

Sermon on The Word Became Flesh

Lessons: Genesis 1:1-5
John 1:1-5, 9, 14
Arcana Coelestia 7, 16, 20

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In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. (Genesis 1:1, 3)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. He was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 3-4, 9, 14)

With this Sunday's sermon, we begin the celebration of the Advent season, a time when we remember and reflect upon the Lord becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

The first word in Genesis, the very first thing said in the whole written Word of God, in the Hebrew is בְּרֵאשִׁית . Expressed in English this Hebrew word is translated "in the beginning." Both Genesis and the gospel of John begin with the words "in the beginning." And in both the gospel of John and in Genesis the opening sentences treat of God, creation, and light. That there is a connection between the first verses of the gospel of John and the first verses in Genesis also appears from Arcana Coelestia 20, which in treating of Genesis 1:3, where God said, "Let there be light, and there was light," quotes from John 1, as we read in the third lesson.

The "beginning" signifies the first state when a person is being regenerated and also the first state of a new church. In Apocalypse Revealed 200 it is stated that what is said in Genesis 1:1 has a similar signification to what is said in John 1:1 concerning the phrase, "In the beginning was the Word." That number says that the words in John 1:1-14 have not been understood in the church. The passage then goes on to say:

He who understands these words as to their interior sense, ... is able to see that the Divine Truth itself in the Word... is understood by 'the Word that was in the beginning with God, and was God'. Yet it is not the Word viewed in the words and letters of languages, but viewed in its own essence and life... From this life the Word enlivens the affections of the will of the person who reads it in a holy manner, and from the light of that life it enlightens the thoughts of his understanding. Therefore it is said in John:-

In the Word was life, and the life was the light of men John 1:4.

This [life and light] makes the Word, because the Word is from the Lord, and concerning the Lord, and thus is the Lord.

By the Word there is the conjunction of the Lord with mankind, and of mankind with the Lord, and by that conjunction there is life.

*From this it is clear, that by "the beginning of the creation of God" is meant the Word, and if you will believe it, the Word such as it is in its literal sense.... And what is wonderful, the Word is so written, that it communicates with the entire heaven, and in particular with every society there...
(Apocalypse Revealed 200)*

The first words of Genesis and the first words of John describe not only the first state of the regeneration of a person, but also the beginning and first state of a new church. This is revealed in the Apocalypse Explained 294, where in treating of Genesis 1:1-3, it is said:

"That previously there was no Church, because men were without good and truth, is signified by 'the earth was void and empty.' ... Their first enlightenment is signified by 'the Spirit of God moved upon the faces of the waters, and by 'God said, Let there be light and there was light.'

"The evening and the morning" of the first day refer to the change of state that has taken place, evening to the prior state when there is no faith and no Church, and morning to a new state when faith has been restored and a new church has begun. Every Advent of the Lord is a morning state which signifies the start of a new day or state. 'Evening' is the state of the Church before His Advent, while 'morning' is the first state of the Church after His Advent.

With respect to an individual, this morning state occurs when the Lord has made His Advent with a person and now dwells interiorly within that person. With respect to the church, by the Lord's Advent a new church, or more precisely a new state of the church, commenced in the world. As we read in the Word:

"Morning" is often mentioned in the Word ... in the highest sense it signifies the Lord, and also His advent; in the internal sense it signifies His kingdom and church, and their state of peace. Moreover, it signifies the first state of a new church, and also a state of love, and a state of illustration, consequently a state of intelligence and wisdom, and also a state of the conjunction of good and truth, the state in which the internal man is conjoined to the external. (Apocalypse Explained 179)

Such states are also the states of every Church from its beginning to its end. Its first state is like a state of infancy and thus one of innocence, and consequently of love to the Lord. This state is called 'morning'. (Arcana Coelestia 10134)

The Christmas season, the time when we remember and celebrate the Advent of the Lord, is for many of us a time when we recall the delights of our childhood which are intimately connected with the season. We may have feelings of innocence, joy, and peace, -- all words associated with the season. It is not surprising that we should have these feelings, as they are feelings that are connected with the Advent of the Lord. At the time of the Lord's birth, a heavenly host of angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" Likewise, when the wise men from the east saw the star of Bethlehem, it is said that "they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy." The joy and happiness that we have at this season are all feelings that we share with others in the world and with the Angels in heaven. Indeed, it can be said that the joy that we experience here in the world is a reflection of the joy that the angels share with each other and with us when celebrating the Advent of the Lord.

Amen.