

THE MANGER AND THE CROSS

By Peter Wiseman

During a conversation on the Virgin Birth some time ago with one of our city pastors, a learned young man, he suggested, in support of his view, that it was not necessary to believe in the Virgin Birth in order to believe in Christ as our Saviour, that only two of the Evangelists record it. We asked him if he ever noticed that only two of the Evangelists record that Christ was born at all, and why not dispute His birth on the same ground? He replied, "I had not noticed this before."

THE SACRED RECORD

RESPECTING THE INCARNATION

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail! Thou art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; Blessed art thou among women! And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:26-31).

All that this record requires is faith. It is supernatural, of course, so is the Bible. To rule out the supernatural would leave us "nothing but leaves." If there is no Virgin Birth, there is no God-man; if there is no God-man, there is no salvation. And then, what?

THE ONLY HOPE

The fact of His coming argues its necessity. It is further argued from the fact of sin, with all its awful results. Man is in bondage, captive. He is lost. He is blind. He is dead. He is condemned and under the wrath of God. Nothing is clearer than that man is a fallen being, and helpless to redeem himself. Redemption must come from outside source.

Redemption is not found in sin, not found in man, not found in the law, nor in works. It must come through atonement, made by one who can properly represent both God and man, and satisfy all the requirements of both. He must satisfy Deity and humanity, at the same time redeeming the latter. There are the claims of the law, the virtue of works, and by expiation. As to the first, the Word says, "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified". Respecting the second, the Word says, "Not of works lest any man should boast." It must, then, be by atonement or expiation.

This expiation must go from God in order to be valid and to avail with him. It must at the same time belong to humanity in order to be valid and to avail for humanity. Hence the necessity of the incarnation, God becoming man, the God-man. "There is one God and one Mediator also between God and man, and man Christ Jesus". (1 Tim. 2:5). "The God-man" says Dr. C. Morgan, "is the gate-way between God and man. Through Him God has found his way back to

man from whom he had been excluded by rebellion. In Him, man finds his way back to God from whom he has been alienated by the darkness of his intellect, the death of his love, the disobedience of His will. God finds Himself in this Person, and is with man. Man finds himself in this Person, and is with God. Through the God-man, Deity takes hold upon humanity. Through the God-man, humanity takes hold upon the Deity.

Christ became flesh. He took flesh, humanity, and dwelt among us. He came down to the lowest circumstances that He might redeem the lowest. He stooped to it, because of His love for us.

"FOR THIS CAUSE"

Christ did not come to this world as a journalist to study the customs, languages of a strange people. He did not come just merely to live a beautiful life—though He lived such a life. He did come to give the world a code of ethics—though such a code may be gathered from His teaching. If this were His mission, why His death? Why not inaugurate an institution of learning in Palestine, become its President, teach and write books, and avoid the cross? No! No! He came to the manger, He took flesh, in view of the cross, to which he stooped as a vocation, and upon which He died as Victor. The last time He went to Jerusalem, He was the most eager of the little band to get there, for He knew the purpose of His mission. "He went before them and they were amazed".

The life of Christ was the only life ever given up in this world. "No man taketh it from me. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Men have died, it is true, sooner than they otherwise would for some great cause; but Christ alone actually gave a life which was forever in His keeping, that the race might be redeemed. "Men die sooner who must in any case die later; but Christ died for us who but for His own willingness could not have died at all". Nothing in the economy of redemption was for Himself; He came for the race. His death was an accomplishment, not an accident. He died as a Victim in the typical relationships which He bore, but He also died as Victor.

The death of Christ, then, was not that of a martyr, much less a criminal. "Was Paul crucified for you?" Christ's death was that of the sinless one, the God-man, who in His own body bore our sin on the tree. On the cross He accomplished human redemption, and from the cross uttermost salvation is offered to all, even to the lowest. Consider the Person of the cross, and the merit of the sacrifice is beyond dispute. "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever sat down on the right hand of God from henceforth expecting till his enemies he made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." For this cause He came into the world.

THE GREAT DYNAMICS

In the Person, His mission, and His death, are definite love, the dynamic of love. Love brought Him down. His life was a life of love. "To measure the heart of the Infinite", says one, "We must get the dimensions of the cross". The cross is a proof and an illustration of the love of God, and also a proof and an illustration of the love of Christ. It was pure love, yes, infinite love, that caused Him to be born among cattle, and live such a glorious life among the poor, upon the up-lifted cross this crowned sufferer to fling wide His arms, and seek to lift the world back to His Father's side. It was infinite love.

In the Person, His mission, and His death on the cross, are infinite merit. There have been

many great missions but never a life just like this one. There have been many crosses and many crucifixions. At the time of Christ's death, and at the same place there were two other crosses, but the center cross is different. It is "the cross", the person on it is an unique Person; His death also unique.

In the Person, His mission, and His death, are infinite power, the dynamic of power; the power of an unique Personality; the power of an unique life; the power of an unique crucifixion, a death on the cross, which is called, "the accursed tree", for upon it He died; yet is it the tree of life, for by its sacrificial Victor we live. In the cross there is power to break the power of cancelled sin and to set the prisoner free. There is cleansing power, and overcoming power; there is life eternal for all.

GLORIOUS OBJECT AND PURPOSE

What was the object of His coming? The answer is found in one word—"lost". What was the purpose of His coming? Again the answer may be given in one little word—"save". "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

The blessed Jesus came from heaven that we might be given a title to a fitness for, and to Heaven. He was born among cattle, died between thieves, that we may be reconciled to God. He was cradled in a manger that we might have mansions. He became poor that we might be rich. He drank the awful cup of death that we might drink the wine of the kingdom. He wore a crown of thorns that we might wear a crown of glory. He became the Son of Man that we might become the sons of God. He was lifted upon a cross that we may sit on a throne. He went to the tomb that we might be raised from it. He wept tears of sorrow that our tears might be wiped away. He died that we might not die. He became a sin-offering that we might be cleansed from sin. He came down to the manger, to the cross, to the grave, that he might lift us up to God. And He accomplished gloriously and triumphantly.

"There is a man whose tomb is guarded by love, whose sepulchre is not only glorious as a prophet declared, but whose sepulchre is loved. There is a man whose ashes, after eighteen centuries, have not grown cold, who daily lives again in the thoughts of an innumerable multitude of man; who is visited in His cradle by frankincense and myrrh. There is a man whose steps are unweariedly retrodden by a large portion of mankind, and who, although no longer present, is followed by that throng in all the scenes of his bygone pilgrimage, upon the knees of His mother, by the borders of the lakes, to the tops of the mountains, in the byways of the valleys; under the shade of the olive trees, in the still solitude of the deserts. The greatest monument of art shelters His sacred images; the most magnificent ceremonies assemble the people under the influence of His Name; poetry, music, painting, sculpture, exhaust their resources to proclaim His glory, and to offer Him incense worthy of the adoration which ages have consecrated to Him. And yet upon what throne do they adore Him? Upon a cross! "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore."

"Hath He marks to lead me to Him,
If He be my Guide?"

In His feet and hands are wound prints,
And His side.

The provision for the recovery of the race was provided by Christ. He trod the winepress alone, but the application of that wonderful provision is still in process. We have something to do in this. In other words, the principle of redemption must be the principle of the church, the body of Christ,