

Sabbath School Lessons.

February 25th, 1861.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS.—MATTH. I. 18-25.
LUKE. II. 1-7.

I. It was a great honour conferred on Mary to be the mother of our Lord. This was testified by the Angel Gabriel,—Luke i. 42. This was thought so by herself,—Luke i. 48. But great joy is often followed by great sorrow. Great honour is usually accompanied by great tribulation. Though she was honored to be the mother of our Lord, doubtless her relatives, except Elizabeth's household, her acquaintances, and even Joseph himself to whom she was betrothed, were so loathe to believe in her virtue, that they regarded her account of her state to be a pious fraud. Doubtless many of them jeered and sneered at her, calling her not only an hypocrite, but one deserving of death. This must have been a sore trial to her pure mind, to be unjustly blamed by neighbours, but to be blamed, and not believed in by Joseph, the man, whom of all others, she loved. She had the consciousness of innocence. She could commit her care to Him who judgeth righteously. This was her consolation in the midst of trial, yet it was a trial notwithstanding.

II. It was a great trial to Joseph to find his dear, beloved Mary to whom he was betrothed, in a condition that showed she was faithless to him, wanting in respect to herself, and a great sinner in the sight of God. The strange, wonderful, but incredible story which she told to account for her apparent guilt, perplexed but did not convince. He pondered over it, v. 19. He was a just man, just towards God, just to himself and to her.—He determined to put her away, but not willing that she should be made a public example as law required,—Deut. xxiv. 1. He thought of putting her away privily.

III. The Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. God often manifested Himself in this way—see Gen. xx. 3; xxxi. 23. Numb. xii. 6. 1 Kings iii. 5. Matth. ii. 13. Observe the Lord did not manifest himself to Joseph till after Mary and Joseph had been sorely tried. He could have appeared earlier, and have told Joseph of the high honour conferred on Mary. He did not, however, in order that their hearts might be exercised.

IV. Jesus was the name given by God to this Holy Child. The name Jesus means Saviour. The reason is assigned for calling him by this name, "For He shall save His people from their sins,"—Matth. ii. 21. This was the grand object Christ had in view in coming into the world. To save His people,

not the whole world. To save, not simply to be an example. To save His people from their sins, which alone condemns men to perdition. The birth of Christ was a matter of prophecy,—Isa. vii. 14. In it His name is called "Emmanuel," which is "God with us."

V. As soon as Joseph rose in the morning he did as the Lord had bidden him. Joseph's promptness and courage in the discharge of duty commends him to us. He feared God, and to please Him was not afraid to do his duty, in spite of the contumely that would arise. In taking Mary to wife in the circumstances in which he was called, he endorsed her position, and subjected himself to the blame that was cast upon her.

VI. The time of Jesus's birth was during the taxing or enrolment ordered by Caesar Augustus, who was Emperor of the Roman Empire. This was about the first year before the beginning of what is called the Christian era. With regard to the extent of the enrolment, there can be little doubt that the words 'the whole world' in our common version, should be rendered the whole land as it is clear Judea only is meant.

VII. The place of Jesus' birth was Bethlehem. This was not the place that Mary usually resided in,—Luke ii. 4. But she and Joseph came out of Galilee into Judea to Bethlehem to be enrolled. The reason for this is given,—Luke ii. 4. 5. It was foretold that Jesus should come out of Bethlehem,—Micah v. 2: Matth. ii. 4, 6.—John vii. 42.

See how the Divine purposes will be accomplished in the most minute particular.—Caesar Augustus had no idea of being instrumental in fulfilling a prophecy when he issued his decree,—Isa. x. 7.

VIII. Christ was born of the family of David. This was the burden of prophecy,—Psalm cxxxii. 11. Jer. xxv. 5. Though for royal descent, He did not appear in royal circumstances. Joseph His reputed father was a carpenter living obscurely in Nazareth.—When he and Mary came to Bethlehem, they found no other accommodation than a stable. There Christ was born. There He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

Learn, 1. That the path of honour is the path of difficulty.

2. That every thing God says, He will do. No distance of time. No complexity of circumstances will interfere with the minute fulfilment of His promise.

3. The humility of Christ. He humbled himself to become a little child.