

A MANGER FOR A BED

By Rev. Donald L. Rose

It was unusual that a newborn baby should be placed in a manger. And that unusual circumstance was to be the sign to the shepherds of Bethlehem. In glorious light an angel appeared and gave good tidings. He told the shepherds there would be this special sign. The babe would be lying in a manger (Luke 2:12). They came with haste, and they recognized the sign.

A manger is a place for feeding. (The French word for eating is *manger*.) The Messianic prophecies had proclaimed that one would come as a feeder of the flock (Isaiah 40, Ezekiel 34). I will mention presently a sense in which the baby himself was like food.

God came to earth in this human way so that people could draw near to Him and have a relationship with Him. It is a relationship symbolized by eating together with Him.

The last book of the Bible contains the following invitation: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

Picture in your mind the babe in the manger, and then add the picture of Jesus standing before a multitude and saying, "He who comes to me shall never hunger." (John 6). Now lift your mind and think of that multitude as "all people." (Remember that the angel tidings were for "all people.")

Add another scene with the picture of the manger still in your mind. Make it the sea of Galilee. In the final chapter of the Gospels the disciples are out on the deep, and they see on the shore a figure. The figure calls out to them, "Children, have you any food?" They answer "No." (John 21). He provides for a harvest of fish. They come to him, and behold they find a fire and food prepared. Jesus says to them, "Come and dine." (verse 12)

We are invited to come and dine with the Lord when we enter into the banquet of dedicated, useful living. Jesus said that his food was to accomplish the work of God (John 4:34). When we reach out with good will towards men, we are sharing in that meal with the Lord. When the disciples pursued their mission they were joined by an unseen presence, for the Lord was "working with them" (Mark 16:20).

I have said that the baby was like food. It sounds strange. And it sounded strange when Jesus said to a multitude. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51).

Those who took it too literally said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" (verse 60) The Lord's flesh which he called "food indeed" is his love, in which we are invited to participate.

The Lord's message is in symbolic language, and the circumstances of his birth were eminently symbolic. As Emanuel Swedenborg wrote, "If it had pleased the Lord He might have been born in a most splendid palace, and have been laid in a bed adorned with precious stones; but there would have been no heavenly representation."

We call this a "festive" time of the year. And we do enjoy natural food, but we may also receive the one born in a manger. He promises if we open the door he will come and dine with us.

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