

THE WOMB OF TIME *

Scripture citations are to the King James (Authorised) Version

*. . . the LORD himself shall give you a sign;
Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,
and shall call his name Immanuel.*

- Isaiah 7: 14 -

*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,
(and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,)
full of grace and truth.*

- John 1: 14 -

THE UNIVERSE held its breath, awaiting the arrival of the Son of God, and when it came the calendar of human existence was profoundly and forever altered, history from thenceforward bracketed by the BC and AD of a great salvation foretold by the ancient prophets, whose portrayals of the Messiah, powerful and vivid as they were, could never match the stunning, moving reality – the overwhelming, majestic truth that the Word had been made flesh, that Immanuel, the ‘*God is with us*’, was here, on the earth, walking amongst us, declaring to those who would listen that He was to be the Redeemer of the world from the curse of Sin and Death.

Time Stands Still

The gestation of Jesus in the womb of Mary sanctified the uterus of all mothers who came after:

And Mary arose in those days [to visit her pregnant cousin, Elisabeth], and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou [Mary] among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. [*Luke 1: 39-42*]

Humanity, past, present and future would find itself invested in the birth of Christ – whether or not they knew or cared about it. He was more than a mere ‘founder’ of a faith that would grow to fill the world. He laid claim to Sonship of God and for whom He spoke. The inevitable progress of the Christian faith would be assured by *the very fact of its existence*. Nonetheless, not long after the faith had set forth its tender roots, the field in which it grew was sown with imposters, tares that little by little choked off the true wheat. Then there came, by degrees, accretions of wilful misinterpretation that expunged the light and smothered His teachings, followed by the rise of sectarianism and hierarchy, to which was added, in due course, the sword of militarism and compulsion – on pain of the rack – a distortion of the mission of the Gospel-Age church, the bona fide disciples of Christ, the ‘little flock’, to be promoted in the last days to heavenly resurrection with Christ, and the inauguration of His kingdom on earth, under which humanity will be blessed with the opportunity to gain everlasting life.

The Crucifixion

‘For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks [Gentiles] seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.’ [*1 Cor. 1: 22-24*]

As the soldiers led Jesus down the streets of Jerusalem towards Golgotha, the crowds followed Him, some sympathetic, some merely curious, as one might be about a fallen celebrity. To the godly women who ‘bewailed and lamented him’, He cries,

‘daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?’ [*Luke 23: 28-31*]

Christ had previously forecast His own rejection and its dire consequences, weeping over Jerusalem for its failure to accept Him as the Sent of God, but even so, after His death, there ensued a relatively brief period during which principally Jewish converts were brought into the burgeoning Church. With the conversion of the first Gentile, Cornelius, in 36, God’s exclusive favour passed from Israel and the door was opened for these non-Jews to join the fellowship.

The Scriptures fix the responsibility for Jesus’ death at the door of the Jewish leaders and their supporters, not the Romans, for although Rome practised crucifixion, later subjecting many of the prisoners it took at the siege of Jerusalem to the same torture, it was not the *method* of Christ’s death that constituted the real crime: it was that the righteous Son of God was judged deserving of it. In this regard, it was the Jewish nation, its people, the inheritors of the Abrahamic promise, disciples of Moses, who had spurned Heaven’s invitation.

The tree’s relative good health and prospects when Jesus was present with them depicts the nation’s ‘green’ (moist) state; its withering, the ‘dry’ phase. The national tree began to wilt over a period of about thirty-four years, from 36 to 70, by which latter date the Roman overlords had ringed Jerusalem with siege engines and all manner of military might, creating such conditions as Jesus had predicted, and with that cruel assault national Israel entered its tinder-dry phase, a condition in which it remained for many centuries, until its restoration as a nation to its promised land in 1948, a few short years after the genocidal attack on Jewry, during the Second World War, and the extermination of six million, the shadow of that massacre looming over Europe today.

Lazarus

John chapter 11 recounts that Jesus and His disciples reached the outskirts of Bethany, where His friend, Lazarus, had been entombed for four days. Even as she hailed Him, Martha, one of the sisters of Lazarus, could not resist venting her bewildered emotions: ‘Lord’, she says respectfully, ‘*if You had been here, my brother would not have died*’. Hanging in the air, unspoken, is the mild reproof, ‘if you had *only* been here’ and ‘my brother would not have died *in the first place*’.

If You had only been here, a complaint that has reverberated across countless centuries of countless sufferings. Couched in various forms, the same bafflement underlies each cry, from *If God loved me, such and such could not have happened*, to *There is no God, or there would be no suffering*, to

Why doesn't He answer my prayers? Most people eventually settle into indifference on theological matters and abandon frequent prayer, some, forsaking all pretence, fall into atheism, for courage is required to believe in God when He is hidden from one's view.

At Bethany, the cross was yet in Christ's future, but He, too, would plumb the depths of sorrow and desolation as He calls out to the Father, *Why have you forsaken me?* But the temporary estrangement was the corollary to His having to die as a though He, too, were guilty, yet He was perfect, without sin, free from all fault. His anxiety is resolved, and He utters the words, *It . . . is . . . finished . . .*

The Aftermath

The Heavens ruptured as the Son of God died slowly on Calvary's hill, perhaps in its finality foreshadowing the upheaval to come at the end of our own history, when the tectonic plates of the social order that now sustains us will shudder, rear up and crash against one another with a gigantic screech, sliding down and under, buckling, pelting down confusion and terror on all who live in such a time. 'Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger' (Zeph. 2: 3).

Of this catastrophe Christ Himself tells us,

' . . . then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.'
[*Matt. 24: 21, 22*]

[*Sidenote:* One might ask, given the present (August 2022) parlous state of the world economy and several ongoing wars, are we on the cusp of the Matt. 24 tribulation now? Consider the proxy conflict under way between the U.S.-NATO alliance against Russia, an urgent attempt by the West to retain its pre-eminence, while Ukraine and its people are being squashed between these upper and nether stones; the geo-political upset that is in view; the pending financial and economic crash of the Western economies, especially those of Europe; and the harassing moves by the West on China – all these disturbances have the potential to compound in unexpected ways, exacerbating the existing weaknesses of the social order.]

Our Pact With Peace

In the course of the events that will, at some point, fall upon the earth at God's appointed hour, those foreseen by the ancients and gestated in the womb of time, epochs before earth was hung in space, it is the privilege of we, the Lord's people – among many other Christians – to make a pact with the future: – that we shall neither murmur against our lot nor pine for the former days as world events impinge upon our comforts and personal preferences, but rather that we deepen our consecration, *exalting* Christ in our hearts and minds, and *exulting* in the joys of service that may, perchance, come our way to preach the Word, to strengthen the weak hands and feeble knees of those around us who are afraid, and to 'lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh' (Luke 21: 28).

* Shakespeare's *Othello*, Act I, Scene III: A council chamber. Speech by Iago.

Thou art sure of me: – go, make money:– I have told thee often, and I re-tell thee again and again, I hate the Moor: my cause is hearted; thine hath no less reason. Let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him: if thou canst cuckold him, thou dost thyself a pleasure, me a sport. There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered. Traverse! go, provide thy money. We will have more of this to-morrow. Adieu.