

The Lectures of Rudolf Steiner

Birth of the Light

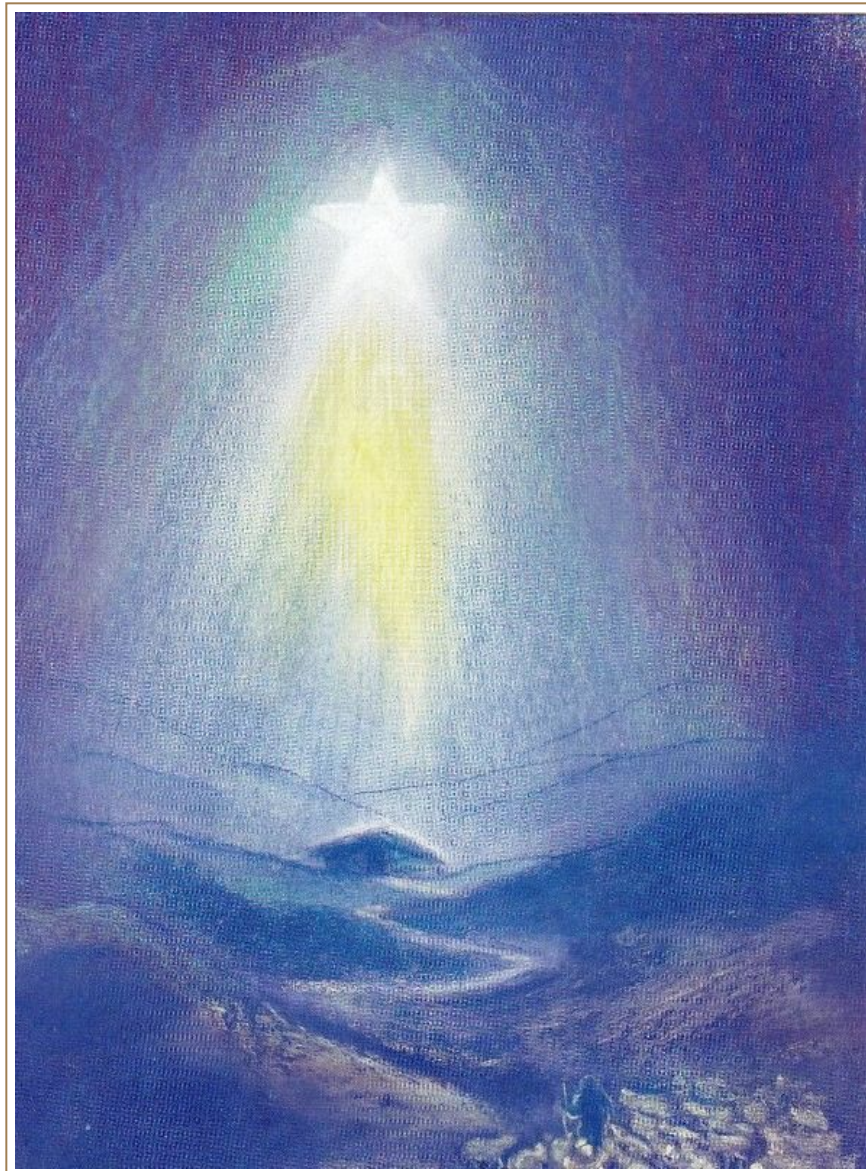
Thoughts on Christmas Eve

Excerpts from <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/19121224p01.html>

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What is it really that we should write in our hearts – the feeling that we may have on this Christmas night?



In this Christmas night there should pour into our hearts the fundamental human feeling of love - the fundamental feeling that says: compared with all other forces and powers and treasures of the world, the treasures and the power and the force of love are the greatest, the most intense, the most powerful. There should pour into our hearts, into our souls, the feeling that wisdom is a great thing - that love is still greater; that might is a great thing - that love is yet greater. And this feeling of the power and force and strength of love should pour into our hearts so strongly that from this Christmas night something may overflow into all our feelings during the rest of the year, so that we may truthfully say at all times: we must really be ashamed, if in any hour of the year we do anything that cannot hold good when the spirit gazes into that night in which we would pour the all-power of love into our hearts. May it be possible for the days and the hours of the year to pass in such a way that we need not be ashamed of them in the light of the feeling that we would pour into our souls on Christmas night!

If such can be our feeling, then we are feeling together with all those beings who wanted to bring the significance of Christmas, of the 'Night of Initiation,' near to mankind: the significance and the relation of Christmas night to the whole Christ-Impulse within earthly evolution.

For this Christ Impulse stands before us, we may say, in a threefold figure; and to-day at the Christ-festival this threefold figure of the Christ-Impulse can have great significance for us. The first figure meets us when we turn our gaze to the Gospel according to St. Matthew. The Being who is born - or whose birth we celebrate - on this Christmas Eve, enters human evolution in such a way that three heads of mankind, three representatives of high magic come to pay homage to the kingly Being who is entering man's evolution. 'Kings' in the spiritual sense of the word: magic kings come to pay homage to the great spiritual King Who appears in the high form that He has attained. For as high a being as Zarathustra once was, passed through his stages of development in order to reach the height of the spiritual King whom the magic kings came to welcome. And so does the Spirit-King of St. Matthew's Gospel confront our spiritual gaze: He brings into human evolution an infinite fount of goodness and an infinite fount of mighty love, of that goodness and that love before which human wickedness feels itself challenged to battle. Thus again do we see the Spirit-King enter human evolution: that which must be enmity against the Spirit-King feels itself challenged in the figure of Herod; and the spiritual King must flee before that which is the enemy of spiritual kingship. So do we see Him in the spirit, in His majestic and magic glory. And before our soul there arises the marvellous image of the Spirit-King, of Zarathustra reincarnate, the flower of human evolution, as He has passed from incarnation to incarnation on the physical plane, and as wisdom has reached perfection, surrounded by the three magic spirit-kings themselves, by flowers and heads of human evolution.

In yet another figure the Christ-Impulse can come before our souls, as it appears in the Gospel according to St. Mark, and in St. John's Gospel. There we seem to be led towards the cosmic Christ-Impulse, which expresses how man is eternally related to the great cosmic forces. We have this connection with the great cosmic forces when, through an understanding of the cosmic Christ, we become aware how through the Mystery of Golgotha there entered into earthly evolution itself a cosmic impulse. As something yet infinitely more great and mighty than the Spirit-King Whom we see in the spirit surrounded by the magicians, there appears before us the mighty cosmic Being who will take hold of the vehicle of that man who is himself the Spirit-King, the flower and summit of earthly evolution. It is really only the short-sightedness of present day mankind which prevents men from feeling the full greatness and power of this incision into human evolution, wherein Zarathustra became the bearer of the cosmic Christ-Spirit. It is only this short-sightedness which does not feel the whole significance of that which was being prepared in the moment of human evolution which we celebrate in our 'night of initiation,' in our Christmas. Everywhere, if we enter but a little more deeply into human evolution, we are shown how deeply the Christ-Event penetrated into the whole earthly

evolution. Let us feel this as we follow this evening a relevant line of thought, whence something may stream out into the rest of our anthroposophical thought, deepening and penetrating into the meaning of things.



A third figure, as it were a third aspect of the Christ-Impulse, is one which can especially bring home to us how, through that which in the full sense of the word we may call Anthroposophy, we can feel ourselves united with all that is human. This is the aspect which is most uniquely set forth in St. Luke's Gospel, and which then worked on in that representation of the Christ-Impulse which shows us its preparation in the 'Child.' In that love and simplicity and at the same time powerlessness, with which the Christ Jesus of St. Luke's Gospel meets us, thus it was suited to be placed before all hearts. There all can feel themselves near to that which so simply, like a child – and yet so greatly and mightily – spake to mankind through the Child of St. Luke's Gospel, which is not shown to the magic kings, but to the poor shepherds from the hills. That other Being of St. Matthew's Gospel stands at the summit of human evolution and paying homage to him there come spiritual kings, magic kings. The Child of St. Luke's Gospel stands there in simplicity, excluded from human evolution, as a child received by no great ones - received by the shepherds from the hills. Nor does he stand within human evolution, this Child of St. Luke's Gospel, in such a way that we were told in this

Gospel, for example, how the wickedness of the world felt itself challenged by his kingly spiritual power. No! but – albeit we are not at once brought face to face with Herod's power and wickedness – it is clearly shown to us how that which is given in this Child is so great, so noble, so full of significance, that humanity itself cannot receive it into its ranks. It appears poor and rejected, as though cast into a corner by human evolution and there in a peculiar manner it shows us its extra-human, its divine, that is to say, its cosmic origin. And what an inspiration flowed from this Gospel of St. Luke for all those who, again and again, gave us scenes, in pictures and in other artistic works – scenes which were especially called forth by St. Luke's Gospel. If we compare the various artistic productions, do we not feel how those, which throughout the centuries were inspired by St. Luke's Gospel, show us Jesus as a Being with whom every man, even the simplest, can feel akin? Through that which worked on through the Luke-Jesus-Child, the simplest man comes to feel the whole event in Palestine as a family happening, which concerns himself as something which happened among his own near relations. No Gospel worked on in the same way as this Gospel of St. Luke, with its sublime and happy flowing mood, making the Jesus-Being intimate to the human souls. And yet – all is contained in this childlike picture – all that should be contained in a certain aspect of the Christ-Impulse: namely, that the highest thing in the world, in the whole world, is love: that wisdom is something great, worthy to be striven after – for without wisdom beings cannot exist – but that love is something yet greater; that the might and the power with which the world is architected is something great without which the world cannot exist – but that love is something yet greater. And he has a right feeling for the Christ-Impulse, who can feel this higher nature of Love over against Power and Strength and Wisdom. As human spiritual individualities, above all things we must strive after wisdom, for wisdom is one of the divine impulses of the world. And that we must strive after wisdom, that wisdom must be the sacred treasure that brings us forward – it is this that was intended to be shown in the first scene of *The Soul's Probation*, that we must not let wisdom fall away, that we must cherish it, in order to ascend through wisdom on the ladder of human evolution. But everywhere where wisdom is, there is a twofold thing: wisdom of the Gods and wisdom of the Luciferic powers. The being who strives after wisdom must inevitably come near to the antagonists of the Gods, to the throng of the Light-Bearer, the army of Lucifer. Therefore there is no divine all-wisdom, for wisdom is always confronted with an opponent – with Lucifer.

And power and might! Through wisdom the world is conceived, through wisdom it is seen, it is illumined; through power and might the world is fashioned and built. Everything that comes about, comes about through the power and the might that is in the beings and we should be shutting ourselves out from the world if we did not seek our share in the power and might of the world. We see this mighty power in the world when the lightning flashes through the clouds; we perceive it when the thunder rolls or when the rain pours down from heavenly spaces into the earth to fertilise it, or when the rays of the sun stream down to conjure forth the seedlings of plants slumbering in the earth. In the forces of nature that work down on to the earth we see this power working blessing as sunshine, as forces in rain and clouds; but, on the other hand, we must see this power and might in volcanoes, for instance, which seem to rise up and rebel against the earth itself – heavenly force pitted against heavenly force. And we look into the world, and we know: if we would ourselves be beings of the world-all, then something of them must work in us; we must have our share in power and in might. Through them we stand within the world: Divine and Ahrimanic powers live and pulsate through us. The all-power is not 'all-powerful,' for always it has its antagonist Ahriman against itself.

Between them – between Power and Wisdom - stands Love; and if it is the true love we feel that alone is 'Divine.' We can speak of the 'all-power,' of 'all-strength,' as of an ideal; but over against them stand Ahriman. We can speak of 'all-wisdom' as of an ideal; but over against it stands the force of Lucifer. But to say 'all-love' seems absurd; for if we love rightly it is capable of no increase.

Wisdom can be small - it can be augmented. Power can be small; it can be augmented. Therefore all-wisdom and all-power can stand as ideals. But cosmic love - we feel that it does not allow of the conception of all-love; for love is something unique.



As the Jesus-Child is placed before us in St. Luke's Gospel, so do we feel it as the personification of love; the personification of love between wisdom or all-wisdom and all-power. And we really feel it like this, just because it is a child. Only it is intensified because in addition to all that a child has at any time, this Child has the quality of forlornness: it is cast out into a lonely corner. The magic building of man - we see it already laid out in the organism of the child. Wherever in the wide world-all we turn our gaze, there is nothing that comes into being through so much wisdom as this magic building, which appears before our eyes – even unspoiled as yet – in the childlike organism. And just as it appears in the child – that which is all-wisdom in the physical body, the same thing also appears in the etheric body, where the wisdom of cosmic powers is expressed; and so in the astral body and in the ego. Like wisdom that has made an extract of itself – so does the child lie there. And if it is thrown out into a corner of mankind, like the Child Jesus, then we feel that separated there lies a picture of perfection, concentrated world-wisdom.

But all-power too appears personified to us, when we look on the child as it is described in St. John's Gospel. How shall we feel how the all-power is expressed in relation to the body of the child, the being of the child? We must make present in our souls the whole force of that which divine powers and forces of nature can achieve. Think of the might of the forces and powers of nature near to the earth when the elements are storming; transplant yourself into the powers of nature that hold sway, surging and welling up and down in the earth; think of all the brewing of world-powers and world-forces, of the clash of the good forces with the Ahrimanic forces; the whirling and raging of it all. And now imagine all this storming and raging of the elements to be held away from a tiny spot in the world, in order that at that tiny spot the magic building of the child's body may lie – in order to set apart a tiny body; for the child's body must be protected. Were it exposed for a moment to the violence of the powers of nature, it would be swept away! Then you may feel how it is immersed in the all-power. And now you may realise the feeling that can pass through the human soul when it gazes with simple heart on that which is expressed by St. Luke's Gospel. If one approached this 'concentrated wisdom' of the child with the greatest human wisdom – mockery and foolishness this wisdom! For it can never be so great as was the wisdom that was used in order that the child-body might lie before us. The highest wisdom remains foolishness and must stand abashed before the childlike body and pay homage to heavenly wisdom; but it knows that it cannot reach it. Mockery is this wisdom; it must feel itself rejected in its own foolishness.

No, with wisdom we cannot approach that which is placed before us as the Jesus-Being in St. Luke's Gospel. Can we approach it with power?

We cannot approach it with power. For the use of 'power' can only have a meaning where a contrary power comes into play. But the child meets us – whether we would use much or little power – with its powerlessness and mocks our power in its powerlessness! For it would be meaningless to approach the child with power, since it meets us with nothing but its powerlessness.

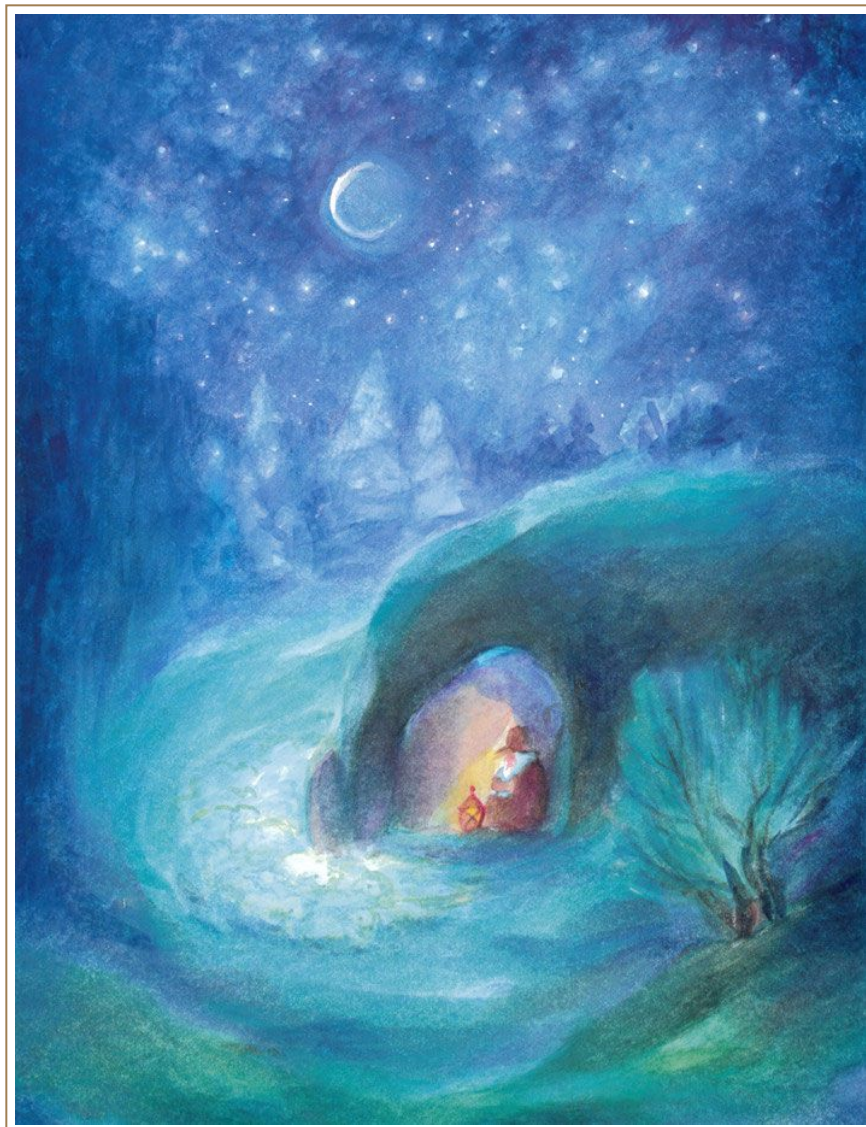
That is the wonderful thing – that the Christ-Impulse, being placed before us in its preparation in the Child Jesus, meets us in St. Luke's Gospel just in this way, that – be we ever so wise – we cannot approach it with our wisdom; no more can we approach it with our power. Of all that at other times

connects us with the world – nothing can approach the Child Jesus, as St. Luke's Gospel describes it – neither wisdom, nor power – but love. To bring love towards the child-being, unlimited love – that is the one thing possible. The power of love, and the justification and signification of love and love alone – that it is that we can feel so deeply when we let the contents of St. Luke's Gospel work on our soul.

We live in the world, and we may not scorn any of the impulses of the world. It would be a denial of our humanity and a betrayal of the Gods for us not to strive after wisdom; every day and every hour of the year is well applied, in which we realise it as our human duty to strive after wisdom. And so does every day and every hour of the year compel us to become aware that we are placed in the world and that we are a play of the forces and powers of the world – of the all-power that pulsates through the world. But there is one moment in which we may forget this, in which we may remember what St. Luke's Gospel places before us, when we think of the Child that is yet more filled with wisdom and yet more powerless than other people's children and before whom the highest love appears in its full justification, before whom wisdom must stand still and power must stand still.

So we can feel the significance of the fact that it is just this Christ-Child, received by the simple shepherds, which is placed before us as the third aspect of the Christ-Impulse; beside the Spirit-Kingly aspect and the great Cosmic aspect, the Childlike aspect. The Spirit-Kingly aspect meets us in such a way that we are reminded of the highest wisdom, and that the ideal of highest wisdom is placed before us. The cosmic aspect meets us, and we know that through it the whole direction of earthly evolution is re-formed. Highest power through the cosmic Impulse is revealed to us – highest power so great that it conquers even death. And that which must be added to wisdom and power as a third thing, and must sink into our souls as something transcending the other two, is set before us as that from which man's evolution on earth, on the physical plane, proceeds. And it has sufficed to bring home to humanity, through the ever-returning picture of Jesus' birth at Christmas, the whole significance of love in the world and in human evolution. Thus, as it is in the Christmas 'night of initiation' that the birth of the Jesus-Child is put before us, it is in the same night as it comes round again and again that there can be born in our souls, contemplating the birth of the Jesus-Child, the understanding of genuine, true love that resounds above all. And if at Christmas an understanding of the feeling of love is rightly awakened in us, if we celebrate this birth of Christ – the awakening of love – then from the moment in which we experience it there can radiate that which we need for the remaining hours and days of the year, that it may flow through and bless the wisdom that it is ours to strive after in every hour and in every day of the year.

It was especially through the emphasising of this love-impulse that, already in Roman times, Christianity brought into human evolution the feeling that something can be found in human souls, through which they can come near each other – not by touching what the world gives to men, but that which human souls have through themselves. There was always the need of having such an approaching together of man in love. But what had become of this feeling in Rome, at the time when the Mystery of Golgotha took place? It had become the Saturnalia. In the days of December, beginning from the seventeenth, the Saturnalia took place, in which all differences of rank and standing were suspended. Then man met man; high and low ceased to be; every one said 'thou' to the other. That which originated from the outer world was swept away, but for fun and merriment the children were given 'Saturnalia presents,' which then developed into our Christmas presents. Thus ancient Rome had been driven to take refuge in fun, in joking, in order to transcend the ordinary social distinctions.



Into the midst of all this, there entered about that time the new principle, wherein men do not call forth joking and merriment, but the highest in their souls – the spiritual. Thus did the feeling of equality from man to man enter Christianity in the time when in Rome it had assumed the merrymaking form of the Saturnalia, and this also testifies to us of the aspect of love, of general human love which can exist between man and man if we grasp man in his deepest being. Thus, for example, we grasp him in his deepest being, when at Christmas Eve the child awaits the coming of the Christmas child or the Christmas angel. How does the child wait at Christmas Eve? It awaits the coming of the Christmas child or angel, knowing: He is coming not from human lands, he comes from the spiritual world! It is a kind of understanding of the spiritual world, in which the child shows itself to be like the grown-up people. For they too know the same thing that the child knows – that the Christ-Impulse came into earthly evolution from higher worlds. So it is not only the Child of St. Luke's Gospel that comes before our souls at Christmas, but that which Christmas shall bring near to man's heart comes near to every child's soul in the loveliest way, and unites childlike understanding with grown-up understanding. All that a child can feel, from the moment when it begins to be able to think at all – that is the one pole. And the other pole is that which we can feel in our highest spiritual concerns, if we remain faithful to the impulse which was mentioned at the beginning of this evening's thoughts, the impulse whereby we awaken the will to the spiritual light after which we strive in our now to be founded Anthroposophical Society. For there, too, it is our will that that which is to come into human evolution shall be borne by something which comes into us from spiritual realms as an

impulse. And just as the child feels towards the angel of Christmas who brings it its Christmas presents – it feels itself, in its childlike way, connected with the spiritual – so may we feel ourselves connected with the spiritual gift that we long for on Christmas night as the impulse which can bring us the high ideal for which we strive. And if in this circle we feel ourselves united in such love as can stream in from a right understanding of the 'night of initiation,' then we shall be able to attain that which is to be attained through the Anthroposophical Society – our anthroposophical ideal. We shall attain that which is to be attained in united work, if a ray of that man-to-man love can take hold of us, of which we can learn when we give ourselves in the right way to the Christmas thought.

Thus those of our dear friends who are united with us to-night may have a kind of excellence of feeling. Though they may not be sitting here or there under the Christmas-tree in the way that is customary in this cycle of time, our dear friends are yet sitting under the Christmas-tree. And all of you who are spending this 'initiation night' with us under the Christmas-tree: try to awaken in your souls something of the feeling that can come over us when we feel why it is that we are here together – that we may already learn to realise in our souls those impulses of love which must once in distant and yet more distant future come nearer and nearer, when the Christ-Impulse, of which our Christmas has reminded us so well, takes hold on human evolution with ever greater and greater power, greater and greater understanding. For it will only take hold, if souls be found who understand it in its full significance. But in this realm, 'understanding' cannot be without love – the fairest thing in human evolution, to which we give birth in our souls just on this evening and night when we transfuse our hearts with that spiritual picture of the Jesus-Child, cast out by the rest of mankind, thrown into a corner, born in a stable. Such is the picture of Him that is given to us – as though he comes into human evolution from outside, and is received by the simplest in spirit, the poor shepherds. If to-day we seek to give birth to the love-impulse that can pour into our souls from this picture, then it will have the force to promote that which we would and should achieve, to assist in the tasks that we have set ourselves in the realm of Anthroposophy, and that karma has pointed out to us as deep and right tasks in the realm of Anthroposophy.

Let us take this with us from this evening's thoughts on the Christmas initiation night, saying that we have come together in order to take out with us the impulse of love, not only for a short time, but for all our striving that we have set before us, inasmuch as we can understand it through the spirit of our anthroposophical view of the world.

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