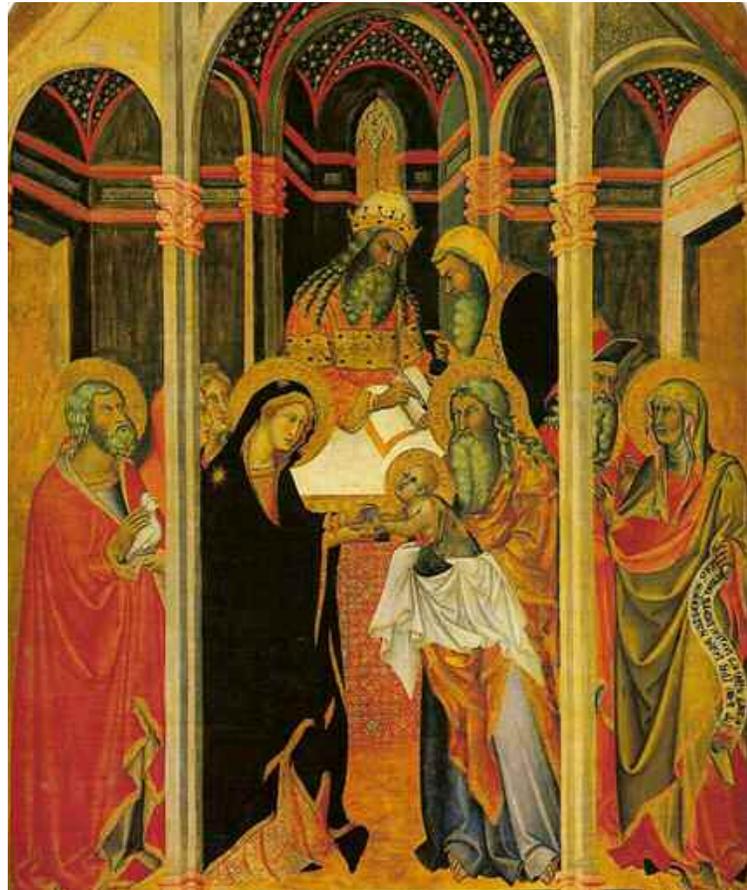


The Fullness of the Time

ONE OF THE MOST neglected aspects of the beautiful Christmas story is that Bethlehem's Babe was born in "the fullness of the time."¹ The Good News Version says "the right time"; Phillips Modern English has "the proper time." What does this mean?

For one thing, the First Advent was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 9:25: "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and three score and two weeks." In Biblical prophecy a day stands for a year. (See Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6.) This time translates as 483 years. The decree referred to in Daniel 9:25 was issued in 457 B.C. (see Ezra 7:11-28). This brings us to 27 A.D., in "the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar," when "Jesus...began to be about thirty years of age" and was baptized (Luke 3:1, 21-23). The Jews knew about this, which explains why there were some, such as Simeon, "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25). But not all, for we also read that "he came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11).

Albeit world conditions were "right." The people of the Mediterranean Basin had largely lost faith in the ideas of the past, and people never are really ready to embrace the new until their confidence in the old has died. And that had happened because the glory that had been Greece had per-



Oil on Wood, Bartolo Di Fredi, active in Siena 1353, Louvre, Paris

The Presentation in the Temple

Simeon, a man "just and devout," had been "waiting for the consolation of Israel," and was told "that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple...Then took he him [Jesus] up in his arms and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace" (Luke 3:25-29). The prophetess Anna, "coming in that instant," saw and gave thanks for the prophesied Redeemer. Joseph, behind Mary, offers the prescribed sacrifice of "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

ished with its defeat at the hands of the Romans.

Fading with Hellenism was Epicureanism, which maintained that man by nature pursues pleasure and finds therein the solution to life's problems. A similar fate had befallen Stoicism, which called for indifference to life's events.² Cynicism was also in decline; it had never been very popular to accept the notion that all of civilization's fruits

were bad and that one's actions were motivated solely by self-interest, like dogs: the word "cynic" derives from *kunos*, whence our English word "canine."

Rome too had peaked and was now in decline, having suffered a disastrous defeat in 9 A.D. at the battle of the Teutoburg Forest (later Prussia). The myth of its invincibility was shattered; the image of Rome's gods was badly tarnished; mankind looked elsewhere for inspiration; the masses were about as ready as they would ever be to accept the new in light of the fate of the past and the present.

But suppose the early Christian missionaries had not been able to bridge the gulf of different languages.³ In the first century A.D. there existed in the Roman Empire and beyond a *lingua franca*, a language understood by multitudes, the *Koiné*, which greatly facilitated the extension of the Christian message.

But suppose there had been real turmoil; surely that would have been a hindering factor. But there was the *Pax Romana*, the Roman peace—not a total absence of war, but according to the great British historian of the Roman Empire, Edward Gibbon, one of mankind's happiest periods until then.

A comparison is in order. Even as we all may recall from our high school science that life on earth would be imperiled were the planet either closer to or farther from the Sun and that the distance between the two cosmic bodies is just right, so it can also be said that the First Advent indeed occurred at just the right time, neither too early nor too late.

Also a great many other events embodying the plans of Providence have taken place at the right and proper time. As we know, the area occupied by the United States has been chosen as the seed bed for the coming New Age. This meant that a certain type of people would have to constitute the pioneer settlers. Most basically they would have to be Christians. It so happened that the Moslems, who by the time of the Renaissance occupied much of Northwest Africa and Southwest Europe, became curious as to what might exist to the west, out in the Atlantic. They set out to explore but encountered a storm and turned back, even as a storm defeated the Spanish Armada. The New Age could

The Grey Monk

But vain the Sword and vain the Bow,
They never can work War's overthrow.
The Hermit's prayer and the Widow's Tear
Alone can free the World from fear.

For a Tear is an Intellectual Thing,
And a Sigh is the Sword of an Angel King,
And the bitter groan of the Martyr's woe
Is an arrow from the Almighty's bow

—William Blake

not be ushered in under Islam's aegis; the British type of Christianity, and culture in general, was the most suitable for Divinity's purposes.⁴

And when these people set out for Plymouth Rock, they did not know but learned only later what had happened there shortly before. A very war-like tribe had left and was replaced by one quite friendly. Surely Providence had been in control.

For the New Order to develop properly, the New World had to separate itself from the Old. That occurred during the American Revolution, which had to be won by the colonists. The ragtag American army had a rough time facing the troops of what then was the world's reigning super power, Great Britain. Suppose George Washington and his men, instead of being able to escape from New York, protected by a fog, had been captured; eventual independence for the colonists would hardly have been achieved. That fog surely occurred at the right time.

The new nation had to divorce itself from slavery if it was to fulfill Providence's mission; hence the American Civil War. The side supporting slavery was winning at the beginning. After the Second Battle of Bull Run (also called Second Manassas) the slave power, in view of a tremendous victory, could easily have taken Washington D.C. and thereby won the war. But an unexpected hailstorm completely disorganized the victors, they missed their opportunity, and the forces of abolition

eventually won. Suppose there had been no down-pour of hail that August afternoon of 1862.

Something similar occurred a little over half a century later during World War I at the Western Front in Europe. The Central Power, the side arrayed against that of the Allies, which the U.S. later joined, planned to strike a knockout blow by their first-time use of a terrible new weapon—poison gas. But the wind blew toward their lines, and eventually they lost the war. Had its outcome been different, the U.S. could not afterwards have taken the giant step it was able to take toward augmenting its global influence. Whence the wind? See Nahum 1:3.

About a quarter century later, not too far from where poison gas had made its debut, the course of history was again associated with the weather. While Hitler was chewing up France at the start of World War II, the British labored to evacuate their troops across the English Channel at Dunkirk. Generally, that body of water is choppy and there are few clouds overhead—an excellent scenario for the Nazi air force to frustrate that operation.

But during later May/early June 1940 the waters were calm and heavy clouds hung overhead; the British managed to rescue most of their army and with U.S. help eventually emerged victorious in 1945. Suppose the weather had been “normal” in the Channel those critical few days and Hitler had won World War II?

It is idle to speculate about this, for there is no doubt concerning the reality: The plans of Providence cannot be frustrated; they are always fulfilled in “the fullness of time.” The Hand of Heaven has abundant resources and can employ them at just the right time, in “the fullness of time.” □

—A Probationer

1 Galatians 4:4.

2 Of course, these philosophies still have some adherents; see Acts 17:18.

3 At Pentecost something unusual did happen linguistically. But there was no speaking in unknown, mysterious tongues; those present asked, “How hear we every man in our own tongue?” (Acts 2:7, 8.)

4 See *New Age Bible Interpretation*, Old Testament, Volume III, Corinne Heline, page 273; *America's Destiny: A New Order of the Ages*, Theodore Heline.

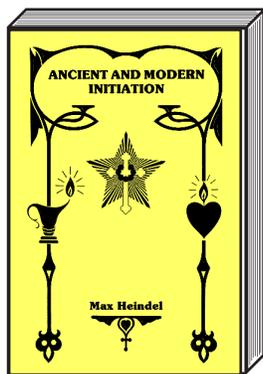
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