

# THE PURPOSE OF CHRISTMAS

by Rev. Mark Carlson

*In the union of His Human Essence with His Divine Essence the Lord had in view the conjunction of all people with Himself. This was His end, and this was His love, which was such that the salvation of the human race, as beheld in the union of Himself with His Father, was to Him the inmost joy (Arcana Coelestia 2034).*

This passage from the Heavenly Doctrines, given through the Lord's servant, Emanuel Swedenborg, is a simple and direct summary of the purpose, the process, and the personal feelings which were involved in the Lord's life in the world.

The Child born in Bethlehem was the Human Essence, which the Almighty God—or the Divine Essence—took on by a virgin birth through a natural woman. This was a virgin birth because no natural man could have fathered such a child. This Child's Father was, quite literally, the Almighty God, the Father of us all. But the Child formed in the womb of Mary was created even more directly by our Heavenly Father, since He Himself was the very soul of the child Jesus. This whole process was completely prophesied in the Old Testament.

Through this process a totally new thing under the sun was created—something that had never existed before and something that would never exist again—the infant Jesus, God in the flesh. This tiny Baby, born of a woman, knew nothing about how He had come to be, or what He was to do in the world. So our loving Father, God Almighty, accomplished a most amazing and mind-boggling thing. In creating the infant Jesus, God Almighty projected an aspect of Himself right into our level of existence—where He would have to deal with all of the ignorance, the uncertainty, and the perversity of human life, just as we do. He was God become man.

How often people love to say of their leaders that if only they *knew* what it was really like for the common person on the street, then things would be different. And in our secret, unspoken prayers, do we not at times say the same thing about our Heavenly Father? “If only He *knew* what it is like to be me, then He would...”

But that is just the point of the great paradox of the story of the Lord's birth into the world. He does know what it is like to be you, even though He is infinite, because He has walked in your shoes for thirty-three years. He knew from the beginning of creation what the process of human spiritual development would be, and now, from His life in the world, He also knows *from experience* what it is like to be limited by mortal flesh and blood, and what it is like to be burdened with massive tendencies toward evil. And so He knows very well what it is like to be you, and, more importantly, He knows how to accommodate Himself to you in a way you can comprehend. This is the greatest paradox of all, for while the Infinite, by definition, can never change, yet there was a change in the Infinite in the way He accommodates Himself to all humankind.

Like us, the Lord was born not knowing where He came from or where He was going. Like us, He had to learn about Himself, which He did, like us, from the Word. Like us, He had to do battle with tendencies toward evil. Like us, He often felt alone and defeated, totally engulfed with a sense of failure and worthlessness. Like us, He occasionally came to a state of utter despair and hopelessness. And, like us, when these times of despair ended, He came into incredible states of peace and bliss as He again experienced the close presence of His Heavenly Father. And, like us, He often experienced states of great joy and happiness.

Unlike us, His greatest joy came from understanding and perceiving that what He was doing with His life was making possible the salvation of all humanity. As He progressed toward a complete union with the Divine soul within Him, the Lord felt intense joy, not because He was becoming one with His Father within, but because *through that process* He was making it possible for all of humanity to be conjoined with God.

The Lord our Father, the infinite Creator of the universe, always was Human, always was Man; it was just that mortal people had lost sight of His Humanness. Through His birth and life in the world, He taught us a lesson about His Humanity that is not likely to be forgotten again. I am sure He wishes you a very happy Christmas.