

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

THE LIGHT SHINETH IN DARKNESS

by the Rev. Arne Bau-Madsen

We know from the Word that the Lord was born in the middle of the night. It is true that it is not stated in just so many words. But we are told in the Gospel of Luke: “And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid” (Luke 2: 8,9).

It certainly is safe to assume that the angel bringing the joyful message to the shepherds would appear at the moment when this greatest of all miracles took place. But there is a further reason to conclude that the Lord indeed (would be/was) born in the darkest hours of the night. We are taught in the Writings that all the things pertaining to the Lord’s life on earth, the things He said, the things He did, all the things that happened to Him, were representative and significant; that is, they had an internal meaning in the same manner as the entire Word does. For the Lord came as the Word made *flesh*, which is also why the Lord’s coming is thus described in the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:1-5).

And there was indeed a great darkness among people at the time of the Lord’s coming on earth. The pagan empire of the Romans, the very embodiment of worldliness and love of dominion, had extended its power over most of the civilized world, including the land of the Jews. And among the Jews, the only nation possessing some true knowledge of God, religion and worship had become utterly perverted. They no longer looked to the teachings of the Word, but for their own traditions and interpretations, many, such as the Pharisees, were pure hypocrites. The priests only cared about worldly power and possessions. We can see this from the fact that they allowed money changers and merchants to conduct their business in the temple itself. There was a similar state of darkness and disorder in the spiritual world. The hells had risen in rebellion against the Lord. They had begun to gain power over some of the heavenly societies. They became like a dark cloud, cutting off the flow of life and light from the Lord to people on earth. So bad had it become, we are told, that if the Lord had not come at that time, to fight against the hells and subdue them, and teach the truth to people on earth, the whole human race would have been destroyed.

The same thing happened again centuries later. In Swedenborg’s time, the Christian Church was coming to an end. The minds of men had again been darkened and confused by false doctrines teaching that there were three gods, that people did not need to lead a good life to go to heaven, and that it was futile or even sinful to try to understand the teachings of the Word, just to mention a few. Many of the learned men had begun to teach openly that there was no God. In the spiritual world the black cloud of the hells was again rising up towards the heavens. That was when the Lord made His Second Coming, restoring the order in the spiritual world through the

Last Judgment. He brought the light of truth back to people on earth by means of the Heavenly Doctrine—which we also call “the Writings.”

But as you think about this you may wonder why the Lord waited so long—in both instances many centuries—before He came to defeat the hells and disperse the darkness in the minds of men. The Lord, after all, knows all things and has all power. He is omniscient and omnipotent, as it is also called. He would know all the time what was going on and even what was going to happen. He certainly would have the power to drive back the hells as soon as they began to rise up, revealing Himself to people on earth in all His glory and power, and thus restoring the Church on earth. But instead He waited. He permitted things to get worse and worse, even to the brink of disaster. And why was that?

To understand it we must bear in mind a very important teaching given in the Writings. The Lord, in His government of the human race, above all else looks to the protection of man’s freedom. It is said that the Lord guards this as the apple of His eye. It is even more important to Him than man’s salvation. And if you think about it you can see that it must be so. Heaven, or salvation, is eternal happiness with the Lord. And happiness cannot exist without freedom. Whenever you are forced to do something, even if it is something you would usually find interesting or enjoyable, you just can’t enjoy it the same way you would if you had chosen it yourself. Or imagine that the Lord suddenly appeared to all people in His glory. He then told them that they were to stop doing evil. Then He punished them at once every time they were about to do something wrong. It wouldn’t take us very long to learn to behave ourselves, would it? It would seem as if evil had been defeated and heaven had come on earth. But that wouldn’t really be true. The evil thoughts and desires would still be within them. People would just be too afraid to put them into act. So there could be no real happiness. Everyone would take great pains to be nice to each other and do what was right, but they would not love it at all.

Only as we learn the truth, think about it, and see how harmful and stupid evil is, and then decide to resist it, only then can the Lord enter into our hearts. Only then will He drive out the hells and put in their place a love of good that will grow to all eternity. And that was also why the Lord waited so long before He came. It was necessary to prepare people to receive Him in freedom. He did not want them to obey Him out of fear. He wanted them to listen to His teachings, understand them, and make them part of their lives because they saw that they were good and right. That is the way that the Lord is born in the darkness of our minds. And that is why He was born in the dark of night in Bethlehem of Judea, to become the Savior of all people.

Texts: Luke 2: 8-9; John 1: 1-5