

Christmas

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In the near future we will again celebrate Christmas, the birth of the Christ. In most if not all Christian churches we see the nativity scene with its manger containing the Child. This scene is both touching in its simplicity, as well as confusing in its complexity. Who is this Holy Child? In one of the Christmas stories Joseph also asks himself: "Who is he?" As this question has intrigued me for so long, I continue to search for an answer, also in the books that I love so much. One of these books is *Esoteric Christianity* by Annie Besant. She in turn also consulted several sources. I summarise:

More than 2000 years ago in Palestine a child was born of parents, though poor, yet of noble lineage. They named him Jeshua and we Christians know him as Jesus. He was brought up with the knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures and his immense seriousness and devotion brought his parents to dedicate him to the religious and ascetic life. He was entrusted to the Essenes and later went to Egypt, the land of the great Initiations. Here he trained for the high Priesthood, which he would later fulfil. His purity and tenderness towards his fellow human beings and his holiness made him prominent in this strict environment in which he lived. This made him suitable to be a temple for a higher Power, which through his body would bring humanity a new exposition of the Ancient Wisdom -or a new dispensation, as it is sometimes called- to wit, a new impulse for the spiritual development of humanity.

We celebrate the birth of this man Jesus as Christmas, of the Festival of Light *par excellence* in our culture. It is of him that we sing: "unto us a child is born". But also as in an old Dutch carol: "he came to the earth and already bore his cross"... Which is justified as he chose the cross as his symbol. We know that this is a powerful symbol whenever we make the sign of the cross over ourselves or over another. We can bless someone with it. Our priests and bishops use it during our ceremonies. It is the symbol of Light. After all, by his nature he was predestined to become the Bearer of Light. After his death he would be the protector of the then young Christianity, to whom we now pray as our Lord. He is the one who later became known as Jesus Christ.

Let us now continue with what happened in the life of Jesus. A Son of God, Teacher of teachers, Truly Word of God, Light of Light, Lord of Wisdom and Compassion, before whom angels and humans bow down in adoration, would descend to our world, as he had done before. Jesus, the pure disciple was chosen to make available for him his pure mind and body. This happened when Jesus was already an adult and we celebrate this event as the Baptism of our Lord.

But we celebrate something more at Christmas. The Christ-in-us, the immanent Christ, our most true Self, that which we truly are, the Light within, is constantly and repeatedly born in us. It constantly and repeatedly takes up its cross within us. In this light we can perhaps begin to understand the thought in the Roman Catholic Church of

the Christ as the Lamb of God who carries the sins of humanity. He lives in us and is what we truly are. He carries our personality -our earthly side- until we become what He is. We are in relation to the risen Christ as the germinating seed, hesitantly pushing its tender sprouts above the ground, is in relation to the ripe fruit hanging from the full-grown tree. We shall one day be what He is and on that foundation our belief is built.

We attempt to be an expression of the Christ-in-us, an image of his Love, an image of Him who makes the inestimable sacrifice of his presence in the entire creation. One could say that this Love is the Love-Wisdom that is the nucleus and key of all growth. That which we practice when we are father, mother, neighbour, priest, bishop, but also as an older brother comforting his little sister after she has fallen, even though they have just had a fight. This is what is so much emphasised in our church, amongst others in the Confiteor.

This is the most touching part of the Festival of Christmas: The realisation that we ourselves carry this Christ child within us. We ourselves are the crib, the mother and the shepherds kneeling before the holy Child within us. We are the three wise men: offering gold symbolising the Kingship within us; frankincense the Wisdom; myrrh the balsam of Love for all that lives. The wonder of the birth of Christ solemnises itself in our hearts and we are the overwhelmed observers of this event. This because we ourselves are this Christ child, this Christ in becoming, irrespective how long it might take. He that went before us did not say for nothing: "Come ye blessed of my Father and inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you from the foundation of the world".

That too, is what we celebrate at Christmas.