

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

It was a cloud above the Ark which manifested to the Israelites a definite manifestation of God. Now this would have drawn away the mind of man from the spiritual nature of God had not God willed to demonstrate His presence in such a fashion that the Ark and the cloud above it would be a mere shadow of a coming historical substance. In the suburb of a Judean village, in the manger of a stable, hewn out from a limestone rock, was born of a Syrian maiden Jesus Christ, the Everlasting Redeemer of the world—our God.

To make such a statement in the face of the modern scientific world seems somewhat audacious, for it bespeaks the blending of two modes of being—the spiritual with the material, the humanly dependent with the absolutely divine. We have little inclination to discuss the serious subject as to how far the old civilisations confounded the phenomena of nature with the Being of nature's God. We are the believers in the mystery of the Incarnate birth of Jesus Christ, the Eternal God. It is much more to our purpose, since we are the children of the dawning hopes of humanity to venture an assertion that the Nativity was a new starting point in the sphere of human liberty and material progress. There is but one question for every individual: "Have I any distinct relationship with Him Who out of Everlasting Love for me clothed Himself with my erring flesh and assumed unto Himself the whole of the physical creation?"

CHRISTMAS DATES CENTURIES AGO

The custom of celebrating a special day in memory of Christ's nativity is one which dates from the earliest ages of Christianity. From primitive times the Eastern Church solemnised the birthday of Our Blessed Lord on January 6. Rome, however, with never-failing constancy, has always celebrated this event on the 25th day of December. Dom Swithber Baumer, O.S.B., is of the opinion that Christmas must have been instituted in Rome some time after the year 243.

Hippolytes may be cited as one of the earliest authorities in favor of the 25th day of December. He lived in Rome during the first half of the third century, and must have had the best opportunities of learning the primitive tradition of the "Mother and Mistress of all Churches." In a recently discovered commentary of his, on the Book of Daniel, quoted by Mgr. Duchesne, the date when Christ was born is set down as the 25th of December. A Roman calendar of the early part of the fourth century also inscribes the 25th of December as the birthday of Christ.

Pagan Rome also kept the festival on the 25th of December. It was the *Nativitas Invicti* (Solis), the birthday of the sun, and the suggestion has been made that this influenced the Church in fixing Christmas on

the same day. Be that as it may, one cannot fail to see a striking parallel between the day of the winter solstice, when the sun is, as it were, born anew, and the old *Sol Justitiae*, the sun of justice, who was believed by the Roman Christians to have risen for the first time upon the world on that day.

The feast of Christmas then must be regarded as essentially a feast of the Latin Church. Its institution dates from Rome about the end of the third century. From Rome it found its way into the East.

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