

CHAPTER 1

THE COMING OF JESUS THE CHRIST

*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all
acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to
save sinners.*

1 Timothy 1:15

THE COMING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST from heaven to earth is one of the fundamental features of the Christian faith. It is foundational to the whole body of revealed truth concerning His person and work. It has in view the distinctive and unique doctrine of God becoming Man; of the revelation of God in human form. It tells how the Son of God left the realm of heaven and appeared before men as a real and sinless human being.

It is important that there should be a right understanding of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures in regard to the incarnation of Christ in order to provide a sound basis for an understanding of Himself as well as His redemptive work. The whole truth of such an event as the Incarnation, however, cannot be fully understood by the human mind. It contains elements of mystery and depth which go beyond our capacity to

grasp, though what transcends the mind the heart will accept with wondering faith.

It was perhaps inevitable that the question should be asked how such a union of two natures – things which differ as the Creator differs from the creature, as the Infinite differs from the finite – was possible. It might perhaps be enough to reply that ‘with God all things are possible’, all things, at least, which do not contradict His moral perfections – that is to say, His essential nature; and most assuredly no such contradiction can be detected in the Divine Incarnation. But, in truth, it ought not to be difficult for a person possessed of such a composite nature as man to answer this question. Perhaps such a being as man might have been reasonably expected never to have asked it. For what is the Incarnation, but the union of two natures, the Divine and the human, in a single Person, Who governs both? And what is man, what are you and I, but samples, on an immeasurably lower level, of a union of two totally different substances, one material, the other immaterial, under the presidency and control of a single human personality? What can be more remote from each other in their properties than are matter and spirit? What would be more incredible antecedently to experience than the union of such substances as are matter and spirit – the union of a human body and a human soul in a single personality? And yet that they are so united is a matter of experience to every one of us. We do not marvel at it only because we are so consciously familiar with it. Thus we must recognise in the composite structure of our own mysterious being the means of answering the question about the possibility of the Divine Incarnation.

The space given in the Scriptures to the description of the coming of our Saviour is an indication of its

importance, there being an abundance of material available for consideration. It is dealt with, not only in the Gospels, but also in the Old Testament and in the remainder of the New Testament. It is clearly our duty to be thoroughly acquainted with that coming in its main features, and with the many details which are grouped around them. Such acquaintance will lead the heart into adoring worship of our incarnate Redeemer.

PROPHETIC BACKGROUND

The incarnation of Christ is dealt with prophetically in the writings of the Old Testament. It is mentioned mainly by the prophets, but a subject of such magnitude must surely have early mention in the pages of Holy Writ, and this is what we find.

Throughout the period of the Old Testament it was the subject of promise, the first of many promises being given in Genesis 3:15. 'And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel'. Spoken immediately after the fall of man, it was a word of judgement addressed to the one who had invaded Eden in the role of the tempter and had successfully brought about that catastrophe. But it contained the promise of deliverance and blessing for sinful man. It told of the coming of a deliverer Who is described as the woman's Seed. There would be enmity between Him and Satan and Satan's followers. The promised Seed would bring about the defeat of the serpent by bruising his head, but in so doing He Himself would endure suffering, for the serpent would bruise His heel. The words 'I will' indicate that all this would be by Divine arrangement.

Thus all contained in the promise found its fulfilment in the coming and work of Jesus Christ. The

main point of the promise is that He would be a real human being, and as such He would defeat the devil. But there is more to it than that. The expression 'her seed' may not appear out of the ordinary, but when viewed in the light of Isaiah's prophecy (7:14), and the record of the Gospels, it can be seen to be a prophetic indication of the virgin birth of our Lord. We are all the seed of men; yet according to this promise He would be the seed of the woman.

A further promise was made to Abraham. 'And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed' (Gen. 22:18). That this promise has direct reference to Christ may be seen from the statement in Galatians 3:16, 'And to thy seed, which is Christ'. The Seed of the woman would also be the Seed of Abraham. There is no contradiction here, for while as to actual mode of birth He would be the Seed of the woman, in legal descent He would also be the Seed of Abraham. The first established His humanity; the second points to His nationality.

David the king received a similar promise. 'Thy seed will I establish forever' (Ps. 89:4). Again this has in view the Lord Jesus. It revealed that in addition to humanity and nationality, royalty would belong to Him, for He would be of the royal lineage of David. It also had the effect of narrowing the promise to within the limits of one family, the royal house of David.

Matthew opens his Gospel with a reference to Abraham and David, telling of the fulfilment of these Old Testament promises. 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.' Much is involved in these two relationships, especially in regard to Israel. Sonship includes heirship. As the son of Abraham Christ is heir to the land promised by

God to the patriarch Abraham; as the Son of David He is heir to the throne occupied by David.

In the Old Testament the Incarnation was also the subject of preparation, especially on the part of God, Who, having given the promises, saw to it that all would be fulfilled. No failure on the part of man would be allowed to prevent this. All God's dealings with men had in view the ultimate coming of Christ to earth. But before this could take place it was necessary for man to be exposed for what he is – a sinner, so helpless as to be incapable of providing his own deliverance. Centuries had to run their course before this could be sufficiently demonstrated. The action of the Law of Moses in thus exposing man's fallen and helpless condition was but a part of the process of preparation (Gal. 3:24).

There was also a progressive self-revelation of God which was preparatory to His final unveiling in Christ. It was necessary for Him to speak through many prophets and in various ways before He spoke His final word in Christ, (Heb. 1:1–2). Only when the fullness of the time had been reached was the preparation complete. Then 'God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law' (Gal. 4:4).

Again, the Old Testament Scriptures present the Incarnation as the subject of prophecy. In addition to the promises many details are given prophetically, which form a wonderful background to the actual coming of the Saviour.

There are details relating to His Person. He would be born of a virgin, yet would be called Immanuel – 'God with us' (Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1:23). He would be born as a human child, and at the same time would be the Son given from heaven (Isa. 9:6). Humanity and Deity would combine in His blessed Person, and He would assume responsibility for the government of mankind.

Details are given as to the place of His birth. 'But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting' (Mic. 5:2; see also Mt. 2:3-6). He would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David, (Lk. 2:11). The place where Rachel was buried; where Ruth gleaned after the reapers, and became the wife of Boaz; where David spent his boyhood days caring for his father's sheep and was anointed to be king. This place of sacred memories, Bethlehem of Judea; the house of bread, is chosen by God to be the scene of the Messiah's entrance into the world.

The time element is introduced in Dan. 9:25-26. Without going into detail as to the interpretation of Daniel's outstanding prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, it may be stated that, according to the prophecy, Messiah the Prince would be cut off in death at the end of 483 years (sixty nine weeks), counting from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem. For those who had 'understanding of the times' (1 Chron. 12:32), this would serve as a guide to the approximate time of the Messiah's appearing on earth.

Such is the wealth of prophetic detail given beforehand, not only in relation to the birth of Christ, but to the whole of His first advent, that it makes it practically impossible that fulfilment could be brought about other than by Divine ordaining. The prophets wrote by the inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3:16), and were thus enabled to describe precisely the details of the Incarnation long before it took place.

HISTORICAL SETTING

Having considered the prophetic background as given in the Old Testament, it is now possible to look at the coming of our Lord and Saviour in its historical setting as presented in the four Gospels.

An event of such importance would surely be preceded and accompanied by special signs from God; and this will be true of His second coming in glory, just as it was true of His first advent.

The state of the world immediately prior to the Lord's coming served to indicate that the time was ripe for that event. Four centuries had run their course since the close of the Old Testament. During that time the prophetic voice was silent, though the faithful in Israel clung tenaciously to the Scriptures and to the hope of the promised Messiah. When the events of the New Testament began the civilised world consisted to a large extent of three races of people: the Romans, the Greeks, and the Jews.

Before the beginning of the New Testament the Roman Empire had come into being, and when the time came for the Lord to be born at Bethlehem the power of Rome held sway. Under the Emperor Caesar Augustus the whole of the then known world was unified under the sceptre of one ruler. Prevailing conditions were such that the Prince of peace was able to make His entrance into a world which was enjoying a brief respite from the constantly recurring scourge of war. National barriers were down and conditions were well nigh perfect for making known the evangel of Christ on a worldwide scale.

With the harsh rule of Rome, standards of law and morality were imposed on the people which had in view the restraining of anarchy and excesses of evil. These afforded a measure of legal protection for Jesus

and His followers in the propagation of the gospel message. Moreover, moral standards such as were known throughout the Roman Empire had the effect of preparing in measure those who found themselves confronted with the higher standards of Christian morality. The Romans excelled in the art of statesmanship and in the framing of laws, and brought into being a legal code which still forms the basis of our modern civilisation.

At that time the Greeks provided the culture of the world. Their learning was recognised everywhere, they had an insatiable thirst for wisdom (1 Cor. 1:22), constantly enquiring into every subject, and they were the philosophers of the day. While Latin was spoken in government circles, the language of the Greeks became the vehicle for the spread of learning and knowledge throughout the world. Spoken everywhere, Greek was the ideal language for making known the glad tidings of the Christian message to mankind, and for the compilation of the writings of the New Testament. The Old Testament was also available in Greek in the Septuagint version, then in common use.

The outstanding feature of the Jews was their religion. Alongside the morality of the Romans, and the culture of the Greeks, was the solid Jewish religious life, bringing the fact of God into everyday affairs. Like the Greeks, the Jews were to be found everywhere. Outside of Palestine as well as in it they clung tenaciously to the religion of their fathers. The expectation of the coming of the Messiah was strong among them, though, because of the bondages they had endured, as well as their waywardness, they did have distorted ideas of the purpose of that coming.

In spite of all this the emptiness of mere religion was never more evident than at this time, and conditions

were ripe for the demonstration of a new life and the declaration of a new faith that were to follow the coming of Christ to earth.

Apart from the general situation obtaining at the time there were specific signs granted which attract our attention. An angel appears to Zacharias to announce the birth of the forerunner of the Lord (Lk. 1:11-17). The angel Gabriel is sent to Mary with the glad news of the unique favour bestowed upon her. She would become the mother of the One Who is the Son of God (Lk. 1:26-38). Then the angel appears to Joseph with an explanation of the strangeness of the birth, and an instruction that he should take unto him Mary to be his lawful wife. This angelic ministry reached its climax in the vision of the shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem when a multitude of the heavenly host suddenly appeared to herald that 'unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord' (Lk. 2:11). How much poorer we should be if this sign had not been granted! The record, so thrilling and captivating, is an indication of the importance which heaven attached to the event. First there was the good tidings of the angel that at last the promised Saviour had arrived. Then with the angel appeared the multitude of the heavenly host joining together in praise, the appropriate opportunity for such angelic praise to be sounded forth in the hearing of men. Their praise told of the significance of what had just happened in terms of Divine glory, human peace, and good pleasure; but while the shepherds worshipped, the townspeople who heard of it merely wondered (v. 18).

The visit of the wise men as a result of the appearance of the star in the east was another important sign (Mt. 2:1-12) as it concerned not Jews but

Gentiles. How full of significance was the quest of these representatives of the world outside Palestine, and their adoration of the Infant Christ! While they acknowledged Him to be the King of the Jews, their presence and worship showed that His coming was to be for the blessing of all mankind. They were the forerunners of multitudes from among the nations who would come to do homage to the Saviour of the world.

What of the event itself? It is described in the Gospels in a two-fold way. There is the Divine aspect as presented by John, and the human aspect as presented by Matthew and Luke. Matthew wrote from the standpoint of Joseph, while Luke deals with the event from the point of view of Mary.

In his opening chapter John the evangelist speaks of Christ as the eternal Word. He tells of His eternity, 'In the beginning was the Word'; of His equality, 'and the Word was with God'; of His Deity, 'and the Word was God'; and of His humanity, 'And the Word was made flesh'. God was manifest in the flesh, a fact which is elsewhere acknowledged to be a great mystery (1 Tim. 3:16). The truth of it is presented to faith, not to reason. Human reason would declare the impossibility of such a thing taking place, but faith bows adoringly before such a sublime revelation, believing that it actually happened.

At this point in the calendar of human history the eternal God becomes a creature of time; the Infinite becomes an Infant; the Son of God becomes the Son of Mary. He who holds the whole universe together by almighty power is held in the arms of a frail woman.

*No less almighty at His birth
Than on His throne supreme;
His shoulders held up heaven and earth
While Mary held up Him!*

The One Whose garment is space, Whose house is the universe, Whose chariots are the clouds, and Whose diadems are the stars, was found wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. He Who was rich now became poor (2 Cor. 8:9). Adam had been made in the likeness of God (Gen. 1:26); now God was made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7).

The human circumstances surrounding the coming of our Saviour and His lowly birth in Bethlehem have captivated the hearts and imaginations of succeeding generations, even when the purpose of His coming has been misconstrued. The details provided by Matthew and Luke make fascinating reading. From the moment when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary event follows event in rapid succession until the supreme moment arrives when she brings forth her firstborn Son.

Before the Lord was born, Mary occupied the central place in the Divinely arranged sequence of the earthly events. The story is told in a series of episodes in which she is the central figure.

It begins with Mary and Gabriel (Lk. 1:26-38). The first indication that the time had actually arrived was the visit to Mary of the angel Gabriel, one of the only two angels whose names are revealed to us, His annunciation told of the great blessing which was bestowed upon her, and explained how the birth of the Lord would take place. The attitude of Mary was one of reverent submission and willing obedience to the word of the Lord through the angel. 'Be it unto me according to thy word.'

Then there was Mary and Joseph (Mt. 1:18-25). The dismay of Joseph when he discovered Mary's condition is understandable, for even if he knew he probably understood little of the surprising story. He was a just

man, and as the seemingly dark cloud crossed his path he was prepared to act in a righteous manner. But all his perplexities were removed when he received through the angel instructions as to how he should act. God gave him understanding of what was happening and he was ready to approve of it. Then, without hesitation or reserve, he co-operated with God and obeyed the instructions he had received, an exquisite picture of genuine love and trusting faith.

The scene now moves to the hill country into a city of Judah. It was the meeting of Mary and Elisabeth (Lk. 1:39–56). As the mother of the forerunner of the Lord, Elisabeth had her part to play in the momentous drama. Here motherhood is called by God into co-operation with Him in His redemptive work. When Mary reached her she did not need to be told what had happened, for in a great prophetic utterance she indicated the Divine appreciation and approval of Mary's faith. Elisabeth's prophecy was followed by an outburst of praise on the part of Mary. In what has become known as the Magnificat, a magnificent song composed almost entirely of quotations from the Psalms, she extolled the greatness of God in the favour He had bestowed upon her, and spoke of His mercy and justice in His dealings with mankind.

Then came the great climax. This time it was Mary and the Babe (Lk. 2:1–7). The normal preparations of Mary for the birth of the Child were rudely interrupted by the decree of Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, that all the world should be taxed. This had the effect of sending Joseph and Mary hurrying southward on the tiresome journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. And yet that decree of Caesar was merely the fulfilling of the prophecy of Micah 650 years before, and it was Micah rather than Caesar who brought about that journey.

Upon their arrival conditions proved to be truly disconcerting. They could find nowhere to stay, and had to be content with accommodation in a cattle shed or grotto 'because there was no room for them in the inn'. There it was that Mary brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, laying Him in a manger, a wooden erection for the hay or straw. From then on Mary recedes into the background, and it is the Babe Who occupies the central place.

The birth was followed by the presentation of the first-born to God in the Temple at Jerusalem. At the same time Mary offered her sacrifice, as required by the Law. There they met the aged Simeon, to whom it had been revealed that he would see the Lord's Christ before he died; and Anna the prophetess, who spoke of Him to those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

As Simeon held the Babe in his arms, he blessed God and gratefully acknowledged that he was looking into the face of the One Who was the salvation of the Lord for all mankind. Then Joseph and the mother received the blessing of Simeon. It is to be noted that he blessed them, not the Child (Lk. 2:34). Then he spoke prophetically of the bitter sorrow which the future held for Mary as she would come to see her Son rejected and put to an ignominious death on Calvary's Cross.

DOCTRINAL VALUE

What are we to gather from the Scriptures as to the doctrinal value of the Incarnation? We have seen that it is fundamental. Almost every other principal doctrine of the Christian Faith is linked with it and dependent upon it. It will be sufficient for our purpose to consider its bearing on the doctrine of the Person of Christ.

The Incarnation may be said to be the proof of His Deity. The birth of Christ was not His beginning, for

He Who began His earthly life at Bethlehem had no beginning. His existence before Bethlehem is amply demonstrated in the Scriptures. In the days of the Old Testament there were several pre-incarnate appearances of Christ. These were occasions when for a brief period He evidently manifested Himself before men. To Hagar and others He appeared as the Angel of the Lord (Gen. 16:7). Joshua saw Him as the Captain of the Host of the Lord (Josh. 5:14). Moses looked upon the bush that burned but was not consumed because of the Presence of Jehovah; and Jacob said of the man Who wrestled with him that he had seen God face to face (Gen. 32:30). These and other appearances may be identified with the Second Person of the Trinity, and are evidence, not only of His pre-existence, but also of His Deity, for how could pre-existence be His apart from His being God?

Pre-existence and Godhood are linked together and claimed by the Lord for Himself in John 8:58. 'Before Abraham was, I am.' The first part denotes pre-existence; the second is a claim to Deity. It is the Name declared to Moses at the burning bush, and would express the eternal self-existence of Christ because He is God. In becoming Man He never ceased to be what He ever was – the eternal Son of God.

It is not the prerogative of the creature to leave one state of existence for another. The fact that in incarnation the Son of God chose to become 'lower than the angels' (Heb. 2:9) is a demonstration of the possession of Divine attributes. 'Being in the form of God . . . He took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men' (Phil. 2:6-7). Only God could do so.

The purpose of the coming of Christ also demonstrates His Deity. He came to reveal God and to redeem man. The testimony of John is clear. Only God

can reveal God. 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him' (Jn 1:18). Then the work of redemption on man's behalf is certainly the work of Deity. No one apart from God could accomplish this great task. One who is not God could not redeem sinful man from his iniquity.

It is also the proof of His sinlessness. If the Lord Jesus had been born by ordinary generation, He would inevitably have been a sinner. The mortal disease of sin is passed from parent to child, and from generation to generation. None has escaped. The Virgin Birth was therefore a necessity. To cast doubts upon the Lord being born of a virgin is to cast doubts also upon His sinlessness, and consequently upon His ability to save. It is hardly possible to reject the one and to accept the other. They stand or fall together. The work of salvation demanded a Saviour Who is God, and Who in His humanity is free from sin. How these conditions could be fulfilled apart from the miracle of the Virgin Birth is difficult to comprehend.

Some may be constrained to ask, 'How can this be?' For an answer much will depend upon the attitude behind the question. Scepticism refuses explanation, and does not hesitate to reject the testimony of the Word of God. The attitude of faith will be acceptance of the miraculous, and a desire to understand only what has been revealed. Mary herself asked, 'How shall this be?' (Lk. 1:34), but it was the enquiry of a submissive faith ready to accept whatever explanation was forthcoming.

The only explanation given in the Bible is that contained in the words of the angel to Mary, 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee' (Lk. 1:35), and in the

statement of the angel to Joseph, 'That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost' (Mt. 1:20). It would be irreverent as well as needless to attempt any kind of enquiry or analysis here. Let it be accepted that the conception was a Divine act, a miracle. Mary, a virgin, was with child of the Holy Ghost. God had chosen the only way possible by which a sinless Child could be born of a sinful mother. Joseph was not the father of Jesus. Luke made this clear when he wrote 'Being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph' (Lk. 3:23).

There being no human father, the possibility of the transmission of a sinful nature to the unborn Child was ruled out. For the accomplishment of man's redemption the human body of the Lord had to be free from sin. So within the body of Mary the miracle took place, and a body for the Son of God was prepared by God (Heb. 10:5). With this in view the angel Gabriel was able to give Mary the assurance that the Babe she was to bear would be holy (Lk 1:35).

In the records of the four Gospels the sinlessness of the Lord Jesus is everywhere apparent. On one occasion He faced His enemies with the challenge, 'Which of you convicteth Me of sin?' (Jn 8:46 *RV*). There was no one who could accuse Him of having actually committed sin. This sinlessness is affirmed repeatedly by other New Testament writers (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn 3:5). If other proof were needed of the sinlessness of our Saviour we point to the record of the manner of His birth. He was born of the virgin Mary, being 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners' (Heb. 7:26).

Again, it is proof of His Saviourhood. The purpose of the Incarnation is described by Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15. 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.'

Deity and humanity were both pre-requisites of His Saviourhood. Because He is God, and because He is without sin, He possesses the necessary qualifications to be the Saviour of sinners. But in order to save sinners He had to make His entrance into the world, having been sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world (1 Jn 4:14).

It is important that this Divine purpose be clearly understood. The coming in itself was not sufficient to provide salvation for mankind but it was the preparation for what He accomplished by His crucifixion. Bethlehem was the first step in the journey of the Lord to Calvary. He was born, not only to live, but in order to die. He became partaker of flesh and blood that through death He might provide deliverance for those who are subject to the fear and bondage of death (Heb. 2:14-15). Salvation is available through the work of the Cross, but that work could not have been accomplished if the Incarnation had not taken place.

PRACTICAL BEARING

Our consideration of this subject would be incomplete were we to fail to see that it has a practical bearing on the lives of the followers of Christ.

The coming of our Saviour provides for us an example of *True Humility*. It is presented in this way in Philippians 2:5-7. In making clear to the saints at Philippi the need for humility, the Apostle Paul points to the Incarnation as a shining example of that humility which ought to characterise our Christian living.

‘Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.’ Everything depends upon the attitude of the mind. Behind every movement there is the mind which controls it. The mind of humility means the avoidance of everything which savours of pride, and a willingness

to take the lowest place. Pride was the downfall of Satan (1 Tim. 3:6), as also of Adam in Eden 'Ye shall be as gods' (Gen. 3:5). Pride has ruined many a Christian testimony, and has spoiled the work of not a few of the Lord's servants. Keeping ever before us the self-humbling of our Saviour will enable us to carry out the exhortation of the apostle, 'Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time' (1 Pet. 5:6).

It provides us also with an example of *Sacrificial Giving*. The important matter of liberality in giving is dealt with by Paul in 2 Corinthians chapters eight and nine. He uses the truth of the Incarnation both as an example and as an incentive. God is a giving God. He gave His unspeakable gift (9:15). The Lord Jesus gave Himself, first in incarnation and then in crucifixion (8:9). This same grace of giving should characterise the people of God (9:7).

How much more could be done in the work of the Lord if every Christian kept before him this Divine example, and practised systematic, sacrificial giving to Him out of their substance. Let it be clear, however, that it is our first responsibility to give ourselves in consecration; then we can freely give of our substance. The Macedonian saints first gave their own selves to the Lord (8:5), and then gave out of their poverty in order to relieve the needs of others.

Again, the Incarnation provides us with an example of *Dedicated Service*. 'As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you' (Jn 20:21). The Lord's entrance into this world is repeatedly described as a sending forth, a term conveying the thought of commission. He came forth as One specially commissioned for service. The deep sense of His dedication to that commission revealed

itself early in His life. 'Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?' (Lk. 2:49).

The sending forth of the Saviour becomes the pattern according to which He in turn sends His followers into the world to fulfil His service. 'Even so send I you' (Jn 20:21). To each there comes a personal commission directly from the Lord Himself; an 'ordination of the pierced hands'; a sending forth; all this being followed by His control of all that is done for Him. It is not for us to choose our own service. We are to find out what He wants us to do (Acts 9:6), and then see to it that we remain always under His control and direction. Dedicated service, patterned according to His own service, will surely receive His constant blessing.

So this fundamental doctrine of the coming of the Christ is seen to be a pattern, setting forth the wonderful possibilities which are open to us in Christian living and service. Closer contact with Christ; greater likeness to Himself; greater usefulness in His service; these will surely flow from a deeper acquaintance with the glorious truth of His Incarnation.

