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CHRIST IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

His Appearance on the American Continent

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*Read by Sister La Preal Jones, at the Cumorah Conference, afternoon of
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Golden Text: And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. (Jesus to the Pharisees, John 10:16.)

The Pre-Mortal Spirit Life of Christ

Knowledge of the Christ in the Book of Mormon is both prophetic and historical. To appreciate the full value of its testimony prophetically, the fact of the pre-existence of the Christ—that is, his existence as a personal spirit before his birth into mortal life—should be set forth and emphasized. The beginning of Jesus Christ was not with his birth at Bethlehem, of Judea. The whole tenor of the New Testament, and certain definite utterances of the Christ himself is against that conception of origin. Jesus said to the Jews when Abraham rejoiced to see his (the Christ's) day, "and he saw it and was glad," the Jews said unto him: "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" And Christ solemnly answered:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am. (St. John 8:58.)

When a number of his disciples complained of some, to them, hard sayings, the Christ answered:

Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? (St. John 6:61, 62.)

These intimations of existence in spirit life before existence in mortal life are in strict accord with the doctrines of the Christ's noble prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane:

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. (St. John 17:5.)

Also, all these sayings are in agreement with the preface of John's gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. * * * That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. * * * And the Word was made 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.

In the light of this passage, among those who accept the scripture, none can doubt the Deityship of the Christ, nor doubt of his pre-mortal existence; nor of his exercising world creating, and world sustaining power in that existence. If they should, then the following passage would surely be convincing:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb. 1:1-3.)

The Revelation of Christ to the Brother of Jared

A very impressive revelation of the pre-mortal spirit of the Christ is given in the abridged record of the Jaredites placed in the collection of the Nephite records, by the Prophet Moroni, who revealed the existence of the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith. The Jaredites were the first colony brought from the Old World to America. They came from the Tower of Babel about the time of the confusion of languages. At the beginning of their voyage over the ocean their prophet leader was awed at the prospect of making the journey in darkness—and such was the structure of their vessels that the journey would have been made in darkness unless some special means could be improvised by which they could be lighted—and hence he took sixteen stones and prayed unto the Lord that he would touch them and make them luminous to give light in the vessel during the journey. And as God, thus implored, did so, the prophet beheld the finger of God, whereupon he pleaded for a full revelation of God and it was granted.

“Behold,” said the Spirit thus revealed, “this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my Spirit; and man have I created after the body of my Spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the Spirit, will I appear unto my people in the flesh.”

The Nephite Knowledge of Christ Through Visions and Revelations

In addition to this revelation of the Christ in the Book of Mormon, the Prophet Lehi, 600 years before the birth of Christ, beheld him and his apostles in vision (I Nephi 1:9-11); and the mission of the Messiah was also made known to this prophet. He was told of a prophet whom the Lord would raise up among the Jews “even a Messiah * * * a Savior of the world.” “And he [Lehi] also spake concerning the prophets, how great a number had testified of these things concerning the Messiah, * * * this Redeemer of the world.” (I Nephi 10:4, 5.)

To Nephi, the son of the above Lehi, was given in prophetic vision an outline of the whole life of the Christ, from virgin birth to the crucifixion; and to his resurrection and his appearance in the west-

ern world after his resurrection (I Nephi chaps. 11 and 12). The mortal life name of the Messiah was also revealed to him—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (II Nephi 25:19.) All through the Nephite record—the Book of Mormon—this knowledge of the mortal life of the Christ and of his redemptive work appears. (See especially Mosiah, chap. 3; also Mosiah 18:2; Alma 18:34; Alma 21:7-9; Helaman chap. 14.)

The birth of Christ to the Nephites—the ancient people of America—was manifested in a most singular and beautiful manner. It was signified to them in the fulfilment of one of their prophetic utterances of one of their prophets, (one Samuel) by the appearance of “great lights in heaven, insomuch that in the night before he cometh there shall be no darkness, insomuch that it shall appear unto man as if it were day. Therefore, there shall be one day and a night, and a day, as if it were one day, and there were no night, and this shall be unto you a sign; for ye shall know of the rising of the sun, and also of its setting; therefore, they shall know of a surety that there shall be two days and a night; nevertheless, the night shall not be darkened; and it shall be the night before he is born. And behold, there shall a new star arise, such an one as ye never have beheld, and this also shall be a sign unto you.” (Helaman 14:3-5.) This is the prophecy, and it was literally fulfilled. (III Nephi Chap. 1.)

Advent of the Risen Christ Among the Nephites

Finally came the fulfilment of all the prophecies concerning the appearance of the Christ to the people of the Western World. And this is the manner of it:

The signs of the Christ's crucifixion to the people of the American continent was a three hour period of terrific storm and tempest and earthquake by which whole cities were destroyed, shore lines sunken, mountains rent and upheaved, and such cataclysmic destruction and changes wrought in the earth as perhaps were never before known to man. This was followed by three days of terrible darkness, during the three days that the Christ lay in the tomb. A time during which the lamentation and cries and moaning of the people were heard through the land. Then the reproving voice of God was tremulously heard through the land, upbraiding the people for their sins and announcing the doom of a fallen people and the destruction of their cities. Then came surcease of all this, and the remnant of the people who survived this period of destruction, as they were assembled about a temple in the land by them called Bountiful, and were talking of all the mighty changes that had taken place in the land, and of this Jesus Christ of whom all these things that had taken place were signs—

It came to pass that while they were thus conversing one with another, they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice which they heard; and it

was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice, it did pierce them that did hear to the centre, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn.

And it came to pass that again they heard the voice, and they understood it not;

And again the third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven; from whence the sound came;

And behold the third time they did understand the voice which they heard and it said unto them,

Behold my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name: hear ye him.

And it came to pass as they understood, they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe, and he came down and stood in the midst of them, and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto them.

And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying;

Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world;

And behold, I am the light and the life of the world: and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning.

And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words, the whole multitude fell to the earth, for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself to them after his ascension into heaven. (III Nephi 11:3-12).

Concluding Reflections

Thus the risen Christ visited the Western world, made known himself unto them; made known to them God's plan for man's salvation; taught them the fulness of the gospel; organized his Church among them; and gave them the same moral and spiritual laws that he had given to the people of the Eastern lands—placed them in the way of salvation; and the Church, so established, reaped a rich harvest of souls through a golden age of some three hundred years; then came departure from the way of righteousness, apostasy from God, wreckage of civilization, anarchy, ultimate barbarism! They reaped the full harvest of their apostasy from God. They sowed the wind, they reaped the whirlwind. The condition in which their posterity were found by the Europeans when they discovered them late in the fourteenth century A. D.—a state of barbarism, and their melancholy history under Gentile nation domination, since that event discloses, indeed,

“How blessings vanish, when man from God has strayed.”

But by this revelation of what God did for the people of the Western world—making known the truth to them; making known the gospel to them—the covenant of everlasting life which God, who

cannot lie, promised before the world began; sending the risen Christ to them, that they might hear his voice and be brought to a knowledge of God, and led into the one fold of Christ—all this vindicates the justice and the mercy of God to the joy of all those who contemplate these high things, and become an added message concerning the hand-dealings of God toward men that is of great value—a new found "Fifth Gospel," to be joined to the four Gospels of the New Testament, that makes for the increase of the witnesses of God that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself to all nations as the Savior of the world and the Savior of men individually that dwell therein, to the praise of his Majesty, and to the glory of his name forever and forever.

The Indian Maid

An Indian maid in blankets gay,
Sat on a city street one day,
Watching with mystic, wondering eye
The stream of traffic rolling by.

Youth laughed to see her squatted down
On the busiest corner of the town;
While men and women looked around
At the gaudy figure on the ground.

And White Cloud watched 'mid dust and din,
The promenade of greed and sin,
Of folly, trade and charity,
And wealth and pleading poverty.

Watched with eyes shot deep with scorn,
Yet tranquil as the blush of morn;
Watched the world White Man had made,
The world of hurry and worry and trade.

She feels the pavements, dirty and hard,
And looks at men's faces still more hard,
And she wonders where the ponies are,
As she follows the honking motor car.

She looks for the sky, the clouds, the trees,
But smoke and stone are all she sees;
She listens in vain for the singing streams,
That weave about her pleasant dreams.

Alone she sits, this Indian maid,
In the heart of the world that man has made;
And she longs for the freedom of the hills,
The camp fire, whispering woods, and rills;
The mountains, plains, the drooping sun,
And the rest that comes when the day is done.

Lethbridge, Canada

FRANK C. STEELE