

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1881.

FIRST QUARTER.

- 1. Jan. 2. Zacharias and Elisabeth. Luke i. 5-17.
2. Jan. 9. The Song of Mary. Luke i. 46-55.
3. Jan. 16. The Prophecy of Zacharias. Luke i. 67-79.
4. Jan. 23. The Birth of Jesus. Luke ii. 8-20.
5. Jan. 30. Simeon and the Child Jesus. Luke ii. 25-35.
6. Feb. 6. The Boyhood of Jesus. Luke ii. 40-52.
7. Feb. 13. The Preaching of John the Baptist. Luke iii. 7-18.
8. Feb. 20. The Preaching of Jesus. Luke iv. 14-21.
9. Feb. 27. Christ Healing the Sick. Luke vi. 12-26.
10. March 6. Witness of Jesus to John. Luke vii. 19-28.
11. March 13. The Sinners' Friend. Luke vii. 36-50.
12. March 20. Review of the Quarter's Lessons.
13. March 27. Selected Lesson: Preaching the Kingdom. Luke ix. 1-6.

Lesson I.—JANUARY 2.

ZACHARIAS AND ELISABETH. Luke i. 5-17.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 13-16.

By our current chronology, Jesus was born A. D. 1, or in the year of Rome 754. But Herod died in the year of Rome 750, before which event Jesus was born. The correct date of his birth must therefore precede the Christian era by, at least, four years, and probably about five years. Luke begins his Gospel with an address to a Christian Friend, in which he explains why he made this record. See vs. 1-4. He then gives full particulars concerning the birth of John, the herald of Jesus, and of Jesus himself. His reason for doing this was to show that Jesus was the Son of man, even while he was the Son of God. His account of the announcement of John extends beyond the present lesson, through vs. 25.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."—Luke i. 6.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

- M. Zacharias and Elisabeth, Luke i. 5-17.
T. John Foretold, Mal. iv. 1-6.
W. Work of Elijah, 1 Kings xviii. 1-20.
T. Work of Elijah, 1 Kings xviii. 21-46.
F. John like Elijah, Matt. xi. 1-14.
S. Law of the Nazirite, Num. vi. 1-8.
S. The Herald Announced, Luke i. 5-17.

PARALLEL TEXTS.

- With vs. 5: Matt. ii. 1; 1 Chr. xxiv. 10-19.
With vs. 6: Psa. cxix. 6.
With vs. 8: 2 Chr. viii. 14.
With vs. 9: Ex. xxx. 7, 8; 1 Sam. ii. 28.
With vs. 10: Lev. xvi. 17.
With vs. 12: Dan. x. 8; Rev. i. 17.
With vs. 13: Gen. xxv. 21.
With vs. 15: Josh. iv. 14; Matt. xi. 11; Num. vi. 3; Luke vii. 33.
With vs. 16: Dan. xii. 3; Mal. iv. 6; Matt. iii. 5, 6.
With vs. 17: Matt. xi. 14; Mark ix. 12.

THE HERALD OF GOD'S SON ANNOUNCED.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. The Parents of the Herald, Vss. 5-7. II. The Announcement of the Herald, Vss. 8-14. III. The Work of the Herald, Vss. 15-17.

QUESTIONS.—To what person did Luke address his Gospel? For what class of persons did he write it? Give some peculiarities of Luke's Gospel. What other book did Luke write?

I. Vss. 5-7.—What two facts about Zacharias are given in vs. 5? What two about his wife? What two about both of them in the Golden Text? What do you understand by these statements? What cause for sorrow had they? (vs. 7). What were they in the matter of years?

II. Vss. 8-14.—Of whom was John the herald? Where was Zacharias when the angel came? What six statements of the angel are in vs. 13, 14? Why was so much joy to attend John's birth? (vs. 14-17).

III. Vss. 15-17.—What three statements concerning John are in vs. 15? How may one be greater than John? (Matt. xi. 11). With what sect does the second statement connect him? (Num. vi. 1-18). What is meant by the third statement? Give some account of Elias [Elijah]. (See Home Readings). What further work of John is

described in vs. 17? Explain each of these items. What commendation of John did Jesus give? (Luke vii. 28).

For four hundred years no prophet had appeared. This "greater than a prophet" was the immediate herald of Christ and the New Dispensation.

I. The Godly Couple. (vs. 5-7.) Much of genuine greatness has had its origin in godly homes. We should be especially grateful for pious parents.

1. Their character, "both righteous;" "before God," not simply before men. See Matt. vi. 2: combining inward piety with outward worship.

2. Their Trial. "They had no child." To be childless was, among the Jews, considered a mark of divine displeasure. See Gen. xxx. 1; 1 Sam. i. 8, 11.

II. A Son Promised (vs. 8-14). To Zacharias, as to Abraham (Gen. xviii. 10.)

1. The place, in "the temple of the Lord."

2. The praying people. Priest and people praying for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

3. The angel of the Lord stood—at the place where prayer, in symbol of incense, ascended. This angel was the herald of many who soon afterwards came to Mary, to the shepherds, to Joseph, to tell the good news of the coming Christ.

4. His message. (1) Words of assurance—"Fear not." (2) The glad intelligence of answered prayer. (3) The long trial of faith shall end in "joy and gladness."

III. His Character and Mission (vs. 15-17).

1. "He shall be great," with a true greatness, i. e., "in the sight of the Lord"; a Nazirite (Num. vi. 2-4.) He shall show his greatness by having control of his appetites.

2. "Filled with the Holy Ghost." Hence, his boldness for the truth and his power with God and men.

3. His work. As a preacher of the kingdom, turning many of Israel to God. See Matt. iii. 5, 6.

NOTES.—Herod was a man of unscrupulous ambition and great cruelty. According to Josephus, Herod was of Idumean descent. The sceptre had, therefore, departed from Judah. (Gen. xlix. 10), and Messiah must come.

Of the course of Abia. Or Abijah. (1 Chron. xxiv. 10). See 1 Chron. xxiv. 7-18, for the division, by David, of the priesthood, sons of Eleazar and Ithamar, into 24 classes, to administer the daily services of the Temple, in an order determined by lot, each course serving one week. Of these, "the course of Abia" was the eighth. Elisabeth; also of priestly descent, a relative of Mary. (vs. 36). Barren, and both well stricken in years—these words reveal their grief, and their hopelessness concerning it. See vs. 18. For the probable age of Zacharias, see Num. viii. 25.

II. A Son Promised (vs. 8-14). Before God. Or, in the face of God, in the holy place of the Temple. In the order of his course. A phrase implying a system of rotation. His lot. The work of each priest of the course, or class, was also determined by lot. To burn incense. The most honorable function of all, not accorded to the same priest a second time in the same week. For the composition of the incense, see Ex. xxx. 34-38. For its symbolism, see Psa. cxli. 2; Rev. v. 8. The temple of the Lord. The holy place, in distinction from the outer courts. The people were praying without. In deep silence, at the sound of the bell (Ex. xxviii. 35). Within, was the symbol of prayer, in the incense; without, the real prayer in the hearts of the people—the complement of each other. An angel of the Lord. Gabriel. (vs. 19). On the right side of the altar of incense. The place of honor and authority. This altar stood in front of the veil dividing the holy place from the Holy of Holies. In Heb. ix. 4, it is spoken of as, constructively, within the Most Holy Place, because of its nearness. Was troubled. As sinful man naturally would be by a supernatural appearance. Fear not. The first message from heaven to man, in the New Dispensation. See it repeated. V. 30; ii. 10; xii. 7, 32; Rev. i. 17. Thy prayer is heard. A prayer, not only such as Hannah's (1 Sam. i. 11), for a son; but of wider reach—for the coming of God's kingdom. The answer connects both petitions in a son who should announce the

Messiah. John. "Jehovah is gracious"—a name which was the pledge of unusual and marvelous favor. Many shall rejoice. A hint that Zacharias had been asking for that which would give joy to the many—the coming of the expected Messiah.

III. His Character and Mission (vs. 15-17).

He shall be great. Not in a worldly sense. That would not satisfy such an one as Zacharias. Great before the Lord, with a greatness which comes from holiness and consecration. Great in the command of his appetites. A Nazirite (Num. vi. 4), like Samson (Judges xiii. 4), Samuel (1 Sam. i. 11), and the house of Jonadab (Jer. xxxv. 6). This abstemiousness was connected with the prophetic life. See Amos ii. 11, 12. See also, Eph. v. 18. Filled with the Holy Ghost, etc. Referring, probably, to the prophetic inspiration. His work was, to bring back estranged Israel to God; to prepare them for the advent of the Messiah. See Matt. iii. In the spirit and power of Elias. See Mal. iv. 5; Matt. xi. 14; iii. 3. Compare vs. 17 with Mal. iv. 6.

It is while we are at our duties that the angel comes. Not to the idle and listless, but to such as, with a cheerful courage, wait upon the Lord.

While we, like the people, pray without, Christ, like Zacharias, offers intercession for us, not simply before, but within, the veil.

Picture the scene, see Zacharias, the old priest, and Elisabeth, the wife, "well-stricken in years?" see the temple; its two rooms; the curtain worked in bright colors, hanging between; the golden altar before the veil? see Zacharias enter, with the sweet spices, and place them on the altar; the smoke rising? Do you hear the bell, that tells the people without to bow in silent prayer?

Picture the lesson in minute detail, try to make the little ones see the scene as you see it; but, remember, that they will see it no more vividly than you do. Remember that many of the little ones have never heard of the temple before.

Tell the substance of what the angel said about John. (Vs. 14-17). Parents sometimes say, "I wonder if my little boy will be good, when he grows up."

Zacharias and Elisabeth knew, even before John was born, that he would grow up to be a good boy, and a good man. They knew that he would HELP MANY PEOPLE LOVE JESUS!

One thing helped John to be a good boy. His father and mother were good people! Learn what the Bible says about them: "They were both righteous before God."

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

Picture the scene, see Zacharias, the old priest, and Elisabeth, the wife, "well-stricken in years?" see the temple; its two rooms; the curtain worked in bright colors, hanging between; the golden altar before the veil? see Zacharias enter, with the sweet spices, and place them on the altar; the smoke rising? Do you hear the bell, that tells the people without to bow in silent prayer?

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Bible Enigma.

No. 104. A CHRISTMAS BIBLE EXERCISE.

Gentle Reader, try now and rehearse The facts and factors in this simple lay, Where they may be found, give chapter and verse, And then to the Prince your homage pay!

Behold! on a fair and starry night, 1. Some patient watchers on vigils were bent,

2. When lo, a wonder burst on their sight! What could it mean? and why was it sent?

That herald strange seemed endowed with a will Its course to pursue, for on it kept, Nor dallied—swerved—nor ever stood still,

3. Till it found the place where its Monarch slept.

Those watchers looked on with wondering eyes, But sorely dismayed with doubts and fears,

4. A voice of solace saluted their ears!

It spoke of love, and joy, and peace, 5. And a chorus of voices filled the air In an anthem of praise that never shall cease,

6. And in it all nations shall have a share.

For to his pavilion the Prince had come— 7. They found him by tokens strange and new; More strange were the residents in that home! But the Prince was there!—the vision was true!

And the nimbus around his lowly bed 8. Announced him the Source of Life and Light!

9. And many crowns were ordained for the head That laid so low on that star-gemmed night!

And over him waved the symbol of peace:

10. For in his name was a banner unfurled,

11. Whose shelter is sure, whose realm shall increase— That love-blazoned banner encircles the world!

His day and coming had long been foretold In types and symbols of deep intent; And in glowing words the Prophets of old

12. Declared the surety of the grand event.

Then let all unite in a choral song With grateful hearts and pious delight, And the praises of that Prince prolong Who came to our rescue on that star-lit night.

CURIOS QUESTIONS.

143. Form a Diamond of these words:

- 1. The first consonant.
2. A domestic animal.
3. An ancient court of justice.
4. A prince's crown.
5. A weather gauge.
6. A musician.
7. A substance that has ductility and maleability.
8. A decade.

144. Behead, a timepiece, and leave a door fastening;

A musical instrument, and leave a measure. A couple, and leave sorrow. A fastener, and leave within. An outer covering, and leave a relative.

145. Form an Hour glass of the following words:

- 1. A superior officer.
2. A body of singers.
3. Native metal.
4. The front of nose.
5. A cloth receptacle.
6. A poisonous reptile.
7. An officer above No. 1.

Answers next week.

Answer to Bible Enigma.

No. 103.

WORD PICTURE.

King Jeroboam's wife goes to the prophet Ahijah in disguise to enquire concerning her child. 1 Kings xiv. 1-6.

ANSWERS TO CURIOS QUESTIONS.

141. CHARADES.

- 1. Rain-bow.
2. Penny-weight.
3. Horse-chest nut.
4. Pen-man-ship.

142. Square of five words.

H A V E N
A G A M A
V A L E T
E M E S A
N A T A L

Christmas Day.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men."

"And all the angels in heaven shall sing On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day; And all the angels in heaven shall sing On Christmas Day in the morning!"

When Christmas morning comes, they say, The whole world knows it's Christmas Day.

The very cattle in the stalls Kneel when the blessed midnight falls. And all the night the heavens shine With lustre of a light divine.

Long ere the dawn the children leap With "Merry Christmas!" in their sleep; And dream about the Christmas-tree; Or rise, their stockings filled to see.

Swift come the hours of joy and cheer, Of loving friend and kindred dear; Of gifts and bounties in the air, Sped by the "Merry Christmas!" prayer.

While through it all, so sweet and strong, Is heard the holy angels' song; "Glory be to God above! On earth be peace and helpful love!"

And on the street, or hearts within, The Christmas carolings begin:

"Waken, Christian children, Up and let us sing With glad voice the praises Of our new-born King.

"Come, nor fear to seek Him, Children though we be; Once He said of children, 'Let them come to me.

"Haste we then to welcome With a joyous lay Christ, the king of glory, Born for us to-day." —St. Nicholas.

About Riddles.

Guessing riddles and studying out puzzles have the same effect on the brain that running, jumping, wrestling, etc., have upon the body. It is well known that moderate exercise of this kind strengthens the limbs, develops the muscles, and makes a person skilful in any of the exercises he may choose to practise. Just so with guessing riddles. To do this, all the powers of the intellect are called in play. It quickens and enlightens the brain, expands the intellectual organs, and at each fresh attempt, especially if successful, the brain acquires greater capacity and skill. It makes young persons quick, sharp, shrewd and observant, and when they arrive at years of maturity, it fits them to solve correctly and advantageously to themselves, the great puzzles of life.

Riddles are of very high antiquity. The first one we have any account of, was proposed by Samson to the young men of the Philistines, and they were given seven days to guess it, and they certainly would have failed had not Samson's wife given them the answer.

The ancient sages and philosophers of Greece and Rome were in the habit of solving puzzles, and they would also send them to each other. Archimedes, when he rushed from the bath, crying out, "Eureka!" (I have found it!) had solved the problem that had puzzled him for a long time.

Riddles are also mentioned in some of the fabulous stories of heathen mythology. The Sphinx, who was said to be half woman and half lion, and who lived near Thebes, would ask every one who came to see her, a riddle, and if they did not guess it, she would devour them. Edipus was the first one to break the spell. When he visited the Sphinx, she propounded the following riddles:

"What is it that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three at night?"

Edipus answered without hesitation: "It is man. In infancy, which is the morning of life, he crawls on his hands and feet; in middle-age, which is noon, he walks erect on two; in old age, he leans on a crutch, which serves for a supplementary third foot."

Chaucer, the old English poet, wrote several riddles, and Otway and Dryden, who lived opposite each other on the same street, in London, would often amuse themselves by sending riddles and conundrums to each other.

The learned and eccentric Dean Swift wrote a great many very excellent riddles. Lord Byron's riddle on the letter "H," is perhaps the best in the English language.

Charles Dickens, when young, was very fond of guessing riddles, and John E. Gough was also noted for his aptness at guessing riddles. In fact, I believe if the history of all the men of genius and talent could be traced to their boy-days, it would be found that nine-tenths of them were fond of this high-toned and intellectual amusement.—Wide-Awake.

The other day at a Cincinnati wedding the organist occupied the time previous to the advent of the bride and groom by playing various voluntaries, and just before they arrived at the church door he struck into the very familiar refrain, "Trust her not, she's fooling thee," with elaborate extemporaneous variations. While he was hard at it the bridal party entered the church, but the professor, totally oblivious of the fact, kept banging away until the bridal party was well on its way to the altar, when he jumped into the wedding march with an emphatic suddenness that nearly took the wind out of the man at the bellows.

There is a romance in figures. A young man met a girl, ler, married her, and took her on a wedding 2er.

Life often seems but a long shipwreck, of which the debris are friendship, glory, and love: the shores of our existence are strewn with them.

The An tion was h week, in Doull, Es Chair. T Prayer, a D. Black several d the Societ

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