

Symbology of Christmas

DEEP IN THE HEART of humanity exists the mystic yearning implanted within it at the first Christmastide when the Light of Man made definite place for Itself within and upon this dense earth planet.

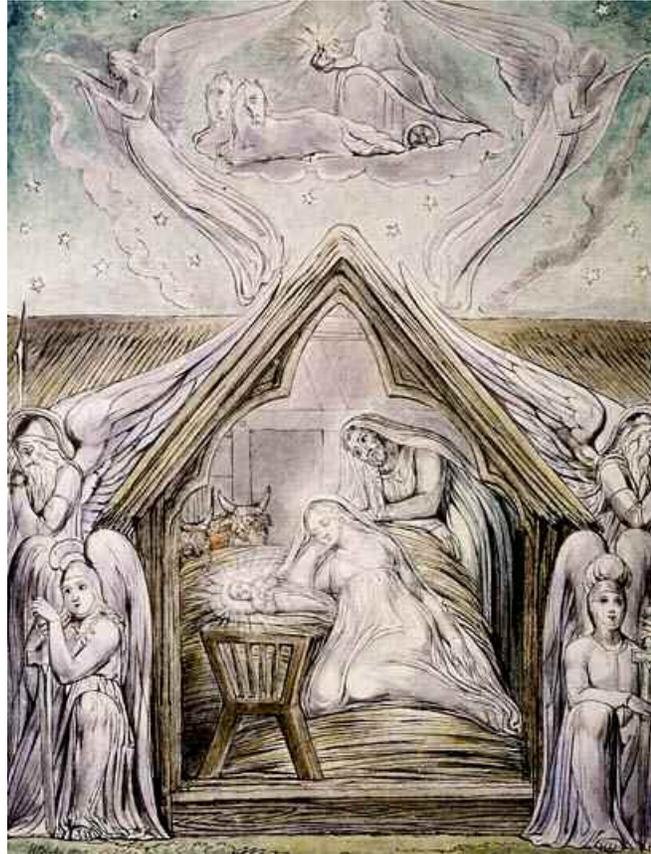
The word *Christmas* is derived from the Latin medieval term *Christe Masse*, the Mass of Christ.

The story of the Christ birth is for the Occident what the birth of Krishna is for the Orient. Whether literally, mystically, or symbolically understood, or all these ways in one, it brings to man fundamental truth which, as his Spirit faculties unfold and function to perceive and accept such truth, raises his entire being to a height not reached hitherto.

“No man cometh to the Father save by Me,” carries a transcendent meaning to the spiritual aspirant. Parsifal inquires, “Who is the Grail?” and the reply indicates high spiritual perception:

“If thou hast by him been bidden,
From thee the truth will not be hidden.
The land to Him no path leads through,
And search but severs from Him wider
When He Himself is not the Guider.”

A true interpretation of the Christmas legend necessitates first of all an understanding—however dim it may be at first—that the birth of the Christ Child in the manger in the stable among the animals, symbolizes the first faint upspringing of the Christ consciousness in animal man. The tiny indwelling flame which *is* the Christ flame has been hitherto dormant in the human constitution. It now receives sufficient stimulus to enable it to



William Blake (1757-1827), Illustration for Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," Nativity Ode 6, 1809, 25.5 x 19.3 cm, Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester

The Night of Peace

Blake envisions the Nativity as both intimate and local and cosmic. A birth sanctuary is created by angel wings (energies) On high shines the guiding star as jubilant angels make music.

grow and enlarge until eventually the Spirit makes itself a potent factor in the life of the individual and the first step toward the Father by way of the Christ is taken.

The Ego-self has taken note of its expressing vehicle, the personal man, and has vivified it, so that among the “animals” of the lower nature of man, in the manger or feeding place of the animal faculties, is born the wee babe of the Christic self. Always the manger or cradle of the Christ Child is a place of sanctuary.

A great solar manifestation comes into fruition at Christmas. Groups of forces composing this

manifestation have been personalized down through the ages. The Biblical story properly interpreted contains a near approximation of the actual truth.

The entire story of Christmas is a universal symbol. It is found in all accounts of Avataric births in all races and nations. Krishna, Mithra, Horus, Orpheus, Hermes, as well as many heroes, gods, and saviors, were born in “mangers,” wrapped in swaddling clothes, visited by Wise Men bearing gifts, worshiped by shepherds, and shone as Stars of Redeeming Light for their peoples and nations.

December twenty-fifth is the date of birth of the physical light bringer in nature, the sun. Jesus, representative of the Universal Christ, Light of the World, is the spiritual light bringer to mankind, and His birthdate should properly be the solar date of the sun’s birth. December twenty-fifth, as the birthday of Jesus, was first celebrated some 200 years after the actual event.

Many myths since dim antiquity concern the mystic Christ birth. Whether born in a cave, a stable, or elsewhere in a literal sense, the birth has two great symbolic meanings: (1) The birth of Love—Goodwill to men. The giving of a new law to mankind. “Love ye one another.” “Love is the fulfilling of the Law.” (2) The birth of the Christic consciousness in the Spirit of man—of all men who aspire to the heights of spiritual truth. No true argument can controvert this universal truth.

In its Cosmic sense, the birth signifies the descent of the Divine Light, Spirit penetrating and permeating matter. In the human sense it refers to the descent of the Son of God (spiritual Light) into matter, descent of the Spirit into the physical body.

Like all great spiritual teachings this one concerning the origin and celebration of Christmas has been perverted and commercialized through greed and selfishness.

Christmas Eve, December 24-25, is considered the Holy Night of the whole year because spiritual influences are strongest on this midnight. In the Mysteries, the candidate through spiritual vision saw the mystic Star of Bethlehem that shone on Holy Night, which guided him onward and upward. In his heart echoed the deathless and prophetic song—“On earth peace, Goodwill toward men.” “Rejoice, ye children of earth, for

At Sunrise

Soul of mine, the sun is rising,
Glorifying sky and sea.
Hear the wild birds improvising
Madrigals from roof and tree.
Sun of Glory, rise in me.

Rise in me, illuminating
All I meet upon the way.
Rise in all men, radiating
Light and love and peace, I pray.
Rise in all mankind today.

—Irene Stanley

unto you is born this day a King”—the Seraphs sang on that long ago Holy Night.

The beautiful custom in Britain of the Yule log was kept in ancient times. It first became a public ceremony in 1577. *Yule* is a Germanic word meaning Christmas. Large candles were lighted on Christmas Eve and a large oak log was laid upon the fire to illuminate the house. It was thought that the remains of the Yule log would protect the house against fire and lightning if kept throughout the year.

The Christmas tree is itself a universal symbol. It originated in Egypt in the worship of the Goddess Isis at a period long antedating the Christian era. A palm tree with twelve short shoots, to represent the twelve months of the year, was used in Egypt at the time of the winter solstice. In northern climes, instead of a palm, a fir tree was used. The origin of exchanging gifts occurred in early medieval days. In some countries the custom of foretelling the future from cakes is celebrated on Christmas Eve.

Gifts were brought to the birth of Jesus who was born in a manger—precious gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Spiritual power, love-wisdom, and intelligence were poured upon the newborn child, the Christic Light atom in the human heart; the babe in its mother’s arms, the great earth mother which carries, nurtures, and preserves the tiny life vehicle. These gifts (qualities) were showered by the glorious Magi of the Cosmic realms, who bless and enrich each individual spiritual birth.

These powers, en rapport with and irradiated by the silver light of the splendid Christic Star, pour into weak and suffering humanity their stimulating light and strength without which man's evolutionary course would be far more difficult and prolonged.

The Magi—High Initiates—were drawn to the Holy Place by their inner perception and knowledge of the Cosmic event pending, the birth of a world Savior. The three Wise Men represent those of higher earthly prominence brought together in their common purpose from the primary races of the earth. Their gifts signify the various elements entering into the process of manifestation. They are led by the glorious Star to the World Savior, to Jesus, the body form which was to be a vehicle for the Universal Christ Power.

He of India brought gold, mentioned in symbology as the emblem of the Spirit. We read of the alchemists of old trying to transmute base metal into gold, which is the occult way of saying that they wanted to purify the dense body, to refine it and extract the spiritual essence. He of Egypt brought frankincense or incense. It is a physical substance of a very light nature, often used in religious services. It serves as an embodiment for the ministering unseen forces, and thus symbolizes the physical body. He of Greece brought myrrh. It is the extract of a rare aromatic plant. It symbolizes that which man, the Spirit, extracts through experience in the physical world—the soul.

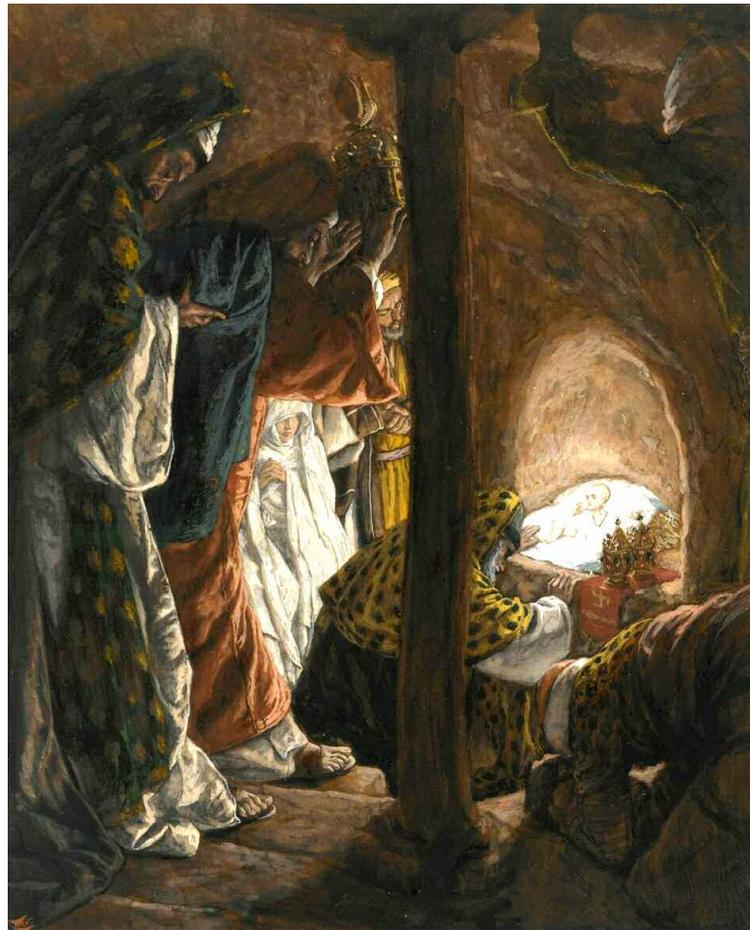
Mary, the mother, was the center of light, the crucible wherein the transmutation of the elements took place and gave the human touch needed to impress the ages yet to be.

The shepherds who saw the Star typify the appearance of Divine Fire as it came to those of the earth plane—the lowly of earth, but highly sensitized as to Spirit faculty, high in spiritual attainment. Their discernment enabled them to see the glory in the heavens and to feel the impulsion of the wondrous Star.

In one sense it was a material star. In a higher sense it was the flame of forces concentrated to bring into material manifestation a physical presentment of the Logos, a World Savior.

The earth was hushed. The air was hushed for it was concentrated on Bethlehem (birth) at that moment. Silence and solitude develop the discerning eye, the hearing ear, the sensitive Spirit.

Shall we not at Christmastide center our thought upon these truths?



Opaque watercolor. J. James Tissot, 1836-1902. Brooklyn Museum
Adoration of the Magi

Meditate upon the true interpretation of the sublime Christmas legend, enlarging our knowledge and understanding, and center our effort upon an expanding power to serve? Celebrate Christmas by rendering to the Central Sun Glory the love and homage which is His right, and say with the Shepherds, “For we have seen his Star in the East, and have come to worship him”? He stands, pointing the Way, revealing the Truth, giving the Life; He, the Star of Light leading the Way to the Father. “For where I go, ye shall also go.” □

—Katharine Hillwood Poor