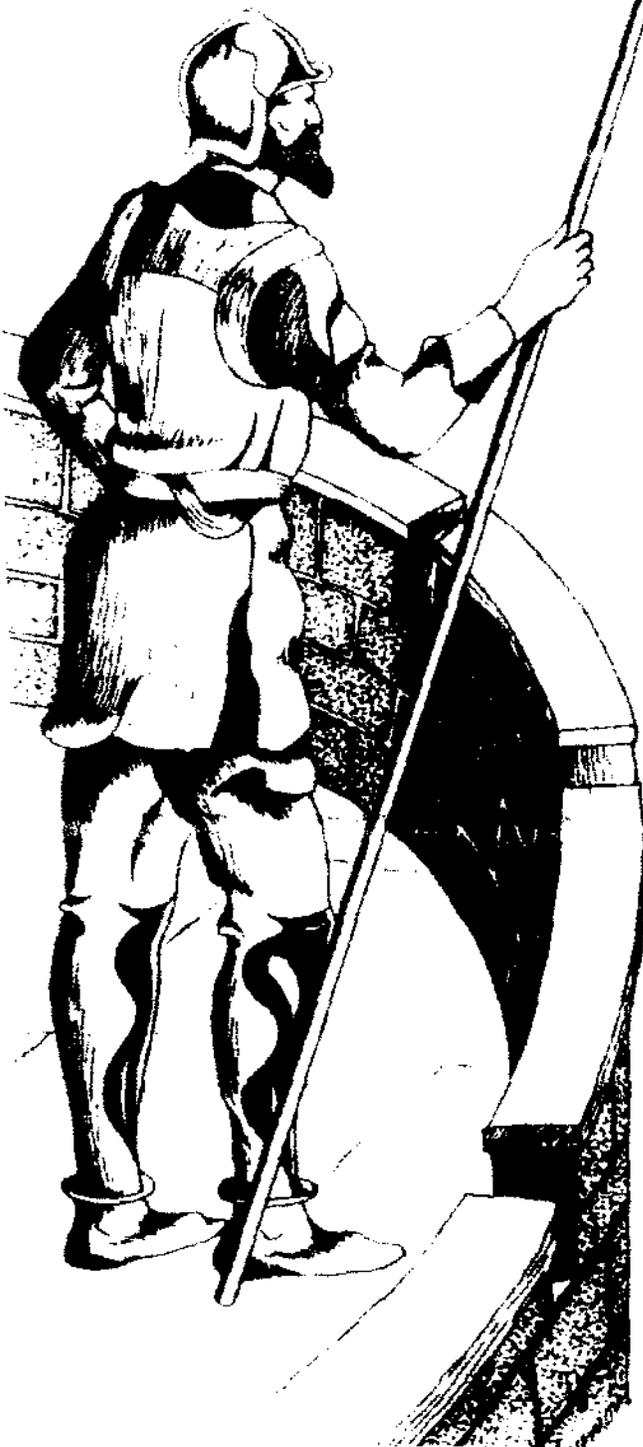


# "Watchman, what of the night?"

*The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,  
the hour and the end!*  
Eze. 7:6 (Moffet)



## "Unto us a Child is Born, Unto us Son is given"

(Page 2)

### Historical Review

(Page 5)

### *Editor's Preface*

The Christian world celebrates the 25th day of this month as the birthday of Jesus. The Stable, the Manger, Shepherds, Wise Men from the East, all focus in Bethlehem. The name, Bethlehem, means, "House of Bread." He who was born at Bethlehem, and laid in a feeding trough for cattle, would proclaim Himself to be "the Bread of life," the very "bread of God" come "down from Heaven" (John 6:35, 33).

In reality, the date December 25, was first honored as the birthday of the sun-god Mithra, and adopted into Christian practice to make Christianity more acceptable to the pagans, as well as worship on Sunday. The actual birth date of Jesus is unknown and never given in Scripture, but it could not have been in December, because the shepherds were still "abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night" (Luke 2:8). The date has no significance, but what occurred does. "God was made manifest in the flesh" and "dwelt among us" (I Tim. 3:16; John 1:14).

"The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ and through Christ to God. This is to be our study. Christ was a real man; He gave proof of His humility in becoming man. Yet He was God in the flesh. When we approach this subject, we do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart. And this study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth." (Selected Messages, bk. I, p. 244)

## *"Unto Us a Son Is Given"*

It was the "gospel" prophet, Isaiah who wrote:

For a child hath been born to us, a Son hath been given to us, and the princely power is on His shoulder, and He doth call His name Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of peace. (9:6; Young's Literal Trans.).

Within the compass of this one verse is to be found the whole of the Incarnation, as well as the controversy which has surrounded it. The Messiah was to be "born to us." He was to become, incarnate, "in flesh appearing." He already was, and was "given to us." How divine? "The mighty God," and "Father of Eternity." For what purpose? That "we (may) have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

It was Paul who wrote, "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16). While Paul's intent could be understood as "Beyond question, great is the mystery of godliness," there has been controversy from the very moment the prophetic promise of Isaiah was fulfilled. In symbolic representation to John on the isle of Patmos, it is declared that "the dragon stood before the woman . . . to devour the child as soon as it was born" (Rev. 12:4). While that Child has been "caught up to God, and to His throne," the "dragon" has not ceased to misrepresent who He was, and what He took upon Himself to be "the Lamb of God which beareth away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, margin).

In his gospel, John records the reaction of the Jews when Jesus declared, "I and my Father are one" (10:30). They took up stones to kill Him. Jesus questioned, why? To this they responded:

For a good work, we stone thee not: but for blasphemy; because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. (v. 33).

The religious leaders had no trouble recognizing Him as a man, but as "God manifest in the flesh," no. To so claim was to them "blasphemy." Over the centuries since, the Christological controversies have concerned both His divine and human natures. Within the Community of Adventism in recent decades, the question which has divided the Church has been the nature of the human nature Christ took upon Himself in becoming a man. The mystery of the Incarnation is still with us.

In the judgment pronounced on the "serpent" is to be found the first gospel promise. The seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. (Gen. 3:15) But it would not be without cost; the heel of the "seed" would likewise be bruised. It needs to be kept in mind that this promise was given after both Adam and Eve had sinned. The "Seed" of the woman would be born into the fallen race. No child of humanity was ever born in Eden. Seth, third son of Adam, who would be a progenitor of Christ, bore the "likeness" and "image" of his father after the Fall (Gen. 5:3).

Another incident which impacts on the controversy of the incarnation is the record of Moses' first encounter with God at Horeb, as he led the flock of his father-in-law to "the backside of the desert." (Ex. 3:1-3). He sees a desert shrub burning but not consumed. Turning to see this unusual phenomenon, God speaks with him from the midst of the glowing bush revealing Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the continuing conversation, when Moses inquired of His name, God responded, "I AM THAT I AM" (v. 14). These "words express absolute, and therefore unchanging and eternal Being."

In the text which records this experience, the Being who converses with Moses is stated to be "the angel of the Lord" (v. 2), "the Lord," and "God" (v. 4). The significance of these names and the self designation by the One speaking as I AM – a verbal name rooted in the verb, "to be" – must be considered against the backdrop of the call

to Moses to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt. He tells Moses, "I am come down to deliver. . ." (v. 8). Keep in mind that when He did come down to deliver from sin, He "emptied Himself" (Phil. 2:7 RV), yet He could still refer to Himself as the "I AM" (John 8:58). Beyond question, great is the *mystery* of godliness, the I AM was manifest in the flesh.

### *Other Old Testament References to Consider*

There are two Messianic psalms which give added light to the mystery of the Incarnation. In the second Psalm, two Beings are presented, the Lord and His anointed (v. 2). The Hebrew word translated "anointed" could be transliterated as Messiah. The Greek word, Χριστος, is Christ. See John 1:41. The God-man of the Incarnation is encompassed in the name Jesus Christ. The second Psalm, however, contains much more. In this Psalm, two existent Beings enter into a compact which is announced as a decree. It reads, "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" (v. 7). In the New Testament, Paul uses this verse as applicable in a double sense. In his Sabbath sermon at Antioch in Pisidia he told the worshippers that Jesus who had been slain, God "raised. . . again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Acts 13:33). Again in the book of Hebrews, this verse is used of Christ in contrast with angels with an added verse from 2 Samuel 7:14, "I will be to him a Father and he shall be to me a Son" (Heb. 1:5).

The contrast between the Christ and the angels is further emphasized by reference to another messianic psalm, Psalm 110. Hebrews reads -- "But to which of the angels said He at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" (1:13). In that Psalm, another provision of the decree is revealed: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (v. 4).

The prophet Zechariah describes these agreements as a part of "the counsel of peace" which "shall be between the Two of Them" (6:13, *Heb*). "The man whose name is The Branch . . . shall grow up out of His place; and "He shall be a priest upon His throne" (vs. 12-13). What contemplations of the "mystery" of the Incarnation these prophets of Old Testament times suggest! From the Throne of the universe, He would condescend to a stable in Bethlehem (House of Bread) -- far from His "place" -- and lay cradled in a feeding trough for cattle. Yet He would rise from the "outer darkness" necessitated because of sin to be a high priest upon the "throne of grace" to which we may come boldly to "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16). Wondrous mystery, "unto us a child is born; unto us a Son is given."

### *When the Fullness of Time was Come*

Paul wrote, "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under law" (Gal. 4:4). [No article in the Greek text before, "law."] The birth of Jesus Christ brought Him into the blood stream of earth the same way, and under the same laws of inheritance as every other son and daughter of Adam. "Unto us a child was born."

Matthew tells us that "the angel of the Lord appeared" to Joseph in a dream and informed him that the conception of Mary was "of the Holy Spirit" (1:20). Luke gives confirming details. He quotes the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary:

The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. (1:35).

This verse demands careful study and analysis. In the Greek text, the word, "thing" does not appear; it has been added by the translators so as to give a noun for the adjective, "holy" to modify. In the Greek

language all nouns had gender, and the adjective, "holy" is in its neuter form, το ... ἅγιον, and linguistically, the noun could be "thing." However, there is another neuter noun and adjective in this verse - Πνευμα ἅγιον (Spirit holy) - the Holy Spirit. What then Gabriel said was that the Holy Spirit would beget Itself in Mary, and the Holy One thus conceived would be called "the Son of God."

In passing it should also be noted that the "Holy One" conceived "shall be called the Son of God," not "was" the Son of God" nor "is" the Son of God, but "shall be" so called.

To the revelation given in Luke regarding the birth of Jesus, must be added what Paul wrote in the Letter to the Church at Philippi. He stated that the One "being" (ὑπαρχων) in "the form of God," "emptied" (εκενωσεν) Himself, taking "the form of a slave" (2:6-7). Here is a great mystery far beyond human comprehension or understanding. Luke stated it to be the Holy Spirit that changed "forms;" John in his gospel declares that the Word who was with God, and was likewise Divine, came to be flesh. (1:1-2, 14). What a cost, our redemption? Even impacting on the Godhead! How full of mystery the condescension so that the "Holy One" could die!

Man can only stand amazed at the lengths the Godhead went to redeem him. How wide is the contrast between "the mighty God" and the helpless infant cradled in a feeding trough for cattle. The "how" of that infinite condescension will forever remain a mystery, but the nature of the slave form that He took upon Himself from Mary is clearly revealed in the Scriptures. He "did no sin" (I Peter 2:22), yet He was "made to be sin for us" (II Cor. 5:21) that we "might be partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4). He came down to deliver us from the slavery of sin; coming "in the likeness of sinful flesh," He "condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3).

The very "gospel of God" involves the "slave form" which Christ took upon Himself. Paul declares that gospel to be "concerning his

Son Jesus Christ our Lord which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:1, 3). Though coming in that "flesh," He still was and now is for evermore, God, over all, blessed forever. (Rom. 9:5; Rev. 1:18).

A Being, truly God, functioning in the realm of the flesh, as truly man, is difficult for us to perceive. One moment He could be "asleep on a pillow" in the back of a boat with a great storm raging, and the waves beating upon the boat; the next moment by His command, "Peace be still," the "wind ceased, and there was a great calm" (Mark 4:37-39). Two confessions could summarize His life as truly man. (Not fully man, for had that been so, He would have been a sinner; nor fully God, for then He could not have died) He declared, "I can of mine own self do nothing" (John 5:30); and "the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works" (14:10). Unless we recognize these two factors in the life of the earthly Jesus, we cannot be victorious in the victory over sin; and neither can we perceive the terrible moment on the cross, when there came the sundering of the divine powers (Matt. 27:46), and Jesus passed into "outer darkness," thus paying "the wages of sin." For unto us a Son was given!

Scripture tells us that Jesus can "be touched with the feelings of our infirmities," because He "was in all points tempted like as we are" (Heb. 4:15). Though He sinned not, yet He faced the same forces and drives of fallen human nature which every son and daughter of Adam face. He faced and conquered "sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). The prophetic picture of "the Seed of the woman" is the emphasis that He was a "man child." The Greek text reads - "And she brought forth a son, a male" (και ετεκεν υιον, αρσεν) Rev. 12:5. He did not come into humanity a eunuch, but as a male being faced with all the sex drives that every human being possesses. But because He ruled Himself with a rod of iron, He shall so rule the nations. This child was caught up unto God and to His throne where He can be touched with the feelings our infirmities, and respond

with mercy and grace in every "time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Isa. 9:6).

## *Historical Review*

The first Statement of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs formulated in 1872 stated that Christ "took on him the nature of the seed of Abraham for the redemption of our fallen race." This was based on Hebrews 2:16, a chapter which would be used as the basis for a heretical movement which developed in the church at the turn of the twentieth century. During the years from 1844 to 1888, little can be found in the publications of the Church in regard to the incarnation outside the writings of Ellen G. White. She stated plainly and unequivocally the nature Christ would take upon Himself in the Incarnation. In 1874 she wrote:

The great work of redemption could be carried out only by the Redeemer taking the place of fallen Adam. ... What love! What amazing condescension! He would place His feet in Adam's steps. He would take man's fallen nature and engage to cope with the strong foe who (had) triumphed over Adam. (*R&H*, Feb. 24, 1874)

A decade later, J. H. Waggoner in his book, *The Atonement in the Light of Nature and Revelation*, declared, speaking of Christ, as One sharing the throne of the universe, he wrote:

He left that throne of glory and of power and took upon Him the nature of fallen man. In Him were blended "the brightness of the Father's glory" and the weakness of "the seed of Abraham." In Himself He united the Lawgiver to the law-breaker - the Creator to the creature; for He was made "sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." (p. 161).

Seventeen years later Ellen White, would borrow the thought and adapt the wording of what Waggoner wrote, declaring:

In Christ were united the divine and the human - the Creator and the creature. The nature of God, whose law had been transgressed, and the nature of Adam, the transgressor, meet in Jesus - the Son of God, and the Son of man. (*Ms. 141*, 1901).

However, between 1884 and 1901, other concepts would be introduced into the Church. In 1894, the Church at the headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan, published a Directory which included a Statement of Beliefs. They stated that these were "points of their faith upon which there is quite general agreement." Concerning the Incarnation the Statement read - "He took on Him the nature of man, for the redemption of our fallen race." This can be understood two different ways. Was it the nature of man as God created him, or was it the nature of man after he had sinned? Whichever conclusion is drawn, the next year at the 1895 General Conference session, A. T. Jones enunciated the nature of Christ's humanity more clearly and more completely than had been done before in any single presentation.

Jones began the study of the humanity of Christ by noting the common source from which the humanity we possess was derived. "One man is the source and head of all human nature. And the genealogy of Christ, as one of us, runs to Adam . . . All coming from one man according to the flesh, are all of one. Thus on the human side, Christ's nature is precisely our nature." (1895 *GC Bulletin*, p. 231). In commenting on John 1:14 - "And the Word was made flesh" - Jones ask the question - "Now what kind of flesh is it?" In answering this question, he asked another, and amplified the answer, stating:

What kind of flesh alone is it that this world knows? - Just such flesh as you and I have. This world does not know any other flesh of man, and has not known any other since the necessity of Christ's coming was created. Therefore, as this world knows only such flesh as we have, as it is now, it is certainly true that when "the Word was made flesh," He was made just such flesh as ours is. It cannot be otherwise. (*ibid.*, p. 232.)

The General Conference session in 1895 was held at Battle Creek. It hardly seems coincidental, that Jones would define so specifically, "the man" whose nature Christ would assume in becoming flesh if there was no controversy over this point, and the statement as drawn up by the Battle Creek Church was not a compromise which could cover two different viewpoints. Jones did use the term, "flesh" the Biblical word, rather than "nature" as used in the Statement.

A further observation should be made in regard to the Battle Creek Church Statement. In 1882 the General Conference Committee authorized the publication of the *Yearbook* which came to be an authoritative voice of the Church's position and standing. In the years 1889, 1905, 1907-1914, the *Yearbook* contained a section devoted to the "Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists." The 1912 *Yearbook* indicated that the Statement was written "by the late Uriah Smith." In 1894, Smith was serving as Editor-in-chief of the official organ of the Church, the *Review & Herald*, and was one of the Church Elders at the Battle Creek Church. Whether he was present when the statements were being drawn up could be an open question inasmuch as he travelled extensively in Europe and the Near East during the year. The 1912 Statement does return to the wording of the first Statement in 1872 - Christ "took on him the nature of the seed of Abraham for the redemption of our fallen race."

At the turn of the Century - 1899-1901 - a deviant Movement arose in Indiana, dubbed The Holy Flesh Movement. First headed by S. S. Davis, the teachings were adopted by the Conference President, R. S. Donnell, and from that point, he led the Movement. In response to a series of editorials written in the *Review and Herald*, by A. T. Jones (Nov. 20 - December 25, 1900), Donnell responded in the official conference organ, *Indiana Reporter*, with a counter series asking the question, "Did Christ Come to this World in Sinful Flesh?" He wrote in article three:

When Christ came to this earth he came to make himself an offering for sin and, in order to make an offering that would be acceptable to the Father, he must at least be as free from sin in every particular as was Adam before he fell. ... But in order to save man, Christ must enter humanity, and because all were sinners, and not a body could be found that was suitable, what had to be done? A body had to be made for the occasion. And so we read in Hebrews 10:5: "A body hast Thou prepared Me."

How did Donnell perceive this body prepared for Christ? In closing his first article, he quoted Hebrews 2:11, emphasizing - "He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified (not He is going to sanctify, but they that are sanctified) are all of one." Then he commented:

Notice that it is the sanctified ones who he is not ashamed to call brethren. Further, it is the sanctified ones of whose flesh He partakes. "Forasmuch, then, as the children (or brethren, sanctified ones) are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise (just as the sanctified one are partakers) took part of the same;... Heb. 2:14. (*ibid.*, pp. 4-5)

The Holy Flesh Movement came to an abrupt end at the 1901 General Conference Session following a testimony given by Ellen White. Donnell and the conference committee resigned. Since the vacancies thus created were a local problem, an Indiana Conference session was convened in Indianapolis. Various brethren - Daniells, Prescott, A. T. Jones, Magan and W. C. White as well as Ellen White who was returning to the West Coast - attended this constituency meeting for the reorganization of the Conference. A Document File (#190) in the White Estate offices contains an eyewitness account of this meeting and reports that Ellen White counselled those present - "When I am gone from here, none are to pick up any points of this doctrine and call it truth. There is not a thread of truth in the whole fabric."

However, this teaching of the Incarnation has been revived and has been defined as Jesus coming into humanity, "born-born again." This concept of the Incarnation is

reflected in the book, *Was Jesus Really Like Us?* Another writer, states it this way, "He was born with the nature that becomes ours when we are born again - humanity combined with divinity." He then comments:

As God, He (Christ) chose Mary to be His Mother. She was chosen because of her piety and her devotion and love to God. She was everything that God could find in a human mother, a sinner, but filled with love for God and her fellow men. In the prenatal experience, while in her womb, Christ was inheriting Mary's love for God. In the post natal experience, He saw God through his (sic) mother. Mary was continually yielding her will to God's will. Christ learned these lessons from His mother's knee.

(*Waymarks of Adventism*, p. 39; 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, July, 1981)

All these variant concepts which reflect the teaching of the Holy Flesh men of Indiana must face the issue of Divine Intervention. If Christ did not take upon Himself the fallen nature of Adam, the only nature He could receive through Mary, then there had to be some type of intervention involving Mary. (This we will discuss in a future issue of WWN, when we consider analytically the series of verses in Hebrews 2 as used by R. S. Donnell.)

After the 1914 edition of the *Yearbook*, the Statement of Beliefs as written by Uriah Smith no longer appeared in it. Ellen White died in 1915. This says something. Yet during the years, 1914 to 1931, when a Statement again appeared in the *Yearbook*, the Sabbath School lessons which discussed the subject of the Incarnation held to the position of the 1872 Statement. However, the new Statement reflected the Battle Creek Church statement of 1894 on the doctrine of the Incarnation. The new formulation read:

That Jesus Christ is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the Eternal Father. While retaining His divine nature, He took upon Himself the nature of the human family, lived on earth as a man, exemplified in His life as our example the principles of righteousness, ...

The phrase, "the nature of the human family," is open to the same dual interpretation as the phrase in the Battle Creek Church Statement, "the nature of man."

In 1980, a new Statement of Fundamental Beliefs was voted by the General Conference in session at Dallas, Texas. This statement did not indicate what nature Christ assumed in the Incarnation. However, in 1988, the Ministerial Association of the General Conference released an analytical study of the Statement - *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*. In the discussion of "God the Son" a section is devoted to "Jesus Christ Is Truly Man," and a subsection (#5) discusses "The extent of His identification with human nature." The conclusion set forth is that of an Anglican divine, Henry Melvill, which he considered the "orthodox doctrine" (p. 57). This "doctrine" reads:

Christ's humanity was not the Adamic humanity, that is the humanity of Adam before the fall; nor fallen humanity, that is, in every respect the humanity of Adam after the fall. It was not the Adamic, because it had the innocent infirmities of the fallen. It was not the fallen, because it never descended into moral impurity. It was, therefore, most literally our humanity, but without sin." (p. 47).

For an in depth Biblical study see our Manuscript, *In the Form of a Slave*.

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