

Wonder and mystery are at the center of our faith. Wonder that God could come to earth and walk among us. The mystery of the Holy Trinity, not revealed until Christ appears. [The Word was with God and the Word was God.] Wonder and mystery should always be components of our faith; if we rightly understand it. David said that he did not inquire into things too high for him; Paul said, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory forever. Amen." (Ro 11:33-36 AV)

Christmas is historical poetry. By this I mean that the events really happened. The events recorded by the Gospel writers are historical events that actually took place. How else do you explain the Apostles? What could have energized common men and women, plain fishermen, tax collectors, and ordinary people, to make them giants of history? The Apostles stand head and shoulders above everybody before and after them. These giants could only have been energized by some great historical and spiritual truth, causing them to deny themselves the ordinary pleasures and ambitions of mankind, to give themselves for some mighty cause, which transcended their own experience and vision.

But these are more than mere historical events. This is poetry in action. The arrangement of the events, the juxtaposition of symbols, does more than give information, as important as that is. It also fires the imagination, stirs the soul, energizes the will, and transforms the lives of men and women. This is why I call it historical poetry.

Much of history is poetry. The greatest poetry is history. The image of George Washington crossing the Delaware on Christmas Day has fired the imagination of patriots and lovers of freedom. The long and bitter retreat of the French from Moscow gave rise to the great Overture of 1812. The Fall of Troy; the attack on Pearl Harbor, and countless other events in the history of the World have fired the imagination of men and have become symbols of man's hopes, dreams, frustration, and sometimes despair.

But what man could have imagined the events and symbols of Christmas? How could anyone have dreamed up a story such as this. Every other symbol in history, including the great Biblical symbols of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; the Ark and Rainbow of Noah, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the serpent in the wilderness; and countless other symbols of biblical history, pale besides the great images of Christmas. How rich are the symbols of Christmas.

One of the surest evidences for the depravity of man is his desire to substitute the solid substances and beauty of Christmas for cheapness and stupidity. Why else would men leave a sumptuous banquet of the manger, the star, the angels, the shepherds, the wise men, the Virgin and Joseph to wallow in the husks of Rudolph, Frosty the Snowman, Santa Claus, and Grandma getting run over by a reindeer. Consider this if you will, and then try to convince me that man is not bound by sin!

There are two ways to destroy the wonder and mystery of Christmas: either by denying the history, or by substituting myth.

1. Turning history into myth, by denying that the events really took place; resulting in cynicism and pseudo intellectualism. Ah, you poor ignorant people can believe in a star if you want, but we smart people know it was the conjunction of planets, or a supernova, or some such thing.
2. Turning myth into history: Santa Clause, drummer boy, etc. Making everything childish and fantasy; the result is the same as the other: cynicism and pseudo intellectualism.

But I would consider three of the most precious and most illuminative images and symbols of Christmas. Historical poetry I call it. For it is more than history: it is history wrapped in images and symbols--laden with meaning and instruction--filled with beauty and inspiration to change lives and lift us up to the presence of God Himself.

- I. The Holy Family. Mary, Joseph, the Baby Jesus. Note: Isa 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.
 - A. How humbling this is: When God would save the world, He did not come as a mighty Archangel with fire and brimstone, and thunders to shake the heavens and the earth. He did not come as a great warrior, a powerful and wise statesmen, a great philosopher. He came as a baby.
 1. He came into a traditional family: a mother, a father. Jesus had brothers and sisters (Mark 6:3). The Virgin Mary was placed under the care and authority of a husband; God appointed a family for the nurturing and care of his beloved Son.
 2. He came as us; so that none of us might despair. There is hope for all of us, because of the coming of Jesus Christ.
 3. He was born of a virgin:
 - a) None of the curse of Adam's sin would affix to Him
 - b) His birth would be a pattern and symbol of ours. "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:13.
 - c) 1Peter 1: 22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, *see that ye* love one another with a pure heart fervently:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.
 - B. God becomes flesh: God did not simply think good thoughts about the people whom he had created who were lost in trespasses and sins: We are not saved by abstractions and platitudes. We are not saved because of superior moral and philosophical insights. We are saved because God was made flesh and dwelt among us. Do not speculate on abstractions when you think of God: go to the manger, and consider the life and Person of Jesus Christ, if you would know who God is. Carefully consider his words and his works, then you will know who God is, and how He thinks and what He does. This is concrete; this is history; this is reality. But what an astounding miracle it was!
 - C. He was born so that he could die. He came in the place of sinners. He grew up before God in the place of sinners. He went to the cross and suffered in the place of sinners; He was rejected and abandoned by God his father in the place of sinners; He was laid in the tomb in the place of sinners; He rose from the dead in the place of sinners; He ascended into heaven and appears there before God in the place of sinners; he is coming again in the place of sinners to be joined forever with the people whom he purchased out of every

kindred tribe and nation under heaven.

- D. Here is where our faith rests: in Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, suffering under Pontius Pilate, dying the death of sinners, rising from the dead. We are justified by the faith of the Son of God
- E. The Babe in the manger is a powerful symbol of our faith; yes we do not stop there, but the Babe reminds us of the way we come into the Christian faith, as babies, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."-- 1Pe 1:23 Jesus said that this was the only way we could come, as little children. No, we are not to stay babes, just as He did not stay a babe, but was made perfect through the things that He suffered; we are to grow and mature, putting off the old and putting on the new.

II. The Star of Bethlehem. I am not going to get bogged down in when the Wise Men came, how many there were, how old Jesus was at the time. I know they came to a house, not the manger; I am sure that it took them some time to travel to Judea after the star appeared. These details, though necessary, may obscure the main thing. Note:

- A. Among other things stars represent hope:
 1. 2Pe 1:19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:
 2. Re 22:16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.
 3. Ge 26:4 And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;
 4. Da 12:3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.
- B. The wise men came to Christ, following a star. Think of that! From the beginning of the world, stars have been used for navigation and direction. The morning star has heralded the coming of the morning sun. The evening star has warned of the coming of night. When God created the heavens, he made the heavenly lights to be signs to mark the seasons: is there symbolism here? I think so. I think the heavens tell of spring, summer, autumn, and winter; but God also put a star in the sky when his Son came into the world to let us know that a new season of joy and grace and mercy had come to the world.
- C. For this star speaks of hope. For it is hope that brings us to Jesus Christ. This is the reason that the Apostle Paul says that we are saved by hope. True faith leads to hope, and hope leads to Jesus Christ. For he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.
- D. Whenever you think of that star that led the wise men, think of hope. Do not despair when trials come; do not faint when persecutions and tribulations come. Jesus said: In this world you shall have persecution, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.
- E. In the Bible, hope is not simply wishful thinking, but confidence because of the promise of God. The promises give us hope and lead us to Christ. "Come unto me, and I will give you rest," Jesus said. "I will raise you up at the last day." "He that believes is not condemned."
- F. By the way, I do not think this was an ordinary star. I do not think that it was a conjunction of planets, or a supernova. Men in those days were much in tune with the skies. The Magi were not dummies or fools. They followed a star. It went before them. It stopped over the house where Jesus was. Did all men see this star--I do not necessarily think so, no more

than all men understood the voice that spoke to Saul. Was this star a miracle: you bet it was. If you can believe that Jesus walked on the water, turned water to wine; raised the dead, forgives sin, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven; then you can believe in a star that travelled across the heavens and then hovered over the place where Jesus lay. I believe it, and no humanist can talk me out of it.

- III. The Shepherds: Luke 2:14. Some of the modern translations are simply awful here. "Peace to men who please God;" "with whom He is pleased.." "all those who are pleasing him." The NIV is somewhat better than many of the modern: "on whom his favor rests."
- A. The truth is that the initiative rests with God. He is unilaterally declaring peace to men, and the symbol of his peace, is the coming of the Lord Jesus. God has good will toward men. He does not desire the destruction of men: He did not send his son to destroy men's lives, but to save men.
 - B. The angels said it well: Unto you is born today in the city a David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. You shall find the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.
 - C. What is God's attitude toward the world: let every doubt forever be erased: He desires the good and the salvation of men. He calls all men to repentance and faith. He has given to you and me the greatest symbol of his love and good will: This is Jesus Christ.
 - D. Any time you doubt the good will of God; remember the Angels of Christmas: remember the good news; remember the promise: Unto you is born this day in the city a David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. Behold the love of Christ; the goodwill that he has toward you.
 - E. If the Bible is clear about anything, it is that men perish by their own fault. God's good will is abundantly clear. He has opened the door of heaven, and called all to Jesus Christ that they might be saved and have eternal life.
 - F. When his disciples asked him, "How can we know the way," Jesus said, "I am the way the truth and the life, no man comes to the father but by me."

So what is the signs of Christmas: They are the miracles of Christmas, and are the most profound miracles of the Christian life:

Faith: This baby who was born in Bethlehem is God Himself, manifested to take away our sins, by the sacrifice of himself. The interpretation is in several verses of Scripture:

Matthew 1: 21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.²² Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,²³ Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

John 1: 10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.¹¹ He came unto his own, and his own received him not.¹² But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name:¹³ Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Hope: Just as the star led the wise men to Christ, so the promises of God, lead us to hope in Christ: it is not in vain to serve the Lord; it is not vain and foolish dreams, or cunningly devised fables that we follow to come to Christ.

2Pe 1:19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed,

as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:

1John 3: 1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.²

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Love. Charity: The message of the Angels to the shepherds is one of good will toward men. Love found a way to redeem my soul: mercy and truth are met together: Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men. Peace, good will in Jesus Christ. Heaven and earth are met together.

John 3:16 "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Rom. 5: 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.⁹ Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. 11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

As Paul said in I Cor. 13:13. And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity; But the greatest of these is Charity. From God's love flow all the good things that we celebrate at Christmas, and which the Christmas story illustrates so eloquently.

God bless you.