

God's Coming Into The World – 1

Who was it who came; and what did He do when He was here?

It was promised that it would take place many, many centuries before it did do. When it happened few people were present or knew about it. And, as an event in history it is now more widely celebrated throughout the world than any other.

I am of course referring to the Incarnation; to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ in Bethlehem over two thousand years ago. And what I might have added is that though so widely celebrated and brought before our notice every Christmas, as it is, yet there remains to this day, as indeed there has existed from the earliest times of the Christian Church, considerable uncertainty as to who Christ was, and what it was He came on earth to do.

In view of this I thought to turn to the question of what was involved in that wondrous event. As I've said, no event was ever so long awaited. Throughout the Old Testament, beginning with the Book of Genesis, there are prophecies that one day a Messiah would be born. As to when it would be nobody knew, and mankind waited for what in fact turned out to be thousands of years. As I also said, when it happened few people were present or knew about it. When the Lord was born on earth it was in circumstances entirely unlike what had been generally expected, and many refused to believe in Him because of this. And even in His own day and amongst His closest followers, there was confusion of thought and uncertainty in their minds.

I will, in a moment, speak of this; of the identity of Jesus Christ and who He was. What I want to do first of all, however, is to talk about the actual circumstances which called for His Coming into the world, and of the situation He came to put right.

And it is in this regard that I must say something about freewill. The Coming of the Lord into the world was very closely related to our continuing to enjoy free-will, and I would like to explain how.

There have been occasions in my talks on this programme when I have referred to our unseen spiritual associates and of the way in which our lives are influenced from the spiritual world. Perhaps you can recall my doing so. Remarkably, and during the whole of our life in this world, we are in unconscious association with heaven and its influences on the one hand, and with hell, and its influences, on the other. The fact is that we live our lives in the midst of unseen spiritual associates whose job it is to convey the impulses of life to us. They are always at hand, inspiring and suggesting, attacking or defending.

The Scriptures are by no means silent about this. In Psalm 91, for example, God

promises to give His Angels charge over us. And in Psalm 35, those forces are spoken of which "seek after my soul". "Let their way be dark and slippery", says the writer of the Psalm, "And let the angels of the Lord persecute them". Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac, and he promised his servant that the Lord would send His angel "before thee" (Genesis 24, 7). And then there is what the Lord said as in Matthew chapter 18, about angels, associated with children who "behold the face of my father who is in heaven". Unaware though we may be of such influences from the spiritual world on our lives, yet they are there.

As Swedenborg wrote of this:

"Man is altogether ignorant that he is governed by the Lord through angels and spirits, and that with every one there are at least two spirits, and two angels. By spirits he has communication with the world of spirits, and by angels with heaven. Without communication by means of spirits with the world of spirits, and by means of angels with heaven, and thus through heaven with the Lord, man could not live at all; his life entirely depends on this conjunction, so that if the spirits and angels were to withdraw, he would instantly perish".

(Arcana Caelestia).

We are, then, at the centre of what are basically two opposing influences constantly playing on our lives. There is that good influence from heaven which would have us do what is right and be unselfish, and there is that influence from hell such as would lead us to do what is wrong and be selfish. Fortunately, we are in a position where we can choose which will hold sway over us. We are, in this matter, a totally free agent. We can choose either to go along with the promptings and urgings which reach us from hell, or to go along with the promptings and urgings which reach us from heaven. There is no compulsion either way. It is a matter we must decide entirely for ourselves. Hence it is that we have free-will, and this is how it comes about. (see *True Christian Religion*, para. 475).

At the time of the Lord's Coming into the world, the balance and evenness of the two opposing influences reaching people from the spiritual world was in danger of being lost. Influences from hell had become stronger and more pressing than influences reaching people from heaven. And you can imagine the effect this was beginning to have on people's thought and behaviour. All that was evil was beginning to take over.

Immorality and indecency were beginning to become the order of the day, as we know from the history of those times. People were tending to become unthinkingly evil. They came very close to losing their free-will; to doing evil without consciously choosing it, and soon evil and falsity would have been totally widespread throughout the world. A situation would have developed where evil would have taken command completely and the human race would not long have survived.

In order to avoid this calamity and to prevent the situation developing where evil from hell came to control the lives of people, even against their wishes, God Himself intervened. It was necessary that He throw back the forces of evil which were beginning to engulf the lives of people everywhere.

He came on earth to restore the balance once again, and to give us back our free-will. And this leads me on to the question which I raised earlier, and promised I would deal with, concerning the identity of Jesus Christ and who He was.

There is only one God who created and who sustains the universe, and who loves and cares for us. As in Isaiah 43, verse 10: "You are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am He: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Saviour." As I have already indicated, this One God Himself came into the world, putting on human nature by birth of the virgin Mary. He Himself decided to meet head-on the influences from hell which were beginning to hold such sway over the lives of people everywhere, and to overcome them.

Perhaps you wonder how God Himself could have come on earth. How can the Almighty have been wholly present within that Child born?

Our difficulty in conceiving of this arises from the fact that we tend to think of God from the point of view of time and space. We tend to think of God as necessarily occupying a certain 'area'. But God is not in time and space. Where God is concerned we have to try to raise our thinking above the limitations which time and space would impose upon it. Again and again Swedenborg stresses the point that "Jehovah God Himself descended and assumed the Human in order to effect our redemption". (*True Christian Religion* para. 81). He willed to be born on earth; to "put on" human nature; in order to overcome those forces and influences which would otherwise have overwhelmed us.

Where in the Bible though does it say this?

Think for a moment on those well-known words from Isaiah: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name" (please note this) "shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace". So often we speak of the Lord as the Prince of Peace. He was also the Mighty God and the everlasting Father.

And further on in Isaiah, chapter 25, verse 9: "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is Jehovah; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

Swedenborg wrote, "While the Lord was in the world He fought against the hells, overcame and subdued them, and so brought them under obedience to Himself." (*True Christian Religion* 116). Had He not done this the human race could not (as we saw earlier) have survived. Out of love for mankind and from deep concern that the possibilities of salvation should always be open to us, He, who was Jehovah Himself, came into the world, veiling over His divinity as He did do, that He might overcome the forces which were beginning to be so stacked against us .

I repeat the point: out of His love and concern for mankind God Himself came on earth to effect redemption. He did not send another. And as we think about this teaching so the Christmas event takes on a completely new significance for us.

This has been the first of three talks on the subject of God's Coming into the world. Next week I will be talking about the Virgin Birth, now widely disbelieved, it is true, but absolutely necessary, if God was to descend into the world.

The Swedenborg Programme – Number 28.

<http://www.swedenborg.com.au>