

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1880.

FIRST QUARTER.

Lesson I.—JANUARY 4.

THE INFANT MESSIAH.

Matt. ii. 1-12.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 7-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given."—Is. ix. 6.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

- M. The Infant Messiah. Matt. ii. 1-12.
T. Welcoming the King. Luke ii. 7-20.
W. The King Recognized. Luke ii. 25-38.
F. The Prince of Peace. Isa. ix. 1-7.
S. The King in Zion. Ps. ii. 1-12.
S. The King Opposed. Acts xvii. 1-12.
S. Serving the King. Acts iv. 13-33.

PARALLEL TEXTS.

- With vs. 1: Matt. i. 21; John vii. 42; 1 Kings iv. 30; Isa. xl. 10.
With vs. 2: Ps. ii. 6; Isa. ix. 6, 7; Num. xxiv. 17; Isa. lx. 3; Rev. xxii. 16.
With vs. 3: Matt. viii. 28; Acts xviii. 6-8.
With vs. 4: Matt. xx. 15, 23; John xi. 47, 48.
With vs. 6: Mic. v. 2; Gen. xlix. 10; Eph. i. 22; Col. i. 18.
With vs. 8: Cor. iii. 19, 20; Prov. xxvi. 24, 25.
With vs. 9: 2 Peter i. 19.
With vs. 10: Ps. cv. 3.
With vs. 11: Ps. ii. 12; Ps. lxxii. 10; Rev. xix. 10.
With vs. 12: Acts iv. 19; v. 29.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Inquiry. Vs. 1, 2. II. Anxiety. Vs. 3-8. III. Adoration. Vs. 9-12.

QUESTIONS.—In what year was Jesus born? Who then ruled over Judea? What is the title of the lesson?

I. Vs. 1, 2.—With what inquiry did the wise men come to Jerusalem? What sight caused this inquiry? Where were they when they first saw the star? For what purpose did they seek the newborn King? Who were these wise men?

II. Vs. 3, 8.—Who were troubled by these inquiries? Why should Herod be troubled? Why should Jerusalem share his trouble? Whom did he call together? What did Herod inquire of the wise men? Why did he wish to know this? What did he command the wise men? What reason for this did he give? What was his real motive?

III. Vs. 9-12.—By what were the wise men led to Jesus? What emotion did this arouse? By what acts should we honor Jesus? What honors did the wise men bestow on Jesus? What titles does the lesson give him?

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

Verses 1.—Bethlehem [house of bread]. A very old town of Palestine, first called Ephrath or Ephratah, about six miles south from Jerusalem on the road toward Hebron. It was the birth-place of David, as well as of "David's greater Son;" it was the scene of the lovely idyll of Ruth; but it always remained an obscure and insignificant village, little noted in Bible history, down to the time here spoken of when Jesus was born there. Of Judaea, formed as it were part of the proper name of the place, Bethlehem-judah. There was another Bethlehem, Josh. xix. 15. Herod the King. Herod the Great was a cruel and bloody man. He had a long reign, thirty-seven years, during which he adorned Jerusalem, re building, though of course from no pious motive, the temple with great splendor. Wise men, Magi, astrologers perhaps. From the East, possibly Persia. Heathen writers testify that there was an impression prevailing in the East that Judaea was to send forth a ruler of wide sway.

Verses 2.—Where is he, etc.—This question was addressed, perhaps to Herod himself, and he is troubled. We have seen. It is not necessarily implied that the star was not visible also to others. His star in the east. What the phenomenon here spoken of really was, there is nothing outside of this passage itself to teach. The occurrence was probably extraordinary and supernatural. To worship him. Perhaps in the sense of homage as to a sovereign, perhaps in that of adoration as to a divine being.

Verses 3.—Was troubled. Herod was, no doubt, in fear of rival pretensions to his throne.

Verses 4.—And when he had gathered together, etc. Herod convened the best Jewish authorities, the Sanhedrim probably, to consult them as to the place of nativity for their predicted Messiah. He was bent on taking suitable precautions to secure himself. Christ. That

is, the Christ, the Messiah, the predicted King and Saviour of Israel. Herod's investigation seems to show that the rumor of Messianic expectation was rife in his time.

Verses 5, 6.—And they said unto him, etc. The reply of the chief priests and scribes is summed up in a prophecy of Micah's (v. 2): "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, &c. Matthew does not himself quote, but simply reports Herod's counsellors' quoting.

Verses 7.—The wise men were apparently waiting at Jerusalem to receive their answer. They were summoned to a secret audience with Herod.

Verses 8.—"Go to Bethlehem," Herod says to the wise men. "There search and make sure you find the child. When you have found him, bring me word. I want to pay him a visit of homage myself."

Verses 9.—Lo. This word, perhaps, imports a surprising suddenness in the re-appearance of the star. Apparently the moving of the star is a phenomenon now first observed.

Verses 10.—Rejoiced with exceeding great joy. Perhaps they had missed the star that first started them on their pilgrimage. Its re-appearance re-assured them. It was a token that their coming was not to be in vain.

Verses 11.—Fell down. After the fashion of their own country, the treasures they had brought consisted of gold, of frankincense ["a vegetable resin, used for the purpose of sacrificial fumigation (Ex. xxx. 34-36); and of myrrh [the product probably of an Arabian shrub described as a "thorny tree like an acacia, from which flows a white liquid, that thickens and becomes a gum"]—costly articles all of them, but in what quantity it is vain to conjecture. They were, we may suppose, chiefly valuable, not for what they would fetch in the market, but for what they signified, that is, recognition and tribute.

Verses 12.—We naturally feel an interest in these men. Who were they? of what nation? of what region? of what religious faith? No one can tell. But God cared enough for them to warn them in a dream, and they cared enough for God to understand and obey the warning. They may have been Jews (the Jews were widely dispersed in those days, and Daniel, we may remember, presided over the "wise men" of Babylon. See Dan. ii. 48); but the language more naturally implies that they were Gentiles.

The visit of the Magi from the East may teach us a lesson in the infinite variety of God's ways of revealing himself to men.

The wise men were professional observers and students of the starry heavens.

We are not to impute power of revelation to dreams in general, simply because God, in certain cases, chose to reveal himself in dreams.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

Tell the story in three Word Pictures: First: Seeking the King. Strangers from far away were first to see 'the sign of the coming of the King.' Picture the wise men, seeing the strange light, following it, guided by it all the long way; their arrival at Jerusalem; instead of every one there eagerly watching, all the people of that place were thinking of their own affairs.

Second: Troubled about the King. Explain that Herod was not born king of the Jews, but made so by men who had conquered them, and whom they hated. Tell of the visit to him, and its results; why he and others were troubled by the inquiries of the wise men, instead of being glad because of the new born king.

Third: Finding the King. The wise men did not give up; they looked for their guide, followed it again, and it led them to the new King. Question on what they must have expected to find; and what they really did find; what they did when they had found him.

But all did not seek Jesus. Some were troubled about the king; did not want him.

If the wise men had not truly cared, been in earnest, they would not have gone on. All who truly seek Jesus will find him. What are they giving to Jesus? Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh. What are our gifts? Our love and obedience; he cares more for such gifts than for all the gold and other treasures in the world.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

Answer to Enigma.

No. 51.

The Whale. Stanza 5 refers to Jonah.

ANSWERS TO CURIOUS QUESTIONS.

- Mo. 19. Adam lived after the birth of Methuselah above 240 years. Methuselah died just before the flood. Noah may have known Methuselah for about 600 years and so have learned much of what Adam knew.
20. Twenty, six letters. Six, four letters. Nine, four letters. Twelve, six letters. Five, four letters.

Bible Enigma.

No. 52.

- 1. One weeping for her children dead, And none could stay the tears she shed?
2. Who gave his privilege away, Forgetful of the future day?
3. Who consecrated all his days With frequent prayers and holy praise?
4. Who passed in fiery car to heaven, Completed all the work God-given?
5. Who sinned when Time its course began, And brought all woe on guilty man?
6. Who gave the laws that Israel broke, When God 'mid Sinai's thunders spoke?
7. Who saw the vision of a "Child"—Of "God and mercy reconciled"?
8. Who warned the world of punishment For wasted years, and called, "Repent!"
9. A name of scorn once borne by Him Whose glories time can never dim?
10. Who in the happy days of youth The lessons learned of lasting truth?
11. Who saw when struck by dire disease The shadow alter ten degrees?
12. The place where first the tempter's art Lured woman from the "better part"?
13. A word that tells of doom profound, The balance weighed, and wanting found?
14. An heir of promise, through whose race Came first the news of God's rich grace?
15. Who saw of men the greatest age Recorded in the sacred page?
16. Where dwelleth He who reacheth down To make the contrite heart His own? A New Year's motto here behold; It might be blazoned forth in gold: The initials take, and day by day The precept thus disclosed obey.

CURIOUS QUESTIONS.

- No. 21. A wagoner passing a store was asked what he had in his wagon. He replied: Three-fourths of a cross and a circle complete, An upright where two semi-circles meet; A rectangle triangle standing on feet, Two semi-circles and a circle complete. What did he have in the wagon?
22. What are the names of two angels given in Scripture.

Boys' Department.

Christmas Eve.

BY MRS. S. M. WALSH.

Christmas Eve, I sat half-dreaming, In the fire-light's ruddy glow; And my busy brain was turning With the thoughts of long ago.

Oh, the light, and warmth, and glory Circling round a Christmas eve! Eastern tale or fairy story Never could such magic weave.

Children count the days and hours Till the Christmas time shall come; Watch them droplikeleaves from flowers Till, at last, the Christmas bloom.

Well, to-night the old time feeling Breathed upon my heart again, While I heard the soft bells pealing, "Peace on earth, good-will to men!"

By the mantel-piece I numbered Six small stockings in a row, While up-stairs their owners slumbered, Just a pair for each, you know.

Tap, tap, tap, and jingle, jingle! "Tis the reindeer on the roof! Oh, you darling old Kris Kringle, You are coming here in truth!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" I heard him stamping, "Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed again; In a minute, in came tramping Just the tiniest of men.

After all his taps and knockings, Here his jolly saintship stands! Then he turns to count the stockings, While he blows his rosy hands.

"That's the way they try to get me! Sly young rogues! I know their game! If I would, dare say they'd let me, Fill a dozen all the same!"

"Ha! ha! ha! well, time is flying, Let us see what we can do; Dearie me! I can't help trying To do the best I can for you."

With a look quite keen and elfish, Harry's stocking down he took; "Here's a boy that's rather selfish—I can read him like a book."

"Shall I scant him, just to teach him Santa Claus don't like his ways? No, no! Christmas-time should preach him Sermons for all coming days;

"Teach him only loving lessons—Generous kindness and good-will; So, young master, here's my blessing While I both your stockings fill!"

Bertie's then he caught, and shook them, Laughed till tears stood in his eyes; "Ha! ha! ha! before I took them, I knew how this fellow cries!"

"Cries when hot and cries when breezy! Worries, too! Look out, my boy! When you learn to take things easy, Santa Claus will wish you joy."

Then, of course, he came to Robbie's, Gave them many a stretch and pull; "Ha! ha! ha! I have my hobbies,—This chap wants his stockings full."

"His must be as big as t' other's, I can't scant the little ones; 'Share and share alike' for brothers—That's the way my programme runs!"

So he stuffed and stuffed each stocking Till they looked just fit to burst; While I sat serenely rocking, Pleased and silent, as at first.

Suddenly I jumped affrighted! Some one came and pulled my nose! There I sat, the lamp dim-lighted, Fire gone out, and I half-froze.

Some one said that it was "shocking," So I hurried off to bed: Not until I'd filled each stocking Just as Santa Claus had said!

The Christmas-Tree's Story.

BY ALICE WILLIAMS BROTHERTON.

It may be that I dreamed; but whether sleeping or waking, this is the story I learned from the Christmas-tree. I had put the last touches to the decorations of the tree; every little gift was in its place, and every tiny taper was ready for lighting when I sank down into an easy chair to look at my completed work. Did I fall asleep while I gazed?—for it seemed to me as if a voice came from the very center of the Christmas-tree.

"On the eve of every Christmas," said the voice, "in the hour before midnight, the forest wakes. Then it is the trees break their silence, and speak together. And it is always one story which they tell:

"Once upon a time a little babe lay cradled in a manger," said the Cedar, "in a ruined stable, where beasts of burden were stalled."

"And the angels sang in heaven," cried a Star, "and a Star moved from its place and journeyed westward; and the wise men of the East followed it; and it stood still above the stable, and the wise ones entered there, and knelt before the little child, worshiping and offering gifts."

"Gold and frankincense and myrrh," said the Sycamore, "these were the costly gifts they brought."

"Three fled by night," cried the Locust, "escaping the mandate of a cruel king; journeying through rocky wildernesses and deserts of burning sand, ever onward."

"To the Nile!" cried the Brooklet. "All the waters of the earth know it; and they dwell there in the country of the pyramids."

"But only for a time," replied the Cedars, "for they returned after the cruel king was dead, to the land from whence they came; and the young child played under the cedars, and in time he worked diligently in the shop of the carpenter, and slowly grew in stature, and in the knowledge and love of God."

"A teacher walked by the banks of a flowing river," said the Willows, "and through the harvest fields, and in the wilderness, followed by a great course of people."

"And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain," said the Olive-trees. "And he opened his mouth, and taught them many things, both of life and of the life to come."

"The powerful of the earth despised him," said the Oak, "but the poor heard him gladly."

"He went about among them doing good; he healed the sick and helped

the suffering, and the hearts of the people went out toward him," said the Palm-tree. "They spread their garments as a carpet before him as he rode into the great city, and strewed palms in his way, and shouted hosannas as for a conqueror."

"But the scholars and the priests were angry, and took counsel together to slay him."

"Under the olives of the garden of Gethsemane they took him prisoner," cried the Olive-tree, "and the leaves turned gray with horror. See! the leaves of all olive-trees are gray since that hour."

"The soldiers and the rabble mocked and jeered him."

"They plaited a crown of thorns," said the Thorn-tree, "and pressed it upon his forehead till the blood ran down in warm drops. Is it not fitting that the thorns upon my branches should be always red like blood?"

"For a sceptre they gave him a bulrush," said the Rushes. "And we sigh, as he sighed, with sorrow ever since."

"O what was it," moaned the Aspens, "that stood out dark against the sky? It was a cross made of aspen-wood, whereon they crucified him. Now you know why the leaves of all aspen-trees shiver with horror!"

"And his followers sorrowed for him," said the Cedar, "all save one."

"I know," said the purple Judas tree, "it was the false traitor who sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, and betrayed him with a kiss, and then went out and hanged himself; and the tree whereon he hung is called the Judas-tree, and its once white blossoms ever since blush red for shame."

"They came by night," said the Oak tree, "and lifted the dead form from the cross, and wrapped it in fine linen, and laid it in the rock-hewn sepulchre, and sealed the mouth of the tomb with a stone."

"But angels rolled away the stone!" cried the Palms.—"Why seek ye the living among the dead?" they said to the disciples who sought him in the tomb.—"For Life has overcome Death, and the Saviour of mankind is to-day an ever-living presence and a healer and helper for all crushed and weary hearts."

"For the third day he rose from the dead!" sang the Cedars joyfully.

"And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty," chanted all the trees in one grand triumphal chorus, "to whose name be honor and praise and glory for ever and ever. Amen!"

"This is the story the trees of the forest tell to each other on the eve of the blessed Christmas day."

Then the voice was silent, and I sat alone in the gloom of the twilight, under the boughs of the Christmas-tree.

The newest service rendered by monkeys to mankind was recently illustrated in London. In one of the school districts too many parents reported no children in their families, and in order to ascertain the real number of children in the district, the school officers resorted to an ingenious measure. Two monkeys were gaily dressed, put in a wagon, and accompanied by a brass band, were carried through the streets of the district. At once crowds of children made their appearance. The procession was stopped in a park, and the school officers began their work; distributing candies to the youngsters, they took their names and addresses. They found out that over sixty parents kept their children from school. The ingenious measure brought to the school about 200 boys and girls.

AN AGED TURTLE.—About the middle of June, a turtle was taken in the St. John's River, Florida, with the Spanish coat of arms and the date 1700 engraved upon his back. There was also inscribed in Spanish the sentence: "Caught in 1700, by Fernando Gomez, in the St. Sebastian, and was carried to Matanzas by Indians; from there to the Great Wekiva." The Great Wekiva is the name by which the St. John's River was formerly known. The turtle was put back into the river with the added inscription: "Eastern Herald, Palatka, Florida, 1879."

Twelve French Canadian Catholics have embraced Protestantism, and have been received into the Baptist Church of Waterville, Me.