

THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN ON CHRISTMAS

by Rev. Donald L. Rose

In the Hebrew language “BETH” means “house.” It makes part of the names of Palestinian cities. Bethshemesh, is “house of the sun.” Bethsaida means house of fishing, Bethphage, the house of figs.

And then there was Bethlehem the town called “little” by prophets of old. Small it might be, but this “house of bread” breathed a unique significance and prophetic hope.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king. The child grew and “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). In the fullness of time He proclaimed His identity and mission. “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger” (John 6:35). “I am the bread which came down from heaven” (verse 41).

According to theologian Emanuel Swedenborg “bread” is a chosen symbol for love. Love in action is the accomplishment of a beloved task. “I have food to eat of which you do not know,” said Jesus. The disciples were slow to grasp this. Why would their master say such a thing? But Jesus went on to say, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34).

It is a heavenly nourishment, says Swedenborg, to will and to do what is good and true. When we are engaged in loving service we dine, as it were, on angels’ food (Heavenly Secrets number 5293).

Completing His work for mankind Jesus arose from the tomb of His burial and continued for forty days to appear in His Divine Human form. Two said they recognized Him “in the breaking of bread” (Luke 24:35). He had walked with them as a stranger, but when He broke bread before them “their eyes were opened and they knew Him.”

Jesus endeavored to lift the minds of His followers to sense a higher meaning of bread. On a certain occasion Jesus was with disciples in a sailing vessel, and it happened that “they had forgotten to take bread.” (Mark 8:14). When Jesus spoke to them of bread or “leaven,” they immediately concluded that it was because of the forgotten bread. Jesus responded with a memorable rebuke.

“Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand?” “Having eyes do you not see? And having ears do you not hear?” (Mark 8:18).

He reminded them that they had seen Him take a few loaves and feed thousands. Their ears heard sayings that no one ever spoke before. And those sayings were invested with loving purpose. “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

“I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). “I am the living bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die” (John 6:50).

As shepherds in that town of Bethlehem spread abroad the message that they heard from angels of heaven, so those disciples set forward a movement inspired by love and centered in love.

We hear the message down the ages. Come ye, oh come ye to the house of bread.

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