two natures have knit themselves the one to the other, and in that nearness are as incapable of intermixture as of separation. Their cohesion has not taken away the difference between them. Flesh has not become God, but has still continued flesh, although it be now the flesh of God."

The term most startling to the mind's eye and filled with the deepest of meaning, is that of *flesh*. St. John is most emphatic and wants to impress upon us that the Word of God, the only begotten of the Father, did not manifest Himself or only take on the appearance of man and flesh, but was *made flesh*, that is, *became flesh* really and truly. Indeed how very expressive is the term flesh, and how strikingly it brings out the contrast between the human and the divine elements of the union. That very flesh, so despicable; that flesh, subject to so many miseries; that flesh, which is common to us and the brute creation, He, the almighty and eternal God took to Himself, rendering it common to Himself and us. He made Himself like unto us. He espoused our nature and made it His own. He remained confined in the womb of His mother, like other children. He became an infant like unto them, subject to all the humiliations, all the infirmities and all the weaknesses of that tender age.¹⁵ How stupendous the marvel! how astonishing the humiliations! most of all, how amazing the annihilations which the only begotten Son of God underwent for us. The distance between man and the smallest insect that crawls on the ground is at least not infinite; but there always has been and there always will be an infinite distance between God and man. The Word incarnate has willed to humble Himself thus, for our sakes, and to unite in one and the same person two natures so different as those of God and man, the Lord and the servant, the Creator and the creature, the highest and the lowest, all that is great in Heaven and that which is little upon earth.

After considering the manner in which Our Divine Lord has humbled Himself in His Incarnation, let us observe His reason for this boundless manifestation of Love. St. Paul tells us that the aim of our Lord was to exalt us from our fallen state by making us partakers of His divine nature: "becoming poor, for your sakes; that through His poverty you might be rich."¹⁶ Thus we become with

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, q. 5, a. 1-2.

¹⁶ 2 *Cor.*, viii, 9.

Him sons of God, and if sons, continues the 'Apopstle, heirs also,—“heirs indeed of God and joint-heirs with Christ.”¹⁷ Thus we were raised to a higher degree of dignity than that from which we had fallen. Yes, the chief purpose of Our Lord was that since we “the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner . . . (might be) partaker of the same: that through death, He might destroy him who had the empire of death, that is to say, the devil;” and that He might deliver us from his servitude.¹⁸ “He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and might cleanse to Himself a people acceptable, a pursuer of good works.”¹⁹

Oh God, how can we, such poor, feeble creatures, thank Thee for such an infinite manifestation of love and condescension? Surely the only fitting expression of our gratitude and the only one really acceptable to the Father, is a submissive adherence to the words and teachings of Jesus His Son. Woe to us indeed, if after God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son,”²⁰ we should make void this gift of gifts. Our prayer, dear heavenly Father, is that the coming of Thy Son into the world may be the means by which we will have life everlasting. Amen.

¹⁷ *Rom.*, viii, 16-17.

¹⁸ *Heb.*, ii, 14-15.

¹⁹ *Titus*, ii, 14.

²⁰ *John*, iii, 16.

SNOW

SEBASTIAN CARLSON, O.P.

Befouled with sins of money, blood, and lust,
That man has branded on its vernal crust,
The world throws off its green, assumes the gown
Of penitent, of grey and humble brown.

And Christ, Who would not see us die, forgives,
And sends the snow. Again earth-beauty lives.