

**A Star  
over Bethlehem**

*From Advent  
to the  
Epiphany*

**New City**

**London**

**New York**

**Manila**

First published in 2001  
In Great Britain  
by  
New City  
57 Twyford Avenue  
London W3 9PZ

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Illustrations by Joan Day  
Cover design by Nick Cianfarani

A catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 904287 77 7

Scripture quotations are from The New English Bible

Typeset by New City, London  
Printed in Canada

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## Introduction

**T**wo thousand years ago, we are told, a star appeared in the East. Certain wise men understood this to mean that a baby had been born who was to be king over all the world. What was that star? Was it a comet? We don't know, but stars then and today, have always been considered lights to steer by, and the story goes that these wise men were guided to Bethlehem, to one who was to be called the Light of the World.

The images are evocative. The wealth of myths and legends, songs and stories that have grown up around the biblical narrative are witness to that and can be taken on several different levels. In fact, the story leading up to the birth of the child and his manifestation to the world, from advent to the epiphany, are a kind of super-history. Whatever may be the precise and objective historical details of what happened all those long centuries ago, and however much scholars, believers or agnostics may vary in their opinions, this story still speaks powerfully and truthfully to us today. The tale of the past unlocks the meaning of now.

The aim of this collection is, in one sense, to present a journey through the whole sweep of the events surrounding the first Christmas stripped of their tinsel and glitter, without trees and reindeer and Santa Claus, and without the stresses and strains of consumerism, to present them in all their beauty, simplicity and depth. It is to go to the heart of the story by meditating on the images that surround and build it up. This may sound like a paradox, but we know that simplicity is deceptive; it is not easy.

It is hoped that the insights gathered here and expressed in the words of saints and poets and great thinkers may help

us in our own meditations and explorations and, not least, be a source of practical inspiration to all those who seek to present any part of the Christmas story – giving pastors, teachers, youth workers and dramatists tools to tell the exquisite tale of God’s love for his people. But in the truest sense, also and especially, it is hoped that these insights will give pure enjoyment for, after all, we are told that joy is of the kingdom.

*Ann Finch*



**Part One**

# **Preparing the Way**



# The Word to be Made Flesh

**T**here appeared a man named John, sent from God;  
he came as a witness to testify to the light, that all  
might become believers through him.  
He was not himself the light;  
he came to bear witness to the light.  
The real light which enlightens every man  
was even then coming into the world.  
He was in the world; but the world,  
though it owed its being to him,  
did not recognise him.  
He entered his own realm,  
and his own would not receive him.  
But to all who did receive him,  
to those who have yielded him their allegiance,  
he gave the right to become children of God,  
not born of any human stock,  
or by the fleshly desire of a human father,  
but the offspring of God himself.  
So the Word became flesh;  
he came to dwell among us,  
and we saw his glory,  
such glory as befits the Father's only Son,  
full of grace and truth.

*John 1: 6-14*

## Then Will Be the End

*W*e are sometimes inclined to think that the same things are monotonously repeated over and over again in the history of creation. That is because the season is too long by comparison with the brevity of our individual lives, and the transformation too vast and too inward by comparison with our superficial and restricted outlook, for us to see the progress of what is tirelessly taking place to and through all matter and all spirit. Let us believe in Revelation, once again our faithful support in our most human forebodings. Under the commonplace envelope of things and of all our purified and salvaged efforts, a new earth is being slowly engendered.

One day, the Gospel tells us, the tension gradually accumulating between humanity and God will touch the limits prescribed by the possibilities of the world. And then will come the end. Then the presence of Christ, which has been silently accruing in things, will suddenly be revealed – like a flash of light from pole to pole. Breaking through all the barriers within which the veil of matter and the water-tightness of souls have seemingly kept it confined, it will invade the face of the earth. And under the finally-liberated action of the true affinities of being, the spiritual atoms of the world will be borne along by a force generated by the powers of cohesion proper to the universe itself, and will occupy, whether within Christ or without Christ (but always under the influence of Christ), the place of happiness or pain designated for them by the living structure of the Pleroma. ‘As the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west... as the flood came and swept them all away... so will be the coming of the Son of Man’ (Matt. 24:27,39). Like

lightning, like a conflagration, like a flood, the attraction exerted by the Son of Man will lay hold of all the whirling elements in the universe so as to reunite them or subject them to his body. 'Wherever the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together.'

Such will be the consummation of the divine *milieu*.

As the Gospel warns us, it would be vain to speculate as to the hour and the modalities of this formidable event. But we have to *expect* it.

Expectation – anxious, collective and operative expectation of an end of the world, that is to say of an issue for the world – that is perhaps the supreme Christian function and the most distinctive characteristic of our religion.

*Teilhard de Chardin*  
(1881 – 1955)

## The Trinity Has Thrown Open Its Gates

*I*t is mysterious and momentous  
that the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity  
became incarnate,  
through which, for all eternity, our human nature  
is inseparably placed  
in the heart of God.  
It is mysterious and goes beyond our reasoning.  
God in his second Person,  
will never more be parted from human nature in Jesus!

If the Most Holy Trinity has thrown open its gates so  
that the Word  
could become human for us,  
we are crazy if we do not believe  
in the love of God for everyone.

*Chiara Lubich*

## To Bring Salvation

**T**he Lord of the world did not consider it right  
to allow human beings, for love of whom everything had  
been made,

to be besieged by sin and to be sold like slaves to death.

For this reason he assumed human form,

hid his invisible nature under visible guise,

and kept the visible nature free from the stain of sin.

Undoubtedly, it would have been easy for him

to save the human race without assuming the garment of  
the flesh.

He could have overthrown the power of death by a simple  
act of will.

He could have made the father of that power, sin,

disappear by exiling it from earth in such a way

that no trace of it would remain on the earth.

Instead of that, he chose to demonstrate the holiness of his  
providential care.

To restore salvation to human beings

he did not employ as his servants the angels and archangels,

nor cause a piercing voice to resound from heaven.

He preferred to build for himself a chamber in the womb of  
the Virgin

and from there to come among us.

For this reason we think of him as man and adore him as God.

Begotten of the Father before the beginning of time,

he took of the Virgin a visible body.

He is the Being who is both new and pre-existent.

*Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus*

(393 – 460)

## A Paradox

**C**hristmas is drawing near. For a man who sees with only one eye what is approaching is cold, darkness and hunger. For the man who sees things in God, with both the human and the divine eye, the Redemption is approaching, which is joy, life and deification.

Christmas, an image of the paradox that the Redemption constitutes for men. It reveals the ways in which the heavenly Father acts, who makes of a stable the abode of the Eternal, the meeting-place of purity and beauty. He can make the God-Man come to birth in the bare and tattered dwelling of an old man, a person who is the temple of the Holy Spirit, if he wishes, and so a meeting-place for angels singing to the universe.

Igino Giordani  
(1894 – 1980)