

Rev John McNeill – Autumn Message

Dear Friends,

One of George MacDonald of Huntly's memorable poems 'Baby' was first thought up (or dreamt up?) after a period of convalescent care in the Izaak Walton Hotel above Dovedale in the Peaks. It was subsequently published, along with series of sermons called 'On the Miracles of Our Lord', in the final issue of a serialised story called 'At the Back of the North Wind' (a London story) in a graphical magazine MacDonald temporarily edited called 'Good Words for the Young' in September 1870, with striking illustrations by the pre-Raphaelite artist Arthur Hughes. The singable lines which I suspect could rock a child to sleep (like 'Away in a manger') go like this,

Where did you come from, baby dear?
Out of the everywhere into here.

Where did you get your eyes so
blue?
Out of the sky as I came through.

What makes the light in them
sparkle
and spin?
Some of the starry spikes left in.

Where did you get that little tear?
I found it waiting when I got here.

What makes your forehead so
smooth
and high?
A soft hand stroked it as I went by.

What makes your cheek like a warm
white rose?
Something better than anyone
knows.

Whence that three-cornered smile of
bliss?
Three angels gave me at once a
kiss.

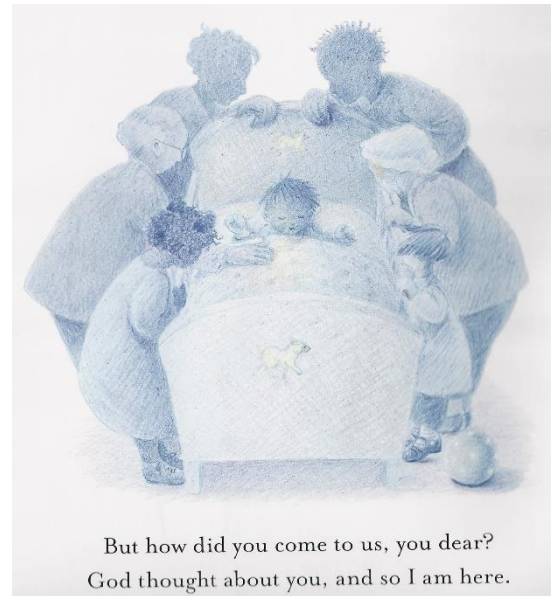
Where did you get that pearly ear?
God spoke, and it came out to hear.

Where did you get those arms and
hands?
Love made itself into hooks and
bands.

Feet, whence did you come, you
darling things?
From the same box as the cherubs'
wings.

How did they all just come to be
you?
God thought about me, and so I
grew.

But how did you come to us, you
dear?
God thought about you, and so I am
here.



But how did you come to us, you dear?
God thought about you, and so I am here.

I have had to revise my long-lasting thoughts about feet (I had always thought of them, especially my own, as quite ugly) after reading here they have celestial origins! Well, who would have guessed, certainly not me!

A constant refrain in MacDonald's spoken and unspoken (published) sermons was that "We came out of the heart of God. Even God did not make us with His hands; we came from His heart"; "There is that in every soul that is God-like; for it comes from God, and is born of God"; and in his final U.K. presentation tour sermon (1891), "We came out of His very Being; He sends us forth His own little ones." Thus, in respect to the protection of vulnerable children, he preached, "all sins against children are against the one Father of children, against the Life itself", God being both the source and end of all being.

Wesley would have concurred with this sentiment as he put it in his birthday hymn '*Away with my fears*':

From Jehovah I came,
for his glory I am,
and to him I with singing return.

Behind this earthly reality are the indivisible heavenly relations between the Father and the Son for "upon that the whole universe hangs". Like Christ, "all our springs of joy are in God" (Psalm 87:7), as Wesley put it, "and trembling to its source return,/in humble prayer and fervent praise."

With this thought in mind, MacDonald through the eyes of one of his fictional heroes *Robert Falconer* as he sat on the bank of the river Bogie deep in Strathbogie, Aberdeenshire, and reflected on his life from beginning to end, suddenly realised at the deepest part of him a coming together of all of life's experiences and on the basis of Christ's incarnation and the Spirit's coming exclaims: "As the light fills the earth, so God fills what we call life. My sorrows, O God, my hopes, my joys, the upliftings of my life are with thee, my root, my life."

The sense of a life at one before and in God is palpable here, something we may all realise in our own lives even as we move forward into the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness.

**Every blessing,
Rev John**