

were the first to tell the world about Jesus. If, as is supposed, they were the keepers of the temple flocks, the news would be proclaimed very soon in the temple itself, and there would be great excitement in Jerusalem. (Acts 4: 20; 1 John 1: 1, 2).

18. *Wondered*—They did not doubt the truth of it, but they did not hasten to Bethlehem to worship him. Many will hear the Christmas chimes next Wednesday and join in all the rejoicings of the day, but will not let Jesus into their hearts because they love other things more than they love him.

19. *But Mary kept all these things*—Such a note as this could only have been made by Mary herself. *She* knew her child was, in some mysterious sense, the Son of God. A glorious being, not of earth, had told her that her Boy would be the Saviour of Israel. The visit of the rough shepherds to her in the crowded caravanserai, and their strange but quiet and circumstantial story of the angels' visit to them, was only another link in the wondrous chain of events which was day by day influencing her young pure life. She could not as yet grasp it all; perhaps she never did in its mighty glorious fulness; but, as at the first, when Gabriel, the angel, spoke to

her, so at each new phase of her life, she bowed herself in quiet trustful faith, and waited and thought, writing down, we dare to believe, the record of all that was passing, and this record, we think, she shewed to Luke or Paul. (Spence). *Pondered*—lit., "casting together," i. e., comparing and considering; like our "casting in mind." Compare Gen. 37: 11. (Farrar).

20. *The shepherds returned*—a beautiful example of their pious fidelity in their vocation. Their extraordinary experience does not withdraw them from their daily and ordinary duties, but enables them to perform them with increased gladness of heart. They probably fell asleep, before the beginning of our Lord's public ministry, with the recollection of this night in their hearts, and a frame of mind like that of the aged Simeon. Their names, unknown on earth, are written in heaven, and their experience is the best example of the first beatitude. (Matt. 5: 3). (Van Oosterzee). They did not know nearly so much about Jesus as we do. How much greater reason we have to glorify and praise God, and how great our guilt if we do not shew our gratitude and love by accepting Christ as our Saviour.

PRACTICAL LESSONS.

1. *Christ was born a Saviour for all men.* The glad tidings brought to the shepherds were intended for "all the people." The Jews thought that the Messiah was to be exclusively their own. He was to be a national deliverer, who would raise the children of Abraham to a level of peerage among the nations. But had they understood the teaching of the prophets they would have known that he was to be a light, to lighten the gentiles as well as the glory of his people Israel. To him the heathen were to be given for a heritage and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession.

2. *We should spread the good news of his birth.* It was permitted to angels to announce the Saviour's birth, but men alone are honored to be the bearers of the glad news throughout the world. Unless told by human lips the story of Jesus' birth the heathen must forever remain in ignorance of the "goodwill" proclaimed by the angels. We cannot all go ourselves to tell them about Christ and his salvation, but we can by our gifts support others who will do so, and by our prayers encourage them and call down a blessing upon their labors. There are many children of the poor in our own land who would realize better that the birth of Jesus was a joyful event if we helped to make their Christmas happy with our gifts.

3. *He came to give peace on earth and manifest God's love to man.* The effect of the gospel is to bring peace to the heart and life of all who love Jesus. It teaches the true

peace principles of forgiveness, forbearance and brotherhood. Ultimately it will bring war to an end. The peace which is the source of all peace it also brings, viz., peace between God and sinners by the atonement Christ made on Calvary. Through Christ alone is God's love for mankind proclaimed. He it is who tells us, not only by his lips, but by his life, and still more by his death, that "God so loved the world" as to give his only begotten Son for its redemption. His mission was pre-eminently one of peace and love, for he came, not to condemn the world, but to save it.

4. *He became a child in order that he might die for sinners.* That the Son of God should become man was indeed a most wonderful act of condescension. It was an event so marvellous that we at once ask ourselves "Why did he do so? What sufficient reason can we give for his self-abasement?" As a mere illustration of divine sympathy with man it was out of all proportion to the truth taught. Men did not need such a costly object lesson in order to comprehend it. Only when we understand that God became man in order to represent man before divine justice, and bear the load of guilt for a sinful world, do we see why it was necessary that Deity should clothe itself with humanity and God's Son become man's brother.

5. *Only through faith in him can we be saved.* As soon as the shepherds knew that the Saviour was born they set out to seek him. That they believed in him is plain, for they