

The Sunday School Lesson

LESSON XIII.—DEC. 26, 1909.

The Birth of Christ.—Matt. 2: 1-12.

Commentary.—1. The coming of the wise men (vs. 1, 2). When Jesus was born—While the exact date of Christ's birth is uncertain there is no reason why it may not have been on December 25, B. C. 5. But why do we say that Jesus was born "before Christ"? Simply because our calendar is incorrect. For some centuries after Christ's time there was no calendar in general use, but each nation dated from some event in its history. Finally, in the sixth century, a learned monk, Dionysius Exiguus, was appointed to ascertain the time of Christ's birth, and it was ordered that history should be dated from that time. But Dionysius, who first published his calculations in A. D. 526, put the birth of Jesus about four years too late. In Bethlehem—"House of bread." "A name properly applied to a place where the true bread has manifested for the life of the world." (Clarke, Of Jesus.) To distinguish it from Bethlehem in Galilee, mentioned to Josh. 19: 15. Herod—Herod the Great. He was an Edomite, and although a proselyte to the Jewish religion, was notorious for his wickedness and cruelty. He reigned 37 years in Judea, and died a few months after the birth of Christ. At this time "the sceptre was departing from Judah, a sign that the Messiah was now at hand." Wise men—Or magi. "Originally a class of priests among the Persians and Medes, who formed the king's privy council. They were men of learning and wisdom. Augustine says that there were twelve magi, but the common belief is that there were but three. But why were these magi seeking the Christ? "We know that the Persian magi believed in a Messiah or future Saviour, who should in the latter day appear and renew the world in righteousness." (Whedon, From the East.) Perhaps from Media, or Persia, or possibly from Arabia. Jerusalem—they seemed to suppose that when they reached the capital of the Jewish nation they would have no trouble in finding the object of their search.

2. Where is he? This inquiry in Jerusalem brought Jesus into popular notice and called attention to the fact that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. Born King of the Jews—This was a title unknown to the earlier history of Israel and applied to no one except the Messiah. It reappears in the inscription over the cross (Matt. 27: 37). Jesus was "born" a king. His star. Many interpreters, especially those who seek to eliminate the supernatural, explain the "star," or "sidereal appearance," by a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, which occurred in May, B. C. 7, and again in December with Mars added. It is, however, much more in harmony with all the facts to believe that the star which attracted the attention of the magi was provided for the occasion. To worship him—To do him homage. They were bold to confess the object of their coming.

3. Light from the scriptures (vs. 3-6). Had heard. The magi had created no small stir by their inquiries, which immediately attracted the attention of the king. Troubled—Herod, now sunk into the jealous deceptiveness of his savage old age, was residing in his new palace on Zion, when, half-maddened as he was already by the crimes of his past career, he was thrown into a fresh paroxysm of alarm and anxiety by the visit of these magi, bearing the strange intelligence that they had come to worship a new-born king—Farrar. Herod feared a rival. All Jerusalem with him—Fearing that he would make this an occasion or renewing his acts of bloodshed. 4. Had gathered. He assembled the Sanhedrin—Lightfoot. Chief priests. This expression probably comprehends the acting high priest and his deputies, those who had been high priests for at this time the office was often transferred by the Roman authorities and "the heads of the twenty-four sacerdotal families, which David had distributed into so many courses." (Clarke.) The learned interpreters of the Jewish law and the collectors of the traditions of the elders. Many of them were Pharisees. Demanded of them because they would be most likely to know. Where the Christ (R. V.). Or the Messiah, the official title of the promised deliverer. The wise men had said nothing about the Christ, or the Messiah, but only about the King of the Jews. But Herod saw that this king must be the expected Messiah.

5. By the prophet—Micah 5: 2. Matthew does not quote the exact words found in Micah, but the sense is given. It was an accepted truth that the Messiah must come from Bethlehem. 6. Art is no wise least (R. V.). Micah says, "Though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." This made Bethlehem "in no wise least." Although Bethlehem was little, yet it was exalted above all the other cities of Israel. The princes—"The thousands" (Micah 5: 2). The tribe had been subdivided into thousands, and over each subdivision there was a chieftain or prince—Morrison. A governor—to control and rule. Who shall be shepherd (R. V.). To feed and care for, as a shepherd his flock. Christ is both shepherd and king. My people Israel—Israel was God's people in a peculiar sense. They were his own peculiar treasure.

III. The intrigue of Herod (vs. 7, 8). Privately called—Herod desired to keep the time of Christ's birth as secret as possible lest the Jews who hated him should take occasion to rebel. Enquired of them diligently—"Learned of them exactly"—R. V. He enquired of them the exact time and received positive information as to the time the star appeared. Assuming that the star appeared when the child was born he would thus have some idea of the age of the child. 8. He sent them—He assumed control; but they followed the directions of the Lord. Search diligently the scriptures—Herod was honest in making this charge to them; he greatly desired to receive definite word concerning the new King. And worship him also—What hypocrisy! He only wished to find the child in order to murder him (vs. 13, 16); he was crafty and subtle, saying one thing and meaning another.

IV. Guided by the star (vs. 9, 10). 9. The star... went before them—The same star which they had seen in their own country now again appears. The star disappeared for a time and this led them to inquire in Jerusalem for the young King whom they sought. Supernatural

helps should not be expected where ordinary means are to be had. stood over—The star pointed out the very house—Benson. 10. they rejoiced—The Greeks is very emphatic. They rejoiced exceedingly because they saw they were about to find the child and because they had such unmistakable proof of being in divine order. That alone is enough to cause rejoicing.

V. The child Jesus found (vs. 11, 12). 11. fell down—They prostrated themselves before him according to the eastern custom. "In this act the person kneels and puts his hand between his knees, his forehead at the same time touching the ground. It was used to express both civil and religious reverence." (Clarke, gifts—The people of the east did not approach into the presence of kings without bringing them presents. The custom still prevails in many places, gold, etc.—Gold would always be useful, while frankincense and myrrh were prized for their delicious fragrance. These were the very presents Isaiah mentioned: "All they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense" (Isa. 60:6). "Incense, or frankincense, is a resinous gum, flowing from a tree, gashed for the purpose, growing in Arabia and Lebanon. Myrrh is also a gum obtained from a tree in Arabia." (Whedon, 12. warned of God in a dream—God communicated his purpose to them in a manner that they understood, and the impression or conviction was so clear that they at once obeyed. another way—They could easily go east from Bethlehem and thus leave Jerusalem on the north.

Questions—Where was Jesus born? When? Who was the king of Judea? What was the character of this king? Who came to Jerusalem seeking for Jesus? From whence did they come? Why was Jesus called King of the Jews? How had the wise men been led in their search? Why was Herod troubled? Why was Jerusalem troubled? Whom did Herod gather together? For what purpose? What charge did Herod give the wise men? Why? How did they approach Christ? After leaving Jesus what did the wise men do?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS.

The Cradle of Christ.

I. A place of salvation. "Now when Jesus was born" (v. 1). "Thou shalt call his name Jesus" (Matt. 1:21). A man's name represents his character. Herod's name is a synonym of cruelty. Abraham's for faith, Stephen's for martyrdom, John's for love, Jesus' for salvation. His name has power to save.

II. A place of obscurity. "In Bethlehem" (v. 1). An insignificant village, not mentioned among the many towns at the time of the division of the land. "In a manger" (Luke 2:7). Not in a palace, not in a house of luxury, but in a cottage surrounded by brightness, but in a limestone cave, did the Christ-child open his infant eyes to earth. Was this to teach how little God cares for external?

III. A place of security. "In the days of Herod the king" (v. 1). Jesus came a stranger to this world; there was no room for him in the inn (Luke 2:7). Herod hunted him (v. 7). His own parents "understood not" His youthful aspirations (Luke 2:49). His own townsmen rejected him (Luke 4:29). He had not where to lay his head (Matt. 8:20; John 7:53; 8:1); Jews and Gentiles conspired to crucify him (Luke 22:65; 23:1, 12). All the way from the cradle to the cross He met with cruelty.

IV. A place of royalty. "Born king of the Jews" (v. 2). The gospel of Matthew is the story of Jesus as King. Its key-phrase, "kingdom," is found fifty-six times. Its key-phrase, "kingdom of heaven," is found thirty-two times, and nowhere else in the New Testament. His royal pedigree, from David, source of Jewish blessing (Matt. 1:1) Jesus was born king, but He waited—He is waiting still for the kingdom (Luke 19:15; Matt. 26:29). The prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth" (Matt. 6:10), has never been literally fulfilled. It will be some day. Christ rules His own to-day as a Shepherd.

V. A place of prophecy. "It is written by the prophets" (v. 5). A study of prophecy gives a miniature life of Jesus (Isa. 7:14; Micah 5:2; Isa. 9:1, 2; Gen. 49:10; Hosea 11:1; Zech. 11:12; 13:7; Zech. 13:7; Isa. 53:12; Psa. 22:18; Psa. 22:1; 60:21; Zech. 12:10; John 1:45; Acts 13:27; 1 Cor. 2:8). A special blessing is promised to those who read and hear and keep the last great prophecy of His second coming (Rev. 1:3; 22:18, 19).

VI. A place of guidance. "The star came and stood over where the young child was" (v. 9). Heralded by a star, Jesus ushered in the day of grace at the beginning of this dispensation. The star which illuminates our pathway goes before us to guide us to Jesus is the Holy Spirit, of whom Jesus says, "He shall testify of me" (John 15:26). VII. A place of rejoicing (v. 10). The wise men, rejoicing at the cradle of the infant King, carry our thoughts forward to another day when a multitude of redeemed men and angels shall cry with a loud voice (Rev. 5:12).

VIII. A place of worship (v. 11). They gave themselves, then their gifts (2 Cor. 8:4, 5). They saw, they "fell down," thus presenting their "obedience a living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1); they "worshiped," pouring out their souls; adoration; then "they offered unto Him gifts" (R. V.).

IX. A place of presents. "They presented unto Him gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." As a Saviour, Jesus is God's great gift to us (John 3:16); as saved ones we are God's gift to Him (John 17:6).

AN APPALLING CONDITION.

Invariably results when you use a cheap corn salve. Be judicious, use "Putnam's." For fifty years it has cured corns and warts that nothing else could touch. Ask for Putnam's Painless Corn Extractor only.

His Trouble.

A Trenton couple were married the other day, and all their friends remarked: "They will certainly be very happy. They have waited for each other a very long while."

No one possesses happiness who is blind to sorrow.

The Quiet Hour

For Thoughtful People

THE FIRST, BEST CHRISTMAS NIGHT.

Like small, curled feathers, white and soft.

The little clouds went by, Across the moon, and past the stars, And down the western sky; In upland pastures, where the grass With frosted dew was white, Like snowy clouds the young sheep lay, That first, best Christmas night.

The shepherds slept; and, glimmering faint,

With twist of thin, blue smoke, Only their fire's crackling flames The tender silence broke— Save when a young lamb raised its head, Or, when the night wind blew, A nesting bird would softly stir, Where dusky olives grew.

With finger on her solemn lip, Night hushed the shadowy earth, And only stars and angels saw The little Saviour's birth.

Then came such flash of silver light Across the bending skies, The wondering shepherds woke, and hid Their frightened, dazzled eyes:

And all their gentle, sleepy flock Looked up, then slept again, Nor knew the light that dimmed the stars.

Brought endless peace to men— Nor even heard the gracious words That down the ages ring "The Christ is born! the Lord has come, Good-will on earth to bring!"

Then o'er the moonlit, misty fields, Dumb with the world's great joy, The shepherds sought the white-walled town.

Where lay the baby boy— And, oh, the gladness of the world, The glory of the skies,

Because the longed-for Christ looked up In Mary's happy eyes!— Margaret Deland, in "The Old Garden and Other Verses."

JOIN HANDS WITH GOD.

Could we see what is behind the curtains of the invisible world we should be able to trace living streams of spiritual influence passing from the heavens at the very instant that the prayer of faith is ascending from some lonely closet, and terminating upon the very persons at that very instant whose names are being held up before the throne. Faith is a force as mighty as that which we control when we touch the electric button or open the valve of the engine or pull the little cord that explodes the mighty subterranean battery which upheaves the mountain of rock or discharges the sunken torpedo. In requiring us, therefore, to play in faith, God simply asks us to join hands with Him in the exercise of His own almighty

power and be partakers of His mighty working.—A. B. Simpson.

THE LIGHTNING GLOVE.

"He covereth His hand with the lightning; and giveth it a charge that it strike the mark" (Job xxxvi, 32, R. V.).

What precision, intensity, directness, devastating certainty! Nor distance nor darkness can disturb the calculation, or turn aside the purpose. The point is so fixed that He strikes the mark every time. Historians tell us that the crises of life are not many. Only one Pharaoh and his host are drowned in the Red Sea. Not many Sennacheribs come up and retire like the tide. The battle of Waterloo was won by a shower of rain. The battle of Trafalgar began a little before twelve, and was over at half-past two. Give our enemies time to bewail their pitiful mischances our God is prompt. He ever gives His purpose a charge to strike the mark. Great events sometimes cluster round a single man—a single vote. A majority of one brought off the head of Charles; a majority of one sent Cromwell to the Long Parliament. The verdict of heaven's consciousness is that God ever strikes the mark!

If crises are only few in nations, they are not few in personal history; they are incessant, and it is marvelous how we come to the right time and pose of soul, the right word, the right vision, the right conclusion is reached we know not how. Who knoweth the make-up of his own mental machinery? Monuments are perpetual, and our own will is scarcely at the helm. Who can tell where our consciousness comes from? how it is related to the things outside? by what hidden machinery it touches and controls thought is an unfathomable mystery. "We are spectators, rather producers, of its effects; the largest part of what we call ourselves is as unknown to us as the other side of the moon."

If this is so, how welcome the promise, "And when they shall lead you to judgment, and deliver you up, be not anxious beforehand what you shall speak, but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye; for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost."

Think of Abraham on Mount Moriah. Isaac is bound; there was the fire, and the knife—stop! Not too soon, not too late, it is ever so.

Think of Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road. The hand with the lightning glove struck the mark; and they led him in to the city stunned, consoled, and saved. "In the shadow of His hand bath He hid me."

Think of the loneliness of these situations even in the midst of company. "I was left alone," says Daniel, "and saw this great vision. I alone saw the vision, for the men that were with me saw not the vision, but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves."

Of Paul it is said, "And the men that journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man."

All great natures must study this great doctrine of loneliness.

"Lo, all these things doth God work, twice, yes, thrice, with a man, to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be enlightened with the light of the living."

Think how much God covers! He covereth the heavens with a cloud; He covereth the mountains with thick darkness. He hideth Himself; the pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at His rebuke. He stretcheth up the sea with His power. He hides His hand, covers it with the lightning glove. Strikes strongly at His foes; strikes tenderly when He lifts up to save. To the former He is a devastating hurricane; to the latter, soft as the breath of evening. He inspires with unspeakable joy. "Lo, these are but the outskirts of His ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of Him!"—H. T. Miller.

SHOCKING!

How the Noblest of Heroism is Punished.

Shortly before railroads were forced to elevate their tracks within the city limits, John Matchett, an engineer, was operating a switch engine on tracks paralleling Archer avenue. It was dusk, and Matchett's engine was standing on a switch track so that a fact, outward bound passenger train might pass.

Matchett heard the passenger train with its human load coming in the distance. Simultaneously he discovered an inward bound freight train, running at high speed and almost at the junction of the side track with the main line. A collision between the passenger and the freight appeared to be inevitable. Matchett thought otherwise.

"Jump off and flag the passenger," shouted Matchett to his fireman, at the same time opening the throttle of his engine.

The fireman jumped and the switch engine leaped forward over the rails with Matchett alone in the cab. At the switch the switch engine crashed obliquely into the freight engine and both locomotives were piled up—a mass of wreckage. Matchett was killed.

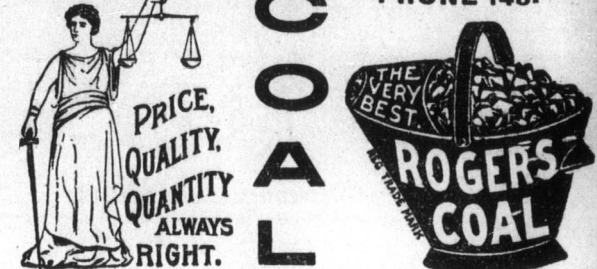
The price of his death was the safety of the passenger train which Matchett's fireman had succeeded in flagging. The pilot of the passenger engine was stopped within a few feet of the wreck in which was buried the crushed body of the hero.

To the average thinking citizen, it seems almost incredible that a corporation would meditate depriving the widow and children of a man like Matchett, who had saved his credit with the traveling public, and prevented the uncounted loss of life at the cost of his own, of aid, but that is just what this railroad did. The claim was set up that Matchett's voluntary martyrdom was outside his technical line of duty and that consequently his heirs were not entitled to any recompense.

The attorneys for the railroad company actually thought they stood a chance of beating the widow and children of Matchett out of the sustaining amount of money by this monstrous plea. But before the case reached the trial stage, the attorney for Matchett's family succeeded in convincing influential officials of the road that they would put themselves on record as the star in a case of a century were they to continue the fight against the claim. A set-

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GOLD MEDAL

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element was the result. From "Heroism vs. Insurance," in January Technical World Magazine.

Chinese Currency.

Business transactions between Chinese merchants and foreign firms are usually in taels. The tael is not a coin, but a Chinese ounce of silver. It varies in different places both as to weight and "touch" (or fineness), and the exchange between the tael and the dollar, or between the former and the copper coinage, is constantly fluctuating.

The only coin in use until recently was the copper cash (of which there are about 1,200 to the Mexican dollar, or 2,850 to the American dollar), but these are fast disappearing, except in the more or less remote interior. A new coin of ten cash piece has been made at the provincial mints, and it is rapidly displacing the old copper cash. The relative value between these and silver dollars or taels is constantly fluctuating. At first they were supposed to represent one one-hundredth of a Mexican dollar, or about one two-hundredth and fortieth of a dollar, but the exchange is now from 130 to 155 for the Mexican dollar, or from 397 to 519 for the gold dollar.

Subsidiary silver coins, 10 cent and 20 cent pieces, are also made at the provincial mints, but these are never worth their face value. They are discounted about 15 per cent. when exchanged for dollars. U. S. Consular Report.

New Yorkers are beginning to doubt the proposition that "what goes up must come down," when they consider the prices of food and study the quotations of the retail market for the last decade.



THE ARTLESS ANSWER.

DOLLIES OF ALL THE WORLD HOLD CONGRESS



Upper row, left to right: Doll from Barbados, Polish Soldier Doll, Hawaiian Belle, and Boy and Girl. Lower row: Ceylon Doll, Totem and Jonahatta, Eskimo Dolls, and Moro Dolls from Philippine Islands.

Cincinnati, Dec. 23.—In the remote parts of Alaska, where there are no missionaries, there is, of course, no Christmas, hence no Santa Claus. If there were, then dusky-faced, roly-poly little Eskimo girls would be sending Santa messages to bring them dolls like Totem and Jonahatta. The real truth is that these names may not be the right ones at all. The dolls thus designated are two of the famous collection which Mrs. Julius Fleischmann has gathered from every quarter of the globe, and which are now on exhibition at the Altemheim.

Totem seemed a very appropriate name for the curious looking object which represents what Eskimos think a boy doll should look like. Totem came from Sitka. So did Jonahatta. Why Jonahatta? Well, don't you think that is a pretty good name for a doll who, like the little hero, came from the interior of a whale? At least if Jonahatta didn't, her clothes did.

The garments of the Eskimo girl doll are made of dried membrane taken from a whale. This may not seem tempting to an American child, but it does not prevent a little Eskimo from pressing such a dolly lovingly to her plump little breast.

There are many more dolls quite as wonderful in the Fleischmann collection. For instance, there is the Moqui doll, made by the Indians of New Mexico. It looks like the man in the iron mask or a griffin hero. But it is just a doll, a real dolly, nothing else.

A young lady doll from the Barbados is adorned with tissue-paper. Ribbon is a scarce commodity in her native islands. The rarest doll is probably the one representing a Singalese woman from the island of Ceylon.