

ATKINSON WILLIAM WALKER

MYSTIC CHRISTIANITY; OR,
THE INNER TEACHINGS
OF THE MASTER

William Atkinson

**Mystic Christianity; Or, The
Inner Teachings of the Master**

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William Walker Atkinson

Mystic Christianity; Or, The Inner Teachings of the Master

The Project Gutenberg eBook, Mystic Christianity, by Yogi Ramacharaka

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MYSTIC CHRISTIANITY

Or, The Inner Teachings of the Master

by

YOGI RAMACHARAKA

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THE FIRST LESSON

THE COMING OF THE MASTER

THE FORERUNNER

Strange rumors reached the ears of the people of Jerusalem and the surrounding country. It was reported that a new prophet had appeared in the valley of the lower Jordan, and in the wilderness of Northern Judea, preaching startling doctrines. His teachings resembled those of the prophets of old, and his cry of "Repent! Repent ye! for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," awakened strange memories of the ancient teachers of the race, and caused the common people to gaze wonderingly at each other, and the ruling classes to frown and look serious, when the name of the new prophet was mentioned.

The man whom the common people called a prophet, and whom the exalted ones styled an impostor, was known as John the Baptist, and dwelt in the wilderness away from the accustomed haunts of men. He was clad in the rude garments of the roaming ascetics, his rough robe of camel's skin being held around his form by a coarse girdle of leather. His diet was frugal and elemental, consisting of the edible locust of the region, together with the wild honey stored by the bees of the wilderness.

In appearance John, whom men called "the Baptist," was tall, wiry, and rugged. His skin was tanned a dark brown by the winds and sun which beat upon it unheeded. His long black hair hung loosely around his shoulders, and was tossed like the mane of a lion when he spoke. His beard was rough and untrimmed. His eyes gleamed like glowing coals, and seemed to burn into the very soul of his hearers. His was the face of the religious enthusiastic with a Message for the world.

This wild prophet was most strenuous, and his teachings were couched in the most vigorous words. There was no tact, policy, or persuasion in his message. He hurled his verbal thunderbolts right into his crowd, the very force and earnestness emanating from him serving to charge his words with a vitality and magnetism which dashed itself into the crowd like a spark of electricity, knocking men from off their feet, and driving the Truth into them as if by a charge of a powerful explosive. He told them that the spiritual grain was to be gathered into the garner, while the chaff was to be consumed as if by a fiery furnace; that the axe was to be laid to the root of the trees which brought not forth good fruit. Verily, the "Day of Jehovah," long promised by the prophets, was near to hand to his hearers and followers.

John soon gathered to himself a following, the people flocking to him from all parts of the country, even from Galilee. His followers began to talk among themselves, asking whether indeed this man were not the long promised Master—the Messiah for whom all Israel had waited for centuries. This talk coming to the ears of the prophet, caused him to answer the question in his discourses, saying: "There cometh one mightier than I, after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose; he that cometh after me is mightier than I." And thus it became gradually known to his following, and the strangers attending his meetings, that this John the Baptist, mighty preacher though he be, was but the herald of one much greater than he, who should follow—that he was the forerunner of the Master, according to the Oriental imagery which pictured the forerunner of the great dignitaries, running ahead of the chariot of his master, crying aloud to all people gathered on the road that they must make way for the approaching great man, shouting constantly, "Make ye a way! make ye a way for the Lord!" And accordingly there was a new wave of excitement among John's following, which spread rapidly to the surrounding country, at this promise of the coming of

the Lord—the Master—perhaps even the Messiah of the Jews. And many more came unto John, and with him waited for the Coming of the Master.

This John the Baptist was born in the hill country of Judea, nearly thirty years before he appeared as a prophet. His father was of the priestly order, or temple caste, who had reached an advanced age, and who lived with his aged wife in retirement, away from the noise and confusion of the world, waiting the gradual approach of that which cometh to all men alike. Then there came to them a child of their old age, unexpected and un hoped for—coming as a mark of especial favor from God—a son, to whom they gave the name of *Johanan*, which in the Hebrew tongue means "Jehovah is gracious."

Reared in the home of his parents—the house of a priest—John saturated himself with all the Inner Teachings reserved for the few, and withheld from the masses. The Secrets of the Kaballah, that system of Hebrew Occultism and Mysticism in which the higher priests of Judea were well versed, were disclosed to him, and occult tradition has it that he was initiated into the Inner Circle of the Hebrew Mystics, composed of only priests of a certain grade, and their sons. John became an Occultist and a Mystic. When the boy reached the age of puberty, he departed from the home of his parents, and went into the wilderness, "looking to the East, from whence cometh all Light." In other words, he became an Ascetic, living in the wilderness, just as in India even to-day youths of the Brahmin or priestly class sometimes forsake their homes, renouncing their luxurious life, and fly to the jungle, where they wander about for years as ascetics, wearing a single garment, subsisting on the most elementary food, and developing their spiritual consciousness. John remained a recluse until he reached the age of about thirty years, when he emerged from the wilderness to preach the "Coming of the Lord," in obedience to the movings of the Spirit. Let us see where he was, and what he did, during the fifteen years of his life in the wilderness and hidden places of Judea.

The traditions of the Essenes, preserved among Occultists, state that while John was an ascetic he imbibed the teachings of that strange Occult Brotherhood known as the Essenes, and after having served his apprenticeship, was accepted into the order as an Initiate, and attained their higher degrees reserved only for those of developed spirituality and power. It is said that even when he was a mere boy he claimed and proved his right to be fully initiated into the Mysteries of the Order, and was believed to have been a reincarnation of one of the old Hebrew prophets.

THE ESSENES

The Essenes were an ancient Hebrew Occult Brotherhood, which had been in existence many hundred years before John's time. They had their headquarters on the Eastern shores of the Dead Sea, although their influence extended over all of Palestine, and their ascetic brothers were to be found in every wilderness. The requirements of the Order were very strict, and its rites and ceremonies were of the highest mystical and occult degree. The Neophyte was required to serve a preliminary apprenticeship of one year before being admitted to even partial recognition as a member and brother. A further apprenticeship of two more years was required before he was admitted to full membership, and extended the right hand of fellowship. Additional time was required for further advancement, and even time alone did not entitle the member to certain high degrees, the requirements being that actual knowledge, power and attainment must first be manifested. As in all true Occult Orders the candidate must "work out his own salvation," neither money nor influence having any weight.

Absolute obedience to the Rules of the Order; absolute poverty of material possessions; absolute sexual continence—these were the conditions of membership to be observed by both Neophyte and Initiate, as well as High-degree Master. Understanding this, one may imagine the disgust inspired in John by the amorous solicitations of Salome, which caused him to lose his life rather than to break the vows of his Order, as is so startlingly pictured in the stage productions of modern times.

One of the ceremonies of the Essenes was that of Baptism (literally, "dipping in water") which was administered to Candidates, with appropriate solemnity and rites. The mystic significance of the ceremony which is understood by all members of Occult Orders, even unto this day, was a part of the ritual originated by the Essenes, and the rite itself was a distinctive feature of their Order. The performance of this rite by John the Baptist, in his ministry, and its subsequent acceptance by the Christian Church as a distinctive ceremonial, of which the "sprinkling of infants" of to-day is a reminder and substitute, forms a clear connecting link between the Essenes and Modern Christianity, and impresses the stamp of Mysticism and Occultism firmly upon the latter, as little as the general public may wish to admit it in their ignorant misunderstanding and materialistic tendencies.

The Essenes believed in, and taught the doctrine of Reincarnation; the Immanence of God; and many other Occult Truths, the traces of which appear constantly in the Christian Teachings, as we shall see as we progress with these lessons. Through its Exalted Brother, John the Baptist, the Order passed on its teaching to the early Christian Church, thus grafting itself permanently upon a new religious growth, newly appearing on the scene. And the transplanted branches are still there!

Of course, the true history of the real connection between the Essenes and Christianity is to be found only in the traditions of the Essenes and other ancient Mystic Orders, much of which has never been printed, but which has passed down from teacher to pupil over the centuries even unto this day, among Occult Fraternities. But in order to show the student that we are not making statements incapable of proof by evidence available to him, we would refer him to any standard work of reference on the subject. For instance, if he will consult the "New International Encyclopedia" (Vol. VII, page 217) article on "Essenes," he will read the following words:

"It is an interesting question as to how much Christianity owes to Essenism. It would seem that there was room for definite contact between John the Baptist and this Brotherhood. His time of preparation was spent in the wilderness near the Dead Sea; his preaching of righteousness toward God, and justice toward one's fellow men, was in agreement with Essenism; while his insistence on Baptism was in accord with the Essenic emphasis on lustrations."

The same article contains the statement that the Essenic Brotherhood taught a certain "view entertained regarding the origin, present state, and future destiny of the soul, *which was held to be pre-existent, being entrapped in the body as in a prison,*" etc. (The above italics are our own.)

John emerged from the wilderness when he had reached the age of about thirty years, and began his ministry work, which extended for several years until his death at the hands of Herod. He gathered around him a large and enthusiastic following, beginning with the humbler classes and afterward embracing a number of higher social degree. He formed his more advanced followers into a band of disciples, with prescribed rules regarding fasting, worship, ceremonial, rites, etc., closely modeled upon those favored by the Essenes. This organization was continued until the time of John's death, when it merged with the followers of Jesus, and exerted a marked influence upon the early Christian church.

As we have stated, one of his principal requisites enjoined upon all of his followers, was that of "Baptism"—the Essenic rite, from which he derived his familiar appellation, "The Baptist." But, it must be remembered that to John this rite was a most sacred, mystic, symbolic ceremony, possessing a deep occult meaning unperceived by many of his converts who submitted themselves to it under the fervor of religious emotion, and who *naïvely* regarded it as some magical rite which "washed away sin" from their souls, as the dirt was washed from their bodies, a belief which seems to be still in favor with the multitude.

John worked diligently at his mission, and the "Baptists" or "Followers of Johanan," as they were called, increased rapidly. His meetings were events of great moment to thousands who had gathered from all Palestine to see and hear the prophet of the wilderness—the Essene who had emerged from

his retirement. His meetings were often attended with startling occurrences, sudden conversions, visions, trances, etc., and many developed possession of unusual powers and faculties. But one day there was held a meeting destined to gain world-wide fame. This was the day when there came to John the Baptist the MASTER, of whose coming John had frequently foretold and promised. JESUS THE CHRIST appeared upon the scene and confronted his Forerunner.

The traditions have it that Jesus came unannounced to, and unrecognized by John and the populace. The Forerunner was in ignorance of the nature and degree of his guest and applicant for Baptism. Although the two were cousins, they had not met since childhood, and John did not at first recognize Jesus. The traditions of the Mystic Orders further state that Jesus then gave to John the various signs of the Occult Fraternities to which they both belonged, working from the common signs up until Jesus passed on to degrees to which John had not attained, although he was an eminent high-degree Essene. Whereupon John saw that the man before him was no common applicant for Baptism, but was, instead, a highest-degree Mystic Adept, and Occult Master—his superior in rank and unfoldment. John, perceiving this, remonstrated with Jesus, saying that it was not meet and proper, nor in accordance with the customs of the Brotherhoods, for the inferior to Baptize the superior. Of this event the New Testament takes note in these words: "But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" (*Matt. 3:14.*) But Jesus insisted that John perform the rite upon him upon the ground that He wished to go through the ceremonial in order to set His stamp of approval upon it, and to show that he considered himself as a man among men, come forth to live the life of men.

In both the occult traditions and the New Testament narrative, it is stated that a mystical occurrence ensued at the baptism, "the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him," and a voice from Heaven saying: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

And with these words the mission of John the Baptist, as "Forerunner of the Master," was fulfilled. *The Master* had appeared to take up his work.

THE MASTER

And, now, let us turn back the pages of the Book of Time, to a period about thirty years before the happening of the events above mentioned. Let us turn our gaze upon the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, in order that we may trace the Mystic and Occult forces at work from the beginning of Christianity. There are occurrences of the greatest importance embraced in these thirty years.

Let us begin the Mystic Narrative of Jesus the Christ, as it is told to the Neophyte of every Occult Order, by the Master Instructor, by a recital of an event preceding his birth by over one year.

In Matthew 2:1-2, the following is related:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came Wise Men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him."

In these simple words is stated an event that, expressed in a much more extended narrative, forms an important part of the Esoteric Teachings of the Mystic Brotherhoods, and Occult Orders of the Orient, and which is also known to the members of the affiliated secret orders of the Western world. The story of THE MAGI is embedded in the traditions of the Oriental Mystics, and we shall here give you a brief outline of the story as it is told by Hierophant to Neophyte—by Guru to Chela.

To understand the story, you must know just who were these "Wise Men of the East"—The Magi. And this you shall now be taught.

THE MAGI, OR WISE MEN

The translators of the New Testament have translated the words naming these visitors from afar as "the Wise Men from the East," but in the original Greek, Matthew used the words "*The Magi*" as may be seen by reference to the original Greek versions, or the Revised Translation, which gives the Greek term in a foot-note. Any leading encyclopedia will corroborate this statement. The term "the Magi" was the exact statement of Matthew in the original Greek in which the Gospel was written, the term "the Wise Men" originating with the English translators. There is absolutely no dispute regarding this question among Biblical scholars, although the general public is not aware of the connection, nor do they identify the Wise Men with the Oriental Magians.

The word "Magi" comes to the English language direct from the Greek, which in turn acquired it by gradual steps from the Persian, Chaldean, Median, and Assyrian tongues. It means, literally, "wonder worker," and was applied to the members of the occult priestly orders of Persia, Media, and Chaldea, who were Mystic Adepts and Occult Masters. Ancient history is full of references to this body of men. They were the custodians of the world's occult knowledge for centuries, and the priceless treasures of the Inner Teachings held by the race to-day have come through the hands of these men—the Magi—who tended the sacred fires of Mysticism and kept The Flame burning. In thinking of their task, one is reminded of the words of Edward Carpenter, the poet, who sings: "Oh, let not the flame die out! Cherished age after age in its dark caverns, in its holy temples cherished. Fed by pure ministers of love—let not the flame die out."

The title of "Magi" was highly esteemed in those ancient days, but it fell into disrepute in the latter times owing to its growing use as an appellation of the practitioners of "Black Magic," or "evil wonder-workers" or sorcerers, of those days. But as a writer in the New International Encyclopedia (Vol. XII, page 674) has truly said:

"The term is employed in its true sense by Matthew (2:1) of the wise men who came from the East to Jerusalem to worship Christ. The significance of this event must be observed because the Messianic doctrine was an old and established one in Zoroastrianism."

The same article says of the Magi: "... they believed in a resurrection, a future life, and the advent of a savior."

To understand the nature of the Magi in connection with their occult "wonder working," we must turn to the dictionaries, where we will see that the word "Magic" is derived from the title "Magi;" the word "Magician" having been originally "Magian", which means "one of the Magi." Webster defines the word "Magic" as follows: "The hidden wisdom supposed to be possessed by the Magi; relating to the occult powers of nature; mastery of secret forces in nature", etc. So you may readily see that we are right in stating to you that these Wise Men—the Magi who came to worship the Christ-child, were in reality the representatives of the great Mystic Brotherhoods and Occult Orders of the Orient—Adepts, Masters, Hierophants! And thus do we find the Occult and Mystic "wonder workers"—the high-degree brethren of the Great Eastern Lodges of Mystic Occultism, appearing at the very beginning of the Story of Christianity, indicating their great interest in the mortal birth of the greater Master whose coming they had long waited—the Master of Masters! And all Occultists and Mystics find pleasure and just pride in the fact that the first recognition of the Divine Nature of this human child came from these Magi from the East—from the very Heart of the Mystic Inner Circles! To those so-called Christians to whom all that is connected with Mysticism and Occultism savors of the fiery sulphur and brimstone, we would call attention to this intimate early relation between The Masters and THE MASTER.

THE STAR IN THE EAST

But the Mystic story begins still further back than the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem. Did not the Magi say, "Where is He? We have seen His star in the East and have come to worship him." What is meant by the words, "We have seen his star in the East"?

To the majority of Christians the "Star of Bethlehem" means a great star that suddenly appeared in the heavens, like a great beacon light, and which miraculously guided the steps of the Magi, mile by mile, on their weary journey, until at last it rested in the heavens, stationary over the house in which the child Jesus lived, between the ages of one and two years. In other words, they believe that this star had constantly guided these skilled mystics, occultists and astrologers, in their journey from the far East, which occupied over a year, until it at last guided them to Bethlehem and then stopped stationary over the house of Joseph and Mary. Alas! that these vulgar traditions of the ignorant multitude should have served so long to obscure a beautiful mystic occurrence, and which by their utter improbability and unscientific nature should have caused thousands to sneer at the very true legend of the "Star of Bethlehem." It remains for the Mystic traditions to clear away the clouds of ignorance from this beautiful story, and to re-establish it in the minds of men as a natural and scientific occurrence.

This story of the "traveling star" arose from the superstitious and ignorant ideas of many of the Christians of the first, second, and third centuries after Christ's death. These tales were injected into the manuscripts left by the disciples, and soon began to be regarded as a part and portion of the authentic Gospels and Epistles, although the skilled Biblical critics and scholars of to-day are rapidly discarding many of these additions as wilful forgeries and interpolations. It must be remembered that the oldest manuscripts of the books of the New Testament are known to Biblical scholars to have been written *not less than three hundred years after the time of the original writing*, and are merely *copies of copies* of the originals, undoubtedly added to, altered, and adulterated by the writers through whose hands they had passed. This is not merely the statement of an outside critic—it is a fact that is clearly stated in the writings of the scholars in the Churches engaged in the work of Biblical study, and the Higher Criticism, to which works we refer any who may have reason to doubt our statement.

That portion of the verse (*Matt. 2:9.*) in which it is said that "and lo; the star which they saw in the east went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was," is known to the Mystic and Occult Orders to be a rank interpolation into the story of the Magi. It is contrary to their own traditions and records, and is also contrary to reason and to scientific laws, and this distorted story alone has been the cause of the development of thousands of "infidels" who could not accept the tale.

All intelligent men know that a "star" is not a mere tiny point of flame in the dome which shuts us out from a Heaven on the other side of the blue shell, although this view was that of the ancient people, and many ignorant men and women to-day. Educated people know that a "star" is either a planet of our solar system, similar to the sister planet which we called the Earth, or else is a mighty sun, probably many times larger than our sun, countless millions of miles distant from our solar system. And they know that planets have their invariable orbits and courses, over which they travel, unceasingly, so true to their course that their movements may be foretold centuries ahead, or calculated for centuries back. And they know that even the great fixed stars, those distant suns and centers of great solar systems akin to our own, have their own places in the Universe, also their Universal relations and movements. All who have studied even the most elementary school book on astronomy know these things. And yet such people are asked to swallow whole this story of the "moving star," traveling on a little ahead of the shepherds for over a year, and at last standing right over the home of Jesus, and thus indicating that the search was ended. Let us compare this unscientific tale, with the traditions and legends of the Mystics, and then take your choice.

Had there been any such star in appearance, the historians of that day would surely have recorded it, for there were learned and wise men in the East in those days, and as astrology was a

science closely studied, it would have been noted and passed on to posterity by both writings and tradition. But no such record or tradition is to be found among the Eastern peoples, or the records of the astrologers. But another record and tradition *is* preserved, as we shall see in a moment.

Yes, there really *was* a "Star of Bethlehem" which led the feet of the Magi to the home of the infant Jesus. We have the following proof of this fact:

- (1) the traditions and teachings of the Mystic Orders which have been handed down from teacher to student for centuries;
- (2) the statements and records of the Ancient Astrologers, which may be proven by modern astronomical calculations; and
- (3) the calculations made by modern astronomers, which shall be stated a few paragraphs further on. These three sources of information give us the same tale, as we shall see.

Before proceeding to a consideration of this three-fold evidence, let us pause for a moment and consider the relation of the Magi to Astrology. To understand the narrative of the Magi's Visit to Jesus, we must remember that they were the very Masters of Astrological Lore. Persia and the surrounding Oriental countries were the fountain-head of Astrological Teaching. And these Magi were Masters, and Adepts, and Hierophants, and consequently knew all that was known to the greatest schools of Astrology of that day. Much of their Ancient Astrological Lore has been lost to the race of to-day, but to these ancient learned men it was as much of a science as chemistry and astronomy are to the learned ones of our day.

The Magi had long waited for the appearance and incarnation of a Great Master of Masters, whose appearance had been predicted centuries before by some of the great Occult Fathers of the Mystic Orders, and each generation hoped that the event would come in his day. They had been taught that when the event took place, they would be informed by means of the planets, according to the Higher Astrology. All students of even our modern fragmentary astrology will understand this. And so they waited and carefully scanned the heavens for the sign.

Now the traditions of the Occult Orders inform us that at last the Magi witnessed a peculiar conjunction of planets; first, the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, in the Constellation of Pisces, the two planets being afterward joined by the planet Mars, the three planets in close relation of position, making a startling and unusual stellar display, and having a deep astrological significance. Now, the Constellation of Pisces, as all astrologers, ancient and modern, know, is the constellation governing the national existence of Judea. Seeing the predicted conjunction of the planets, occurring in the Constellation having to do with Judea (as well as the relative positions of the other planets, all of which played its part in the observation), the Magi knew two things, *i.e.*, (1) that the birth of the Master of Masters had occurred; and (2) that He had been born in Judea, as indicated by the constellation in which the conjunction occurred. And, so, making the calculation of the exact moment of the conjunction, they started on their long journey toward Judea in search of the Master of Masters.

Now, again, the records of the Astrologers, preserved in the Oriental Occult Brotherhoods, in their monasteries, etc., show that at a period a few years before the Christian Era such a peculiar conjunction and combination of the planets occurred in the Constellation symbolizing the destinies of Judea, which was interpreted as indicating the appearance of an Incarnation or Avatar of a Great Divine Soul—a Master of Masters—a Mystic of Mystics. It must be remembered that these Orders are composed of non-Christians—people that the average Christian would call "heathens," and that therefore this testimony must be regarded as free from bias toward Christianity or the corroboration of its legends.

And, in the third place, the calculations of Modern Astronomy show without possibility of contradiction that in the Roman year 747 (or seven years before the Christian Era) *the planets Saturn and Jupiter formed a conjunction in the Constellation of Pisces*, and that these two planets,

still in close position to each other, were joined by the planet Mars in the Spring of 748. The great astronomer Kepler first made this calculation in the year 1604, and it has been since verified by modern calculations. To those who would object that all this occurred seven years before the commonly accepted date of the birth of Christ, we would say that any modern work on New Testament Chronology, or any encyclopedia or reference work on the subject, will show that the former calculations were several years out of the way, and that the records of other events mentioned in the Bible, such as the "enrollment" of the people, which brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, enable modern Biblical scholars to fix the date of the birth of Christ at about six or seven years before the usually accepted time. So that modern research fully corroborates the astrological record and the Mystic traditions.

And so it would appear that the coming of the Wise Men—the Magi—was in accordance with the astrological signs, of the interpretation of which they were adepts and masters. When this truth is known, how puerile and petty seems the myth of the "traveling star" of the commonly accepted exoteric version? And the pictures of the Wise Men being led by a moving heavenly body, traveling across the skies and at last standing still over the cottage of Joseph, with which the Sunday school books are filled, must be relegated to the same waste-paper basket which contains the Bible illustrations, formerly so popular, which picture Jehovah as a bald-headed old man with a long white beard, clad in flowing robes designed to hide his body. Is it any wonder that skeptics, infidels, and scoffers of the spiritual truths have arisen in great numbers, when they have been asked to accept these things or be damned?

And is not this connection of Astrology with Early Christianity a rebuke to the modern Christian Church which sneers and scoffs at the science of astrology as a "base superstition" fit only for fools and ignoramuses? Does not this picture of the Magi give a clear view of that which was formerly regarded as a mere fable, to be solemnly smiled over and taught to the children, with whom the story has always been a favorite owing to their intuitive perception of an underlying truth. And now with this Mystic version, cannot *you* enjoy the legend with the children? In this connection let us once more quote from the New International Encyclopedia (Vol. II, 170), a standard reference work, as you know, which says:

"Some of the earlier Christian Fathers argued against the doctrines of the earlier astrology, while others received them in a modified form; and indeed it formed a part of the basis of their religion in the Gospel narrative of the visit to Bethlehem of the Wise Men of the East, who were Chaldean Magi or Astrologers."

Here is the testimony in all of the standard reference books, and yet how many of you have known it?

To understand the importance of the event which drew the steps of the Magi to Bethlehem, we must realize that the Coming of the Master was a favorite subject of speculation and discussion among Occultists and Mystic organizations all over the Oriental countries. It had been foretold, in all tongues, that a Great Master would be given to the world—a mighty *avatar* or appearance of Deity in human form, who would incarnate in order to redeem the world from the materiality which threatened it. The Sacred Writings of India, Persia, Chaldea, Egypt, Media, Assyria, and other lands had foretold this event for many centuries, and all the mystics and occultists longed for the day "when the Master would appear." The Jews also had many traditions regarding the coming of a Messiah, who would be born of the seed of David, at Bethlehem, but their Messiah was looked upon as likely to be an earthly king, destined to free Israel from the Roman yoke. And so, the tradition of the Jews was regarded as of inferior moment to their own predictions, by the Mystic and Occult Brotherhoods of the East. To them it was to be an *avatar* of Deity—God in human form come to take his rightful seat as the Grand Master of the Universal Grand Lodge of Mystic—a descent of pure Spirit into matter. This conception certainly was very much higher than that of the Jews.

And so, knowing these things, we may readily understand why the Magi pursued their search with such ardor and enthusiasm. They had many weary miles of travel to Bethlehem, over a year being consumed in the journey. They reached Bethlehem over a year after the birth of Christ and the appearance of the Star, the sight of which had started them on their quest. They sought not a new-born babe, as common belief has it—they searched for a child born over a year before. (We refer the student to any reference work, for a verification of this last statement. The illustrations in the Sunday school books showing the Wise Men worshipping a new born babe in the manger are on a par with the others mentioned. The Wise Men had nothing to do with the stable or the manger—for Joseph, Mary and the Babe were lodged in a house by that time, as we shall see as we proceed.)

At last after their long and weary wandering over hill and plain, mountain and desert, the Magi found themselves in Jerusalem, inquiring diligently as to the whereabouts of the Master of Masters—the Promised One, whose coming had been the subject of prophecy for centuries among the Eastern peoples. The Jews of whom they inquired, although not familiar with the predictions regarding a Mystic Master, or *avatar* of Deity, were nevertheless thoroughly familiar with the prophecies of the coming of the Hebrew Messiah, and naturally thought that it was of this expected earthly King of the Jews that the Magi inquired, and so they reported it far and wide that these Great Men from the East had come to Jerusalem to find the Messiah—the King of the Jews, who was to deliver Israel from the Roman yoke. And, as the Gospel of Matthew (2:3) informs us: "When Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Naturally so, when it is remembered that it was an Earthly Kingdom that they expected the Messiah would inherit. And so, gathering the chief priests and scribes of Jerusalem around him, he bade them tell him the particulars regarding the prophecies regarding the Messiah—where he was expected to be born. And they answered him, saying: "In Bethlehem of Judea for so hath the prophets spoken."

And hearing the testimony of the scribes and priests, the wily Herod, who feared the realization of this old Hebrew prophecy which threatened to cost him his throne if fulfilled, called the Magi to his palace and in private consultation inquired of them the reason of their search. And when they told him of the astrological indications—of the "Star"—he was still more wrought up, and wished to locate the dangerous child. And so he inquired of them the exact date at which the star had appeared, that he might be better able to find the infant, knowing its date of birth in Bethlehem. (See Matthew 2:7.) And learning this he bade them go to Bethlehem and find the child they sought, and cunningly added, "And when ye have found him, bring me word, that I also may come and worship him." Thus craftily concealing his intentions to seize and kill the child, he endeavored to press the Magi into his service as detectives, by pretending to join in their desire to locate the Divine Child.

The Magi traveled on to Bethlehem, and arriving there made diligent inquiry regarding infants that had been born about the time that the star appeared. There were many infants born in Bethlehem during the same month, of course, and the search was difficult. But they soon heard strange rumors about a babe that had been born to travelers in Bethlehem about that time, the birth of whom had been attended by a strange occurrence. This peculiar happening is related in Luke 2:8-20, in which it is stated that at the time of the birth of Jesus in the manger, certain shepherds keeping the night-watch over their flocks saw an angel standing by them, and "the glory of the Lord" shining around about them. And the angel bade them be not afraid, for to them was to be given tidings of great joy, for there was born that very day, in Bethlehem, one who was to be the Anointed Lord of the world. And the angel further directed them that the babe would be found lying in a manger in a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes which was to be their sign. And then suddenly the place was filled with a multitude of supernatural beings, praising God, singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good-will among men." And the shepherds flocked to the town, and there found the child in the manger. And they spread abroad the report of the wonderful event accompanying the birth of the child. And consequently the child and its parents became objects of more or less public interest.

And so when the Magi instituted their search they were in due time informed of this strange occurrence. And they visited the house of Joseph and Mary and saw the Babe. Making close inquiry of the parents, they found that the time of the child's birth tallied precisely with the moment of the astrological signs. Then they cast the Child's horoscope and they knew that their shepherd's vision coincided with their own science, and that here indeed was He for whom the Eastern Occultists and Mystics had waited for centuries. They had found the Master! The Star Child was before them!

Then these Great Men of their own lands—these Adepts, Masters and Hierophants—prostrated themselves on the ground before the child and gave him the salutation due only to the great Occult Master of Masters who was come to take his seat upon the Throne of the Grand Master of the Great Lodge. But the child knew naught of this, and merely smiled sweetly at these strange men in gorgeous foreign robes, and reached out his little hand toward them. But Occult tradition has it that the tiny fingers and thumb of his right hand, outstretched toward the Magi, unconsciously assumed the mystic symbol of the Occult Benediction, used by the Masters and Hierophants (and now used by the Pope in Papal Benediction) and gave to the worshippers that Master's benediction. The tiny Master of Masters thus gave his first blessing to his followers, and exalted worshippers. But His Throne was not that of the Great Lodge, but a still higher place—the knees of a Mother!

And the Magi then made mystic and symbolic offerings to the child—Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh offered they Him. Gold, signifying the tribute offered to a Ruler, was the first symbol. Then came Frankincense, the purest and rarest incense used by the Occult and Mystic Brotherhoods and Orders, in their ceremonies and rites, when they were contemplating the sacred symbol of the Absolute Master of the Universe—this Frankincense was their symbol of worship. Then, last symbol of all, was the Myrrh, which in the occult and mystic symbolism indicated the bitterness of mortal life, bitter though pungent, preserving though stinging—this was the meaning of the Myrrh, that this child, though Divine in his inner nature, was still mortal in body and brain, and must accept and experience the bitter tang of life. Myrrh, the strength of which preserves, and prevents decay, and yet which smarts, and tangs, and stings ever and ever—a worthy symbol of Mortal Life, surely. Wise Men, indeed, ye Magi! Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh—a prophecy, symbol, and revelation of the Life of the Son of Man, with His indwelling Pure Spirit.

And the Magi, having performed their rites and ceremonies, departed from Bethlehem. But they did not forget the Child—they preserved a careful watch over his movements, until they saw him again. Saw Him again? you ask? *Yes, saw him again!* Though the Gospels say naught of this, and are silent for a period of many years in the Life of Jesus, yet the records and traditions of the Mystics of the East are filled with this esoteric knowledge of these missing years, as we shall see as we proceed. Left behind by the Magi, but still under their loving care, the Child waxed strong and grew in mind and body.

But the Magi, being warned by higher intelligences in a vision, did not return to the wily and crafty Herod, but "departed unto their own country another way." (*Matt. 2:12.*) And Herod waited in vain for their return, and finally discovering their escape wrathfully ordered the massacre of all male children that had been born in Bethlehem and its suburbs of two years of age and under. He calculated the two years from the witnessing of the "star" by the Magi. Matthew 2:16 states the story of the fixing of the time as follows:

"And slew all the male children that were in Bethlehem, and all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, *according to the time which he exactly learned of the wise men.*"

Herod sought to kill the feared Messiah—the King of the Jews, who threatened to drive him from his earthly throne—by killing all the male infants in Bethlehem that had been born since the astrological indication as stated by the Magi.

But this plot failed, for Joseph had been warned by "an angel in a dream" (which mystics teach was the Astral Form of one of the Magi) and was told to take the mother and child and flee into Egypt, and to stay there until the death of Herod. And so Joseph, Mary, and Jesus then fled from the wrath of Herod, and stole silently away to Egypt. And the Occult traditions have it that the expenses of the journey of this poor carpenter and his family—that journey into strange lands, hurried, and without the chance to earn money along the way—was accomplished by the means of the Gold that the Magi had offered to Jesus, and which they had insisted upon his parents storing away for His use. And so the gold of these Occult Mystics saved the founder of Christianity from massacre. And how poorly has Christianity repaid the debt, when one thinks of the persecutions of the Oriental "heathen" by the so-called Christians of all times!

And note this—they carried the child to Egypt, the home of Mystery and Occultism—the land of Isis! A worthy resting place for the Great Occult Master that was to be! And Occult tradition also has it that one night, wearied with their long journey, the family halted and passed the night in the place of the Sphinx and Pyramids. And that the Mother and Babe rested between the outstretched forepaws of the mighty Sphinx, which held them safe and secure, while Joseph threw himself on the base before them, and slept on guard. What a scene—the Master as an infant protected by the Sphinx, that ancient Occult emblem and symbol, while close by, reared like mighty watchful sentinels, stood the Great Pyramids of Egypt, the master work of Egypt's Mystics, every line and inch of which symbolizes an Occult Teaching. Verily, indeed is Christianity cradled in the lap of Mysticism.

Thus endeth our First Lesson. The Second Lesson will take up the Mystic Teachings regarding the Divine Incarnation of the Spirit in the mortal body of Jesus—a subject of the greatest importance to all who are troubled with this difficult point. We hope to be able to shed the Mystic light of Truth upon this corner which so many have found dark, non-understandable, and contrary to reason, natural law and science. The Mystic Teachings are the great Reconciler of Faith and Reason.

THE SECOND LESSON

THE MYSTERY OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

One of the points of conflict between Established Theology on the one hand and what is known as Rationalism, the Higher Criticism, and Comparative Mythology, on the other hand, is what is known as "the Virgin Birth" of Jesus. Perhaps we may show the points of difference more clearly by simply stating the opposing views and, afterwards, giving the traditions of the Occult Brotherhoods and Societies on the subject. We are enabled to state the opposing views without prejudice, because we rest upon the Occult Teachings with a feeling of being above and outside of the theological strife raging between the two schools of Christian theologians. We trust that the reader will reserve his decision until the consideration of the matter in this lesson is completed. We think that it will be found that the Occult Teachings give the Key to the Mystery and furnish the Reconciliation between the opposing theological views which threaten to divide the churches into two camps, i.e., (1) the adherents of the established orthodox theology, and (2) the adherents of the views of the Rationalists and the Higher Critics.

The school of theology which clings to the old orthodox teachings regarding the Virgin Birth and which teachings are commonly accepted without question by the mass of church-goers, hold as follows:

Mary, a young Jewish maiden, or virgin, was betrothed to Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth in Galilee. Before her marriage, she was informed by an angelic vision that she would miraculously conceive a son, to whom she would give birth, and who would reign on the Throne of David and be called the Son of the Highest. This teaching is based solely upon certain statements contained in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Matthew's account is as follows:

"Now, the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with the child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins. And now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall be with a child and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus." (*Matt. 1:18-25.*)

Luke's account is as follows:

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear

not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (*Luke 1:26-33.*)

And so, this then is the commonly accepted, orthodox teachings of Christian theology. It is embodied in the two best-known creeds of the church and is made an essential article of belief by the majority of the orthodox churches.

In the Apostle's Creed, which has been traced back to about the year A.D. 500, and which is claimed to have been based on an older creed, the doctrine is stated thusly: "... and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," etc. In the Nicene Creed, which dates from A.D. 325, the doctrine is stated thusly: "... and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father ... and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary," etc.

And so, the doctrine is plainly stated and firmly insisted upon by the orthodox churches of today, although such was not always the case for the matter was one which gave rise to much conflict and difference of opinion in the early centuries of the Church, the present view, however, overcoming those who opposed it, and finally becoming accepted as beyond doubt or question by the orthodox, believing Christian.

But the present time finds many leading minds in the churches, who refuse to accept the doctrine as usually taught, and the voice of the Higher Criticism is heard in the land in increasing volume and many doctrines unquestioningly held by the pews are being abandoned by the pulpits, usually in the way of "discreet silence" being maintained. But here and there courageous voices are heard stating plainly that which their reason and conscience impels. We shall now consider these dissenting opinions.

We have to say here, at this point, that we have no sympathy for the so-called "infidel" opinion, which holds that the whole tale of the Virgin Birth was invented to conceal the illegitimate birth of Jesus. Such a view is based neither on intelligent investigation or criticism, or upon the occult teachings. It was merely "invented" itself, by those who were unable to accept current theology and who, when driven from the churches, built up a crude system of reconstructed Biblical History of their own. And so we shall not stop to even consider this view of the matter, but shall pass on to the scholarly objectors and their views and thence to the Occult Teachings.

In the first place, the theologians who favor the views of the Higher Criticism object to the idea of the Virgin Birth upon several general grounds, among which the following are the principal ones:

(1) That the story of the Divine Conception, that is the conception by a woman of a child without a human father, and by means of a miraculous act on the part of Deity, is one found among the traditions, legends and beliefs of many heathen and pagan nations. Nearly all of the old Oriental religions, antedating Christianity by many centuries, contain stories of this kind concerning their gods, prophets and great leaders. The critics hold that the story of the Virgin Birth and Divine Conception were borrowed outright from these pagan legends and incorporated into the Christian Writings after the death of Christ;

(2) that the idea of the Virgin Birth was not an original Christian Doctrine, but was injected into the Teachings at a date about one hundred years, or nearly so,

after the beginning of the Christian Era; this view being corroborated by the fact that the New Testament Writings themselves contain very little mention of the idea, the only mention of it being in two of the Gospels, those of St. Matthew and St. Luke—St. Mark and St. John containing no mention of the matter, which would not likely be the case had it been an accepted belief in the early days of Christianity—and no mention being made of it in the Epistles, even Paul being utterly silent on the question. They claim that the Virgin Birth was unknown to the primitive Christians and was not heard of until its "borrowing" from pagan beliefs many years after. In support of their idea, as above stated, they call attention to the fact that the New Testament writings, known to Biblical students as the oldest and earliest, make no mention of the idea; and that Paul ignores it completely, as well as the other writers;

(3) that the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke bear internal evidences of the introduction of the story at a later date. This matter we shall now consider, from the point of view of the Higher Criticism within the body of the Church.

In the first place, let us consider the Gospel of St. Matthew. The majority of people accept this as having been written by St. Matthew, with his own hand, during his ministry; and that the Gospel, word for word, is the work of this great apostle. This idea, however, is not held for a moment by the educated clergy, as may be seen by a reference to any prominent theological work of late years, or even in the pages of a good encyclopedia. The investigators have made diligent researches concerning the probable authorship of the New Testament books and their reports would surprise many faithful church-goers who are not acquainted with the facts of the case. There is no warrant, outside of tradition and custom, for the belief that Matthew wrote the Gospel accredited to him, at least in its present shape. Without going deeply into the argument of the investigators (which may be found in any recent work on the History of the Gospels) we would say that the generally accepted conclusion now held by the authorities is that the Gospel commonly accredited to St. Matthew is the work of some unknown hand or hands, which was produced during the latter part of the first century A.D., written in Greek, and most likely an enlargement or elaboration of certain Aramaic writings entitled, "Sayings of Jesus," which are thought to have been written by Matthew himself. In other words, even the most conservative of the critics do not claim that the Gospel of St. Matthew is anything more than an enlargement, elaboration or development of Matthew's earlier writings, written many years before the elaboration of the present "Gospel." The more radical critics take an even less respectful view. This being the fact, it may be readily seen how easy it would have been for the latter-day "elaborator" to introduce the then current legend of the Virgin Birth, borrowed from pagan sources.

As a further internal evidence of such interpolation of outside matter, the critics point to the fact that while the Gospel of Matthew is made to claim that Joseph was merely the *reputed father* of the child of Mary, the same Gospel, in its very first chapter (*Matt. 1*) gives the *genealogy of Jesus from David to Joseph the husband of Mary, in order to prove that Jesus came from the "House of David,"* in accordance with the Messianic tradition. The chapter begins with the words, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (*Matt. 1*), and then goes on to name fourteen generations from Abraham to David; fourteen generations from David to the days of the carrying away into Babylon; and fourteen generations from the Babylonian days until the birth of Jesus. The critics call attention to this *recital of Jesus's descent, through Joseph, from the House of David,* which is but one of the many indications that the original Matthew inclined quite strongly to the view that Jesus was the Hebrew Messiah, come to reign upon the throne of David, rather than a Divine Avatar or Incarnation.

The critics point to the fact that *if Joseph were not the real father of Jesus, where would be the sense and purpose of proving his descent from David through Joseph?* It is pertinently asked, "Why the necessity or purpose of the recital of Joseph's genealogy, as applied to Jesus, if indeed Jesus were not truly the son of Joseph?" The explanation of the critics is that the earlier writings of Matthew

contained nothing regarding the Virgin Birth, Matthew having heard nothing of this pagan legend, and that naturally he gave the genealogy of Jesus from David and Abraham. If one omits the verses 18-25 from Matthew's Gospel, he will see the logical relation of the genealogy to the rest of the account—otherwise it is paradoxical, contradictory and ridiculous, and shows the joints and seams where it has been fitted into the older account.

"But," you may ask, "what of the Messianic Prophecy mentioned by Matthew (1:23)? Surely this is a direct reference to the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14." Let us examine this so-called "prophecy," of which so much has been said and see just what reference it has to the birth of Jesus.

Turning back to Isaiah 7, we find these words, just a little before the "prophecy":

"Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?" (*Isaiah 6:13.*)

Then comes the "prophecy": "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel." This is the "prophecy" quoted by the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, and which has been quoted for centuries in Christian churches, as a foretelling of the miraculous birth of Jesus. As a matter of fact, intelligent theologians know that it has no reference to Jesus at all, in any way, but belongs to another occurrence, as we shall see presently, and was injected into the Gospel narrative merely to support the views of the writer thereof.

It may be well to add here that many of the best authorities hold that the Greek translation of the Hebrew word "*almah*" into the equivalent of "virgin" in the usual sense of the word is incorrect. The Hebrew word "*almah*" used in the original Hebrew text of Isaiah, does not mean "virgin" as the term is usually employed, but rather "a young woman of marriageable age—a maiden," the Hebrews having an entirely different word for the idea of "virginity," as the term is generally used. The word "*almah*" is used in other parts of the Old Testament to indicate a "young woman—a maiden," notably in Proverbs 30:19, in the reference to "the way of a man with a maid."

But we need not enter into discussions of this kind, say the Higher Critics, for the so-called "prophecy" refers to an entirely different matter. It appears, say they, that Ahaz, a weakling king of Judea, was in sore distress because Rezin the Syrian king, and Pekah the ruler of Northern Israel, had formed an offensive alliance against him and were moving their combined forces toward Jerusalem. In his fear he sought an alliance with Assyria, which alliance was disapproved of by Isaiah who remonstrated with Ahaz about the proposed move. The king was too much unnerved by fear to listen to Isaiah's arguments and so the latter dropped into prophecy. He prophesied, after the manner of the Oriental seer, that the land would be laid waste and misery entailed upon Israel, should the suicidal policy be adopted. But he held out a hope for a brighter future after the clouds of adversity had rolled by. A new and wise prince would arise who would bring Israel to her former glory. That prince would be born of a young mother and his name would be Immanuel, which means "God with us." All this had reference to things of a reasonably near future and had no reference to the birth of Jesus *some seven hundred years after*, who was not a prince sitting upon the throne of Israel, and who did not bring national glory and renown to Israel, for such was not his mission. Hebrew scholars and churchmen have often claimed that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled by the birth of Hezekiah.

There is no evidence whatever in the Jewish history of the seven hundred years between Isaiah and Jesus, that the Hebrews regarded Isaiah's prophecy as relating to the expected Messiah, but on the contrary it was thought to relate to a minor event in their history. As a Jewish writer has truly said, "Throughout the wide extent of Jewish literature there is not a single passage which can bear the construction that the Messiah should be miraculously conceived." Other writers along this line have stated the same thing, showing that the idea of a Virgin Birth was foreign to the Jewish mind, the

Hebrews having always respected and highly honored married life and human parentage, regarding their children as blessings and gifts from God.

Another writer in the Church has said, "Such a fable as the birth of the Messiah from a *virgin* could have arisen anywhere else easier than among the Jews; their doctrine of the divine unity placed an impassable gulf between God and the world; their high regard for the marriage relation," etc., would have rendered the idea obnoxious. Other authorities agree with this idea, and insist that the idea of the Virgin Birth never originated in Hebrew prophecy, but was injected into the Christian Doctrine from pagan sources, toward the end of the first century, and received credence owing to the influx of converts from the "heathen" peoples who found in the idea a correspondence with their former beliefs. As Rev. R.J. Campbell, minister of the City Temple, London, says in his "New Theology," "No New Testament passage whatever is directly or indirectly a prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus. To insist upon this may seem to many like beating a man of straw, but if so, the man of straw still retains a good deal of vitality."

Let us now turn to the second account of the Virgin Birth, in the Gospels—the only other place that it is mentioned, outside of the story in Matthew, above considered. We find this second mention in Luke 1:26-35, the verses having been quoted in the first part of this lesson.

There has been much dispute regarding the real authorship of the Gospel commonly accredited to Luke, but it is generally agreed upon by Biblical scholars that it was the latest of the first three Gospels (generally known as "the Synoptic Gospels"). It is also generally agreed upon, by such scholars, that the author, whoever he may have been, was not an eye witness of the events in the Life of Christ. Some of the best authorities hold that he was a Gentile (non-Hebrew), probably a Greek, for his Greek literary style is far above the average, his vocabulary being very rich and his diction admirable. It is also generally believed that the same hand wrote the Book of Acts. Tradition holds that the author was one Luke, a Christian convert after the death of Jesus, who was one of Paul's missionary band which traveled from Troas to Macedonia, and who shared Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea; and who shared Paul's shipwreck experiences on the voyage to Rome. He is thought to have written his Gospel long after the death of Paul, for the benefit and instruction of one Theophilus, a man of rank residing in Antioch.

It is held by writers of the Higher Criticism that the account of the Virgin Birth was either injected in Luke's narrative, by some later writer, or else that Luke in his old age adopted this view which was beginning to gain credence among the converted Christians of pagan origin, Luke himself being of this class. It is pointed out that as Paul, who was Luke's close friend and teacher, made no mention of the Virgin Birth, and taught nothing of the kind, Luke must have acquired the legend later, if, indeed, the narrative was written by him at all in his Gospel.

It is likewise noted that Luke also gives a genealogy of Jesus, from Adam, through Abraham, and David, and Joseph. The words in parenthesis "as was supposed," in Luke 3:23, are supposed to have been inserted in the text by a later writer, as there would be no sense or reason in tracing the genealogy of Jesus through a "supposed" father. The verse in question reads thusly: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli," etc. Students, of course, notice that the line of descent given by Luke differs very materially from that given by Matthew, showing a lack of knowledge on the part of one or the other writer.

On the whole, scholars consider it most remarkable that this account of the Virgin Birth should be given by Luke, who was a most ardent Pauline student and follower, in view of the fact that Paul ignored the whole legend, if, indeed, he had ever heard of it. Surely a man like Paul would have laid great stress upon this wonderful event had he believed in it, or had it formed a part of the Christian Doctrine of his time. That Luke should have written this account is a great mystery—and many feel that it is much easier to accept the theory of the later interpolation of the story into Luke's Gospel, particularly in view of the corroborative indications.

Summing up the views of the Higher Criticism, we may say that the general position taken by the opponents and deniers of the Virgin Birth of Jesus is about as follows:

1. The story of the Virgin Birth is found only in the introductory portion of two of the four Gospels—Matthew and Luke—and even in these the story bears the appearance of having been "fitted in" by later writers.

2. Even Matthew and Luke are silent about the matter after the statements in the introductory part of their Gospels, which could scarcely occur had the story been written by and believed in by the writers, such action on their part being contrary to human custom and probability.

3. The Gospels of Mark and John are absolutely silent on the subject; the oldest of the Gospels—that of Mark—bears no trace of the legend; and the latest Gospel—that of John—being equally free from its mention.

4. The rest of the New Testament breathes not a word of the story or doctrine. *The Book of Acts, generally accepted as having also been written by Luke, ignores the subject completely.* Paul, the teacher of Luke, and the great writer of the Early Church, seems to know nothing whatever about the Virgin Birth, or else purposely ignores it entirely, the latter being unbelievable in such a man. Peter, the First Apostle, makes no mention of the story or doctrine in his great Epistles, which fact is inconceivable if he knew of and believed in the legend. The Book of Revelation is likewise silent upon this doctrine which played so important a part in the later history of the Church. The great writings of the New Testament contain no mention of the story, outside of the brief mention in Matthew and Luke, alluded to above.

5. There are many verses in the Gospels and Epistles which go to prove, either that the story was unknown to the writers, or else not accepted by them. *The genealogies of Joseph are cited to prove the descent of Jesus from David, which depends entirely upon the fact of Joseph's actual parentage. Jesus is repeatedly and freely mentioned as the son of Joseph.* Paul and the other Apostles hold firmly to the doctrine of the necessity of the Death of Jesus; his Rising from the Dead; and his Ascension into Heaven, etc. But they had nothing to say regarding any necessity for his Virgin Birth, or the necessity for the acceptance of any such doctrine—they are absolutely silent on this point, although they were careful men, omitting no important detail of doctrine. Paul even speaks of Jesus as "of the seed of David." (*Rom. 1:3.*)

6. The Virgin Birth was not a part of the early traditions or doctrine of the Church, but was unknown to it. And it is not referred to in the preaching and teaching of the Apostles, as may have been seen by reference to the Book of Acts. This book, which relates the Acts and Teachings of the Apostles, could not have inadvertently omitted such an important doctrine or point of teaching. It is urged by careful and conscientious Christian scholars that the multitudes converted to Christianity in the early days must have been ignorant of, or uninformed on, this miraculous event, which would seem inexcusable on the part of the Apostles had they known of it and believed in its truth. This condition of affairs must have lasted until nearly the second century, when the pagan beliefs began to filter in by reason of the great influx of pagan converts.

7. There is every reason for believing that the legend arose from other pagan legends, the religions of other peoples being filled with accounts of miraculous births of heroes, gods, and prophets, kings and sages.

8. That acceptance of the legend is not, nor should it be, a proof of belief in Christ and Christianity. This view is well voiced by Rev. Dr. Campbell, in his "New Theology," when he says "The credibility and significance of Christianity are

in no way affected by the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, otherwise than that the belief tends to put a barrier between Jesus and the race, and to make him something that cannot properly be called human.... Like many others, I used to take the position that acceptance or non-acceptance of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth was immaterial because Christianity was quite independent of it; but later reflection has convinced me that in point of fact it operates as a hindrance to spiritual religion and a real living faith in Jesus. The simple and natural conclusion is that Jesus was the child of Joseph and Mary, and had an uneventful childhood." The German theologian, Soltau, says, "Whoever makes the further demand that an evangelical Christian shall believe in the words 'conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,' wittingly constitutes himself a sharer in a sin against the Holy Spirit and the true Gospel as transmitted to us by the Apostles and their school in the Apostolic Age."

And this then is the summing up of the contention between the conservative school of Christian theologians on the one side and the liberal and radical schools on the other side. We have given you a statement of the positions, merely that you may understand the problem. But, before we pass to the consideration of the Occult Teachings, let us ask one question: *How do the Higher Critics account for the undoubted doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood, as clearly stated all through the New Testament*, in view of the proofs against the Virgin Birth? Why the frequent and repeated mention of Jesus as "the Son of God?" What was the Secret Doctrine underlying the Divine Parentage of Jesus, which the pagan legends corrupted into the story of the Virgin Birth of theology? We fear that the answer is not to be found in the books and preachments of the Higher Criticism, nor yet in those of the Conservative Theologians. Let us now see what light the Occult Teachings can throw on this dark subject! There is an Inner Doctrine which explains the mystery.

Now, in the first place, there is no reference in the Occult Teaching to any miraculous features connected with the physical birth of Jesus. It is not expressly denied, it is true, but the Teachings contain no reference to the matter, and all the references to the subject of Jesus' parentage speak of Joseph as being His father, and Mary His mother. In other words, the family is treated as being composed of father, mother and child just as is the case with any family. The Occult Teachings go into great detail concerning the *Spiritual Sonship* of Jesus, as we shall see presently, but there is no mention of any miraculous *physical* conception and birth.

We can readily understand why the Virgin Birth legend would not appeal to the Occultists, if we will but consider the doctrines of the latter. The Occultists pay but little attention to the physical body, except as a Temple of the Spirit, and a habitation of the soul. The physical body, to the Occultist, is a mere material shell, constantly changing its constituent cells, serving to house the soul of the individual, and which when cast off and discarded is no more than any other bit of disintegrating material. They know of the existence of the soul separate from the body, both after the death of the latter and even during its life, in the case of Astral Travel, etc. And in many other ways it becomes natural for the Occultist to regard his body, and the bodies of others, as mere "shells," to be treated well, used properly, and then willingly discarded or exchanged for another.

In view of the above facts, you may readily see that any theory or doctrine which made the Absolute—God—overshadow a human woman's body and cause her to physically conceive a child, would appear crude, barbarous, unnecessary and in defiance of the natural laws established by the Cause of Causes. The Occultist sees in the conception of *every child*, the work of the Divine Will—*every conception and birth a miracle*. But he sees Natural Law underlying each, and he believes that the Divine Will always operates under Natural Laws—the seeming miracles and exceptions thereto, resulting from the mastery and operation of some law not generally known. But the Occultist knows of no law that will operate to produce conception by other than the physiological process.

In short, *the Occultist does not regard the physical body of Jesus as Jesus Himself*—he knows that the Real Jesus is something much greater than His body, and, consequently, he sees no more

necessity for a miraculous conception of His body than he would for a miraculous creation of His robe. The body of Jesus was only material substance—the Real Jesus was Spirit. The Occultists do not regard Joseph as the father of the Real Jesus—*no human being can produce or create a soul*. And so, the Occultist sees no reason for accepting the old pagan doctrine of the physical Virgin Birth which has crept into Christianity from outside sources. To the Occultist, there is a real Virgin Birth of an entirely different nature, as we shall see presently.

But, not so with the people who flocked to the ranks of Christianity toward the close of the first century—coming from pagan people, and bringing with them their pagan legends and doctrines. These people *believed that the Body was the Real Man*, and consequently attached the greatest importance to it. These people were almost materialists as the result of their pagan views of life. They began to exert an influence on the small body of original Christians, and soon the original teachings were smothered by the weight of the pagan doctrines. For instance, they failed to grasp the beautiful ideas of Immortality held by the original Christians, which held that *the soul* survived the death and disintegration of the body. They could not grasp this transcendental truth—they did not know what was meant by the term "*the soul*," and so they substituted their pagan doctrine of the resurrection of the physical body. They believed that at some future time there would come a great Day, in which the Dead would arise from their graves, and become again alive. The crudeness of this idea, when compared to the beautiful doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul of the original Christians, and by the advanced Christians to-day, is quite painful. And yet these pagan converts actually smothered out the true teachings by their crude doctrine of resurrection of *the body*.

These people could not understand how a man could live without his physical body, and to them future life meant a resurrection of their dead bodies which would again become alive. To them the dead bodies would remain dead, until the Great Day, when they would be made alive again. There is no teaching among these people regarding the soul which passes out of the body and lives again on higher planes. No, nothing of this kind was known to these people—they were incapable of such high ideas and ideals—they were materialists and were wedded to their beloved animal bodies, and believed that their dead bodies would in some miraculous way be made alive again at some time in the future, when they would again live on earth.

In view of modern knowledge regarding the nature of matter, and the fact that what is one person's body to-day, may be a part of another's to-morrow—that matter is constantly being converted and reconverted—that the universal material is used to form bodies of animals, plants, men, or else dwell in chemical gases, or combinations in inorganic things—in view of these accepted truths the "resurrection of the body" seems a pitiful invention of the minds of a primitive and ignorant people, and not a high spiritual teaching. In fact, there may be many of you who would doubt that the Christians of that day so taught, were it not for the undisputed historical records, and the remnant of the doctrine itself embalmed in the "Apostle's Creed," in the passage "*I believe in the resurrection of the body*" which is read in the Churches daily, but which doctrine is scarcely ever taught in these days, and is believed in by but few Christians—in fact, is ignored or even denied by the majority.

Dr. James Beattie has written, "Though mankind have at all times had a persuasion of the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body was a doctrine peculiar to early Christianity." S.T. Coleridge has written, "Some of the most influential of the early Christian writers were materialists, holding the soul to be material—corporeal. It appears that in those days some few held the soul to be incorporeal, according to the views of Plato and others, but that the orthodox Christian divines looked upon this as an impious, unscriptural opinion. Justin Martyr argued against the Platonic nature of the soul. And even some latter-day writers have not hesitated to express their views on the subject, agreeing with the earlier orthodox brethren. For instance, Dr. R.S. Candlish has said,

"You live again in the body,—in the very body, as to all essential properties, and to all practical intents and purposes, in which you live now. *I am not to live as a ghost, a spectre, a spirit, I am to live then as I live now, in the body.*"

The reason that the early Church laid so much stress on this doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body, was because an inner sect, the Gnostics, held to the contrary, and the partisan spirit of the majority swung them to the other extreme, until they utterly denied any other idea, and insisted upon the resurrection and re-vitalizing of the physical body. But, in spite of the official fostering of this crude theory, it gradually sank into actual insignificance, although its shadow still persists in creed and word. Its spirit has retreated and passed away before the advancing idea of the Immortality of the Soul which returned again and again to Christianity until it won the victory. And as Prof. Nathaniel Schmidt has said, in his article on the subject in a leading encyclopaedia, "... The doctrine of the natural immortality of the human soul became so important a part of Christian thought that the resurrection naturally lost its vital significance, and it has practically held no place in the great systems of philosophy elaborated by the Christian thinkers in modern times." And, yet, the Church continues to repeat the now meaningless words, "I believe in the Resurrection of the Body." And while practically no one now believes it, still the recital of the words, and the statement of one's belief in them, forms a necessary requisite for admission into the Christian Church to-day. Such is the persistent hold of dead forms, and thoughts, upon living people.

And, so you can readily see from what has been said, why the early Christians, about the close of the first century A.D., attached so much importance to *the physical conception and birth* of Jesus. To them the physical body of Jesus was Jesus Himself. The rest follows naturally, including the Virgin Birth and the Physical Resurrection. We trust that you now understand this part of the subject.

We have heard devout Christians shocked at the idea that Jesus was born of a human father and mother, in the natural way of the race. They seemed to think that it savored of impurity. Such a notion is the result of a perverted idea of the sacredness of natural functions—a seeing of impurity—where all is pure. What a perversion, this regarding the sacredness of human Fatherhood, and Motherhood, as impure! The man of true spirituality sees in the Divine Trinity of Father, Mother and Child, something most pure and sacred—something that brings man very close indeed to God. Is the beautiful babe, held close in its mother's fond embrace, a symbol and type of impurity? Is the watchful care and love of the Father of the babe, an impure result of an impure cause? Does not one's own heart tell him the contrary? Look at the well known picture of the Journey to Egypt, with Mary carrying the babe, and both guarded and protected by the husband and father—Joseph—is this not a beautiful symbol of the sacredness of Parenthood? We trust that the majority of those who read these pages have advanced spiritually beyond the point where The Family is a thing of impure suggestion and relationship.

And, now, what are the Occult Teachings—the Secret Doctrine—regarding the Real Virgin Birth of Jesus? Just this: that the Spirit of Jesus was fresh from the bosom of the Absolute—Spirit of SPIRIT—a Virgin Birth of Spirit. His Spirit had not traveled the weary upward path of Reincarnation and repeated Rebirth, but was Virgin Spirit fresh from the SPIRIT—a very Son of the Father—begotten not created. This Virgin Spirit was incarnated in His body, and there began the life of Man, not fully aware of His own nature, but gradually awakening into knowledge just as does every human soul, until at last the true nature of His Being burst upon him, and he saw that he indeed was God incarnate. In his short life of thirty-three years—thirty years of preparation, and three years of ministry, Jesus typified and symbolized the Life of the Race. Just as he awakened into a perception of his Divine Nature, so shall the race awaken in time. Every act in the Life of Jesus typified and symbolized the life of every individual soul, and of the race. We all have our Garden of Gethsemane—each is Crucified, and Ascends to Higher Planes. This is the Occult Doctrine of the Virgin Birth

of Christ. Is it not a worthy one—is it not at least a higher conception of the human mind, than the physical Virgin Birth legend?

As we proceed with our lessons, we shall bring out the details of the Occult Teachings concerning the Divine Nature of Christ—the Spirit within the Human Form. And, in these references and instruction, you will see even more clearly that nature of the Spiritual Virgin Birth of Jesus.

The original Christians were instructed in the Truth concerning the Virgin Birth, that is, those who were sufficiently intelligent to grasp it. But after the great Teachers passed away, and their successors became overzealous in their desire to convert the outside peoples, the influx of the latter gradually overcame the original teachings, and the physical Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of the Body, became Doctrines and Articles of Faith, held of vital importance by the new orthodox leaders. It has taken centuries of mental struggle, and spiritual unfoldment to bring the Light of the Truth to bear upon this dark corner of the Faith, but the work is now fairly under way, and the great minds in the Church, as well as those out of the Church, are beginning to lay the old legend aside as a worn out relic of primitive days when the cloud of Ignorance overshadowed the Light of Truth.

In concluding this lesson, let us glance once more at the words of the eminent divine, Dr. Campbell, in his *New Theology*, in which he states:

"But why hesitate about the question? The greatness of Jesus and the value of his revelation to mankind are in no way either assisted or diminished by the manner of his entry into the world. Every birth is just as wonderful as a virgin birth could possibly be, and just as much a direct act of God. A supernatural conception bears no relation whatever to the moral and spiritual worth of the person who is supposed to enter the world in this abnormal way.... Those who insist on the doctrine will find themselves in danger of proving too much, for pressed to its logical conclusion, it removes Jesus altogether from the category of humanity in any real sense."

Let us trust that these Higher Critics may become informed upon the truths of the Occult Teachings, which supply the Missing Key, and afford the Reconciliation, and which show how and why Jesus is, in all and very truth, THE SON OF GOD, begotten and not created, of one substance from the Father—a particle of Purest Spirit fresh from the Ocean of Spirit, and free from the Karma of past Incarnations—how He was human and yet more than human.

In our next lesson we shall take up the narrative of the secret life of Jesus from the time of his appearance, as a child at the Temple, among the Elders, until when at the age of thirty years he appeared at the scene of the ministry of John the Baptist, and began his own brief ministry of three years which was closed by the Crucifixion and Ascension. This is a phase of the subject of intense interest, and startling nature, because of the lack of knowledge of the occult traditions on the part of the general public.

THE THIRD LESSON

THE MYSTIC YOUTH OF JESUS

In our last lesson we promised to tell you the esoteric story of the youth of Jesus. And there is such a story to tell, although the churches know little or nothing about it. The churches have nothing but the husks that have always been the property of the masses. The real kernels of truth have been possessed by but the few elect ones. The legends of the mystic brotherhoods and occult orders have preserved the story intact, and you shall now be given the essence of the mystic legends and traditions.

At the end of our first lesson we left Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus in Egypt, the land to which they had flown to escape the wrath of the tyrant Herod. They dwelt in Egypt for a few years, until the death of Herod. Then Joseph retraced his steps, and returned toward his own country, bringing with him his wife and the babe. For some reasons unknown to those familiar with the legends and traditions, Joseph decided not to locate in Judea, but instead, bent his way toward the coast and returned to Nazareth where Mary and he had originally met and become betrothed. And, so, in Nazareth, the humble little mountain town the boyhood days of Jesus were spent, the grinding poverty of the family being relieved (according to the occult legends) by the yearly presents of gold from the hands of disguised messengers of the Magi.

The traditions relate that Jesus began His study of the Hebrew Law when He was but five years of age. It is related that He displayed an unusual ability and talent in the direction of mastering not only the text, but also the spirit of the Hebrew Scripture, and far outstripped His fellow students. It is also related that He displayed an early impatience at the dreary formalism of His Hebrew teachers, and a disposition to go right to the heart of the text before Him, that He might discern the spirit animating it. So much was this the case that He frequently brought down upon His head the censure of His instructors who overlooked the spirit of the teachings in their devotion to the forms and words.

Nazareth was an old-fashioned place and it and its inhabitants were made the target for the jests and witticisms of the people of Judea. The word "Nazarene" was synonymous with "lout"; "boor"; "peasant"; etc., to the residents of the more fashionable regions. The very remoteness of the town served to separate it in spirit from the rest of the country. But this very remoteness played an important part in the early life of Jesus. Nazareth, by reason of its peculiar location, was on the line of several caravan routes. Travelers from many lands traveled through the town, and rested there overnight, or sometimes for several days. Travelers from Samaria, Jerusalem, Damascus, Greece, Rome, Arabia, Syria, Persia, Phoenicia, and other lands mingled with the Nazarenes. And the traditions relate that Jesus, the child, would steal away and talk with such of these travelers as were versed in occult and mystic lore, and would imbibe from their varied founts of learning, until He was as thoroughly informed on these subjects as many a mystic of middle age. The traditions have it that the boy would often delight and astonish these traveling occultists with His wonderful insight into their secret doctrines and knowledge. And it is also told that some of the wisest of these, seeing the nature of the child, would overstay their allotted time of sojourn, that they might add here and there to the various parts of general occult lore possessed by the child. It is also taught that the Magi informed some of these travelers regarding the boy, that they might impart to him some truth or teaching for which He was ready.

And so the boy grew in knowledge and wisdom, day by day, year by year, until, finally, there occurred an event in His life, which has since been the subject of greatest interest to all Christians and students of the New Testament, but which without the above explanation is not readily understood.

The Feast of the Passover occurred in its allotted time of the year—April—when Jesus was in his thirteenth year. This feast was one of the most important in the Jewish calendar, and its observance

was held as a most sacred duty by all Hebrews. It was the feast set down for the remembrance and perpetuation of that most important event in the history of the Jewish people when the Angel of Death swept over all of Egypt's land smiting the first-born child of every house of the natives, high and low, but sparing all the houses of the captive Hebrews who marked their door-sills with the sacrificial blood as a token of their faith. This is no place to give the explanation of this apparently miraculous event, which students now know to be due to natural causes. We merely mention it in passing.

The Law-givers of Israel had appointed the Feast of the Passover as a perpetual symbol of this event so important by the nation, and every self-respecting Jew felt obligated to take part in the observance and sacrament. Every pious Jew made it a point to perform a pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the time of the Feast of the Passover, if he could in any way manage to do so.

At the time of the Passover celebration of which we are speaking, Jesus had just entered into His thirteenth year, which age entitled Him, under the ecclesiastical law, to the privilege of sitting with the adult men of His race at the Passover supper, and also to publicly join with the male congregation in the thanksgiving service in the synagogues.

And so, on this year, He accompanied His father and mother to Jerusalem and made His *second* visit to the Holy City. It will be remembered that His *first* visit there was made when as an infant He was carried thither from Bethlehem in His mother's arms in accordance with the Jewish law, and at which time an aged priest and an old prophetess had publicly acknowledged the divine nature of the child.

The father, mother and child—the divine trinity of Human relationship—traveled slowly over the highway that led from Nazareth to Jerusalem. The father and mother were concerned with the details of the journey, mingled with pious thoughts concerning the sacred feast in which they were to take part. But the boy's mind was far away from the things that were occupying his parent's thoughts. He was thinking over the deep mystic truths which He had so readily absorbed during the past few years, and He was looking forward in delightful anticipation to His expected meeting with the older mystics in the temples and public places of Jerusalem.

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