

## **CHRISTMAS CONSCIOUSNESS**

(A Mytho-Dynamic Perspective on the Christmas Story)

by

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A little over two thousand years ago, a new form of consciousness entered into the world, and the world was irrevocably changed, “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us [John 1:14].” Such a monumental event went largely unnoticed--an omission that seems unnatural to eyes such as ours, accustomed to virtually instant media attention to all manner of events great and small. In fact, the first chronicler of this new consciousness, the author of the gospel of Mark did not even include the events of Christmas in his account, (nor did John). This enormous omission was subsequently “corrected” by the gospels of Luke and Matthew, from which we derive our primary version of the Christmas story. If Luke or Matthew had not been written and we only had Mark and/or John, how would we know of the angels, shepherds and magi? How would we know of the annunciation, virgin birth, or the flight into Egypt and other dramatic elements that are so familiar to us? In fact, would we even have Christmas to celebrate? All we would have is the gift of Christmas, the new consciousness itself, devoid of the mythological wrappings that in many ways have eclipsed our awareness of the substance of the celebration.

In one sense, a mythological perspective on the Christmas story is a contradiction, because the story itself is probably a mythological perspective of a mysterious phenomena—the birth of a new mode of consciousness manifested in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. So, in a sense, we are undertaking a mythological perspective on a mythological perspective. However, it is precisely this methodology that is required to get beneath the literalness of the “story,” to show how it provides a mythological perspective of events that exist outside the purview of history or science. Through this explanation, we can examine what constitutes a mythological perspective, and through that lens, perhaps better understand some aspects of that new consciousness.

In a sense, I am proposing a methodological tautology: grasping the Christmas story requires a certain perspective to comprehend the mythological elements in the story, but it is those elements in the story that help us express and understand what a mythological perspective might be. It is a chicken and egg type of problem, the solution of which has been rather elusive until now. I have developed some conceptual tools which we will employ in our investigation in order to clarify matters.

However, we will not be employing a general mythological perspective, but a very specialized form based upon what I call Mytho-Dynamic theory. In essence, the type of mythological perspective we will be utilizing is a “Mytho-Dynamic Perspective.” This will help us to avoid all manner of complications involved within the world of mythological scholarship.

Because of the contradictory nature of many of the problems before us, we will be using both linear and non-linear approaches to exploring the idea of Christmas Consciousness.

The overall flow will be linear: exploration of the story elements, exploration of the elements of mytho-dynamic perspective, and the exploration of Christmas Consciousness. However, within that overall schema we will be moving back and forth between the various elements of each of these categories, but will hopefully arrive at a fairly clear understanding of Christmas Consciousness.

## I

In one sense, a myth is a story of truth that does not have to bear the burden of facts. Now, admittedly, this sounds a bit strange to people of our day—what is un-factual - truth? Rather than define it, let me give an example. For instance, until Galileo and others some 500 years ago put telescopes to the heavens, the earth was considered to be “the center” of the universe. However, with all the discoveries made at that time, the notion that the earth as the center of anything was discredited once it became clear that the planets (including the earth) circled the Sun. So, because of such “facts” the earth ceased for a time to be the “center” of the universe. However, with further developments in math and science, it was discovered that the universe was in fact an infinite space. One of the interesting things about an infinite space is that any arbitrary point can be the center of that infinite space. In effect, if the universe is infinite, then the earth can certainly be the “center” of the infinite universe. So, from a mythological perspective, the earth is the center of the universe, in spite of a set of facts that dispute that claim. Regardless of the factual motion of the earth around the sun, from a mytho-poetic perspective the sun continues to rise and set as it always has done.

In order to look at Christmas from a mythological perspective, it might be helpful to determine just what constitutes a mythological perspective. It is my contention that there are six elements to such a mythological perspective. A mythological perspective:

1. Transforms consciousness
2. Reveals meaning & significance
3. Patterns perceptions
4. Consecrates the ordinary
5. Organizes Time
6. Contextualizes experience

The Christmas story exists within an overall structure of the Christian Mythos. Figure 1 designates some of the primary elements of that structure. Time is organized in a linear fashion, proceeding from creation to eschaton. Within those two points are a series of epochs, beginning with Advent, the time leading up to the birth of Jesus. Next, there is the period leading up to the passion, death and resurrection, followed by the period of mystagogia that endures until the eschaton. The meaning and significance of this sequence has a variety of perspectives, but the traditional one is a focus on what must be called a sacrificial perspective. Within this perspective, the emphasis is placed upon the sacrifice of Jesus and his taking away “sin” from the world. Now the transformation of consciousness involved could be described as a love, salvation or eternal life consciousness, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life [John 3:16]. Perceptions

are patterned to see “insiders” and “outsiders” and ordinary events are seen within the perspective of aiding or impeding the quest for eternal life. Such a quest for eternal life is the context of the human experience as far as this vision of Christianity is concerned. Without altering any of that perspective, or diminishing it in any way, there are other perspectives that can be derived from the same mythos. One such perspective is a “gift” perspective.

A gift perspective emphasizes more of what Christ brought to earth as gift, rather than what he took from earth in terms of sin and sacrifice. Some of the early fathers of the Church were of the opinion that salvation was accomplished at the Incarnation, or Christmas as it is more familiarly called. Within this perspective, salvation was a gift that Jesus brought with him, not something that still needed to be accomplished in a sacrifice on Calvary. Now, what constitutes salvation is a mystery, but if Jesus gave us a new form of consciousness as a by-product of his birth, that could be considered “salvation” in and of itself. So, I am going to explore the Christmas story from the mytho-dynamic perspective of a gift dynamic rather than a sacrificial one.

The Christmas story itself has to be amalgamated from two of the four gospels, Luke and Matthew. I’m going to label the elements of the Christmas Story in the following manner:

- I. Annunciation- the angel tells Mary she’s pregnant-found in Luke 1:20-37
- II. Visitation-Mary visits Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist)-Luke 1:39-44.
- III. Dream of Joseph-Mary’s condition is revealed to Joseph in a Dream-Matt. 1:18-25
- IV. Birth of Jesus—few details: Luke 2:1-7
- V. Shepherds and Angels-Angels reveal to the shepherds what’s going on, they in turn go to Bethlehem to catch the event-Luke 2:8-20.
- VI. Visit of the Magi—Kings from the East visit the child, but encounter King Herod on their way-Matt. 2:1-12.
- VII. Prophecies of Simon & Anna: Luke 2:25-40
- VIII. Herod and the Massacre of the Children: Matt. 2:16-18.
- IX. Flight Into Egypt & Return-Matt. 2:13-15.

One of the first things we need to be aware of is that the gospels themselves are byproducts of this new consciousness. In effect, they will be unaware that they are conveying the new consciousness, even though they are steeped in it. From their perspective, Section IV, the birth of Jesus would probably be the most important, however God’s ways are different than human ways.

From a Mytho-Dynamic perspective, the new consciousness I have been referring to is born, not in a manger in Bethlehem, but with the angel’s annunciation in section I. It is not the physical birth of Jesus that brings about the new consciousness, but his inception as an act of the creative Word uttered, after which Mary became pregnant. From this perspective it is Mary who is the first recipient of that consciousness, as well as the bearer of it. What would that be? First of all, let’s review the passage:

<sup>26</sup> *In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,<sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.<sup>28</sup> And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you."*

<sup>29</sup> *But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.<sup>30</sup> Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.*

<sup>31</sup> *Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus.*

<sup>32</sup> *He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father,*

<sup>33</sup> *and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

<sup>34</sup> *But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"*

<sup>35</sup> *And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.*

<sup>36</sup> *And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;*

<sup>37</sup> *for nothing will be impossible for God."*

<sup>38</sup> *Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*

*Luke 1:26-38*

Within this passage there are three notable elements, after the angel greets Mary and she is a bit shaken. 1) The angel tells Mary to have no fear, 2) the angel assures Mary that God is with her, and 3) nothing is impossible for God (or stated positively, "With God all things are possible.") I would posit that these three elements form the core of the new consciousness. This is a consciousness of "wonder", as compared with the consciousness demonstrated by Herod in section VIII of the story, a consciousness of power and fear. In contrast to Mary, Herod is filled with fear (paranoia), his heart is far from God, and of course he is intent on thwarting God by any means available.

Within the framework of section I, we can see all the elements of a Mytho-Dynamic perspective demonstrated. Obviously, there is the transformation of consciousness, and a whole new level of meaning and significance is revealed. Figure 2 is a graphic representation of that meaning and significance, and the accompanying essay on the

Ontogenic Themescape explains further. I suspect the other elements of the story are merely patterning our perceptions to see the wonder of these events, particularly through the eyes of Mary and Joseph. Mary, a humble peasant girl from a small village in a remote part of the Roman Empire is perhaps as ordinary as any other girl her age, but through her, that ordinariness is consecrated to become Theotokos (god bearer) for the whole world. The meaning of time and history is transformed into the temporal framework referred to above and the context of everyone's life is forever changed by this story. Those story elements are conveyed in figure 3.

So, the angels and shepherds and Magi are vehicles for patterning our perceptions and allowing us to wonder at the mysterious nature of God. Unfortunately, people over the ages have literalized the story and become focused on the infant in the manger, losing sight of the divine invitation for all of us to become God bearer's to our world. From a Mytho-Dynamic perspective, however, those words still resound: Be not afraid, God is with us, and with God all things are possible.

Having viewed the Christmas story from a mythological perspective, there are a number of things this process can do for us. Some of the ways this perspective aids in our journey are that it:

1. Helps to balance, focus and synchronize the rhythms of the internal and external dimensions of our life.
2. Helps us deal with the pain and challenges of change.
3. Helps to discern between illusion and substance.
4. Provides tools to help interpret and validate our experience.
5. Helps us to define express and answer the questions:
  - Who we are
  - Where we come from
  - Where we're going
6. Helps us to fully participate in the gift and mystery of creation.
7. Provides the context for our life's journey.
8. Helps us explore and embrace our own unique possibilities and limitations.
9. Influences and patterns our perceptions.
10. Empowers us to respond appropriately to the circumstances of our life.

Hopefully, we can embrace and celebrate our Christmas Consciousness, not as a gift given long ago, but as a reality lived deeply in our lives today. Each Christmas, including this one is a reaffirmation of an incredible gift we've been given. Perhaps we can journey together and help one another walk in wonder.