

SUNDAY  
SCHOOL

## The Quiet Hour

YOUNG  
PEOPLE

## THE SHEPHERDS FIND JESUS.\*

(By Rev. J. W. Macmillan, B.A., Winnipeg.)

Joseph also went up, v. 4. Life is full of surprises. Things do not happen at the time nor in the way we had expected. Prediction is always a miracle, and always astonishing. Who could have guessed that the census regulations of the Roman empire should be the means of fulfilling the prophecy that Jesus should be born in Bethlehem? And just as little can you tell what temptation or triumph, sorrow or enchantment, humiliation or promotion may be just breaking upon your life. Any morning you may go out to meet the greatest opportunity or the deadliest peril or steady the purpose like the habit of dependence upon God and obedience to His will. Then, come what may, it will find us ready.

No room . . . in the inn, v. 7. Plenty of places are like that, filled up beforehand, so that there is no space left for the Saviour. Somehow, when His meek knock is heard, it seems easy to discover that every place is taken. One wonders if the landlord would have sent a Roman centurion, or one of Herod's courtiers, to the stable. Business gets filled up with money-making, the home with ordinary domestic duties, the school with studies, the playground with sports, so that religion is refused admission. When wealth and rank and cleverness and laughter apply, they are treated more considerately. Some people seem to think that a Sunday rain is wetter than any other!

Shepherds . . . keeping watch, v. 8. Visions may come to people in sleep, but never to sleepy people. These shepherds were watching their flocks, not dozing around their camp fires. Esau lost his birthright because he was too dull to appreciate it. The man with the muckrake sees not the crown above his head. Religion deserves intelligent and wide-awake attention. The Bible requires study, as well as arithmetic. The careless traveller may get some touch of the atmosphere of a strange country, but if one would really know lands and people, one must keep eyes open and mind alert. The way of the righteous is the way of truth, and, as an old proverb says, "Truth lies at the bottom of a well."

Be not afraid (Rev. Ver.), v. 10. Fear is a foolish thing, because it is so disastrous. A coward is easily chased, and a discouraged person soon grows weary. When Joshua was detailed to conquer Canaan he was bidden to "be strong and of a good courage." There is nothing like a stout heart for fighting, and life is all a battle, anyhow. Pluck often wins a game of baseball or lacrosse, when nothing else will. And in the keener and deadlier contests to which sin challenges us, there is need to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

Good tidings, v. 10. The gospel is not good advice, but good news. Good advice is for those who can apply it. It is of no use to those who are so weak or so shackled that they are powerless. What use to tell a prisoner in a stone cell that if he had a sledge hammer and a dynamite cartridge he might escape? For he neither has, nor can get, these things. Rather unlock the door of his cell and hand him a royal pardon. Jesus came, not to help those who can help themselves, but to help those who cannot as p themselves.

A Saviour, v. 11. There is no joy for a sufferer like the joy of relief. The in-

valid's dearest hopes are set on a cure. He may find some pleasure in the visits of friends, and in the books and fruit and flowers they bring him. But the fun he supremely wants to see is the doctor who can make him well. And similarly, this lost world needs, above all things, a Saviour. Its learning, its arts, its civilization may do their utmost; they yet leave it vexed and defiled with sin. There is no other joy possible to it so rapturous as salvation.

Let us . . . go, v. 15. When we hear of any great sight, our first impulse is to go and see it. When the military procession files along the streets, when the fire bells clamor, when a famous man visits our town, wherever there is a marvel or a tumult, both old and young want to start at once for the scene of interest. Let us go, then, and see this Child of whom the angels have been singing! We shall find Him where He is worshipped, and we shall find Him, as He taught, wherever there is any one of His human brethren in need.

The shepherds returned, v. 20. This is a parable for life. We need the heavenly vision to hearten and inspire. But our days are not all to be spent in the enjoyment of visions. To prove their value we must go down into the dusty streets of life's common way and take up the daily drudgery with the greater cheerfulness and diligence. If we linger in selfish rapture, we shall lose the very Presence that gives us joy. But let us walk in the lowly path of obedience, and it will be ever at our side.

## SPARE MOMENTS.

No life is so busy but it has its spare moments. Amid all the rush and complexity of our modern life, there are moments when the strain is relaxed and a brief lull comes for the jaded nerves and the overtaxed brain. Such moments are like oases in the desert, and if properly used may be as refreshing to the soul as the palm-shaded fountain to the weary body.

One moment for a thought of God! How full of refreshing and reinvigorating possibilities is such a thought. We are sustained by his might, shielded by his wing, and working for the accomplishment of his purpose. Such a thought will steady the soul, and if the need of our purpose has trembled from the polestar of his grace, the moment's pause will rectify the compass.

One moment for prayer! What a source of pleasure and health is in a breath of fresh air. The lungs rejoice in it and a thrill of health passes through the whole body. The very brain becomes clearer. Prayer is to the soul what fresh air is to the body. It thrills with life as the clear, bracing air of communion passes through it. Its age brightens and its life expands. All untold possibilities lie in one moment of renewed consecration. "Heaven comes down our souls to greet and glory crowns the mercy seat."

One moment for a thought of home! We know many men in business to whom each spare moment comes for a benediction, for it is filled with a thought of home, wife, and little one. The man seems to leave his immediate surrounding and, annihilating space, he is at home, surrounded by its love and gladness. One moment may be filled with the thought of the soul's home. If we will have it so, one spare moment may lift us to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, and set us in the presence of Jesus, the lover of our souls. All heaven is around us, and in celestial company the heart warms with a gladness not known before.

## CHEERFUL PREACHING.

The Congregationalist, Boston.

"I wish I could hear a cheerful sermon again." The words were spoken by a good woman as she came out of church one Sunday morning after an earnest and affecting appeal in which the preacher took it for granted that the age was evil and most Christians sadly neglectful of their opportunities. He urged them to more faithful and more earnest living as if there was little faith or zeal in their hearts and lives on which to build. And the net result in this good woman's case was not incitement but discouragement. She did not resent the urgency of the appeal, but she felt the chill of dejection in the preacher's thought.

Is it impossible, then, to preach the deep, heart-searching, challenging truths of God's kingdom so that they shall lay hold upon the consciences of those who hear, and yet to make a cheerful sermon—a sermon such as would have sent this good woman on her homeward way with a sense of confidence refreshed and heart uplifted? We do not think so; nor does the history of the pulpit show that the great challenging and impelling sermons have been otherwise than cheerful and inspiring. The great preachers have been the confident preachers. Through their lips, the power and purpose, as well as the majesty of God have spoken. There has been a life-inspiring quality about their words, which has given their hearers a sense of a larger world and a clearer air. They offered men something above and beyond themselves—as the Moravians opened a new world to Wesley and Wesley to the miners who had been left to live without hope or morals by the Christians of their time.

This cheerful and inspiring atmosphere of the sermon must, of course, reflect the preacher's vital joy and confidence in God. "In the hour when Luther's wife lovingly reproached her husband with holding the belief that God was dead, he could scarcely have gone into the pulpit with a cheerful sermon. But who would not have liked to hear him preach after he came from that great meeting of the princes of the empire, where he gave his testimony to the truth which he believed. True it is that we all have our moments of discouragement, but it is also true that we must correct and change our feeling in such hours by a recurrence to the sources of our joy. As the ship before her voyage must have her compasses corrected, so the preacher, before he enters the pulpit where he is to pilot the thoughts of the congregation, must correct his feeling by adjustment to the eternal, cheerful verities of faith and promise.

So, too, the Christian attainments of the individuals who make up the congregation are entitled to the preacher's recognition and respect. The worshipping flock of God are entitled to encouragement. Are there some hypocrites and backsliders and some whose love has grown cold? Very well, then, speak to their hearts and consciences; but they are not the church. Do not give the faithful an idea that you consider their endeavors a failure and their lives a sham. To send a single soul away with lessened courage, to deprive the humblest child of the rest and consolation of his Father's house, to decrease by words the joy of the Lord among believers is to defeat the very end of worship of which the sermon is but a part.

The heart of the matter will be found at last in the quality of the preacher's faith which shapes and colors his thought of the life progress of the world and of the opportunity of overcoming which God

\*S.S. Lesson, January 7, 1906.—Luke 2: 1-20. Commit to memory vs. 13, 14. Read Matthew 1: 1-25; Luke 1: 1-80. Golden Text—For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord—Luke 2: 11.