

CHRISTMAS SEASON

November 1957 - Unrevised Lecture by Willi Sucher

In view of the approach of Christmas, let us turn once again to that sublime revelation, which has led humanity through time, as represented by the Madonna and Child of Raphael. It is a theme painted by innumerable artists.

We celebrate Christ at this time of the year, and the Imagination has a deep background. Pre-Christian religions have no such picture as centerpiece of their religious life and contemplation. In order to approach the solution, let us take an excursion to the time of Christ's birth and the experience of the Three Kings, or Three Wise Men. Humanity then had different means of gauging time—that is, by the stars—of which they knew much more than we do. It is especially necessary for agriculture to watch the Moon, yet now we could hardly discern a precise full Moon if we were asked. The stars at night told human beings both time and season, especially the Great Bear with its direction in relation to the Pole Star, and so forth. The shepherds as well as the kings used these “clocks”, as they both had a deep knowledge of Earth and sky, though in a different way.

Why Three Wise Men, or Magi? They were priests whom Cyrus brought to Babylon when he captured Mesopotamia, and were of Zoroastrian origin, or religion, having a deep wisdom of the stars. Since that time in Persia, traces of their knowledge have been found in all the great traditions of the world since 4000 BC, telling us of the Virgin birth and of the Savior to come. Humanity was warned, even in the time of Zarathustra, to watch the stars for the Savior, and they were well equipped with a science to read the script of the heavens. Although things moved more slowly then, there was time for contemplation, too, which was necessary for reading the stars, for penetrating the veil of external experience. At certain times, they drew what they saw in the heavens in the earth, and in this “mirror” reflection, traced the message of the divine world from the visible stars.

L. F. Jacks, who inaugurated the Oxford Teachers' Course for Rudolf Steiner, wrote a book called *Mad Shepherds*, in which he states that one of them had the power to leave his body and go to the stars. This was still possible in the Middle Ages. Nostradamus used a basin of water in which he watched the stars by night, as the stars' light had to be broken up in this “mirror” image that was thereby produced. In this way the inner language of the stars could be experienced, and of such was also the knowledge of the Three Wise Men. If at the time of the Wise Men, one was in the southern latitudes, one would have noticed the constellation of Virgin—the largest constellation—above Palestine, but now it is no longer there, as it has moved with time. In those days, people still had a dim clairvoyance and an awareness of all that lived in the sky as it was streaming into the Earth from the cosmos. If nowadays one obtains peace and objectivity and gazes up at the heavens with an expectant patience, one can still hear a heavenly symphony, such as the Three Wise Men experienced, out of a glory of wisdom beyond our comprehension.

They saw this Virgin constellation, not only viewed as an outline of the stars but as a vision, a field of forces and of beings dwelling in this region, which contained a lightning force that can strike the observer and even alter substances. Through this constellation, they could look back into the past. The heavenly constellations are a great chronicle of the totality of evolution. We wouldn't need any books if we were able to read their story, which also tells of divine events to come. However, it was a scientific method that the Magi used, and then confirmed by calculation, for these inner experiences. Calculation and divination were the twin portals through which they went back in history that evening to about the year 24BC [Ed. Note: about 24BC was the previous Great Conjunction]. They worked not as mystics, who rely only on inner experience, but as true occultists, who really walked the Earth but who contained the inner experience within the scientific verification.

While looking back, they saw the “Sun” standing in Virgin, as the majestic background to this sublime Imagination. In Rudolf Steiner's “Et incarnatus Est” lecture, there are strange things reported. “The Magi, who were really astrologers with the last star wisdom, said that on the night of the 24th to the 25th December the Sun was shining in the constellation of the Virgin; and it was realized by this Sign that the Savior, who had been

expected for thousands of years, had been born. This would seem nonsense, because, in fact, the Sun was in Capricorn that day; and the Sun, as we say, never shines at midnight? However, this statement is a challenge to our modern humanity not to merely consider only what appears to our senses, but to use the scientific gateway of the Three Wise Men. This we will do, for they would also have known inwardly, and verified by calculation on that date, that the Wise Old Man of the universe, Saturn, was standing behind Virgin, whilst at her feet rested the planet Jupiter.

To their inner perception the horizon would disappear, revealing the stars below it; and thus the Wise Men saw the constellation of Scales, and then farther below, Scorpion. In between these two constellations stood the fiery planet Mars. The Magi would read the meaning as well as the vision. They knew the predicted time had arrived, which was foretold about 24 years earlier.

In Greece, the Virgin was known as Demeter or Ceres, the Goddess of Wine and Bread. She carried in her hand a bunch of grapes (the star Vindemiatrix) and in her other hand, a sheaf of corn (the star Spica). But she has changed since then into the Imagination of St. John the Divine, with the crown of stars around her head; She who would give birth to the Sun Child, Who would rule the nations with a rod of iron. The Dragon at her feet sought to destroy her, but Michael and his hosts protected her from injury.

We know how Christ's birth was threatened by adverse powers on Earth. We know that Saturn has absolute gnosis of all things, and that Jupiter is a manifestation of the cosmic forces of Michael. And in the depths, between Scales (or Balance) and Scorpion's "sting", stands Mars "the fighter", whose forces can bring divorce and discord to the world. These lie below the horizon. This was the vision of the Magi that Christmas night, through their clairvoyant faculties and their knowledge of cosmic rhythms, verifying their inner experiences by their eternal courses. One has to have the keys to open that gateway, and also an awareness of the beings who are its guardians—the Guardians of Saturn. This, then, was their first verification.

The Christmas "Star" is a complex of events to be interpreted. It led the Wise Men to the Child and the Mother, as their second verification. Such sages could verify their search and vision a third time by seeing the shining aura around the Child's head. The Midnight Sun would be final verification. At the moment of conception, a soul descended from the cosmos unites with the body. A sage could see the soul mood of the Virgin, the Sun of Expectation hidden in the Earth, shining in the aura of this divine Child. But they saw more; they saw that the Child in its thirtieth year would pass through a great crisis, the Mystical Death of ancient days. This, too, was printed in the aura of the world of the stars during embryonic development. They would see in that 30th year, Mars at his feet in the constellation of Bull, hiding and blocking the Bull forces by its attack. Below this Bull constellation stood Orion, the Hunter, who also represents Osiris of ancient Egypt, dismembered and buried. In this constellation was that future crisis foreseen.

The constellation of Waterman tells of another great event in the past, in the universe before our own, that of Ancient Moon. Then the Moon-Earth was split off from the Sun, came under the dominion of adverse powers, and took an independent life. Eventually the Sun powers overcame it, and a reunion occurred between the dark planet of rebellion and the mighty forces of the cosmic light. The sages saw such ancient truths working into the 30th year, and then the reunion of the dark forces and the light. This is known as the symbol of the Holy Grail, the Vessel holding the Holy Host, the symbol of the Sun.

In the 30th year, this Child would become a personified Holy Grail, a body with such maturity, in the spiritual sense, as to be able to offer itself to the cosmos as the vessel of the Sun. At his death, this vessel body would become the Vessel for the Christ, the Guide of the spiritual forces of the Sun and Master of the solar universe. That great Being descended at the moment of the Baptism into the body of Jesus, at the age of 30 years old. It was thus that a threefold verification came to the sages of the Virgin Birth.

One can see this sublime Imagination of Mother and Child is not a Christian "invention", but deep implications lead us right back to the Council of Divine Worlds, expressed through the events of the starry world. One could go further and say that in the beginning there was nothing but Virgin. The Greeks called Venus "The First One", though it was almost a caricature of this divine truth. The Cosmic Virgin began, and from Her was born all that came into existence in the universe. Her final act of creation was the Christ, and the body in which He was to dwell. The Kings witnessed the Divine become human.

Now there must again be born into the future, through such a virgin birth, human moral thoughts and deeds in the realm of culture. These are all that will survive into the future, whilst all else perishes around us. The

Virgin is not an earthly being but a being that even stands upon the Moon, as the Soul of Humanity beyond all incarnation, as the aim of the dim future. In that dim future, human beings will no longer be able to incarnate physically, and yet they must retain their integrity in the realm of the deed, as they now retain their humanhood on the Earth.

This age is a milestone for acquiring the fundamental knowledge of life after death and the staff that will support us in the life beyond. We can only be born by the Virgin, and we must practice reality of spirit in our deeds, rather than any superficial values.

Tonight we have traveled a long way, from the dim ages of the past through the Imagination of the Cosmic Virgin, the Isis Sophia, until we came to the earthly reality. Now we must turn our contemplation to the Virgin, and the virgin birth of humanity, which can transform the future and make an event of Christmas both of commemoration and of experience.

