

The Coming of the Redeemer

The Prologue (John 1:1–14)

“In the beginning was the Word.”

If the Word was before all creatures, and if they were created and came to be through it, then it is of a different being than the creatures, and it was not created or came to be as they. It must be eternal and have no beginning. When all things came into being, it was already there and is not to be comprised under creature and



time but hovers above time and creature, for through it time and creature come to be. This cannot be denied: what is not of time must be of eternity. That which has no beginning cannot be of time and what is not a creature must be God.

"In him was life."

The meaning of this passage in simple terms I take to be this: He who does not recognize and believe in Christ as truly God, who does not believe that he is the Word who was in the beginning with God through whom all things were made but regards him as a creature who had a beginning in time, is eternally lost and cannot have life.

"The light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not."

The reference is to the natural light of reason, which is kindled by God and yet does not recognize, comprehend, or feel the light by which it is kindled. That is why it is in darkness and does not see the light from which it derives all of its own light. O that this reason were rooted out of my heart! How deeply it is ingrained! Not that it is false or improper, but it does not belong at this point in the Gospel and does not allow me to take these blessed and comforting words in their simple and plain meaning.

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men."

This is a light that shone, but nobody saw it. Therefore it had to be pointed out by an outward word and by John the Baptist. The Spirit did not show it. There had to be an outward man, an outward word, an outward finger. This is a thunderclap for the Spiritualists, who despise the outward word and wait upon the Spirit. John had to stand and say, "Behold the man!" This passage is an invincible weapon against those who would take away the outward preaching of the Word, who say it is of no use and attribute everything to the

Spirit. They make of none effect the preaching of John. If the Spirit does everything, why did he have to come and point out the light?

“John bare witness of him.”

I believe the Evangelist is a heretic for rating John no higher than that. He makes him nothing more than a witness. The Evangelist should have given John a share in our salvation and should have let him teach us his ascetic deportment, but no, John's task is to point with his finger. And if John the Baptist was only a witness, what shall we say of St. Francis and the rest of the saints?

“As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.”

If you can believe on this man and on this light, I will tell you what you are: You have right and might and you may boast saying, “God is my father; I am his child.” John wishes to express the unspeakable treasure belonging to believers. What an inexpressible gift it is to be a child of God! We cannot voice it with tongue or pen. Listen to John: “He is a child of God.” What claim on a child of God can be made by Satan, kaiser, pope, devil, or death? What John is saying here is very simple yet inexpressible. To be a son of God is to be lord of sin, death, and hell. This text should be emblazoned in letters of gold.

We are made brothers of Christ and beloved children of God. All this is possessed by those who believe, only through faith. Some there are who amass gold and live in debauchery, but when grace ennobles them they too are glorified and are children of God. God sends his love through the Lord's Supper and through preaching. Faith gives a child not as a painter depicts, but a child born of God, that is begotten and born anew through the Holy Ghost.

“And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven.”

Before the coming of Christ the heaven was tightly closed, and the devil reigned mightily. But in Christ and through Christ the heaven

is opened again, and we can hear the Heavenly Father talking with us, and the dear angels hover over us. These words, “Thou art my beloved Son,” are still spoken to us always by the Father and will be until the Judgment Day, and heaven will never be closed. If you come to Baptism and receive the Lord’s Supper and absolution, heaven is open and the voice of the Father in heaven is heard.

The Genealogies (Matt. 1:1–17)

Ever since the time of the Gospel there has been perplexity as to why Matthew and Luke should present discrepant genealogies of Jesus. And what is more serious is that to prove the Davidic descent they should trace the line through Joseph, who was not his father, rather than through Mary, who was his mother. The Jews and after them Julian the Apostate, and many others, ancient and modern, have in consequence declared our faith to be false, uncertain, or at least utterly obscure. But the primary point is whether Jesus was the Messiah. Matthew begins his Gospel with the words, “The generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David.” If then he was the Christ, that is the Messiah, the son of David, his mother must have been of the house of David.

The Annunciation (Luke 1:26–38)

Mary was a poor maid. To be sure, she was of the house of David, but the priests had arrogated power to themselves until the house of David had fallen into such disrepute that to expect a king from the tree of Jesse [David’s father] was like looking for a flower from a shriveled, rotten, old root. Mary was a waif.

The story that Joachim and Anna divided their substance into three portions and gave her one is pure fable. She was perhaps a poor orphan and despised, because she said of herself that God “regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.” To this poor maid the marvelous announcement was given that she should be the mother of the Most High, who would be called a Son of God. He would be a king and of his Kingdom there would be no end. She might well have said, “Who am I, little worm, that I should give birth to a king?” She might have

doubted, but she shut her eyes and trusted in God that he is powerful and can bring all things to pass, though reason and all creatures be against it. Because she believed, the word of the angel was fulfilled in her. At first she held back, and said, “How shall this be, seeing I



know not a man?” She too was flesh and blood. Therefore the angel reassured her, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. . . . And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age.”

[Even so we are abashed because God offers us so much.] When we come to die nature and the devil confront us with the overflowing abundance of the gifts of God, and we recoil at the thought that to those who believe, Christ is Lord of sin, death, and hell and that we thereby are fellow heirs with him. We say: “We are poor and miserable. Who are we that we should live forever in heaven? We are not fit to receive such great gifts.” Then the heart falters. One must be very wise not to let oneself be dismayed. Christ comforted his disciples saying, “Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”

The angel quickens us to believe that the child will be a mighty king and will be called the son of the Highest. The mightier we

make this king the more will our faith be strengthened if we believe that he is so mighty. There are some who believe that Christ is Lord, but not that he is Lord of all things. They do not believe that Christ is Lord of the enemy. When such men are beleaguered they leap to violence and to defend themselves. They really do not believe. If they did, they would say: "Whom then shall I fear? God is my Father and Lord, nothing will happen to me without his will." When we believe, we fear no man.

The angel Gabriel might have gone to the daughter of Caiaphas, rich, fair, and clad in gold-embroidered raiment. Instead he went to Mary, whose name means bitterness in view of the bitter plight of her people, like that of our own today.

Benedict and Bernhard saw here three miracles: the first, that God became man; the second, that a virgin was a mother; and the third, that the heart of man should believe this.

Really the virgin birth is not such a great miracle, because Jesus was made out of flesh and blood. This was not so extraordinary as making Adam out of mud and Eve out of a rib, but we do not regard any of these as miraculous because we have heard about them so often. I do not suppose Adam and Eve believed their creation to



have been miraculous. We do not believe that our own births are miraculous. Where in the seed is the material for eyes and teeth and nails? So all God's works are incredible. Mary believed, and yet she overlooked the greater miracle that her child would be the Son of God. She did not ask how that could be and how his Kingdom could be without end. She forgot all this. Her thought centered on herself, and she asked only how *she* could conceive, though the other was more marvelous. It is only a little miracle for God to make a virgin conceive, but to create a man who is also eternal, that is a great miracle.

Such miracles we should take to ourselves for our comfort. It is a great consolation for us that divine majesty became flesh and blood, and an even greater consolation if we can believe that this happened for *us*. We merely talk, but if a prince for my sake were to go to prison, should I not see he loved me and should I not be beside myself? Such an outward thing is nothing compared with what God, who has all things in his hand, has done. Surely if one believed this, the heart would break in a thousand pieces for very joy.

The Visitation (Luke 1:39–56)

When Mary heard that her cousin Elizabeth was with child, she set out to help her. Mary was of royal lineage and was to be the true, natural mother of God. Yet she set out on foot on a journey of two or three days to do maid service for Elizabeth. Shame on all of us for our pride! No peasant and no townsman of good family among us would stoop so far. If one of us is descended from a noble or a prince, there is no end of bragging. Yet no queen of the Romans or empress could be compared with Mary. What honor is there in the world to be compared with her honor, and she was of royal seed! She might well have said: "Why should I go to help that priest's old lady? It is beneath me, for I am of David's house, and I am carrying the Son of God. The angels should take me in a chariot of gold with wheels studded with jewels." She was descended from the noblest stock, and spiritually she was God's daughter. Nevertheless she went