

## THE VISIT

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There is a hymn (Ride on Ride on in Majesty) that is sometimes sung which contains these lines:

*The Angel armies of the skies  
Look down with sad and wondering eyes  
To see the approaching Sacrifice.*

That, of course, is "only a hymn", but we have at least one piece of evidence from the Gospels that the angels of God are interested in human affairs. For Jesus Himself said: "I tell you there is joy among the angels in Heaven over one sinner who repents." ' If, then, there is joy, why should there not be sorrow? And why, indeed, should not those other beings which God has created, different though they may be from ourselves, watch the unfolding of the human drama with the deepest interest? These celestial beings live, as far as we know, perpetually in the Royal Presence. Apart from the fact that they are sometimes used as messengers, seen or unseen, from that world to this, we know nothing of the reasons for their existence. Nevertheless, it helps sometimes to break in imagination the fetters of earth and try to see things from the angels' point of view. We might even go so far as to say that this is part of Paul's thought when he talks of it being possible to "sit together with Christ".'

It may give us a fresh perspective on life, if for a few moments we shed the limitations of earthbound thinking and detach ourselves deliberately from modern pressures and problems. Let us pretend for a little while; the pretence may be fanciful, but it may help us to let the real truth break over us afresh.

*Once upon a time a very young angel was being shown round the splendours and glories of the universes by a senior and experienced angel. To tell the truth, the little angel was beginning to be tired and a little bored. He had been shown whirling galaxies and blazing suns, infinite distances in the deathly cold of interstellar space, and to his mind there seemed to be an awful lot of it all. Finally he was shown the galaxy of which our planetary system is but a small part. As the two of them drew near to the star which we call our sun and to its circling planets, the senior angel pointed to a small and rather insignificant sphere turning very slowly on its axis. It looked as dull as a dirty tennis-ball to the little angel, whose mind was filled with the size and glory of what he had seen.*

*"I want you to watch that one particularly," said the senior angel, pointing with his finger.*

*"Well, it looks very small and rather dirty to me," said the little angel. "What's special about that one?"*

*"That," replied his senior solemnly, "is the Visited Planet."*

*"Visited?" said the little one. "you don't mean visited by -----?"*

*"Indeed I do. That ball, which I have no doubt looks to you small and insignificant and not perhaps overclean, has been visited by our young Prince of Glory." And at these words he bowed his head reverently.*

*"But how?" queried the younger one. "Do you mean that our great and glorious Prince, with all these wonders and splendours of His Creation, and millions more that I'm sure I haven't seen yet, went down in Person to this fifth-rate little ball? Why should He do a thing like that?"*

*"It isn't for us," said his senior a little stiffly, "to question His 'why's', except that I must point out to you that He is not impressed by size and numbers, as you seem to be. But that He really went I know, and all of us in Heaven who know anything know that. As to why He became one of them - how else do you suppose could He visit them?"*

*The little angels face wrinkled in disgust.*

*"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that He stooped so low as to become one of those creeping, crawling creatures of that floating ball?"*

*"I do, and I don't think He would like you to call them 'creeping, crawling creatures' in that tone of voice. For, strange as it may seem to us, He loves them. He went down to visit them to lift them up to become like Him."*

*The little angel looked blank. Such a thought was almost beyond his comprehension.*

*"Close your eyes for a moment," said the senior angel, "and we will go back in what they call Time."*

*While the little angels eyes were closed and the two of them moved nearer to the spinning ball, it stopped its spinning, spun backwards quite fast for a while, and then slowly resumed its usual rotation.*

*"Now look!" And as the little angel did as he was told, there appeared here and there on the dull surface of the globe little flashes of light, some merely momentary and some persisting for quite a time.*

*"Well, what am I seeing now?" queried the little angel.*

*"You are watching this little world as it was some thousands of years ago," returned his companion. "Every flash and glow of light that you see is something of the Father's knowledge and wisdom breaking into the minds and hearts of people who live upon the earth. Not many people, you see, can hear His Voice or understand what He says, even though He is speaking gently and quietly to them all the time."*

*"Why are they so blind and deaf and stupid?" asked the junior angel rather crossly.*

*"It is not for us to judge them. We who live in the Splendour have no idea what it is like to live in the dark. We hear the music and the Voice like the sound of many waters every day of our lives, but to them - well, there is much darkness and much noise and much distraction upon the earth. Only a few who are quiet and humble and wise hear His Voice. But watch, for in a moment you will see something truly wonderful."*

*The Earth went on turning and circling round the sun, and then quite suddenly, in the upper half of the globe, there appeared a light, tiny but so bright in its intensity that both the angels hid their eyes.*

*"I think I can guess," said the little angel in a low voice. "That was the Visit, wasn't it?"*

*"Yes, that was the Visit. The Light Himself went down there and lived among them; but in a moment, and you will be able to tell that even with your eyes closed, the light will go out."*

*"But why? Could He not bear their darkness and stupidity? Did He have to return here?"*

*"No, it wasn't that" returned the senior angel. His voice was stern and sad. "They failed to recognise Him for Who He was - or at least only a handful knew Him. For the most part they preferred their darkness to His Light, and in the end they killed Him."*

*"The fools, the crazy fools! They don't deserve ----"*

*"Neither you nor I, nor any other angel, knows why they were so foolish and so wicked. Nor can we say what they deserve or don't deserve. But the fact remains, they killed our Prince of Glory while He was Man amongst them."*

*"And that I suppose was the end? I see the whole Earth has gone black and dark. All right, I won't judge them, but surely that is all they could expect?"*

*"Wait, we are still far from the end of the story of the Visited Planet. Watch now, but be ready to cover your eyes again."*

*In utter blackness the earth turned round three times, and then there blazed with unbearable radiance a point of light.*

*"What now?" asked the little angel, shielding his eyes.*

*"They killed Him all right, but He conquered death. The thing most of them dread and fear all their lives He broke and conquered. He rose again, and a few of them saw Him and from then on became His utterly devoted slaves."*

*"Thank God for that," said the little angel.*

*"Amen. Open your eyes now, the dazzling light has gone. The Prince has returned to His Home of Light. But watch the Earth now."*

*As they looked, in place of the dazzling light there was a bright glow which throbbed and pulsated. And then as the Earth turned many times little points of light spread out. A few flickered and died; but for the most part the lights burned steadily, and as they continued to watch, in many Parts of the globe there was a glow over many areas.*

*"You see what is happening?" asked the senior angel. "The bright glow is the company of loyal men and women He left behind, and with His help they spread the glow and now lights begin to shine all over the Earth."*

*"Yes, yes," said the little angel impatiently, "but how does it end? Will the little lights join up with each other? Will it all be light, as it is in Heaven?"*

*His senior shook his head. "We simply do not know," he replied. "It is in the Father's hands. Sometimes it is agony to watch and sometimes it is joy unspeakable. The end is not yet. But now I am sure you can see why this little ball is so important. He has visited it; He is working out His Plan upon it."*

*"Yes, I see, though I don't understand. I shall never forget that this is the Visited Planet."*

Imaginary? Fanciful? Certainly, but a good deal truer than some of our current modern thinking. For in the eyes of the Eternal World this little planet is of the highest importance simply because it is the Visited Planet. We may not realise it at all, but we are right plumb in the middle of a vast drama, a tremendous battle between light and darkness. The whole core and essence of the Christian Faith, which many of us hold so lightly, is that Light Himself visited our darkness, scaled down to fit the human scene. It is true that since the Visit we know for certain that this rolling ball is by no means our permanent home; our destiny is higher even than that of the angels. But today, and every day that we live in the here-and-now, we are part of the vast Experiment, the age-long Battle, whose stage and testing-ground is the planet which we call the Earth.