

Christmas — 25<sup>th</sup> December 2023

‘Λογος — the reason for the season’

	Page
① (Advent) Oh come Emmanuel	2
② Angels we have heard	4
③ Away in a manger	5
④ Christmas bells	6
⑤ The First Nowell	6
⑥ Good men ye merry gentlemen	8
⑦ Good King Wenceslas	10
⑧ Hark, the Herald angels sing	12
⑨ The Holly and the Ivy	14
⑩ I in the bleak Mid-winter	16
⑪ Plum had a Baby	18
⑫ Mary's Boy child	19
⑬ Oh come all ye faithful	21
⑭ Oh little town of Bethlehem	23
⑮ Once in Royal David's City	
⑯ Over the hills	
⑰ See, amid the wintry snow	
⑱ Silent Night	

(cont. overleaf)

A few years back, when my Dad was, little by little, trying to clear out the loft of junk, he brought down various of my boxes of miscellaneous things that had ended up there. Many of them were student

papers, notes, etc. from my various studies — school, university, seminary — and some were boxes of cuttings and all sorts of hoarded papers. In one such box, I found a gem ... a childhood exercise book in which I had meticulously copied out all the words of my favourite Christmas carols, so that come Christmas we had all the words to hand, as a family. My Grandad, who lived to be nearly 100, was a devout Anglican and a great pianist, and loved nothing more than leading a sing-song of hymns and carols, especially at Christmas. [*Here it is! ... the exercise book of carols! ... a precious possession of my young life.*]

For me, the experience of Christmas is rooted deep in my history and subconscious, and the whole memory of singing carols, seeing the local houses festooned with lights, and serving Mass at extraordinary times, like midnight, is an emotional one. And I think it is true of many in Christian countries, not just the practising Christians. Why is that? Why is it that Christmas has such a grip on us, old or young, devout or lapsed, Christian or, frankly, non-Christian? What is it about this particular event — I don't like the word 'story'! — that grabs our human attention and emotions like no other? What can it be, other than the *genius* of God Almighty? Who could have thought up the mystery of Christmas if not only our Creator God?

But it's not just that is a clever plot, an unexpected turn of events, that demanded a really intricate Mind to have invented. It's still more profound, more visceral, than that. I believe it's actually that the account of Christmas speaks to the deepest needs of human heart, the need to be loved passionately by our Maker. The Nativity of the Lord

Jesus is the assurance that we are not alone, that God cares for us, that the universe has a masterplan, tended as it is as the loving product of the Supreme Mind. Pope Benedict XVI said, in a classic phrase in the sermon for the opening Mass of his Pontificate in April 2005: “We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.”

This is not true just in some vague, wishy-washy sense: this is true in the most fundamental, personal, direct fashion — the mode that corresponds to what speaks to our innermost soul. Because the love that is expressed when the Son of God takes flesh is the sort of love that is making the supreme expression, the sacrifice of fully entering into the loved-one’s world. There are no half-measures; this is no hands-off formal association, or contractual commitment. No-one can see otherwise than that, if it be true, the birth of God’s Son in the poverty of a Bethlehem animal shed, to humble residents of Nazareth of Galilee — a remote outpost of the empire, nowhere near any seat of

power — is anything other than total, all-out love for humanity, every single human being of whatever state of life. There is no falseness, deception, or sin, in this event, only a purity of love and self-giving. And most human hearts can see that — and can only avoid the beautiful conclusion of the Christian faith by writing it off as a ‘story,’ and not as true history or factual reality. But, on what basis may it be dismissed? Is it contradictory, is it beyond reason, is it impossible? ... or is it just contrary to expectation?

This Christmas morning we don’t have the Gospel passage from any infancy narratives of St Matthew or St Luke, which recount the immediate context of the birth of this Son of Mary’s, conceived from God alone, and consubstantial with the Father. Christmas morning, instead, gives us the masterly Prologue of St John, (1:1–18), in which we don’t go back to the year dot, or 4BC, or whichever year precisely that Jesus was born. No, we go back far, far, further, to examine this mystery of Christmas: we go back to the beginning, in fact to before the

beginning, to God Himself, before all things like time and space were made: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ...*” and it is that ‘Word’ that “became flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we have seen His glory.” Yes, interesting isn’t it, that on Christmas morning the Church insists on the deep theological reflection of Jn 1, and not on details of donkey, inns full, and stable hay-filled manger? St John’s Prologue revolves around the identity of ‘the Word’ who became flesh. Clearly we are talking about the Son of God, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Holy Trinity, who becomes incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. But the actual word used for ‘the Word’ is *Λογος*, the Greek word implying ‘reason’ or ‘mind’ or ‘rationality.’ In other words, He who comes into the world to take His place in human history, is the very *Mind of God*, so that what takes place is utterly rational, completely reasoned and thought-through, way beyond the small-mindedness of much of human activity. But we also are reasonable creatures; we too have a spiritual, rational, soul, capable of the most profound philosophical reflection on

existence, the cosmos, and the meaning of life. So, no wonder then, when we do give some concerted thought to the Christmas mystery, the incarnation of the *Λογος* — whether that is consciously done, or more an instinctual connection between our immortal soul with the Creator’s own divine spirit — we are bound to be drawn closer to the reason of it all. We are bound, in fact, to love it deeply; we are bound to fall in love with Christmas: not with the tinsel and the turkey, as such, but as a response — the only true response — to the infinite love of the Creator for His creation. God did not have to do this. The *Λογος* of the Father and the Holy Spirit of the Father and Son are perfectly happy in themselves, and are in need of *nothing*, least of all, us. But their mutual, unbounded, overflowing, love, chose to create us, and then to re-create us in the Paschal Mystery; and that salvation requires the Incarnation, the bodily presence of ‘God with us,’ and therefore it requires Christmas.

When we sing, we pray twice, says St Augustine, so it’s right and proper that at this most beautiful time of year,

this moment of celebrating God's immense love — that almost cannot help Himself in becoming so vulnerable as to enter into history conceived in the womb of a teenage girl from Nazareth, and born in the setting of an animal barn — we *sing!* The human race pens such poetic outpourings, and sets them to heart-stirring tunes, and the world abounds with these loving offerings of words and music which mark Christmas: carols, that genius of Christian artistic expression that we love so much, that carries us from Christmas to Christmas, and holds us spiritually and emotionally to God's eternal plan for us.

Here is just one verse (from 'What Child is This?' usually sung to the exquisite Tudor-English tune, 'Greensleeves') of those many that fill my childhood carols-book, and which expresses that poverty, suffering, and supreme self-gift that is the Christmas new-born Christ-child. Good that we do let Him touch our hearts, reassure us of His holy presence, draw us after Him by infallible, invisible, cords of divine love:

*Why lies He in such mean estate,  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading.*

*Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,  
The cross be borne for me, for you.  
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary.*