

CELEBRATING CHRIST'S INCARNATION

At Christ's conception and later birth, there were no permanent physical changes in the Universe whatsoever. Yes, there was the unique sinless conception of Jesus -- and His star. But these left no imprints which could later be studied by scientists.

However. The wayward mediaeval Church changed all this! As Calvin pointed out in his *Inventory of Relics*, "Anna, mother of the Virgin Mary, has one of her bodies at Apte in Provence; and another in the church of Mary Insulan at Lyons.... She has one of her hands at Treves; another at Turin; and a third in a town of Thuringia....

"With regard to the Virgin Mary..., as to milk there is no town however small -- no monastery or nunnery however insignificant -- which does not possess it.... Had the breasts of the most Holy Virgin yielded a more copious supply than is given by a cow, or had she continued to nurse during her whole lifetime -- she could scarcely have furnished the quantity which is exhibited!...

"Nor can the Virgin Mary's ring or comb or girdle be venerated, without the risk of venerating some part of the dress of a strumpet.... Henceforth, no man will be able to excuse himself by pretending ignorance....

"Were I to take a survey of the common herd of saints (such as Saint Nicholas or Father Christmas), I would get entangled in a forest out of which I would never be able to escape.... The best thing indeed would be...if, among us who profess the name of Christ, this heathenish custom were abolished -- whether they be relics of Christ or the saints.... As they do degenerate into idols, the pollution and defilement which they occasion ought not on any account to be tolerated" (John Calvin's *Tracts and Treatises*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1958, I:316-41).

'When a Prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, and the thing that he has spoken does not come to pass -- that is a word which the Lord has not spoken to him. But the Prophet has spoken it -- presumptuously!' Deuteronomy 18:22.

Calvin commented: "Nowadays in the Popedom..., the Priests and Monks...will sing a Mass to our Lady and a Mass to such a Saint.... And so idols are intermingled with the majesty of the Living God.... Although the Saints, as in respect of themselves, be no idols -- yet they make them so, who so abuse their names." *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, Banner of Truth, University Printing House, Oxford, 1987, pp. 679 & 583.

When Christ was born, there was no Santa Claus arriving on a sled through the sky from the north pole. There was no Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer or Frosty the snowman or even snowflakes in that 60-degree Fahrenheit end-of-the-year time in subtropical Bethlehem climatically comparable to the nearby African temperatures of Alexandria, Tripoli, Casablanca -- or Mexico's Lower California.

There were no "Christmas trees" suddenly sprouting up -- covered with angel hair, candles, cardboard stars, coloured baubles, holly, ivy, mistletoe, red socks topped with white fur, ribbons and tinsel. There was no breach of the Second Commandment with blasphemous nativity scenes of an undepictable divine baby, surrounded by donkeys. There were no secularized Christmas cards, with their inane 'Happy Holidays!' messages.

But the divine Saviour had entered into the world's history! He would smash Satan's skull, when He Himself got bruised in His heel (Genesis 3:15). He would lay His sceptre on His enemies' necks, when He washed His garments in wine and His clothes in blood (Genesis 49:8-11).

He would be called 'Immanuel' or 'God with us' (Isaiah 7:14). The government would be upon His shoulder; and His name would be called 'Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.' Of the increase of His government and peace, there would be no end (Isaiah 9:1-7). Out of David's city of Bethlehem, a Ruler would appear Whose goings forth were from eternity (Micah 5:2). For Bethlehem, out of you shall come a Governor Who shall rule My people -- and they worshipped Him! Matthew 2:1-6 & Luke 2:4-15.

His name would be called 'Jesus' (meaning 'Salvation'). He would be great, and be called 'the Son of the Highest.' He would reign for ever. And He would be called 'the Son of God' (Luke 1:31-35). He would be the Saviour, Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). For God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached to the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory (First Timothy 3:16).

This would have great eschatological consequences. After His resurrection, Christ commanded His Church to go and turn all nations into His disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). He then ascended into Heaven, from where He directs this process (Acts 1:8-11 & 2:32-39). The Church would then produce Christian families, businessmen and scientists -- worldwide!

In Christ, all shall be made alive. He shall deliver up the Kingdom to God, when He shall have put down all rule, authority and power. He must keep on reigning, till He has put all enemies under His feet. And when all things shall have been subdued to Him, God shall be all things in all people (First Corinthians 15:22-28).

All nations shall stand before the throne and the Lamb, and all nations shall come and worship Him. They shall be His peoples, when the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of the holy city New Jerusalem and bring in the glory and honour of the nations. The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants, with His name on their foreheads, shall serve Him when they reign with Him for ever. This shall be a return not to Noah's Flood, but to the garden of Eden as extended and perfected! Genesis 2:9-12 *cf.* Revelation 3:12 & 7:3,9 & 15:3-4 & 21:2-3,18-21,24-26 & 22:1-5,14. Hallelujah!

-- Rev. Professor-Emeritus Dr. Francis Nigel Lee.