



## Passing Between the Worlds

An address for the Cosmic Mass ● 12<sup>th</sup> November 2006 ● Rev Heather

*Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?  
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!  
If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
even there thy hand shall lead me,  
and thy right hand shall hold me.  
If I say, "Let only darkness cover me,  
and the light about me be night,"  
even the darkness is not dark to thee,  
the night is bright as the day;  
for darkness is as light with thee.  
For thou didst form my inward parts,  
thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful.  
Wonderful are thy works!  
Thou knowest me right well;  
my frame was not hidden from thee,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.  
Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance;  
in thy book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me,  
when as yet there was none of them.  
How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.  
When I awake, I am still with thee.  
Psalm 139:7-18*

In this month of November, we experience the veil that separates us from the spiritual worlds as being a little more transparent. "*There are angels hovering round*" an old song says, and not only angels but also the souls of those who are now in spirit, and we were very aware of this in our service last Sunday. As well, close to the earth, many souls are gathering in readiness for their momentous journey back to the earth.

And what a momentous journey it is. Psalm 139 gives us some inkling of what is involved. In poetic words, the Psalmist tells us that the physical characteristics of the human being are formed through the activity of the spiritual worlds:

*Thou didst form my inward parts.  
Thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb,*

he says.

He also makes clear that our pathway through earth life is not accidental, Each soul enters incarnation with what we call a blueprint of their life:

*In thy book were written, every one of them,  
The days that were formed for me,  
When as yet there was none of them.*

These verses give us a sense of how the heavens enfold the newborn soul and securely hold the knowledge of its purpose in incarnating.

### **Births of Special Children**

The Bible tells the stories of the births of a number of special children, who came into the world with a specific purpose to fulfil. In the Old Testament we read of Isaac, of Samson and of Samuel. When we turn to the New Testament we find the stories of John the Baptist and of course Jesus. The coming of these children was heralded by special signs. Angelic messengers announced that barren and aged mothers, or even a young virgin, would conceive. That was a sure sign of the significance of the forthcoming birth and of the important purpose for which the soul was entering into incarnation.

In Luke's gospel we read, for instance, of the birth of John the Baptist. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah while he was serving in the temple and told him that his barren wife Elizabeth would have a son. This child was to be called John and his mission would be "to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." Zechariah was at first unable to accept the angel's words. Because of his doubting, Gabriel told him he would be unable to speak until the child was born. The story continues in Luke chapter 1:

*Now the time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son. And her neighbours and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they would have named him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said, "Not so; he shall be called John." And they said to her, "None of your kindred is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, "His name is John." And they all marvelled. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came on all their neighbours. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea. And all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.... And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel.*

What will this child be? was certainly a question for all those who knew the circumstances of John's birth. Years later, that purpose was manifested when John came out of the desert to commence his ministry as a burning and a shining light, preparing the way for the Christ.

What will this child be? The parents of Isaac, Samson and Samuel and others before John would also have asked this question as these children of promise entered their families. Their individual purposes were revealed in the unfolding of their lives.

### **All Births are Special**

What will this child be? is also the question we ask when we look at any newborn baby with its future hidden within it. I'm sure our newest grandmothers know all about this wondering.

Every soul comes into incarnation with a purpose to fulfil - a purpose which it has chosen and accepted in the heavens. In our baptismal service we say to the parents that if they have

been sensitive to the incoming soul, then the name they give the child will resonate with its purpose on this earth. John, for instance, could not simply receive the traditional family name. He had to have a name which reflected his individual purpose.

### Passing between the Worlds

From our teachings we know that the processes of birth and death are complex, as souls pass from the spiritual worlds to earth life and return again to the heavens.

Many years ago, I was introduced to a play which had a profound effect upon me. It contained notions that were quite foreign to me at that time, like reincarnation, but I was fascinated by the play and lines from it have remained in my memory for over fifty years. It is really a mystery play, dealing with the passage between the two worlds where the traffic is two-way – souls entering the spiritual worlds and souls returning to earth.

The complex processes of gradually setting aside what has covered the spirit during our earthly life and of taking up what will clothe us in incarnation have many facets to them, In this play, these processes are somewhat condensed so that they take place at the crossing-over point, the bridge between the worlds.

There are three characters in the play: an angel, an unborn spirit and one newly dead. The scene is the passage between the two worlds and is described as a rocky place where there is a patch of green.

### Seeking Incarnation

An unborn soul gropes its way into the crossing. In the dimness which contrasts so strongly with the glory of the place from which it has come, it is trying to find its way to the earth. At length, the soul realises that an angel is present and asks for help:

*I have been sent, dear sister, as you know,  
To find the world.*

The angel tests the soul's eagerness for rebirth. It asks:

*Do you **want** life? Had you not bliss enough?*

The soul then explains why it has made its choice to reincarnate:

*I am a jar that heaven has brimmed with love  
To overflowing. Since I can hold no more,  
What wonder if I seek to share my store?  
For though my memories of the earth are kind,  
There must be many things that I forget:  
And often, with a strangely-puzzled mind,  
I have heard some that had been lately there  
Say that men have not yet  
Made quite the whole world fair as heaven is fair;  
And so – perhaps too proudly – I dared hope  
Love there might still find scope.*

The angel points past the sun and the planets to the little, obscure speck in the vastness of space which is the earth, and tells the soul that there it will find "great beauty and much woe hard to endure". But the unborn soul refuses to let the thought of hardship sway it from its purpose. It says:

*I swear it shall not put out my intent  
Still to be spending love till life be spent.*

The angel warns the soul that “birth contracts the sky-large mind.” In entering incarnation, our consciousness which had roamed through the universe is contracted to a partial and narrow view.

Stanley Drake, in his book “The Path to Birth” describes this contraction of consciousness in this way:

*Think of yourself sitting in a room looking out of a window at a wide view, which takes in fields and woods, a river, houses in the middle distance and distant hills. It is evening and dusk is falling, so that the details of the houses, fields and woods slowly fade from your sight till only the dark silhouette of the hills against the horizon remains, and after a little while, even that disappears. Your consciousness has contracted from the contemplation of this wide view into the limitations of the room where you sit.  
(pp 31-2)*

### Seeking the Heavens

It is the angel’s task to assist not only the unborn but also those souls journeying to the spiritual worlds from the earth. As a newly dead woman approaches the crossing point, the angel explains that its task now is to assist her to cast aside the richly-patterned cloak that she has woven through her life and which hides her “true self as a flame in smoke.” Only then may she enter into heaven.

The unborn soul begs the angel to let her prove the strength of her purpose by taking on this task, and the angel agrees. The woman is confused as to where she is and what is happening. The unborn soul approaches her and seeks to help her understand that she has died and that what she has most valued on earth is not necessarily of value in the worlds to which she has now come.

The woman says:

*If I am dead, I have lost my wealth, my fame –  
And now, in heaven, you tell me, I shall find  
The inflexible will (that made men fear my name)  
And the great learning of my book-built mind  
Mere chaff? That leaves me just like other folk!*

She is determined that she will enter heaven and asks what she must do.

The unborn soul indicates that the first thing she must do is to fling aside the cloak that covers her.

*This? But I worked at this my whole life through,  
Making it from a thousand threads and scraps.  
The intricate design  
Marks me for what I am; and though perhaps  
The world may have a few that are as fine,  
There’s none that matches mine!*

When the unborn tells her it is merely a garment, she replies:

*No, - much more!  
It is the personality that I wore  
So long – my memories – all that I have been;  
And if I lose my cloak, what will it mean?  
To lose identity, to be but one  
Of millions, like a flame within the sun, -  
Not to be I at all.*

She tells the unborn soul how necessary it is to have such protection in order to survive on earth, and that the unborn's picture of how it will live its life is an impossible dream. Nevertheless, she begins to understand how she must now cast aside what has been so precious to her. She says:

*... in heaven, it seems,  
Our personalities –*

and the angel quickly completes the sentence:

*Are but earthly dreams.*

The moment of choice has come. She can divest herself of the cloak and go forward, or cling to it and:

*... remain within this middle state  
Till time have taught you wisdom and you tire  
Of being yourself.*

It is a great struggle, but the soul has a strong desire to move onward, and finally she flings aside the cloak and is immediately filled with joy.

*I am free!  
Now I know what joy is, and I come home  
After so long.*

The angel escorts the soul, now free of the transient trappings of her earthly life, onto the next stage of her journey.

## **The Test**

As the angel and the newly dead woman leave, the unborn soul eyes the discarded cloak. The words of the newly dead concerning the difficulties she will face in incarnating have taken root in her. She has begun to doubt her ability to survive in the world without some protection. She hesitates, and then takes up the cloak, announcing that she wants to be strong, subtle-brained, a giver of burdens rather than a bearer of them, the mightiest, not the least. "And all the world shall know that I am I," she tells herself.

What a picture! One soul, having to divest itself of all the trappings of earthly life to re-discover the purity of spirit that is its birthright, the other putting on the cloak of personality that we all wear in our life on earth, and that covers our true nature and being.

When the angel returns to the scene it sees that the cloak is missing and the unborn soul has moved on.

*She failed ... It is not there, the angel says.*

For all of us, for every soul, to retain our relationship with the heavens takes courage, since there is much in the world that dulls our consciousness of our true nature. To live out the destiny we accepted in the spiritual worlds takes courage. Whatever our particular purposes may be, there is one over-arching purpose that we are part of - that through us love may grow as a power in the world, that through us the world may become more fair.

## **Remaining in Touch with our Purpose**

In the play, the unborn quickly forgets its purpose when faced with the picture of a world where spiritual values leave a person vulnerable to others who are motivated by selfishness and greed and lust for power. But this it is not the case for all human beings. While the cloak some souls wear completely hides their true nature and they identify absolutely with that

cloak, forgetting their heavenly origin, for other souls the cloak is lighter and allows something of their real self to shine through. These souls know that it is just a cloak, not the reality of their being.

As the angel heralds the approach of yet another unborn soul, it recognises the possibility of such a life:

*But who comes now? And what shall be her fate?  
For as they leave that state,  
**Some have I seen in whom love was a flame  
So bright that men remembered Whence they came.***

John the Baptist was such a soul. He grew strong in spirit, Luke says, and the day came for his manifestation to Israel. This is not the word usually translated manifestation; it means showing forth, exhibiting. John's purpose was clear for all to see. Through him, people became aware of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. In him, a strong love burned, one that was never sentimental. His purpose in incarnating motivated all his words and actions.

When we meet people who make us aware of the spiritual realms, it is as though they have a flame burning within them, a flame which they have kept alight through whatever life has brought them. They are a testimony to the fact that, in spite of the limitations that are part of our earthly existence, we can fulfil our purpose. We do not have to be overwhelmed by the forces that work against this. We too can shine with the light of the heavens.

We are aware, at this time, of the souls gathered close to the earth waiting for birth and also of those who have newly come from the heavens. Each one has come with a purpose, and we know that life will test their commitment to that purpose. We have the opportunity and the privilege of surrounding them with our prayers that as they enter into life on earth, the knowledge of the heavens may continue to live in them and that in them love may be a flame so bright that men remember whence they came.

So shall it be.

(The play referred to in this address is "The Cloak", a one-act play by Clifford Bax, published in "Seven Famous One-Act Plays", Penguin Books, 1937)

Works from Rev Mario Schoenmaker  
Used with permission  
Antoinette Schoenmaker ©

The Centre in Melbourne  
The Independent Church of Australia ©  
email: [melbournecentre@ica.org.au](mailto:melbournecentre@ica.org.au)  
web: <http://www.ica.org.au/melbourne>