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Welcome.
A new year smiling comes. It seems that we But yesterday the last one turned to greet. Swiftly the months passed by, and silently We marked it fade, and felt that something sweet Was drifting from us, and we softly sighed! As the year, lately new, grew pale and died.

O January! first of this new year, What scenes are hidden in thy coming hours? We greet thee with a mingled joy and fear, Knowing thou hast for us both thorns and flowers; And as we blindly meet each new-born day, We ask for guidance o'er the untrodden way.

Welcome, New Year! Faith bids each heart be strong.

For God will order all that comes with thee.

To Him we leave it, glad to march along, Feeling that what is best alone will be. And as we onward pass, kind wishes fall, That this may prove a happy year for all.

—SOPHIE L. SCHENCK.

The Sabbath-School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

First Quarter-Lesson I.—January 6.

THE MISSION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

—Mark 1:1-11.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.*—Mark 1:3.

PROVIDENTIAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST.—At the coming of Christ the world was peculiarly prepared for him and his work. There were many lands, but nearly all the world was subject to the one government at Rome, so that the preachers of the Gospel could travel in safety, and be protected in their work. The world was at peace, so that the Gospel could have free course. The Greek language was spoken everywhere with the native languages, so that the Gospel could be heard and read by all. The Jews had been dispersed through all lands, carrying the Old Testament, which bore witness to one God, and held the prophecies of the Messiah. And they had established synagogues in almost every town, so that there was a place in which to preach the Gospel, and a people who could be easily reached. It was a time of great intellectual activity, and there was a widespread disbelief in the existing religions.

THE ONE FOR WHOM JOHN CAME TO PREPARE.—Ver. 1. *The beginning of the gospel.* This verse is a title to the book of Mark. It is equivalent to the liturgical phrase "Here beginneth" the Gospel, etc. The preaching of John the Baptist was the beginning of the announcement of the Gospel by Jesus. The gospel, shortened from "good news," i. e., good story, news, tidings. *Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* This is the full title of our Lord, a complete description of our glorious Saviour. *Jesus* (meaning Saviour) was his personal name, showing his human nature. *Christ* (meaning anointed) is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Messiah*, the official title of the expected King and Saviour. *The Son of God.* This declares his eternal and divine nature.

JOHN THE BAPTIST FORETOLD IN THE SCRIPTURES.—Vers. 2, 3. *As it is written in the prophets* ver. 2, is from Mal. 3:1, and ver. 3 from Isa. 40:3. *Behold, I send my messenger before thy face.* As heralds went before the oriental kings proclaiming their coming, and bidding every one to make way for him. *The voice.* (Isa. 40:3-5.) John is called "a voice" because he was the utterer of God's thought; he called attention not to himself, but to his message. *Of one crying in the wilderness.* The thinly inhabited regions. *Prepare ye the way of the Lord.* The figure here used is founded on an eastern custom of sending persons to prepare the way for the march of a monarch through a wild and uncultivated region. This consisted of leveling hills, filling valleys, putting roads in order, and getting everything in readiness. *Make his paths straight.* Level up and straighten the ways.

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARING THE WAY FOR CHRIST.—Vers. 4-8. Studying these verses in connection with the description of John's work as given in Matthew and Luke, we note several ways in which John prepared the way for the work of Jesus Christ.

FIRST. John called the Attention of the People to the fact that the new kingdom of God was at hand. His preaching would set them to searching the Scriptures and watching the signs of the times.

SECOND. He led the People to Deep Conviction of Sin, and thus made the people feel their need of a Saviour. John called the Baptist in Matthew. This name, the Baptizer, was of course given him in consequence of the remarkable rite he performed, which attracted universal attention, and was repeatedly used as the characteristic representation of his whole work. *Baptize, ... preach.* An explanation of how John performed the duty of forerunner, according to the prophecy. *Baptism of repentance; i. e., a ceremonial washing, which denoted a profession of repentance, or a thorough change of mind with respect to sin. Remission of sins.* It is more than the taking away of the punishment due for our sins. It is the being received back into the family of God, as his true children, so that we may draw near to God as to a loving father, who treats us as if we never had sinned.

THIRD. He awakened a General Interest among the masses. There was a wide ferment of thought and feeling and hope, and this was a necessary preparation for the reception of Christ. *And there went out unto him all the land of Judea.* A popular description of the multitudes,—representatives from all parts, city and country, and of all classes. *And they of Jerusalem.* Even the highest and most educated and wealthy classes were drawn to hear the wonderful preacher.

FOURTH. Large Numbers were brought to Repentance, and so prepared to believe on Jesus. *And were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan.* The place (five miles northeast of Jericho) was known as Bethabara, "the house of the ford." Fords do not change in a river like the Jordan; roads are never altered in the East, and this must always have been, as it is now, the place of passage from Jericho to Gilead. *Confessing their sins.* The very act of baptism was a confession of sins and a promise of repentance, but doubtless they also, as Alford says, made "a particular and individual confession," not, however, made privately to John, but before the people. No one truly repents who does not also confess,—to God the sins against God, to man the sins against man, ever also making restitution as far as possible.

Value of Confession of Sin. Confession strikes at the root of the matter, showing that we ourselves are to blame for our sins. It honors God before men, no longer imputing to him the evils which belong to ourselves. It confirms and strengthens us in our new life. It is a barrier against returning again to sin. It tends also to convict others of sin, and to lead them to repentance.

And John was clothed with camel's hair. Woven into a garment, a mantle or tunic such as the Bedouins still wear. Not the elegant kind of cloth made of the fine hair of the camel, which is thence called camel-hair, but a coarse stuff manufactured from the long and shaggy hair (shed every year) of those animals. *And with a girdle of a skin; i. e., of untanned leather, like that worn by the Bedouin of the present day. And he did eat locusts.* The common brown locust is about three inches in length, and the general form is that of a grasshopper. Locusts have been used as food from the earliest times. *And wild honey.* Wild honey is common in the forests of Eastern Palestine, or just where John was baptizing. John's habits were perfectly natural for a poor person living in the wilderness. He contented himself with the natural supplies Providence afforded him. The dress was probably deliberately adopted by the Baptist as reviving the outward appearance of Elijah. *And preached.* John did much more than baptize; he warned, and entreated, and persuaded men to repentance, and proclaimed the coming Christ. *There cometh one mightier than I.* He called attention away from himself, who was but a man, to the divine Saviour, who was able to save them from their sins. *The latchet of whose shoes, or rather, sandals.* "Latchet" a word now obsolete, was the "thong" or "lace" with which shoes or sandals were fastened. *I am not worthy to loose.* It was the business of the lowest servants to bind on, to loose, and carry about their master's sandals. The general sense is, "I am not worthy to perform for him the humblest offices." *I indeed have baptized you with (or in) water.* I have administered the outward rite, that expresses your repentance, but cannot renew your hearts. *But he shall baptize you with (or in) the Holy Ghost.* Matthew adds, and *with fire.* This Holy Spirit was symbolized by fire, which enlightened, and purified, and renewed, with intense power.

THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST: A PREPARATION FOR HIS WORK.—Vers. 9-11. *In those days.* While John was preaching and baptizing. Probably in January, A. D. 27. *Jesus came from Nazareth.* His home with his parents, where he lived till he was now about 30 years old (Luke 3:23), the age at which the Levites began their ministry, and the rabbis their teaching. *And was baptized of John in Jordan.* It is uncertain where, but "probably at a ford near Jericho, where John had been baptizing. Why Jesus was baptized. Matthew says it was in order "to fulfil all righteousness."

If one so deeply, though hitherto quietly, devout, had stayed away from the ministry and baptism of the new prophet, it would have been setting a very bad example, unless explained. Jesus was the example for his disciples to imitate; and as baptism was to be an ordinance of perpetual obligation in the new dispensation, we see in the baptism of Jesus an example to his followers. *And straightway coming up out of the water.* As soon as the baptism was completed, and he was going up the bank of the river. He went up praying. *He saw.* Even to Jesus the best gifts came through prayer. *The heavens opened; and the Spirit like a dove descended upon him.* The Holy Spirit descended not only in the manner of a dove, but in the bodily shape. A most captivating symbolism. All along the ages it is the power of his gentleness and tenderness and meekness,—his love, in short,—that has been victorious. He has "wooed" and won. We are apt to think of Jesus Christ as the only great manifestation of God's love. But the Spirit is another manifestation of God's love. And the Spirit produces, in the hearts of those who dwell in the Spirit, the dove-like nature,—gentle, loving, attractive. *And there came a voice from heaven.* Three times during our Lord's earthly ministry was a voice heard from heaven: at his baptism; at his transfiguration; in the courts of the temple during Passion Week. *Saying, Thou art my beloved Son.* Thus the baptism of Christ was the occasion of his public recognition and authoritative attestation as the Son of God and as the true Messiah. *In whom I am well pleased.* This voice from heaven assured Jesus that he was indeed the Son of God, and had God's help and approval in all his difficult mission. It was also a testimony to John and to the people, that this Jesus was the true Messiah for whom they had been looking.

PRACTICAL HINTS.

It is a terrible thought that there are souls close by us which have not yet had the beginning of the Gospel in their own hearts.

It is the duty of every one to prepare the way of the Lord, both in his own heart and in the community.

True teachers are a voice, calling attention, not to themselves, but to their message.

Repentance and confession are necessary to remission of sins.

True repentance is always accompanied by the confessing and the forsaking of sin. It is a change of mind, of heart, of life.

Of all acts, is not, for a man, repentance the most divine? The greatest of faults is to be conscious of none.

There can be no success in saving men except through the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the part of the teachers and the taught.

Jesus not only possessed religion, but professed it in God's way; and every true follower should follow him both in the kind of religion and in the public profession of it.

Charming the Cobra.

Once a year, during the rainy season, the cobra lays from twelve to twenty eggs. In one specimen shown by Mr. Phipson, the young one is seen just as it is emerging from the egg. The tooth with which it cuts its way out is shed as soon as it has served its purpose. When born the young cobra measured about seven and one half inches long, and were about nine inches in length, but had lost all their plumpness. It was very remarkable that the original nutriment got out of the egg should be able to sustain them so long. On account of its timidity and the great ease with which it can be tamed, it is the only snake with which the snake-charmers will have anything to do. By attracting its attention, with one hand, it may be easily seized round the body with the other; and so long as the hand or any other object is kept moving before its eyes it will never turn to bite the hand that holds it. This is the simple fact the knowledge of which the charmers turn to such advantage in their well-known performances. The snake is taken from its basket, and a slight stroke across the back brings it at once into a defensive attitude. The constant motion of the musical instrument before the snake keeps it watchful and erect, and not the music produced. As a matter of fact, snakes have no external ears and the cobra hears the music at all. The charmers say that theadder of the East, the *Daboia*, has no ear for music, because they cannot operate on it as they do on the cobra. It is rather interesting to note that this has been the belief since David's time at least,—"like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, which will not harken to the voice of charmers."—*Nature*.

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