

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON.

LESSON I.—JANUARY 4, 1880.

THE INFANT MESSIAH.—Matt. 2: 1-12. TIME.—Jesus Christ was born in the year of the world 4000; four years before the date from which we count the year of the Lord, which is A. M. (Anno Mundi; year of the world) 4004. So that Christ was born B. C. 4, or 1884 (not 1880) years ago.

THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN.—The date of this lesson was several weeks after the birth of Christ, or about midwinter B. C. 4.

PLACE.—Bethlehem of Judaea, a village five or six miles south of Jerusalem, and east of the road to Hebron. (See below.)

RULES.—Augustus Cæsar emperor of Rome; Herod, called the Great (the first of the seven Herods named in the New Testament), king of Judaea (34th year), under Augustus.

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY.—The Roman Empire the universal empire of the known world. "The empire now at peace with all the world, the Temple of Janus shut."—Hayden's Diet. Dates. Great Britain had been conquered by the Romans about fifty years before Christ; but "for nearly a hundred years after that date, the history of Britain is almost a blank."—Encyc. Brit. Diodorus Siculus, the Greek historian, and Strabo, the Greek geographer, were living at this time. Greece, though subject to Rome, "continued to be the school of letters and art. She was crowded with temples and statues. Her schools of philosophy and rhetoric flourished."—American Encyclopedia.

CHRONOLOGY.—Herod died just before the passover, A. U. C. 750. (A. U. C.: Anno Urbe Condita, the year of the founding of the city of Rome. The probable date of our Lord's birth is a few months before Herod's death, either toward the end of A. U. C. 749, or just at the beginning of 750, i. e., in B. C. 5 or B. C. 4 of the vulgar era, which erroneously places our Lord's birth A. U. C. 754. Wiesler decides the month to be December, January or February, with a probability in favor of the last; but this latest date allows only two months from our Lord's birth to Herod's death, which is barely sufficient for the intervening events. The earlier dates, January B. C. 4, or December B. C. 5, seem on the whole more probable.—Canon Cook. As much confusion exists in the minds of some, in consequence of the reckoning from two eras, we insert a list of corresponding years. It should be carefully noted that the numbers are ordinal, standing for "first," "second," &c.

Table with 2 columns: CHRIST BORN, OUR DATE. Year of the world, 4000; Year of Rome, 749; Year of Christ, 5. OUR DATE: 4005, 4006; 754, 755; 1, 2 A.D.

EXPLANATORY.

1. When Jesus was born. The parents of Jesus were living in Nazareth, and came to Bethlehem to be enrolled for taxation, as here was their family home. The account of the circumstances of the birth of Jesus is given in Matt. 1: 18-25, and Luke 2: 1-20. In Bethlehem of Judaea. A village five or six miles south of Jerusalem. Its name, Beth lehem (house of bread), was due to the fertility of the adjacent cornfields. The modern village contains about five hundred houses, a famous convent, within which is a large rock-hewn cave, which the monks point out as the manger where Christ was born. The days of Herod the king. Near the close of the reign of Herod, who died in the year of Rome 750, in March, just before the Passover.—Ellcott. This was the founder of the Herodian family; he was called Herod the Great. He was the son of a Roman senator, a governor of Judaea, an Idumean. Though alien by race, the Herods were Jews in faith, and from the time of their conversion remained constant to their new religion.—Smith's Bible Dictionary. He possessed energy of character, but an unscrupulous ambition, and was notoriously cruel. He was made governor of Judaea at the early age of fifteen, and distinguished himself by his campaign against the brigands who infested the mountains. Wise men from the East. The Greek word is magi, sages. Originally a class of priests among the Persians and Medes, who formed the king's privy council, and cultivated astrology, medicine, and occult natural science. They are frequently referred to by ancient authors. Afterward the term was applied to all Eastern philosophers. From the East. This is a different term, and used in a different sense from the word "east" in verse 2. Here it should be translated "the Far East," and in verse 2, the star "in the east." "The Far East" refers to Persia, where the wise men belonged, and "the East" is Babylonia or Chaldaea; or the direction in which they saw the star.—From Uphan's Wise Men of the East. To Jerusalem. They would naturally come to Jerusalem, as the capital of Judaea, and the central place of Jewish religion.

2. Where is he? The Magi express here the feeling which the Roman historians, Tacitus and Suetonius, tell us sixty or seventy years later had been for a long time very widely diffused. Everywhere throughout the East men were looking for the advent of a great king who was to rise from among the Jews. It had taken root in the minds of men, heathens as well as Jews, and would have led them to welcome Jesus as the Christ, had he come in accordance with their expectations.—Ellcott. Virgil, who had lived a little before this, owns that a child from heaven was looked for, who should restore the golden age and take away sin. But these Magi were moved, doubtless, by a divine impulse.—Jacobus. We have seen in the east. Seen by them in Eastern countries, or seen in the eastern sky. The first was certainly the fact, but the second is the probable meaning here.—Popular Commentary. His star in the east. We learn from astronomical calculations that a remarkable conjunction of the planets of our system took place a short time before the birth of our Lord. In the year of Rome 747 (about two years before the received date of Christ's birth, the exact

date of which is, however, uncertain) on the 29th of May there was a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation Pisces in the part of the heavens noted in astrological science as that in which the signs denoted the greatest and most noble events. On the 29th of September, in the same year, another conjunction of the planets took place, and on the 5th of December a third. Supposing the Magi to have seen the first of these conjunctions, they saw it actually in the east; for on the 29th of May it would rise three and a half hours before sunrise. If they then took their journey, and arrived at Jerusalem in a little more than five months, and if they performed the route from Jerusalem to Bethlehem in the evening, as is implied, the December conjunction would be before them in the direction of Bethlehem, one and a half hours east of the meridian at sunset. These circumstances would seem to form a remarkable coincidence with the history in our text. They are in no way inconsistent with the word "star," understood in its wider astrological meaning. Nor is this explanation of the star directing them to Bethlehem at all repugnant to the plain words of vers. 9, 10, importing its motion from south-east to south-west,—the direction of Bethlehem.—Alford. To worship him. To honor and adore him as the Messiah, the King, and the Saviour.

3. Herod the king... was troubled. Joseph represents these troubles as raised by the Pharisees who prophesied a revolution. Herod as a foreigner and usurper feared one who was born King of the Jews. The people, worn away by seditions and slaughters, feared fresh tumults and wars. There may be also a trace of the popular notion that the times of the Messiah would be ushered in by great tribulations.—Alford. And all Jerusalem with him. The excitement naturally spread throughout the city.—Ellcott. The progress of religion, the coming of Christ, is always a source of trouble to the wicked.

4. The chief priests and scribes. The chief priests were probably the heads of the twenty-four courses into which the sons of Aaron were divided (2 Chron. 23: 8. Luke 1: 5), but the term may have included those who had, though only for a time, held the office of high priest. The "scribes" were the interpreters of the law, casuists, and collectors of the traditions of the elders, for the most part Pharisees. The meeting thus convened was not necessarily a formal meeting of the Sanhedrim, or great council, and may have been only as a committee of notables called together for a special purpose. With a characteristic subtlety, as if trying to gauge the strength of their Messianic hopes, Herod asks where the Christ, the expected Messiah, the "anointed" of the Lord (Ps. 2: 2; 45: 7; 89: 20) was to be born.—Ellcott. Scribes (writers). The official copyists of the Scriptures, who naturally became its expounders.—Schaff. Where Christ should be born. Where the Scriptures taught that he should be born.

5. And they said; i. e., the chief priests, &c. The answer seems to have been given without any hesitation, as a matter perfectly well understood, and settled by divine authority.—Alexander. Bethlehem of Judaea. See verse 1. Thus it is written. What is quoted in the next verse. By the prophet. Micah, in chap. 5: 2.

6. And thou. Freely quoted from the Greek version (the Septuagint) then in common use. The Hebrew is literally: "But thou Bethlehem Ephrath, too small to be among the thousands of Judah [i. e., the towns where the heads of thousands resided, the chief towns of the subdivisions of the tribes]; but of thee shall come forth unto me one who is to be ruler in Israel." The variations are undoubtedly intentional and explanatory. It is not evident whether the passage was quoted by the scribes, or inserted as an explanation by Matthew. Instead of Ephrath, we find "the land of Judah" (as a better-known name of the place); and instead of "too small to be among," we have "not the least," which is a sort of question introducing the insignificance of the place, and implying its moral greatness as the birthplace of the Messiah.—Popular Commentary. Princes is, according to a usual figure, put for the towns where the princes, or heads of thousands, lived. For gives the reason for the greatness in spite of the insignificance. Shall come a governor. This includes both ruling and teaching; the meaning is, shall be a careful and affectionate ruler.—Schaff.

7. Privily, secretly, diligently, with care (ascertained exactly). Herod intended fraudulent or treacherous concealment. His motive was to avoid popular excitement, which might prevent his unscrupulous plot. Vs. 13-16.—Binney's People's Commentary. What time the star appeared. He asked this in order that he might know how old the child was, and under what age he must slay all the children, so as to include in this young king of the Jews. Bethlehem was but a short six miles from Jerusalem. Diligently, i. e., as before, exactly. So far as the mission became known, it would impress the people with the belief that he, too, shared their hopes and was ready to pay his homage to the new-born King.—Ellcott. It was a diplomatic lie, based on the truth.—Schaff.

8. Lo, the star. It is not likely that they were led by the star to Jerusalem. They went to the holy city because they were warned of God so to do, or because they knew that this was the place to inquire, as the seat of the Jewish religion. And behold, the token, whatever it was, that first appeared to them, now unexpectedly re-appeared, and moved perceptibly on, till it took a marked station over the very house. It must have been near the earth to indicate the dwelling.—Jacobus. Saw in the east. Not in the eastern part of the heavens, but which they had seen when they were in the East.

9. Stood over where the young child was. This may mean, over that part of Bethlehem where the young child was, which they might have obtained by inquiry; or it

may mean over the whole town of Bethlehem. If it is to be understood as standing over the house, and thus indicating to the Magi the position of the object of their search, the whole incident must be regarded as miraculous. But this is not necessarily implied.—Alford.

10. They rejoiced. This was, most of all, a revelation to their souls, and it filled them with joy. The same mark that had been given them at first was again vouchsafed, and they were doubly assured. "Then shall ye know if ye follow on to know the Lord."—Jacobus.

11. When they were come. They found (1) a child (2) a saviour, (3) a king. House. The throng brought together by the requirement of the census had dispersed, and Joseph and Mary were no longer in the stable (Luke 2: 7). With Mary. Possibly Joseph was not present at the time; possibly he is not mentioned because the Evangelist recognized the father of the child.—Abbot. And worshipped him. Three acts are here,—falling down, worshiping and offering,—the first, the worship of the body; the second, of the soul; the third, of our goods. With these three, our bodies, our souls, our goods we are to worship him. Without them all, worship is but a lame and maimed sacrifice, neither fit for wise men to give nor Christ to receive.—Dr. Mark Frank, in Christ in Literature. Opened their treasures. The word points to caskets, or chests, which they had brought with them.—Ellcott. These were the rarest products of the East, an offering such as any monarch might have had presented to him by the ambassadors from any foreign prince.—Dr. Hanna. Gifts. Setting forth greater treasures than they knew, they offered, to the Son of man and Son of God, myrrh, hinting at the resurrection of the dead, the royal gold; and frankincense that breathes prayer,—myrrh to a mortal, gold to a king, frankincense to God.—Uphan's Wise Men. Frankincense. A gum resin, obtained by an incision made in the trunk of a tree of the genus Boswellia. It occurs in commerce in semi-opaque round or oblong tears. It is of a yellow or yellowish-brown hue,—the best being most colorless. Valued for its sweet odor when burnt; used for incense. It was, in olden times, accounted one of the most valuable products of the East.—Encyclopedia Britannica. Myrrh, an aromatic gum highly prized by the ancients, and used in incense and perfumes. It distils from incisions from a small thorny tree, which grows chiefly in Arabia.—Abbot on Matthew.

12. Being warned of God. It seems probable, that, after their homage on the evening of their arrival, they retired, possibly to the "inn" of Bethlehem, and were then, in their sleep, warned not to return to Jerusalem the following day, but to make their way to the fords of Jordan, and so to escape from the tyrant's jealous pursuit. So ends all that we know of the visit of the Magi. These "wise men" have been regarded as the first-fruits of the outlying heathen world, the earnest of the future ingathering.—Ellcott's N. T. Com.

INDIAN SUMMER.

Just after the death of the flowers, And before they are buried in snow, There comes a festival season, When nature is all aglow— Aglow with a mystical splendor That the brightness of Spring— Aglow with a beauty more tender Than aught which fair Summer could bring.

Some spirit akin to the rainbow, Then borrows its magical dyes, And mantles the far-spreading landscape In hues that bewilder the eyes. The Sun from his cloud-shadow'd chamber Smiles soft on a vision so gay, And dreams that his favorite children The flowers have not yet passed away.

These days so serene and so charming, Awaken a dreamy delight— A tremulous, tearful enjoyment Like soft strains of music at night; We know they are fading fleeting, But quickly, too quickly they'll end, And watch them with yearning affection, As at parting we watch a dear friend.

STORY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

SOMETHING FOR CHRISTMAS.

"Go away I go away!" piped a thin, childish voice. There was no reason why Fritz, the little terror, should snap and dance around Jim, he was neither trespassing, nor thieving, nor begging, but had come to take a bundle of clothes home for his mother, and receive, in return, her honest earnings from the lady who lived in the grand house. The servant at the kitchen-door ordered him to wait in the sitting-room until her mistress could attend to him. "Everything was strange-

ly pleasant for Jim—it was very warm and well lighted, there were pictures in gilt frames on the wall, and books, with bright and pretty bindings, in the book-case, and a comfortable crimson carpet, that made a pleasant glow over it all. Through the open door, in an adjoining room, Jim saw three or four young girls standing around a piano, and while one played the other sang a Christmas carol. To Jim's untutored ears it sounded like heavenly music, and he stood as if entranced, while their voices rang through the rooms:

"We three kings of Orient are; Bearing gifts, we traverse afar, Field and fountain, Moor and mountain, Following yonder star. O star of wonder, star of night, Star with royal beauty bright, Westward leading, Still proceeding, Guide us to the perfect light." "Frankincense to offer have I; Incense owns a Deity nigh; Prayer and praising, All men raising, Worship him, God on high." "Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume Breathes a life of gathering gloom— Sorrowing, sighing, Bleeding, dying, Sealed in the stone-cold tomb." "Glorious now behold him arise, Kind and God, and Sacrifice; Heaven singing Hallelujah! Joyous, the earth replies."

The light the crimson glow, had seemed like fairy land to Jim. Now the music reminded him of heaven, and the sound of the voices were ringing in his ears as the servant paid him the money, and in sharp, short words, told him that he might go, as she opened the door for him.

The chill air woke him, as if from a dream, and, when the servant slammed the door upon him, Jim stumbled over the gravelled walk—the pretty picture vanished away—only an echo of the Christmas carol lingered with him:

"Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume breathes a life of gathering gloom."

The short December day was fast closing, but Jim sat down on the raised turf, under a tree, to count his money, for an over a certain sum his mother had promised should be his; he might spend it as he pleased for Christmas money.

"One, two, three, four, five cents," he said aloud, counting the pennies over two or three times very carefully. "Five cents for Jessie and me; I wish it was six."

He held the money tight in his hand after putting his mother, in his pocket, and revolving in his mind how his own might be spent to the best advantage. If it had only been six cents—one more penny would have made him rich enough to buy one of those little dolls Jessie had been gazing at with wistful, longing eyes, as she stood looking in the store window, decked gayly for the holidays with all sorts of attractive toys.

Five cents would not buy the doll, Jim, with a sigh of disappointment, was getting up from his seat under the tree, when Fritz, seeing him, began barking furiously, and finding Jim a little boy, seized his clothes with his teeth, and made sad holes in his well-worn but well-preserved pantaloons.

"Go away!" cried Jim faintly, very much startled and frightened; "go away!" Fritz paid no attention to him, but ran toward the house wagging his tail, when the same sharp-voiced servant called him off, and said to Jim: "Run home now, little boy; you have been hanging about here long enough."

Jim ran away very fast after Fritz released him, and soon the great gate closed with a bang upon him; He heard other voices calling him; but this made him run faster down the road, and he did not slacken his steps until he reached the already brilliantly lighted shop. Then he thought of Jessie and the doll, and, opening his numb fingers, found the money had slipped from his hand, and in his hurry and fright, he had not noticed that it was gone. Poor Jim! it was too late that night to find them. How bright and gay everything in the window seemed! There were the dolls—those he could have bought—and he looked sorrowfully and wistfully at the things his five cents would have bought for Jessie. He could see the busy shopkeeper all smiles and bows, for it was only once a year that his shop was crowded. An organ grinder was playing before the door. Many a penny was dropped in his box by good-natured persons. The music brought back the pretty parlor and the Christmas carol to Jim's mind. As he blew on his cold fingers, and turned away, the same strain haunted him:

"Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume breathes a life of gathering gloom."

"It's no use, mother, crying over spilt milk," he said, as he related his loss, forcing back his own tears when he saw Jessie's listening and disappointed expression. "It seems to me we have all the bitter. Some folks have fine warm houses, fine furniture, and lots of money, and others half starve and half freeze in cold garrets." "The Babe of Bethlehem had no fine, warm house, fine furniture, and money, Jim," said his mother reproachfully. "Let us try to think of Him as our

Christ; the Saviour of the poor as well as the rich."

"Yes, but it must be very easy for rich folks to sing hallelujah," said Jim, as he went to bed, resolving to start out in the morning in search of his lost pennies, so that Jessie might not lose her Christmas.

It was no use—some person had been before him—the pennies were not found, Jim dared not go in the gate, fearing Fritz might attack him again. Jessie must go without her Christmas, after all, this year. He loitered about the toy-shop and streets, and picked up a few sprigs of evergreen to carry home with him—and then, with a heavy heart, that grew heavier, he went up the dark, narrow, steep stairs that led to their room. He felt like turning back and running away, when he heard Jessie coming out quickly to meet him. She opened the door and called:

"O Jim where have you been all this time?"

"I haven't found them Jess," said Jim sadly.

"Come in, and we will tell you what has happened since you went out," exclaimed his mother. Only think, Jim, after you went out, a young lady came to see the little boy who lost his pennies yesterday; she called to you she said, "I thought they were sending me off," said Jim.

"They found the pennies under the tree where you were sitting. And never say the poor are always forgotten Jim," she sent us a Christmas dinner," said Jessie, peeping in a basket.

"And left me this to help us through the winter," continued his mother, almost crying as she showed Jim a bank-note. "It is a great help. God must have put it in her heart to think of the widow and fatherless. Isn't this a fine Christmas?"

"I could sing hallelujah easy enough to day," said Jim.

SCRIPTURAL ENIGMA.

No. 5—48 LETTERS.

- 24, 34, 14, a priest. 3, 12, 16, 2, 11, one of the Jewish months. 38, 10, 17, 23, 5, 19, a woman of high rank, who, out of self respect refused to obey her husband. 8, 31, 28, 26, that which hath torment. 25, 21, 43, 35, 18, 29, 42, 27, 32, 4, 15, 37, what the Pharisees loved to display. 1, 7, 25, 21, 37, 36, the father of one of the men sent to spy out the land of Canaan. 13, 39, 32, 22, 33, 40, one of an embassy sent from the king of Assyria to the king of Judah. 4, 9, 39, 21, a city which the king of Assyria boasted of having been destroyed by his fathers. The whole is a saying of a very wise man. L. M. M.

ANSWERS RECEIVED. From E. A. M. Victoria Crossing, P. E. I., to N. 2, and from Windsor, to No. 3. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging."

MR. JAY GOULD'S PERSONAL HABITS.

Mr. Gould's millions are now close to those of Vanderbilt. He is a man of finer texture than the old Commodore's son. He doesn't run to fine houses, costly stables, and blooded steeds. At night, when he dismisses his operators from the telegraph office in his own house in Fifth avenue, and enters upon a little book the telegraphic records of the receipts of the various railroads which he owns, he does not go to a club to carouse, to a banquet, to steam up with champagne, or to a theatre; he retires to the recesses of a peaceful library, and with his young sons about him, reads the Latin classics, the world forgetting but not by the world forgotten—a large majority. The next morning early he has the telegraph doing lightning service, and he is sending an electric shock through Wall street as soon as the bulls and the bears come into the field for pasture. Mr. Gould is a liberal man, although when he makes a banquet he does not have the information written in manifold and sent to all the newspapers. The first news New York had of a gift to the Memphis sufferers of \$5000 came from Memphis, as did the news of the second gift of \$5000.

Mr. Gould, being a small man of little physical power, is naturally not disposed to put himself recklessly in the way of the horns of the bulls and the claws of the bears. There are some men in Wall street, as Mr. Gould has reason to know, who wish to resent their losses with their fists, and are disposed to follow Major Selow's example and despatch him bodily down into a convenient area. Accordingly, Mr. Gould keeps his office guarded by a stout Irishman, who prevents the intrusion of visitors, and he has usually a private way to get out into the street. He has, too, it is said, a big Italian book-keeper who accompanies him on many of his business trips about town, and stands ready to protect his millionaire employer.

The importance and value of Johnson's Anodyne Liniment to a family cannot be estimated in dollars and cents. It is both for internal and external use and will prevent and cure diphtheria and all dangerous throat and lung troubles.