

March/69.



"WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night:
if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

ASPECTS OF THE INCARNATION - I

In the Bible the incarnation is referred to as a mystery. One reads:

No one would deny that this religion of ours is a tremendous mystery, resting as it does on the One who showed himself as a human being, and met as such, every demand of the Spirit in the sight of the angels.¹

But the word, "mystery" (μυστηριον), as used in the New Testament does not carry the enigmatic concept that we often conceive in the English use of the word. Quoting J. A. Robinson, Moulton and Milligan state that "in the New Testament sense a mystery is 'not a thing which *must* be kept secret. On the contrary, it is a secret which God wills to make known and has charged His Apostles to declare to those who have ears to hear it.'"²

But having recognized this fact, we need to understand that the study of the incarnation is not a subject to which we can give only passing attention, and content ourselves with elementary conclusions. It is a problem for deep study, for it was "the most marvelous thing that ever took place in earth or heaven."³

While Bethlehem was the point of contact of heaven with earth, unless we understand clearly basic facts concerning the Godhead prior to Bethlehem, we shall not correctly interpret what happened when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."⁴ It is stated in the Spirit of Prophecy this way:

There is light and glory in the truth that Christ was one with the Father before the foundations of the world were laid. This is the light shining in a dark place, making it resplendent with divine, original glory. This truth, infinitely mysterious in itself, explains

other mysterious and otherwise unexplainable truths, while it is enshrined in light, unapproachable and incomprehensible.⁵

The first aspect of the incarnation that we need to consider is that the One who was born at Bethlehem had existed prior to that time and place as a member of the Godhead. It was *not a different One* who appeared in humanity from the One who had existed with the divine Father from all eternity.

The Divine Ego, Spirit, or whatever human word you wish to use to describe the individuality, the self identity, of the second Person of the Godhead, was not created at Bethelhem, but came to be in another form. He who was in the form of God took upon Himself humanity. "This was not done by going out of Himself to another, but by taking humanity into Himself."⁵ Of this we are told:

Christ, at an infinite cost, *by a painful process*, mysterious to angels as well as man, assumed humanity. Hiding His divinity, laying aside His glory, *He was born a babe in Bethelhem.*⁶

This transition will ever remain for us an unfathomable fact. Mary provided, by normal process, the human organism in which the pre-existent One was to function and express Himself. But to transmute Himself into this human form required the unlimited power of the Godhead. This power was conveyed through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. Luke states the message of the angel in these words - "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and *the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.*"⁷

Paul provides a deep insight into this great transition. He states that Christ, "emptied Himself"⁸ The meaning of the word, translated, "emptied" (εκενωσεν) can be illustrated by its usage in contemporary papyrii. Moulton and Milligan cite the example of a man in the Imperial corn service writing that he finished unloading (emptying) his boat on a certain date.⁹ By disposing of his cargo, the man reduced the boat to its basic identity - an empty structure with the capacity to receive another cargo. Paul in his epistle⁸ is simply

stating that Christ emptied Himself to the absolute minimum for the transition of His identity into human form that God might be revealed to man. We have already noted that this process was painful, but here Paul asserts that the power of the Highest exerted Itself back upon Itself to effect the incarnation. The language in the Greek is emphatic. Literally translated it reads, "But Himself, He emptied." (αλλα εαυτον εκενωσεν) It was just the first step in the pathway to the cross.

In this Scriptural statement on the incarnation, Paul does not stop with the fact of the transition, but employs language that we might understand what Christ accepted in the transition. He was in the "form of God"; but exchanged this existence for the "form of a servant." In so doing, He appeared in "fashion" as a man. Two different Greek words are used here. The word for "form" (μορφη) signifies that which is essential in the form, the basic nature; while the word, "fashion" (σχημα) denotes the external appearance.¹⁰ Even as Christ in His pre-existent state was in substance, God - "the express image" of the Father¹¹ - so when He emptied Himself, He became in substance, man, and appeared physically as any other human being. Paul is not saying that He ceased to be God, for His very Ego was divine, and could be nothing else. But Paul in the contrast is emphasizing the fact that in accepting the nature of the human, it was the "slave" form. "He took on Him the form of a servant" (δουλος - slave) "It was in the order of God that Christ should take upon Himself the form and nature of fallen man."¹²

The question naturally arises relative to this "slave-form" that Christ accepted - What was the bondage inherent in the human form that Christ took upon Himself? Paul does not leave us in darkness as to what he meant. He stated that God sent His Son in "the likeness of sinful flesh"¹³ The children of men are in bondage - slavery - but Christ came to deliver those who residing

in the shadow of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. To accomplish this, He took the same flesh and blood that the children of men have, for "in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren."¹⁴ Paul would have us understand that Christ accepted the liabilities of the slave-form of mankind, and the limitations of the physical organism, - "He was found in fashion as a man." "He was not only made flesh, but He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh."¹⁵

Jesus illustrated this very work in a question He asked the caviling Pharisees. He questioned:

How can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house. ¹⁶

Paul describes the house of the strongman as "the body of this death."¹⁷ It is controlled by the law of sin and death.¹⁸ Its power lies in the impossibility of the sinful flesh to resist its demands. It is indeed a slave-form. But Christ being transmuted into the likeness of sinful flesh, from Bethlehem to Calvary condemned sin in the flesh. This will likewise be accomplished in all who choose to walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.¹⁹

At this aspect of the incarnation many draw back and declare that if Christ indeed had such a nature to contend with, He could not help but sin. And so because He did not sin, many want to conclude that His human nature was different from the one they receive through human inheritance. But the fact that He did not sin, does not limit the liability of the human nature He assumed. We are to ponder "Christ's humiliation. He took upon Himself *fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin.*"²⁰

To soften the impact of the slave nature, it is frequently quoted from the Spirit of Prophecy that "He [Christ] is a brother in our infirmities, but not possessing like passions."²¹ In so doing we overlook that the source of

inspiration also states - "Though He had *all* the *strength of passion of humanity*, never did He yield to temptation to do one single act which was not pure and elevating and ennobling."²² And because of this, "He [Christ] knows how strong are the inclinations of the natural heart."²³

Why should this be? We are informed:

Christ did in reality unite the *offending nature* of man with His own sinless nature, because by this act of condescension He would be enabled to pour out His blessing in behalf of the fallen race. Thus He has made it possible for us to partake of His nature.²⁴

Truly -----

The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study.²⁵

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- ¹I Timothy 3:16 Phillips
²James H. Moulton & George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament, p. 420, art., $\mu\sigma\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\sigma\upsilon\nu$
³Ellen G. White, Ms. 79, 1903 (7BC:904)
⁴John 1:14
⁵Ellen G. White, "The Word Made Flesh", Review & Herald, April 5, 1906
⁶Ellen G. White, Ms. 29, 1899
⁷Luke 1:35 ⁸Phil. 2:7 RV Read whole passage - Philipians 2:5-8
⁹James H. Moulton & George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament, p. 340, art., $\kappa\epsilon\nu\omega\omega$
¹⁰Ibid., p. 619, art., $\sigma\chi\eta\mu\alpha$ ¹¹Hebrews 1:3
¹²Ellen G. White, Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 2, p. 39
¹³Romans 8:3 ¹⁴Hebrews 2:14-15, 17
¹⁵Ellen G. White, Ms. W-106-1896
¹⁶Matthew 12:29 ¹⁷Romans 7:24 ¹⁸Romans 8:2 ¹⁹Romans 8:4
²¹Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 2, p. 202
²²Ellen G. White, In Heavenly Places, p. 155
²³Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, p. 177
²⁴Ellen G. White, "The Lord's Vineyard", Review & Herald, July 17, 1900
²⁵Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, bk., i, p. 244
²⁰Ellen G. White, The Youth's Instructor, Dec. 20, 1900 (4BC:1147)

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