

## **“Why it is So Important to Turn to the Lord as both Human and God?”**

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"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult." (Numbers 24:17)

With these words the prophet Balaam foretold one of the most remarkable events in all time, the coming of the Lord. Some of us have been hearing these words every Christmas for years, often at the Tableaux service. They are a reminder of the ancient wisdom that had the wise men of the east studying the night sky. The wise men were looking for a special star that would be a sign that king had been born.

Think of the core of this prophecy: “A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel.” Jacob and Israel are two names for the same person. Jacob was the name given to him by his parents and Israel was given to him following a remarkable nighttime wrestling match. The teachings for the New Church tell us this about Jacob’s second name:

Israel in the original language means “one contending as a prince with God,” and these words mean in the internal sense that [the Lord] overcame in the conflicts that accompany temptations; for it was through temptations and the conflicts which take place in temptations that the Lord made His Human Divine . . . And it is temptations and victories in temptations that make the spiritual person. This is why Jacob first received the name Israel after his wrestling - “wrestling” meaning to undergo temptation. (*Arcana Caelestia* 4286:8)

These two names for the same person, Jacob and Israel, are then associated with two items that would not normally thought to be a pair. Often one would associate a scepter with another sign of royalty, such as a crown. Stars are often spoken of with the other things created on the fourth day of creation, the sun and moon (Genesis 1:16, see also Revelation 8:12). Nevertheless, the prophecy links these two names and two dissimilar items, a star and a scepter.

In the internal meaning of the Word Jacob and Israel refer to two qualities in the Lord’s church and two qualities in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In general “Jacob” in the Word means the external aspect of the Church and “Israel” the internal, for every Church has an external aspect and it has an internal one, that is, it is internal and also external. And because that which constitutes the Church is meant by “Jacob” and by “Israel” and because the Church in its entirety originates in the Lord, both Jacob and Israel therefore mean the Lord in the highest sense - “Jacob” the Lord's Divine natural, “Israel” His Divine spiritual. Consequently the external aspect of the Lord's kingdom and of His Church is meant by “Jacob” and the internal by “Israel.” (*Arcana Caelestia* 4286:7)

Why is a star linked to the name “Jacob” and a scepter to the name “Israel?” A star is a twinkle of light in the night sky. It is a very small light and yet for centuries people knew they could find

their way by using stars in the night sky as a guide. The Lord was born into the world so that we could know He is a human God. He was the Word made flesh to dwell among us (John 1:14). He came to show us examples of what it means to live our lives from love guided by wisdom. After He humbly washed His disciples feet on the night of the Last Supper, He said “I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you (John 13:15). For those who read the Gospels and reflect on their stories of the Lord’s life, enriched with greater meaning by the teachings for the New Church, there are powerful images of what it means to live a wisely kind life. These images show the Lord reacting to specific individual circumstances – they don’t necessarily translate into clear instructions for what we are to do today interacting with the people in our lives, but they give guidance, perhaps like a star in the night sky that keeps us heading in the right direction.

A scepter is linked to the name “Israel.” We are told that a scepter as a sign of royalty or kingship means power and control, in particular the power and control of truth motivated by good loves (*Arcana Caelestia* 6371:1). The Lord came into the world, born as a newborn infant with Mary as His mother in order to accomplish our redemption and salvation. It could not have happened in any other way. The explanations the teachings for the New Church give us of Lord’s life and mission in this world can be less than easy to follow. See what you can understand from the following quotation:

From good which is Jehovah’s [or God’s from eternity] the Lord united the Divine Essence to the Human Essence, and from truth united the Human Essence to the Divine Essence, and so achieved every single thing all from Himself. Indeed His Human was left to Itself in order that of Himself He might fight against all the hells and overcome them; and because He had life within Himself, as stated, which was His own, He overcame them by His own power and strength, as is also clearly stated in the places quoted from the Prophets. So then, because He acquired all things to Himself by His own powers, He became Righteousness, cleared the world of spirits of hellish genii and spirits, and in so doing rescued the human race from destruction - for the human race is governed by means of spirits - and thus redeemed it. This is why the Old Testament Word speaks so often of Him as Rescuer and Redeemer, and also Savior, as His name Jesus describes. (*Arcana Caelestia* 2025:5)

The Lord while in the world battled the evil spirits in His temptations. Through conquering in these temptations He took on the power represented by a scepter, a sign of kingship. As He taught his disciples “All power has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). The Lord came to provide us the possibility of choosing the happiness and usefulness of a heavenly life.

While the details may not be as clear as we might want, anyone who knows and reflects on the teachings for the New Church about the Lord’s first advent can have increasing awe for its significance. The process of His spiritual development from being an infant knowing nothing more than you or I did when we were born to having a mind perfectly able to receive the infinite love and wisdom of God the creator was the work of His life. Without the birth of the Lord into the world by means of the Virgin Mary it would have been impossible for anyone to become an angel in heaven. It would have been impossible for anyone to experience true peace and happiness. The power of the hells had grown so great that the ability of any human being to resist

them was gravely endangered. If the Lord had not come, everything good in each member of the human race would have been destroyed by the evil spirits of hell breaking the connection between heaven and the earth. We are told that a cataclysmic destruction of all human beings would have immediately ensued upon the breaking of this connection.

Although the danger of the situation at the time of the advent might fill us with a sense of an averted disaster, another aspect of the Lord's birth may bring us wonder and awe. If we reflect on the idea that the infinite God of creation, who has created and maintained two trillion galaxies, each averaging 100 billion stars, chose to clothe Himself in a finite body much like yours or mine in order to be born in this world in a small town, in a relatively primitive culture in order to save and redeem each of us and the human race as a whole, this is an amazing idea. It was absolutely necessary that the Lord took on a natural body and mind, together with its hereditary inclinations evil by being born of Mary in order for Him to accomplish His work. He could not have conquered the hells and reestablished the spiritual freedom of every human being to resist the power of evil loves and the false ideas that support them. It was absolutely essential that the Lord take on a natural mind with its limitations that allowed the hells to approach Him and tempt Him. By conquering in these temptations the Lord changed the influence and operation of both the evil spirits of hell as well as the angels of heaven. He provided a new order for each that saved and redeemed all of us.

Through His birth at the first Christmas and the life in this world the Lord made Himself visible to us in a way that had been impossible before. Each of us can turn to Him as our God and Savior. We can realize we are loved by this Human God with infinite perfection and with infinite wisdom. May we turn to this essential truth even in the dark times of our lives. May this essential truth guide us through the darkness like a star.

The Lord also came to gain the power represented by the scepter. If we face our own times of spiritual trial and temptation, knowing that we must fight as though we were doing it alone, but that all the power that will allow us to conquer comes from the Lord, something of this scepter of truth motivated by good loves will grow within our lives. It is this growing presence of the Lord within our own lives that He wants for each of us. The Holy Supper represents this growing presence of the Lord in our lives as we try to follow Him ever better each day. The bread represents His gift of love to warm our hearts. The wine represents His gift of growing wisdom to bring light to our minds.

The prophet Balaam spoke words of ancient wisdom when He foretold the Lord's birth into the world. He said "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult" (Numbers 24:17). May this prophecy remind us of the Lord's purposes in being born into the world. May we be inspired by it and all we know of the birth and life of our savior and redeemer to live better lives, to follow His example and teachings, and to turn to Him for strength and hope. AMEN.

Lessons: Numbers 24:10-19, *Arcana Caelestia* 2034:5-7

## **Numbers 24:10-19**

<sup>10</sup> Then Balak's anger was aroused against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and look, you have bountifully blessed *them* these three times!" <sup>11</sup> Now therefore, flee to your place. I said I would greatly honor you, but in fact, the LORD has kept you back from honor." <sup>12</sup> So Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying, <sup>13</sup> 'If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD, to do good or bad of my own will. What the LORD says, that I must speak'?" <sup>14</sup> And now, indeed, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the latter days." <sup>15</sup> So he took up his oracle and said: "The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor, And the utterance of the man whose eyes are opened; <sup>16</sup> The utterance of him who hears the words of God, And has the knowledge of the Most High, *Who* sees the vision of the Almighty, *Who* falls down, with eyes wide open: <sup>17</sup> "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult. <sup>18</sup> "And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession, While Israel does valiantly. <sup>19</sup> Out of Jacob One shall have dominion, And destroy the remains of the city."

## ***Arcana Caelestia* 2034:5-7**

As for the conjunction of the Infinite, or Supreme Divine, with the human race being accomplished through the Lord's Human made Divine, and as for this conjunction being the reason for the Lord's Coming into the world, this is an arcanum to which many apply their minds, but because it is beyond their grasp they do not believe it. And since they do not believe it, for the reason that they cannot grasp it, that arcanum becomes a stumbling-block to them. That this is so I have been given to know from much experience of people entering the next life. Very many of these - the majority of clever people in the world - when they merely think that the Lord became man and was in outward appearance like any other human being, and that He suffered, and yet is at the same time governing the universe, immediately fill the sphere around them with stumbling-blocks. The reason they do so is that to them this whole idea had been a stumbling-block during their lifetime, though they had not then made this public but had worshipped Him in outward expressions of holiness. For in the next life the things that are interior are laid bare and revealed by the sphere that emanates from them. From this sphere one perceives quite plainly what their faith had really been and what they had really thought about the Lord.

This being so let the matter be explained a little further. After everything celestial with human beings perished, that is, all love to God, so that as a result the will for what is good existed no longer, the human race was separated from the Divine. For nothing other than love effects conjunction, and when love has been reduced to nothing, disjunction has taken place. And when the latter has taken place destruction and annihilation follow. At that point therefore a promise was given concerning the Lord's Coming into the world, who was to unite the Human to the Divine, and by means of this union was to join [to the Divine] the human race that was abiding in Himself through faith grounded in love and charity.

From the time of that first promise given in Gen. 3:15, this kind of faith in the Lord who was to come was conjunctive. But once faith springing from love did not remain any more in the world the Lord came and united the Human Essence to the Divine Essence so that these were completely one, as He Himself states explicitly. At the same time He taught the way of truth to the effect that everyone who believed in Him, that is, who loved Him and what was His, and who abided in His love, which is a love directed towards the entire human race and so towards the neighbor, would be conjoined and thus saved.