

THE GOOD NEWS.

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THE GOSPEL HISTORY.

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Matthew i. 18-25.

When we last heard of the blessed virgin, she was just taking leave of Zacharias and Elizabeth, under whose hospitable roof she had sojourned for about three months, and was setting out upon her return to her own residence at Nazareth. We have no information regarding her spiritual exercises about this time; but we have every reason to believe that her faith in the justice, and goodness, and mercy of God, was unwavering; and that, whatever might be the trials to which she was exposed, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, kept her heart and mind.

It is probable that the delicacy of feeling, the virgin modesty, of Mary, prevented her from opening her mind to any one at Nazareth. Indeed, the narrative of Matthew leads us to believe that her condition had become apparent to her friends, before she revealed it. Doubtless Mary, in justice to herself, and with a view to instruct her friends in regard to the great salvation, which God was preparing for his people, embraced this opportunity of stating to them all the circumstances of her case. It is probable that some of them were incredulous. So long, however, as a hope remained of the honour of the family being unsullied, we may well believe that the whole matter was kept private. But it was needful that Joseph should be made aware of what had occurred.

We may well conceive the tumult of emotions which would be excited in his righteous soul. It was hard to believe one guilty of so great a crime, whom he so ardently loved, and so highly esteemed; but yet the account which she gave was so extraordinary and unlikely, that he could not help giving way to his suspicions, and believing that it was a story ingeniously contrived to save her reputation, and impose upon himself. Being a just man, he could not think to take one to his bosom whom he believed to be polluted: and at the same time, amiable, and gentle, and

kind as he was, he did not wish to expose her, and still less subject her to the rigour of the law, which would have condemned her to be stoned to death. In these circumstances, it occurred to him that his most judicious course would be to give her privately a bill of divorce, without specifying the reason, which, according to Jewish law, a husband had it in his power to do.

No doubt all this was a severe trial to Mary, but we may well believe that she was still, and knew that the Lord was God, and that he would bring forth her righteousness as the light, and her judgment as the noon-day. God does not promise to keep his people from trouble, but he *does* promise to support them under it. He does not prevent them from becoming objects of suspicion, or their good name from being assailed by the strife of tongues. This is a species of discipline to which they are often subjected. But if we are careful to keep our consciences void of offence towards God, he will be careful to keep our characters from ultimate ruin.

We have cause of thankfulness now, that Joseph did not at once receive the statement of Mary; for, from the caution and deliberation which he manifested, we may have thorough confidence in the accuracy of the conclusion at which he ultimately arrived. Happily, he was not left to his own resources in investigating this matter; for, whilst he was meditating on these things, the angel of the Lord appeared to him. It is somewhat remarkable that this angel, who was probably Gabriel, did not appear to him in open vision, as he had done to Zacharias and Mary; but it is useless to enquire into the reason, and better far simply to say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." We may be quite sure, however, that the dream was of such a nature, that no doubt could remain on his mind that an express from heaven had, in this way, been sent to him. In this way God's will was often communicated to the ancient prophets. Thus we find God saying to Aaron and Miriam: "If there be a prophet among you, I, the Lord will make myself known to him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream;" Numbers xii. 6. But in ancient times, divine communications were thus made not only to prophets, but occasionally to the people of God in general, and even at times