

## **WHY THE LORD WAS BORN AS A MAN**

BY THE REV. DAVID W. AYERS

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

All residents of this planet we call “earth” share a common element of our heritage, one that is unique among all of the planets, galaxies, and universes. Something happened 2,000 years ago on this planet that never happened anywhere before or since: the Maker and Creator Himself, the infinite God came to earth and was born as a human being. He walked among His people, taught them, loved them, and so saved the entire human race from total destruction.

What had made this incredible mission necessary? Nothing short of infinite Divine Love burning with a desire to save human beings from a hidden, but impending doom. Through generations of choosing to serve their selfish and worldly loves, people had separated themselves from God. They had chosen to forget Him and forget how He meant people to live. The Lord could not be present in people’s lives because they had chosen to exclude Him. Mutual love among people was extinguished, and evil was breaking out everywhere, in both the natural and spiritual worlds, destroying all ability to see or choose anything true or good, dragging people further into hell. Complete planetary annihilation was imminent.

And so the Lord assumed a human body so that He could be attacked by the hells, defeat them, and break the grip of every evil and falsity that held the human race in bondage. And He came to teach people how they could again live and be conjoined with Him.

### **Two Questions**

Even though the Lord has provided us with the four Gospels

and many volumes of the Writings for the New Church which explain His mission, it can still be difficult for us to understand how this process could have worked. Two questions especially stand out:

First, how could the Creator of every person and every thing ever be attacked by evil? After all, the Lord is Life Itself, Love Itself, Power Itself. How could anything or any one He created pose any threat to Him at all?

Second, why did the Lord have to be born on earth as a human being? Since He is so powerful, couldn't He simply have accomplished His work from heaven, using angels and miracles to defeat evil and save the human race?

In answer, we are taught first that the Lord had exhausted every other method of helping people. For hundreds of years the Lord had appeared to people in the form of angels who spoke in His name and acted as willing instruments of His love and guidance. He had empowered dozens of prophets to speak in His name, warning the human race of its spiritual folly in turning away from their Creator. But in time, the spiritual condition of the human race degenerated so much that this indirect communication was no longer sufficient or powerful enough. The Lord Himself would have to come.

Secondly, the Lord would never have used His great power to force His will on anyone. It would have been contrary to His nature to compel people to obey Him through fear and awe. He wants us to be free to choose in spiritual things above everything else. In fact, He guards this freedom so closely that we are allowed to use it to reject Him and choose hell. People can become spiritual only by *choosing* to leave behind their selfish loves, and by *asking* the Lord to grant them heavenly loves. In order to do this, we have to be able to understand what the Lord wants and then compel ourselves to accept it. This freedom to understand and choose heaven is what was missing from

people's lives before the Lord was born on earth. The Lord came to restore this freedom.

### **How Could the Lord Redeem Us?**

The Lord had to devise a way to carry out His mission of redemption while preserving our precious freedom, a way that would enable Him to restore conditions in the natural and spiritual worlds permanently so that freedom would never again be threatened.

How did He do this? The Lord is so powerful that no evil love or false thought could ever come close to Him. In order for the hells to attack Him, the Lord needed to find a way to share in the human proclivity for evil and falsity. He had to become, as it were, like one of us, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy given 700 years earlier: "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities..." (53:4-5). The method He chose to meet all these requirements was birth in a physical human form. The Lord's physical body was born from Mary but was conceived by the "power of the Highest." From the beginning, therefore, the Lord had two natures, one derived from God Himself that was His "soul" (which He referred to as "the Father"), and the other derived from Mary, that was His physical body (which He referred to as "the Son"). As to His Father, the hells could not even approach, much less tempt, the Lord. It was from His human mother that the Lord received the hereditary tendencies associated with His physical body that would enable the hells to attack Him—His external man, the Son.

### **The Temptation of the Lord's Human**

The Lord could never have been tempted to do evil by the hells as to His Good or Love. But because He was born into a physical

human body, the Lord had a natural part to his mind. He had to grow and learn like everyone else. And in that process of viewing the world and learning about the world around Him through that impure mind, He could be assailed by the illusions and falsities that had overwhelmed every other person. The Lord could be tempted to think, consider, and accept false assumptions and illusions based on His senses—and from this false thinking, be drawn toward evil. In this way all the hells broke upon the Lord and tormented Him throughout His entire earthly life.

We read about the Lord's temptations in this powerful passage from *Arcana Coelestia* 1690:

[T]he whole of the Lord's life in the world from earliest childhood consisted in constant temptation and constant victory. The last was when on the Cross He prayed for His enemies, and so for all people in the whole world...[and] *out of His love towards the whole human race He fought against self-love and love of the world*, with which the hells were filled completely.... The love that was the Lord's very life is meant by His being hungry and by the devil's saying, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered, "It is written that man will not live by bread alone but by every word of God" (Luke 4:2-4; Matthew. 4:2-4). [emphasis added]

### **Combats Against Love of the World**

The Lord's combats against *the love of the world* are described in the Gospels in the account of the devil's taking Him up on a high mountain and showing Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and saying, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve'" (Luke 4:5-8; Matthew 4:8-10).

### **Combats Against Love of Self**

The Gospels describe the Lord's combats against self-love in the account of the devil's taking Him into the holy city, setting Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and saying to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He shall give His angels charge concerning you,' and, 'in their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.' Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'" (Matthew 4:5-7; Luke 4:9-12).

Based on these teachings, can we surmise what kinds of illusions and falsities tormented the Lord? Because He fought against all the loves of self and the world from a love for saving the entire human race, *He was tempted to doubt that His mission would succeed, about His ability to save people, and their willingness to be saved. He was assailed with doubts and fears* because He had a frail human part just like ours. He knew He must die and feared His mission might fail. He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane and sweated blood. He may have been *tempted to take shortcuts*: to force people to accept Him, to exercise the great power that was within Him, rather than allow people to mistreat and reject Him. These temptations, and more, battered the Lord throughout His entire earthly life.

We also know that the Lord's temptations were "so serious that no other could ever endure one ten thousandth part of them" (*Arcana Coelestia* 1573:4). This was because "the intensity of the love determines that of the temptation" (*Arcana Coelestia* 1690:6). Since the love that was tempted in the Lord was His infinite, burning, compassionate love for the entire human race, His grievous temptations were of a correspondingly intense nature.

Yet, miraculously, the Lord never failed in any temptation. Every time He was tempted, the Lord was victorious. Every day of His life the Lord fought the hells from the Divine Truth of the

Word. And every day He won great victories: “The hells were constantly overpowered, subdued, and vanquished by Him; and this He did solely out of love towards the whole human race” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1690:6).

Through this process the Lord gradually glorified His human. He put off every hereditary tendency for what was false and evil, and put on what was from the Father. By the time His earthly life ended, the Lord’s material body was completely dissipated. There was nothing left in the tomb. Instead, the Lord had a Divine Human—He was God even down to the natural level.

### **The Wonder of the Lord’s Incarnation**

As we celebrate this Advent season, may each of us spend time reflecting on the reason why the Lord had to be born as a man on our earth. By becoming flesh and living among us, the Lord broke hell’s evil stranglehold over our hearts and minds, restoring our ability to receive, understand and accept the truth, and so be saved from hell—if we choose to do so. This is the Lord’s *hidden* gift to us.

But He has also given us another gift of immeasurable worth—one that *we can see*. Because He was born as a man, we know that the Lord is Human, that He became the embodiment of all that is truly human. Through His presence on earth, the example He set by His life, and the clear teachings He gave in the Sacred Scriptures and the Writings for the New Church, we can see Him for what He is: our infinite, loving, merciful Heavenly Father, Who was and is willing to do *anything and everything* to give us every opportunity for eternal happiness—the joy and peace of heaven that we will all receive when we allow Him to make His Advent into our lives. *Amen*.

Lessons: John 1: 1-14; Malachi 4; *Arcana Coelestia* 2034:6