

Symbolism of Christmas

Deep in the heart of humanity exists the mystic yearning implanted within it at the first Christmastide when the Light of Man made a definite place for Itself within and upon this dense earth planet.

The word Christmas is derived from the medieval *Christe Masse*, the Mass of Christ.

The story of the Christ birth is for the Occident what the birth of Krishna is for the Orient. Whether literally, mystically, or symbolically understood, it brings to man fundamental truth which, as his Spirit faculties unfold and function to perceive and accept such truth, raises his entire being to a height not reached hitherto.

For the spiritual aspirant, Christ's words "No man cometh to the Father save by Me," carry a transcendent meaning. Parsifal inquires, "Who [sic] is the Grail?" The reply indicates high spiritual perception:



Egg tempera on wood, c 1485-95, Pietro di Francesco degli Orioli, National Gallery, London

The Nativity with Four Saints

John the Baptist and Saint Stephen are at left, Jerome and Nicholas on the right.

*If thou hast by him been bidden,
From thee the truth will not be hidden....
The land to Him no path leads through,
And search but severs from Him wider
When He Himself is not the Guider.*

A true interpretation of the Christmas legend necessitates first of all an understanding, however dim it may be at first, that the birth of the Christ child in the manger in the stable among the animals symbolizes the first faint upspringing of the Christ consciousness in ani-

mal man. The tiny indwelling flame which is the Christ flame has been hitherto dormant in the human soul. It now receives sufficient stimulation to enable it to grow and enlarge until eventually the Spirit makes itself a potent factor in the life of the individual and the first step toward the Father by way of the Christ is taken.

The Ego-self has taken note of its expressing vehicle, the personal man, and has vivified it, so

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that among the “animals” of man’s lower nature, in the manger or feeding place of the animal faculties, the babe of the Christic Self is born. Always the manger or cradle of the Christ Child is a place of sanctuary.

A great solar manifestation comes to fruition at Christmas. Groups of forces composing this manifestation have been personalized down through the ages. The Biblical story properly interpreted contains a near approximation of the actual truth. The entire story of Christmas is a universally applicable symbol. It is found in all accounts of avataric births in all races and nations. Krishna, Mithra, Horus, Orpheus, Hermes, as well as countless heroes, gods, and saviors, were born in “mangers,” wrapped in swaddling clothes, visited by wise men bearing gifts, worshiped by shepherds, and shone as stars of redeeming light for their peoples and nations.

December twenty-fifth is the date of the birth of Earth’s physical light bringer, the Sun. Jesus, representative of the universal Christ, the Light of the world, is the spiritual Light bringer to mankind, and His birth date should properly be the solar date for the sun’s birth. December twenty-fifth, as the birthday of Jesus, was first celebrated some 200 years after the actual event. From early antiquity, many myths concern the mystic Christ birth. Whether born in a cave, a stable, or elsewhere, this

birth has two great symbolic meanings:

1. The birth of Love-Goodwill to men. The giving of a new law to mankind, expressed in the commandments “ Love ye one another,” and “Love is the fulfilling of the Law.”

2. The birth of the Christic consciousness in the souls of all men who aspire to the heights of spiritual truth. No gainsaying can controvert this universal truth.

In its Cosmic sense, the Christmas birth celebrates the descent of the Divine Light, Spirit penetrating and permeating matter. In the human sense it is the descent of the Son of God (Spiritual Light) into matter, the descent of the Ego into the physical body.

Like all great spiritual teachings, this one concerning the origin and celebration of Christmas has been perverted and commercialized through greed and selfishness.

Christmas Eve, December 24-25, is considered the holiest night of the year because on this midnight spiritual influences are strongest. In the

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Mysteries, the candidate, in spiritual vision, saw the mystic Star of Bethlehem, the spiritual Sun that shone on Holy Night, which guided him to the inner Christ. In his heart echoed the deathless and prophetic song “On earth peace, good will toward men.” “Rejoice, ye children of earth, for unto you is born this day a King,” the Seraphs sang on that long ago Holy Night.

In early Britain the beautiful custom of the Yule log was kept. It first became a public ceremony in 1577. Yule is a Germanic word meaning Christmas. Large candles were lighted on Christmas Eve and a large oak log was laid upon the fire to illuminate the house. It was thought that if kept throughout the year, the remains of the Yule

log would protect the house from fire and lightning.

The Christmas tree itself is a universal symbol. Antedating the Christian era, it originated in Egypt during the worship of the Goddess Isis. A palm tree with twelve short shoots on it, representing the twelve months of the year, was used at the time of the winter solstice. In northern regions a fir tree was used instead of a palm. The origin of exchanging gifts occurred in early medieval days. In some countries the custom of foretelling the future from cakes is celebrated on Christmas Eve.

Gifts were brought to the birth of Jesus in the shepherd's cave—precious gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh: spiritual power, love-wisdom, and intelligence were poured upon the newborn Child, the Christic Light atom in the human heart, the babe in its mother's arms, the great earth mother which carries, nurtures, and preserves the tiny life vehicle. These gifts (qualities) were showered by the glorious Magi of the Cosmic realms who bless and enrich each individual spiritual birth. These powers, in rapport with and irradiated by the argentine light of the splendid Christic Star, pour into weak and suffering humanity their stimulating influence and strength, without which man's evolutionary course would be far more difficult and prolonged.

The Magi, high initiates, were drawn to the holy place by their inner perception and knowledge of the supervening, cosmic event, the birth of the world's Savior. The three Wise Men represent those advanced egos brought together in their common purpose from the three primary races. Their gifts signify the several human faculties or sheaths which enter into the process of manifestation. They are led by the glorious Star to the World Savior, to Jesus, whose physical form was to provide the vehicle for the universal Christ Spirit.

He of India brought gold, designated in symbolism as the emblem of the Spirit. We read of alchemists trying to transmute base metal into gold and understand that this is esoteric language for



Tempera on panel, c. 1460, Fra Filippo Lippi, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

Madonna in the Forest

The young St. John carries a cross with a scroll inscribed in Latin, "Behold the Lamb of God." Behind him, Joseph in meditation. Above them all is God, and the Holy Ghost descends in the form of a dove.

describing the purification of the dense body, refining it and extracting its spiritual essence.

He of Egypt brought frankincense or incense, which is a physical substance of very light nature, often used in religious services. It serves as a scaffolding or matrix for the embodiment of ministering unseen forces, and thus symbolizes the physical body.

He of Greece brought myrrh. It is the extract of a very rare aromatic plant. It symbolizes that which man as spirit extracts through experience in the physical world—the soul.

Mary, the mother, was the focus of light, the holy etheric crucible in which the transmutation of the elements took place. She represents the ideal of purity, devotion, and humility, which makes possible the incarnation of the most evolved of human egos.

The shepherds who saw the Star typify the inward vision of Divine Fire as it comes to those on the earth plane whose piety opens the window

of the soul and activates clairvoyance. Their discernment enabled them to see the glory in the heavens and to feel the spiritual impulses radiating from the wondrous Star.

In one sense it was a material star. In a higher sense it was the flame of forces concentrated to bring into material manifestation a physical presentment of the Logos, the world's Savior.

The earth was still. The air was reverently hushed, as if holding its breath, for at that moment it was rapturously focused on Bethlehem (birth). Silence, solitude, and adoration develop the discerning eye, the inner ear, and the sensitive Spirit.

Especially during this Christmastide shall we not focus our thought upon these truths? Shall we not meditate upon the true interpretation of the sublime Christmas narrative, deepening and enlivening our knowledge and understanding of this mystic event? Shall we not center our effort upon expanding our power to serve? Let us celebrate this Christmas by rendering to the Christ Child the love and homage which is His due and our gift and blessing. Let us rejoice with the Shepherds, "For we have seen His Star in the East, and have come to worship Him." He, Who lighteth every man who comes into the world, He stands illuminating the Way. As the incarnation of the Truth and the Life, the Bethlehem Star discloses the path leading to the Father. "For



Boyd Hanna

where I go, ye shall go also."...□
—Katharine Hillwood Poor

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