

promises of Christian piety, but sets it forth in its sublimity, which is so surprising and incredible to the natural man. Of these sublime promises nought is to be abridged; for a noble human heart only they can have the genuine charm. Fellowship with Christ, however, is not absorbed by fellowship with the Father, but continues uninterruptedly for the apostles, because fellowship with the Father is fellowship with God in and through Christ. Nothing is so repugnant to John as such a separation between God in Himself and Christ. He knows nothing of the idea, that to man there could be given an image of God otherwise than in the face of this Son of man Jesus Christ, in whom he beholds only the only-begotten of the Father.

Ver. 4. John now adds for what purpose he writes thus (vv. 1-3) to his readers. *This write we unto you*—according to the apostle's usual way of writing (ii. 26, v. 13), this refers, not to what follows, but to what has preceded. His purpose is to make the joy of his readers full, to render the joyousness of their standing as Christians complete. Their joy is fulfilled by its being brought home to their consciousness, that in their faith in the proclamation of the Gospel they have known the Highest, viz., the Absolute itself, the Eternal Life, yea, that with this Highest they have entered into real fellowship. He who knows that the primordial life has been manifested, and that he can have

fellowship with the same and thereby with the Father—his heart must beat high. We must hold fast to this as a general test of one's Christian standing being real, that it is joyousness. Sorrow, however, is not by any means excluded from the mood of a Christian; but being presupposed in it in its full depth and inwardness, it is at the same time overcome. Still, it is only gradually that this joy of the Christian state becomes a reality, and only in proportion as the object of Christianity actually becomes the matter of joy. And only if with our love we really incorporate ourselves with the primordial life in Christ, can we have true joy, which keeps pace with the diminishing of delight in the world. For this reason it is a *holy* joy and requires no further discipline. Only that requires discipline which is ever disturbing it, viz., the ever reviving delight in the world. It is the joy, which the Saviour calls His own (John xv. 11, xvii. 13), and the fulness of which He promises to His own (John xvi. 20-24); the joy in the Lord, which Paul calls for (Phil. iii. 1, iv. 4), the joy in the Holy Ghost, in which he makes the kingdom of God consist (Rom. xiv. 17), the joy which he represents as the fruit of the faith that is steadily advancing towards its completion (Phil. i. 25). This joy should reach its full measure in his readers. Instead of their present joyless, languid, cold Christianity, he seeks to awaken one that is joyous.

## Sunday School.

### The International Lessons for 1890.

SHORT NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL.

THE Gospel according to Luke will be the subject of lesson throughout the year, so that it will be worth while for the teacher to possess some of the best books on that Gospel. The most suggestive of the larger Commentaries is Godet's. But it costs money and needs scholarship to appreciate it. There are three small and cheap Commentaries. St. Luke, in the *Cambridge Bible for Schools*, is by Farrar, and costs 4s. 6d. Farrar is not at his best in commenting, but this is a good serviceable book, full of simple illustration. Professor Lindsay writes the other two; viz., "Handbooks for Bible Classes": St. Luke, Part I., 2s.; Part II., 1s. 3d.; published by Clark. And "Commentaries for Bible Classes and Senior Sabbath Scholars": St. Luke, two parts, 4d.

each, published by Blackie. The former is much the fuller and the better for teachers; the latter is very cheap, and quite sufficient for the pupils.

Then there are other aids innumerable. A scholarly *Life of Christ* will be found of service. The Religious Tract Society recently published, at 6d., an excellent little *Life of Christ*, by Dr. Conder. It confines itself mainly to the historical and geographical details. Andrews' *Life of Our Lord* has a still more limited range, but is very instructive on all points of chronology and geography. For the pupils, especially in higher classes, Dr. Salmond's *Life of Christ*, in "Bible Class Primers," is by far the most satisfactory. It costs 6d. Larger, and very suitable for teachers, is Scrymgeour's *Lessons on the Life of Jesus*, 2s. 6d. It presents questions on each chapter, and a reference to other sources. Stalker's *Life of Christ* is cheaper, 1s. 6d., and exceedingly fresh and interesting, but it presents picturesque groupings without traversing the whole narrative. Quite recently, in "Men of the Bible" Series, has appeared *Jesus*

*Christ, the Divine Man*, by J. F. Vallings. It is a careful study of the life of Christ, full of learning, well mastered, and eloquently expressed. Of the larger Lives of Christ, Farrar's is the most readable, Geikie's the richest in information, Edersheim's the best all round.

## I.

Jan. 5.—Luke i. 5-17.

*The Forerunner announced.*

A single scene is presented in this lesson, and that a striking scene; it should not be difficult to make it interesting and instructive to children of any age. It should be read aloud by them, and, as they read, only the really obscure points explained. These are:

1. "Of the Course of Abia." By the days of David the priests had become too numerous for the service that was required, and they were divided into twenty-four courses, each of which served for a week, and then gave place to another course.

2. "His lot was to burn incense." The priests belonging to one course cast lots to settle what part of the temple service each should undertake. Thus nothing was done by human appointment.

3. "To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" (verse 17). It is very difficult to say what this means. The usual explanations are: (a) that the reference is to domestic concord; or (b) that the "fathers" mean the Jews, and the "children" the Gentiles.

On a certain day—it was at the very close of the reign of Herod the Great—the lot having been cast, it fell to an aged priest, named Zacharias, to enter the Holy Place and offer incense. It was the supreme moment of his life. When the silver trumpet sounded for the morning sacrifice, the people assembled outside the court of the priests. The sacrifice was laid on the altar of burnt offering; Zacharias and two attendants entered the Holy Place. The attendants laid the burning coals upon the altar of incense within, and then withdrew. Zacharias stood alone before God. He was dressed in white linen garments, the symbol of purity, a turban on his head, his feet bare, for it was holy ground. The bell rang without, and, at the signal, Zacharias threw the incense on the altar which stood close to the door of the Most Holy Place; the cloud rose up before the place of the Mercy Seat; and the people without lifted up their hearts in prayer to God as by one common impulse.

Immediately there appeared an angel standing on the right side of the altar—the propitious side; on the other stood the golden candlestick. His first words, the first words of the new Gospel, were "Fear not!" The people were praying outside; Zacharias had prayed within. "Thy prayer is heard." The word means a definite request. What was it for? A son; for Elizabeth was barren, a great sorrow to a Jewish wife, who might be the mother of the Messiah. The prayer is heard. The Messiah is at hand, for this son is to be His forerunner.

There are several topics which may be touched upon to profit. Select what will suit the children as to age. There is the reverence due to God, so well illustrated by the

different parts of the temple; within the innermost sanctuary He was understood to dwell. Yet He may be approached now, through Jesus Christ, "boldly". "Fear not" is the door thrown open by the Gospel. Or, there is the great lesson that He is a prayer-hearing God. Though He delay long, yet He will answer. But note the character of Zacharias and Elizabeth. Think of the meaning of the blind man's words, "We know that God heareth not sinners". The prayer was real, definite; an answer was hoped for still. And what an answer when it came!

In the "Notes of Recent Exposition" in this number of the EXPOSITORY TIMES will be found something upon the altar of incense.

## II.

Jan. 12.—Luke i. 46-55.

*The Song of Mary.*

It is known as the *Magnificat*, which is just the Latin word for "doth magnify".

Whoever wishes to understand this beautiful hymn of praise should read four sermons which Canon Liddon delivered in St. Paul's, last autumn. They may be found either in the *Family Churchman*, Nos. 411-414; or in the *Christian World Pulpit*, Nos. 928-931; or in the *Church of England Pulpit*, Nos. 724-727; or in a volume just issued of the *Contemporary Pulpit Library*, pp. 129-188. They are truly great sermons.

It is by no means an easy lesson. A careful division will make it much clearer. There are four strophes:

1. Mary praises God because He has visited her in her humble station.—Verses 46-48 (middle).

2. She then refers to the special privilege which God has granted her.—Verses 48-50.

3. This is God's way with all human lives: He puts down the proud, and exalts the humble.—Verses 51-53.

4. Returning to His special mercy at this time, she says it is the fulfilment of the promise made to the fathers.—Verses 54, 55.

Now, take these parts in order:

1. Mary praises God with her *soul*; that is, her thoughts and emotions as a reasonable being; and with her *spirit*; that is, with that diviner part which links her to her Maker and Redeemer, which enables her to apprehend and worship God. She sees a definite reason for praise—God has "regarded" her though in a humble position.

2. She does not yet give a name to the "regard" which has been shown her. But she says it is something which will make her name blessed to all generations; it is a "great thing," she adds; and then it is all of His *mercy*. And so will He deal with them that fear Him, in every generation.

3. But He who always raises up the humble, because of His mercy, is a great God of might, and in His wrath "scatters" the proud in the very midst of their proudest thoughts. The one side involves the other. (Remember the words: "Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee".) This thought is thrice repeated.

4. Lastly, it is no caprice; it is the fulfilment of an old promise—a promise that goes back as far as the days of

Abraham. And Mary feels that she has a place in that line of promise, just as she is a link in the chain of succession from Abraham, through David, to the Messiah. Her very words show the succession; for they are full of the Old Testament.

Think of Mary—the modest, the lowly handmaiden—uttering this great burst of triumphant song! There is no such thing as distinction in the worldly sense with God. It is the poor in spirit who are blessed in the kingdom of God; it is the hungry He fills with good things. How often is it asked in these days, How does Christianity deal with the poor? Ask more definitely, How does *Christ* deal with the poor? And here is the answer: “The hungry He filleth with good things”. That is to say: They that are rich and increased with good things in this life miss the only blessings that outlive the few short years here. And they that come near to Him with hungry hearts are filled themselves, and then sent forth to minister to the poor and needy around them. How does Christianity deal with the poor? Ask how Christ deals with the *poor in spirit*, and then how they deal with the hungry and naked and homeless. Christianity alone knows how to deal with the poor.

### III.

Jan. 19.—Luke i. 67-79.

*The Song of Zacharias.*

Another song! This song is called the *Benedictus*, the Latin for “blessed,” the first word of the song. It was natural and easy for the pious Israelite in moments of exaltation to break forth in song, for his spirit was daily fed on the psalms and the songs of the prophets. Both this song and the last are described as a Mosaic of Old Testament quotations.

There are a few phrases that need explanation:

1. “Raised up a horn of salvation.” The horn is for the animal’s protection; and so the metaphor is natural: A horn for our salvation.

2. “Since the world began.” Literally “from of old”. The first promise—the *protovangelium*—is found in Gen. iii. 15.

3. “The dayspring from on high.” The word, which evidently means the dawn, the morning light, had come to be used as a name for the Messiah—and a beautiful name it is.

Lindsay divides Zacharias’ song into four parts: (1) The coming of the Messiah (68-70); (2) the work of the Messiah (71-75); (3) the relation between the Messiah and the infant John (76, 77); (4) the glory of the Messianic advent and salvation (78, 79).

There is no difficulty in understanding the meaning of the words of this song. But it will be no easy task to make it an interesting lesson, at least to the younger children. The great theme is God’s promise. Let them turn to the place where it is first found (Gen. iii. 15). Then they will think of it repeated to Abraham (Gen. xxii. 18), uttered by Jacob (Gen. xlix. 10), and even by the apostate lips of Balaam (Num. xxiv. 17). Then through Moses, on to the prophets, not yet fulfilled even in Malachi’s day; yet never lost. And now, at last, not fulfilled merely, but so gloriously

fulfilled! God promised “to save them from the hand of all their enemies”; and to do it He sent His only-begotten Son! He has added great promises to us. We may well believe that they will be fulfilled as much more gloriously than our highest hopes. “That where I am, there ye may be also!”

### IV.

January 26.—Luke ii. 8-20.

*Joy over the Child Jesus.*

*The Angels and the Shepherds* it might have been called.

“The same country” is Bethlehem. The shepherds were pasturing the flocks for the service of the temple at Jerusalem.

“By night.” The time of year cannot be determined now for certainty. It may have been winter, though they were out with the sheep all night, for that is common still with shepherds in the East.

“The glory of the Lord.” This is the Shechinah, the cloud of glory that led the Israelites through the wilderness, and then rested, as the symbol of the Divine Presence, above the Mercy-seat.

“Good tidings.” This, rendered in our Anglo-Saxon speech (God-spell), gives “Gospel”. The Greek word here gives evangelise and evangelist.

“On earth peace, good-will towards men.” Or, “On earth peace among men of good-will”. The difference depends upon the form of the Greek word for “good-will”. Some MSS. have it in the nominative, and some in the genitive. The Revised Version follows the latter, but its translation is clumsy.

“The shepherds made known,” but “Mary pondered the words in her heart”. So there are two such classes of converts always. It is thought, with much reason, that by pondering the words (not the “things”) in her heart Mary was able to tell the story afterwards; and thus we have it here.

Dr. Lyman Abbott, taking the angel’s song, which is also the golden text, as subject, says: The angel, who is the first evangelist, affords the first illustration of Gospel preaching. His message is (1) *Good News*. Christianity is not a mere re-enactment of the moral law, but *news* of salvation to those who have broken that law. (2) *Of great joy*. Neither conviction of sin nor admonition of punishment is the Gospel, for these are not messages of great joy; they are the groundwork of preparation for the Gospel. Nothing is Gospel that is not joy-producing in those that receive it. (3) *To all people*: all nations, all ages, all classes in society. The words of the angel refer primarily to the Jewish people (“to all *the* people”), but the larger meaning is implied in this and the preceding chapter. (4) *The cause of this joy*—the advent of a “Saviour” to save His people from their sins; “Christ,” the Anointed High Priest of God; “the Lord,” the very incarnation of Jehovah Himself. (5) The “sign” or proof of His Divinity—that He should be found cradled in a manger, the very humility of love.

Teachers should further read Neander’s *Life of Christ*, chap. iii., and Stier’s *Words of the Angels*.