

## O LORD, OUR LORD

“O LORD, Our Lord.” So begins the 8th Psalm, and by LORD there the Psalmist – David – meant Yahweh, or, as later vocalized, Jehovah. This was ancient Israel’s God, the creator of the universe, whose power extended supreme over that of all other gods. Today we recognize it as a reference to the Divine itself, to the one and only God, who is at once transcendent and immanent, infinitely beyond finite nature and yet at the same time omnipresent within it.

In essence this God is love, which manifests itself in His wisdom, two qualities which, though divisible in the recipients of His creation, are forever united in Him.

This is the God we worship. And yet it is a God whose nature and essence surpasses all understanding,<sup>1</sup> being beyond our comprehension, finite creatures that we are. It is vain to speak of a love of God, therefore. No one can love what he or she does not know. If we try to love this transcendent God, either we fail in the attempt or we remake God into whatever image of Him we choose to invent.

Inevitably, then, God has found ways to make Himself known. Known in finite form, or rather, reflected in finite form. This He has done through sacred scripture, first in the Ancient Word, later in the Old Testament, and then by taking on human form as recorded in the New Testament, on which the Christian Church is founded.

As described in the preface to the Gospel of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word. This was in the beginning with God. All things were made by it, and nothing that was created was created apart from it.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as though of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-3,14)

This incarnation refers, of course, to the birth of Jesus in the small town of Nazareth in the northern Palestinian province of Galilee. It was a miraculous birth, accomplished without the participation of a human father. We can imagine the consternation and perhaps terror experienced by the mother, Mary, a virgin, at the cessation of her menses. What was wrong with her? Perhaps a fatal disorder.

And so the angel Gabriel was sent to her to allay her fear. “Do not be afraid, Mary,” said the angel. You will bear son, conceived in you by the spirit of God.<sup>2</sup>

Now Mary was betrothed to be married to Joseph, a carpenter, and when he found that Mary was with child he was minded to put her away privately. He was minded to put her away privately because in Israel and Judea the essential marriage compact was the betrothal. A betrothed woman found to be with child not the child of her intended would have been termed an adulteress, and the penalty for adultery was death by stoning.<sup>3</sup>

But Joseph was unwilling to charge her with adultery. He determined instead simply to terminate the betrothal. To prevent this unhappy result, an angel appeared to him in a dream, who explained that the child had been conceived by the spirit of God. Furthermore, the child’s name should be Jesus, “for He will save His people from their sins.”<sup>4</sup> “Jesus” is a Hellenization of the Hebrew name Joshua, which

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Cf. Philippians 4:7.

2

Luke 1:26-35.

3

Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22.

4

means “Yahweh saves.”

From His birth, then, Jesus was to be a savior. And this was affirmed by angels appearing to shepherds out in the fields;<sup>5</sup> by a man named Simeon when Jesus was presented at the Temple;<sup>6</sup> at the same time by Anna, a prophetess, there;<sup>7</sup> and so, too, shortly afterward by wise men from the east.<sup>8</sup>

Of Jesus’s outward life during His childhood in this world we know almost nothing. We know that Mary and Joseph married, that Jesus was accounted the son of the carpenter, and that He was raised in Nazareth<sup>9</sup> with several brothers.<sup>10</sup> The one account we have took place when He was twelve years old, when He was taken to Jerusalem by Mary and Joseph to take part in His first celebration of Passover.<sup>11</sup> They would not have traveled alone. Highwaymen made traveling alone too dangerous. Rather they would have traveled in a caravan of their fellow citizens. We infer this from the fact that at the end of a day’s journey on the way back home, Mary and Joseph found Him missing. How could they have not found Him missing earlier? Because they assumed Him to be with His friends or relatives elsewhere in the caravan.<sup>12</sup>

So they traveled a day’s journey back to Jerusalem, despite the danger, to find their son, and they found Him in the Temple precincts, conversing with the rabbis there, experts in the Jewish law and religion. We sometimes suppose that it was just Jesus asking them questions; but in fact the rabbis were also asking Him questions, and all present were astonished at His answers and understanding.<sup>13</sup>

This tells us two things about Jesus’s young life. First, it shows that He had received enough education to impress the rabbis. Indeed, we also know that at some time during His life He had learned to read.<sup>14</sup> He also later quoted Old Testament scripture. And secondly, this incident shows that He matured more quickly than is the case with others.<sup>15</sup>

After that the record is again silent. It was not until Jesus turned thirty years of age that He began His work of salvation. It may be supposed in accord with the Heavenly Doctrines that the preceding years were ones of internal preparation. But at the end of that time He presented Himself at the Jordan river in the southern Palestinian province of Judea to be baptized by His distant cousin John. John’s mission was to call the Jews to repentance in preparation for the coming of the promised Messiah or Christ. And it was

Matthew 1:18-21.

5

Luke 2:8-14.

6

Luke 2:25-32.

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Luke 2:36-38.

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Matthew 2:1-12.

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Luke 2:39,40.

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Matthew 12:46,47, 13:55; Mark 3:31,32; Luke 8:19,20; John 2:12, 7:3.

11

Luke 2:41.

12

Luke 2:44.

13

Luke 2:46,47.

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See Luke 4:17.

15

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John who identified Jesus as being that Messiah or Christ.

“Behold!” he said. “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’”<sup>16</sup>

So began Jesus’s journeys through the provinces of Palestine and the territories just to the north and east. He led the life of an itinerant preacher and miracle-worker. What He preached is exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew<sup>17</sup> and in the Sermon on the Plain found in Luke.<sup>18</sup> In these sermons He taught the virtues of humility, mercy, peace-making, chastity, forgiveness, sincerity, generosity, piety, love of the neighbor, love even of enemies, trust in Providence, and more. The Golden Rule is made a Christian commandment.<sup>19</sup> When Peter once asked Him how often he should forgive his neighbor, Jesus told him to forgive “up to seventy times seven.”<sup>20</sup> That is four hundred and ninety times, which is forgiveness practically without end.

In Jesus’s teaching, the central precept is love for the neighbor. He named it one of the two great commandments on which, He said, “hang all the Law and the Prophets.”<sup>21</sup> And to His disciples He said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.”<sup>22</sup>

As for His miracles, most of them involved the healing of illnesses and the curing of diseases. But He also turned water into wine.<sup>23</sup> He walked on water.<sup>24</sup> He put an end to a storm at sea, so that His disciples exclaimed, “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”

Perhaps His greatest miracle, however, was the resurrection of Lazarus after Lazarus died and had been entombed four days.<sup>25</sup> No such miracle had been seen in Israel since the days of Elijah and Elisha. And even greater than this was His own resurrection of Himself, after His crucifixion and death, when He rose from the tomb and was seen alive by a number of His followers.<sup>26</sup>

Did Jesus ever claim to be God incarnate? The answer is yes. When His disciple Philip once said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father,” Jesus said to him, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”<sup>27</sup> And when some Jews challenged His authority, saying, “Are you greater than our father Abraham?” Jesus

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<sup>16</sup>

John 1:29,30.

<sup>17</sup>

Matthew 5-7.

<sup>18</sup>

Luke 6:17-49.

<sup>19</sup>

Matthew 7:12. Luke 6:31.

<sup>20</sup>

Matthew 18:22.

<sup>21</sup>

Matthew 22:37-40.

<sup>22</sup>

John 13:34.

<sup>23</sup>

John 2:1-11, 4:46.

<sup>24</sup>

Matthew 14:22-27. Mark 6:48.

<sup>25</sup>

John 11:1-44.

<sup>26</sup>

Matthew 28. Mark 16. Luke 24. John 20, 21.

<sup>27</sup>

John 14:8,9.

replied, "Before Abraham was, I am."<sup>28</sup> "I am" echoes the answer Moses received at the burning bush, when he asked who he should say had sent him, and God replied, "I am I who am.... Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I am' has sent me to you."<sup>29</sup> The identification was clear to all who heard it.

Some boys in the spiritual world were once advised by their teacher to think of God in terms of His essence and from this of His person.<sup>30</sup> The Heavenly Doctrines teach us His essence. The Gospels present the person, namely Jesus, who embodies that essence and whom we acknowledge as Lord. Jesus also once said to His disciples, "You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am."<sup>31</sup>

So began the Christian Church, a church that eventually spread throughout Europe, Greece and Russia, and was finally carried to the Americas and Australia, to India and Africa, to the point that there is scarcely a country today where the name Jesus Christ is not known. Christianity is now the dominant religion in the world, and even among Islamic nations Jesus Christ is viewed as a great prophet.

The long history and spread of Christianity are itself testimony to the hand of Providence. Indeed, one might deem it a miracle, indeed a very great miracle, as unlikely as it might otherwise have been. For who could have predicted that the ministry of this itinerant preacher, which lasted only a short three years in a tiny country, would have had such an impact on civilization? Indeed, western civilization is a Christian civilization. Atheists and agnostics, wittingly or not, espouse Christian virtues and values. Jews and Muslims espouse Christian virtues and values. Who does not know the Golden Rule? Who does not acknowledge the goodness of love for the neighbor? Humility, mercy, honesty, generosity, and other Christian virtues akin to these are commonly esteemed, even if not practiced, even without people's realizing their Christian foundation.

"O LORD, Our Lord. How excellent is Thy name in all the earth!"<sup>32</sup>

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John 8:53-58.

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Exodus 3:13,14.

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*True Christian Religion* no. 623:5.

31

John 13:13.

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Psalm 8:1,8.