

"Behold, I Bring You Good Tidings of Great Joy . . ."

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The Birth of a Royal Heir

By Thomas Guthrie

THE birth of an heir to the throne is usually accompanied by circumstances befitting so great an event. No place is deemed worthy of it but a royal palace; and there, at the approach of the expected hour, high nobles and the great officers of state assemble, while the whole country, big with hope, waits to welcome a successor to its long line of kings. Cannons announce the event; seaward, landward, guns flash and roar from floating batteries and rocky battlements; bonfires blaze on hill-tops; steeples ring out the news in merry peals; the nation holds holiday, giving itself up to banqueting and enjoyments, while public prayers and thanksgivings rise to Him by whom kings reign and princes decree justice. With such pomp and parade do the heirs of earthly thrones enter on the stage of life! So came not He who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. On the eve of His birth the world went on its usual round. None were moved for His coming; nor was there any preparation for the event — a chamber, or anything else. No fruit of unhallowed love, no houseless beggar's child enters life more obscurely than the Son of God. The very tokens by which the shepherds were taught to recognize Him were not the majesty but the extreme meanness of his condition: "This shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." In fact, the Lord of heaven was to be recognized by his humiliation, as its heirs are by their humility. Yet, as we have seen a black and lowering cloud have its edges touched with living gold by the sun behind it, so all the darkest scenes of our Lord's life appear more or less irradiated with the splendours of a strange glory. Take that night on Galilee when a storm roared over land and lake, enough to wake all but the dead. The boat with Jesus and His disciples tears through the waves, now whirling on their foaming crests, now plunging into their yawning hollows; the winds rave in His ear; the spray falls in cold showers on His naked face; but He sleeps. I have read of a soldier boy who was found buried in sleep beneath his gun, amid the cries and carnage of the battle; and the powers of

nature in our Lord seem to be equally exhausted. His strength is spent with toil; and with wan face and wasted form He lies stretched out on some rude boards — the picture of one whose candle is burning away all too fast, and whom excess of zeal is hurrying into premature old age and an untimely grave. Was the sight such as to suggest the question, Where is now thy God? — how soon it changed into a scene of magnificence and omnipotent power! He wakes — as a mother, whom louder sounds would not stir, to her infant's feeblest wail, He wakes to the cry of His alarmed disciples; and standing up, with the lightning flash illumining His calm, divine face, He looks out on the terrific war of elements. He speaks; and all is hushed. Obedient to His will, the winds fold their wings, the waves sink to rest; and there is a great calm. "Glory to God in the highest!" How may His people catch up and continue the strain which falls from angels' lips? In disciples plucked from the very jaws of death, and pulling their boat shoreward with strong hands and happy hearts over a moonlit glassy sea, Jesus shows us how He will make good these sayings, "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not afraid, for I am thy God" — "I have given unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish."

The divine glory of that scene is not peculiar to it. For as an eagle, so soon as she has stooped from her realm to the ground, mounts aloft again, soaring into the blue skies of her native heavens, our Lord never descends into the abasement of His meanest circumstances without some act which bespeaks divinity, and bears Him up before our eyes into the regions of Godhead. The grave, where He weeps like a woman, gives up its prisoner at His word. Athirst by Jacob's well, like any other wayfaring, way-worn traveller, He begs a draught of water from a woman there, but tells her all she ever did. Houseless and poor, His banquet hall is the open air, His table the green grass, his feast five barley loaves and a few fishes from the neighbouring lake, yet this scanty fare supplies the wants of five thousand guests. His birth and life and death, His whole history, in fact,

resembles one of those treasure-chests which double locks secure; for as that iron safe yields its hoards of gold, silver, pearls, and precious stones to none but Him who brings to each lock its own appropriate key, so the riches of divine truth, redeeming love, and saving mercy are open only to such as come to Jesus with a belief in His divinity on the one hand, and a belief in His humanity on the other — who behold in the child, whose birth was sung by angels, the son of Mary, and worship the only begotten, well beloved, and eternal Son of God.

Now this mingling of divine and human characters distinguished Christ's birth as much as His death. The halo of glory that surrounded His dying, crowned His infant head. His sun rose, as it afterwards set, behind a heavy bank of clouds; but the divinity they screened, touched their edges alike with burning gold; so that He at whose death the rocks were rent, and the sun eclipsed, and graves deserted of their dead, no more entered than He left our world as a common son of Adam. Not that a world which was to reject Him went out to meet its King with homage and royal honours. Omen of coming events, it received Him in sullen silence. But the heavens declared His glory, the skies sent out a sound; and the tokens of His first advent — unlike the thunders which shall rend the skies when He comes the second time to judgment — were all in beautiful harmony with its object. It was love and saving mercy; there were light, music, and angel forms. With this object all things indeed were in perfect keeping — the serene night — the shining stars — the pearly dews glistening on the grass — snowy flocks safely pasturing — and the shepherds themselves, to whom the annunciation was made; men who, whether going before their charge, or carrying the lambs in their arms, or gently leading those that were with young, or standing bravely between their flocks and the roaring lion, were the choicest emblems and types of Him who, dying to save us, gave His life for the sheep. To them there suddenly appeared a multitude of the heavenly host, turning night into day, and shedding on the soft hills around a bright but gentle radiance. As guard of honour, they had swept in their downward flight by many a sun and star, escorting the Son of God to our nether world. And now, ere they left Him to tread the wine-press alone, and returned on upward wings to their native heavens, and their service before the throne of God — these celestials bent their loving eyes on the stable; and in anticipation of Jesus' triumphs, of men saved, death conquered, graves spoiled, and Satan crushed, they sang "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

"THE EXCEEDING SINFULNESS OF SIN"

Our Message implies that sin is a universal reality, from which there is no deliverance but through Jesus. Has the fact of sin, its reality, and its consequences its due place in modern preaching? I for one very much doubt it. Modern theories of heredity and environment, modern laxity of moral fibre, have taken many shades of blackness out of the black thing. Men think less gravely of sin, and so they superficially diagnose the world's disease, and therefore they superficially prescribe the remedy. An inadequate conception of sin lies at the root of most theological heresies and Utopian

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schemes of reformation of society. It is fatal to the earnestness, the pathos, and the power of the preacher's work. Unless we have our hearts and minds laden with the burden of men's sins, our voices will not ring out the vibrating notes of the good news of One who saves His people from their sins, because "Himself bare our sins in His own body." We must all confess that yielding to the "Zeitgeist", the trend of opinion and feeling prevalent around us, and as children of the age, we have been tempted to think less severely, less pityingly of sin, and less solemnly of its certain result — death — than either our Master or His apostles did. We have too much shrunk from plain speech on the guilt and the danger of sinners. And, just in exact proportion to our failure in these respects, has necessarily followed our failure in ringing out the good news of the Christ, the propitiation for our sins and for the whole world.

—ALEXANDER MACLAREN

A FIRM STAND

We do not pretend to be unsectarian — if by this term be meant the absence of all distinctive principles, and a desire to please parties of all shades of opinion. We believe, and therefore speak. We speak in love; but not in soft words and trimming sentences. We shall not court controversy, but we shall not shun it when the cause of God demands it.

—CHARLES H. SPURGEON

THE JARVIS STREET PULPIT

The Glory of Bethlehem

A Sermon by Dr. T. T. Shields

Delivered in Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Christmas Morning, December 25th, 1929

(Stenographically Reported)

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Micah 5:2.

IT will, I am sure, be generally recognized that the author of any book is the best interpreter of his own thought. He knows what he meant when the words were written. If that be admitted, it follows that the Holy Spirit is the one and only reliable Interpreter of the words of Scripture. The New Testament is the best commentary on the Old, and the Old Testament is the best illustration of the New. The particular verse which I have read as a text this morning is the scripture which was quoted to Herod when he called the chief priests and the scribes together "demanding of them where Christ should be born". From a reading of the Scripture itself they concluded that he was to be born in Bethlehem, and very literally this was fulfilled.

Before we come to the great truth which lies at the heart of this prophetic word, it may be profitable to note a few of the flowers that grow about the house.

It is not without significance that the birth of Jesus was here predicted. How great must be the Person whose advent is foretold some seven hundred years before His birth! It does not necessarily establish the truth of His Deity, for some who were not divine were the subjects of prophecy before their coming into the world. But certainly it does indicate that the Child Who was born in Bethlehem of Judaea had a very large place in the divine plan, when long before men thought of His advent, the particular place in which He was to be born was specifically predicted.

There is a suggestion here, too, of the great difference that always obtains between God's way of doing things, and man's way. Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem. Bethlehem was noted in this scripture, and the tribe it represented, as being little among the thousands of Judah. It was small and insignificant; and yet out of Bethlehem would arise the One Who should be the Ruler of God's people. It is ever so, that God's ways are other than ours. We are disposed to associate greatness with bigness, with human ignorance, with rank and standing among men. It is not so with God. He Who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, was manifested in Bethlehem, which was little among the thousands of Judah.

Then there is the suggestion here of how pronounced and how everywhere apparent, is the human tendency to pervert the things of God, and to misinterpret the ways of God! Think of the thousands, the tens of thousands, in this city, who have worn themselves out physically and mentally in their effort to observe Christmas, with-

out one thought of Him Whose birth this season celebrates. How far from the great message of this text is the ordinary view of the conception of Christmas.

Let us look for a few moments this morning at the heart of it, and try to realize, as the Holy Spirit may lead us, something of the tremendous import of the historic fact which now we celebrate.

I.

LOOK, FIRST OF ALL, AT THE CHARACTER WHICH HE IS TO ASSUME WHOSE BIRTH IS HERE PREDICTED. "Out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to rule, or govern, my people-Israel." One becomes almost weary of the names that are applied to Jesus Christ. How much we hear of the "meek and lowly Jesus"! How frequently we hear men speak of "the humble Nazarene"! I saw in a magazine recently, in an article under the title, "An Appreciation of Jesus", an estimate of Jesus. How common it has become for men to speak of Him under that one name only! And even the name, "Jesus", is emptied of its content for it was said, "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." But this great word predicts that He has come to be the Ruler, to be the Governor, of God's people — not to be patronized, not to be lauded as the worthiest of all human examples, not merely that His name should be used as a synonym for the spirit that bestows gifts upon one's friends, and cares somewhat for the poor; that is a perversion of the meaning of Christmas. Jesus came into the world to be the Ruler of His people, to be Lord of all. He was born to be a King, He came to be a King.

I know that He was humbly born, that He chose to be born in a stable. There was a providential order in it, without doubt; and it may well be that the stable was freer from moral taint than the most elaborately-furnished room in the palace would have been. He was born to be King, and we do well in this day frequently to emphasize, and ever to keep in our own thinking, the tremendous fact that Jesus Christ is the Ruler of His people; that He wears the crown and wields the sceptre.

We are living in a day when people are increasingly disposed to lawlessness, when the idea of government of any kind becomes to some more and more objectionable. We are not surprised at the little child who refuses parental direction, who insists upon having his own will; but we expect him to grow out of it, and to become more sane. But we are living in a day when from university class-rooms, from pulpit and platform, from editorial

chair, from every place where men assume the right to teach others, we are being taught that it is a human privilege to express one's self, to have his own way. The idea of restraint, of control, of self-denial, of government, is everywhere discounted. Yet let it be remembered that we are subject to law, that we live in a realm of law; and the highest expression of that law was given to us at Bethlehem; for He came to be our Ruler, our Governor, our King.

Jesus Christ is to be King in the individual life. We sang a moment or two ago, declaring our desire to worship Him, to adore Him, to recognize Him as our Lord. But, my dear friends, that ought to be true of the individual Christian life; not merely in the place of prayer and praise, not only on occasions of public worship, but in all relationships of life; every day, and every hour. God's people Israel are subject to the authority of Jesus Christ. He came to be King over all in every human life, in every department of life, to reign over the whole kingdom of man's soul, and to bring every thought into captivity to His obedience.

But we sang, too, that He was born in order that we might be born again; He came to be a King in order that we might become kings also. I think it was not without significance that the Representative Man, He Who was to be in so true a sense representative of us under the law, in all relationships of life, in relation to men, to the earth about us, and to heaven above us — it was not without significance that He should have chosen to begin His earthly existence in a stable, and that He was laid in a manger.

How often I have seen these two ideas associated! Someone, I think it was Talmage wrote a life of Christ which he entitled, "From Manger to Throne". But the truth is, sin has brought men from the throne to the manger, from their high standing and station as kings, down to the level of the beasts of the earth. And He stooped to our low estate in order that He might lift us up again. What a pathetic figure the ex-Kaiser presents in Doorn, a king without a crown, without a kingdom, and without a sceptre, an exile from his own country, finding his enjoyment and his exercise in the humblest sort of occupation, sawing wood! It is almost like Samson grinding the Philistines' mills! "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands." That was written of man, of you and of me. We, too, were born originally to be kings, made to have dominion, and to have the rule. But we are exiles. It is folly for any of us to say that we are kings.

Frequently the question is asked, "Can the Kaiser return? Can the house of Hohenzollern be restored to its one-time glory? Can he ever sit upon the throne again, and wear a crown?" I do not suppose he ever will — and certainly we are none of us desirous that he should. But the big question for us is: Can we come back? Can we have a kingdom? Is there any way by which we too may have dominion, ceasing to be serfs? May we some day even yet be sovereigns? From all the ruin and shame of sin, may we be brought back again to the enjoyment of the glory that was God's plan for us? In other words, is there any hope of glory for any one of us? There is only one hope. If our hearts shall become a Bethlehem, if Christ be formed in us, there is a hope of glory. He came to be a King, and to make it possible that we should be born again of the Holy

seed, and that there should be implanted within us that overcoming life that will ultimately, by His abounding grace, bring us again to the throne, and establish us in a kingdom.

What a blessing that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, and let it never be forgotten that it is written He was born "in the days of Herod the king". You will remember how Herod sought to terminate that life. He gave commandment that the male children should be destroyed. The message was ultimately given to Joseph. "They are dead which sought the young child's life." And when Christ is formed in the believer, He is again born "in the days of Herod the king", when evil and all that is opposed to God are regnant, and in the ascendancy, where there seems not the shadow of a chance that this spark of divine life should ever unfold into beauty and power, and at last produce a king. And yet, my dear friends, that is the promise, the prophecy of Bethlehem. Let us take the larger view, and remember that He is to be a Ruler of all God's Israel. He was to be great; He was to be called the Son of the highest; and the Lord God will give unto Him the throne of His Father David.

I have heard it asked whether our present gracious king is to be the last king of England. We do not believe he will be. We believe the monarchy will continue. But of this we are sure, that the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ will be established; and that He, the Babe of Bethlehem, shall reign from sea to sea, and from the rivers unto the end of the earth.

II.

BUT WHAT IS OUR GUARANTEE OF ALL THIS? How can we be sure that Jesus Christ shall wear the crown of universal empire? How can we be absolutely certain that the kingdoms of this world shall "become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ"? Because of the great truth that is further stated in this text, "Out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." No one can ever understand Jesus Christ who attempts to understand him as beginning His life in Bethlehem. That is the crowning heresy; that is the heresy of all heresies; that is the error which contains within itself all other errors that ever were promulgated by the pit, that Jesus Christ began His life at Bethlehem. Who is this Child Whose coming is heralded by a star, Whose advent is predicted centuries before His birth? Whence came He? His goings forth are "from of old, from everlasting". From the days of eternity our Lord set His face toward Bethlehem. Yes, before there was a Bethlehem. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever He had formed the earth", from everlasting, He set His face and His sovereign will toward Bethlehem — and further, toward the throne and the kingdom.

That is an interesting suggestion, is it not? That is said of no one else. The birth of Jesus is absolutely unique in that it was but a manifestation of One Who had existed from everlasting. We shall understand the supernaturalism of the Christian religion, we shall understand the possibility of the fulfilment of all those great promises in respect to ourselves, and in respect to the world at large, and the ultimate redemption of God's people, only as we come to understand that this Jesus Who is the Author of the new creation, was also the Author of the old. We must worship Him as the One "in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our

ways." Christmas was but the disclosure of the face of Him by Whom all creation is lighted, and at Whose almighty word it came into being.

III.

WHAT PRACTICAL BEARING HAS THAT GREAT FACT UPON OUR LIVES AS CHRISTIANS? To most of us it is but a commonplace to insist upon the pre-existence, the eternity of Jesus Christ Who was born in Bethlehem. I do not suppose there is anyone here who ever for a moment calls in question the fact that there never was a day when Jesus was not, that there never can be a day when He shall cease to be, that from everlasting, from the days of eternity to the days of eternity, He is God. We believe that, and, as such, we bow before Him in humble adoration, and worship Him as our Lord and our God.

But what has that to do, I say, with the revelation upon which our faith is based? What practical bearing has this upon, say, the simple promise of the Book upon which you and I have to live every day? Does it help us to see where God draws the veil, and carries us back into the counsels of the eternal, showing us that before He laid the foundations of the earth, before He gave to the sea His decree that it should not pass His commandments, before He stretched out the heavens as a curtain, and stretched it out as a tent to dwell in — before He made anything, He planned our redemption?

Think of the long prophetic preparation for His coming. This is but one of many prophecies which pointed to the advent of the Eternal Son of God. His earthly life was but a parenthesis in His eternal existence, when the Invisible and the Infinite clothed Himself, veiled Himself in human flesh, in order that He might reveal Himself and show us in His own Person the face of God. I ask again, What bearing has the fact that through all the passage of the centuries, and the gradual unfolding of the plans of God, the ancient prophecies relating ultimately to our Lord, and before that to those who should prepare His coming — what does it mean to us that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, when the hour ordained from all eternity struck, and God came as He had planned to come, what does it mean? Never once did He vary His plan. Never once did He amend it. Never once did He add by one jot or tittle to the provisions of His eternal covenant. And I know that "whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever." I was talking to somebody who was connected with one of the great railways, and he told me of one thing that had involved a great expenditure of money, hundreds of thousands of dollars — for aught I know, millions. This man said, "That is our white elephant." I said, "What do you mean?" "Everybody knows it was a mistake." "Why," I said, "do great corporations like yours make mistakes, and spend money in ways that are not profitable, so that you wish you had it to spend over again?" A few of you can remember when the old Union Station was built. I wonder why they did not build one big enough while they were at it? Can you tell me? Now we have another, and they are busy elevating the tracks through the city to accommodate changed conditions. Just now the papers are full of the discussion of a certain Town Planning Scheme. I wonder why it was not planned from the beginning?

I wonder why there should be so much truth in that old idea that most cities were planned by a cow path through the pasture, and then somebody went after, and

somebody went after, and that became the main street of the city. Why was it not planned? Why should we need to spend millions and millions of dollars tearing down buildings, cutting streets where there are no streets, making streets wider, correcting the mistakes of those who have gone before us — and making some more, so that those who come after will still have mistakes to correct? I wonder why we do things like that? It is simply because we cannot see into the future. We know not what a day nor an hour may bring forth.

There is a city that will need no town-planning scheme to get it straight. The size of it is determined, and how it is going to be built. The walls are all arranged for, as are the mansions that are going to be built there. And I am positive that it will not be found too small. There will not be some new method of moving about discovered so that the street will have to be widened after we get there. I do not think they will have to tear up the golden streets, and put them down again. I do not know what some people would do if they were not always tearing up and putting down the streets — tearing them up and putting them down. We must not blame anyone, for that is because we cannot see ahead. But when we come into the realm of this revelation we come into another world, and we see that things were planned from everlasting, that the history of the race was pre-written, that into that prophetic mould all history is run, and God never changes it a bit.

That is more manifestly true of that great matter which relates to our salvation. There are many people who are trying to invent a new gospel. I said to a young man some years ago, "What are you going to do now?" He had just resigned his pastorate by the unanimous consent of his congregation, and I said to him, "What are you going to do?" He said, "I am going to take a post-graduate course." He had taken several already, but he was going to take another! That is a sort of strategic retreat, you know. That is a comfortable way for a minister to cover the utter failure of his ministry. This young man was going to take a post-graduate course. I said, "I thought you had spent a good part of your life in university?" "I do not know how many degrees he had." "Well," I said, "What are you going to do?" He replied, "I am going to specialize in certain subjects, because I think the great need of the hour is that we should know how to re-state the gospel." Poor man! When God states a thing, it does not need to be re-stated. It is so well stated that you cannot improve on it at all, and the best thing for us to do is to accept His statement, and believe it, because it never has been changed. He Who came to Bethlehem came by no accident, for "His goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

Some young man says, "That is all very well, sir, but do you not know that in the sphere of navigation, for instance, the mariner's compass was invented, and that we have many mechanical aids to-day? Do you not think in this great matter of piloting the soul from this life into the other that the human brain could do something to assist?" I have never yet heard that a mariner's compass was at variance with the pole-star! I have never yet heard that fundamental things were changed. We may have some few mechanical aids in order to the understanding of them, and to assist in the application of certain well-known laws to our own movement. Ask the expert chemist if there is any advance in the way wheat

is matured to-day over the day in which Joseph lived? Is the wheat of our Western prairies produced by the operation of the same laws of assimilation and growth? We may learn how to till the soil a little better. We may learn how to put the seed in rows, and how to reap the grain by mechanical aid; but the chemistry of the soil, the laws which govern growth, are everlastingly the same.

You cannot grow a flower but by obedience to God's laws. It matters not into what realm you go, electricity, chemistry, physiology, any realm, the best the human mind can do is to discover how, in this particular realm, God is operating; and then to bring one's self into conformity with that inexorable law. That is all we can do. Did you ever hear of a physician's proposing a substitute for blood? "The life of the flesh is in the blood." Who said so? God said so. Why? Because He had ordained that it should be so, that is why. And with all your advancement you cannot unwrite that which is written, nor can you change the operation of that law by a hair's breadth. All your science is of value only in the measure in which it helps you to understand that which God has ordained.

When we come into the realm of the Spirit, what a blessing it is to know that just as He prepared His earth

for our habitation physically, supplying all our needs, the laws governing climate, the production of certain fruits, and all the rest of it, fitting this earth for our habitation, so He anticipated our coming, and He Who came to be our Saviour, planned to come before the worlds were made, and never changed His course at all. And at last He appeared saying, "Here I am, your Saviour." What have we to do? Simply rejoice in the fact that He Who was born for us, Who lived for us, Who died for us, Who was buried for us, Who rose again for us, Who ascended into the glory for us, and is interceding for us, is some day coming again for us. You do not need to change a thing, but just accept the precious Word of God, and rejoice in this great fact, for "we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true."

Let us pray.

We thank Thee, O Lord, for this perfect redemption. We pray that our meditation this morning may be used of the Holy Spirit to enable us more completely and unwaveringly to rest upon the promises of the eternal Word, believing that Thou art but fulfilling Thine eternal counsels of grace; and that, as Thou hast kept Thy word thus far, Thou wilt keep it to the end, for Thy faithfulness reaches even unto the heavens, and we know that God is true. Accept the worship of our hearts, O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, through the merit of the precious blood. Amen....

Christmas Greetings to the Family

DURING the Christmas season many of our readers will be gathering in family groups for festivity and worship. The great fact of which this time speaks is the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ when "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." A secondary accompaniment of the season, however, is the consideration of a family day when, in the quietness and peace of our homes, we may turn aside from a busy world and enjoy a time of fellowship and relaxation.

All across the world will be found members of our own GOSPEL WITNESS family and, although we shall be unable to meet as one company during the holiday season, our thoughts will be with each and all. We trust that your prayers, in turn, will ascend to God on our behalf.

Those who are associated with the paper have felt very keenly the loss of the guiding hand of the founder who regarded each reader as a valued member of the family. The Lord has been gracious, however, and has supplied needed grace and strength for this labour in the gospel and has added new members to our expanding family of readers.

The Board of Directors and the Editors of THE GOSPEL WITNESS send to every reader of this gospel messenger our hearty wishes for spiritual blessings and true joy. May each believer know this blessing of the Lord which maketh rich and addeth no sorrow thereto.

Papalized Protestantism or Protestantized Popery

"ON TO ROME!" This could well be the watchword and marching orders of much of modern Protestantism which is out-Romanizing the Romanists. Such a deplorable trend should cause deep concern and alarm in the hearts of Christians for it is surely abominable in the eyes of the Lord. The larger Protestant groups are rapidly forfeiting a great heritage by default. The enemies, in many cases, are found not only on the outside but in places of leadership, in the Protestant ranks. Church leaders and local ministers are seemingly intent upon importing in a wholesale fashion the practices, empty ceremonies and the pomp of the Roman Catholic Church.

The architecture of some recently-constructed church buildings indicates that there is more than a passing admiration for things Roman. The pulpit which once occupied the central place in the Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian churches is now relegated to the side while an altar, replete with a brass cross has been imported and placed where it will claim the attention of the dazzled and benumbed worshippers. This heralds more than a mere change in the position of the church furniture; rather it is an indication of a deeper symptom for the preaching of the Word of God through which men are saved is also discounted by those who prefer empty ceremonies. The "chancel" of the new Protestant building can hardly be distinguished from its Roman counterpart except that the latter has images in evidence. Candles too have been dragged into the Protestant sanctuary. The minister, bedecked in colourful garb, flits hither and yon from pulpit to "reading desk" while the choir and congregation chant in an unintelligible manner. No one can deny that the whole affair is quite a show for it could appeal to the eye and the ear; we are just as certain that it overlooks the greatest need of the souls of men for there is no word as to how people are to be prepared for that time when they shall have to meet the Judge of all the earth. At that terrible moment, these popish innovations will seem as empty toys that mock the soul.

What has brought about this change? What change has taken place that Protestantism which once gloried in a spiritual message must now resort to cheap but colourful performances?

The great contributing factor is *modernism* which denies the great realities of the gospel such as the authority of the Word of God, the sinfulness of man, the Deity of Christ and the need of regeneration. When the gospel is thus robbed of its content, only an empty shell remains and this must be adorned in order to appeal to the senses of those who are held captive by sin. This spiritual nothingness is rendered attractive to the carnal mind by adorning it with elaborate ceremonies.

Our hearts ache whenever we come into contact with this ritualistic brand of decadent Protestantism for it has the same paralyzing effect upon its followers as does Rome. In speaking of false teachers, Jude uses some descriptive terms that could well apply to these Romish importations — "clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots."

The devotees of this ritualized Protestantism seem as

persuaded as any Roman Catholic that these performances are the sum and substance of religion. One seems nearly helpless in its presence for there is a hollow, reverent air about it with a quasi-Biblical terminology. Yet dead ceremonialism is in sharp opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We have no desire to deal in generalities or to make accusations or insinuations that lack substantiation. It is necessary that we cite examples of that of which we speak. In so doing, we shall be open to the charge that we lack "diplomacy" and "charity"; we covet nothing of diplomacy and long only for Scriptural charity. Those who have a love of God's truth and fear the face of God more than the scorn of men will find true charity in our conviction that we fully serve God only when we have pointed out error.

A specific example of last week caused us to write on this matter of dead formalism. On Thursday evening, December 8, we attended a service held in Timothy Eaton Memorial Church (United) in Toronto. The service was held under the auspices of the General Council of the United Church of Canada for the purpose of affording a public welcome to the visiting Soviet Russian Orthodox clergymen.

As the evening progressed we tried in vain to imagine any of the apostles taking part in such a performance. The simplicity which is in Christ was conspicuous by its absence and in its place was a coldness and formality that was lifeless and depressing. The chanting, the prayers read by the kneeling congregation, the colourful procession, the candles, the raised "altar" and the cross all made us wonder if we were actually in a Protestant building.

We shudder to think that this performance could be typical of the United churches of this land. If it is then it is time that voices are raised warning believers in the larger denominations that they are being drugged by a popish anaesthetic. If that service was representative of the sentiments and desires of the leaders of modern Protestantism, then we are but one step removed from high Anglicanism and two steps removed from Rome.

We were not too surprised when the Russian clerics crossed themselves before the "cross" nor when one, after preaching, kissed the hand of his "superior" for it is well known that the Russian Orthodox Church is a thinly-veiled form of Romanism. Let all ponder this however — modern Protestantism is well on the way to the adoption of similar practices which are but indicative of a deeper unbelief in the gospel of grace. This process has gone so far that these "Protestants" can have fellowship with those who are held captive by dead ritualism.

MY COVENANT DOLLAR-A-MONTH CLUB

Desiring to have a vital part in the work of the furtherance of the Gospel, I hereby pledge One Dollar per month, to be applied to the Church Extension Loan Fund of The Conservative Regular Baptist Association of Canada. This money will be loaned out to deserving causes to assist in the erection of suitable places of worship. — (Matt. 28:19, 20).

Name

Address

\$9,700.00 Raised in Special Offering

SINCE the passing of Dr. T. T. Shields, readers of THE GOSPEL WITNESS and scores of friends of the late Editor have written to ask what plans had been formulated for a memorial to Dr. Shields. After careful consideration the pastor and deacons of Jarvis Street Baptist Church felt that the most fitting tribute would be the establishment of a fund that would extend the written ministry of Dr. Shields. This fund would assist in the publication of the proposed volumes of the Dr. T. T. Shields' Memorial Library and in furthering the influence and circulation of THE GOSPEL WITNESS.

Dr. Slade announced during last week that a special offering would be taken on Sunday to launch the Memorial Fund. The people of the church responded nobly and, in addition to the regular offering, \$9,700.00 was raised at the two services. *This is only the beginning!* We know that many other friends desire to contribute to this work and during the coming weeks we look for a large return.

Printed below is the letter which Dr. Slade sent to the church members. Let all our readers regard it as a personal letter to each of them.

Dear Fellow-Member:

Ever since the passing of our illustrious Pastor, Dr. T. T. Shields, nearly nine months ago, the matter of the best possible method of continuing and extending the publication of his works, has been under consideration. After thorough investigation and careful thought, the Deacons have come to the unanimous opinion that Dr. Robert Dubarry's suggestion to establish a Foundation for this purpose is by far the best one. This Foundation will be known as:

THE DR. T. T. SHIELDS' MEMORIAL FUND

During the last few years of his life and ministry here there was nothing Dr. Shields cherished more than the hope that the publication of his works, consisting of sermons and writings, might be, both in THE GOSPEL WITNESS, and in book form, not only continued, but greatly extended.

In the light of the imperative need in our day for sound evangelical literature, we have every reason to believe that the announcement of such a plan will be received, not only by the members of our church, but by hosts of others outside, with great enthusiasm.

In order to put the Fund on a solid basis, which would for many years to come guarantee the maintaining of this vital ministry, it ought to be endowed with at least \$30,000.00. While many large gifts will be necessary to enable us to reach this desired goal, every contribution of whatever size will certainly help.

The Fund will be used to strengthen and enlarge the ministry of THE GOSPEL WITNESS, and to publish volumes of Dr. Shields' sermons. You will be interested to know also that a biography of Dr. Shields is in process of being written. As he was for years by far the most outstanding figure in "Canadian Baptist History", this biography, when ready for publication, is bound to be in great demand.

We cannot think of anything more appropriate than that THE DR. SHIELDS' MEMORIAL FUND should be started next Sunday by a Special Christmas Thankoffering taken by the Church which he pastored for nearly forty-five years, and by the people whom he loved most.

In making our gifts to this Fund a Thankoffering, especially at this time of the year, when we are thinking of His Unspeakable Gift to us, we shall, we believe, greatly honour God.

We enclose an offering envelope, and if you are unable to put in your gift by next Sunday, December 11th, please send it as soon as possible.

Wishing you the Season's Greetings, and the blessing of the Lord as you seek to serve Him during the coming year.

Heartily yours in His Glad Service,

(H. C. SLADE — Pastor)

Brazil: Baptists Rejoicing, Romanists Furious

THE gospel is enjoying new triumphs in the South American country of Brazil. Often we think of that country as being a Roman Catholic preserve but the fact is that evangelicals are making headway. We rejoice especially that our Baptist brethren are seeing many souls saved, Christians baptized and churches established. In a recent newsletter from that land, a beloved Baptist missionary, W. C. Taylor, tells us that there are 101 Baptist churches in the capital city of Rio de Janeiro. Across the land new testimonies are being established and these churches in turn are assuming the responsibility of evangelizing outlying communities.

How does the Church of Rome regard these gospel victories of the Baptists and other evangelicals? The Jesuit magazine *Relations* (published in Montreal) of December, 1955, carries an article on Brazil. One paragraph of that article reads as follows:

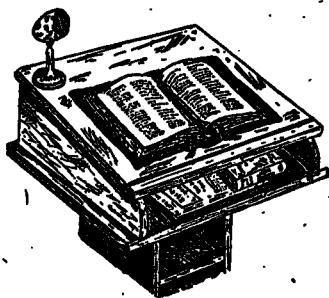
The Enemies of Brazil

"The heart of the Brazilian priest bleeds when he sees Protestants opening churches, schools, founding works and drawing the baptized (Catholics) unto themselves with funds from the United States. During the last few years the Protestants have increased ten times. They number 2,000,000 at the present, with 4,522 pastors, eighty-five per cent of whom are Brazilians, whereas the Catholic priests are hardly 10,000 in number for a population of 50,000,000 baptized (Catholics). Let us add that the Protestants maintain among other things, 88 secondary schools and 8,000 Sunday Schools. In 1953 they spread 1,609,000 Bibles throughout Brazil in addition to their seventy magazines. Let us not be afraid to affirm that these active Protestants and the Americans who support them are doing an unpatriotic and anti-national work by sowing division. Brazil must remain a Catholic nation. This is the condition for its peaceful unity and for its stability."

It is encouraging to know that the gospel is making such progress that Rome is alarmed. How the papal church hates the liberty which is afforded to all in Brazil! Much more to her liking is the oppression of Colombia, for Romanism cannot stand the prospect of competition with the glorious gospel.

We may live well enough on plain food without dainties, but not on dainties without plain food. Let us thank God, that what is most needful and useful, is generally most cheap and common.

— A practical observation by MATTHEW HENRY



English Bible Course

ELEVENTH LECTURE
in the
ENGLISH BIBLE COURSE
TORONTO BAPTIST SEMINARY

By Dr. C. D. Cole

December 8th, 1955

PAUL'S PERSONAL PREFERENCE

Philippians 1:12-26

IT IS worth the trip to this place just to hear these young men of God, talented and yet modest, sing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." In the scripture we have before us tonight, we have Paul's state of mind, while a prisoner in Rome. I wonder what my state of mind would be under similar circumstances. Paul's reaction to his imprisonment is revealed in this letter to his brethren at Philippi. It is suggested that the Philippians had written Paul concerning the effect of his imprisonment upon the cause of Christ. They either wrote a letter expressing concern or else Epaphroditus had conveyed their concern to him. The Philippians had heard very little about Paul for about four years or since he had sailed from Philippi on his last journey to Jerusalem. But they did know that he was in prison, and the thought of his imprisonment had stirred them up to send Epaphroditus with financial help who would also tell Paul of their deep concern for him personally, and also for the gospel which he had so zealously proclaimed. But now that he is in prison they are distressed about the missionary program.

I.

Paul's Good News (v. 12)

So at verse twelve we have his sudden transition to this very question. He seems eager to get to the matter for he has good news to tell. We are always glad to tell good news and just as glad to hear good news. This good news from Paul had more to do with the gospel than it had to do with himself. And so he says, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." Paul does not go into detail about what has happened to him. He considers that of a small importance as compared with what had happened to the gospel. He might have recited a long story about his experiences from that day when he was seized in Jerusalem up to the present time. He might have written about his experiences at court both at Caesarea and in Rome, but he does not discuss these matters. He might have dwelt on his prison life telling of the discomforts of being chained to a soldier day and night,

week after week, month after month, year after year, but he does not speak of these things. He might have written about the poor quality of the prison fare or lack of food, but he will only a little later tell the Philippians that he has learned that in whatsoever state he is in, therewith to be content. Paul writes as a joyful Christian; he has nothing but good news to tell, and throughout the epistle he seeks to engender joy in the hearts of the Philippians. Oh, he does indeed speak of his bonds but nothing about his defense. The defense is always of the gospel. So he hastens to tell the Philippians that the gospel has not suffered. He is bound but the gospel is free. He cannot go about preaching, but men can and do come to him and the gospel has not been silenced. What had happened to him had advanced the gospel of Christ.

Evil Overruled For Good

God had overruled everything for the gospel's sake. Paul could say to his enemies what Joseph said to his brothers, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." Paul saw God's hand making the wrath of man to praise Him. Paul's enemies had caused his mouth to be stopped in Judea, but God had overruled so that they had unwittingly become the occasion of his mouth being opened in the world's metropolis. We have so many examples of God overruling the sins of men to His own praise. The imprisonment of the ark of Israel was the fall of Dagon. Paul's thorn in the flesh was the occasion for God's grace in his soul. Paul's weakness became the occasion for God's strength. Man's extremity is God's opportunity.

Luke's Story of Paul's Imprisonment

Luke concludes his story of missions in the book of Acts with a brief account of Paul's two years as a prisoner in Rome. Luke says, "when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him." Three days after Paul's arrival in Rome he called the chief Jews of the city together to tell them his story, the story of his arrest in Jerusalem, of his two years' imprisonment at Caesarea, and his reason for appealing to Caesar. And he tells these chief Jews that he has not come to bring any charge against his nation, that he had not done anything against the people or against the customs of the fathers, and that for the hope of Israel he is bound. This raises a question concerning the truth of that statement since Paul's whole life as a Christian had been spent in fighting Judaism and in a denial of the law way of salvation. But the answer is simple. Paul knew that the Mosaic system was but typical and that all the types had found fulfilment in Christ and Christianity. Paul knew that the real Jew was a believer in Jesus Christ. What the fathers did in their day was according to the divine order of things. But those things were predictive of a new order under a new and a better covenant. Paul was no more against the Old Testament than are we when we refuse to preach and practice the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant. No man is fighting Moses and the law by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was bound for the hope of Israel. And the only hope of Israel, or anybody else now or at any other time, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now these Jews tell Paul that they had had no criticism concerning him from any source, but that they had heard of Christians as a sect that

was everywhere spoken against. With a desire to hear his story they set a day when they would come in larger numbers to hear what he has to say. And when that day came they came, and Paul took the whole day expounding the scriptures, testifying the kingdom of God and persuading them concerning Jesus. That must have been a Red Letter Day, one of the great days in the life of Paul. Paul was no cold logician. He was a loving evangelist pleading with his own flesh and blood to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. And I think he must have pleaded with them that day in tears for he often prayed and preached in tears. Luke announces the results by saying that some believed and some disbelieved.

Paul Causes a Division

And when the Jews could not agree among themselves, they departed, after Paul had quoted Isaiah in explanation of Israel's unbelief. He then tells them that the gospel is sent unto the Gentiles and they will hear. Some of these Jews were persuaded by Paul's arguments from the scriptures and were converted to faith in Jesus Christ. Others must have been stunned and provoked and made more bitter against the gospel of Jesus Christ. So Paul like His Lord has caused another division. Christ did not come to unite the world but according to His own words to divide it. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." Read Matthew ten verse, thirty-five and the following verses. Christ did not inaugurate a program to unite the religions of the world. He did not come with an inclusive gospel that would bring together people of all religious opinions. Luke's account raises another question. It said nothing about any of the Christians visiting Paul. There was a large church in Rome and they had received a letter from Paul some four years prior to this time. Moreover, they knew that Paul was in Rome for many of them had gone to meet him some going as far as The Three Taverns and some going as far as the Apii Forum, whom when he saw, he thanked God and took courage. It goes without saying, and Luke does not think it necessary for him to speak of the visit of the Christians to Paul while in prison. All the saints join him in the closing salutation and some of them belong to Caesar's household. Luke ends his mission story by saying that for two whole years Paul dwelt in his own hired house, receiving all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things that concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

II.

Paul's Bonds Promotes the Gospel (13-18)

Now back to our epistle. In verses thirteen and eighteen we are told the ways in which Paul's imprisonment had advanced the gospel. He says, "So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places." The Revised Version is preferable, "throughout the whole Praetorian Guard, and to all the rest." The Praetorian Guard was the emperor's bodyguard. This Guard consisted of nine cohorts of a thousand men each. These soldiers received double pay and enjoyed special privileges and each one of them had the

rank of a centurion in the regular Roman legions. They became a powerful force in the life of Rome and some of the emperors had to court their favor. Now one of these soldiers had charge of Paul day and night. And every time there was a change of Guard Paul would have a new audience, a new listener. These soldiers would talk, in their barracks about the strange prisoner who would talk about nobody but the Christ. And so it got to be published that Paul was in prison because of Christ. That furthered the gospel. Many of these soldiers must have been saved for they are included in Caesar's household along with all the men of rank in the government. It became known everywhere that Paul's bonds were because of Christ. Nobody could think of Paul without thinking of Christ. Paul was not just another prisoner come to Rome hoping to hear a favourable verdict from Caesar. Nero had never dealt with a prisoner like Paul. Here was a man who made no personal defence. All he talked about was Christ and the kingdom of God. It was not Paul who was on trial after all. It was the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed is the Christian against whom no charge can be made save his loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Timid Brethren to the Front

Another way Paul's bonds furthered the gospel was that many of the hitherto timid brethren waxed bold by his bonds and began preaching Christ. Paul's bonds unloosed many tongues. The binding of one preacher released many preachers with the gospel of Christ. The clipping of Paul's wings gave wings to the gospel. "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." Oh! how wonderful that God makes the wrath of man to praise Him. Paul's boldness to speak in bonds moved others to speak. Paul's boldness in bonds gave others courage. Soldiers almost intuitively follow a brave captain.

Self-Seeking Preachers

Verse fifteen speaks of mixed motives among the preachers. Some preached Christ out of envy and strife and some of good will. Some preached Christ with envy towards Paul. They were envious of Paul's prominence. Paul was getting too much publicity. If they had daily newspapers Paul was making the headlines day after day and these self-seeking preachers could not stand that. And so they said, We'll preach Christ with a vim and we'll let the world know that Paul is not the only pebble on the beach. We'll push him off the front page of the dailies. And they expected this to excite envy on the part of Paul. And they knew by experience that envy was very painful and therefore they would add the pain of envy to Paul's bonds. But this crowd did not know Paul. They did not know of his purity of motives. They did not understand that nothing mattered to Paul but the glory of Christ. What they were doing in preaching Christ did not make Paul resentful but happy. Paul was wrapped up in the gospel and these selfish brethren were wrapped up in themselves. Paul's idea of success was to so live that Christ would be honoured. He wanted to be nothing so that Christ could be everything. He was willing to sink that the gospel might swim. He would decrease that Christ might increase. Who were these men thus preaching Christ with such a bad motive? Dr. Robertson (I respect his authority as much as anybody's,) and others, think that they were Judaizers. But I cannot go along with that. The

Judaizers did not preach Christ as the whole Saviour. They preached Christ plus. They wanted to add to Paul's gospel. And to add to Christ is to take from Christ. Dr. Robertson says in his word studies that some Christ is better than no Christ. But he misses the point. Some Christ is no Christ. Christ will be all in all or nothing at all. The gospel is Christ only. These brethren preached Christ, the true gospel, but with a bad motive. They preached a pure gospel with an impure motive. Paul was not endorsing their motive. He criticizes it severely. But he does endorse the subject of their preaching. They were preaching Christ the true gospel. Their motive was bad. He criticized it. They were hypocritical as to their motives pretending to love when they did not. But he rejoices that Christ is preached. Paul never rejoiced in the preaching of the Judaizers.

The Motive of Love

Others preached Christ out of love and good will; love to God and good will to Paul. They preached Christ with a good motive. They were inspired by Paul's defence. They saw that Paul was set for the defence of the gospel. They identified Paul's bonds with the gospel of Christ. Paul's boldness and unselfishness bring them to the front not for publicity's sake but out of love. A soul aflame for Christ will have power to kindle a flame in other souls. There is a story of a Scottish martyr named Patrick Hamilton whose constancy at the stake touched many hearts and moved men to boldness. And one day a man said to Cardinal Beaton, "If you burn any more, you should burn them in cellars for the smoke of Mr. Patrick Hamilton has infected as many as it blew upon." The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. And the devil never acted more of a fool than when he tried to destroy Christianity with the sword and the stake. So Paul rejoices that Christ is preached. He would rather have men preach Christ in love but he has no personal resentment towards those who preach Christ to hurt him. Whether Christ is preached in pretence, or in love, Paul is glad.

III.

Paul's Calmness in the Face of Death (19-26)

Now in verses nineteen to twenty-six Paul faces the two alternatives of life and death and gives us his state of mind concerning these two things. Paul's consuming ambition to magnify Christ made him bold and calm in the face of danger and death. His trial is about over and the verdict will soon be forthcoming. What will it be? What does Paul want it to be? If Paul could enter the heart of Nero and render the verdict himself what would it be? Well, he frankly says that he does not know. "What I shall choose I wot not." Paul is more interested in salvation in another sense than release from prison. He says I know that all this shall turn to my salvation through your prayers, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul here speaks of a future salvation by which he neither means deliverance from hell nor deliverance from prison, but deliverance from the danger of compromising the gospel of Jesus Christ, in the final hours of his trial. He wants to magnify Christ whether by life or by death. He wants to be bold and unshamed to the very last breath that he draws. In times of martyrdom many professors weaken and compromise their faith to save their necks. But Paul wanted to be delivered from such weakness and he believed he would be. Paul

did not believe that he would of himself stand firm in the face of death. He believed his deliverance would come through the prayers of the Philippians and through the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul was not depending on himself but on the Holy Spirit to enable him to give a bold testimony to the very end. I think Paul must have been thinking about the words of Christ to His disciples before He went away when He told them that the Holy Spirit would tell them what to say when they were brought before earthly judges. And Paul is depending upon the Holy Spirit. He believes the Holy Spirit will enable him to be bold and give him the words to say at his trial. He will not fail Christ because the Holy Spirit will not fail him. And notice he does not say as if boasting, I will magnify Christ. But he says, He shall be magnified in my body, both in life and in death.

Paul's Dilemma

Now while waiting for the verdict Paul finds himself in a dilemma. As he faced the two alternatives of life and death he was in a strait betwixt the two. He did not know what to choose because he did not know God's secret will. He had a personal preference which was to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better. But he will not make this desire his choice. The choice is not his to make but God's. Paul does not desire to depart and to be with Christ because he was tired of living, but because of the superlative glory of Jesus Christ, and of presence with Him. Many people want to leave this life because they are tired of living, and my friends if our lives are not in Christ sooner or later every one of us will become tired of living. But that was not why Paul wanted to depart. He was not choosing between something bad and something good. He was choosing between the good and something better. To live would be good because it would mean to serve Christ and have fruit of his labour. But to die would be better because it would mean Christ in a better sense. But he says, I don't know what to choose and I'm not making any choice. Paul says if the verdict is life it means living for Christ. If it is death it means living with Christ in glory. If it is life it means fruit of labour. Paul will not choose but he believes God's will means a favourable verdict and his release from prison. Paul is confident that he will abide and continue with the Philippians for the furtherance and joy of their faith and having this confidence he says, "I know that I shall abide and continue with you." This is a little technical but I think it is worth noticing. This was not absolute knowledge. This was not knowledge based upon any direct revelation from God. The way the trial was proceeding there was evidence of a favourable verdict and Paul thinking about the needs of the Philippians was confident that he would be released for further ministry among them. And having this confidence, he said, I know that I shall abide and continue with you. It is somewhat like the knowledge he had when he addressed the Ephesian elders at Miletus. In addressing them he said, "I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more." Now this knowledge was based upon the testimony of the Holy Spirit that bonds and imprisonment awaited Paul in Jerusalem, but no direct revelation from God that it would mean death. And so Paul basing his knowledge upon this testimony of the Holy Ghost about bonds and imprisonments said to the Ephesians, I know that ye shall see my face no

more. Now there is rather good evidence that some of them at least saw him again because after his release from prison he visited those parts and perhaps Philippi and other places. So he was not talking about an absolute knowledge but a knowledge based upon his confidence that because he was needed there would be a favourable verdict, and he would abide and continue with the Philippians. And while for personal reasons he would like to depart and be with Christ, he will be glad to abide and minister to them. Their needs are more important than his personal pleasure. What is needful for them is more important than what is better for him. It was more important for him to serve them than to enjoy heaven a bit sooner. That was Paul's emotion when he faced the two alternatives of life and death. I don't make a choice. I do have a personal preference. I am conscious of a desire to depart and be with Christ. But for the sake of the Philippians and others, I will be glad to abide and continue with you.

Bulganin in India; Boris in Canada!

WORLD Communism has secured the attention of people in recent weeks because of the visit of Premier Bulganin and Party Secretary Khrushchev to India and Burma. If anyone needed further evidence of the divisive nature and real intent of these Communist masters, it has surely been furnished by their brazen utterances. While this carnival has been touring India, Canada has been treated to a similar visit which has a religious flavour. Visiting our fair land have been Archbishop Boris who describes himself as "the exarch for North and South America of the Moscow patriarchate", Archpriest Konstantin Ruzhitsky, rector of the Moscow church seminary, and another individual whom *The Toronto Star* aptly depicts as "a sombre, slightly mysterious layman, Anatole Gorbachev, 39, described as 'inspector of the Seminary'." (The same paper tells of an incident that casts an interesting light on this "seminary inspector" — "On the way back to the hotel, one of the escorting Montreal policemen nudged a reporter, indicated Gorbachev and asked — 'What kind of a cop is that guy?' 'He's a seminary inspector,' replied the newsman. 'Monsieur, I'm a policeman and know one when I see one.'")

How are we to regard this visit of the Soviet clergymen? We refuse to take the position that they should be barred from our country for such a restriction would involve a serious blow to liberty and would only serve as good propaganda material for the Soviet masters. Of more importance, however, is the fact that any such prohibitive measures could in time be enacted logically against innocent parties or even against their present authors.

The plain fact is that the behaviour and utterances of these Russians have furnished abundant proof of Soviet oppression to any thoughtful person. If they had come to Canada, without the benefit of United Church sponsorship and apparent condonement, the people of this country would have had the issue clearly before them. Their own words and acts have betrayed them.

A disturbing factor, however, has obscured the picture. Many persons have been misled by this visit for they have not bothered to read all the newspaper accounts. Their favourable judgment of the current religious situa-

A Trophy of Grace

My brethren and sisters, as we study Paul we are apt to exclaim, "What a man!" But we must not preach Paul. We must preach Christ. And I have had a feeling at times that there was danger that I was preaching Paul rather than Christ. And Paul would not want us to do that. When we preach Paul we are holding him up only as a trophy of divine grace. We are showing you a man who was completely mastered by the Lord Jesus Christ and who had an all-absorbing ambition to magnify Christ in life and in death. So let us exclaim, "What a Saviour! What amazing grace that would cause the thrice holy God to do so much for hell deserving and hell bound sinners. Hallelujah! what a Saviour!"

"Praise the Saviour, ye who know Him;
Who can tell how much we owe Him?
Gladly let us render to Him
All we are and have."

tion in Russia is based upon their feeling that if a Canadian denomination sponsored the visit, then all must be well in Russia. This reaction we have heard from several quarters: The United Church of Canada will stand condemned at the bar of history for having thus lent an air of respectability and plausibility to the Russian lie that there is freedom of worship in the Soviet. Need we add that this fraternizing with those who have obscured and buried the gospel will require an answer not at the bar of history but before the Judgment Seat of the universe?

Is There Freedom of Religion in Russia?

At his very first press conference in Canada, Archbishop Boris sounded the old cry that there is freedom of religion in the Soviet. He affirmed that any Russian can believe in God and practice those beliefs and added that "many persons so believe and practice". At other press conferences he has reaffirmed his contention that there is freedom under the red regime.

Is this true? There is abundant evidence to show that there is no freedom of religion in the Soviet Union. On the contrary, the government itself aids and fosters a vigorous anti-religious campaign and has ruthlessly suppressed the activities of the churches.

Let us examine *the facts* and we dare anyone to deny them.

First of all, the very basis of the Soviet policy is found in the first decree. "On Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church." This edict was issued on January 23, 1918, three months after the red regime took power. In 1932 the Russian government issued a correspondence course which dealt with the interpretation of this decree. Here are a few choice sentences from this course — "It is necessary to emphasize that the Soviet Decree concerning the Separation of Church from State and the School from the Church, was from the beginning directed against religion . . . this decree cannot be considered otherwise than as a measure deliberately directed against religion. . . Soviet power fights against religion . . . In a few words, the analysis of the Decree may be summarized as follows: If the capitalistic separation of Church and State leads to the free and highest development of religion, the Soviet

separation of Church and State leads to the free and final death of religion."

We could multiply quotations to show that the Soviet leaders have always maintained and implemented a hostile attitude toward the churches. Anyone interested in a well-documented book on this subject should read *Church and State Behind the Iron Curtain*. The book is financed by the Free Europe Committee and has been prepared by lawyers who have escaped from the Soviet satellite countries.

Not only is the Communist philosophy hostile to religion but the deeds of the Communists indicate that the freedom of which Archbishop Boris speaks is unknown. In 1922-1923 severe repressive measures were enacted against churches and clergymen. Again in 1929-30 severe measures including the execution of thousands of clergymen were enacted which deprived the churches of the right of property, the right to teach religion and even the right to organization. When Archbishop Boris maintains that the churches are unmolested he either is unaware of the facts or else he lies!

As further proof that there is no freedom of religion in the Soviet we cite an article in *The Globe and Mail* of December 13. The article follows:

EDITOR CLAIMS REDS DENY JEWS CHURCH FREEDOM

If there is religious freedom in Russia, it does not extend to the 2,000,000 Jews who have been denied synagogues, a language press, Jewish schools and community centres.

This is the claim of Chaim Shurer, editor-in-chief of *Davar*, Israel's largest daily newspaper, who spent several weeks in

the Soviet Union recently. He addressed the 12th annual Histadrut Conference at the King Edward Hotel.

In Moscow, with its 500,000 Jews, there is only one synagogue, "the only place where Jews meet as Jews, in the Soviet Union," the newspaper editor said. He told of the extreme difficulty he experienced in making contact with Russian Jewry.

"I could not visit any Jewish community centre in Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Leningrad and Kishinev and simply ask how matters were," Shurer explained. "There are no congregations, no community centres. I could not see a Jewish newspaper and talk to its editors, simply because there are no Jewish newspapers published in Russia."

The Israeli journalist said he would have liked a glimpse of Jewish life as reflected in the Jewish theatre, but he found there was no such thing. And it was the same with Jewish schools and libraries.

"Even Jewish homes were out of bounds for me," he said. "I did not enjoy any Jewish hospitality in the 40 days I spent in Russia."

If one needs further evidence of where Archbishop Boris really stands it is found in his statements which he made in a press conference on December 12. *The Toronto Star* records the question and answer as follows: "Asked if he votes for the Communist ticket in elections, Boris replied that he voted for the candidate, not the party and I haven't backed a loser yet." Under the Communist system of elections one could hardly back a loser when all candidates are Reds! Freedom indeed!

The United Church is very free in uttering censures against the ills of our Canadian society and is more interested apparently in social questions than in spiritual matters. Let us hear some clear pronouncement now about the deceitful declarations which are being passed as truth by that Church's Russian guests.

A Devotional Study in Revelation

by Dr. R. Dubarry

CHAPTER 24

THE FINAL BEATITUDE OF THE REDEEMED

Revelation 21:1-22:5

ACCORDING to a rhythm which is now familiar to us the vision to be interpreted in the book of Revelation is presented under a twofold aspect: we have, first, an introductory revelation; secondly, a descriptive revelation.

I. INTRODUCTORY REVELATION (21:1-8)

This first revelation successively depicts: A. The scene of the final beatitude; B. Its actors.

A. The Scene of the Final Beatitude (21:1)

From the accursed depths of the lake of fire, the seer's eyes are suddenly carried toward a marvellous spectacle. That impressive contrast teaches a great and obvious lesson.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea."

To the inhabitants of the first rebelled and condemned earth, the first heaven was distant, obscure and dreadful. But here, the first heaven and the first earth have "passed away". A suggestive parallel passage found in Hebrews 12 — completed by 2 Peter 3 — which tell us that "fire", sent by the divine Judge Himself, is the agent of destruction: "for our God is a consuming fire". A great upheaval, both physical and moral, must completely stamp out in heaven and on earth all that can recall the revolt of mankind.

The new heaven and the new earth will henceforth serve as a perfect background to the scenes — equally new — for which they will have been conceived and created. Since evil cannot have access to those blessed places, the divine presence will fill them with holiness, happiness and glory.

To avoid an inconsistency or a physical impossibility, we must see in the disappearing of the sea a symbolic figure for the earthly end of the "peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues" which, in chapter seventeen verse fifteen, represented the "waters where the whore sitteth". Not only the former scene but many of its actors are now and for ever beyond the reach of the apostle's eyes.

B. The Participants in the Final Beatitude (21:2-8).

A new group, the elect people, is not introduced on the scene.

(a) *The elect people are first of all presented under two figures: the "holy city" and the "adorned bride".* And that, in striking contrast with the twofold description of the false people of God, Babylon and the prostitute.

"The holy city, new Jerusalem" depicts the elect people in its origins, "coming down from God out of heaven", and perhaps also in its diversity — a city reminding one of a multifarious population.

"The bride adorned for her husband" is a picture of the elect people in their destiny, and naturally also in their unity.

(b) *The two blessings of the elect people are then described.* They are: the divine fellowship, and the divine comfort. The loud voice coming from heaven emphasizes the importance of that revelation.

The divine fellowship (21:3) is particularly manifested in connection with the figure of the holy city: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people." The intimacy of that communion, infinitely closer than that of the first Jerusalem, is emphasized by the words: "And God himself shall be with them, and be their God."

The divine solace (21:4) is particularly manifested in connection with the figure of the Bride: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

AMONG THE CHURCHES

GOOD NEWS FROM FORT WILLIAM

We were happy at our Fall Convention to enjoy the fellowship and ministry of Brother Norman Day. Many of our constituency met him for the first time. We rejoice with the Fort William Church in the blessings they have already received under the ministry of Mr. Day, who is also a member of the Board of the Association. He speaks for himself:

"Week by week, the local Press notices of the Fundamental Baptist Church are headed by the words, 'Declaring the Whole Counsel of God.' This sums up our aim and our endeavour at all times, and it is our constant prayer that by the grace of God, this may be the outstanding characteristic of our work. During the year now drawing to a close, some 15 souls have been added to the Church, most of whom have been converted in the regular services, and received into the fellowship by baptism. Concerning these, it is our earnest prayer that (their) faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God, and we are glad that we have nothing, and need nothing more than 'the whole counsel of God' in His Word, to set before these young Christians for their development and growth in grace.

(c) *The privileges of the elect people are finally described in their contrast with the malediction of the rebels.*

That contrasted state is more impressively brought out by the intervention of the One sitting upon the throne: by His declaration: "Behold, I make all things new"; by His command: "Write, for these words are true and faithful"; by His proclamation: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." The "It is done" which introduces the sanctions which are to follow is an echo of the "It is done" which announced the punishment of Babylon the great (16:17).

The first aspect of the final contrast between elect and rebels presents "he that overcometh", that is, any one who will have pinned his faith on the sacrificed Lamb of God. He will "inherit all things", which means that, incorporated in the "holy city" and the "adorned bride", he will actually possess all things. But his privilege will be greater still: not only will he acquire the heavenly goods, but a new relationship will be established between him and the One who made the promise: "I will be his God and he shall be my son."

The second aspect of the contrast is brought out in the description of the condemned (21:8). All those who have rebelled against the laws and the love of Him whose eyes are too pure to see evil are found guilty by the just Judge, "the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars." That common guiltiness is confirmed by a common doom: "They shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

Truly such unfailing truths, and the anticipation of the heavenly bliss are well made to entertain our dearest wishes. But those anticipations will have more reality still as we study the detailed description which follows.

We shall simply add here, with whatever power of persuasion we have: "BELIEVEST THOU THIS?"

WITH THE SECRETARY

"The range of current activities is wide, from the fully attended Sunday morning service, and four department Sunday School, to the various groups meeting most nights of the week. The Sunday evening service has only about half the attendance of the morning gathering, and presents a real challenge. There has been a slow but perceptible growth in this service in recent weeks. The adult Bible class meets in the Church Sunday mornings, and is a joy to the Pastor's heart, as with eagerness a constantly increasing enrolment revels in the Word of God. Scripture Press materials are used throughout the Bible School, and are a tremendous help.

"Prayer comes in for continually greater emphasis, and in addition to the Sunday evening pre-Service prayer meeting, and the regular week-night service on Wednesdays, the Pastor was led to call the men of the Church together on a recent Saturday evening for a time of prayer fellowship. This proved to be a fruitful season, when everyone present took part in prayer, including some who do not ordinarily participate in the regular prayer meetings. A whole week of prayer is being planned for early in the New Year, when most regular activities will be suspended that we may give ourselves

to supplication and intercession without distraction. — "The church is confronted with a definite challenge in the matter of the adolescent group coming up through the Bible School, and is seriously considering introducing a uniformed youth activity to help meet this need. 'The Campaigners' a British Christian Youth Movement, Christ-centred and church integrated, in which every officer and leader must have a personal experience of Christ in conversion, is being studied.

"A parallel problem is that of accommodation. If the Sunday School and youth potential is to be realized we MUST have more room. The staggering costs of re-building, or even of extension, are overwhelming in the contemplation of our membership of just over 100, but God-given vision and dedicated faith knows that 'there is nothing too hard for the Lord.'

"Any account of the work at Fort William would be incomplete without some word concerning the half-hour radio programme, 'Mid-Week Meditations,' which reaches its 670th consecutive weekly broadcast on December 20th. Commenced in faith, and carried on over the years with characteristic energy by Rev. Walter C. Tompkins, B.Th., now of Calgary, the continuance of the programme after his ministry concluded here last year was a matter of prayerful concern by the Church. The loyal band of singers was willing to carry on, and the support of those within the church who had been giving up to half the cost of the programme would still be contributed, but would the listening constituency remain constant, and would the balance of the expense be met from this and other sources, particularly, as it turned out, in face of a 30 per cent increase in charges called for by the 1955 contract? Suffice it to say that the more than \$1,300 for the year's radio ministry has been forthcoming from month to month, with frequently little or nothing in hand, and, during the summer, even a persistent deficit. So it is always a "work of faith, and labour of love" which finds its encouragement in the numerous letters which come to hand telling of blessing received, and its reward in the assurance that it is an offering acceptable to the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose Name it is presented. In addition to the regular airing of 'Mid-Week Meditations', on Tuesdays at 8 p.m., the Pastor speaks three or four times a month on Friday mornings, on the 7 a.m. Morning Devotions, when the fifteen minutes is on free time, courtesy of Radio Station CKPR.

"Only passing reference can be made here to the Women's Meeting, the Young People's Fellowship, the 'Happy Hour', the newly formed Men's meeting, and the Arthur Street Sunday School just outside the city limits, but the mention of them in addition to the foregoing will help to emphasize the vigour and prospects of the Fundamental Baptist Church.

"We have one request to make of our friends wherever these lines are read: it is: 'Brethren, Pray for us!'"

VICTORIA AVENUE CHURCH, HAMILTON

Rev. P. B. Loney, D.D., formerly of Atlanta, Georgia, commenced his ministry in Victoria Avenue Church on Sunday, December 11th. Dr. Loney will be remembered by many for his gracious pastoral ministry in Runnymede Road, Toronto, and in Bethel Church, St. Catharines. Dr. Loney succeeds Rev. John Byers who resigned in the spring because of ill-health. We wish him God's blessing on his new field.

—O.L.C.

REV. JOHN BYERS

Many GOSPEL WITNESS readers will be grieved to learn of the serious illness of Rev. John Byers, former Pastor of Victoria Avenue Church, Hamilton; Mr. Byers is now in Hamilton General Hospital.

—O.L.C.

SUNDAY IN JARVIS STREET

The preacher at the Sunday morning service was the secretary of The Conservative Regular Baptist Association of Canada, Rev. B. R. Oatley-Willis. His subject was "No Cleansing From Sin by Human Means." At the conclusion of the service one lady publicly responded to indicate her desire to unite with the local church.

In the evening the pastor, Dr. Slade, spoke on the subject "Kept From Falling". Again the presence of the Lord was felt. Elsewhere in this issue there is reference to the special offering that was realized at these services.

For Younger Readers

WHAT JOE GAVE

A True Christmas Story

By Helena H. Thomas

HE ALWAYS looked so sunny when he came for the week's washing and returned it that Mrs. Blank soon ceased to pity him because he must work, while other boys played.

His coming always brought such a fresh breeze that Mrs. Blank often encouraged him to talk. Consequently, she was not long in learning that his mother was a widow with four children, and that Joe, the oldest and only son, was impatient to be a "grown up" so that he could support the family and "make ma quit washing".

His merry whistle was the herald of his approach the day after Christmas, last year; and hearing it, Mrs. Blank brought forward the gift she had in readiness for "the little hero".

"Merry Christmas! if it isn't too late," said Joe in a jubilant tone, doffing his cap. "Merry Christmas to you and here is a little gift for the boy who always brings good cheer."

"For me!" were the only words Joe's lips seemed capable of uttering when he took the book from the hands of the thoughtful doner; but his sparkling eyes and happy face were sufficient thanks. "Can't make it seem like it's mine for keeps."

"That makes me two presents!" he finally said. "See, ma knit these mittens for my Christmas present. He looked at the coarse mittens with admiring eyes, and then went on, as if he could no longer keep back a secret. "I didn't think about any presents for myself, but I gave ma a very nice one. Anyhow, she's as pleased with it as I am with my mittens and book. But it was the finest you ever heard of. I don't believe you'd guess what 'twas in a week."

"Why, Joe, what was it? You have aroused my curiosity," was the laughing rejoinder.

"Well, it was this way," said the excited boy, "I wanted to buy ma something out o' the stores, like I heard t'other boys talking about getting for their mas, but I hadn't any money, 'cause, you see, ma makes me go to school, so's I'll know enough to do business when I'm a man, an' so it takes all my spare time to fetch an' carry clothes an' split wood an' wait on ma. For I turn the wringer and help lots, 'fore an' after school."

He said it as if so proud of the ability to help his hard-working mother that his interested listener brought the red to his happy face by exclaiming: "You do not need to tell me that, my boy!"

"Well," Joe went on, "there's a grove, a piece back of our house an' one day after ma said the wood melted like dew, I was over there and noticed a lot of dead limbs lying around an' then I hustled and found the owner of the grove an' he said I was welcome — just his word, lady, — to cut it up for wood. Now you couldn't ever guessed, could you?"

"Well, it was the very best sort of a present, anyhow, 'cause ma has to use a lot of wood an' it was 'most gone. So I told my teacher — she ain't one of the stuckup kind — all about it, an' she said she would hear my afternoon lessons separate for a spell, so's I could get off early, an' she did.

"So I run off for the grove an' pitched in best I know, till 'twas time for school to let out an' then I put for home. I had a big pile of wood I'd sawed myself. I thought at first I'd only get what I could draw home on my sled by spells, but I kept at it till I had so much I didn't know what to do till I—I—You won't laugh if I tell you I prayed about it, will you?"

"No, indeed Joe!" was the emphatic answer. "I am glad to know that you are a praying boy. I think that solves the secret of your bravery."

"Well, I prayed that time, anyway, an' say, wasn't it just like God to put it in the heart of a rich woman to hire me to carry a lot of wood into her cellar, an' pile it up so's I could earn some money to hire a dray. So after I had the wood all cut up, teacher let me off long enough to earn the money to have it hauled. The drayman wanted more'n I had, but when I told him how I'd cut it for ma's present, he had an awful time blowing his nose an' acting like he'd had something in his eyes, an' then he said he'd be glad to haul it for half price.

"Well, when the man drove up with the first load of wood an' began to throw it off, ma rushed to the door and said: 'There must be some mistake. I haven't ordered any wood.' An' then the man laughed real hearty, an' said: 'But your son ordered it, ma'am.' An' then I told ma it was her Christmas present, an' you ought to see her! She hugged me and cried an' an' — Well, I can't tell the rest—but—but ma talked real good to me."

"Anyhow," Joe went on rising to his feet, and looking as if inches had been added to his height, "We've got wood enough to last us quite a spell, an' I tell you it looks good when I think ma didn't work to earn it."

—Gospel Banner

Bible School Lesson Outline

Vol. 19 Fourth Quarter Lesson 13 December 25, 1955

OLIVE L. CLARK, Ph.D. (Tor.)

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

Lesson Text: Luke 2:1-20.

Golden Text: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."—Luke 2:11.

I. The Census: verses 1-7.

The Roman world was chosen by the Divine Director to provide the setting for the most stupendous drama of human history. It was by no mere chance that Caesar Augustus should be ruling over a vast and united Empire. One in

government and language, one in its network of highways and lines of communication, it became an ideal vehicle for the spread of the Gospel. As Caesar set his seal to the proclamation that a census should be taken which would include the population and property of every city, village and district, he little thought that he was but a pawn in the hand of the Supreme Ruler of the universe.

This census was decreed for the destined year; God's time to manifest His Son had now arrived (Mark 1:15; Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 1:2, 3; 1 Pet. 1:20). From papyri written about this time we learn that such a census was taken periodically to serve as a basis for future taxation.

The regulation that each Roman citizen should enroll in the city of his own tribe must have seemed unnecessary and inconvenient to many, but this was God's way of bringing His servants to the chosen town of Bethlehem, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled (Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:4-6; John 7:42).

Here, too, was circumstantial evidence for future generations that Christ was indeed the lineal descendant of David, as had been prophesied (2 Sam. 7:12, 13; Isa. 9:7; 16:5; Luke 1:32, 69). If, as is probable, the genealogy of Joseph is given in Matt. 1:1-17, and that of Mary in Luke 4:23-38, we see why they were both required to register in Bethlehem, the city of David (Matt. 1:1, 16, 20; Luke 1:26, 27).

Notwithstanding the fact that Christ was the eternal Son of God, manifest in human form (John 1:14, 18; Col. 1:19; 2:9), and that He was of the royal seed of David, according to the flesh; He came to us in deep humility. Travellers to Palestine tell us that even to-day there are annexes to the inns and other dwelling-places, large rooms on the ground floor with doors opening out into the street similar in plan to the garages which adjoin many modern homes. The animals could enter the open doors. In some such humble place the Christ-child was born. Born for our redemption (1 Tim. 1:15), He lived a sacrificial life that He might die a sacrificial death (Heb. 2:7-11, 14-18). The child born for us at Bethlehem was the Son given for us at Calvary (Isa. 9:6). He became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; He knew the pangs of human weakness, suffering and sorrow (Matt. 8:20; John 4:6; 11:35; 2 Cor. 8:9; Heb. 4:15).

II. The Chorus verses 8-14.

Only a heavenly choir could teach men the new song of salvation from sin which the advent of our Saviour made possible (Exod. 15:2; Psa. 118:14; Isa. 12:2, 3; Rev. 5:9; 14:3, 4). No mortal could by his own reasoning have discovered the way to God (Jon. 2:9; John 14:6), but angels, whose interest in man's salvation is great, heralded the glad tidings (Job 38:6, 7; Luke 15:7, 10; 1 Pet. 1:12; Rev. 5:11, 12).

Dazzled by the radiant glory, the shepherds might have thought that it was all a dream which would fade with the morning light, had they not been given a token that the tidings were true. They would find a babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Surely this was a strange sign of Deity! How utterly unlike the spectacular signs which worldlings demanded (Matt. 27; 40-44; Mark 8:11, 12; Luke 11:16; 23:8; John 2:13; 6:30)! And yet, the Incarnation was a stupendous miracle — the infinite God veiling Himself in the flesh of a little child.

III. The Child: verses 15-20.

The humble shepherds have pointed out to us the way in which the word of God is to be received. They listened in Godly fear to the evangel proclaimed by the angels (Luke 8:15; Acts 8:6), recognizing that the message was from the Lord (Acts 10:33; 1 Thess. 2:13). Not satisfied with a mere intellectual knowledge of the good news, they made a personal investigation for themselves (John 4:39-42; Acts 17:11). When once they were convinced that the message was true, they declared it to others (Acts 4:20, 29; 2 Cor. 4:13). They also glorified and praised God for the wonderful revelation which He had given them of a holy Saviour who had been born in Bethlehem (Psa. 106:12; Matt. 2:10, 11). So may we all bow our hearts before the Christ of God and reverently adore Him (Psa. 95:2; 100:2; 106:12).

Mary of Bethlehem and Nazareth treasured in her heart the memory of her sacred experiences (verses 19, 51). They were too holy and too deep for utterance, and even for understanding. Rapturous joy and poignant griefs were strangely mingled for the one whom God had chosen to be the mother of our Lord (Luke 1:28-56; 2:34, 35).