

weary men and women toiling through life toward the grave, who need cheering words and helpful ministries. The incense is gathering to scatter about their coffins, but why should it not be scattered in their paths to-day? The kind words are lying in men's hearts and trembling on their tongues, which will be spoken by and by, when these weary ones are sleeping. But why should they not be spoken now, when they need them so much, and when their accents would be so pleasing and grateful?

It costs but little to give men a great deal of joy and help. One brought a bunch of flowers to my table, and for a whole week filled my room with fragrance. One wrote me a cheering letter, breathing a spirit of gratitude and love. It came when I was weary and depressed, and was like the meal prepared by the angel for the old prophet. I went on in its blessed strength for many days.—One met me on the street and spoke an encouraging word and grasped me warmly by the hand, and for hours I felt that warm grasp and heard that word echoing through my brain.

A little child may brighten scores of lives every day. There is not one of us who may not gladden and strengthen many a heart between every rising and setting sun. Why should we not live to bless the living, to cheer the disheartened, to sweeten cups that are bitter, to hold up hands that hang down, to comfort those that mourn, to bear joy into joyless homes? Kind words will not spoil a man. If a sermon helps you, it will do the preacher no harm to tell him so. If an editor writes an article that does you good, he can write a still better one if you send him a word of thanks. If a book blesses you, do you not owe it to the author to write a grateful acknowledgment? If you know a weary or neglected one, would it not be such work as angels do, would it not be Christ-like work, to seek every opportunity to brighten and bless that life? Do not wait till the eyes are closed, the ears deaf, and heart stilled. Do it now. *Post mortem* kindnesses do not cheer. Flowers on the coffin cast no fragrance backward over the weary days. — J. D. MILLER in *Canada Christian Advocate*.

INTERNATIONAL S. S. LESSON,

Sunday, Jan. 23.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS.— Luke 2:8-20.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.—Luke 2:14.

INTRODUCTION AND CONNECTION.

Our last lesson closed with the prophetic words of Zacharias, uttered on the occasion of the naming of his son; this brings us to the birth of Him whose coming and kingdom were the burden of that prophecy. In conformity with an Imperial order that a general tax should be levied throughout "all the world," that is, the Roman Empire, the inhabitants of Judea went each to his own city, "to be taxed," or, more probably, to be "enrolled," or "registered," in order to facilitate the taxing which was about to be made. Among those who went up from Nazareth of Galilee to Bethlehem, the city of David, were Joseph and Mary. Their home was Nazareth, but our Lord was to be born in Bethlehem, according to the sure word of prophecy (Micah 5:2); therefore at the appointed time and in the appointed place he was born; and, probably by the mother's own hand, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger—the place from which the cattle fed. Thus, "because there was no room for them in the inn," the Saviour of men, the Creator of the world, found no resting-place in the homes of those He came to save, but only in such a place as might be sought by the poorest and most abject of mankind. (2 Cor. 8:9.)

LESSON NOTES.

(8) *In the same country*—in the mountain region of Judea and in the neighborhood of Bethlehem. *Shepherds abiding in the field*—remaining day and night, proba-

bly in tents, for the purpose of watching over their flocks. It was usual in that country for shepherds to follow their flocks, and remain with them constantly during the warm season, or from April till the autumn set in. This makes it almost certain that our Lord's birth was not in December, but later in the year. *Keeping watch*, or keeping "the night watches" over their flocks.

(9) *The angel (messenger) of the Lord came upon them*. These shepherds were, undoubtedly, devout men; for we find that such gracious revelations as this were given to no others. Even the "wise men from the East" seem to have been of that class. *The glory of the Lord shone*, &c. It is reasonable to suppose that it was in the midst of devout and serious conversation—possibly of worship—that this burst of glory fell upon the shepherds, and yet, when it came, they were sore afraid. We naturally fear to come in contact with the unseen world. It is mysterious, and mystery itself is a source of fear.

(10) *The angel said.....fear not*. There was no just cause for fear. It is true, God had come very near them, but it was in mercy and not in wrath. *Behold—look, consider—I bring you good tidings* (news, information of something not previously known) *of great joy*. They were more than good tidings in the ordinary sense; they were good tidings of GREAT JOY. For them the world had been waiting for four thousand years, and at last they had come; and they were to be of great joy to all people, not to themselves, the Jews, alone, but to all people, Gentiles and Jews alike.

(11) *Unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord*. He is born unto you, that is, of your own nation, of the Jews. In this sense he was peculiarly their own. "He came to His own (possession, rights) 'and his own' (nation) 'received Him not.'" *In the city of David* (1 Sam. 16:1, 10-13). *A Saviour*. It is likely those Jewish shepherds understood this word chiefly, if not exclusively, in a national sense. *Which is Christ* (the anointed One) *the Lord*, or *Jehovah*.

(12) *A sign unto you*. The sign appears to have consisted in the two facts of this Saviour, Christ, being an infant in swaddling clothes, and His lying in a manger; both circumstances being in striking contrast to the dignity and glory the angels' words had implied.

(13, 14) *And suddenly there was with the angel, &c.* They were not seen to come, but suddenly they were there. *A multitude*. Probably the multitude remained invisible for a time, lest a full view of their presence and glory should be too much for the shepherds to endure. *Praising God*. The angels felt a lively interest in the work of redemption, although they do not seem to have understood it except in its gradual unfolding (1 Pet. 1:12); yet they understood enough to elicit their most rapturous praises. *Glory to God in the highest*. The highest glory of God of which we can form a conception flows from the plan, the work, and the results of redemption. *On earth peace*, not of nations, of communities, or even of families as such (Matt. 10:34-36), but the individual, conscious peace of regenerated souls (John 16:33; Rom. 5:1).

(15, 16) *Let us go, &c.* The shepherds hastened, not to certify themselves of the truth of what they had heard, but to see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. This simplicity and confidence on the part of the shepherds reveal their character as men of simple and unquestioning faith, they did not hesitate, and query, and doubt, but went straight, with haste, to see for themselves, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. Doubtless these men were guided by the Spirit, or they could not easily have found the child they sought, in the intricacies of the city and the darkness of the night. It was not the "wise men from the east," nor yet the great and noble of Judea, who first looked upon Christ in human flesh; but humble, unlettered shepherds, whose only learning was drawn from God's word, and whose only riches was their faith. Such was God's plan—for the reason that it is so (see 1 Cor. 1:26-29).

(17) *Made known abroad*—probably that very night, in the city of Bethlehem. These shepherds, then, were Christ's first witnesses, publishers of the gospel of peace while yet the world's Redeemer was only a babe in the manger of Bethlehem.

(18) *All they that heard it wondered*—(Lk. 9:9).

(19) *But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart*—that is, hid them away—not as material for conversation, but to be pondered—weighed, considered—in her thoughts. She knew no human mother had ever before been blessed with such a Son; but even to her He was a mystery. *How He was to be a Saviour, how He was to restore the ancient honors to the house of David, and be exalted to "reign over the house of Jacob forever,"* were as great mysteries to her as to any one. But that mystery was too precious, too sacred for wordy talk; so she kept the various hints she gained of the exalted glory that awaited her babe, and turned them over in her mind in blessed ignorance of the gulf of immeasurable anguish that lay between that helpless infancy and the glory of His promised exaltation.

(20) *Returned—to their flocks and their task—glorifying and praising God for the things which they had heard and seen as it was told unto them*—that is, for having been permitted to see and hear for themselves the full confirmation of the angelic vision.

QUESTION SUMMARY.

(FOR THE CHILDREN.)

8). What country is meant? What are shepherds? What were those shepherds doing? 9). Who came suddenly where they were? How could they see him, if it was night? How did they feel? Why were they sore afraid? 10). What did the angel say to them? Why not fear? For whom were those to be good tidings of great joy? Then they were for you, were they not? Why should they make all people so glad? Because they tell of One who came to seek and save those who are lost. Are you lost? Then did Jesus come to save you? Yes; if you believe and trust in Him? 11). Where was Jesus born? Who was David? Was Jesus born in the same city that David was? Can you tell how many years there were between David and Jesus? What is the meaning of Christ? Why is He called Lord? Because He was truly God in the form of a little child? 12). What was the sign by which they were to know He was Christ? Were those circumstances what they would naturally look for? Why? Whom did they suddenly see with the angel? What were they doing? 14). What did they say? How had God shown good-will to men? Why did God send Jesus into the world? Repeat John 3:16. 15). What did the shepherds do as soon as the angels were gone? 16). Why did they make haste? Did they find it just as the angels had said? 17). What did they do just at once? 18). Why did the people wonder? Did Mary say much about what was said of her child? What is meant by *pondered*? What were the shepherds doing as they returned to their flocks? Should we praise and bless God for sending us Jesus? Why?

THE FIRST DOLLAR.

The following story is true, and must please as well as counsel our young readers.

Many years ago, a gentleman from the town of Methuen, Mass., while on a visit to a prominent merchant in Boston, was asked by the merchant if he knew a boy in Methuen that he could recommend to work in his store. At first he could think of none, he knew that only a faithful, honest boy would suit the thrifty merchant; at last, however, he called to mind a boy of excellent character in his neighborhood, but he feared he would hardly do, as his parents were very poor, and he had no education or other advantages to fit him for such a position.

But the description of the boy's habits pleased the merchant so much that he handed the gentleman a dollar with which to pay the boy's fare to Boston by stage, and request him to send the lad to the city, and if on a personal interview, he should not prove satisfactory, he would pay his fare back home again.

The gentleman, as requested, visited the boy's parents and, stating the merchant's proposal, advised them to send the boy for trial. He then gave him the dollar which was to pay his fare to Boston, and departed.

Under similar circumstances ninety-nine out of every hundred boys would have said, "Now for a good time! I never saw a city, and never rode in a stage. Oh! there will be so much to see, and it will be such a nice ride, and here is money sent to pay my fare." Not so with this boy.

Putting the money carefully in his pocket, he said to himself, "This is the first dollar I ever had. How I wish I could save it! It is only twenty-five miles to Boston. I can walk there in a day. I'll do it and save my dollar."

His mother patched up his clothes as well as she could, and early next morning the little fellow parted with his father and mother at the door of their humble home, and set out on his long tramp to the great city, which he reached tired and dusty, a little before sunset. He found the merchant, who sternly asked:

"Where have you been all day? The stage came in hours ago."

The boy thought he had displeased the merchant at the outset, and with downcast eyes and trembling tone, he answered:

"I did not come by the stage, sir."

"Did not come on the stage? What do you mean? Didn't I send you money to pay your fare?"

The boy thought it was all up with him, sure. Through the gathering tears he managed to reply, "I am very sorry, sir. I did not mean to offend you. I thought I would walk and save the dollar. I never had one before."

Placing his hand gently upon the boy's head, the merchant replied, "My little man, you're exactly right. Come home with me and get some supper." Then, turning to a bystander, he remarked, "I would not take a thousand dollars for this boy to-day."

The boy has grown up to manhood and since become widely known in business circles. He is now the owner of an extensive mill at Methuen, the Pemberton mills at Lawrence, a banking house in Boston, and one of the finest farms in Massachusetts.

The master of a grammar school was censuring his pupil for the dulness of his comprehension, and said "Is not the price of a penny loaf always a penny?" when the boy innocently answered, "No, sir; the baker sells them two for three-half-pence, when they are stale."

Said a young man to a professor of chemistry, at the same time holding up a fungus-looking plant, "Is there anything by which I can tell whether this is a mushroom, or a toadstool?" "Yes," answered the professor, "eat it; if it's a mushroom, you'll live; if it's a toadstool you'll die."

The following curious directions to worshippers in the Church of St. Michael's and All Angels at Chiswick, require some explanation.—During prayers, all are requested to kneel. The kneelers should be hung on the hooks provided for the purpose by those who have used them.

The *Calcutta Star of the East* says that there are one hundred and fifty students in the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ramapatam, who are in training for the ministry. Some of the students are married, and their wives are obliged to spend a part of their time in study, and some of them keep up with their husbands in the full course.

—Prof. Robertson Smith, in reply to an invitation, numerously signed, asking him to deliver a series of lectures this winter in Glasgow, on "Biblical Criticism," says he feels that he ought not decline without "cogent reasons." As he understands there are members of the Free Church in Glasgow who believe such "cogent reasons" exist, and as he desires to do nothing liable to misconception, he proposes to delay his answer until he can communicate with those who object.