

# The Gospel Witness

PUBLISHED EVERY THURSDAY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF EVANGELICAL PRINCIPLES AND  
IN DEFENSE OF THE FAITH ONCE FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS.

\$2.00 Per Year, Postpaid, to any address. 5c. Per Single Copy.

Editor: T. T. SHIELDS.

Associate Editors: T. I. STOCKLEY, ALEXANDER THOMSON, W. GORDON BROWN.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans 1:16.

Address Correspondence: THE GOSPEL WITNESS, 130 Gerrard Street East, Toronto 2, Canada

Vol. 9. No. 32.

TORONTO, DECEMBER 25th, 1930

Whole No. 449.

## "HIS STAR"

"His star." This is a new language. We have heard of a millionaire: we speak of his house, his railroad, his mines, his millions; we have read of kings, of their armies, their jewels, their crowns, and their kingdoms; but what master of millions or monarch of men can speak of "his star"? What manner of child is this? Why "His star"? "All things were made by Him." "He made the stars also." Why His? They speak of Him: "The heavens declare the glory of God." But which is "His star"? They are all His: "He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names." Then why not "His stars"? Of all these sparks from the divine anvil, these fragments that remain from the cutting of the foundation stones of the gold-paved, graveless city, of all these myriad gems scattered like dust of diamonds on the floor of the Eternal's workshops, where "the clouds are the dust of His feet", which is "His star"? Can anyone identify it?

The wise men said: "We have seen His star". Perhaps they can teach us. They were astrologers; it was their special work to "consider the heavens". Was it a new star, or was it one of the ever-shining worlds which had a new meaning and mission because they who considered the heavens had been given new sight? Nature needs not to go out of her way to lead to Jesus. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera"; but "in their courses", without leaving their appointed track, they light the way to Bethlehem and the King. "There is one glory of the sun and another of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory." "The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind." "He will give grace and glory"—subjective grace for objective glory, the opened eye, and yonder—"His star". When "the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of the birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land", all but the physically blind and deaf have complimentary tickets to Nature's opening concert; but she has only a small audience: so many have eyes but see not, and ears but hear not. The same is true of spiritual harmonies of sound and sight—only the wise men see "His star".

In the firmament of truth there are many stars, but there is one which outshines all others, which always leads to where the Young Child is; we call it the Bible. It is, in a peculiar sense, "His star"—"a light that shineth in a dark place". But thousands who are called educated people have never seen the Bible. They have seen the cover, and the pages, and the cold type, they know something of the mere grammar of the text; but they have never seen the Bible. Only the spiritually wise men see "His star". There are literary vivisectionists whose favourite subject is the Bible. They call themselves "scholars", and think they know all about the Book because they have cut it in pieces; while the fact is, they are as ignorant of the beauty and value of their subject as the blind man is of the brilliance of the stars; they have no spiritual qualification for their work; only the wise men see "His star".

"We have seen His star in the east and are come to worship Him"—that is the proof of the vision, a changed life. Many profess to know all about the stars; they know the course of every planet, the track of every little world of light—but they do not come to worship. They know the path of the star better than the long, weary road to Bethlehem. You know the people I mean: their admiration of Nature's beauty does not make their own human nature any more beautiful. Or they are lovers of the Bible. They read it? And believe it? Of course! How they love the truth—with their heads! How they measure everybody by it—but themselves! How its light is made to discover everybody's sin—except their own! They have seen the star, but they do not come to worship.

There are those who love a religion of stars. They believe in a religion of culture: they are star-gazers. What connection, say they, can there be between a star and a stable, between a Monarch and a manger? They can exalt themselves above the stars of God, but cannot humble themselves to worship. You have never seen a lily if you have not learned to trust; you have never "considered the heavens" if you have not been humbled by Divine visitations. You have never really seen the Cross if it has not broken your heart and made you worship the Crucified.

"They departed into their own country another way." And "His star" led them to the place where they saw the Child—that was the turning point, that was conversion. They saw "His star", they walked "another way". You have never really seen "His star" if the vision has not changed your life, if you are not living "another way". This is the message of Christmas.

### THE MANIFESTED LIFE.

By Rev. T. I. Stockley, D.D., Dean of Toronto Baptist Seminary.

It was the sunset of the apostolic age. John, the aged, was the only one left of the apostolic band. The other apostles had passed through the glorious death of martyrdom into the joy of their Lord. Jerusalem and the temple had fallen, and a kind of new world had come into being. But the beloved John was getting tired, and homesick. He would fain leave the world and "go where he was known"—go into the presence of his Lord, and to the company of his departed brethren. During the lifetime of Peter and Paul, the beloved John had been much overshadowed by their bold and energetic presence. John was of a more retiring nature. He walked in silence and deep thought beside those who were more fitted for the daring pioneer work. John was loftier in spirit than most of his brethren, and from his lofty abode he saw more deeply into the ocean of Divine life and truth: he pierced into the very heart of things; and might well be described as the quiet master of the secrets of the spiritual life.

His first epistle probably saw the light at Ephesus, which, following Jerusalem and Antioch, was then the capital city of Christianity. It is wonderfully akin to the fourth gospel, which surely was John's also. The epistle is beautifully simple in language, profound in thought, and certain and clear in utterance. It is probably the last word of inspiration, the final statement of the great gospel of our Lord Jesus, and is, therefore, of profound interest and importance to us. In the opening verses of this First Epistle of John we note three things. First:

#### The Divine Revelation.

It is the revelation of Life, "Concerning the Lord of Life," says verse one. And here at once we enter upon controversial ground, for the phrase, "the Word of Life" is taken by some to mean the Personal Logos, and by others to mean the Christian revelation. Westcott and some others adopt the latter interpretation, and say, "The obvious reference is to the whole gospel of which Christ is the Centre, and Sum, and not to Christ personally." This, however, we cannot accept. John's use of the word "Logos" in his gospel, and in the Revelation is personal, and we believe his use is the same here. Beside, to John, the Person of the Lord Jesus was everything. He was the Alabaster Box full of spikenard, very costly; and it was his delight to pour forth the good ointment upon the hearts of fainting sinners. The Lord Jesus was to John as a Bundle of Myrrh; and it was his labour to open out to sinking souls its refreshing odours. Jesus was to him the Balm of Gilead, and he found his joy in bringing it to sick souls that they might be healed. Moreover, John

tells us that the One of Whom he writes, is One whom he had seen with his own eyes, and his hands had handled. This was surely no other than the Personal Word, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

And here He is called the Word of *Life*. "Life" is one of John's great words. We read of the "Water of life," the "Tree of life," the "Bread of life," "the Way, the Truth and the Life," the "Resurrection and the Life." And here in the first epistle of John the apostle writes of the "Word" Who is life, the Word of God, and the Life of men. He brings to life, for all things were made by Him. He brings the life of man and beast, and bird, and flower. But here He is the Eternal Life; and that is something wholly different from what we call natural life. The eternal life is the life which is of the character of eternity. It is the Divine life, the life that *is*, and which was manifest in the Lord Jesus. It is life which is not a question of time, but depends wholly on our relation to Jesus Christ. Our Lord says, "I give unto my sheep eternal life"; and Christ Himself is the Life. He brings to men the very life of God.

Verse one further says "That which was from the beginning." So this revelation is no new thing, sprung up as the religions of men spring up. Before Pentecost, and Calvary, and Bethlehem, the "Word" was. The two phrases, "was from the beginning," and "was with the Father", carry us back before the world. So that Word is no new-fangled invention. We are carried back to sources quite out of sight. "That which was from the beginning." Here we touch the very spring of being, the principle that animates creation, from star to farthest star, from the archangel to the worm in the sod, while the phrase, "which was with the Father" speaks of a Being Who was from eternity. "In the beginning" in John's gospel, gives us the starting point of revelation. "From the beginning" in the Epistle carries us along its process. Throughout the creation and the course of the natural universe, through the patriarchs, through the calling and history of Israel, through types and prophets, the Word wrought and spoke, shaping itself into a message of life for men, and moving on to the Incarnation which was its goal.

Palestine has the striking characteristic of subterranean rivers. It is said that beneath the whole of the plain of Sharon, and down to the Philistine country, an underground river flows. In other parts of Palestine, too, there are such rivers. And in some places they break through and become manifest. "In the wilderness shall waters break out; and streams in the desert." In some places there are cracks in the ground, and the listening ear can catch the sound of murmuring waters. Again, an electric current may run silent, unsuspected, through dark and winding ways until it reaches the carbon points, where it bursts into luminous splendour. These pictures may be suggestions of the movement of the Eternal Word through the ages until He breaks forth in a wondrous light in the Person of the Man, Christ Jesus. So that which was with the Father, and was from the beginning, bursts forth in visible beauty and power in the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour and Redeemer.

#### The Historic Manifestation.

Then we have, second, *the historical manifestation*. "And the life was manifested." This is another great

word, and it is used in three different connections. It is used of the revelation of the Lord at His incarnation in chapter three, verses five and eight. It is used of His revelation after the resurrection, John, chapter twenty-one, verses one and fourteen. It is also used of His future revelation in His second advent, Colossians chapter three, verse four. What a stupendous fact it is!—the Word of life becoming manifest in human flesh. The fact that Eternal Life has been manifested in Jesus is so vast, and so sublime, that it has always its doubters and deniers. In every age such a revelation as that has met with incredulity. In the Apostle John's day there were realists who held that Jesus was but a man, and that Christianity was just one of the many religious movements of the time. There were also dreamy idealists who spiritualized away the facts of Christianity. We have both with us to-day. "We have our realists in art, and literature; painters who strip the halo from our Lord's brow, and set before us simply the Man Jesus; authors who write 'Lives of Jesus' as the Son of Mary, but not of Christ the Son of the living God." Then we have our dreamy idealists, too, who regard the Lord Jesus as a dream, a beautiful myth, a lovely phantom, quite too beautiful even to have been actual.

John meets both these classes of doubters and deniers with a powerful statement of fact; the fact that Eternal Life came to the earth, that He actually was born here, and lived, and suffered, and died, and rose again. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ was absolutely unique. It has been represented thus. At Bethany, Lazarus had died while Jesus was away. Mary and Martha went to the grave to weep there, as others had done in their bereavement. If you asked these sisters why they went to the grave, they probably could have given no intelligent account of the purpose of it. They would have said that life was not the same now the dear brother was gone. And it seemed some relief to go to the grave and weep there. "It is really no use, but we cannot help it." And the Jews would have said, "We were friends of the family, and have come to show our sympathy." But our Lord gives a very different account of Himself. Said He, "I go that I may awake him out of sleep. I am the resurrection and the life." He spoke the commanding word, and the dead arose. He came with purpose, and with power. So He comes to humanity with tears of truest sympathy indeed. But His mission is unique. He says, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." He comes to meet our need. He comes to bring eternal life to men. Wondrous fact! Glorious Gospel! It is a fact overwhelming in its magnitude, and tremendous in its significance. A fact so stupendous, the apostle feels, demands the strongest evidence. And John claims direct, first-hand acquaintance with the facts of our Lord's life on earth.

John himself was a fact. He can be traced away up through the fathers, through Irenaeus, Ignatius, and Polycarp the disciple of John, to the Apostle himself. He was no dreamer, or fanatic, or deceiver. All his faculties had attested the fact of Christ, and in giving us the evidence he uses four verbs, two in the perfect tense, and two in the aorist tense. He says, "We have heard Him." He had heard that voice, which was "as the sound of many waters," the voice which

spoke such gracious words concerning God and His way of peace; the Voice that spoke pardon to guilty souls, and healing to suffering bodies, and life to the dead. For three and a half years John had heard the Redeemer's wondrous words. They had become an abiding possession. John knew that he had heard Him. Have you? John had heard Him with the outward ear. Have you heard Him with the ear of the spirit? As He speaks in His written Word, have you heard Him?

(To be continued next week.)

### A Correction.

In our article touching the dissolution of the Women's Auxiliaries in Jarvis Street Church last week, we published a letter from the Executive Board of the Union to the Women's Board, and in that letter there appeared a paragraph in which we asked the Women's Board to consider the taking over of certain Home Mission interests, including the Collier Street Church, of Barrie. That letter further said that even relieved of these burdens the Board would find it difficult to carry its load, or words to that effect.

We exceedingly regret the publication of this paragraph because the Collier Street Church has never received a grant from the Executive Board of the Union. Owing to removals and the general situation, just about the time the letter to the Women's Board was written, the Union Board had a communication from the Collier Street Church, saying they were experiencing great difficulty in carrying on, and the Board felt it was so needy a work that it required help. The fact that the Women's Board had had something to do with the establishment of the Collier Street Church, and had liberally helped it, led us to believe that that work would be especially near to their hearts. So we asked them if they could come to the help of Collier Street. The Women's Board did not do so; neither did the Executive of the Union, because our funds would not permit it.

This paragraph ought to have been explained in our article of last week, but was inadvertently overlooked. Our attention has been called to it by the Collier Street Church, and we very gladly make this correction. We want our readers to understand that Collier Street Church is maintaining itself—as it has been from the beginning; and has been no burden of the Board. It was what was in prospect we had in mind when we wrote that paragraph.

The official Board of the Collier Street Church ask us also to correct another statement occurring on page twenty-two of last week's issue, but we will quote their letter, as it will speak for itself. This section of their letter is as follows:

"The second statement is on page twenty-two in reference to the formation of the Collier Street Regular Baptist Church, Barrie, wherein it is stated that the Woman's Board was responsible for the formation of that church. With all due respect to the Women's Board, permit me to say that the Women's Board was in no way responsible for the formation of the Collier Street Regular Baptist Church. A few of us had decided to organize as a church, and the property had been secured on a rental basis with an option to buy at a stated price before the organization meeting was held, and the building wired for the lighting system at once without any assistance from any outside source. But the Women's Board did come to our help after we had organized, and gave very largely toward improvements on and in the building. . . . As a church we are very grateful for all the assistance that has been rendered along other lines by all our friends, and praise God for all His goodness and mercy.

"With all due regards, I am, as ever,  
(Signed on behalf of the Official Board)

W. L. TOWER."

We apologize to the Collier Street Church for these inadvertencies, and thank them most heartily for directing our attention to the mistakes.

# The Jarvis Street Pulpit

## THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST INDISPENSABLE TO THE SUPERNATURALISM OF CHRISTIANITY.

A Sermon by the Pastor, Dr. T. T. Shields.

Preached in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, Canada, Sunday Evening, December 21st, 1930.

Broadcast from Station CKGW, 690 k.c., 434-8 metres.

Short Wave VE9GW 6095 k.c., 49.22 metres.

(Stenographically Reported.)

"The angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Luke 1:35.

We had for our lesson in the Bible School this morning a very interesting chapter in the book of Genesis, the twenty-sixth. There it is said that "Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them." It is often necessary to reopen old wells, and to restate and reaffirm old truths.

I told my class this morning that but a few years ago I regarded this Christmas season with some apprehension, because one was supposed to confine himself to a particular subject, and because it is difficult, after two thousand years of discussion to say any new thing about the Christmas story, or even to state an old truth in a fresh way.

Many here who are not very old can remember distinctly when the truth of the virgin birth of our Lord was almost universally believed by people who called themselves Christians. It seemed quite unnecessary even to argue the truth of this doctrine, because it is so manifestly an integral part of the gospel story, and so necessary to all its implications. And yet we have come upon a day when this cardinal doctrine, this doctrine upon which the supernaturalism of the gospel hinges, is quite generally questioned, and all too frequently denied. Thus it occurred to me that it might be profitable for us to give our thought again to this story, to dig again this ancient well from which countless generations have, with joy, drawn water, but which, during these latter days, have been stopped by the Philistines who have filled the old well with earth, with very much earth, with that which is only of the earth, earthy.

Here is the plain declaration of Scripture, that Jesus Christ was born of a human mother, but had no human father; that He was divinely begotten by the power of the Holy Ghost; and that therefore He was not only man, but God,—“Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

I.

I begin the discussion this evening with this very simple, and, it seems to me quite obvious observation, that THE TRUTH OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF OUR LORD IS INDISPENSABLE TO THE INTEGRITY OF THE RECORD ITSELF. Even critical scholarship does not suggest that these stories of the nativity are not an integral part of the gospels which contain them. To take this story out of Matthew's gospel, or out of the gospel by Luke, would be to destroy the gospel itself; for by no sort of argument can it be shown that any

other part of either of these gospels is more deserving of the confidence of reasonable men than those parts of these gospels which record the virgin birth of our Lord. If these stories are to be discredited, then we must take Matthew and Luke out of our Bible.

Nor have we reached the end of our difficulty there, for while the Virgin Birth is not stated in explicit terms in the gospel of Mark, it is surely implied in its opening declaration that this is “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”. When we have passed Mark's gospel, we have equal difficulty surely with the gospel by John, for there we read: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. . . . And the Word was made flesh (the Eternal Logos was made flesh) and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The Acts of the Apostles was written by the author of Luke's gospel from which my text is taken; and if we regard these two documents as only human productions, setting aside, for the moment, the assumption of their divine inspiration and authority, by looking upon them as merely human productions, you will find that the writer of the Acts of the Apostles assumes the accuracy of the former record when he says, “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.” Luke evidently had nothing to withdraw from his former treatise. Any author issuing a second volume on the same subject, if he had any occasion to correct anything he said in his first volume, would certainly not allow the second volume to appear without correcting the inaccuracy of the first. Luke evidently believed that his gospel, his treatise, of “all that Jesus began both to do and teach” was thoroughly reliable.

Then, of course, if we add that which we most certainly believe in this place, that neither Luke's gospel nor the book of Acts, is a merely human production, but that it was written by somebody who was moved by the Holy Ghost, it is impossible to regard the Acts of the Apostles as other than a divine confirmation of the accuracy of the gospel which bears Luke's name.

If the Acts of the Apostles were not valid, then the

only inspired record of the apostolic era would be taken from us,—and the epistles also because they are inextricably interwoven with the Acts, and grow out of them as a flower grows out of the bulb that contains it. You will find as you peruse the New Testament, that on every page the truth of the virgin birth of Christ, while not set out in so many words, is assumed. It is taken for granted that God has come down to earth, and that He has clothed Himself in human flesh.

And surely the final book of the canon so exalts Him that no other explanation of His glory could possibly be given than that He is what here the Holy Ghost by Luke declares He shall be called, "the Son of God".

If that be true of the New Testament, it is equally true of the Old, for you cannot divorce the New Testament from the Old, nor the Old from the New: they are one and indivisible; the one establishes the truth of the other, and whether—it may seem a strange saying—whether you read the Bible forward or backward—you will find the whole Book supplies the incontrovertible proof of its divine origin in the One Who was before Abraham, the Eternal Son of the Father, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, from everlasting to everlasting, God.

Therefore if the Virgin Birth be denied, with that denial goes a denial and a rejection of the divine inspiration and authority both of the New Testament and of the Old; and we are left to grope in the darkness with no light but the poor taper of human wisdom whose light is but luminous enough to make darkness visible.

We had better accept the Bible as it is. And if we do, we shall have no difficulty with the Virgin Birth. But if we accept the implications of the denial of that which is an integral part of the canon, and which is a divine certification of the truth of the whole of it—if we thus deny that, we shall be logically forced to a denial of the Bible altogether. In this place we accept both. We rejoice to believe that the Holy Ghost did really say to Mary,—or the voice of God through the angel, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

## II.

Let me take another step, and say that THE TRUTH OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH IS INDISPENSABLE TO THE TRUTH OF THE INCARNATION. I am aware that the case has been argued that God could have become incarnate in some other way. It is difficult, however, to understand how it would be possible for God to take up His tabernacle in sinful flesh, in anyone born by natural generation. But we accept that which the Scripture tells us, that God was "in Christ", that God was "manifest in the flesh", that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us," that God did become incarnate and make Himself visible to mortal eye, and make it possible even for the human ear actually to hear God speak.

How, otherwise, could God identify Himself with human flesh, when it is said that He is of purer eye than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity? If it be so that we are, all of us, born in sin, if it be so that we are shapen in iniquity, how could the Holy One tabernacle in human flesh without this miracle of the Virgin Birth?

Furthermore: *how could redemption be accomplished*

*other than by such a union of the human and the divine?* You remember how Job longed for a Daysman betwixt us, Who should lay His hand upon us both. He longed for One Who should be human and divine, divine and human, a Mediator between God and man. "He took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham." He was "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons". How but by a divinely-human sacrifice could the penalty of the law have been paid? How could such value be given to a human life as for the shedding of its blood to constitute an adequate payment of the indebtedness of the whole world? What human life could possibly have such value that by the shedding of the blood of one all might be saved? It was only as the human was joined with the divine, it was only as divine qualities, divine capacities, were linked with human flesh so that the heart of a Man might be big enough to feel the sorrows of a world, and the blood of a Man might be valuable enough to cancel the sins of a world, that our redemption could be accomplished. Hence He was made, this High Priest, not like other high priests "after the power of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an indissoluble life". Eternity was in His heart. He was a Priest for ever "after the order of Melchisedec", "without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually." And therefore His blood was of such worth that by its outpouring the sins of a world could be washed away.

## III.

Then let me go farther and say THAT THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST, OR THE PRINCIPLE INVOLVED IN IT, IS REALLY INDISPENSABLE TO THE SUPERNATURALISM OF THE GOSPEL. I have so often said to you in one way or another that if you can yield heart and intellect to the first verse of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth", you will have no difficulty with anything that follows. Once let heart and mind postulate God, once assume God to be, without limitation in His qualities, infinite in every quality of His being—once assume that, and nothing is impossible. Once believe that the Bible is the word of God, and that God is speaking in its pages, and you will have no difficulty with the Virgin Birth.

A certain distinguished preacher of the modern school says that the Virgin Birth involves a biological miracle that is unthinkable to the modern mind. Quite so! He might better have said, It involves a miracle unthinkable to the carnal mind, whether ancient or modern. It is unthinkable! It is impossible apart from God. If you approach the Bible as nothing but a human record, if you eliminate God and subject its declarations to the test of science falsely so-called,—or put it on a higher plane, of actual science—you will find a hundred things in the Bible that, on the purely natural plane, are utterly impossible.

If I did not believe the Bible to be the word of God I could not believe the story of Isaac's birth. That was a miracle. If I did not believe the Bible to be the word of God I could not believe the story of Israel's passage through the Red Sea. But I do not care if even ten thousand scientists tell me it cannot be so. I would say, "Thank you, gentlemen; I should expect you to say that." It cannot be so unless God says it shall be, and has been;

and when He declares the truth of it we bow and rejoice in it.

Similarly, the story of the life of Jesus Christ begins with a miracle, and unless you accept that miracle, you can never understand. The life, the character, and the work, of Jesus Christ are utterly inexplicable on natural grounds. You cannot account for them. He is the outstanding, incontrovertible evidence against the theory of evolution. His incarnation is the outstanding evidence of divine interposition,—when God came into human life and took on Himself our human flesh and form.

*There is involved in the Virgin Birth that which is fundamental to faith all the way through, namely, that it is of the very essence of the gospel that God comes into the lives of men and does, by divine power, what can never be accomplished by anyone but God. Is that what we need?*

Many friends will exchange compliments and gifts this Christmas season, and some poor people—many of them—will gratefully receive the ministry of some who are a little better off. They will be glad that others remember them. Yes, there are many ways by which we can help one another. But when the Christmas dinner has been given, when all that human kindness can do has been done for someone, if you go to that man or woman and say, "Are you satisfied now?" With all of life, past, present, and future, under inspection, that person will say, "No." "Is there anything more I can do for you?" "No!" "Is there anything more that any man can do for you?" "No!" Such an one could tell you that down deep in his heart something needs to be done that no man can do, something that only God can remedy.

Does God help? Does He? Do you really believe in this age of science, when we are told so much about the inexorability of law, and that we are shut up to the operation of these cosmic forces—are you foolish enough and old-fashioned enough in this place to believe that God can do something? ("Praise God, yes!") O yes, that is our gospel. That is the only reason for our existence as a church, our only reason for gathering here from time to time, that we believe the implications of this story that God stoops and enters into human life and does something.

What does He do? *What practical bearing has the Virgin Birth, after all, upon our faith?* Why must I believe that, in order to be assured of the truth of the gospel? *The principle is involved in the experience of conversion, as we call it, or regeneration, or the new birth.* What did we sing just now? That he was born—what for—"to give us second birth." The miracle of the Virgin Birth is repeated every time a soul dead in trespasses and sins is quickened into newness of life. How else can we have implanted within us the seed of eternal life? By what other process can we dare to hope that these sinful natures can be prepared for the holy presence of a holy God?

What is conversion? It is the stoop of God. It is the touch of God upon a soul that is dead, the Holy Ghost coming upon him, the power of the Highest overshadowing him, so that he is born again, not of flesh, but of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.

Marvel not," said He Who was Incarnate Wisdom and Incarnate Truth, "marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." The same Spirit that gave Him flesh and quickened Him and brought Him into the world, that same Spirit must come into our lives, quickening us, making us new creatures, effecting a new creation, imparting to us a new nature, so that we are made one with God.

We should surrender everything were we to surrender the Virgin Birth.

I wonder if that gives hope to some man here this evening? I wonder if you have thought of salvation as being something wholly objective to you? I wonder if you have thought of salvation as being a laborious effort to achieve a divine idea, as if someone should say, "Your past debt is paid, now go on and sin no more." Salvation is a supernatural work in the soul, doing something in me as well as something for me.

Does anyone who hears me over the air say, "I have discovered the weakness of the flesh. I have discovered my own impotence in the presence of a thousand failures. I have tried and tried and tried—and failed. Do you tell me, sir, that it is possible for this poor, weak human nature to be given a heart that loves God, that He can come and dwell in me, and give me power over the world about me?" That is the religion of Christ: "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

What is true of conversion *is equally true of the ongoing of God's purposes of grace in the soul, which is spoken of in the Bible as sanctification;* the education of the soul, the growing up of the new-born soul into an ever-increasing conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ.

What hope have you that you will appear in the glory? The only hope worth cherishing is this: "Which is," said the apostle, "Christ in you the hope of glory." The only hope that any one of us can have that we shall ultimately be glorified and appear in His holy presence is that the seed of God is in us, that we have been begotten by the Holy Ghost, by the "word of God that liveth and abideth for ever"; and that that life, unfolding, will at last reveal the very image of Him Who gave it.

Did you ever have anybody ask you, when first you saw that new treasure that had come to a home, his majesty the baby,—did you ever have anybody ask you which of the two parents he most closely resembled? "Is he like his father, or is he like his mother?" When I am asked that question, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred all I can say is that he is like a baby! I do not know what he will be by and by, but I suppose when he grows up he will look like somebody. No doubt, when he grows up, you will see some resemblance to his mother, and some resemblance to his father. You may not see much in the beginning; there are exceptions; but in that infant of days you cannot tell very well which parent he will resemble.

I have often found comfort in that principle. There is an old saying to the effect that very pretty babies do not make very handsome people when they grow up; on the other hand, that babies who are not at all

attractive as babies sometimes become quite handsome when they grow up! I knew an old man in England who was foreman of a brickyard. It rains occasionally in England (laughter), and the men, when it rained, ran into shelters. This man's name was Laws. Sometimes the men did not get back into the pits as soon as they ought to when the rain ceased. The foreman was going his rounds on one such occasion and came upon a group of men in a shelter, and one of them invented a story. He said, "Mr. Laws, we have just been discussing a question. It is said that very ordinary looking babies become very handsome people, and that sometimes very pretty babies are homely when they grow up. Do you think there is anything in that at all, Mr. Laws?" "Maybe there is", he replied. "Well," said this wag, "what a handsome baby you must have been!"

There is hope for this ugly human nature of ours,—for it is rather ugly—but there is hope for us. If Christ be formed in us, some day the Christ Who is in us will shine through us, and we shall grow up into Christ in all things, and at last, become like Him.

I have no doubt we shall be an astonishment to the angels at last when they say, "No one but God could ever have made a faultless saint out of such a sinner as that man was." It is the life of God in the soul that constitutes salvation. That is our hope.

Had I time to point out to you all the implications of this principle I should tell you if it were not true there would be no use for you to pray; I should tell you that the promises of God would be of none effect. How wonderful that was when Gabriel had made that announcement, Mary received the promise and said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. I do not understand it at all. It is the miracle of all miracles, but if it be God's will, let it be so." Mary simply said, Amen, to what God said should be.

What is it to be a Christian? To believe the Word of God, that the power of the Holy Ghost can come upon you, and that the creative power which spoke all worlds from naught can make you a new creature. If somebody should say, "Amen, Lord! let it be so to-night", you will go home from this place a new creature, an outstanding proof for time and eternity of the truth that Jesus was virgin-born. May God help us thus to receive Him!

Let us pray: O Lord, in our destitution, in the utter impotency of our human nature, at the end of ourselves like the prodigal in the far country, having spent all and having begun to be in want, with no resource in ourselves or in our circumstances, or in any human friend or institution roundabout us, we turn our thoughts to the Father's house, and confess before Thee that unless God shall help us we are ruined. Many of us know Thee. Blessed be Thy Holy name for ever, we know that when Thou didst say, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save his people from their sin", Thou didst will that He should come to die for us, and live again. Some of us, notwithstanding our waywardness, our unworthiness, our unchristlikeness, which we humbly confess before Thee—notwithstanding it all, we know that Christ has been

formed in us, that our hearts have become like Bethlehem's manger where His new life is cradled, and the new life is kindled which all the storms of earth can never extinguish. We thank Thee for eternal life.

There are some to whom Thou art speaking now, some man in the solitary place, some man who is alone with God yonder, to whom God has already spoken. Help him to say, Amen, to Thy promise of newness of life. There may be someone just on the verge of another world, someone who will change worlds to-night, and who is not ready to go. O Holy Ghost, touch such an one and make him live. Little groups are gathered here and there, near and far, who hear Thy Word, and they all need God. They need a redeeming Saviour, they need a Fountain filled with blood. Help them to receive Thee, to receive Thy gospel and believe, to be saved. And here in this building to-night there are some who have long postponed the reception of Jesus Christ. Their hearts have been like the inn at Bethlehem, so crowded that there has been no room for Jesus. O Lord, come to such to-night. Claim a place for Thyself, and may there be real conversions in this service and through the message of Thy gospel everywhere. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

### THIS ISSUE OF "THE GOSPEL WITNESS".

This issue of *The Witness* is but half its usual size. The reason for that is that Christmas falls upon our publication day, and it is necessary to go to press on Tuesday. A large number of subscriptions begin with this issue as a Christmas present from some friend. We want our new readers to understand that this is not a sample copy of *The Witness*. We had expected to publish a large edition instead of a small one, but discovered there is to be no delivery on Christmas day this year, so that we are forced to a hurried production of the paper. We are, however, sending by first-class mail to our new subscribers a copy of last week's issue with this—but we are sending a copy of our foreign edition of last week. Last week's Canadian edition had thirty-two pages, but the extra sixteen pages had to do with a denominational matter of local interest, so that we did not trouble our foreign readers with it. We assure our new readers that the eight pages lacking from this edition will be made up many times over during the year, as we often run twenty, twenty-four, and sometimes thirty-two pages. Meanwhile we hope our new readers will enjoy this first instalment, and the volume of sermons which will reach them under another cover.

We are happy to welcome them to our *Gospel Witness* family, and most heartily wish them, with all other readers, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

### LAST SUNDAY IN JARVIS STREET.

The attendance at School in the morning was 1,427. There was a fine congregation at the morning service, and again in the evening, when the sermon appearing in this issue was preached. Five believers were baptized.

## Baptist Bible Union Lesson Leaf

Vol. 6

No. 1.

REV. ALEX. THOMSON, EDITOR.

Lesson 1. January 4th, 1931.  
First Quarter.

### JACOB'S LADDER.

Lesson Text: Genesis, chapter 28.

**Golden Text:** "Behold I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Genesis 28:15.

#### I. JACOB'S DEPARTURE—(vs. 1-5).

The record of this chapter is both interesting and important. Jacob's departure from home is recorded together with his experience at Bethel and included therein is the covenant promise of God given to Jacob for the first time. That promise was first given to Abraham then to Isaac, and now to Jacob. The incident is therefore important from the standpoint of the covenant as well as from that of the divine manifestation. The reason for Jacob's departure from home was twofold, first to escape the wrath of his brother, and second to secure a wife, both being in accordance with Rebekah's plan, (27:41-46). The reason urged before Isaac was the latter, (27:46) and in accordance with this he gave his son a solemn and strict charge, concerning the kind of wife he should choose. In this connection it is of interest to note the charge given by his father, Abraham, concerning his own wife, (24:3, 4). Isaac's charge, as in the case of his father's, first relates to the kind of wife who should not be chosen: "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan", (v. 1). The scriptural principle relating to marriage and all other relationships of life, is that of separation from all that is in any way opposed to God, (2 Cor. 6:17). Two cannot walk together unless they be agreed, and the child of God should marry only in the Lord. The Canaanites were heathen, and not with any of them could Jacob have fellowship, nor were any of them qualified to be mothers in Israel. The direction is given to Jacob to go to Paden-aram, to the home of his uncle Laban, and there secure a wife, (v. 2), to the home of his mother and his own kindred, with whom he could have fellowship, being of like mind. The parting blessing of Isaac is worthy of note. In it there is implied the passing on of the covenant blessing.

#### II. ESAU'S MARRIAGE, (vs. 6-9).

Esau already had two wives, (26:34), but realizing that his parents were not pleased with them, he secured another one this time from among the Ishmaelites, and again he made a mistake, for Ishmael had been set aside by God and sent forth from the camp of Abraham, (21:14). And the character of these people was not such as to commend itself to the people of Jehovah, (16:12). On the part of Esau this may have been the manifestation of a sincere desire to

please his parents, or it may simply have been a move to humour his father, with a view to the restoration of the privileges of the first-born. In the incident Esau still proves himself to be a carnally-minded man, lacking in understanding of spiritual principles, and he remains a type of all such. Spiritual things are spiritually understood.

#### III. JACOB'S VISION, (vs. 10-17).

Jacob's departure from home was really a flight. He knew he had not acted right toward his brother; he was aware of his anger against him, and he feared the consequences of that anger. Such fear evidently lent wings to his feet, for on the first day of travel he reached a place about forty-eight miles from home. It was a lonely, rugged spot, and here Jacob slept beneath the canopy of heaven, "he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep", (v. 11). His feelings are more easily imagined than described; away from home for the first time and under such circumstances He would probably be conscious of the fact that "the way of transgressors is hard", (Prov. 13-15). And such a truth requires emphasis. One cannot act in a wrong manner without expecting evil consequences to ensue.

The circumstances may have inclined Jacob to the belief that he was forsaken, and a spirit of loneliness may have crept over him. If so, God was soon to prove Himself very near, for this wandering son of Isaac was privileged to have a dream of the heavenly beings, and to hear the voice of his Creator. He dreamed and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (v. 12). This vision speaks to us of direct connection between heaven and earth established from the Godward side. Whether the ladder was that which we commonly associate with that name, or as some think, a mound of rock reaching unto the heavens, it at least assured Jacob of a heavenly connection, and is in itself a type of our Lord Jesus Christ, (John 5:1).

The most wonderful part of the dream related to the Lord's presence in it. "And behold the Lord stood above it", (v. 13). On the ladder the angels of God were ascending and descending, manifesting the ministering character of their duties, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation, (Heb. 1:14). And God was at the top of the ladder. Note other visions of a like nature, (Is. 6; Acts 7:55-56), also the blessedness of meeting God. Now we may meet Him by faith, but some day we shall see our Redeemer and be like Him, (I John 2:2). Not only did Jacob see such a wonderful sight, but he heard the voice of God. This was probably the first time he had come in such direct touch with Him, and the message given assured him of the covenant blessing. There is first the self-designation of God as, "The Lord God of Abraham thy Father, and the God of Isaac", (v. 13), thus making Himself known as the covenant-keeping One, and disclosing his relationship to the family of Jacob. Then follows the promise concerning the land, "the land where-

in thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed". Jacob owned none of it, not even a comfortable place to lay his head, yet it was all to be his. Such a promise called for the exercise of faith. There was no visible evidence pointing to its fulfilment, but we know how wonderfully God kept His word. He never fails to do so, and we can trust Him implicitly and continuously. The third part of the divine message related to the multiplication of Jacob's seed, "thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth", (v. 14), to their dwelling in various parts of the earth, "thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north and to the south"; and to their use as a means of blessing unto others; "and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed". History again gives evidence to the truthfulness of God's word for Jews are to be found in all parts of the world and through Christ, who according to the flesh was a Jew, the whole world has been, and is still, being blessed. A further promise is given Jacob concerning the divine protection which would be exercised over him, (v. 15), which in after days must have brought comfort to his heart. The immediate effect upon him, however, was that of fear. He was conscious of the divine presence, (v. 16). "And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven", (v. 17). Note the covenant blessing was wholly of grace. Jacob did nothing to earn it; also that God may be met with in any place.

#### IV. JACOB'S VOW, (vs. 18-22).

The vision of the night had greatly and permanently affected Jacob on arising in the morning, "he took the stone that he had put for his pillow and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it", (v. 18). This act was one of solemn dedication. Jacob had no animals to offer in sacrifice, but he used what he had, and set up the stone as a memorial. "And he called the name of that place Bethel" meaning "house of God". The Canaanites called it Luz, but later, the Israelites again called it by the name of Bethel.

Then follows the statement of Jacob's vow. It seems at first as if he was manifesting his bargaining disposition, and promising something to God if He would give something in return, but such is not its significance, rather is the sense of it to be understood as a vow based on an accepted promise. God had promised to look after Jacob, and he said, "If God will be with me" or "Since God will be with me", not distrusting, or requesting, but expressing a fact, "then shall the Lord be my God", (v. 21). This evidently was Jacob's first declaration of purpose concerning God, possibly akin to that which we term conversion, although he was yet to enter upon a deeper spiritual experience at Peniel, (32:24-30). Here is Jacob's definite decision to accept the Lord as his God. Explanation may be made, and the necessity urged of definite decision for Christ these days. Note the promise of the tenth, (v. 22), its use in Israel, and the obligation and privilege of giving to the Lord on the part of Christians, (I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 9:6, 7).