



The Pilgrim

“All the trumpets sounded for him on the other side”

—PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

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Come, Come to Bethlehem

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I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

— *Isaiah 57:15*

It is, indeed, not one of the show places of the world, to which travelers are drawn by the fame of stately buildings and splendid works of art... Nor yet is it set amid surroundings of great natural beauty... No, Bethlehem is “little among the thousands of Judah.”... It is only a poor straggling village on a stony ridge... But on this humble, unlikely place it pleased God to confer an honor and a dignity far beyond any to which the great capital cities of earth can lay claim... Here God reached down from heaven to reknit the close tie which united Him with mankind until Adam’s sin broke it on that woeful day in Eden... Yes, here at Bethlehem, God entered into an even more intimate relationship with man than Adam had ever known, for whereas God in the beginning made man in His own likeness, He now reversed the process and made Himself in the likeness of man... God was born into the world as a human infant...

How could He so humble Himself?... How could the Lord of eternity step down from His throne, lay aside all His glory and majesty, and, like any other helpless babe, become dependent on the ministrations of an earthly mother?... That this could take place is the greatest marvel and mystery of the universe... It is to adore this mystery that we are invited to come to Bethlehem... How it could be, we cannot explain... That infinitely transcends our powers of comprehension; our reason can make nothing of it... But when in the divine Word the secret of God’s boundless love for mankind is revealed to us, we can gain an understanding of the meaning of what took place at Bethlehem...

The key to that understanding lies in the nature of love... True love wipes

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out all distinctions of rank and position; it does not depend on the merits of the loved one, for it creates its own values and is guided by them... True love finds its reward in the welfare of the beloved, and therefore it does not weigh any sacrifices that may be required against gains that it seeks for itself, but only against the benefits which it hopes to convey...

With such unstinting love God loved us in His Son, for only such a love could come to our aid in the extremity of our need — lost as we were to all hope of redemption from the power of sin and death, groping helpless in the night of our exile from heaven and God... To regain for us a place in Paradise, Jesus took our place on this sin-cursed earth; that we might become children of God, He became a child of man and therewith set His feet on the way that led through untold suffering to the Cross and the grave...

Let us, then, go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us... Let us look in faith on Him who came down from the high and holy place, in which He dwells by virtue of His Godhead, to lay His homeless head in a stable and to win for us a home in the mansions of His Father... Humble shepherds were the first to be invited into His presence... Only the humble will ever find their way to Bethlehem and the newborn Babe... Only those who are of a humble spirit because they know how worthless and helpless they are... Only those who are contrite, brokenhearted, and sorrowful because of their sins... But when they — when we — come in that spirit and worship the incarnate God, our Savior, He will fill our empty hands with the riches of heaven...

We see and believe the divine in Christmas: The Christ of God lying in the manger, the glory of God on the plains of Bethlehem, God's messenger announcing the good news, the hymn of the angelic chorus which gives glory to God, God's power working faith in the shepherds, and the praises of these shepherds directed to this same God — and Christmas becomes a festival of inexpressible and abiding joy... For then it means that the Infant lying in the manger is man's only Savior, that He is the Savior of every sinner, that only God's love for a sinful world moved Him to send into it His only Son, that man becomes a believer in the diviner message because God Himself created that faith, and that this faith lays hold on eternal life...

