

CHRISTMAS 1980

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"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

Recently I read this illustration of what Christmas means. Just imagine that you were able to have a perfect understanding of what goes on in ant colony. You discover that the ants are very miserable, and you perceive that if you could communicate with them you would be able to help them considerably. But, although you can understand them, they cannot understand you. How, then, can you assist them? The writer suggested that what you could do would be to become an ant yourself, actually to enter the colony, to live amongst them, to gain their trust, and so to communicate the truth. This, he maintained, was what God had done at Christmas - the Creator of the world, deigned to bridge the immense gap between himself and his creatures by becoming one of them - or, as I should say, one of us.

It's a very bad illustration, isn't it? You can't really draw a comparison between God and man and man and ants. In one sense we are closer to God; in another sense we are further away.

Man, after all, is made in the image and likeness of God. He alone has this privilege - he is unique in the created order. Man and ants have no such link between them. But man is infinitely valuable to God; and man can understand the things to do with God because of this image. No wonder, then, that Christ chose to be born amongst us. Furthermore, in the illustration of the man becoming an ant, a temporary visit alone is suggested. The man ceases to be an ant when his work is done. But this is not the Christian teaching at all. You can find such ideas in other religions, where various gods supposedly visit the earth disguised as men; or even become men for a while. But the Christian belief is that the Son of God became

man. He did not cease to be the Son of God, but he was truly and entirely man. As well, he did not cease to be man; nor has he ever done so. He is true God and true man; he is the Saviour and Head of our race. When we see him we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

However we are also further removed from God than ants are from us. This may seem odd in a way, and yet it's true. For ants are not in rebellion against us; but we are in rebellion against God. We do not want him to rule over us, even though he made us and owns us. Indeed, we can correctly be said to be the enemies of God. This means that the work of Jesus in becoming man is all the more amazing. The New Testament rightly speaks to us of the love of God which impelled the Son of God to become man.

Lastly, the illustration of the ant is inadequate because it implies that men simply need better teaching. In truth, even the best teaching is of no use to the enemies of God. We do need light, but we chiefly need forgiveness and the taking away of sin. This is precisely the reason for Christ's entry into the world, for as the angel said to Joseph his earthly father, 'you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins'.

Forget illustrations about saving ants; concentrate on the truth; it is just as clear, and far more wonderful.

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