

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1878.

SUNDAY, July 7th, 1878.—Birth of Christ the Lord.—Luke ii. 8-20.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 10-14.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."—Luke ii. 11.

DAILY READING.—Monday, Luke i. Tuesday, Luke ii. 1-33. Wednesday, Genesis iii. Thursday, Hebrews ii. Friday, Philippians ii. Saturday, Isaiah ix. 6, 7; Micah v. 2. Sunday, Revelation v.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. The shepherds. Vs. 8. II. The angel. Vss. 9-12. III. The heavenly host. Vss. 13, 14. IV. The visit to Bethlehem. Vss. 15-20.

QUESTIONS.—Where was Luke born? I. The Shepherds.—Vs. 8.—What "country" is here referred to? How far was it from Nazareth? What was the season of the year?

II. The Angels.—Vss. 9-12.—Who preached the First Advent? Who will proclaim the Second? 1 Thess. iv. 16. What was this "glory of the Lord"? Why did it frighten the shepherds? Where is Jesus said to be born? What prophecy is now fulfilled? Micah v. 2. What three terms are applied to the new-born Child? Where was he to be found?

III. The Heavenly Host.—Vss. 13, 14.—What was the song of the heavenly host? Of what music has this angelic song been the key note?

IV. The Visit to Bethlehem.—Vss. 15-20.—What was the effect of the story of the shepherds? What did Mary do?

Why did the Saviour come in human form? Heb. ii. 14-18. How long before his birth had he been promised? Gen. iii. 15. Why was his coming so long delayed? Gal. iv. 4. What effect will he produce upon the world? Ps. lxxii. 17.

According to Eusebius and Jerome, Luke was a native of Antioch, in Pisidia. By profession he was a physician. Col. iv. 14. The date, place, and circumstances of his conversion, are unknown. We first meet with him as a companion of Paul from Troas to Macedonia; thence, years afterward, accompanying him to Asia, Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome, where he remained until the end, or nearly the end, of Paul's life.

The third Gospel, ascribed to Luke, and written probably in Caesarea during Paul's imprisonment, A. D. 58-60, has a universality of character that leads to the belief that it was written for Christians of all classes, particularly for those of the Gentile world, not, however, excluding the Jews. No other Gospel has such completeness. It embraces "the whole procession of events by which our redemption by Christ was ushered in, accomplished, and sealed in heaven."

EXPOSITION.—I. Notes on the Text.—Read with care the first chapter, and the preceding verses of this chapter, and thus get a view of the order and connection of events. The events of this lesson are recorded only by Luke.

Verses 8.—In the same country.—Where Joseph and Mary now were. (See vs. 4). Abiding in the field. The usual time for driving out the flocks, was the month of March; which is against the twenty-fifth of December being the day of Christ's birth, it was not till the fourth century that December 25th was fixed upon.

Verses 9.—The angel of the Lord.—Rather, an angel, etc. See i. 26. This was not the Being so constantly mentioned as "the Angel of the Lord" [Jehovah] in the Old Testament. See Gen. xxii. 11, 12; Ex. iii. 2, 6, 14, etc. The latter angel was the Divine Word, or Logos, who was now incarnate in the infant. Came upon them. That is, met them, presented himself close at hand—not necessarily in the air over their heads. The glory, etc. Light—the symbol of God's presence—so often used in the Old Testament, and also in the New Testament. Sore afraid. See i. 29, 30. Men feel a solemn awe and dread of superior powers, which a sense of sin heightens.

Verses 10-12.—Fear not.—The shepherds evidently feared God with a holy fear, and hence needed not to fear with terror. Which shall be to all people. Rather, to all the people—that is, to the whole Jewish nation. To the Jews first. To you. As Jews, and hence of "the people." Saviour. Pointing to the work. Christ. Or Messiah, the Anointed. His appointment and qualification—as anointing was a separation to the

offices of prophet, priest, and king, and a symbol of inward preparation for each. Lord. This name points to the rightful and destined dominion and Headship. A sign. To confirm their faith, and that of others. A manger. See vs. 7.

Verses 13.—Suddenly.—No previous hint, or sign of their presence. This was not "evolution" or "development." The heavenly host. Or, exactly, army consisting of angels such as the one who had just spoken. The words "praising" and "saying" are, in the original, plural—so representing the "army" as made up of individuals, each of whom praised and sang, rather than as though it were merely a mass.

Verses 14.—Glory to God.—Let God be praised. In the highest. Among those in the highest places, that is, in heaven. Angels are interested in God's redemption of man—profoundly, intensely interested. Heb. i. 14, and often. On earth peace. The gospel of reconciliation with God, and of consequent peace with him and so with ourselves, but not with sin or that which is sinful. Good will toward men. God's good pleasure among, or in, not "toward" men—within them each as an experience.

Verses 15, 16.—Let us now go.—"Now," not waiting for day. Prompt in obedience, because hearty in faith. With haste. The eagerness of a great and burning desire.

Verses 17-19.—Made known abroad.—Or, simply made known—both to the parents (vs. 19), and subsequently to their associates, as vs. 18 shows. Their hearers wondered, but the narrative shows that the statement did not gain any general acceptance, and create any widespread conviction as to the Saviour. It naturally would not. Upon Mary, however, the report made a deep impression, because it harmonized with her own previous experience. She did not fully understand all that was signified, and the time had not come to talk of these things freely.

Verses 20.—These shepherds were devout, and hence the effect of this revelation. Heavenly host. Both at the appearance of the heavenly army, and at the visit to Bethlehem.

I. The Heavenly Message.—Verses 8-12.—(1.) To whom.—Not to the great and noble, but to men of low degree; to godly men—for God will honor those who honor him; to men busy at their proper work, for he who works well, worships well, provided he works in the spirit of worship.

(2.) By whom.—Vs. 9.—The Lord's angel, perhaps Gabriel—not one of the departed patriarchs, and not the Spirit of God. Thus is shown the interest awakened by redemption through all the rational universe.

(3.) What.—Vss. 10-12.—(a.) The hour of Israel's joy is come. The Gospel joy, the great, eternal joy, of all God's children. (b.) The birth of the Babe makes the hour glorious. This is the beginning of the end. (c.) The word shall prove itself by the fact, and so shall the fact be a sign, to help a healthy faith in them and in us. God gently nurses and helps us, when as yet we cannot walk or even creep alone, much less mount.

II. The Heavenly Doxology.—Verses 13, 14.—(1.) It was for the coming of man's Saviour and Lord. (2.) It was by multitude of angels, in token of the universal interest in man. (3.) It was to God, the Author of Salvation, the Father of our Lord and Saviour. (4.) It was with the grateful shepherds on the one hand, and the unmanifested millions of fellow-angels "in the highest" on the other. (5.) It was at the time and place of the annunciation. (6.) It was from a holy and reverent joy in God's ripening purpose of grace to his elect. (7.) It was in order to awaken in human hearts a kindred joy and adoration.

III. The Visit.—Verses 15, 16.—(1.) The shepherds are left. Angels make short visits. We have here only glimpses of heaven. (2.) The shepherds confer on the message, and agree to obey it. Conference strengthens faith and loyalty. (3.) The firm purpose to obey fruits in the speedy, eager obedience. (4.) Faith in God's word stands the test of experience. Faith ends in sight. The "hope maketh not ashamed."

IV. The Results.—Verses 17-20.—(1.) The news is spread. We testify of God that which he has testified to us. (2.) Men are puzzled at the works of grace in and for the Christ. They cannot understand even where they do not

disbelieve. (3.) There are those who hide in their hearts, and ponder on that revelation, which as yet shows not its full meaning. Blessed are such. (4.) Every new revelation of grace awakens in the Christian new joy and larger praise.—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, July 14th, 1878.—The Childhood of Jesus.—Luke ii. 40-52.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."—Luke ii. 52.

The Story of the Bible Lesson. FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS. Lesson I. July 7.

One day two strangers came to the city of Bethlehem, in Judea; their names were Joseph and Mary. Their homes were at Nazareth, but they came to Bethlehem because Cæsar, the Roman king, who was over the Jews, had ordered all people to go to their father's city to pay money to him. There was no room at the inn, and they had to stay in the stable. There a little baby was born; his mother was Mary, but his father was not Joseph, but the Lord God. Mary had some clothes for the baby, but no cradle, so she laid him in a manger. That night some shepherds were watching their flocks on the hills outside of the city, when suddenly the air was filled with light. They were much afraid, but an angel said "Fear not," and told them the glad news that a Saviour was born to them in the city near by. Then it grew brighter still; for instead of one, there was a multitude of heavenly angels, singing:

"Glory to God in the highest, On earth peace, God will toward men."

When the song was over, the angels went back to heaven. The place was dark as before, but the shepherd's hearts were light, and they said, "Let us go to Bethlehem and look at this thing which the Lord has made known to us."

Booths' Department.

Diary of Nine Days on a Nile Boat.

At the end of several hours' sailing, we reached a populous and scattered village I had formerly visited, and was very anxious to see again. As soon as possible we landed, and I stood looking about to try and find some face I knew. As my young companions were new to the place, I wished to introduce them to some old acquaintance, but after more than five years, would any of the peasants recognize one whom they had only seen in brief passing visits? Yes, they had not forgotten—the little party which had stopped on their shores with God's book in their hands were not forgotten. Presently two men, one of whom was an elderly man in a dark flowing robe and a large white turban, and the other, whose hands stained with indigo, marked his profession as dyer of the neighborhood, turned round as they stood under a tree chatting with the neighbors (for it was just about sunset), and stared at the European-dressed strangers for a moment. Then they came forward with outstretched hands and beaming faces, saluting me by my Christian name with great naïveté and cordiality, saying, "Welcome, welcome! and why so long without coming to our parts?"

Briefly I explained that two of those who had visited them were now in the region of blessed spirits above, and for a moment they stood silent, awed, and sorrowful-looking. Then the older man having been introduced to Mr. Naseef, began to press us all to come and drink coffee in his house. He is a wealthy peasant, and has cattle and a good-sized though rustic dwelling.

We excused ourselves on account of the late hour, but promised to come early the next day. His wife now came up unveiled, for in the country they are much freer and more simple in their habits than in towns. She seized both my hands affectionately and poured out inquiries after "Sitt F—", who was always with you before, and wanted to know all the reasons why she could not come.

"And I want a book," said a fine lad, pressing through the circle, which was now increased by several women with

pitchers on their heads, coming up from drawing water at the river. "You had books before—have you not one for me?"

"To-morrow," we said. "Come into my house, do come?" cried an elderly woman, who declared she also recollected me, pulling my

arm and opening the door which led to a walled court, with little low rooms opening into it (without any windows). In this court stood an immense buffalo with formidable horns, which looked startling so close; but the woman said she was quite gentle and we need not fear; and she called our servant who had followed us to buy milk, and milked the great creature before us, while we took observations of the curious interior. One of the little rooms round the court was an oven, and a young girl was busy lighting brushwood or reeds in it, which threw a bright light on her dark blue robes. I asked if they were going to bake bread. "No," they answered, "this is for us to sleep in."

"Sleep in the oven?" "Oh yes, when it is cold as now we warm the oven thus, and when the fire is out sleep in it; it is very nice and warm."

It certainly was rather cold, but a lovely bright evening had succeeded a dull afternoon, as is sometimes the case, and the sudden change was almost magical: the sloping rays of the declining sun had burst out, tinging the palms with gold, and revealing the opposite cliffs—which had been scarcely visible a moment before—in rich hues of pink and lilac, while the river reflected in long purple shadows the sails of the boats that were slowly progressing in the breeze, that lessened every minute till it dropped almost entirely. The palm-grove looked like an Arcadian scene, for into the stream of warm yellow light between the shadows of the palms came in little groups the peasant girls and lads from the distant clover fields, bringing home the cattle; tiny kids frisked before their mothers, lambs trotted after brown and white sheep, cows and oxen hastened towards the water to drink, and great buffaloes solemnly paced along, often led by a little child; and one pretty black-eyed girl of nine or ten came riding on her father's young buffalo with a heap of clover before her, her white teeth showing themselves in a smile of pleased curiosity as she glanced at us in passing, and her little bare brown foot hanging down among the green fodder, making a perfect rustic Egyptian picture. But, like all sunset scenes in the East, it was as brief as lovely, and the soft twilight flowed, as rapidly to be succeeded by absolute darkness, and we knew there was no moon till quite late, so it was necessary to hurry away and get to our temporary abode on the river.

Early the following morning we were again on land, and made our way to the house of one of our last night's acquaintance, where we received a very warm greeting. Our party divided, the ladies adjoining to the inner court, where the wife and mother of the host sat with them, and a couple of female neighbors, while Mr. Naseef talked to the men. The old moth was the most intelligent of the female audience, and she was a strong Mohammedan, yet seemed really an earnest sincere person, and listened with most evident interest to some passages from the gospel which were read to her, and over which we conversed with her and the wife. The latter, though equally friendly, appeared more grossed with her household business; she had indeed the special care of a sick child, about whom the father had our advice. He was evidently extremely fond of the little creature, and the way in which this frail spikely wailing girl of eighteen months crouched round a neck of the tall, handsome, vigorous father, with his jet-black beard and blunt eye, was touching to see. My experience of Egyptians leads me to think that, though very ignorant parents, and therefore often neglectful, they are very affectionate in general, and that our friend the Sheikh here was no exception.

After spending some time here, we went to another part of the village, to the abode of another of the chief men, whose family also recollected former visits, and were very anxious to see us. He had collected a number of his neighbors, which it was Friday, on which

day many of them do not work, or only for a few hours, it was easier to do than on other days. A large party were assembled in the men's court accordingly, and it was beyond description interesting to see them crowded round the missionary, so eager and yet so quiet, their dark faces full of intelligent attention, as they sat on the mat, every eye riveted on the book in his hand. Every now and then when he paused, a question would be asked, or some difficulty brought forward, and if answered satisfactorily a sort of acquiescent grunt would be heard. Of course to bring the gospel before ignorant men, and those whose little knowledge of Scripture was obtained from a source where legends and vain traditions are mixed up with bits of God's word, till truth and falsehood are blended together in inextricable confusion, is no easy task, and not to be done in a day; still to gain a friendly hearing and a little opening for the Word of life is a blessed thing, and one to be deeply thankful for. Who can say that some of the seed thus cast on the waters may not be found after many days?

Meantime we ladies were sitting in the inner court on a heap of clean maize straw with our hostess and her young daughter and a friend. They all listened with interest, and indeed were quite unwilling to let us go. We wished to visit some other houses, but the wind permitting us to go a little farther up the river, it was thought best to defer till our return any other calls; and in the afternoon we set sail again, and by dint of a strong wind blowing in the direction, arrived at our destination in less than two hours promised by our rai (or captain).

At — we found a palm-grove also, though a far less magnificent one than at our last station. There was just time for an hour's exploring before sunset; so we quickly stepped on shore and began walking along the embankments which form a sort of rude path in these villages, and which in the summer inundation are the only dry places to walk upon. The empty channels or little valleys between them are apt in the dry season to be filled with rubbish, and are neither sightly nor pleasant in any way. A carcass of a camel or some other large beast, with wild dogs around it, was so far from agreeable that I hurried away and got outside the village on another embankment flanking a nice clover field, and shaded by gum-arabic trees. Here a very pretty peasant woman, with an empty pitcher on her head, met and stopped me with a look of pleased and kindly recognition.

"Yes, yes, I know you; and where is the other lady?" she exclaimed. I told her, and asked some questions, and found her brother had had a gospel from us years before, but he lost it. "It fell in the river," she said; "however, he recollects you and those gentlemen very well, and so do I, though I was very young then—it is years ago."

She was as anxious not to let it be supposed that she could have been of mature age five years ago as any belle of London or Paris! Mr. Naseef spoke to some men, and made a little acquaintance with them, and even began to read; but a village funeral interrupted the party, and sunset was at hand, so we returned to our boat.

Next day by nine o'clock we had finished not only our prayers and breakfast, but I had nearly completed a sketch of the wide expanse of river and the palm-grove in the early morning hues, which are so exquisite here. We then started on our mission work.

First only a troop of children could be found, all adults being at work; and with mere children this sort of desultory teaching is rarely of use, as experience in many countries has shown me. However they served to attract the attention of several peasants whose morning labours were apparently over, and who soon joined us. We saw presently a very cheering sight, which was an old man, still brisk and vigorous in his looks, who was seated on a clod at the edge of a cornfield, diligently reading a tract which he had received from Mr. Naseef the night before. He seemed to be really touched at heart with what he had heard, little as it was. One or two others said to each other in a way evidently meant for me to overhear, "We had better go away if there is no *backsheeh* for us."