

The First Advent Of Christ

I was carried down to the time when Jesus was to take upon Himself man's nature, humble Himself as a man, and suffer the temptations of Satan.

His birth was without worldly grandeur. He was born in a stable and cradled in a manger; yet His birth was honored far above that of any of the sons of men. Angels from heaven informed the shepherds of the advent of Jesus, and light and glory from God accompanied their testimony. The heavenly host touched their harps and glorified God. They triumphantly heralded the advent of the Son of God to a fallen world to accomplish the work of redemption, and by His death to bring peace, happiness, and everlasting life to man. God honored the advent of His Son. Angels worshiped Him.

Angels of God hovered over the scene of His baptism; the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and lighted upon Him, and as the people stood greatly amazed, with their eyes fastened upon Him, the Father's voice was heard from heaven, saying, Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased.

John was not certain that it was the Saviour who came to be baptized of him in Jordan. But God had promised him a sign by which he should know the Lamb of God. That sign was given as the heavenly dove rested upon Jesus, and the glory of God shone round about Him. John reached forth his hand, pointing to Jesus, and with a loud voice cried out, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!"

John informed his disciples that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world. As his work was closing, he taught his disciples to look to Jesus, and follow Him as the Great Teacher. John's life was sorrowful and self-denying. He heralded the first advent of Christ, but was not permitted to witness His miracles, and enjoy the power manifested by Him. When Jesus should establish Himself as a teacher, John knew that he himself must die. His voice was seldom heard, except in the wilderness. His life was lonely. He did not cling to his father's family, to enjoy their society, but left them in order to fulfill his mission. Multitudes left the busy cities and villages and flocked to the wilderness to hear the words of the wonderful prophet. John laid the ax to the root of the tree. He reproved sin, fearless of consequences, and prepared the way for the Lamb of God.

Herod was affected as he listened to the powerful, pointed testimonies of John, and with deep interest he inquired what he must do to become his disciple. John was acquainted with the fact that he was about to marry his brother's wife, while her husband was yet living, and faithfully told Herod that this was not lawful. Herod was unwilling to make any sacrifice. He married his brother's wife, and through her influence, seized John and put him in prison, intending however to release him. While there confined, John heard through his disciples of the mighty works of Jesus. He could not listen to His gracious words; but the disciples informed him and comforted him with what they had heard. Soon John was beheaded, through the influence of Herod's wife. I saw that the humblest disciples who followed Jesus, witnessed His miracles, and heard the comforting words which fell from His lips, were greater than John the Baptist; that is, they were more exalted and honored, and had more pleasure in their lives.

John came in the spirit and power of Elijah to proclaim the first advent of Jesus. I was pointed down to the last days and saw that John represented those who should go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah to herald the day of wrath and the second advent of Jesus.

After the baptism of Jesus in Jordan, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. The Holy Spirit had prepared Him for that special scene of fierce temptations. Forty days

He was tempted of Satan, and in those days He ate nothing. Everything around Him was unpleasant, from which human nature would be led to shrink. He was with the wild beasts and the devil, in a desolate, lonely place. The Son of God was pale and emaciated, through fasting and suffering. But His course was marked out, and He must fulfill the work which He came to do.

Satan took advantage of the sufferings of the Son of God and prepared to beset Him with manifold temptations, hoping to obtain the victory over Him, because He had humbled Himself as a man. Satan came with this temptation: "If Thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread." He tempted Jesus to condescend to give him proof of His being the Messiah, by exercising His divine power. Jesus mildly answered him, "It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."

Satan was seeking a dispute with Jesus concerning His being the Son of God. He referred to His weak, suffering condition and boastfully affirmed that he was stronger than Jesus. But the word spoken from heaven, "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased," was sufficient to sustain Jesus through all His sufferings. I saw that Christ had nothing to do in convincing Satan of His power or of His being the Saviour of the world. Satan had sufficient evidence of the exalted station and authority of the Son of God. His unwillingness to yield to Christ's authority had shut him out of heaven.

Satan, to manifest his power, carried Jesus to Jerusalem, and set Him upon a pinnacle of the temple, and there tempted Him to give evidence that He was the Son of God, by casting Himself down from that dizzy height. Satan came with the words of inspiration: "For it is written, He shall give His angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." Jesus answering said unto him, "It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Satan wished to cause Jesus to presume upon the mercy of His Father and risk His life before the fulfillment of His mission. He had hoped that the plan of salvation would fail; but the plan was laid too deep to be overthrown or marred by Satan.

Christ is the example for all Christians. When they are tempted, or their rights are disputed, they should bear it patiently. They should not feel that they have a right to call upon the Lord to display His power that they may obtain a victory over their enemies, unless God can be directly honored and glorified thereby. If Jesus had cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, it would not have glorified His Father; for none would have witnessed the act but Satan and the angels of God. And it would have been tempting the Lord to display His power to His bitterest foe. It would have been condescending to the one whom Jesus came to conquer.

"And the devil, taking Him up into an high mountain, showed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto Him, All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If Thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind Me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

Satan presented before Jesus the kingdoms of the world in the most attractive light. If Jesus would there worship him, he offered to relinquish his claims to the possessions of earth. If the plan of salvation should be carried out, and Jesus should die to redeem man, Satan knew that his own power must be limited and finally taken away, and that he would be destroyed. Therefore it was his studied plan to prevent, if possible, the completion of the great work which had been commenced by the Son of God. If the plan of man's redemption should fail, Satan would retain the kingdom which he then claimed. And if he should succeed, he flattered himself that he would reign in opposition to the God of heaven.

Satan exulted when Jesus laid aside His power and glory and left heaven. He thought that the Son of God was then placed in his power. The temptation took so easily with the holy pair in Eden that he hoped by his satanic power and cunning to overthrow even the Son of God, and thereby save his own life and kingdom. If he could tempt Jesus to depart from the will of His Father, his object would be gained. But Jesus met the tempter with the rebuke, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." He was to bow only to His Father. Satan claimed the kingdom of earth as his and insinuated to Jesus that all His sufferings might be saved: that He need not die to obtain the kingdoms of this world; if He would worship him He might have all the possessions of earth and the glory of reigning over them. But Jesus was steadfast. He knew that the time was to come when He would by His own life redeem the kingdom from Satan, and that, after a season, all in heaven and earth would submit to Him. He chose His life of suffering and His dreadful death, as the way appointed by His Father that He might become a lawful heir to the kingdoms of earth and have them given into His hands as an everlasting possession. Satan also will be given into His hands to be destroyed by death, nevermore to annoy Jesus or the saints in glory.

The Ministry of Christ

After Satan had ended his temptations, he departed from Jesus for a season, and angels prepared Him food in the wilderness, and strengthened Him, and the blessing of His Father rested upon Him. Satan had failed in his fiercest temptations; yet he looked forward to the period of Jesus' ministry, when he should at different times try his cunning against Him. He still hoped to prevail against Him by stirring up those who would not receive Jesus, to hate and seek to destroy Him. Satan held a special council with his angels. They were disappointed and enraged that they had prevailed nothing against the Son of God. They decided that they must be more cunning and use their power to the utmost to inspire unbelief in the minds of His own nation as to His being the Saviour of the world, and in this way discourage Jesus in His mission. No matter how exact the Jews might be in their ceremonies and sacrifices, if they could be kept blinded as to the prophecies and be made to believe that the Messiah was to appear as a mighty worldly king, they might be led to despise and reject Jesus.

I was shown that Satan and his angels were very busy during Christ's ministry, inspiring men with unbelief, hate, and scorn. Often when Jesus uttered some cutting truth, reproving their sins, the people would become enraged. Satan and his angels urged them on to take the life of the Son of God. More than once they took up stones to cast at Him, but angels guarded Him and bore Him away from the angry multitude to a place of safety. Again, as the plain truth dropped from His holy lips, the multitude laid hold of Him and led Him to the brow of a hill, intending to cast Him down. A contention arose among themselves as to what they should do with Him, when the angels again hid Him from the sight of the multitude, and He, passing through the midst of them, went His way.

Satan still hoped that the great plan of salvation would fail. He exerted all his power to make the hearts of the people hard and their feelings bitter against Jesus. He hoped that so few would receive Him as the Son of God that He would consider His sufferings and sacrifice too great to make for so small a company. But I saw that if there had been but two who would have accepted Jesus as the Son of God and believed on Him to the saving of their souls, He would have carried out the plan.

Jesus began His work by breaking Satan's power over the suffering. He restored the sick to health, gave sight to the blind, and healed the lame, causing them to leap for joy and to glorify God. He restored to health those who had been infirm and bound by Satan's cruel power many years. With gracious words He comforted the weak, the trembling, and the desponding. The feeble, suffering ones whom Satan held in triumph, Jesus wrenched from his grasp, bringing to them soundness of body and great joy and happiness. He raised the dead to life, and they glorified God for the mighty display of His power. He wrought mightily for all who believed on Him.

The life of Christ was filled with words and acts of benevolence, sympathy, and love. He was ever attentive to listen to and relieve the woes of those who came to Him. Multitudes carried in their own persons the evidence of His divine power. Yet after the work had been accomplished, many were ashamed of the humble yet mighty teacher. Because the rulers did not believe on Him, the people were not willing to accept Jesus. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. They could not endure to be governed by His sober, self-denying life. They wished to enjoy the honor which the world bestows. Yet many followed the Son of God and listened to His instructions, feasting upon the words which fell so graciously from His lips. His words were full of meaning, yet so plain that the weakest could understand them.

Satan and his angels blinded the eyes and darkened the understanding of the Jews, and stirred up the chief of the people and the rulers to take the Saviour's life. Others were sent to bring Jesus unto them; but as they came near where He was they were greatly amazed. They saw Him filled with sympathy and compassion, as He witnessed human woe. They heard Him in love and tenderness speak encouragingly to the weak and afflicted. They also heard Him, in a voice of authority, rebuke the power of Satan and bid his captives go free. They listened to the words of wisdom that fell from His lips, and they were captivated; they could not lay hands on Him. They returned to the priests and elders without Jesus. When asked, "Why have ye not brought Him?" they related what they had witnessed of His miracles, and the holy words of wisdom, love, and knowledge which they had heard, and ended with saying, "Never man spake like this man." The chief priests accused them of being also deceived, and some of the officers were ashamed that they had not taken Him. The priests inquired in a scornful manner if any of the rulers had believed on Him. I saw that many of the magistrates and elders did believe on Jesus; but Satan kept them from acknowledging it; they feared the reproach of the people more than they feared God.

Thus far the cunning and hatred of Satan had not broken up the plan of salvation. The time for the accomplishment of the object for which Jesus came into the world was drawing near. Satan and his angels consulted together and decided to inspire Christ's own nation to cry eagerly for His blood and heap upon Him cruelty and scorn. They hoped that Jesus would resent such treatment and fail to maintain His humility and meekness.

While Satan was laying his plans, Jesus was carefully opening to His disciples the sufferings through which He must pass—that He would be crucified and that He would rise again the third day. But their understanding seemed dull, and they could not comprehend what He told them.

The Transfiguration

The faith of the disciples was greatly strengthened at the transfiguration, when they were permitted to behold Christ's glory and to hear the voice from heaven testifying to His divine character. God chose to give the followers of Jesus strong proof that He was the promised Messiah, that in their bitter sorrow and disappointment at His crucifixion, they would not entirely cast away their confidence. At the transfiguration the Lord sent Moses and Elijah to talk with Jesus concerning His sufferings and death. Instead of choosing angels to converse with His Son, God chose those who had themselves experienced the trials of earth.

Elijah had walked with God. His work had been painful and trying, for the Lord through him had reproved the sins of Israel. Elijah was a prophet of God; yet he was compelled to flee from place to place to save his life. His own nation hunted him like a wild beast that they might destroy him. But God translated Elijah. Angels bore him in glory and triumph to heaven.

Moses was greater than any who had lived before him. He had been highly honored of God, being privileged to talk with the Lord face to face, as a man speaks with a friend. He was permitted to see

the bright light and excellent glory that enshrouded the Father. The Lord through Moses delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Moses was a mediator for his people, often standing between them and the wrath of God. When the anger of the Lord was greatly kindled against Israel for their unbelief, their murmurings, and their grievous sins, Moses' love for them was tested. God proposed to destroy them and to make of him a mighty nation. Moses showed his love for Israel by his earnest pleading in their behalf. In his distress he prayed God to turn from His fierce anger and forgive Israel, or blot his name out of His book.

When Israel murmured against God and against Moses because they could get no water, they accused him of leading them out to kill them and their children. God heard their murmurings and bade Moses speak to the rock, that the people might have water. Moses smote the rock in wrath and took the glory to himself. The continual waywardness and murmuring of the children of Israel had caused him the keenest sorrow, and for a little time he forgot how much the Lord had borne with them, and that their murmuring was not against him, but against God. He thought only of himself, how deeply he was wronged, and how little gratitude they manifested in return for his deep love for them.

It was God's plan to bring often His people into strait places, and then in their necessity to deliver them by His power, that they might realize His love and care for them, and thus be led to serve and honor Him. But Moses had failed to honor God and magnify His name before the people that they might glorify Him. In this he brought upon himself the Lord's displeasure.

When Moses came down from the mount with the two tables of stone and saw Israel worshipping the golden calf, his anger was greatly kindled, and he threw down the tables of stone and broke them. I saw that Moses did not sin in this. He was wroth for God, jealous for His glory. But when he yielded to the natural feelings of his heart and took to himself the honor which was due to God, he sinned, and for that sin God would not suffer him to enter the land of Canaan.

Satan had been trying to find something wherewith to accuse Moses before the angels. He exulted at his success in leading him to displease God, and he told the angels that he could overcome the Saviour of the world when He should come to redeem man. For his transgression, Moses came under the power of Satan—the dominion of death. Had he remained steadfast, the Lord would have brought him to the Promised Land, and would then have translated him to heaven without his seeing death.

Moses passed through death, but Michael came down and gave him life before his body had seen corruption. Satan tried to hold the body, claiming it as his; but Michael resurrected Moses and took him to heaven. Satan railed bitterly against God, denouncing Him as unjust in permitting his prey to be taken from him; but Christ did not rebuke His adversary, though it was through his temptation that the servant of God had fallen. He meekly referred him to His Father, saying, "The Lord rebuke thee."

Jesus had told His disciples that there were some standing with Him who should not taste of death till they should see the kingdom of God come with power. At the transfiguration this promise was fulfilled. The countenance of Jesus was there changed and shone like the sun. His raiment was white and glistening. Moses was present to represent those who will be raised from the dead at the second appearing of Jesus. And Elijah, who was translated without seeing death, represented those who will be changed to immortality at Christ's second coming and will be translated to heaven without seeing death. The disciples beheld with astonishment and fear the excellent majesty of Jesus and the cloud that overshadowed them, and heard the voice of God in terrible majesty, saying, "This is My beloved Son; hear Him."