

Devotional Service.

By REV. T. J. PARR, M.A.

DECEMBER 21.—"CHRISTMAS: ITS MESSAGE AND MOTIVE"

Luke 2: 1-20 John 3: 14-17.

HOME READINGS.

Mon., Dec. 15, The promise Luke 1: 26-28
Tues., Dec. 16, The Magnificat Luke 1: 46-55
Wed., Dec. 17, "An horn of salvation." Luke 1: 67-79
Thurs., Dec. 18, Light and glory Luke 2: 22-35
Fri., Dec. 19, The magi Matt. 2: 1-12
Sat., Dec. 20, Blessed Bethlehem! Mic. 2: 1-3

At Christmas-tide, the thoughts of the devout believer naturally turn to Christ. We think of his entrance into the world to reveal the Father; to make our salvation possible; to be a perfect example of life and conduct; to undergo the sufferings common to humanity; to return to the Father, and ever live to make intercession for us; and to be present for ever with his people in the person of the Holy Spirit. These are great themes, young people, upon which to reflect, as Christmas again returns with its hope and cheer, and spiritual truth, to bless the world.

CHRISTMAS TRUTH LIVING STILL.

The inspiration and hope of the Christian Church and of the individual believer is in the assurance of the fact that Jesus was not only born in Bethlehem of Judea nineteen hundred years ago, but that he is present now, and always present in the world. Creeds are important in their place, but they do not constitute Christianity. The words of Jesus as the utterances of the Son of God are priceless; but even these cannot of themselves give power. Creeds need vitality, and words need life to become effective as spiritual agencies. And life, essential both to the believer and to the church, is conveyed through the fulfilment of the promise, "Lo, I am with you always." A living faith in a living Christ is the kernel of Gospel teaching, and the essential ground of thanksgiving in Christmas reflection. A Royal Brother indeed is he who is always present for help, comfort, and inspiration.

AN INSPIRING THOUGHT.

Christ's own claim is, "I am the first and the last." We can find nothing before him in the point of time. We shall find nothing after him in point of efficiency. He is the source and consummation of all things. He originates, sustains, and controls the universe, and under his authority, it shall fill its design, and be brought to its proper end. The Saviour and not Satan is sovereign, and one day we shall see all counter forces powerless, and all things under the complete sway of his dominion. "I am alive for evermore" are the sublime words on which he conveys the great thought of his continuous life to the mind, and heart. The faith and hope of the Christian is not in a Saviour who was born and who is dead and whose historic influence alone lives on through time. No! His belief is in the living Christ, whose life was given, not taken, for the redemption of the world, and who, possessing absolute life in himself, lives for ever more. This conception of the ground of the Christian's life and hope is of infinite grandeur, and unbounded potency—a most inspiring Christmas thought.

THE NEW-BORN KING EVER PRESENT.

"I am with you always" are the words of Christ spoken to his disciples as they went forth to teach his truth, and they

sound out over all the centuries to inspire the faithful. 1. the living Christ, to whom all power has been given, by whom all real authority is exercised, and with whom reside the influences that shall subdue the world to righteousness, I am the only one who will be with you always. I who can give salvation to the sinful, grace to the saint, strength to the weak, hope to the despairing, and help to all—I will be with my people to the end of time.

EVERY DAY HELPS.

Let all Epworth Leaguers grasp the thought, and hold it as with hooks of steel, that Christ reveals his helpful presence everywhere and always—in the home, on the farm, at the bench, in the factory, at the desk, behind the counter, in the school, on the playground—everywhere. Wherever we go he will go with us, if we do his will and invite his companionship. The essential thing to make the Christian life what it should be to the young, and to all, is the presence in the heart and life all the time, and without cessation, of Christ, the Son of Man, and the Son of God. Remember that the Gospel is not the record of a past, but the revelation of a present Saviour, of one whose voice sounds deep and clear across all the storms of life, giving hope and promise of rescue.

MAY THIS BE THE PRAYER OF ALL.

"O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in,
Be born in us to-day.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great, glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel."

THE SAME FOREVER.

Men change, the fact of nature changes, the starry heavens change, but Christ changes not. He is essentially the same in character and attitude toward the humanity yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The ever-living, ever-present Christ is the ever-changeless Christ. What Jesus is in spirit from all eternity, that he was when he walked the hills and valleys of Judea, and that he is to-day, and that he will be through the ceaseless march of the eternal ages. Of some men it may be said, "he is some twenty several men at least, each several hour." But to Christ we may adapt the words which Cato is represented as using when addressing his son:

"The stars shall fade away, the sun himself
Grow dim with age, and nature sink in
years;
But thou shalt flourish in immortal youth,
Unchanged amidst the war of elements,
The wreck of matter, and the crash of
worlds."

CHRISTMAS LIGHT.

1. God has spoken to man. It suggests the divine interest in humanity. It also teaches that man is capable of receiving communication from the infinite mind.

2. Christ, in order to be a perfect man, a true brother of men, and thus to become by right the Head of the race, voluntarily entered into the sorrows as well as the joys of men.

3. Jesus enshrined his divine nature in human flesh and blood, and felt all the innocent emotions and sensations of our race. He was hungry and thirsty; he was weary and slept; he wept and rejoiced like his brethren.

4. New life, new light, new power, new inspiration, new devotion, new love, are some of the blessings which we possess with Christ, the child of Bethlehem, the Saviour of the world.

5. How may we prove ourselves un-

worthy of this great Christmas gift? (a) By rejecting him as our Saviour and Lord. (b) By conduct unworthy of Christ and contrary to his teachings. (c) By taking sides against him in amusements, business principles and social customs.

6. "The star that shone at Bethlehem
Shines still, and shall not cease,
And we listen still to the tidings
Of glory and of peace."

POINTS FOR THE PRESIDENT.

This should be a Christmas meeting. Have brief papers prepared on, "Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus," "The wise men, ancient and modern," "The message of Christmas to the world." These in addition to the presentation of the topic. Decorate your meeting-room with evergreens and mottoes. Let the music have the Christmas ring. Invite all to accept the Christ of Bethlehem, and celebrate Christmas with enthronement of the Lord in heart and life.

DECEMBER 23.—"OUR HEAVENLY HOME, AND THE WAY."

John 14: 1-6; Rev. 21: 1-8.

HOME READINGS.

Mon., Dec. 22, Who are in heaven? Heb. 12: 22-24
Tues., Dec. 23, Who are not there? Matt. 23: 41-46
Wed., Dec. 24, How to get there Ps. 73: 23-28
Thurs., Dec. 25, What to do there Rev. 7: 9-17
Fri., Dec. 26, Heavenly joys Ps. 16: 1-11
Sat., Dec. 27, Heavenly glories 1 Cor. 2: 9-16

It is a great encouragement to keep our heavenly reward in view. We cannot in this busy world always be thinking of heaven; but it is very stimulating, spiritually, to contemplate at times our eternal home and its glorious attractions. True, the joys of heaven will be ours if we live right in this world; yet a man will be not the worse, but all the better Christian by having a due sense of what awaits him, by brightening and beautifying his earthly life by visions of his heavenly home. The toiler in the factory, or the office, or the shop, labors for his home, and sweetens his toil by thoughts of the loved ones there. So in working out our salvation, thoughts of our abiding home, and the many attractions of the place, will bring good cheer as we struggle forward and labor for the prize that is incorruptible.

WHAT HEAVEN IS.

Heaven is a place prepared; and how magnificent Christ's preparing is he has shown in this beautiful earth.

Heaven is a place where Christ is; and those that know him wish for no other heaven than to be with him.

Heaven is beyond our imagining. If we could guess its joys, they would simply be larger earth joys.

Heaven is a mansion, a place to remain in. It is eternal.

WHAT HEAVEN IS NOT.

No pain there. Suppose yourself in a body perfectly strong, perfectly obedient to your will, perfectly lovely. Would not that be a fair beginning of heaven?

No sin there. Remove sin, and even this earth would seem a heaven; what will heaven seem?

"No more sea" that is, no more loneliness. Heaven is companionship, and just the companionship for which you long.

No death there. Our plans for work, for pleasure, for friendship, for study, may be made as extensive as we please, for there will be no interruption.

HOW TO FIND THE WAY.

The way of life is only for those that thirst, but it is for them freely. Hunger is the key to heaven.