

CHRISTMAS CHIMES

Dr. Paul S. Rees

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." John 1:14.

Bethlehem is still the strange cradle wherein were rocked more wonders than have ever been packed into any other nativity. For one thing, it was at Bethlehem that God began to speak a new language. It seems bold to talk in such fashion, but the text is our warrant for it. The Word! That is the chief title before us. It means "speech," "discourse," "eloquence," "doctrine," "reason." Christmas proclaims the tremendous truth that Jesus Christ is God become vocal to man's ears, as well as visible to his sight and tangible to his touch, in an altogether new and effectually redemptive way.

A word is a very wonderful device. Language is a boon so common that we seldom stop to reflect upon the mystery and might of it. Yet if it were not for these magic symbols, we could neither think consecutively nor express ourselves effectively. The word articulates and reveals, even though imperfectly, the thinker behind the thought. It mediates between "me" and "you," and vice versa.

How expressive, then, the term, "Word!" God has spoken in Christ—spoken as He had never spoken before. That He had spoken before none can deny. He spoke in Creation. Turn back to the first chapter of Genesis. Not less than ten times, in that creation account, do we read the phrase, "And God said." "Let there be light." "Let there be a firmament." "Let the earth bring forth." "Let the waters bring forth." "Let us make man." Thus we have God's speech. His Word, in Creation. But Christmas, let us mark, brings us to the higher ranges of the speech of Deity. The enfleshed Word that the Eternal God speaks in Jesus Christ is the language not of Creation but of re-creation; it is the language of Redemption.

Setting the truth of the text to the music of the season we are observing, let us listen to these Christmas Chimes:

I. The Fact of Christmas is That God has Come Near Us.

"And the Word was made flesh!" Does John mean that God comes down to us in the flesh and form of the Bethlehem-born Jesus? Nothing less! Let him be his own interpreter. If we glance back to the first verse of the chapter, we read: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This in turn throws us back upon Genesis 1:1, where we read: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Creation—from atoms to angels—from grass to galaxies—had a "beginning," but even in that "beginning" the Word already was. Before ever the universe took shape, back in unchronicled pre-creation immensity, three tremendous facts stood out. First, "the Word was," thus giving us the Christ of Eternity; second, "the Word was with God," thus giving us the Christ of the Trinity; and third, "the Word was God," thus giving us the Christ of Deity.

But to these facts Christmas adds a fourth. It is that this everlasting, invisible, creative, divine Word has come down and wrapped Himself in our poor humanity in order that He might bring God savingly near to men and lift men attunely and gloriously near to God. Specifically, the method of his entrance into the stream of human life was that of

natural birth issuing from supernatural conception. The Gospel narrative reads: "And the angel answered and said unto her [Mary], The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Both scientist and theologian have called in question the angelic announcement, but neither has been able to disprove it. The virgin birth fits into the whole Christ-pattern perfectly. Some of us are still on the side of the angels!

When God sets out to do something, He often upsets our neat calculations. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. Think of God, in His purpose to reveal Himself and His passion to save men, stripping Himself to the tiny dimensions of a helpless babe committing Himself to the weak but willing arms of a poor Jewess! Yet by that very fact the sympathies of earth's multitudes have been awakened, and attention has been compelled to that glorious frailty with which God was willing to implement Himself in producing for us the Perfect Man.

So there it stands—this stupendous Christmas fact God is come down to us! In the person of His Son the eternal God is enfleshed as a cooing baby born beneath Judean skies. The Infinite stoops to the finite—and the finite can never be the same again! The Eternal accommodates itself to the temporal—and the temporal grows big with meaning for eternity! The Sinless has assumed the likeness of the sinful—and the sinful, while condemned, is offered grace that will turn sinfulness into holiness! No wonder the Wise Men were stirred out of the dreamy East and set upon their far quest. No wonder the Star left its beaten path through the wide fields of the firmament and found a new orbit for itself. A grand new day had dawned. "The Word was made flesh!"

II. The Wonder of Christmas is That God Has Come to Live Among Us:

The Incarnation, which became a fact at Bethlehem, grew in wonder with every development of Jesus from infancy to childhood, from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood. And as this true Son of Man "grew, and waxed strong in spirit," filled with wisdom, something unspeakably precious was unfolded. It was that God had come to live among us and before us a life that was truly, though sinlessly, human. The glory of His deity was veiled; about this there can be no question. And to a very great extent, one feels safe in saying the power of His deity was not invoked. He was a glorious character, as we shall see before we are done; and He was in touch with power by which nature was commanded and demons were mastered and wonders were wrought; but it is a question if these victories were not, in the main, evidences of what redeemed man is destined to be and do through the power of God's Spirit and by reason of harmony with God's will. There is every reason to believe, for example, that when Jesus met Satan as the tempter in the wilderness, He met him not as God would meet him but rather as man would meet him in the strength of God. His victory has meaning and encouragement for us simply because He fought with no weapons other than those which we have at our disposal—the will to obey God, the truth of the Word of God, and the power of the Spirit of God.

Ah, yes, God has come wondrously close to us and found a dwelling place among us. He has established, within limits, a community of experience with us. He has toiled; He has hungered; He has thirsted; He has suffered; He has wearied; He has been tempted; He has been misunderstood; He has been forsaken; He has bled and died, and through it all He has won! What heavenly balm for every stricken soul! What heavenly sympathy for every struggling human! What heavenly hope for every despairing breast! What heavenly purity for every polluted heart! What heavenly music for every discordant spirit. What heavenly radiance for every blackened life!

III. The Glory of Christmas is That God Has Been Revealed to Us. "(And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."

This does not contradict our former statement that in the Incarnation the glory of deity is veiled. The flaming splendor of the absolutely holy and infinitely mighty God is an overwhelming and insupportable thing. Moses' prayer, "Show me thy glory," could have but a partial answer. Mortal capacity has its limits. The great lawgiver, secreted in a cleft of rock, must be content with a glimpse of the burning skirts of Him who is eternally garmented with a holiness and majesty before which suns are as snuffed candles and stars as quenched tapers. It is this glory, associated with angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, that Christ the Lord laid aside when He came to be born of a woman.

The glory of Christmas, then, is something else. It is not the glory of absolute deity on parade; it is the *glory of self-emptying*, self-giving deity in passionate service for a sin-struck race of men. It is the glory of "Grace" and "Truth." "Truth" that says, My life is your example; "Grace" that says, My Death is your expiation. "Truth" that says, My deeds are to be your aim; "Grace" that says, My dying is to be your atonement. Such is the dual glory we behold in the only begotten Son of the Father.

Let the chimes of Christmas peal it out. Let the Holy Spirit catch it up and breathe it in. In the person and work, in the sinless life and sin-bearing death, of the "Word made flesh," "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other!"—Heart & Life.

A CHRISTMAS DIRGE

World without Christmas—

How empty, how drear—

No angel songs ringing; no message of cheer;
No gift of the Father of Jesus His Son
To the world's teeming millions in darkness
undone.

World without Christmas—a world without
hope—

Such misery is too vast in its scope.

World without Christmas—how empty, how
drear.

No roses to blossom; no candles to cheer;
No wreaths of bright holly on windows and
door;

No children's feet dancing all over the floor;
No happy eyes gleaming; no glad voices
singing

The carols of Christmas as in days of yore.

O world without Christmas,

You're gray and you're old;

A vale full of weeping, a dirge sad and cold.

—Augusta M. Kastendieck