

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

The Gospel reading for Christmas Eve is always Luke 2:1-14. Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem and in verses 7-8 is written: “While they were there the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” In verses 11-12 angels appear to shepherds and say: “...to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” (NRSV)

This story is written as an historical narrative; however, the meaning of the story is not found in the *external* “historical events” it reports. Its meaning lies in the way it illumines something that happens *internally* in each of us in the present. This article is an attempt to describe the internal present-day meaning by using contemporary concepts.

If we elaborate the Greek in verses 11-12 noted above, the thought expressed is-- to us is born a deliverer, who will save us, protect us, keep us safe, is consecrated to doing this, and has the authority to accomplish it. The sign that this has happened is a new-born child.

The birth of Christ is the appearance in human experience of a mind that approaches life differently from our human mind. Our human mind inherently moralizes. That is, our mind is preoccupied with assessing and evaluating; it has a predilection toward determining whether what we are considering is right or wrong, correct or incorrect, according to whatever standards we hold in the moment. This other, different mind has none of that preoccupation. It does not moralize; instead, it seeks to take in, comprehend, appreciate and manifest what is true.

This different mind is the mind of God as that mind appears in human life. It is not the entire mind of God, but the mind of God as God’s mind incarnates in human life. Perhaps we can borrow a phrase used by Paul and describe this as “the mind of Christ”. This mind of Christ does what the mind of God does—it feels everything, it thinks about everything, it is curious about and seeks to understand everything, it relates to everything, it appreciates everything, and it engages and divulges everything. The mind of Christ does not work in the same way as our human moralizing mind; however, our minds can be informed by the mind of Christ, can grasp its content, can experience its way of seeing and working, and can learn from it.

Perhaps this mind first appeared in human experience in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps this mind had always been available and Jesus was the first person to have the experience of it in a conscious way. Whichever of these is true, the essential message of the Christmas story is that this mind has come to inhabit our life with us and we are all hard-wired to interact with it. The mind of Christ does not come to us to make us like God, but to make us more human, helping us to see ourselves more accurately and assisting us in occupying our own life more fully.

The season of Advent describes our perceiving something about ourselves which is difficult for us to assimilate because it does not fit our image of who we are. We are introduced to something which is true of us, yet which we do not want to accept. We find ourselves being unable to erase this perception from our awareness, and then waiting to see what God will bring to life through what we now perceive. What God brings to life is this different mind. It begins by our becoming aware of how judgmental we are toward

ourselves for what we now know to be true. Seeing how judgmental we are creates the opportunity to wonder what it would be like if we were not being so judged, and then we find ourselves being the object of interest and attention. We are accepted, appreciated, and enfolded as we now see ourselves regardless of how “good” or “bad” we think and feel we are. The mind of Christ that incarnates in us works ceaselessly to comprehend who we are, as we are. This is very different from our being moralized on by our human mind working ceaselessly to make sure whoever we are is correct and proper.

Christmas is the time when crèches or nativities are bought out and enjoyed. These portrayals of the birth of Christ can help us understand what we are describing. Think of a crèche as a representation of an environment that is created inside each of us. In a crèche the Child is the center of attention, and the attention focused on the Child is loving, adoring, encouraging, and supportive. Imagine you have seen something about yourself which you think of as illegitimate and yet are unable to erase from your awareness. The mind of Christ attends to this illegitimate aspect of your life just as the figures in the scene attend to the Child, the illegitimate part of you being related to in the same way the Child in the crèche is related to. The mind of Christ goes about the work of developing this internal environment in each of us.

As we experience the mind of Christ relating to us we are provided an opportunity to see the difference between how we relate and it relates. We grasp by comparison how moralistic we are toward our own lives, how judgmental and critical we are of ourselves. We become able to see our moralizing in action, and watch how it twists the way we relate to ourselves. In contrast, we experience compassion and appreciation from the mind of Christ for our being this way, and that offers us a choice about how we might relate to ourselves in the moment. The mind of Christ helps us see and explore what is true for us, especially allowing us to see how moralistic we are toward that truth. Reflecting on these generates the option of wondering what our life would be like if we were not so moralistic, which allows us to lean in that direction.

In the Gospel of John the mind of Christ is referred to as “the light of all people... [which] shines in the darkness [and] which enlightens everyone” (John 1:4, 5, 9) (NRSV). The light that shines in the darkness shines there to show us what lies in the darkness. We are not asked to look at the light; we are asked to walk in the light and look at what the light reveals about us which is in our darkness. What lies in our darkness are many aspects of our life we look on as illegitimate, as well as our judgments against them which keep them in our darkness. The birth of Christ is God’s way of bringing these to light in us and for us. In this sense the mind of Christ delivers us, saves us, protects us, and keeps us safe. We learn by experience that this mind has the authority to accomplish what it sets out to do because the work it does turns out to be irrepressible.

The mind of Christ comes as a gift. The experience of not being judged and not being moralistic is something we cannot generate. What does come from beyond us as a gift is the ability to see how moralistic we are, to appreciate our being that way, and then to wonder what life would be like if we were not so. From that comes the possibility of being treated differently, more compassionately, by ourselves. As we learn to relate to ourselves with more compassion the ability to do the same with others also appears.

This mind of Christ that appeared in the life of Jesus is born into us in the present, and all of us are hard-wired to interact with it. [Jim Robie – 12/20/11]