

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

IV. QUAR., LESSON XIII., DEC. 25, LUKE 2:8-20.

Golden Text – "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." – Luke 2:10.

The story of this lesson is one so familiar as to require no special comment, and yet in its simple details lies the hope of the whole world. Four thousand years previous the birth of this child was promised, and all the way along during those forty centuries some faithful souls continued to trust in the promises and to look for the salvation to be brought about through him. We may surely take for granted that the humble shepherds to whom the message of the Lord's advent first came were men who thus hoped in the promise of God; for to such, and to such only, the Lord discloses his purposes.

These men were quietly tending their flocks by night when suddenly the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone around about them; and they were sore afraid. (Verse 9.) But their fear was soon overcome by the message of the angel, contained in our golden text, but which, strange to say, our lesson committee has only partially quoted, leaving out one of the grandest features of the message – viz., that it was to be to all people.

The message reads, "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you *good tidings*, of GREAT JOY, which shall be to ALL PEOPLE." It will be observed that the blessedness of these tidings is cumulative: first it is "good tidings;" then it is "great joy;" and then the crowning feature of it is that it is "to all people" – not only to you shepherds who are this night looking for the hope of Israel, but for all your friends and relations and neighbors far and

near; and to all their friends and relatives and neighbors, both to those who now live and to those who shall live, as well as to all those who slumber in death.

Blessed tidings! Hearken to the gladsome sound: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." (Verse 11.) Then he was to be a savior to all people: so the Scriptures clearly affirm, saying that, by the grace of God, he tasted death for every man, and that he gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time – to all. (Heb. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:6.) The testimony, however, is quite as necessary to the salvation of the sinner as the fact that Christ gave himself a ransom for all. The favor of salvation will not be forced upon any; but the testimony that it has been provided for every man, on condition of his acceptance of the favor upon God's terms, is to be given to every man, for his acceptance or rejection. And though millions of the race for whom Christ died have gone down to the grave without such testimony, still the fact remains that the testimony shall be given *in due time* – which due time, to all such, must be after their awakening from death.

And to this agree the words of the Lord: "The hour is coming in which all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and shall come forth; they that have done good [who during the present life have come into judgment and who have passed their trial successfully], unto the resurrection of life [the full reward of the faithful. Such will be the overcoming Church]: and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:25-29.) That is, the latter class will come forth from the grave to have the truth testified to them then, for their acceptance or rejection; and their final judgment of worthiness or unworthiness of life will be based upon their course under trial after the truth has been testified to them – in the Millennial age. Thus the angel of the Lord preached the good tidings of the

restitution of all things to the shepherds on the plain of Bethlehem.

VERSE 12. Then they told where and how they should find this bud of promise, so that when they would see him they might feel doubly assured that this was he.

VERSES 13,14. "Then suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." This shows how the angels of God are interested in the affairs of men, and how they sympathize with us and rejoice over our prosperity. And this reminds us of other statements to the effect that there is joy in heaven among the angels over one sinner that repenteth (Luke 15:7); and again that they are earnest students of the plan for human salvation; and that they are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation. (1 Pet. 1:12; Heb. 1:14.) [R1478 : page 366] Thus we see them to be creatures of God full of loving benevolence even toward a fallen race, and esteeming it a privilege to serve the heirs [R1479 : page 366] of this salvation, although they know, as they studiously look into God's plan, that some of this fallen race are by and by to be highly exalted, even above the angels who never sinned.

Thus we see their humble recognition of the right of the Creator to do what he will with his own, and their cheerful and joyful acquiescence in his perfect will, which they know to be determined by his unerring wisdom and his fathomless love. Oh! what universal joy will prevail when the whole family of God in heaven and in earth is brought into fullest harmony under the headship of Jehovah's Anointed.

VERSES 15,18 show the teachable attitude of the shepherds: they recognized the angels and their message as from the Lord, and, their fears being allayed, their hopes revived and their faith

increased, and they felt that they must go at once and see this which had come to pass. And when they had so determined, a strange star (evidently a meteor, as it could not have been a fixed star) appeared, moving in the direction which the angel had told them to go; and they followed the star until they reached Bethlehem, when it stood still over the place where the young child was. And when they saw him they worshiped him and presented to him gold and frankincense and myrrh, recognizing in him the long-promised Messiah. [see "Our Critical Readers" Jan. 15, 1893 Tower - site Editor] And being warned of God in a dream, they disregarded the request of Herod to inform him of the whereabouts of the new-born king, and so departed into their own country another way. But as they went they published abroad the good tidings which the angels had brought to them, and how they had actually seen him of whom the prophets testified.

VERSE 19. "But Mary [mother-like] kept all these things and pondered them in her heart," doubtless calling to mind also the message of the angel to her. (Luke 1:28-35.) Again and again we seem to hear her say, "My soul doth magnify the Lord;...for he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: ...he that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is his name." – Luke 1:46-49.

VERSE 20. The shepherds returned to their flocks, fully assured of the wonderful truth that the promised seed of the woman who was to bruise the serpent's head had really come. And they rejoiced and glorified God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as they were told unto them.
