

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1881.

FIRST QUARTER.

Lesson IV.—JANUARY 23.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

Luke ii. 8-20.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 10-14.

GOLDEN TEXT—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men."—Luke ii. 14.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

- M. The Birth of Jesus, Luke ii. 8-20. T. Foretold by Isaiah, Isa. ix. 1-7. W. Foretold by Daniel, Dan. ix. 20-27. T. Promised by Gabriel, Luke i. 26-35. F. Described by Matthew, Matt. i. 18-25. S. Praise to the Lord, Rev. v. 6-14. S. Universal Joy for the New-born Son, Luke ii. 8-20.

PARALLEL TEXTS.

- With vs. 9: Psa. xxxiv. 7; Matt. xxviii. 2; Acts viii. 26. With vs. 10: Gen. xii. 3; Isa. ii. 2; Matt. xxviii. 19. With vs. 11: Isa. ix. 6; Phil. ii. 11. With vs. 13: Gen. xxviii. 12; Psa. ciii. 20; Lev. v. 11. With vs. 14: Isa. lvii. 19; Col. i. 26. With vs. 15: John i. 4-6.

UNIVERSAL JOY FOR THE NEW-BORN SON.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Joy among Angels, Vss. 8-14. II. Joy among men, Vss. 15-20.

QUESTIONS.—Who was the Roman Emperor at the time of the birth of Jesus? What decree did he make in those days? Who went from Nazareth to Bethlehem in obedience to this decree? How many miles was this journey? Trace out the probable way upon a map of Palestine.

I. Vss. 8-14.—What three facts are stated in vs. 9? How, in vs. 10, does the angel quiet their fears? What were these good tidings? (Vs. 11.) What sign did he give them? What were "swaddling clothes"? Of what was this condition of Jesus a sign? What evidences of joy among the angels are found in this narrative? Why should they rejoice at the birth of Jesus? On what other occasion do angels rejoice? (Luke xv. 10.)

H. Vss. 15-20.—What statement of the angel gave a reason why all men should rejoice? Why is this a cause for joy to all people? Doing what did the shepherds return from Bethlehem (Vs. 20.) What had made them so glad? What is said of Mary in vs. 19? How did she describe her state of heart in her song? (Luke i. 46, 47.)

All the world was put in motion to bring about the fulfilment of Micah. v. 2, that Christ should be born in Bethlehem.

The glory which had heretofore been revealed to patriarchs and prophets, now shines with greater lustre upon humble shepherds. The Lord does not entrust his great things to idlers.

Christ is born; no more an event of the future, to be looked forward to, for he is born "this day." He is born in the right place, "the city of David." Otherwise, he would not be the Messiah.

The sign. Swaddling clothes and a manger; not royal purple, and a couch of ivory and gold. The sign reveals him as the poor man's Saviour. The stable is the token of his kingship.

Their glorious discovery. "They found . . . the babe." So did the seeking Magi (Matt. ii. 11). So do all who heartily seek him. See Matt. vii. 7.

The shepherds went back to their flocks. But not to be silent. Christianity does not call us to neglect our business, but to put our religion into our usiness.

NOTES.—I. Joy among the angels (vss. 14.)

The same country. Historic ground, where Ruth had gleaned, and David had fed his sheep. (1 Sam. xvii. 15.) Shepherds abiding, etc. Almost every month of the year has its advocates as the month of the Nativity. It is fortunate that the period of the year is of no importance. Keeping watch, etc. As in Matt. xiv. 25—more likely by turns. The Lo is a sign-board, pointing to a wonderful event. It is not the angel, but an angel. Not the Covenant Angel of the Old Testament; for he lay as an infant in the manger; but,

probably, Gabriel who was accustomed to come upon errands of grace, (Dan. ix. 21), and had already appeared in this matter. See i. 19-26. He came upon them. Suddenly, as the phrase implies; doubtless in human form; as seems to have been the case with all the angelic appearances to men. See Gen. xviii. 2; xix. 1, 2; xxxii. 24; Mark xvi. 5, etc. The wings are the creation of artists, or borrowed from the mysterious beings of Isa. vi. 2; Ezek. i. 6; Rev. iv. 8.

Why should this announcement be to shepherds? 1. It may be that, like Simeon, they were "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Christ appears to such as "look for him" (Heb. ix. 28). 2. The Gospel Dispensation brings honor to the lowly (1-52). 3. There may have been a hint of his own office as "Chief Shepherd" (1 Pet. v. 4.) The glory of the Lord. A familiar phrase in the Old Testament (Ex. xxiv. 16; Lev. ix. 6. 23; Num. xiv. 10, etc.) The Shechinah, or cloud of supernatural brightness, which was the common symbol of the Divine presence. They were sore afraid. Literally, feared a great fear. This fear at a supernatural appearance, and the assuring Fear not, are familiar to us. See i. 13, 30; Matt. xxviii. 5, 10, etc. The gospel comes to take away fear. I bring you, etc. The angel was the first evangelist. To all people. To all the people; that is, to all classes in the nation, rather than to all nationalities. The Gentiles are included in vs. 32. Unto you, etc. The purpose of the Incarnation. Not for selfish ends, but for your salvation. Christ the Lord. The Messiah, who is Jehovah. Says Dean Alford: "I see no way of understanding this Lord, but as corresponding to the Hebrew Jehovah." A sign. The life of Jesus, here, began in the valley of humiliation. A multitude of the heavenly host. The Scriptures speak of "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" of angels. See Rev. v. 11; also, Psa. lxxviii. 17; Dan. vii. 10. Praising God. On earth, or in heaven, this is their employment. Glory to God. The sublime choral of heaven. In the highest. In the very heaven of heavens, where God's throne is. On earth peace. Peace between God and man, through Him who is our peace (Eph. ii. 14.) Only through Christ could Righteousness and Peace kiss each other. (Psa. lxxxv. 10.) "It is a matter of interest that the period of Christ's advent was one of universal peace throughout the Roman Empire—the gates of the Temple of Janus being closed, for the third time, in seven centuries."—Kitto. Good will toward men is sometimes rendered, to men of good will; that is, Peace on earth to his chosen ones. Either rendering teaches us that we are reconciled to God by his good will, or pleasure, as revealed in Christ.

II. Joy among Men (vss. 15-20.)

Let us now go, etc. Not because they doubted, but because they believed. This thing. Or, rather, this word from the angel. With haste. The zeal of these humble men presents a delightful picture. They seek at once. They find. They publish the good news abroad. All . . . wondered. It is not said that they believed. Mary kept all these things. Or, words which the shepherds had told her, and meditated upon them. Returned. To their flocks. But they carried the news with them, and continued glorifying and praising God for the things heard from Mary, and told them by the angels.

Godet says: "The oftener we read the nineteenth verse, the more assured we feel that Mary was the first and real author of the whole narrative." He thinks that Luke obtained it from her.

The incarnation of Christ is a great mystery. But its purpose is very clear. To every man we may say, "Unto you is born a Saviour."

The conduct of the shepherds was, in every way, most admirable, and is an example to us.

We do not read that the shepherds were learned men, but they could and did tell over the glad story of Christ.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

Our lesson to-day is about some shepherds who often staid out in the fields all night to take care of their sheep.

Yet, when their sheep were lying quietly

asleep, I think the shepherds often sat on the grass and looked up at the stars.

These shepherds lived near Bethlehem, the place where Jesu was born. The very night that Jesus was born, they were out in the field, "keeping watch over their flocks." They did not know that Jesus was born until some one came to tell them. Who came? Tell the story, as in vs. 9-12. Afterwards ask questions.

When the angel stopped speaking, the shepherds heard sweet music. Suddenly—many, many angels had come from heaven, and they were praising God. Let them repeat and learn the words they sang. (Vs. 14.)

When the angels were gone—darkness came—everything was quiet, and the shepherds leave their sheep, walk to Bethlehem. Describe the manger. Tell who was with Jesus. Ask who Joseph was. The shepherds went abroad telling this wonderful story. Give each child the Golden Text.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

Booths' Department.

Scripture Enigma.

No. 107.

SCRIPTURAL ACROSTIC.

Peter's exhortation on Pentecost day. What Christ left by His perfect life. That which only the Saviour can give. What Matthew says we must do if we expect to be saved.

Necessary on earth, but not needed in heaven. What the redeemed have access to in heaven.

Those who will join the chorus of the heavenly song.

The accepted time.

What Jesus gives to His disciples when in sorrow.

What is promised to those who believe.

The initials show that without which we cannot have salvation.

CURIOS QUESTIONS.

153. Who am I? I am a character well known in England, and there are few, high or low, rich or poor, but know my name and qualities. As I am a stranger to beauty and innocence, I cannot often appear among the fair sex; but in the gangs of gypsies and beggars, I make a principle figure. I take up my abode near the extremity of a village, and late in the evening or in the middle of the night, I appear. I often associate with ghosts and goblins; in fact, I may be considered their head. Never have I been seen more than once in the same light. But do not suppose that I myself am a supernatural being; nothing of the kind, as you will admit when you see me embellishing your gardens and greenhouses, even in your drawing-rooms, and in the very centre of your dining-rooms. Although I am thus far honored, I mix with blackguards, I assist in burglary, and without my aid, smuggling could not exist. It was the opinion of Burns and Blackstone that I should be in jail. Now from this you might suppose me to be a thief or a pick-pocket; but I assure you I am never seen in a crowd, and the moment I appear before one I am gone? Who am I?

154. Form a square of five words:

- 1. To come forth. 2. A perfume. 3. To boil slowly. 4. To unfasten. 5. A volatile medicine.

Answers next week.

Answer to Scripture Enigma.

No. 106.

- 1. Gen. xxviii. 11; 2. Deut. xxvii. 6; 3. Dan. v. 4; 4. 1 Sam. vii. 12; 5. 1 Sam. xvii. 49; 6. 1 Kings v. 17; 7. John xi. 38; 8. Matt. xxvii. 60; xxviii. 2; 9. 1 Peter ii. 8; 10. 1 Pet. ii. 7.

STONE.

ANSWERS TO CURIOS QUESTIONS.

148. David wrote to Joab. 2 Samuel xi. 15, 16.

149. Jeroboam.

150. Jericho.

151. The first prayer addressed to God and asking for a blessing for one's self, is recorded in Gen. xxxii. 9-13.

152. Diamond Word Puzzle:

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Select Serial. A Thorny Path.

BY HESBA STRETTON.

CHAPTER II.

HELP IN NEED.

Half an hour had passed by, and night was fast closing in; yet still the blind old man and the little child were waiting, in their utter helplessness, under the dark trees. Now and then a faint ray of hope gleamed on the old man's despair, as he heard a step drawing near, and fancied it might be Hagar's, coming back to them. He would not move from the spot where she had left him, for fear of her missing them in the dusk. Dot cried softly to herself, having been taught not to cry aloud, lest grandfather should hear her and be angry. She was the more miserable because he held her hand so fast that she could not stir from his side. He was constantly asking her if she could not see her mother, and the shivering, hungry child saw nothing but the tall black trunks of the trees standing thickly around them, and growing blacker every minute.

At last a brisk step was heard, and a boy's loud whistling coming close to them. The footstep stopped on the path beside them, and the boy's sharp voice spoke to them.

"Hallo, mister!" he said; "the gates are being locked, and you'll be turned out soon. If you're tired, I'll carry your little girl for you as far as we go together. What's she crying for, eh? Why, you're blind! Where's your dog?"

The lad paused, and looked about him in sheer amazement. There was no dog to be seen, or any one to lead the blind man. The little girl was too small and young to know her own way; and how could she get here, with a blind old man, in the heart of Kensington Gardens? He stooped down, and brought his sharp bright eyes on a level with the child's, who left off crying, and broke into a smile as she looked at him.

"She's gone!" moaned the old man; "she has left me to die like a dog."

"Who's she?" asked the boy.

"My daughter, Dot's mother," he replied. "She brought us here an hour ago or more, and she's gone away and deserted us." She wanted to put me in the poorhouse—

"Oh, don't you go there!" said the lad eagerly; "bless you! it's worse than a prison—lots." Mrs. Clack says so. It would be a sad pity for the little girl to go into the poorhouse. You tell me where you live, and I'll lead you home; and maybe she'll be sorry she fersook you by this. There, you catch hold of my arm, and I'll lead you home to her."

"We've no place to go to," he said, "that is why Hagar has left us. They turned us out of our lodgings this morning."

"That's bad!" exclaimed the boy, falling back a step or two to contemplate the old man and the child, with his head one side, and with an air of profound interest on his face. He could not find it in his heart to go away and leave them in the gloom and chill of the evening, never to know what had become of them. Plunging his hand into his pocket, he drew out a crust of bread, round which he had wound a bit of string, and carefully unwinding it, he put the crust into Dot's hand, and watched her with curiosity as she fastened her little teeth upon it.

"Hungry! why, that's bad again," he said; "if she was only a little dog, I'd take her straight home with me to Mrs. Clack. Well, I couldn't leave them to be found dead in the morning, or to go to the poorhouse, that's certain. Mister, will you and your little girl come along with me and ask Mrs. Clack what we had best do?"

"Who's Mrs. Clack?" he asked.

"Don't you know Mrs. Clack?" cried the boy, "that lives down in Chelsea? Well, I do errands for her, and I'll take you along with me and see what she says. It's a good step, but I'll carry the little girl, and you can catch hold of my arm; and we will go slow. Mrs. Clack likes little girls."

He lifted Dot tenderly in his arms, and bidding the old man grip him hard,

and step out without being afraid, for he would guide him carefully, he led them along the path towards the gate, chatting gaily as they went.

"What is your name!" asked the old man.

"I never had what one would call a name," he answered; "at least, not like other boys, you know; or, if I had, I lost it before I can remember. But I call myself Don; and I will not answer to any other name. I'll tell you why. Folks kept calling me anything they liked, until I didn't even know who I was. And there was a little dog, a little black and-tan terrier, as sharp as a needle, that used to run up to me and sniff around me and eat a bit out of my hand, as if we had known each other all our lives; and the lady that belonged to him called him Don." "I heard her once call him away from me: 'Don, Don!' she said; and that was the very last time I ever saw him. I never set eyes on that little black-and-tan dog again; so I chose his name for my own; and it often makes me think of him; coming up so friendly and familiar. That's how I came to call myself Don. I suppose, mister," suggested Don, half timidly, "you would not mind telling me your name?"

"My name is John Lister," he replied. "I'm come down in the world, young sir, lower than I ever could have dreamed of. I've been first violin in popular theatres, and drawn as much as a pound a night. We did well, young sir, very well, till my violin was broken in a street row; and Hagar's husband died after a long illness, which drained our exchequer. Could a man such as I am stoop so low as to enter a poor-house?"

"No, no!" cried Don, eagerly and respectfully, "you must never think of such a thing. I'm fond of music, I am. Perhaps Mrs. Clack has got a fiddle in her stores somewhere. She don't know half what she's got. If there's a fiddle you'd be set up again, wouldn't you? I wish I'd come sooner, and saved Mrs. Hagar from going away and leaving you. You'll be all right, now you are going to Mrs. Clack. She's the cleverest woman in London, and she'll know what to do. We shall be there sooner than you think."

The old man's mind was fast falling into a state of confusion and bewilderment; and as he dreamily walked along he scarcely heard the flow of Don's words, mingled with the din of the streets through which they were passing. He began to fear that he had made a fatal mistake, and that Hagar had left him and Dot only for a little while; perhaps to buy bread, or to seek a shelter for the night, and that she would return to the spot where she had left them to find them gone. Was it probable that his own daughter would desert him? For nearly thirty years she had been at his beck and call, serving him with unflinching patience. Could she fail him now, in this bitter extremity? He had grown so accustomed to having her about him that he could not realize that she had at last forsaken him. He stopped short on the pavement and set his gray, blind face once more in the direction of Kensington Gardens.

"I must go back," he said sharply, striking the pavement with his stick, "my daughter will be searching for us."

"No, no," answered Don. "Bless you! the gates were closed after us as we came through, and nobody would be let in after that. You told me she'd left you to die like a dog, didn't you? I couldn't have done it myself, never! But nobody can tell why she did it; and never you fret. You come along to Mrs. Clack, and if she's got a fiddle in her stores, I'll guide you to lots of quiet streets, where the police let you alone. You'll play on your fiddle and you'll pick up a sight more than your living. I've known blind fiddlers take shillings sometimes; and Dot's such a pretty little girl, she'll make folks' hearts soft, I know. Come, now; don't you fret. Never care for nothing, I say."

Old Lister went on feebly; sobbing now and then as a child does, when his fit of crying has been over some time ago. He was chilled to the bone, and faint with hunger. It was well, perhaps, that he did not see the turn Don took at last, under an archway which led into a blind alley at the back of a low and squalid street. It was an old court, no longer used as coach-houses and stables, with the rooms over them originally