

THE GOOD NEWS.

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THE GOSPEL HISTORY.

BY THE REV. W. B. CLARK.

Luke I., 5-25.

When the number of the Jewish priests had increased to such an extent, that they could not with advantage be simultaneously employed, in the tabernacle service; in order to prevent confusion, and at the same time, give the church the benefit of the services of all in succession, David divided the whole body into twenty-four classes, or courses, according to the principal families, of which the descendants of Aaron were, at that time composed; appointing the heads of these families, as the presidents of the respective courses. And these courses were ever afterwards called by the names of those, who were their first presidents. The presidents of these courses were ever afterwards called by the names of those, who were their first presidents. The presidents of these courses were men of considerable authority, and appear to be the individuals spoken of in the New Testament as the chief priests. These courses of priests, each in succession, ministered for a week at a time, at Jerusalem. They came up from their respective cities, on the day preceding the Sabbath, so as to be ready to enter on the discharge of their duties on the day of sacred rest; and after having ministered their week, returned again to their own houses, on the day after the Sabbath. Thus each class, or course of priests ministered only two full weeks in the year, and that at intervals of six months, and spent four Sabbaths annually in Jerusalem.

To the eighth of these classes, that of Abia, or Abijah, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist belonged. We are told

that this venerable priest *was married to a woman of the name of Elizabeth, who, like himself, was a descendant of Aaron.* There was no law compelling the priests to marry into a sacerdotal family, and we have no means of ascertaining whether the practice was common. The choice, however, on this occasion was a happy one.— They were both eminent for their piety; not only respectable in the estimation of men, but righteous in the sight of God;— not absolutely righteous, for there are none such among men, but belonging to that class, who, as distinguished from the wicked are termed the righteous. No doubt, the piercing eye of Omniscience could discover much that was imperfect in their motives and conduct; but with regard both to the commandments of the moral law, and the ordinances of the ceremonial, they were blameless in the sight of men. How happy a thing it is, when the ministers of religion are consistent in their character; teaching not only by precept, but by example, and when their families exemplify in their conduct and condition, the beauty of holiness, and the blessedness of conformity to God's law.

Zacharias and Elizabeth, though now well advanced in years, had not yet been honoured with children; and it is remarkable that some of the most distinguished women mentioned in scripture, such as Sarah, Rachel and Hannah, were long childless, and when at last, their wombs were opened, the children whom they bore, were the most illustrious characters of their age, as if God would thus show to the world, that the instruments whom He employs, in the furtherance of His work, are specially raised up by himself, and fitted for the task assigned them.

A new dispensation was about to be introduced; the grandest event that ever occurred in the world's history, was about to be transacted. That infinitely glorious person was about to appear among men, whose advent had been foretold by prophets, and whose propitiatory death had constantly been kept before the church, by