

CHRISTMAS LIGHT

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Readings: John 1:1-14; Heaven and Hell 129.

Have any of you children ever been lost on a dark night? Can you imagine what it would be like to be out alone on a starless night—not sure where you are, uncertain what direction you should take, wondering if you are going to bump into something, or stumble and be hurt? If you have ever felt like that, if you have ever been lost, then you know how wonderful it is to see a light, even if that light is away off in the distance, and how much more secure you feel if that light is pointed in your direction. How grateful you would be if someone brought the light to you!—especially if it was someone who knew who you were, someone who knew where you lived, a friend who could take you by the hand and lead you home.

You may not have thought of it, but this is the Christmas story. For people, all people, were in darkness. And they were in such danger of being hurt that the Lord Himself had to send a light, and had to bring that light to them in person. He had to come as a friend, to save them and lead them home.

But to understand this, to understand why the Lord had to come and bring light on earth, you must know that there are two kinds of darkness. There is natural darkness, and there is spiritual darkness. There is the darkness that comes when the sun goes down and it is night, or the darkness that brings its shadows when thick clouds get in the way and hide the sun. And there is the other kind of darkness, the darkness of the mind which we call ignorance. This kind of darkness comes when people do not know the truth, or when dark clouds of mistaken or false ideas stand in the way of the truth.

As the darkness of night mixes us up, making it difficult for us to find our way home and sometimes causing us to stumble, so does the spiritual darkness of ignorance in our minds. When we do not know the truth, or when our minds are filled with false ideas we are in danger of becoming confused, getting lost, and even being badly hurt. And it was because the spiritual darkness of ignorance and falsity brought such terrible dangers that it was necessary for Christmas to happen—for the Lord, “the true Light,” to be born among people.

Before the Lord came, spiritual darkness reigned everywhere. People no longer knew right from wrong. They no longer knew what true love of the neighbor was. They no longer knew the way to their spiritual homes in heaven. They no longer knew or cared about the Lord. Concerning this sad state, the prophet Isaiah wrote, “The people...walked in darkness...dwelt in the land of the

shadow of death [spiritual death]" (9:2); and John wrote in his gospel, "[M]en loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (3:19).

As this darkness increased, it grew to the point at which it would have resulted in the total destruction of the human race. Therefore, in His Word, the Lord sent promise after promise of His coming, of the light that He would bring. More than a thousand years before His birth, He prophesied His advent as the coming of a star, the Star of Jacob. Through Balaam, a wise man from the east, He said: "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult" (Numbers 24:17). And later, through His prophet Isaiah, the Lord declared, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined" (9:2).

These promises of a "light" were fulfilled when the Lord was born into the world. For He Himself was "the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world" (John 1:9). "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). And He Himself said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8: 12). "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not where he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light" (John 12: 35,36).

This Christmas light was what was seen by the wise men in the east as a star. However, it was no ordinary star, for no star has ever acted as it did. What kind of a star could be seen only by a chosen few? What kind of a light could lead first to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem, to the place "where the young child was"? The wise men, who treasured the wisdom of Balaam, knew this. The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tells us that "they knew that the Lord was to come into the world and that a star was then to appear...[in the east] because the Lord is the east" (*Apocalypse Explained* 422:20)—that is, He is seen in the east in heaven.

And from the Christmas story in Luke we learn just what kind of a star this was. "And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them [the shepherds]....And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host..." (Luke 2:9,13). The Heavenly Doctrine explains this further, for it tells us that it was an angelic society reflecting the glory of the Lord which made this light. For, we are told that a society of angels in heaven, "in the sight of those who are in heaven, sometimes shines like a star" (*True Christian Religion* 160). And it also reveals that the very homes of the angels sparkle with the splendor of stars (*Arcana Coelestia* 7988:4).

But you must remember that the true wonder of Christmas is not only that it happened long ago, but also that it can happen in our own lives, if we will allow it. For each one of us is born in spiritual darkness. We all begin life ignorant of the truth. We all have mistaken and false ideas in our minds. We are all spiritually lost and in great danger. Each one of us desperately needs the Lord to come, to bring His light to save us.

The Lord knows this, even as He knew it years ago. And for this reason He has given His Word as a light to guide our lives and as a “lamp unto our feet.” When we know this, then Christmas, the eternal Christmas, can occur in us. For the Lord tells us in the Heavenly Doctrine that His coming takes place when we acknowledge Him with our whole hearts. From that time on, our understandings begin to be enlightened, and we advance from darkness into light (see *True Christian Religion* 766).

At first the truth of the Word will seem to you like a distant star. But if you study and learn, you will come nearer to it—to see angels, and your own spiritual homes, shining above you. And if you draw still closer to the light, you will see the holy city, New Jerusalem, and then, lighting that city, the very source of heavenly light, the spiritual sun, “the glory of the Lord.” And, finally, you will be led to see the Lord in that sun—the strong ardor of His love, which burns to give light and life to all people.

And when you see these things, when you think about them and ponder them in your hearts, then something wonderful will take place inside you. The infant Lord will be born in your minds. He will grow into a Man, into the Lord Jesus Christ, teaching and working miracles for you. And He will be transfigured before you, as He was before Peter, James and John; so that His face will “shine as the sun” (Matthew 17:2), and you will see Him as a Divine Man in glory, as the glorified Lord of heaven and earth.

Amen.