

OUR INNOCENT RECEPTION OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY

Adapted from a piece by Rev. F. E. Gyllenhaal

“There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Luke 2:11

Our Lord is Jehovah God in human form, born of the virgin Mary. The Creator of the universe, the Fountain of life, He who alone lives, He who eternally rules heaven and earth and hell, the Redeemer and Savior of humankind, was born a babe on earth. We worship Him. We strive to do His teaching. We learn about His marvelous works and try to understand them, so that we may wisely use what He has given into our hands. But our affections are most deeply stirred, our thoughts most sharply concentrated, by the holy story of His birth, of the Lord as a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, adored by shepherds, worshiped by wise men, tenderly watched over by the wondering virgin mother.

It is not that we worship the Lord as an infant. We worship Him as God-Man. The Divine Human is the perfect Man, glorified, and altogether Divine. But the infant Lord, the Holy Baby, was innocence itself revealed to people; and the eternal sphere of that innocence is communicated to all who think of Him as the Holy Baby, and with song and good will worship Him. The innocence of our own infancy is awakened, a state in which the Lord can dwell with us, even though it is only for a time—while the state is active, while the affections and thoughts are spiritually quickened. The yearly celebration of His birth, of the Lord as the Holy Baby, renews and strengthens with us the sphere of innocence, enabling us to partake of it, to receive it in ever increasing measure. In this manner the foundations of regeneration are renewed and strengthened. Because of this re-awakening of our states of innocence, we are moved with good will toward others, moved to kindly and helpful words and deeds, so that all people may know the joy we feel and share it.

The innocence of infancy, however, is an innocence of ignorance, or an innocence devoid of intelligence and wisdom. Therefore, it is not genuine innocence. Only with the Holy Baby was innocence genuine (because He was born celestial-spiritual). With human beings, the innocence of infancy is representative of the genuine innocence that comes as intelligence and wisdom are acquired by a good life—a life lived according to the truth of the Word. And the innocence of infancy is a plane for the reception of knowledge, by which, gradually, the infant becomes an adult. The knowledges, which are increasingly acquired, give form and character to the child's loves and affections, and so become recipient vessels for heavenly things.

Therefore, year after year, we learn the meaning of the Lord's birth. These spiritual knowledges are of the utmost importance to us as children, young people, and older people, for they qualify the sphere of innocence in our celebration of the Lord's birth, and they make our reception and enjoyment of it possible. Unless we have increasing knowledge and understanding of the spiritual meaning of the holy story—thus of the purposes for which the Lord was born on earth, and the work He did and continues to do in fulfillment of its purposes—the celebration of His birth becomes a merely natural festival. It then lacks the eternal spirit that has saving qualities

and genuine peace and good will. For the groundwork laid by our affections becomes fruitful only through the work of regeneration. A celebration of the Lord's birth which is both spiritual and natural gives us a renewed impulse to work on regeneration.

The greatest accommodation on the part of the infinite and invisible God—the Ancient of Days, the Jehovah of the Old Testament—was that He came to earth as a person. First He became a Baby, helpless and ignorant, but with all the innocent appeal of an infant. This marvelous accommodation took place, not only two thousand years ago, but perpetually ever since, especially in our celebrations of the Lord's birth.

All the particulars of the story are designed to raise our thoughts to the Lord as God-Man and Man-God, upward from the earth, the merely natural, to heaven and above the heavens to the Divine Itself. The sacred story yearly instructs us in the truth, of which He then was the incarnation. It shows us the high purpose of His coming and the pattern of our regeneration. It deeply stirs our affections for these things, for His good and truth, and for our fellow human beings. The telling and picturing of the story draws forth our love for the Lord our Savior, a love which He implants in little children through worship all year round and through the yearly celebration of His birth into the world with prayers, songs, and gifts of good will. These joyful celebrations gather us together into His fold, to a life of hope and usefulness.

Let us then open our minds and hearts to the Lord; not only to the story of His coming as an innocent Baby, but also to the light and life flowing from Him. And let us join the angelic choirs in the song,

*“Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will toward men.”*

Luke 2:14