

Christmas

The Birth of the Light for the Redemption of Humanity

RSArchive Blog

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Madonna Terranuova, Raphael, c. 1504–1505

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During this season of gifts and gratitude, we'd like to thank those of you who have generously donated to support our efforts to make all of Rudolf Steiner's teachings available online in English. Through Advent and Christmas, we offer highlights of Dr. Steiner's lectures on the greatest gift to humanity—the birth of Christ in Man. With the descent of the Christ into the world, humanity was graced with a path out of the dark realms of Earth, which has become as C.S. Lewis put it in *That Hideous Strength*, a place where the criminal classes of spiritual beings have established their headquarters. With the pinnacle of Christ's mission here on Earth, the Mystery of Golgotha, there is now hope for humanity.

Advent as a Recapitulation of Evolution

Much preparation was required for such an exalted being as the Christ to incarnate here on Earth as a man. In [Pre-Earthly Deeds of Christ](#) Steiner outlines three stages of this preparation taking place in the Lemurian and Atlantean epochs. Additionally, in the [Birth of](#)

Light, he explains how Advent is a recapitulation of the four prior Post-Atlantean cultural periods (Indian, Persian, Chaldean, Greco-Roman) and the evolution of the universe itself—from Unity to Duality to a Trinity and, ultimately, to the Birth of Christ in Man.

Week 1	UNITY	In the beginning was the Word/Brahman	Indian (Rishis)
Week 2	DUALITY	The Fall, Good/Evil, Light/Darkness Division of the Sexes	Persian (Zarathustra)
Week 3	TRINITY	Father, Son, Holy Spirit	Egyptian-Chaldean (Isis, Osirus, Horus)
Week 4	CHRIST BORN IN MAN	The Word Made Flesh	Greek-Roman (Christ Jesus)

We are now in the fifth cultural period of the Post-Atlantean epoch. Through the prior deeds of the Christ, we can now evolve *ourselves* through our thinking, feeling and willing to become fitting garments for the original Word of God. We may thereby become reunited members of the Cosmic Self, our higher Self. Jesus, like an older brother, shows us the way. Christmas reminds us of this gift and serves as an opportunity to reexamine the spiritual significance of this monumental event.

Two Different Christmas Stories

In the investigation of the esoteric meaning of Christmas, it is helpful to first recall the two biblical accounts of the event as written in the Gospels. Here are some key differences.

The Gospel of Luke

The ancestry of Jesus is traced back to Adam. He is of the Nathan line of the House of David.

The Gospel of Matthew

The ancestry of Jesus is traced back to Abraham. He is of the Solomon line of the House of David.

The Gospel of Luke

The Gospel of Matthew

<p>The angel Gabriel appears to the Virgin Mary announcing both she and her barren cousin Elizabeth would miraculously bear sons—Jesus and John the Baptist.</p>	<p>An angel appears to Joseph announcing the virgin birth of Jesus. Later, an angel appears to Joseph warning the family to flee to Egypt because King Herod would kill all boys under the age of two.</p>
<p>Mary and Joseph live in the poor village of Nazareth. Mary visits Elizabeth and then travels with Joseph to Bethlehem for the first census. The family then returns to Nazareth.</p>	<p>Mary and Joseph live in the large city of Bethlehem. After Mary and Joseph travel to Egypt to escape the danger of King Herod, the family settles in Nazareth.</p>
<p>Jesus is born in Bethlehem in a stable and laid in a manger while they are there for the census.</p>	<p>Jesus is born in Mary and Joseph's hometown of Bethlehem.</p>
<p>Humble shepherds come to pay tribute to Jesus after a vision of angels announcing the birth.</p>	<p>Three wise men from the East follow a great star to Jesus seeking the new King of the Jews.</p>

The Gospel of Luke recounts the birth of a child of the Nathan line of the House of David. Steiner tells us the child was born filled with boundless love and a pure etheric body. He was not subject to karma because he had never incarnated before. He really wasn't of this world. The Buddha himself empowered the astral body of the Nathan Jesus child and quickened the body of John the Baptist when Mary visited Elizabeth. In Steiner's lectures on the Gospel of Luke, he states:

We know that in the etheric body of the Jesus-child of the Nathan line of the House of David there was present the hitherto untouched part of the etheric body that had been withdrawn from humanity at the time of the 'Fall into sin'. The etheric substance withheld from Adam had been preserved and was sent down into this child. This was necessary in order that a being so young and entirely untouched by any experiences of earthly evolution might be in existence and assimilate all that he was destined to assimilate. Would an ordinary human being who had passed through incarnations since the Lemurian age have been able to

receive the overshadowing power of Buddha's Nirmanakaya? No indeed! A human body of great perfection had to be made available, one that could only be produced through part of the etheric substance of Adam — untouched by all earthly influences — being united with the etheric body of this Jesus-child. This etheric substance was imbued with the forces that had worked upon Earth evolution before the Fall and now, in the Jesus-child, their power was immeasurably enhanced. This made it possible for the mysterious influence referred to in the lecture yesterday to be exercised by the mother of the Nathan Jesus upon the mother of the Baptist — that is to say upon John himself before he was born.

See [THE GOSPEL OF ST. LUKE, GA 114, Lecture 6](#)

Then Steiner discusses the Gospel of Matthew which recounts the birth of a child of the Solomon line of David. Rather than being filled with boundless love, the child is filled with the wisdom of Zarathustra, the ancient Persian king who was reborn again to fulfill his mission and karma. Zarathustra, or Zoroaster, was the great leader of the Iranians who foretold of the coming of a high Spiritual Being from the Sun:

He [Zarathustra] pointed towards the sunlight as the external body of a high Spiritual Being, and to distinguish it from the small human aura, he called it the 'Great Aura' Ahura Mazdao. In his teaching he indicated that this as yet remote Being, would one day descend to earth in order to unite with its substance, and that this would be an historical event affecting the whole future of mankind. Thus in speaking of Ahura Mazdao, Zarathustra referred to the Being known later in history as the Christ. Such was the mighty mission of Zarathustra.

See [THE GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW, GA 123, Lecture 1](#)

Here also, Steiner talks in detail of the preparation that was required for Christ to incarnate in the body of a man. The recounting of the ancestry of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is presented for this very reason.

Let us therefore ask: What was attained in the course of the forty-two generations from Abraham to Joseph? What was attained was, that in the last of the generations a blending of the blood in accordance with the laws of the stars — as taught in the Holy Mysteries — had been accomplished. In this blending of the blood necessary to the Zarathustra individuality for the accomplishment of his great work, there was an inner order and harmony that corresponded to one of the most beautiful and significant arrangements of the stellar system. The blending of blood, prepared throughout many generations for the reincarnating Zarathustra, was therefore a reflection of the whole cosmos. All this is to be found

in that great original Scripture, which, if I may venture to say so, lies before us in weakened form in the Gospel of Matthew. It is based on the profound mystery of the development of a people as the reflection of a cosmic development. This was felt by those who first knew something of the mighty Mystery of Christ. To them it already seemed that in the blood of the Jesus of Nazareth of Whom this Gospel tells, they could perceive a reflection of the Spirit that rules the whole cosmos. They gave expression to this Mystery in the words: In the blood which is to be the abode of the Ego of Jesus of Nazareth lives the Spirit of the whole cosmos. Therefore, if this physical body is to be born, it must be an image of the Spirit of the whole cosmos, the Spirit ruling the whole world.

See [THE GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW, GA 123, Lecture 4](#)

Two Ancient Streams Uniting Heaven and Earth

With the Christmas events and two Jesus-children, two very different spiritual streams were unified: (1) the infinite love of the Nathan/Buddha/Adam Jesus; and (2) the wisdom of the Solomon/Zarathustra/Abraham Jesus. [The Nathan child can be seen as representing the original Unity (Week 1 of Advent and the 1st Post-Atlantean Cultural Period), while the Solomon child from the Duality (Week 2 of Advent and the 2nd Post-Atlantean Cultural Period).] These two streams joined as one being in the twelfth year of the boys' lives.

One fact, however, we must keep firmly in mind: the Solomon Jesus-child, although the incarnation of so lofty an individuality, was only a highly developed man. Hence he was encumbered — as even the most highly developed man must be — with certain liabilities to error and moral difficulties, though not exactly vices or sins. Then we know that in his twelfth year the individuality of Zarathustra, by an occult process known to everyone who has made himself conversant with such facts, forsook the body of the Solomon Jesus-child and went over into the body of the Nathan Jesus-child. Now the body of this Nathan Jesus-child — or, better, his three-fold bodily organisation physical body, etheric body, astral body — was formed in a quite special manner. In fact, this body was such that the child showed capacities exactly contrary to those of the Solomon Jesus-child. Whereas the latter was remarkable because of his great gifts in relation to things one can learn externally, it might almost be said that in this respect the Nathan Jesus-child was untalented. You will understand that saying this implies not the slightest deprecation. The Nathan Jesus-child was not in a position to familiarise himself with the products of human culture on earth. [...] The child's most strongly marked characteristics were qualities of the heart. He had an immense capacity for love and a disposition capable of immense self-sacrifice. And the remarkable thing is that from the first days of his life his mere presence, or his touch, had

beneficent effects — magnetic effects, one might perhaps call them nowadays. Thus all the qualities of heart were manifest in this child, enhanced to such a degree that they could have a beneficent magnetic influence on his environment.

See FROM JESUS TO CHRIST, GA 131, Lecture VIII

The bible tells us all were amazed when the simple Nathan child was found preaching wisdom in the temple in his twelfth year. This was Zarathustra now speaking. Jesus would continue in this manner until his thirtieth year when Zarathustra would depart and the Christ would enter the body of Jesus when baptized by John the Baptist.

The shepherds and the wise men further personify the remnants of two streams: (1) the Shepherds representing the instinctive, dreamlike clairvoyance of ancient times as brought forth in the Nathan child; and (2) the Magi Kings representing the Eastern gnosis of the Heavens as expressed in the Solomon child.

We may recognise as such the poor shepherds out in the fields, who in the piety of their hearts possessed a certain clairvoyant capacity of a dreamlike nature. And we also recognise as such the Three Magi from the East, who are pictured as standing on the topmost rung of human society, and had retained from ancient times a capacity gained from a certain stream of wisdom, giving them insight into the course of world-events. [...]

These are the two absolute contrasts: the Magi with their knowledge of the heavens, and the shepherds with their earth-revelation. And it corresponds completely to the Mystery of Golgotha that the revelation came from two such different quarters. For a heavenly Being, as yet untouched by earth, was descending to it, and this descent had to make itself known by means of the wisdom of the heavens, which knew that something heavenly was descending. In the shepherds' wisdom we learn to know the earth by feeling our way into its weaving life as it perceived the descent of the heavenly Being. It is the same annunciation, only from another side. Wonderfully unified, we thus see what, although it was one and the same event, was announced in a twofold way to men.

See THE TWO CHRISTMAS ANNUNCIATIONS, GA 203

The Rescue of Mankind From Death and Devolution

Why did Christ come? With the Fall of Adam after temptation by Lucifer and eating of the Tree of Knowledge, Man assumed a material form subject to decay and death. Over time, the human etheric body lost its contact with spiritual forces and the physical body began to dry and harden. Steiner discussed this loss of connection to spirit with a simile of a child squandering his father's wealth, the Father-wisdom, without replenishing the store.

That is what took place in the course of human evolution. How did it come about that man gradually exhausted his capital of wisdom? Because in the past he had given access to two kinds of spiritual beings: the Luciferic beings, and later, as a consequence of these, the Ahrimanic or Mephistophelean beings. These prevented him from adding, by his own labor, to the store of old wisdom, for they acted upon his being as follows: the Luciferic beings tended to corrupt his passions and feelings, while the Ahrimanic, the Mephistophelean beings were more concerned with outwardly distorting his view of the world. Had the Luciferic beings not intervened in Earth evolution, man would have developed no such interests in the physical world that drags him down beneath his true status; and if, as a result of the Luciferic influence, the Mephistophelian, the Ahrimanic, the Satanic beings had not taken a-hand, man would know, and would always have known, that underlying every object of the senses there is spirit, and he would look through the surface of the sense world upon the spirit. But Ahriman infused into human observation something like a dark smoke cloud that prevents penetration to the spiritual. Through Ahriman's agency, man is enmeshed in lies, in maya, in illusion. — These are the two beings that prevent man from earning any increment to the store of ancient wisdom once bestowed upon humanity; and as a consequence, this heritage has dwindled away and gradually become wholly useless.

See [THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN IN RELATION TO THE OTHER THREE GOSPELS, GA 112, Lecture 12](#)

Had the Christ impulse not come, man would perish member by member as Earth evolution approached its termination.

*But what outer form did all this have to take? What was it that entered the physical body through the Luciferic and Ahrimanic beings? The tendency to decay, to dissolution — in short, the tendency to die. The germ of death had entered the physical body. Had no Christ come, this death germ would have developed its full power only at the end of Earth evolution, for then the etheric body would be for all time powerless to reanimate man; and at the completion of Earth evolution, that which had come into being as human physical body would fall into decay and the earth's mission itself would end in death. *Ibid.**

In another series of lectures, Steiner explains that Christ incarnate was “the Second Adam” who gave mankind the opportunity of eternal life once again.

All men have inherited their physical body from Adam. This is the body which meets us in external Maya, and is mortal; it is the body inherited from Adam, the corruptible body, the physical body of man that decays in death. With this body

men are 'clothed'. The second Adam, Christ, is regarded by Paul as possessing, in contrast to the first, the incorruptible, the immortal body. Paul then affirms that through Christian evolution men are gradually made ready to put on the second Adam in place of the first Adam; the incorruptible body of the second Adam, Christ, in place of the corruptible body of the first Adam.

See FROM JESUS TO CHRIST, GA 131, Lecture VI

Shining the Light of Christ this Christmas

Christmas is the birth of Christianity itself—changing the path of human evolution from death to eternal life in Christ. Steiner's message delivered on Christmas Eve in 1918 rings true today on this 100th anniversary of the re-founding of the Anthroposophical Society. He solemnly inspires us during the Christmas season to bring the light of Christianity to the world.

But even though the light is weak, it shines on something whose effect within human earthly evolution is not weak, something that is working powerfully as the deepest meaning of human evolution. The light illumines what we may call the birth of Christianity, the Christmas of Christianity. Along with the Easter meaning of anthroposophical spiritual science may this its Christmas meaning be understood. May many, many souls look forward in this spirit to the profound experience of the Christmas Holy Nights. They will then be able to feel that already a call is sounding through the world to contemplate the appearance of Jesus, who awaited here on earth that moment when He was to meet death, in order in His spirit-life after death to give a new meaning to mankind and to earth evolution.

My dear friends, let us feel something of this Christmas mood that is to enter our souls from spiritual science! I would like at this moment to begin Christmas solemnly, by expressing the wish — as my soul's innermost holy Christmas greeting — that you may experience the mood of consecration that wills to receive the new Christ-revelation. I assume that you too are beginning Christmas with that earnestness of which I endeavored to speak today, an earnestness appropriate to the present condition of the world. In this spirit, my dear friends, I wish you with all my heart a holy, solemn Christmas!

See HOW CAN MANKIND FIND THE CHRIST AGAIN?, GA 187, Lecture II



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