

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR JANUARY.

- JAN. 1—CIRCUMCISION of our Lord.
“ 5—Friday—Fast.
“ 6—EPIPHANY.
“ 7—1st Sunday after the Epiphany.
“ 12—Friday—Fast.
“ 14—2nd Sunday after Epiphany.
“ 19—Friday—Fast.
“ 21—SEPTUAGESIMA. (*Notice of Conversion of St. Paul*).
“ 25—Conversion of St. Paul.
“ 26—Friday—Fast.
“ 28—SEXAGESIMA. (*Notice of Purification*)

THE EPIPHANY—JANUARY SIXTH.

THE EPIPHANY story of the visit of the Wise Men has a charm which is quite its own.

It is a strictly human story. There is no archangel messenger, no seraphic song, no angelic chorus. The Wise Men came to Bethlehem because they saw Christ's Star in the East; and they came to worship Him.

They were men venerable and venerated above all the men of the East—royal priests of their own nation.

Their confident enquiry for an unknown King of the Jews; their audience with Herod, and the deference he showed them; their unheralded arrival in Bethlehem, and their prostrations before a “Carpenter's son”; their costly gifts, and their abrupt departure; all these things make up a human lyric fit to stand next to the Divine epic of the birth of Christ.

Kings of Arabia and Saba bringing gifts were the vanguard of that great army in which all Gentile peoples are numbered. They were the pioneers of that mighty emigration from the power of sin and Satan unto God, which has never since ceased to flow toward Christ, and shall go on increasingly to the end.

It is small wonder that the Fathers and Doctors of the Church have always delighted to find mystical meanings in the gifts of the Wise Men, as an example to all Gentiles, how they may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

It is not that God needeth anything. The God of the whole earth is not enriched by men's oblations, nor impoverished by men's impiety. But as there is no more distinctive badge of sovereignty than the levying of tribute, even so hath the Lord also ordained that He will be served by the tithes and offerings of His willing people. It is a Divine condescension and humility which should move all hearts, that God should so commit His cause on earth to the honor and chivalry of men.

Since Cain and Abel brought of the first-fruits of their toil an offering unto the Lord, the worship of God has always been sustained by gifts. If the Hebrew Church seems an exception, with its compulsory tithes, it must be remembered that the Hebrew Church was an exception every way. It was a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ, and the very fact that under its system of pupillage tribute was exacted of the Children of the Kingdom is an

assurance of God's complacency toward them who, being not under the Law, do by their new nature the things contained in the Law.

Moreover, the compulsory tithes of the Mosaic code were not held to supplant the more ancient system of free-will offerings, but rather encouraged it. The Law only taxed the principal fruits of corn and wine and oil. Yet our Lord did not condemn the scrupulosity of the Pharisees, who tithed mint, anise, and cummin. On the contrary, He said expressly: “These things ought ye to have done,” without neglecting the weightier matters of “judgment, mercy, and truth.”

And, as the Wise Men teach wisdom by the fact of their gifts, so they do also by the manner of their gifts. For, though they were great and honorable in their own land—kings and priests, noble guests, received with honor in Jerusalem, they sounded no trumpet before them except to enquire, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” They made their adoration, and presented their gifts, and departed into their own country another way. If they had done anything else they would have betrayed the Child Christ to his enemies. Herod counted so surely on their bringing him word that he let them go unwatched of his spies, and left himself with no other clue to the whereabouts of the King of the Jews than that which his own scribes had given him: “In Bethlehem of Judaea.” And, indeed,” says Jeremy Taylor, “that man hath a strange covetousness or folly, that is not content with this reward, that he hath pleased God. For he that does good works for praise or secular ends sells an inestimable jewel for a trifle; and that which would purchase heaven for him, he parts with for the breath of the people, which is at best but air, and that not often wholesome.”

The Lord is not a beggar at our gates, but a King, to whom tribute is due.

The gifts of the Wise Men were of such intrinsic value that they furnished the Holy Family for their flight into Egypt. The gold was good anywhere. The frankincense and myrrh were current in Egypt, since there passed by Midianites with their camels, bearing spicery, and balm, and myrrh, going to carry it down to that land of many shrines and many plagues.

The Magi did not serve the Lord their God of that which cost them nothing. They worshipped Him with their best. They gave gold, which is the representative of all values. They gave frankincense, which is the symbol of all worship. They gave myrrh, which is the symbol of all benevolence. They presented unto Him gifts, because God wills to be served with gifts; secret gifts, for God loves not ostentation; valuable gifts, which hasten God's kingdom; self-denying gifts, the fruit of their own labors; perfect gifts—without reservation; well-ordered gifts—first, the Gold of their substance; then, the Frankincense of their piety; and, last, the Myrrh of their charity, without which, whosoever liveth is counted dead before God.—*Selected.*

NOTES ON THE EPISTLES.

BY THE REV. H. W. LITTLE, RECTOR HOLY TRINITY, SUSSEX, N.B.

(Author of “Arrows for the King's Archers,” etc.)

“Mind not high things.” Rom. xii, 16.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

I.—Spiritual gifts were very widely distributed among the early Christians at Rome and elsewhere. At this distance of time we cannot say precisely what these gifts were, or what were the graces or offices distinguished in this Epistle from each other, but generally they seem to arrange themselves under the two

heads of ministering instruction to the ignorant and distributing relief to the poor. These “gifts” were standing evidence of the Divine origin of the religion taught by the Apostles. The “gifts” were different and wonderful in their power, and those possessing them were liable to be puffed up, and to be led to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. To correct this tendency the Apostle shows that the various gifts and blessings bestowed upon Christians are for the common good, not for individual self-advancement, or vain-glorious exhibition. Christians are members one of another, and each have an equal claim upon the “gifts” which are possessed by the “one body,” as its common inheritance. “Individualism” discouraged. The Churchman should say in all things, “We,” not “I.” The loss of this great idea of a common life, and common right, in the Church, has led to class feeling and isolation of interests amongst the people. The individual exists for the community, not the community for the individual. This is the teaching of the Catholic Church. On the other hand the trend of popular religious sectarians is in the direction of a purely selfish individualism, in social and religious matters, the un-Christian spirit of which this Epistle, and I Cor. xii, exposes and condemns.

II.—Diligence in the discharge of duty, each in his own office, is commended. Let each person do his appointed task, as God hath ordained and decreed. Every calling may be made a ministry if pursued in a spirit of sanctified cheerfulness, and as a sphere of service ordained of God. All work, however humble, is part of the Divine scheme for restoring humanity. “Simplicity” should accompany this service, a pure motive, a single eye to serve and please God. Mixed motives, double purposes, an eye to the world as well as to God, these will spoil and mar the most devoted service if not avoided and prayed against day by day. To “simplicity” and “diligence” in the use of God's gifts is to be added “cheerfulness”—readiness, joyousness. With special reference to Preaching and Expounding of Holy Scripture, i.e., “prophecy,” as here meant, the analogy or Proportion of the Faith is to be observed. Scripture is not to be expounded according to man's private opinion, but with reference to the general symmetry of the whole body of Christian doctrine, and according to the relation of each doctrine preached to the entire body of doctrine.

III.—The rules of conduct here given serve a double purpose. They are both axioms and precepts. “Love” is to be without pretence—hating the evil, cleaving to the good. “In your haste be not idle” (v. ii.) “In your business be not lazy.” We all know something of busy sloth, of that unprofitable vanity in a restless hurrying to and fro, which is not work. There may be idleness in haste. Let your haste and bustle be really such as brings you and others nearer to the goal of eternal life. Mary was really more busy in her quietness than Martha with all her movement and demonstration of service.

“Serving the Lord”—The key-thought of the Christian Life in all degrees and conditions of service. Looking towards the mark, the commendation of Him who is “Head over all things in His Church.” Patience under persecution; perseverance and insistence in prayer, a generous hospitality, a sharing of church burdens—“the necessity of the saints,” i.e., the baptised. Sympathy—Unity—Humility—Special mistrust of our own opinion—all these are features of the Christian portrait which the Apostle draws in this Epistle with a master hand.

IV.—i. Socialism, as taught by the Apostle and upheld by the Christian Church in theory