

The Coming of the Heir

J. McBroom.

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 36, 1948-50, page 209.)

In Luke 2: 1 we read, "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed." This decree had a result of which he had no conception. It has been said that, "In whatever conferred dignity and power he had no rival and no check;" and again, "Whilst in enjoyment of this pre-eminence, the Roman Emperor was unconscious that in a village in Judea, in the lowest ranks of life, among the most contemned tribe of his dominions, his Master was born. By this event the whole current of the world's history was changed."

How different are the ways of God from the doings of man and the world! An event which stands alone in the world's history came to pass; the eternal God came into it as an Infant (see Isaiah 9: 6). He was unnoticed and unwanted, and there was no room for Him in the inn. All heaven, the very throne and heart of God were moved. The events in time, connected with it, are given in Matthew and Luke, but the activities and bearing of it in the eternal world are given in such Scriptures as Psalm 40: 5-8; Hebrews 10: 5-8; John 1: 1, 14; John 10: 36. All heaven was astir, and the angelic celebration, recorded in Luke 2 shows how far-reaching its effects: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good pleasure in men" (New Trans.) The Son had passed by all the hierarchies of the heavens to become Man.

But what of the lower, infernal part of creation? There was undoubtedly consternation, and a malignant opposition, which is pictured in Revelation 12: 1-5 and which found its channel of expression on earth in the massacre of the infants, recorded in Matthew 2. Previously the malevolence of Satan had attempted to hinder the fulfilment of the promise by cutting off the royal line (see 2 Kings 11: 1-3) but, now that the Heir was here, the activities of evil were held in check till the moment when the exercise of all its hatred was permitted at the cross. It was impossible that the incarnation of the Son of God should pass as an ordinary event. Though fallen men knew little of it and cared less, the vast arena of heaven, earth and hell was in commotion.

The one great event towards which all the events of this world's history were directed, was the Incarnation. This shows Divine omniscience and omnipotence, and also the perfection of inspiration. The whole history of our Lord is outlined in the Old Testament, and it should be observed that if His coming had in view man's necessity as a sinner, it had also in view the necessity of the heart of God in connection with His eternal plan and purpose. We have been created by Him and for His pleasure, and while the death of our Lord was for us, it remains true that we were created for Him and have been redeemed by Him. All was foreseen long ere time began; creation and the permission of sin was not an accident, but the fruit and outcome of an eternal plan, which emanated from the heart of God.

The holy body of our Lord was prepared for Him by the Father and formed by the Holy Spirit. This answers to the fine flour and oil of the Meat Offering. His words and works were the fruit of the gracious activity of the whole Trinity. Entering upon His ministry, the Spirit came upon Him; all His works were by the Spirit, and when He had gone on high, who but the Holy Spirit could record the story of that wonderful life?

The interweaving of events as they came out in that life, was not only the work of a "Cunning Artificer," they also remind us of the four ingredients that were used in the composition of the holy

incense. "Thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy" (Ex. 30: 35). It is clear that the Spirit alone could recount in proper and perfect order the life of the Man Christ Jesus here on earth. "Behold Thy King," is fitting as a heading for the Gospel of Matthew, as "Behold My Servant" is for Mark, and "Behold the Man" is for the Gospel of Luke; but with John it is, "Behold your God."

Again, the word most suitable for Matthew might be drawn from Romans 15: 8, "Jesus Christ was a Minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers." For Mark the words most suitable might be "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him." For Luke we might well bring forward the words of Titus 2: "The grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared" (margin). With John it is different: he gives his own headline in his golden preface, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth." In all this we have the weaving of the Skilful Artificer and the compounding of the Divine Apothecary.

Eternity itself will never exhaust the fulness of that blessed Man, who is excellent in dignity and glorious in power. "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

Matthew and Luke give the birth and pedigree. The former traces His lineage to Abraham, and the latter to Adam. Mark and John record no genealogy; in the former He is presented as a Bondman, and it is not expected that the pedigree of a bondman should be traced. With John it is different. He goes back into eternity, and speaks of Him, who is without father or mother and beginning or end of days, the eternal One.

But the Bondman of Mark's Gospel is Jehovah, as the opening verses, taken from Isaiah 40, prove. John the Baptist came saying, "Prepare ye the way of Jehovah." Yet it is in this Gospel that we read, "He could there do no mighty work . . . and He marvelled because of their unbelief." Here also it is that we find Him disclaiming knowledge of the day and hour of His second advent; yet in the previous verse we hear Him saying what would be blasphemy on the part of the highest created being, "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but My words shall not pass away" (Mark 13: 31). And also in Mark 6, where there is something He could not do, He in Godhead power feeds five thousand men besides women and children with five barley loaves and two fishes.

Observe too, that Matthew and John omit the ascension. With the former it is the King Messiah, and it closes with a little picture of millennial glory and His earthly people worshipping Him. The closing words are, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." This is proper for the Gospel where what is dispensational and administrative is prominent. In John we have what is above and beyond all dispensations, He is God, and wherever He is, there is heaven.

Passing over details we come to the Transfiguration. John, who certainly was a witness of it, does not refer to it, for what he was given to write is of a still deeper and richer character. Matthew speaks of the Son of Man coming in His kingdom and he gives us the title "Son of Man" more often than Luke, and yet that is the setting of Luke's Gospel. Mark speaks of the kingdom of God come with power. How fitting are these words in this Gospel where our Lord is presented as a Bondman. In Luke, who writes for Gentile believers, three great things come before us — the kingdom of God, the Cross and the Shekinah glory cloud. Stress is laid upon His death: Moses and Elijah were communing with Him of His decease which He would accomplish at Jerusalem. On four different occasions the Lord

spoke to His disciples about His approaching death, but not one of them could take it in. We learn here that if it could not be taken in by His own on earth, it was a well known theme in that world of glory.

The transfiguration was the Father's answer to His completed service. He came down from the mountain to die, setting His face to go to Jerusalem. He knew that the elders, — the aged, - the chief priests, - the ministers of God - and the scribes, - the learned - of that nation, which had so long been the scene of His care and culture, would put Him to death. All three Synoptic Gospels give the Shekinah, from which the Father's voice was heard, proclaiming His own thought of His beloved Son. This links itself with the heavenly and eternal relationships within the ever-blessed Godhead, which were given to John to bring out. There is the administrative order of blessing in the kingdom of God, revealed in the Son of Man, which for us begins with forgiveness of sins and goes on to new creation, as setting us in Christ before God for His pleasure. But this is linked together with the relationships and affections proper to the Father and the Son, into which we are brought in family relations with Divine Persons: our home the Father's house forever.

In Matthew and Mark the disciples are seen more as the remnant from the nation, who clung to Him as the Messiah in His rejection. This should be noted in connection with the progress in the testimony, recorded in Acts 1-12. There we see that remnant being transferred consciously from Judaism to Christianity. This transition had become necessary by the new circumstances and relationships, brought about by the ascension of the Lord and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

With Luke all this is different, for he laboured with Paul and wrote for Gentile believers. Hence, after the transfiguration, he is led by the Spirit to recount a long course of the Lord's ministry, wherein He is seen turning from the nation that rejected Him and from earthly blessing, and bringing into view a new company for heaven. In this way we get the blessing of the heavenly company indicated in Luke 10-18. The ministry of Paul began from the glory; that is, from the ascended Lord, and had in view the Gentiles, the "other sheep" of which the Lord had spoken. So we see Christianity coming out anticipatively in the Gospel, and then established and progressing in Acts 13-20, through the labours of the Apostle Paul.

Coming back, let us dwell a moment on the differences of statement in these holy Gospels about the amazing scenes of Gethsemane and Golgotha. John gives neither the sweat of blood in the garden nor the cry of abandonment on the cross. Our suffering Saviour and Lord is seen here as the great I AM. The scene surpasses all. A multitude come to take Him with swords and staves. Stepping forward, He said, "Whom seek ye?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I AM," was His answer. They all went backward and fell to the ground. Therein had burst forth His majesty supreme. Nor was it different at the cross. "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." These words from John 13 cannot be divorced from the cross, for never was He more glorified than when He was hanging there.

But if the sweat of blood with all its agony is in Luke and not in John, it is absent also in both Matthew and Mark. How deeply important it is for us to trace these differences. It was in the garden that the whole power of him, who had the power of death, was met anticipatively but, while that was so, it in no way lessened the awful load, that had to be born in actuality at the cross. It was there that the full weight of Divine wrath had to be borne, and that it was that drew out the cry of abandonment. This is what both Matthew and Mark give, as recording His death in the light of the sin and trespass offerings — "My God My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" The distance, the darkness, with its mystery and magnitude; its infinite height morally, and its measureless depth — all are so amazingly great, that we are left in our own littleness to worship and adore.

Could anything touch the chords of our hearts like this?

*"Hark! ten thousand voices crying
'Lamb of God!' with one accord
Thousand thousand saints replying
Wake at once the echoing chord."*

As with burning hearts we listen, do we not realise that,

*"Loud and far each tongue partaking
Rolls around the endless song."*

If there were vibrations and perturbations through the whole creation at the birth of our Lord, what must there have been at His death, when the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake and the rocks were rent?

Truly,

*"Earth shuddered as He died
God's well beloved Son."*

and we may apply the words of Psalm 18: "The earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth . . . He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under His feet."