

## The Inner Meaning of Prophecies of Christmas

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*“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).*

Only the Lord knows the future. He alone predicts, with Divine accuracy, events to come. And He does this and has done it for one purpose—so that prophecy may become a vital part of Divine revelation.

Inmosty, all Divine revelation teaches us about the Lord, His Essence and Person, why and how He came into the world to effect human redemption, and how and why He came a second time to bring into full, eternal effect the redemption made by His first advent.

But what is the use that makes prophecy so vital a part of Divine revelation? There are many uses of prophecy. First and most obvious is the use of announcing the future advent of the Lord, which all prophecy, regardless of wording, accomplishes. Without such announcements people would not look forward to and long for His coming. They would not watch for Him or prepare to receive Him. Nor would those who rejected Him be truly free to do so without this pre-knowledge. So the Lord provided for successive prophecies throughout the ages, so that the longing for His advent might be rekindled in each generation. And with each new prophecy, the excitement of the past was not only restirred but some new concept regarding the Lord’s coming was added—some additional idea to help accommodate Divine truth for the people of that particular age so that the hope of salvation might be kept alive.

The first prophecy to appear was directed to the people of the Ancient Church, and it is contained in the third chapter of Genesis, in which we read, “And the Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel’” (Genesis 3:14-15).

By this prophecy, the Ancients understood that the Lord—the woman’s Seed—would be attacked by the hells as to His lowest nature—the heel representing the human nature that the Lord would put on. The serpent signified the forces of evil attacking. However, the heel of the Manchild would ultimately crush the head of the serpent. And the Lord would ultimately crush the power of hell through and by means of the Human nature He would put on.

Centuries later, when this first prophecy was all but lost in obscurity, the Lord caused another prophecy to be given. Jacob, blessing his twelve sons on his deathbed, said to Judah, “the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes” (Genesis 49:10). This prophecy added the concept of a ruler and lawgiver—an Infinite love for the human race ruling by means of an absolute law and order founded in Divine truth. The Jewish people understood very little of the real implication of this prophecy, but it served its purpose by

awakening in them a desire for the coming of a Messiah or King, whose laws would rule all people with power and great glory.

A number of centuries later the Lord again prophesied, this time through Moses as he spoke to the children of Israel in the wilderness: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear” (Deuteronomy 18:15). Here the idea of the Lord as a prophet was added. A prophet was someone whose ability to foretell the future was clearly recognized, but whose essential work was teaching, blessing in the name of the Lord, and leading to the good of life.

Again, years later, as the children of Israel were about to emerge from the wilderness to possess the promised land, they entered the land of Moab, on the final lap of their wanderings. The Moabites, filled with hatred for these intruders, wished immediately to destroy them, but they feared the consequences that the Egyptians and the Amalekites had suffered when they had harassed the Lord’s people. So the Moabites sent to a distant land for a prophet who could be hired to curse the children of Israel. But when Balaam, the hired prophet, saw the children of Israel camped below him in heavenly order, he could only utter a blessing. And as he praised them, he prophesied, “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult” (Numbers 24:17).

The personality of the Messiah was emphasized here, a Man whose birth would not only be signaled by the appearance of a star, but whose royalty and power would triumph over His enemies outside the land of Canaan—the Moabites—as well as those inhabitants within that were wicked—the sons of tumult.

And hundreds of years later, the shepherd king of a united Israel, David, poetically and prophetically defined the Messiah further, saying “I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You’” (Psalm 2:6-7). Here was a startling prediction. The Savior to come would not only be a lawgiver and prophet, but the King of Zion and the Son of God.

Later on in the prophecy of Isaiah it was said, “Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel [God with us]” (7:14). Truly, this was the promise of a sign that could not be ignored or mistaken—a virgin birth, a miracle of innocence and beauty whereby God Himself would become incarnate.

In the prophecy of Micah it was added, “You, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel” (5:2). Now the very place of the Lord’s birth was known—Bethlehem of Judea.

That the Jewish Church would reject the Lord, in spite of this clear sequence of prophecies, was also foretold by Isaiah when he said, “He has no form or comeliness.... He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (53:2-3). And truly He was despised and rejected by those who had already despised and rejected His Word before His coming. Just as the prophecies had prepared the faithful to await and exalt in His coming, so they

stood in judgment of those who deliberately turned their backs upon Him when He came and who, when they could no longer ignore His words, silenced them upon the cross.

How vital, then, were the prophecies in preparing the human race for the Lord's coming—keeping alive the hope of salvation and providing the means for a free reception or rejection of Him when He came.

A second and equally vital use of the prophecies was their simultaneous effect upon those in the spiritual world. In the internal sense, these same prophecies contained for the angels of heaven complete instruction with regard to the part the angelic heavens would play in the Lord's coming. For, in His descent to earth, the Lord would "bow the heavens," adjoining to His infinite Soul those successive degrees of accommodation whereby His own Divine love and wisdom were present with the angels, in appearance as if their very own life. Furthermore, these same prophecies, when received in the active thought and affection of people on earth, provided a continuous ultimate basis upon which the heavens could rest and through which they might inspire people with the hope of salvation.

The hells were also affected by the Messianic prophecies as they were active in people's minds. They were affected with intense hatred for the Lord and a fierce desire to obstruct His coming and extinguish all hope of salvation. As a result, by the time the Lord actually came the entire complex of the hells was mobilized and overwrought with lust to attack and to destroy the Prince of Peace. The Lord permitted this in order that evil spirits might exercise their ruling love to the full and thereby encounter total defeat, rejection and subjection. Thus did the prophecies (all of them in their orderly succession) perform a vital use to the inhabitants of the spiritual world.

A third use of prophecies is to be seen in the way in which they confirmed the events foretold when they actually took place. It is a law of order that any prophecy is only partially understood until the final hour of its fulfillment. So it was with the Lord's coming. Those who at first doubted His authenticity but wished to be affirmative, after they had remembered and reflected upon the prophecies concerning His birth, no longer hesitated to acknowledge Him as their Savior. For this reason, the Lord reiterated the prophecies and on numerous occasions talked to His disciples about the Scriptures of law and prophecy.

A fourth and vital use of prophecy was for the Lord Himself, for the Lord put on a finite mind by His birth into the world. And His mind, like that of any other person, had to be opened and established in truth from the Word, including the prophecies of His coming. Each of these prophecies, in its inmost sense, foretold and thus explained some vital stage of the Lord's development, by which His process of Glorification would be effected. The Lord alone understood this, and, though this Divine truth, He alone united His Infinite Soul with His Human Essence. Though we cannot fully understand this, we can humbly acknowledge it as the inmost use of prophecy.

Finally, in His second coming the Lord has revealed a culminating use of prophecy. Although these words were given long ago, and although their (previously mentioned) uses have already been accomplished in full, nevertheless, they are made to live again, over and over, for the sake of each person's regeneration.

For, like the human race as a whole, each one of us begins life in the Golden Age of infancy, surrounded and moved and delighted by a heavenly host of celestial angels. But, with the dawn of self-consciousness, like the human race we fall. And inherent in the implied condemnation of our hereditary loves of self and the world, a prophecy is given, a first tender word of hope: the promised coming of a Savior. Our first innocent concept of the Lord as a Heavenly Father is this first prophecy. We cannot, in the beginning, appreciate the full significance of it; nevertheless, it is there. This first vision of the Lord, acquired during infancy, takes place in the sensual mind, though in a sphere of innocence. It is a childish concept of a Divine Man, born from the state of Christianity in us and around us at the time (the woman, representing the church). And just as our vision and worship of the Lord begins in the sensuous plane of the mind, so it is there that the fiercest struggles take place, between the Lord's will and the lusts of self and the world.

In later life, the serpent will strike continually at the heel of the woman's child. But that same heel will, if a person freely chooses it by shunning evils as sins, crush the head of the serpent. The final combats of regeneration take place in the natural mind in order to subdue its opposition to the spiritual mind, and thus to bring it into correspondence with interior, spiritual conscience.

As we review the prophecies year by year, feeling once again the mystery and awe which led up to the Lord's birth, we are given an opportunity to reflect also on how each one of these ancient sayings, in its proper place, refers to the orderly development of our concept of the Lord, as the blessed event of His birth into the world of our rational mind draws near.

Again and again He must be born in our lives. We see Him as the Seed of the woman, that is, born of and in the true church. We must recognize Him as a Scepter out of Judah, a King upon Zion, a Prince of Peace—that is, as the Omnipotent God; as a prophet and star out of Jacob—the Omniscient God; as Immanuel, God with us—the Omnipresent God; and as the Son of God, born of a virgin—that is, the Divine truth entering into us, conceived of the Holy Spirit of love and born from the love or spiritual will of that truth (the virgin). With each regenerating person, the Lord descends and becomes again the Word made flesh, in an image and likeness in the very same way in which He came to redeem the whole human race.

Let us then look with hope and trust to the Lord's advent in each of us. Let us heed the prophecies that lead us to Bethlehem, to the Lord's Word, for it is in going to the Word that we behold and worship His Divine Humanity in all its power and great glory. He is born in us when His Word becomes flesh in us—when it enters into our thought and affection, our every word and deed. Then it can be said, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isaiah 25:9).

Amen.