

# New Church Courier December 2002



Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a  
conspiracy of love



.Hamilton Wright Mabi

## The Word Becoming Flesh

by Rev. Garry Walsh

### The lineage of the house of David

Imagine for a moment what it would like to read the opening to the Gospel of Matthew for the first time. There we read by way of introduction: *"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham"*. The stage had been set to introduce the figure of Jesus Christ. The introduction points to his noble ancestry. The pronoun his is italicised here, because the introduction in itself does nothing to indicate His divinity.

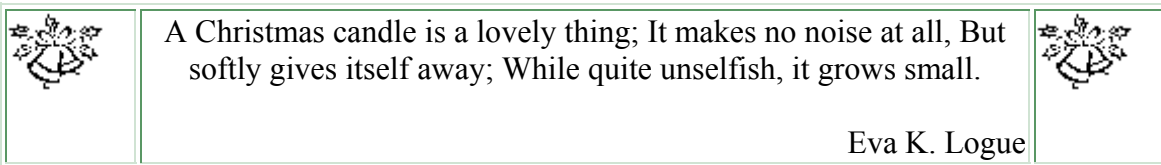
For the most part, the genealogy that follows the introduction initially shows no hint of His divinity either. For 14 verses, the genealogy proceeds in a way that is generally indistinguishable from similar genealogies in the Old Testament. There are three such genealogies in the book of Genesis for instance. These deal with the descendents of Shem, Abraham and Jacob. The 1st book of Chronicles is almost all genealogies. And so, the genealogy that opens Matthew is essentially unremarkable. Its most significant feature is that it contains the names of the three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It also contains the names of Israel's kings, David and Solomon, together with thirteen succeeding generations of kings that ruled Judah. If nothing else, it soon becomes clear that "Jesus Christ" has descended from Israelite nobility. It is hard to image a more noble blood line than the one pictured here.

### Not "begotten"?

Everything changes in verse 16. Until then, each male figure that is introduced is said to have "begotten" the next male figure in the series. Each subsequent generation is defined as being the physical offspring of the one before. But, this is not the case in verse 16. There we read, *"And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ"*.

The fact that a child's mother was named is not all that remarkable. Earlier in the genealogy we read that Perez's mother was Tamar. Obed's mother was Rahab and Jesse's

mother was Ruth. Yet, here we have not only the name of Jesus' mother, but no indication that Joseph was the biological father. Joseph was indeed Mary's husband, but no where does the text say that Joseph "begot" Jesus.



The first time reader of Matthew might ask, "How can this be?" "How could Jesus be the son of Mary and not at the same time the son of her husband Joseph?" Because we probably all come from a Christian heritage, we may well be able to accurately fill in some of the missing details regarding Jesus' paternity. But, the first time reader of Matthew may not be able to do this. The reason is because all sorts of people find themselves in marriages where a child is the offspring of their spouse and not them. Having step-children is commonplace.

From a legal perspective, there was no real difference between biological children and adopted children in Israel. Once a man had brought a child into his house and had taken responsibility for that child, the child was considered every bit as much his family as if the child was fathered by him. And so, as far as Jesus' ancestral lineage was concerned, he was clearly from David's line even though Joseph was not his biological father.

### **The miraculous conception**

We have to wait until the eighteenth verse of the chapter to find an explanation of the circumstances in which Mary became pregnant with Jesus. There we find a startling statement. "*After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit*"(emphasis added). This is the first time that such a statement had appeared in the Scriptures. It indicates no earthly father in the process of conception. Surely such a thing is impossible! Surely such a thing is outside of the bounds of nature! To believe this thing, requires a leap of faith. A leap that is fundamental to acceptance of the Christian message. Jesus Christ was not conceived as every other mortal baby had been. He had been conceived by means of the Holy Spirit. There was Divinity within His natural mortal body.

This concept of the Divine within the natural is central to New Church thought. There is a teaching in the work *Divine Love and Wisdom* that states that:

"Out of nothingness, nothing is or can be made. This is an abiding truth. The universe, therefore, which is in God's image, and hence full of God, could only have been created in God from God" (DLW 55).

The following number goes on to say that:

"Every created thing, by virtue of its origins, is such in its nature that it may be a recipient of God."

In the case of normal human conception, we can deduce that it is the Lord's work that causes the male seed to fertilise the female egg, and consequently moves the cell division that will result in the creation of a new human being. The egg within a potential new mother is a vessel produced by the Lord, with the potential to be used as a tool by the Lord in the creation of a new life. What is more, we are taught that "the Lord conjoins Himself to a person in the womb of the mother from the first conception, and forms the person" (Divine Wisdom III: 1). The passage goes on to say that, "(the Lord's) life itself is present from the first conception and is what gives form."

This type of idea is reflected in the teaching that:

"All reproduction, all propagation, and all procreation stem in origin from an influx of love, wisdom and application to useful purpose flowing in from the Lord....Processes of reproduction, propagation and procreation are clearly continuations of creation; for creation can have no other source than Divine love acting through Divine wisdom in Divine application to useful purpose"

(Conjugal Love 183: 4, 5).

Given these teachings, it does not seem surprising that the Lord, when the occasion in human history called for it, chose to inflow into the natural egg of a woman the way he did, and so create a new life that required no biological father. His Divine love and purpose was the salvation of the whole human race. There was no other way for this salvation to be achieved than through His taking on of a finite human body and His subsequent life in the world.



Let us remember that the Christmas heart is a giving heart, a wide open heart that thinks of others first. The birth of the baby Jesus stands as the most significant event in all history, because it has meant the pouring into a sick world of the healing medicine of love which has transformed all manner of hearts for almost two thousand years... Underneath all the bulging bundles is this beating Christmas heart.



George Matthew Adams

The Lord knew the minds of Mary and Joseph. He knew that Mary was in a state of life where she would be receptive to this unexpected motherhood. The Lord also knew how Joseph would receive the message given when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, and would accept Mary as his wife, despite her pregnancy. The Lord knew that

His intentions to provide salvation for the whole human race could be achieved through Mary and Joseph.

### **The long-term plan**

The genealogy in Matthew, together with a different genealogy found in the 3rd chapter of Luke, indicates how far the Lord's wisdom stretched into the future of the Israelite people. He had foreseen the progressive decline of humanity, and had a plan in mind to make His Advent into the world. Beginning in King David's own times there have been prophecies given that state that the Saviour would come from among David's descendents (see Psalm 89: 34-37). This message becomes clearer through the prophets. In Jeremiah we read:

"Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is the name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jeremiah 23: 5, 6).

The Lord's Advent took place nearly a thousand years after David's reign. The Lord's Divine wisdom and foresight is such that He undoubtedly knew the Advent would come well before then.

### **The Word become flesh**

The opening of the Gospel of John says:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....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: 1, 14).

The Lord from His Divine love, by means of His Divine wisdom, created a means by which He would come into the world and save the human race. He was the Word. He had always been all truth. When the time and circumstances were right, the Word became flesh. Mary became His handmaiden and Joseph became His surrogate father and protector until the infant body grew to the point where it could defend itself.

Mary remained a constant companion for Jesus through His life on earth. She had been integral at His conception and birth. She was there at His crucifixion. Again in John we read:

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved (presumably John) standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then

He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home" (John 19: 25-27).

We do not know what happened to Joseph. His presence is never recorded during the Lord's public ministry. His role however had been fulfilled. He had provided Jesus with a legal lineage to the house of David. He had been by Mary's side when the miraculous pregnancy and birth took place. Together with Mary, Joseph had been a willing servant of the Lord and a means by which the Word could become flesh and dwell among us.



Once in the year and only once, the whole world stands still to celebrate the advent of a life. Only Jesus claims this worldwide, undying remembrance.



Anonymous

## A Christmas Message

by Father Robert A. Sirico

President of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty  
December 2001

One of the traditional hymns employed throughout the Advent season is the haunting refrain:

"O Come, O Come Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That longs in lonely exile here,  
Until the Son of God appear."

This has been a season of anticipation and expectation, but for what? The answer comes in numerous ways: Deliverance, being set free, release of the captive, proclaiming a year of liberty.

It is remarkable how the idea of freedom so permeates the season. In a grand, eschatological sense, the freedom for which the heart of man most deeply longs is freedom from the bondage of sin and death. Political, economic, and personal freedom are critical, but the fundamental freedom is salvation. And it is this confrontation with the mystery of human redemption that may appear at first like a contradiction: How can it be said that sin, which must be freely chosen, results in bondage?

The answer is that the freedom of which the Scriptures speak is not the freedom to do what we want, but the liberty to choose what we ought.

The American people, indeed the entire world have seen the mystery of human freedom at play in recent months, both in the abuse of freedom in tragic events of last September, but also in the myriad acts of comfort, love, kindness, and generosity following those acts.

No power on earth, or even in heaven, can force the conscience of man to choose what St. Paul calls, "the freedom of the children of God." Even God Himself permits us to choose sin; so great is his commitment to our dignity that he will never force our free will. Yet, He stands ready, at any moment, to show us the meaning of true liberty. And when we encounter that freedom, we will understand more fully than ever the words of Jesus, "If the Son will make you free you shall be free indeed," as well as the final refrain of the ancient hymn,

"Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,  
Shall come to thee, O Israel".



It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you . . .  
yes, it is Christmas every time you smile at your brother and offer  
him your hand.



Mother Teresa of Calcutta (1910 -)

## Hurstville Society Pastor's Report for 2001-2002

Presented at the Annual General Meeting: 17th of November, 2002

Rev. Garry B. Walsh

### **The Year That Has Passed**

I am pleased to be able to present a brief outline of the activities of the Hurstville Society for the period, 1st of July 2001, through 30th of June 2002. To a certain degree, this has been an unsettled period for the Hurstville Society. It was during this time that the Society found that it was likely losing its relatively new and enthusiastic pastor Rev. David Ayres. Indeed this report is principally a review of his activities during that period. I know that the decision to leave Hurstville and move to Toronto was not an easy one for David and his family. The Ayres family had settled in and were making Sydney their home. I know that Dave took his commitment to the Hurstville Society very seriously. No doubt his focus on supporting the members and friends of this Society would have been

evident in the way Dave approached his work here. It is no wonder that the people of the Hurstville Society felt upset, and perhaps even a little betrayed by the circumstances that result in Dave accepting a new position. I'm sure I speak for the whole Society when I say that David, Darcy and the family will be missed. We wish them all the best in their new endeavours, and we hope that the bureaucratic hassles that they faced here will be overcome a little more easily in Canada.

### **Hurstville Society Membership**

Membership has remained largely static during this period. As at the 30th of June, 2002, the Society Member Roll Book still showed 29 people. The number of people who are recognised as friends of the Society extends well beyond these numbers. One of the challenges for the pastor and for the Society as a whole is to help demonstrate the benefits of membership to those who have not yet signed the roll. This includes our young people who are approaching, or who are already at an age when membership of the General Church and membership of the Hurstville Society can begin. Current General Church policy places a minimum age of 20 years for membership.

### **Membership Footnote**

Although falling outside the report period the pastor was happy to announce an increase of 2 members with Cliff Adamou and Huiling Sun signing the roll this morning.

### **Worship Services**

The past year saw 54 worship services in Hurstville. This was up from 52 the previous year, and down from 56 the year before. It will take some more investigating to figure out where the differences from year to year lie. One of those services, back in May of this year, was highlighted by the baptism of Cliff Adamou. As in previous years, there was no worship on the Sunday of the annual family camp.

Attendance at worship services remained much the same as the year before. Setting aside the special services at Christmas and Easter, the average attendance was 30. That number comprised an average 25 adults and 5 children. 36 of the services were a combined children's talk and adult sermon accompanied by Sunday School. An additional 4 services were Holy Suppers. As far as I understand, the Holy Supper services have been an extension of the standard children's talk/adult sermon format. The average attendance at these Holy Supper services was also 30. Of those, 21 people on average took the Holy Supper. The other 11 services were the Family Service style where the talk is aimed at people of all ages and there is no accompanying Sunday School. The music for the Family Services has tended to be slightly more contemporary in nature. These Family Services continue to be held monthly with an average attendance of 31. The records do not indicate whether the style of worship has been having an effect upon the decision of particular people to come to church that week.



The simple shepherds heard the voice of an angel and found their Lamb; the wise men saw the light of a star and found their Wisdom.



Archbishop Fulton J Sheen

Average attendance at the three key festival services was up from 38 to 44. These services included a Christmas pageant on the 23rd of December, Christmas Day and Easter Sunday. Unlike the previous year, there was no Christmas Eve vespers service in 2001. This appears to have been a consequence of Christmas falling on a Tuesday. We will be having a Christmas Eve service again this year.

The new style Order of Service booklets have continued from the year before. Generally it seems that people are comfortable with this format. Unless, there are major objection, the booklets will be retained as the normal Order of Service.

### **Classes**

There were 18 Friday doctrinal classes over the last year. This is 2 more than the year before. Average attendance this year was 10, which was the same as the previous year. It is interesting to note that at no time during the year just finished did a Friday class get anywhere near the turn up that a movie night showing "Splendors of the Spirit" received at the end of the previous year. The turn up that night was 27! This calls for another "movie night" in the near future.

The Wednesday morning reading/discussion group met 29 times. This time has been spent studying the Arcana. The average attendance has been 4, 1 down on the average for the previous year.

The Young People's group met 20 times. The average attendance was 8. This was also 1 down on the previous year. History show that movie nights were slightly better attended than regular meetings.

### **Visits/Travelling**

Perth: Not visited since 2001

Tamworth: Not visited since November 2000

Canberra: 2 day workshop on "Nostrodamus and Revelation" in July 2001

Worship and a home dedication in October 2001

### **Sunday School**

During the previous year the decision was made to match the Sunday School topic to the Children's Talk. My sense is that this has been working reasonably well. Many thanks to

those who volunteer to teach, particularly Margaret and Owen who have continued to teach Sunday School despite their own family having grown out of the programme.

The departure of the Ayres family has changed the dynamics of Sunday School. We now have a situation where Jeffrey Heldon and Phillipa Horner are getting toward the end of their time in Sunday School. We hope that they will feel comfortable staying for the adult portion of church in the not too distant future. This leaves Laurel's and my children as the only ones of normal Sunday School age. Decisions regarding how to serve their needs will need to be made in the next year or so.

### **Newsletter/Courier**

The Hurstville Society has continued to publish The New Church Newsletter every month, with the normal exception of January, and the New Church Courier every quarter. Neither of these publications would be possible without the tireless work of Owen Heldon (layout and printing) and Rhonda Hall who does the addressing and mailing. Both publications are also posted on the Society website [www.newchurch.org.au/hurstville](http://www.newchurch.org.au/hurstville).



Don't expect too much of Christmas Day. You can't crowd into it any arrears of unselfishness and kindness that may have accrued during the past twelve months.



Oren Arnold

Articles or other contributions for either publication are always very welcome, as are comments or suggestions for how the Newsletter and Courier may better serve our readers. A special thank you should go to Normal Heldon, whose carefully constructed insights into New Church teachings and their real world applications in human lives are always a delight to read.

### **Family Camp**

The camp that almost wasn't became a camp that by all reports was a huge success. The last minute change of venue from the burned out Stanwell Tops Conference Centre to the Vision Valley Conference Centre in Arcadia (near Dural) may be regarded as a remarkable sign of the Lord's providence at work. And apparently also a sign of Murray Heldon's tenacity which I understand helped inspire Rev. Julian Duckworth into a day of frantic phone calls and ultimately a terrific result. Despite the change of venue and the one day shorter duration, 86 people were still able to attend. We all hope for more of the same uplifting spirit of community when the camp moves to Tahmoor, NSW from the 6th to the 12th this coming January.

### **The Year Ahead**

The year of transition has passed and the Hurstville Society is now in a stable position to focus on the future. The average age of the congregation is still relatively young. This

together with a solid core of dedicated and fiscally responsible church members puts the Society in a reasonably good position to address the uncertainties and possibilities of the years ahead.

It is a joy to see how adaptable the congregation has been to change over the years. Each new pastor has put his own particular stamp on the way the Society operates. As a result, some worship services today look a lot different to when I was my daughter's age. In the same vein, the recent landscaping work at the front of the property demonstrates the Society's recognition of the need to show the world that we exist.

Our challenge is to hold onto the best of what the Hurstville Society has been, while making our church accessible to those who may be seeking the truths that the New Church has to offer, but who may not necessarily feel as comfortable with traditional ways as we are. Striking this balance will require a considerable amount of dialog and cooperation.

Another challenge comes with our responsibility to serve those outside of our immediate congregation. Those General Church members and families outside of Hurstville have not been visited as frequently as they could have been over the past twelve months. My aim is to serve these people with face-to-face visits as regularly as possible, without compromising the level of attention given to the central church congregation here in Hurstville.

Within the near future, I will produce a questionnaire in consultation with a cross-sectional sample of Society members. The exact make up of this group is yet to be determined. The questionnaire to seek to ask each member and friend of the Society what his or her preferences are in regards to a range of issues that affect the life of the congregation. This type of "fact finding" process is common when a new pastor begins with a congregation. The results of this survey will hopefully highlight potential areas of strength, together with areas where the activities of the Society require attention.

The future of the Hurstville Society will be fashioned by the enthusiasm and spirit of cooperation shown by its members. The more we each invest in this Society the greater will be the personal rewards. This investment is not just for us. It is for our sons, daughters and grandchildren. Indeed it is for all people whose lives can find greater fulfilment through knowing and living the truths of new revelation that we know and adhere to.

This is the Lord's church. We have only been granted temporary custody. I look forward to being able to report back in a year's time, and to describe new initiatives that will aim at providing the type of future for the Society that we aspire to, and that will demonstrate to the world the Lord can truly be found here.



What is Christmas? It is tenderness for the past, courage for the present, hope for the future. It is a fervent wish that every cup may overflow with blessings rich and eternal. and that every path may



lead to peace.

- Agnes M. Pharo