

BIRTH OF "THE MAN CHRIST JESUS."

– *DEC. 20. – MATT. 2:1-12. –*

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." – Luke 2:10.

OUR subject does not take us back to the beginning of God's creation when Christ as a spirit being became "the first born of every creature;" – the Word that was with God in the beginning of creation, and by whom all things were made, and without whom not one thing was made. (John 1:1-3,10.) Our Master at that time was "the beginning and the ending, the first and the last," of Jehovah's direct creation: all subsequent creations being by and through him as Jehovah's honored agent. (Rev. 1:11; 3:14; Col. 1:15; John 1:1-3.) We come to the time when he who was rich for our sakes became poor (2 Cor. 8:9) and left the glory which he had with the Father "before the world was." (John 17:5.) Then, without dying, our Master underwent a change of nature and "humbled himself," "was made flesh" (Phil. 2:8; John 1:14), "took upon himself the form of a servant" and was "found in fashion a man;" "a little lower than the angels;" and then still further he humbled himself even unto death, and yet more even unto the shameful death of the cross – as a culprit, as a sinner. (Heb. 2:9,16; Phil. 2:6-9.) This lesson, appropriate to the season, calls our attention to the birth of "the man Christ Jesus."

In the divine predictions of a coming Savior attention is largely called to the fact that he is to be a King, a Deliverer, a Savior. This point is made prominent because God appealed to mankind along the line of their necessities and hopes. The sacrificial feature of our Lord's ministry was made less prominent than his power and majesty and glory, because the sacrifice related specially to God and was to meet the demands of the divine law against the sinner-race. The question of how God would settle the matter consistently with his own sentence of death, resting upon the race, would to the average human mind be much

less important than the statement of the resulting glories, restitution and blessings. Hence, we find the references to the sacrificial features of our Lord's ministry largely presented under types and symbols intended to be comprehended only by those who, as sons of God, would be guided into the truth by the spirit of God.

It is not surprising that the angels who announced our Lord's birth mentioned only the glories to follow and not his sufferings which would intervene. It is not surprising that they did not weep for the sufferings and humiliation, but sang "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men;" grasping merely the culmination of the great divine plan which had its beginning in the birth of Jesus.

(1,2) Whether or not the "wise men" of the East were Hebrews we are not informed; but since divine favor was for the time confined to Israel, and since that favor did not depart until they had rejected the Messiah, we consider it highly probable that these wise men from the East were part of "the twelve tribes scattered abroad," who, "instantly serving God," were hoping for and "waiting for the consolation of Israel" through the long promised Messiah. (Acts 26:7; Luke 2:25.) We do know that hundreds of thousands if not several millions of Israelites were carried captive to this very East country – Babylon, Medo-Persia; and we know also that less than 55,000 availed themselves of the decree of Cyrus permitting their return to Palestine. The great bulk of the people Israel, therefore, at that time (as now) resided in foreign lands. And it would appear that their foreign captivity was helpful to their religious interests, and that the Israelites in general had more faith in the Lord and more strong interest in prophecies respecting Messiah after the captivity in Babylon than for several hundred years previous, when they were continually beset with idolatry.

The promise of God to Abraham of a great "seed," a great king and ruler who should bless the world with a righteous reign, it would appear, was carried by the Israelites into all the then civilized world; leading some to expect a Jewish Messiah, it led others through a feeling

of pride to declare that they were as able as the Jews to produce the desirable government and ruler for the world. Hence, we find that the idea of universal dominion began to prevail. It is claimed by some that Zoroaster, the great Persian religious teacher, was a disciple of the Prophet Jeremiah, and the memoir of Mrs. Grant, missionary to Persia, says: –

"Zoroaster taught the Persians concerning Christ. He declared that in the latter days a pure virgin should [R2081 : page 309] conceive, and that as soon as the child was born a star would appear, even at noonday, with undiminished luster. 'You, my son,' exclaimed the venerable seer, 'will perceive its rising before any other nation. As soon as you see the star follow it wherever it leads you and adore the mysterious child, offering your gifts to him with the profoundest humility. He is the almighty Word which created the heavens.'"

Although this is only a legend, it is interesting to know that there was such a legend amongst the people of the East. And respecting Zoroaster it may be said that his teachings were of a higher character than those of other heathen teachers.

(3-6) Expecting a king, the wise men naturally came to the palace of Herod, who, although called the King of the Jews, was the representative of their conquerors, the Romans. Herod was the founder of the House of Herod and naturally had great expectations, not only with reference to the duration of his own dominion, but also with a view to the establishment of his posterity in the power and office which he enjoyed. No wonder, then, that he was "troubled." The prospect of a rival either in the power or in the esteem of the people was not to his liking. "And all Jerusalem [was troubled] with him." Political influence takes in a wide circle. There were connected with Herod's government or benefited by it, directly or indirectly, many whose plans, hopes, etc., might be very much disarranged by any change of the government. Herod evidently knew of the Jewish tradition respecting Messiah, for he at once sent for those who were learned in the Scriptures to demand

of them where the prophets indicated that Messiah should be born. The scribes and Pharisees were evidently quite familiar with the subject, had looked it up, and apparently without hesitation gave the name of Messiah's birthplace as Bethlehem, and quoted from the prophet in support of it.

(7-12) The cunning art of Herod, by which he hoped to learn who was this divinely designated Prince and heir to his throne, is only appreciated when we remember the sequel to this narrative: how, when he found that the wise men did not return to give him the information and permit the destruction of the child Jesus, he determined to kill all the children of the city of Bethlehem of two years old and under; thus he might be sure, he thought, that he had outwitted the divine plan and protected his own power.

The star which seemingly had led these wise men toward Jerusalem, and which then apparently had vanished, and left the searchers to arouse the curiosity and interest of the people of Jerusalem, again became their guide as they left the city, and led them to Bethlehem, which is only a short distance, and the star appears to have indicated even the very house in which they found the new-born King. According to the custom of the time they presented costly treasures as well as their homage.

Although the King came, his own received him not; and like the "young nobleman" of his own parable he went "into a far country," even heaven itself, there to be invested with power by the King of kings, and to postpone the establishment of his kingdom until his Church, his bride, his joint-heirs, should be selected and prepared to share the Kingdom with him.

Meantime, the world still needs a King as much as ever. All nations are learning more and more their need of a wise, a just, a powerful, a loving, a merciful ruler. They need this very one, and are gradually learning that none of the fallen race can be trusted with much power, honor and glory; that all are weak through the fall, and that a

superior king and a superior government are essential to their highest blessing. The masses are beginning to feel this need more keenly; and it is remarkable to what extent various advocates of Socialism recognize and quote the teachings of this very King with commendation; – even though it may be said that they wish others to be governed by the Golden Rule, while they themselves fail to walk by it.

The world is beginning to realize that the King is at the door: the Herods of to-day and with them all those of influence and power, political and financial, are "troubled" at a prospect of a *change of government*, which their own "wise men" announce as imminent. We need not expect that the princes of the world will welcome him: rather they will fear a disruption of present institutions; – fear that under his government they would not have so favorable opportunities for prosperity; and that in the general levelling, which the prophets declare will accompany his reign, some that are high shall be abased, and some that are low shall be exalted. As a consequence, Messiah's Kingdom, although a kingdom of peace and righteousness, must be introduced by "a time of trouble, such as was not since there was a nation." Yet we rejoice in the promise that "when the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness," and that eventually his kingdom shall come to be the "desire of all nations."

Thus far the gospel of the kingdom has been received by only a few; and the special blessings have been with the few who have acknowledged the King, and who are being prepared to be joint-heirs in his kingdom. But let us not forget the gracious results that are to follow the establishment of that kingdom, when, as declared in the Golden Text, – the good tidings and the great joy "shall be to all people."

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DEC. 27. – REVIEW of the lessons respecting Solomon.
