

FOR THE SABBATH SCHOOL.

International S. S. Lesson.

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST QUARTER

Our lessons for the first quarter of this new year cover the first two years of the public ministry of Jesus. Beginning with His baptism near Bethabara, in the Jordan, we follow along with Him through the forty days' temptation in the wilderness of Judea, where He was tempted in all points yet without sin. We include a part of that wonderful Sermon on the Mount in this quarter's study, which may serve as an inspiration for the whole year. The tenderness with which he instructed His disciples is beautiful to contemplate. His choice of men for the ministry, and the preparation which He gave them for their work, reveals his genuine interest in their future. His words of warning, followed by the most pathetic invitation to find rest in Him, are more precious to us than many nuggets of gold. The parables which He put forth are so practical and clear. He spared no pains to make truth plain to all who desired to learn about the Kingdom of Heaven. His care and oversight in small matters make him to us a comforting Friend. Though censured and criticised by the Pharisees and Scribes, he was blameless in all. None who ventured to teach Him could at all show that they practiced what they preached. None was so careful to observe the law as he. He only lived out its requirements. By His own spirit and words He taught the people how to keep the law in its truest sense. It was necessary to preach unto the strictest sect the way of repentance. When His fame spread abroad, and persecution became more heated against Him, word came that John the Baptist was beheaded. Less than one year more and He, too, should suffer death at the hands of His enemies. But we do not find that He wavered from His firm purpose to accomplish the plan of redemption. With His life upheld before us, we should make this quarter a time of spiritual advancement. With him as a Friend to whom we may take all our cares, a Saviour to help in every time of need, we may not be guiltless if we live beneath our privileges.

LESSON I.—JESUS AND JOHN.—JAN. 2.

(Matt. iii : 7-17.)

GOLDEN TEXT—"This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."—Matt. iii, 17.

TIME AND PLACE—A. D. 26 and 27. Bethabara, in the Jordan Valley, near Jericho.

INTRODUCTION—John the Baptist began his ministry in the summer of A. D. 26. The baptism of Jesus was in January, A. D. 27. John's circuit extended along the western coast of the Dead Sea, reaching along the Jordan Valley as far north as Jericho. The baptism of Jesus was doubtless at the fords of the Jordan called Bethabara, probably at the place where the Israelites first crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land. Coming from Nazareth in Galilee to John's baptism, Jesus journeyed about eighty miles.

VERSE BY VERSE—7. "When he saw."—This was John the Baptist. He was preaching in the wilderness, at the fords of Bethabara, on the Jordan, calling people to repent and be ready to receive the Messiah. "Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees."—The Pharisees were the strictest Jews; the Sadducees did not believe in a future life. "Come to his baptism."—Those who confessed their sins and promised to lead better lives were baptized by John. "O generation of vipers."—Though they professed to be holy, John knew how bad they really were. "To flee from the wrath to come."—Their coming to be baptized meant this.

8. "Fruits meet for."—Show by a new, good life that you have truly repented.

9. "We have Abraham to our father."—Merely being descendants of Abraham would not save them, John said. "(Of these stones.)"—Pointing to the stones at his feet. God could from these make descendants of Abraham.

10. "The axe is laid unto the root."—Ready to cut them down but for God's patience and forbearance. "Therefore every tree."—He waited to see if it would bear fruit. If not, it must be cut down.

11. "With water."—John gave only outward baptism. Water cannot cleanse the heart. "Ho that cometh after me."—Jesus, the Messiah, who was about to appear. "Whoso shoes."—The lowest servant of a king was the one who carried his master's shoes. John said he was not worthy even to do this least and humblest service for his coming King. "With the Holy Ghost."—Instead of water, Jesus would send the Holy Spirit into men's hearts and change them.

12. "Whoso fan."—A fan was used to separate chaff from wheat in threshing. "Thoroughly purge his floor."—Driving out all but the pure wheat. "His wheat."—The good. "The chaff."—The unworthy. "With unquenchable fire."—The chaff was burned after the threshing was over.

13. "Thou comest Jesus."—Among the rest who came to be baptized by John. Probably Jesus and John had never before met.

14. "John forbade him."—He tried to prevent Jesus, for he felt unworthy to baptize Him.

15. "Suffer it to be so now."—Jesus, though without sin, took the place of sinful men and bore the world's sin, therefore He must do all that was required of sinful men.

16. "Jesus, when He was baptized."—Luke says He was praying as He was being baptized. "The heaven's were opened."—As a gateway opening into heaven's glory. "He saw the Spirit."—John also saw the dove, the symbol of the Holy Spirit. See John i : 32.

17. "A voice."—The voice of the Father, declaring to the world that Jesus was His Son, the long-promised Messiah.

CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR.

DAILY READINGS.

First Day—"Thou shalt call his name Jesus."—Matt. i. 1-25.

Second Day—"Jesus was born in Bethlehem."—Matt. ii. 1-12.

Third Day—"He dwelt in a city called Nazareth."—Matt. ii.

13-23.

Fourth Day—Jesus and John.—Matt. iii 1-17.

Fifth Day—"The voice in the Wilderness."—Isa. xl. 1-11.

Sixth Day—John's Testimony to Jesus.—John i. 15-34.

PRAYER MEETING TOPIC, Jan. 2.—"How to pray."—Luke xi. 1-13.

PRAYER.

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire
Utter'd or unexpressed;
The motion of a hidden fire,
That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try,
Prayer the sublimate strains that reach
The Majesty on high.

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air,
His watchword at the gates of death:
He enters heaven with prayer.

Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice,
Returning from his ways;
While angels in their songs rejoice,
And cry, "Behold, he prays."

Pray, looking up, in expectancy; looking down, in humility looking abroad, in sympathy.

Prayer is the rustling of the wings of the angels that are on their way bringing us the boons of heaven. Have you heard prayer in your heart? You shall see the angel in your house. When the chariots that bring us blessings do rumble, their wheels do sound with prayer. We hear the prayer in our own spirits, and that prayer becomes the token of the coming blessings. Even as the cloud forshadoweth rain, so prayer forshadoweth the blessing: even as the green blade is the beginning of the harvest, so is prayer the prophecy of the blessing that is about to come.—*Spurgeon*.

Keep prayer going; do not neglect your prayer meetings. Christmas Evans gives us a good idea of prayer. He says "Prayer is the rope in the holly; we pull it, and it rings the bell up in heaven." And, so it is. Mind you keep that bell going. Pull it well. Come up to prayer meetings. Keep on pulling it. Though the bell is up so high that you can not hear it ring, depend upon it it can be heard in the tower of heaven, and is ringing before the throne of God, who will give you answers of peace according to your faith. May your faith be large and plentiful, and so will your answer be!

Immediately before the battle of Trafalgar, Nelson, having seen that all was as it should be returned to his cabin and wrote the following prayer: "May the great God whom I worship grant to my country, and for the benefit of Europe in general, a great and glorious victory. And may no misconduct in any one t ruin it, and may humanity after victory be the prominent feature in the British fleet! For myself individually, I commit my life to Him that made me, and may His blessing alight on my endeavors for the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend. Amen."

If thou shouldst never see my face again pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice rise like a fountain for me night and day. For what are men better than sheep or goats that nourish a blind life within the brain, if knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer both for themselves and those who call them friend? For so the whole round earth is every way bound by gold chains about the feet of God.—*Lennyson*.