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JESUS, THE ETERNAL CHILD: THE VENERATION OF THE INFANT JESUS AS AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CENTRAL MYSTERY OF CHRISTIANITY

Summary: The article titled “Jesus, the Eternal Child: The Veneration of the Infant Jesus as an Introduction to the Central Mystery of Christianity” examines the theological and liturgical significance of the veneration of the Infant Jesus, focusing on its role in understanding the essence of Christian faith. It explores biblical and apocryphal narratives, liturgical celebrations, and the popular devotion associated with specific representations and places of worship of the Infant Jesus, such as *Pražské Jezulátko* and *Santo Niño de Cebú*. The study emphasises the theological depth of the devotion, presenting it as a pathway to comprehending both the Trinitarian Father-Son relationship and the divine childhood shared with every Christian.

The authors propose the thesis that the veneration of the Infant Jesus is not merely a devotional practice but a profound theological key to understanding the Incarnation and the relational essence of Christianity. The devotion, rooted in the mystery of Jesus’ eternal childhood, draws believers into a filial relationship with God the Father.

The aim of this study is to highlight the spiritual and theological richness of the veneration of the Infant Jesus, demonstrating its centrality in the Christian mystery of salvation and its implications for liturgy, theology, and popular devotion. The article bridges the dimensions of Trinitarian theology and soteriology, emphasising their cosmic and universal scope.

The research employs scientific methods of theological analysis, including textual and comparative studies of biblical, apocryphal, and liturgical sources, as well as historical and iconographic analysis of representations and traditions associated with the Infant Jesus. By integrating these approaches, the article presents a comprehensive reflection on the transformative power of the divine childhood for individuals and the Church as a whole.

Keywords: Theology of childhood, Infant Jesus devotion, Father-Son relationship, Divine childhood.

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“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3).

The veneration of the Infant Jesus may seem like a rather simplistic devotion, primarily aimed at children and often associated with Christmas nativity scenes and plays. It appears “charming” on the surface, visually appealing, and seemingly uncomplicated in terms of religious formation. However, from a theological perspective, it possesses profound depth, touching the very essence of Christianity. The childhood of Jesus – His youth – is a central mystery of Christian theology. The devotion to the Infant Jesus introduces believers to this mystery, inviting every Christian to contemplate it.

This article examines the foundational elements underpinning the veneration of the Infant Jesus, including sources such as the Bible and apocryphal writings, liturgy, and popular devotion connected to specific places of worship. These reflections form the basis for theological and dogmatic conclusions regarding both the Father-Son relationship within the Godhead and the divine childhood of every Christian in relation to God.

1. The Childhood of Jesus in the Bible and Apocryphal texts

The childhood of Jesus is described in the Bible in a concise and selective manner, with only the Gospels of Matthew and Luke recounting events from His early, pre-public life. These episodes, numbering seven, carry profound theological significance as well as historical value. Each of these events has left a wide-ranging imprint on Christian devotion and sacred art (Aasgaard, 2009).

The first episode, described by both Matthew and Luke, recounts the circumstances of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem (Mt 2:1; Lk 2:4–7). Matthew emphasizes the royal and messianic significance of the event, highlighting the fulfilment of Micah’s prophecy about the Messiah’s birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:1). Luke, on the other hand, underscores the simplicity and humility of the occasion, depicting Mary and Joseph finding no room in the inn and laying the child in a manger. The narrative of Jesus’ birth introduces the tension between His royal majesty and His humble circumstances – a theme that runs throughout the Gospels.

The second episode, found only in Luke’s Gospel, concerns the circumcision of Jesus eight days after His birth (Lk 2:21). In accordance with Mosaic Law, circumcision incorporated the child into the community of Israel, and the naming of Jesus signified obedience to the divine command given to Mary by the angel during the Annunciation (Lk 1:31). This event symbolizes Jesus’ complete fulfilment of the Law, identifying Him with the people of the old covenant while also paving the way for a new covenant.

The third episode recounts the presentation of Jesus at the Jerusalem Temple forty days after His birth (Lk 2:22–38). Mary and Joseph, following the Law, brought a purification offering of two turtle doves or young pigeons. This event gains further significance through the prophetic declarations of Simeon and Anna, who recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Simeon's words proclaim Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Lk 2:32), underscoring the universal scope of His mission.

The fourth episode details the visit of the Magi from the East, as described in Matthew's Gospel (Mt 2:1–12). Guided by a star, their arrival signifies the global significance of Jesus' birth, extending beyond the confines of Israel. The gifts they brought – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – symbolize Jesus' royal, priestly, and sacrificial roles. The presence of the Magi also introduces tension with King Herod, highlighting the contrast between God's plan of salvation and human ambition and fear.

The fifth episode, also recorded by Matthew, recounts the Holy Family's flight into Egypt (Mt 2:13–15). This event follows Herod's decree to kill all male infants in Bethlehem. Matthew interprets the journey as the fulfilment of Hosea's prophecy: "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hos 11:1). Egypt, traditionally a place of refuge, becomes in this narrative a symbol of salvation and a foreshadowing of the ultimate exodus achieved through Jesus' saving work.

The sixth episode, described by both Matthew and Luke, narrates the return of the Holy Family to Nazareth after Herod's death (Mt 2:19–23; Lk 2:39–40). Settling in Galilee, Jesus grows up in an atmosphere of simplicity and daily labour. Luke emphasizes Jesus' spiritual and intellectual development, noting that He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Lk 2:52).

The seventh episode recounts Jesus' visit to the Jerusalem Temple at the age of twelve during the Passover festival (Lk 2:41–50). Jesus stays in the Temple for three days, engaging in discussions with teachers of the Law and astonishing them with His wisdom. This is the first instance where Jesus reveals His unique relationship with the Father: "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49). This episode foreshadows Jesus' future mission and His complete dedication to the Father's will.

The accounts of Jesus' childhood in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke present seven pivotal episodes that bridge the historical context of His life with theological insights. These narratives, enriched with symbolic and supernatural elements, portray Jesus as the One who, from the very beginning, manifests a unique relationship with God the Father. Events such as His birth in Bethlehem, His presentation in the Temple, and His discussion with scholars in Jerusalem serve as signposts guiding the reader towards a deeper understanding of His mission, which transcends the boundaries of Israel and encompasses God's universal plan of salvation (Davis, 2014).

The Gospel of Matthew emphasizes the messianic significance of Jesus' childhood by frequently referencing Old Testament prophecies, thereby demonstrating the fulfilment of God's plan. Luke, on the other hand, focuses on Jesus' relationship with the Father and His spiritual and intellectual growth. Each of these episodes – from His birth to His visit to the Temple – reflects the tension between the majesty and humility of the Messiah, a theme that recurs throughout His life and mission.

Contemporary biblical exegesis highlights that these accounts carry not only historical value but also profound theological meaning. They reveal Jesus as the “Son in the Son” – the One who, from the very beginning, aligns Himself with the Father's will and brings a new quality of relationship between God and humanity. This relationship, characterized by love and trust rather than mere adherence to the Law, serves as the foundation for understanding His redemptive mission (Taylor, 2025).

The devotion to the Infant Jesus, deeply rooted in Christian tradition, draws inspiration from these narratives, emphasizing childhood as a pathway to a fuller openness to God. These episodes are not merely a backdrop to Jesus' later ministry but serve as the foundation for reflecting on the mystery of the Incarnation – the union of God and humanity, a theme that will be developed further in this article.

The Christian imagination has been deeply influenced by apocryphal writings recounting the life of the Infant Jesus. Apocryphal literature, particularly the Infancy Gospels, offers a rich collection of narratives that supplement the canonical accounts of Jesus' birth and early years. Texts such as the *Proto-evangelium of James*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Arabic Infancy Gospel* portray Jesus as a child endowed with extraordinary powers, revealing His messianic identity even at a young age (Gero, 1971). The *Arabic Infancy Gospel*, likely composed in the 6th century, describes miracles performed by Jesus during the flight into Egypt, such as healing the sick and raising the dead, highlighting His divine power from His earliest years. These accounts include remarkable events, such as animating birds made of clay, performing wonders during the flight into Egypt, and engaging in profound discussions with teachers in the Temple at the age of twelve. Although these texts were not included in the biblical canon, they significantly influenced Christian culture, particularly during the medieval period (Sękowski, 2016a; Voicu, 2012).

Apocryphal texts became a source of inspiration for literary and artistic works, especially in the context of the growing devotion to the Infant Jesus. Christian writers such as Ephrem the Syrian, author of the hymns *De nativitate*, and John of Damascus drew on both biblical and apocryphal motifs in their compositions. In the Middle Ages, stories from the Infancy Gospels were

transmitted in poetic, dramatic, and iconographic forms, enabling the faithful to experience the mystery of the Incarnation more profoundly.

The legend of the Child Jesus as a miracle worker also inspired later folk tales. These stories, often rich in fantasy, depict Jesus as a child who, despite His innocence and playful nature, reveals His divine essence by performing miracles or addressing injustices. Popular themes include Jesus restoring life, calming storms, or healing the sick, emphasizing His eternal obedience to the will of God.

The devotion to the Infant Jesus, inspired by these texts, was developed by various Christian traditions, such as the Cistercians and Franciscans. This devotion not only brought believers closer to the childhood of Jesus but also shaped a spirituality rooted in humility, trust, and surrender. Traces of this spirituality can be found in both literature and pilgrimages to sites associated with the Infant Jesus, such as the Grotto of the Nativity in Bethlehem or the relics of the manger venerated in Rome since the 7th century.

Through apocryphal texts and the literary and legendary works they inspired, the mystery of Jesus' childhood gained rich and diverse expressions that continue to inspire Christian theology, liturgy, and culture to this day.

2. Liturgical Feasts Related to the Childhood of Jesus

The childhood of Jesus, as described in the Gospels, finds profound expression in the liturgy of the Church, which celebrates key events from His early years. In the liturgical tradition, six major feasts are particularly associated with the childhood of Jesus (Youssef, 2023).

The first and most significant feast is the Nativity of Jesus Christ, celebrated on 25 December. This solemnity commemorates the Incarnation of the Son of God and His birth in Bethlehem. It highlights the mystery of God becoming man to redeem humanity, juxtaposing the majesty of Christ's kingship with His humility, symbolized by the simple setting of a manger.

The second feast is the Circumcision of Christ, observed on 1 January in Eastern traditions and some Western rites. This celebration recalls Jesus' circumcision eight days after His birth, in accordance with Mosaic Law, and the conferral of His name, "Jesus," which means "God saves". This event signifies Jesus' full obedience to the Law and His inclusion within the community of Israel, prefiguring the new covenant He would establish.

The third feast is the Most Holy Name of Jesus, celebrated on 3 January. This feast focuses on the theological significance of the name given to Jesus during His circumcision, encapsulating His mission to save the world. Instituted by the

Franciscans in the 15th century and later extended to the entire Church, the feast emphasizes the central role of Jesus' name in Christian prayer and liturgy.

The Feast of the Epiphany, also known as the Manifestation of the Lord, is celebrated on 6 January. It commemorates the revelation of Christ as the Messiah, not only to Israel but also to the Gentile nations, symbolized by the visit of the Magi. The gifts of the Magi – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – highlight Jesus' royal, priestly, and sacrificial roles. This feast reminds believers of the universal nature of salvation brought by Christ and His light illuminating all nations.

The fifth feast is the Presentation of the Lord, observed on 2 February. This feast recalls the event when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, as prescribed by Mosaic Law. During this event, the prophet Simeon recognized the Child as the Messiah, calling Him "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Lk 2:32). Symbolically closing the Christmas season, this feast portrays Jesus as the meeting point between God and humanity.

In Eastern traditions, there is also the Mid-Pentecost Feast, celebrated on the 25th day after Easter. This feast commemorates Jesus' teaching in the Temple during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. At that time, Jesus amazed His listeners with His wisdom, reinforcing His role as the Divine Teacher who reveals profound truths about God.

The celebration of these feasts throughout the liturgical year helps the faithful to reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation and the childhood of Jesus as keys to understanding not only His salvific mission but also the invitation for every Christian to enter into a filial relationship with God. Each of these feasts reminds believers that, even from His earliest years, Jesus revealed His unique relationship with the Father, introducing humanity to a new kind of bond with God – one based on love, light, and salvation.

Through the liturgical celebration of these events, the Church invites the faithful into a deeper union with Jesus, who is "the light of the world" and "God who saves", and above all, the Son of the Father, the eternal Child of His Abba.

3. Significant Places of Veneration of the Infant Jesus

The Infant Jesus holds a unique place in Christian devotion, expressed both in the liturgy and in the veneration of His images. The Church's tradition encompasses numerous places of worship associated with icons and statues depicting Jesus in His childhood, which serve as tools for evangelization and spiritual growth among the faithful. Particularly significant are the canonically crowned images, which underscore the universal and profound nature of this form of piety.

A canonical coronation is a solemn act through which the Pope or a representative appointed by him places a crown on an image as a sign of special honour and veneration. This process, preceded by thorough investigation, affirms the longstanding tradition of devotion and the graces and miracles attributed to the image. The coronation is therefore an official acknowledgment by the Church of the image's exceptional place in the spirituality of the faithful and its role in strengthening their faith.

Canonically crowned images hold greater significance than uncrowned ones, as they symbolize universality and alignment with the teachings of the Church. The coronation highlights the unity of the community of believers in their veneration of Christ and links local expressions of devotion with the spirituality of the universal Church. This act elevates the image or statue to a special status, making it a pilgrimage centre and a symbol of the unity of the faithful around the mystery of the Incarnation.

Furthermore, the coronation of images of the Infant Jesus, such as the Infant Jesus of Prague or the Santo Niño de Cebú, emphasizes the royal dignity of Christ, who, as the Son of God, reigns over the entire world. The crown, globe, and other royal insignia symbolize His dominion over the universe and highlight the theological depth of the Incarnation – God becoming man to restore humanity to the fullness of life in unity with the Father.

These images, revered as objects of special devotion, not only inspire the faithful to emulate Christ's humility and love but also demonstrate the saving power of His childhood, which unites diverse traditions and nations in a shared act of glorifying God. Through this, the act of coronation attains a supra-local and universal character, making it a distinctive element of Christian piety.

Undoubtedly, the development of the veneration of the Infant Jesus has also been influenced by the tradition of nativity scenes, whose origins can be traced to St. Francis of Assisi. These nativity scenes are commonly constructed in Catholic parishes during the Christmas season, serving as a visual representation of the mystery of the Incarnation and fostering deeper spiritual reflection among the faithful.

3.1. Canonically Crowned Images of the Infant Jesus

In the Catholic Church, canonically crowned images hold a special place as objects of profound veneration and pilgrimage. Among the most renowned is the Infant Jesus of Prague (*Pražské Jezulátko*), located in the Church of Our Lady Victorious in the Czech Republic. This small statue, depicting Jesus in regal attire with a globe in His hand, symbolizes His dominion over the world. The Child Jesus is the Lord-King of the Universe. The statue was canonically

crowned by the Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Ernst Adalbert von Harrach, in 1655, emphasizing its significance in Czech and European Christian devotion (La Rocca, 2007).

In Italy, two images of the Infant Jesus are venerated with particular devotion: the *Bambino Gesù* of Arenzano and the *Santo Bambino* of Aracoeli in Rome. The statue from Arenzano was canonically crowned on 29 June, 1924, by Pope Pius XI, underscoring its unique role in Catholic spirituality. It represents childlike innocence and trust in God, and its sanctuary has become a pilgrimage centre in Liguria. The *Santo Bambino* of Aracoeli, carved from olive wood originating in the Garden of Gethsemane, was canonically crowned in 1897 by Pope Leo XIII. For centuries, it has attracted the faithful seeking spiritual support and healing, making it one of the most famous images of the Infant Jesus in Rome.

In the Philippines, the focal point of devotion to the Infant Jesus is the *Santo Niño de Cebú*, regarded as the oldest Christian image in the country. This statue was gifted to Queen Humamay by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521 as part of his missionary efforts. The statue was canonically crowned on 28 April, 1965, by Pope Paul VI, highlighting its extraordinary significance in Filipino spirituality and its role as the protector of the nation (Klejnowski-Różycki, 2023).

The devotion to *Santo Niño de Cebú* is centred on trust in Divine Providence, which the faithful see embodied in the figure of the Infant Jesus dressed in royal garments, holding a sceptre and globe as symbols of His sovereignty over the world. The Basilica of *Santo Niño* in Cebu City serves as a major pilgrimage site, where believers gather to pray for blessings, express gratitude, and participate in processions. The statue also holds a prominent place in baptismal traditions.

One of the most important events associated with the *Santo Niño* is the annual *Sinulog* festival, celebrated on the third Sunday of January. This festival commemorates the acceptance of Christianity by the local population and Magellan's gift to Queen Humamay. It begins with a solemn Mass, followed by a vibrant procession and a dance that symbolizes the ebb and flow of water, expressing gratitude and trust in the Infant Jesus. Participants, dressed in colourful costumes, chant "Pit Señor!" as they seek blessings and protection.

The *Santo Niño de Cebú* and the *Sinulog* festival are not only expressions of faith but also integral to the cultural heritage of the Philippines, blending religious traditions with national identity.

Each of these images is more than a symbol of local piety; they also serve as reminders of the universal message of the Incarnation, wherein God draws near to humanity, fully sharing in human life and experience.

3.2. Other Representations and Places of Devotion

In addition to canonically crowned statues of the Infant Jesus, many other representations play a significant role in the spiritual lives of the faithful. The *Santo Niño de Atocha*, popular in Spain and Latin America, depicts Jesus as a child pilgrim, carrying a staff and a basket of bread, symbolizing care for the poor and needy. Similarly, the *Divino Niño de Florencia* in Colombia and the *Santo Niño Doctor de los Enfermos* in Mexico attract pilgrims seeking physical and spiritual healing (Cruz, 1995).

In Europe, notable representations include the *Infant Jesus of Mechelen* in Belgium, venerated since the Middle Ages. Depictions of Jesus with Mary and Joseph, such as scenes of the Holy Family, were especially prominent in Renaissance art, particularly in the works of Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, emphasizing the unity and sanctity of family life.

In Eastern Christian iconography, a special place is held by depictions of the Infant Jesus in the arms of Mary, known as the *Theotokos Eleusa* (Klejnowski-Różycki, 2021). These icons express the depth of the mother-child relationship and the mystery of the Incarnation.

Places of devotion to the Infant Jesus and their associated representations reveal how deeply the mystery of Jesus' childhood is rooted in the liturgical and devotional life of Christianity. Both crowned statues and other depictions of the Infant Jesus remind the faithful of God's closeness and love, fully manifested in the Incarnation. Their universal appeal unites people from different cultures and traditions, inviting all to contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation and a renewed relationship with God.

4. The Theology of Childhood

The theology of the childhood of Jesus Christ encompasses at least two essential dimensions: one intra-trinitarian, traditionally referred to as *theology*, and the other soteriological, addressing the Incarnation and the salvation of humanity – and even the Cosmos – traditionally referred to as *economy*.

4.1. Jesus as the Eternal Child

Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, exists eternally in a filial relationship with the Father, which is the essence of His divine nature within the Holy Trinity. This relationship, characterized by unconditional love, total trust, and mutual self-giving, is not merely a theological abstraction but a reality revealed

throughout the history of salvation. Jesus, as the Eternal Child, receives His existence from the Father and fully offers Himself to Him, embodying a perfect love that is the source of creation and redemption. As the Eternal Child, the Only-Begotten Son of the Father, Jesus defines the Fatherhood of God – God cannot be the Father without the Son. In this light, the childhood of Christ forms the foundation of God’s plan for humanity and all creation: “For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible” (Col 1:16).

The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem visibly and tangibly manifests this mystery to humanity. The humble setting of the manger highlights the Son’s complete dependence on the Father, while simultaneously signalling His royal dignity. Jesus, the Child-King and Lord of the universe, does not express His authority through earthly power but through love and humility. In this paradox – majesty and meekness – lies the profound depth of Christ’s childhood, which reveals the true nature of His mission: not ruling over humanity but drawing humanity into a relationship with the Father (Clément, 1999, p. 55–69).

The childhood of Jesus Christ also holds a broader, cosmic dimension. Through the Incarnation, the Son of God becomes man, uniting Himself not only with every individual but also with all of creation. Christ’s presence renews the order of creation, giving it new meaning and direction. The divine childhood, an eternal model of love and unity within the Trinity, extends to encompass the entire cosmos, which is incorporated into the story of salvation. Jesus – the Eternal Child – demonstrates that every created being has a place in God’s plan, grounded in a relationship of love and freedom (Balthasar, 1983; 1996).

For Christians, the childhood of Christ serves as both a model and an invitation. When Jesus says, “Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3). He does not call for immaturity or dependency but for a life marked by love, trust, and freedom. Divine childhood signifies entering into a relationship where God is not only the Creator but also the Father, who embraces His children and makes them heirs of His kingdom. To be a child of God is to accept a life that does not rely on merits or adherence to the law but on a loving bond with God (Sękowski, 2016b).

By emulating the childhood of Jesus, Christians discover their capacity for living in a relationship that transcends human limitations. Divine childhood opens a perspective of freedom that is not chaos but participation in the love shared between the Father and the Son. In this relationship, believers become heirs to God’s promises, living in complete unity with Him and discovering their true calling in the world.

The childhood of Jesus Christ is not only a doctrinal truth of faith but also a way of life for every Christian. Through the relationship the Son shares with the Father, humanity finds its identity as children of God, called to participate in

His love and freedom. This mystery encompasses both individual lives and the entirety of creation, which is transformed by the presence of Jesus – the Eternal Child – who is both the Saviour of the world and the King of the universe.

4.2. The Christian as a Child of God

The Polish edition of the Roman Missal (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, 1986, p. 368*–370*) stands as a remarkable testament to theological and liturgical reflection on the mystery of divine childhood, a central element of Christian doctrine. The introductions to the *Our Father* prayer in this edition highlight various aspects of this mystery according to liturgical seasons, forming a deeply rooted catechesis based on the mysteries of the Incarnation, Salvation, and the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

Examples of these introductions, such as those used during Advent – “God has loved us so much that He sent His Son as our Saviour; therefore, we dare to say:... Our Father...” – underscore the gift of the Incarnation as the foundation of divine childhood. Jesus, the Son of God, became man so that every believer could call God their Father. This profound truth, further developed during the Christmas season with introductions like “The Son of God became man so that we might become children of God...,” reveals the essence of Christian faith: through Christ, humanity becomes heirs to God’s promises.

Easter tide introductions such as “We are called children of God, and that is what we are...” or “We have received the Holy Spirit, who has made us children of God...” emphasize that the Paschal mystery of Christ not only opens the gates of eternal life but also establishes believers in a new relationship with God as Father. This relationship is not merely a spiritual state but a new way of life, grounded in freedom, love, and profound trust in God.

In special liturgical moments such as baptism, the Missal introduces prayers that recall the beginnings of divine childhood in the life of the believer: “The newly baptized children will call God their Father...” Baptism becomes the gateway to participation in this relationship, where the individual not only discovers their identity as a child of God but also begins to live within it.

In contrast to the Polish edition of the Roman Missal, the American version (Paul VI et al., 2011, p. 663) lacks the rich theological depth of these introductions. It omits the emphasis on the relationship of divine childhood as the centre of Christian life, which may impact the pastoral communication of this fundamental truth of faith. The textual poverty of this edition limits the exploration of the spiritual dimension of divine childhood, which finds a broader theological context in the Polish liturgical tradition.

These introductions collectively reveal an underappreciated, yet central truth of faith in pastoral teaching: the mystery of divine childhood. Through

His childhood, Jesus Christ invites every Christian into a relationship with the Father that transcends human limitations, encompassing all of reality – even the cosmos itself.

The words of Jesus, “Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3), remind us that divine childhood is not a state of immaturity or passive dependence but rather the fullness of a relationship rooted in love, freedom, and trust in God as Father. In this perspective, childhood becomes the key to understanding the central mystery of Christianity – the Incarnation, in which the Son of God becomes man so that every human being might become a child of God.

Being a child of God means entering into a relationship with the Father that transcends human limitations and gives new meaning to the existence of humanity and all creation. In this relationship, a person becomes an heir to God’s promises, called to live in unity with God and participate in His love, which encompasses all that exists. Christ, as the Eternal Child, reveals that relationality, love, and openness are not only paths to salvation but also the foundation of a renewed vision of reality, in which every person, united with God, finds their true calling (Clément, 1999, p. 87–116).

The childhood of Jesus, which introduces Christians into the fullness of relationship with the Father, is not confined to human experience but has a cosmic dimension. By uniting with humanity and creation, Christ transforms all reality, making it a space for the revelation of God’s love and grace. In this sense, divine childhood encompasses not only the believer’s personal relationship with God but also the relationship of all creation with its Creator.

Christian childhood does not exclude maturity or responsibility but rather perfects them, leading individuals to live in complete freedom, love, and relationality. This childhood shapes a Christian vision of the world as a place where everything is oriented towards God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Within this dynamic of relationship, Christians discover that their calling is not only to participate in God’s plan of salvation but also to bear witness to His love before the entire world (Francis, 2019, n. 30–34).

Divine childhood thus becomes the foundation of a new quality of Christian life, where the person, as a child of God, finds their place in a renewed cosmos filled with love and harmony. It is not merely a theological concept but an invitation to live in unity with God, making the believer a participant in God’s kingdom here and now, and for eternity. The mystery of the childhood of Jesus – the Child who is the Lord of the universe – reveals that only by embracing this relationship can a person fully understand who they are and where they are destined to go.

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Jezus wiecznym Dzieckiem. Kult Dzieciątka Jezus wprowadzeniem do centralnego misterium chrześcijaństwa

Streszczenie: W artykule pt. „Jezus wiecznym Dzieckiem. Kult Dzieciątka Jezus wprowadzeniem do centralnego misterium chrześcijaństwa” zostało zbadane teologiczne znaczenie dzieciństwa Jezusa Chrystusa oraz rozwój kultu Dzieciątka Jezus w kontekście biblijnym, liturgicznym, ikonograficznym i apokryficznym. Przeanalizowano kluczowe wydarzenia z dzieciństwa Jezusa, opisane w Ewangeliach kanonicznych i apokryfach, a także omówiono liturgiczne uroczystości związane z tym okresem życia Chrystusa oraz szczególne miejsca kultu, takie jak *Pražské Jezulátko* i *Santo Niño de Cebú*. W artykule ukazano również, jak te treści kształtują duchowość chrześcijańską i relacyjność wiernych wobec Boga.

Autorzy stawiają tezę, że dziecięctwo Jezusa stanowi klucz do zrozumienia centralnego misterium chrześcijaństwa – Wcielenia, w którym odwieczny Syn Boży staje się człowiekiem, aby każdy chrześcijanin mógł odnaleźć swoje miejsce jako dziecko Boże.

Celem opracowania jest ukazanie dziecięctwa Jezusa jako wzoru relacyjności w Trójcy Świętej oraz podstawy teologicznej i duchowej dla zrozumienia chrześcijańskiego dziecięctwa Bożego. Dodatkowo, celem jest przedstawienie, jak różnorodne tradycje kulturowe i liturgiczne rozwijają teologię dzieciństwa Jezusa, pogłębiając refleksję nad Wcieleniem i odkupieniem.

W opracowaniu zostały użyte metody naukowe, takie jak analiza teologiczna, badania porównawcze źródeł biblijnych i apokryficznych, studia liturgiczne oraz analiza ikonograficzna. Dzięki interdyscyplinarnemu podejściu artykuł łączy refleksję teologiczną z historycznym i kulturowym ujęciem kultu Dzieciątka Jezus.

Słowa kluczowe: teologia dziecięctwa, kult Dzieciątka Jezus, relacja Ojciec-Syn, dziecięctwo Boże.