

“It is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.”

THE INCARNATION

What a joy! We have just read from the Gospel of St. Matthew an account which describes what C.S.Lewis calls the Grand Miracle, the Incarnation. Which is the conception of Jesus such that he becomes true God and true human. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this. He further says that every particular Christian miracle manifests at a particular place and moment the character and significance of the Incarnation. Yes the Incarnation is both an event in history and a sign. The event is the virgin conception and birth of a unique child and a sign that Jesus is Emmanuel, God-with-us.

But let me confess that many times when I read or hear the account of Jesus' conception, I haven't thought about it very much because it is so familiar, I have heard it many times. You know God is God and God does miracles all the time. So God performs this miracle which is foundational but has become matter of fact. My faith from the beginning has given and still gives ascent. We all will celebrate this event with the birth of the baby Jesus at Christmas. What're can I say? Turns out to really understand how this event connects with the cosmos (universe) and heaven, we need to say much more!

Well we have called this event a miracle. Now what pops into your head when you hear the word miracle: (1) it is an awesome event which gets your attention and confirms that God is here; (2) It is a violation or a breaking of the laws of nature; (3) it is a fantasy that can't happen or will be explained in the future; (4) or it could be an embarrassment as an indication that God messed up and has to correct what he should have anticipated at the beginning of creation. But seriously how should we define miracles so that we can talk about them intelligently Let's go with C.S. Lewis' definition. A miracle is “an interference with Nature by a Supernatural power.” So in this simple definition we have three ingredients: Nature, Supernature, and interference.

First what do we mean by Nature (with a N)? To a naturalist, one who believes in Nature only, there exists in the universe nothing but nature. Nature is thus the whole thing, every thing we perceive with our senses and intellect and emotions and anything else. The Natural is what springs up or comes forth or arrives or goes on of its own accord. No help needed. Thus the Naturalist believes in the utmost Fact which is a vast process in space and time happening of its own accord.

Supernature, on the other hand says that things fall into two classes. First there are things, actually One Thing which is basic and original and which exists on its own. Secondly there are those things which are derivatives from that one thing. The one basic thing have caused all other things to be. The One Thing exists on its own, the other things exist because it exists. (heaven and earth will pass away but I won't pass away).

So what do we have? If the Naturalists are right, then miracles cannot happen. If the Supernaturalists are right then we are not safe from miracles, they may happen indeed. God always has the option. Furthermore if we are expected to accept naturalism then we have the right to demand that every single thing should be such that we understand in general how it could be explained in terms of the Total System. If there are things that cannot be so explained, Naturalism would be ruined. Now my reading of the current situation is that there are such inexplicable things. According to ex-atheist philosopher Antony Flew they are: How did the laws of nature come to be? How did life as a phenomenon originate from non life? How did the universe come into existence?

An exquisite answer to these questions for the supernaturalist is from John Chapter 1: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory glory as the only begotten son from the Father".

Even so the world today disbelieves the miracles can happen. Popular religion which is some form of pantheism excludes miracles because it excludes the living God of Christianity. This is what we routinely hear: The march of scientific thought and discoveries will do away with the concept that we need miracles to explain certain events; or the size and scope of the universe is so vast that if there is a personal God He would in no way be concerned with our petty ways.

Here I offer two responses. First from Mt6:26, "Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more important than they?" Secondly, a little boy sat down

at the kitchen table with his crayons and a big sheet of blank paper and he started to draw. His father noticing his youngster hard at work at the table, stopped to look. “what are you doing son?” “I’m drawing a picture of God” said the little one. “but son, you can’t draw a picture of God. Nobody knows what God looks like.” The little boy thought for a moment and said, “Well, they will when I get through!”

So thirdly, we are left with interference, an intervention of Supernature upon Nature, and it sounds negative. But interference does not mean violation of the laws in creation. In miracles God adapts to the laws in a gently way. For sure in the Grand Miracle. An embryo is the beginning of the human being and is the result is the result of an ovum from the woman and a spermatozoon from the man. In a sense this union recapitulates the whole history of the universe from the appearance of sub particles, to particles to atoms, to molecules that cause the DNA to form the proteins necessary for life. In a way the miracle event of the creation of a human being relies on God as the antecedent cause. So the miraculous interference is replacing the spermatozoan with the life directly from the Holy Spirit. After this the growth and maturation of the child is completely natural. The procession from embryo to fetus to a new born is completely our experience. The reason for the intervention? This time God is creating not simply a man but the Man who was to be Himself who was to be God. He was creating Man anew. He is beginning at this divine and human point the new creation of all things. That’s why this event is called the Grand Miracle.

We are witnessing a new beginning! How are we to take this to heart? (HN) Let a sense of joy permeate your being. “Learn to live each day, each hour, yes each minute as a new beginning for you, as a unique opportunity to make everything new. Imagine that we could live each moment pregnant with new life. Imagine we could live each day as a day full of promises. Imagine we could walk through the new year always listening to the voice that says to us: “I have a gift for you can’t wait for you to see it!” Imagine!

So with our imagination we open our hearts and minds to the voice that resounds through the valleys and hills of our life saying: ‘Let me show you where I live among my people. My name is God-with-you I will wipe away all tears from your eyes. There will be no more death and no more mourning and sadness. The world of the past has gone’”.