

Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

Lesson 4—Jan. 23.

Luke 2: 8-20.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.—Luke 2: 14.

Topic.—Universal joy for the new born son.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, January 17: Luke 2: 8-20. Tuesday, January 18: Rev. 10: 1-6. Wednesday, January 19: Acts 12: 6-17. Thursday, January 20: John 12: 29-30. Friday, January 21: Rev. 19: 4-10. Saturday, January 22: 1 Sam. 17: 30-37. Sunday, January 23: John 10: 7-18.

NOTES BY A. C. KENDRICK, D.D. LL.D.

The scene of the angelic appearance and visit of the shepherds is omitted by Matthew, as is the visit of the magi by Luke. Both are strikingly significant, and appropriate to the birth of the Messiah, the one bringing, in the persons not of proud Pharisees, but of humble shepherds, the homage of Israel; the other, in the persons of the magi, that of the Gentiles. The historical reality of neither need be questioned by a believer in the grand central miracle of the incarnation. These lesser miracles cluster naturally and most significantly about it. The respective forms of the revelation too are eminently fitting. To the Jews we might expect the theophany to come through angels; to Gentile astrologers, remote from Jewish life and history through a star. The visit of the shepherds was probably prior in time. They found the infant in the stable in which he was born; the magi in a house to which was probably early removed.

Vs. 8.—IN THE SAME REGION: the neighborhood of Bethlehem. IN THE FIELDS BY NIGHT: the weather allowed them to be by night in the open fields; a fact commonly regarded as precluding the supposition that the Lord was born in December, near January, when the weather would be too severe for such open-air exposure. The flocks, the rabbin tells us, were led out to pasture in March, and brought home to shelter in November. Yet dry and warm weather so often occurs in December that no inference can be confidently drawn from the text regarding the date of the nativity. KEEPING WATCH: more strictly plural, KEEPING WATCHES; which may mark the succession of watches, or different localities in which they were guarding their flocks. BY NIGHT: when the angelic glory would be more conspicuous by contrast.

Vs. 9.—AN ANGEL. Coming most gladly on this blessed errand. STOOD BY THEM: came to, or upon them. A word used in the classics of heavenly visitations and appearances (Acts 12: 7). THE GLORY OF THE LORD. The brightness that encompasses the throne of God attended the descending angel and shone around the shepherds. TERRIFIED. As is natural under extraordinary manifestations from the invisible world. Without sin, earth would have stood open to heavenly intercourse. Sin barred it from that intercourse, and makes heavenly visitations, even to the pious, exceptional and startling. Here the extraordinary splendor augmented the terror.

Vs. 10.—GREAT JOY. The tidings of the birth of the long-since promised and long-looked-for Messiah. WHICH WILL BE TO ALL THE PEOPLE (not as English Version, "to all people," that is, to all nations but) the people of Israel, to whom the Christ had been promised, and for whom primarily, he was born. The wider scope of the Messianic messages, so as to make this a joy to all people, was unfolded later, though included in the original promise (Gen. 22: 18), and often referred to in the Old Testament (Ps 72: 17; 42: Isaiah 1).

Vs. 11, 12.—THAT: introducing the contents of the message; or BECAUSE: the reason of the joy. FOR YOU, as belonging to all Israel. SAVIOUR. Rescuer and deliverer. Spiritual as it ultimately proved. City of David (Micah 5: 2; Matt. 2: 6). CHRIST. Anointed; the expected MESSIAH. LORD expresses his character as divine ruler, bearing the name by which the Septuagint renders the Old Testament name, Jehovah. It seems difficult to avoid giving this sense here. The sign or token of the truth of the angel's announcement was to be an infant in its swaddling clothes, which they would find lying in a manger.

Vs. 13.—A MULTITUDE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST, hovering around the wondrous child, and as the announcement was concluded, bursting into view. Earth has probably never witnessed so sublime a spectacle as this vast body of singing sons of light, breaking on the darkness and silence of the night. It surpassed in moral grandeur the angelic descent on Sinai.

Vs. 14.—GLORY. The angelic song consists of two strains or divisions, with a simple antithesis: Glory in the heavens—to God. Peace on earth—among men. The song, brief as it is, is of the widest comprehension. It embraces heaven and earth, God and man, ascribing glory to the one, and declaring peace to the other. The highest [HEAVEN] is the "heaven of heavens" where is supposed to be the throne of God. Fresh ascriptions of glory are made to him by the holy beings that surround his throne, in view of the marvelous display of his grace in the birth of the Messiah. Peace is proclaimed to the earth at the birth of the Son of God.

whose reign would come peace between rebellious man and God, peace among warring nations, and peace in the discordant elements of the Lord. All this may seem late in coming, but it WILL COME, and its coming is guaranteed by what the gospel has already accomplished. MEN OF [HIS] GOOD PLEASURE. Such is the rendering demanded by the best critical texts. It limits the "men" to those of God's good pleasure; in whom he is well pleased, the pious, the righteous.

Vs. 15, 16.—With the departure of the angels the shepherds naturally resolved to go (strictly GO THROUGH, complete the journey) CLEAR TO BETHLEHEM, and see the wondrous things which the Lord had made known. Their language is not that of doubt, but of assurance. They believed, and hastened to Bethlehem expecting to find, and actually found, all as predicted. A divine impulse, no doubt guided them to the spot.

Vs. 17-18.—ON SEEING the realization of the angel's declaration, they naturally made known the wondrous scene that had transpired with them, AND ALL WHO HEARD IT WONDERED at the story. There were others besides Mary and Joseph; some already present; others drawn by the wonderful news which would fly rapidly. There was that in the air and manner of the shepherds, which, conjoined with what was already known of the child, inspired confidence in their story. It was a fitting accompaniment of the marvelous birth. The Spirit of God was present, breathing an atmosphere of sacred enthusiasm around the divine child, over whose birth he had presided. In the mention of the parents, Mary, is named before Joseph; the real before the ostensible and merely legal parent.

Vs. 19.—MARY, rather than Joseph, as the true parent. KEPT (continued to keep) ALL THESE SAYINGS OF THINGS, as the word may be rendered. PONDERING. Literally, "casting together" (conjecturing), putting them together, and searching into their true character and significance. Mary, like the rest of the Jews, had to learn gradually, and was late in fully learning the character of her Son and Lord. HER HEART. Not as the seat of the affections, but (as in 1: 51) of the inner rational life.

Vs. 20.—GLORIFYING: ascribing glory to. Everything aroused them to a transport of devotion. The fire kindled by the message and song of the angels was fanned to a flame by what they had seen and heard in Bethlehem, the sight of the child, and the accounts of its parents. ACCORDING AS IT HAD BEEN SPOKEN TO THEM: namely by the angels. The angelic announcement, the appearance of the child, and the story of the parents, all blended into harmony.

LIGHT FROM BIBLE LANDS.

BY REV. GEORGE E. POST, M.D., BEIRUT, SYRIA.

Shepherds might abide in the field (Luke 2: 8) in Southern Palestine, even at the usually received birthday of Jesus, Dec. 25. The argument against that date from the difficulty of travelling or living out of doors at night, at that season will not hold good. Men do travel then with women and children. Shepherds live in the open air the whole year; and at that season the pastures, instead of being covered with snow, as in the northern districts of Europe and America, are just attaining their full freshness and greenness after the long draught of summer. Sheep and goats are often taken into folds for protection; but these folds are generally open to the sky. The shepherd is protected from the inclemency of the weather by a great cloak of sheepskin, with the woolly side in and the untanned skin without, well greased to enable it to shed water.

The flocks are watched to protect them from wolves and leopards, and rarely from the attacks of dogs and jackals. The Syrian fox rarely or never attacks sheep. Leopards are now confined to Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon.

The shepherds of the present day are mostly Moslems, in name, but have little religion in fact. They seldom know how to read; and their whole lives are given up to the care of their flocks. They eat little but what the animals furnish.

The flocks are usually too large for one shepherd, as appears from vs. 8 and 15, from which it would seem that there were several, and that they were religious men. Shepherds have been astronomers; and there is nothing in their mode of life, except their isolation, to make them irreligious. In fact they seem in a peculiar sense exposed to the casualties which turn men's minds to God, and dependent upon the care of a Providence without which they could not exist.

The manger (v. 16) may have been cut in the solid rock, as is not unfrequently the case or it may have been built of stone, they are seldom of wood. To one familiar with the Oriental habits of travellers, it does not seem so strange that Joseph and Mary should have been among the animals, or that the convenience of a manger filled with straw (chopped straw) should have been eagerly seized upon in the absence of a cradle.

The inn, wherein there was "no room for them" was doubtless one of the unfurnished chambers above or around the court of the caravanserai, not itself so much better than the vaults where the cattle are housed. These chambers are bare walls, with a stone or composition floor and blackened roof, as cheerless and unhomelike as conceivable. Mary's lodging was rather the result of the crowding of the khan than of her poverty, as usually thought.

Shepherds were well chosen to spread the tidings (v. 18) as they see much of men in their migrations, and would carry the news to all who dealt in the products of their flocks, or met them at the fountains or wells.

A brave Spanish miner saved a comrade lately at the risk of his own life in one of the principal mines of Linares, in Spain. Three miners were engaged in sinking a shaft, and after charging the boreholes with dynamite, two of them climbed to the gallery above, the third remaining behind to light the fuses attached to the charges. Having done so, he signalled to his comrades, and was in the act of being hoisted up with a windlass and rope, when, on nearing the mouth of the shaft, he lost his hold and fell a distance of fifty feet to the bottom of the shaft, where he lay stunned and disabled, in close proximity to the burning fuses. A chain ladder communicated with the bottom of the shaft, and on observing the fall one of the miners at the windlass, placing his drawn knife between his teeth, went down without a moment's hesitation to the rescue of his injured comrade and severed the fuses as they were on the point of igniting the charges, thus saving him from an awful and instantaneous death. How aptly this illustrates Christ's descent from the heights of glory into the dark regions of suffering and sorrow, and even into the lower parts of the earth at his death, to deliver us from the crushing explosion of Divine wrath.

A DEADLY KEY.—In a museum in Venice there is a case filled with pistols, daggers, and other instruments of murder and torture. Among these deadly things there is a key so arranged as to throw poisoned needles into the hand of any one using it. When the king who owned it wished to get rid of any one he used to hand him the key, and tell him if he would go and unlock a certain door with it he would find a great deal of money and other valuables, which he could have. But while the unsuspecting person, expecting soon to be made glad by obtaining the promised treasures, was unlocking the closet, a hidden spring would force the poisoned needles into his hand, and very soon he would die. Satan very often comes to us and tells us that if we will only do some sinful thing it will be just like a key, for it will unlock for us some make-believe closet so that we can get our heartful of happiness; but let us remember that he wants to fill our hearts with sorrow.

PORRIDGE AND PRAYERS.—Dr. Guthrie was in Amsterdam in 1867 at the Evangelical Alliance Congress in that city. The doctor gave an account of his Ragged School to a vast audience, chiefly composed of foreigners. Many were able to follow him, though he spoke in English, and their astonishment was great. Even the undemonstrative Dutch were aroused by his stirring appeals, and their enthusiasm rose to a high pitch when he closed by saying:—"Now, if you mean to take this work in hand, and try and rescue these forsaken ones, mind that ye provide plenty of soap and water. Begin by washing and scrubbing them well, that they may know, it may be for the first time in their lives, the feeling of being clean. Then feed them with a bountiful meal of milk and porridge; and then prayers! Porridge first, mind; prayers afterwards." The people fairly shouted as they listened to this quaint but sensible advice from the eloquent Scotchman.

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D. POTTINGER, Chief Superintendent. Railway Office, Moncton, N. B., November 24th, 1880. dec 8

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