

Sunday School.

LESSON XIII.—DEC. 26, 1938.

The Birth of Christ.—Matt. 2: 1-12.

Commentary.—1. The coming of the wise men (vs. 1, 2). 1. When Jesus was born—While the exact date of Christ's birth is uncertain there is no reason why it may not have been on December 26, B. C. 5. But why do we say that Jesus was born "before Christ"? Simply because our calendar is incorrect. For some centuries after Christ's time there was no calendar in general use, but each nation dated from some event in its history. Finally, in the sixth century, a learned monk, Dionysius Exiguus, was appointed to ascertain the time of Christ's birth, and it was ordered that history should be dated from that time. But Dionysius, who first published his calculations in A. D. 526, put the birth of Jesus about four years too late, in Bethlehem—"House of bread." "A name properly applied to a place where the true Bread was manifested for the life of the world."—Clarke. Of Judea—To distinguish it from Bethlehem in Galilee, mentioned to Josh. 19: 15. Herod—Herod the Great. He was an Edomite, and although a proselyte to the Jewish religion, was notorious for his wickedness and cruelty. He reigned 37 years in Judea and Syria, a few months after the birth of Christ. At this time "the sceptre was departing from Judah, a sign that the Messiah was now at hand." Wise men—Or magi. "Originally a class of priests among the Persians and Medes, who formed the king's privy council. They were men of learning and wealth. Augustine and Chrysostom say there were twelve magi, but the common belief is that there were but three. But why were these magi seeking the Christ? "We know that the Persian magi believed in a Messiah or future Saviour, who should in the latter day appear and renew the world in righteousness."—Whedon. From the east—Perhaps from Media, or Persia, or possibly, from Arabia. Jerusalem—They seemed to suppose that when they reached the capital of the Jewish nation they would have no trouble in finding the object of their search.

2. Where is he—This inquiry in Jerusalem brought Jesus into popular notice and called attention to the fact that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. Born King of the Jews—This was a title unknown to the earlier history of Israel and applied to no one except the Messiah. It reappears in the inscription over the cross. Carr. Notice that Jesus was "born" a king. His star—Many interpreters, especially those who seek to eliminate the supernatural, explain the "star," or "sidereal appearance," by conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, which occurred in May, B. C. 7, and again in December with Mars added. It is, however, much more in harmony with all the facts to believe that the star which attracted the attention of the magi was provided for the occasion. To worship him—To do him homage. They were bold to confess the object of their coming.

3. Light from the scriptures (vs. 3-6). 3. Had heard—The magi had created no small stir by their inquiries which immediately attracted the attention of the king. Troubled—Herod, now sunk into the jealous decrepitude of his advanced age, was residing in his new palace on Zion, when, half-madened as he was already by the crimes of his past career, he was thrown into a fresh paroxysm of alarm and anxiety by the visit of the magi, bearing the strange intelligence that they had come to worship a new king—Farrar. Herod feared—All Jerusalem with him—Fearing that he would make this an occasion of renewing his acts of bloodshed. 4. Had gathered—He assembled the Sanhedrin.—Lightfoot. Chief priests—This expression probably comprehends the acting high priest and his deputy, those who had been high priests—for at this time the office was often transferred by the Roman authorities—and "the heads of the twenty-four sacerdotal families, which David had distributed into so many courses."—Scribner. The learned interpreters of the Mosaic law, and the collectors of the traditions of the elders. Many of them were Pharisees. Demanded of them—Because they would be most likely to know. Where the Christ (R. V.)—Or the Messiah, the official title of the promised deliverer. "The wise men had said nothing about the Christ, or the Messiah, but only about the King of the Jews. But Herod saw that this king must be the expected Messiah."

5. By the prophet—Micah 5: 2. Matthew does not quote the exact words found in Micah, but the sense is given. It was an accepted truth that the Messiah must come from Bethlehem. 6. Art is no wise least (R. V.)—Micah says, "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." This made Bethlehem "in no wise least." Although Bethlehem was little, yet it was exalted above all the other cities of Israel. The princes—"The thousands" (Micah 5: 2). The tribe had been subdivided into thousands, and over each subdivision there was a chieftain or prince.—Morison. A governor—To control and rule. Who shall be shepherd (R. V.)—To feed and care for, as

a shepherd his flock. Christ is both shepherd and king. My people Israel—Israel was God's people in a peculiar sense. They were his own peculiar treasure.

III. The intrigue of Herod (vs. 7, 8). 7. Privily called—Herod desired to keep the time of Christ's birth as secret as possible lest the Jews who hated him should take occasion to rebel. Enquired of them diligently—"Learned of them exactly."—R. V. He enquired of them the exact time and received positive information as to the time the star appeared. Assuming that the star appeared when the child was born he would thus have some idea of the age of the child. 8. He sent them—He assumed control; but they followed the directions of the Lord. Search diligently—Herod was honest in making this charge to them; he greatly desired to receive definite word concerning the new King. And worship him also—What hypocrisy! He only wished to find the child in order to murder him (vs. 13, 16); he was crafty and subtle, saying one thing and meaning another.

IV. Guided by the star (vs. 9, 10). 9. The star... went before them—The same star which they had seen in their own country now again appears. The star disappeared for a time and this led them to inquire in Jerusalem for the young King whom they sought. Supernatural helps should not be expected where ordinary means are to be had. stood over the star—The star pointed out the very house—Benson. 10. They rejoiced—The Greek is very emphatic. They rejoiced exceedingly because they saw they were about to find the child and because they had such unmistakable proof of being in divine order. That alone is enough to cause rejoicing.

V. The child Jesus found (vs. 11, 12). 11. fell down—They prostrated themselves before him according to the eastern custom. "In this act the person kneels and puts his hand between his knees, his forehead at the same time touching the ground. It was used to express both civil and religious reverence."—Clarke. Gifts—The people of the east did not approach into the presence of kings without bringing them presents. The custom still prevails in many places, gold, etc.—Gold would always be useful, while frankincense and myrrh were prized for their delicious fragrance. These were the very presents Isaiah mentioned: "All they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense" (Isa. 60:6). "Incense, or frankincense, is a resinous gum, flowing from a tree, gashed for the purpose, growing in Arabia and Lebanon. Myrrh is also a gum obtained from a tree in Arabia."—Whedon. 12. warned of God in a dream—God communicated his purpose to them in a manner that they understood, and the impression or conviction was so clear that they at once obeyed. another way—They could easily go east from Bethlehem and thus leave Jerusalem on the north.

Questions—Where was Jesus born? When? Who was the king of Judea? What was the character of this king? Who came to Jerusalem seeking for Jesus? From whence did they come? Why was Jesus called King of the Jews? How had the wise men been led in their search? Why was Herod troubled? Why was Jerusalem troubled? Whom did Herod gather together? For what purpose? What charge did Herod give the wise men? Why? How did they approach Christ? After leaving Jesus what did the wise men do?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS.

The Cradle of Christ.

I. A place of salvation. "Now when Jesus was born" (v. 1). "Thou shalt call his name Jesus" (Matt. 1:21). A man's name represents his character. Herod's name is a synonym of cruelty. Abraham's for faith, Stephen's for martyrdom, John's for love, Jesus' for salvation. His name has power to save.

II. A place of obscurity. "In Bethlehem" (v. 1). An insignificant village, not mentioned among the many towns at the time of the division of the land. "In a manger" (Luke 2: 7). Not in a palace, not in a house of luxury, but in a cottage surrounded by brightness, but in a limestone cave, did the Christ-child open his infant eyes to earth. Was this to teach how little God cares for external things?

III. A place of cruelty. "In the days of Herod the king" (v. 1). Jesus came a stranger to this world; there was no room for him in the inn (Luke 2: 7). Herod hunted him (v. 7). His own parents "understood not" His youthful aspirations (Luke 2: 49). His own countrymen rejected Him (Luke 4: 28). He had not where to lay his head (Matt. 8: 20; John 7: 53; 8: 1); Jews and Gentiles conspired to crucify Him (Luke 22: 66; 23: 1, 12). All the way from the cradle to the cross He met with cruelty.

IV. A place of royalty. "Born king of the Jews" (v. 2). The gospel of Matthew is the story of Jesus as King. Its key-phrase, "kingdom," is found fifty-six times. Its key-phrase, "kingdom of heaven," is found thirty-two times, and nowhere else in the New Testament. Matthew gives His legal genealogy, His royal pedigree, from David, source of Jewish blessing, and Abraham, source of Jewish blessing (Matt. 1: 1). Jesus was born king, but He waited—He was waiting still for the kingdom (Luke 19: 15; Matt. 26: 29). The prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth" (Matt. 6: 10), has never been literally fulfilled. It will be some day.

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Christ rules His own today as a Shepherd.

V. A place of prophecy. "It is written by the prophets" (v. 5). A study of prophecy gives a miniature life of Jesus (Isa. 7: 14; Micah 5: 2; Isa. 9: 1, 2; Gen. 49: 10; Hosea 11: 1; Zech. 11: 12, 13; Zech. 13: 7; Isa. 53: 12; Psa. 22: 18; Psa. 22: 1, 60, 21; Zech. 12: 10; John 1: 46; Acts 13: 27; 1 Cor. 2: 9). A special blessing is promised to those who read and hear and keep the last great prophecy of His second coming (Rev. 1: 3; 22: 18, 19).

VI. A place of guidance. "The star... came and stood over where the young child was" (v. 9). Heralded by a star, Jesus ushered in the day of grace at the beginning of this dispensation. The star which illuminates our pathway and goes before us to guide us to Jesus is the Holy Spirit, of whom Jesus says, "He shall testify of me" (John 15: 26).

VII. A place of rejoicing (v. 10). The wise men, rejoicing at the cradle of the infant King, carry our thoughts forward to another day when a multitude of redeemed men and angels shall cry with a loud voice (Rev. 5: 12).

VIII. A place of worship (v. 11). They gave themselves, then, their gifts (2 Cor. 8: 4, 5). They saw, they "fell down," thus presenting their "obedience a living sacrifice" (Rom. 12: 1); they "worshipped," pouring out their souls adoration; then "they offered unto Him gifts" (R. V.).

IX. A place of presents. "They presented unto Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." As a Saviour, Jesus is God's great gift to us (John 3: 16); as saved ones we are God's gift to Him (John 17: 6).

Santa Claps on the Train.

On a Christmas eve an emigrant train sped on through the blackness of night.

And cleft the pitchy dark in twain With the gleam of its fierce headlight.

In a crowded car, a noisome place, Sat a mother and her child; The woman's face bore want's wan trace,

But the little one only smiled. And tugged and pulled at her mother's dress,

And her voice had a merry ring. As she lisped, "Now, mamma, come and guess What Santa Claus'll bring."

But sadly the mother shook her head, As she thought of a happier past; "He never can catch us here," she said, "The train is going too fast."

"O, mamma, yes, he'll come, I say, So swift are his little deer, They run all over the world to-day—I'll hang my stockings up here."

She pinned her stockings to the seat, And closed her tired eyes, And soon she saw each longed-for sweet In dreamland's paradise.

On a seat behind the little maid A rough man sat apart, But a soft light o'er his features played, And stole into his heart.

As the cars drew up at a busy town But scarce had from the steps jumped down Ere he was back again.

And a great big bundle of Christmas joys, Bulged out from his pockets wide; He filled the stocking with sweets and toys

He laid by the dreamer's side. At dawn the little one woke with a shout,

"Twas sweet to hear her glee; 'I knowed that Santa would find me out; He caught the train, you see.'"

Though some from smiling may scarce refrain The child was surely right, The good Saint Nicholas caught the train, And came aboard that night.

For the saint is fond of masquerade And may fool the old and wise, And so he came to the little maid In an emigrant's disguise.

And he dresses in many ways because He wishes no one to know him, For he never says, "I am Santa Claus," But his good deeds always show him.

Henry C. Walsh.

The Christmas Rose.

They've brought you from your garden bed, Pale from the snowflakes' kiss; But, ah, your bonnie heart is red.

As summer's heart, I wis! It holds the breath of June, the breeze The golden glow, and hark The drowsy humming of the bees, The carol of a lark!

—Jean Hewlett, in the Christmas Canadian Magazine

SCENE OF WORLD'S GREAT TRAGEDY.

Jerusalem Undergoes Many Changes Since Crucifixion of the Saviour.

Garden of Gethsemane Is Much of Its Original Condition.

Then came Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Tarry ye here, and watch Me.

And He went a little farther, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?

Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

He went away again, the second time, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done."

And He came and found them asleep again; for their eyes were heavy.

And He left them and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

Then cometh He to His disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now and take your rest; behold the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Rise, let us be going; behold, He is at hand that doth betray Me.

And while He spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

Now, he that betrayed Him gave them a sign, saying, Whosoever I shall kiss, that same is He, hold Him fast.

And forthwith He came to Jesus and said, Hail, Master; and kissed Him.

And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took Him.

Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

NINETEEN HUNDRED YEARS AGO. Nineteen hundred years have elapsed since the momentous event thus recorded simply in the 26th chapter of St. Matthew, and in these intervening years millions have wended their way from all parts of the earth to historic Gethsemane to see the place where the world's most famous prisoner, Jesus of Nazareth, was betrayed and arrested.

Time and wars and all sorts of tumults have cleared away a great many of the works of man, which existed at the time when Christ lived in Jerusalem, but the city still stands on the hill where it then stood, and much of the material of the present houses was culled from the ruins of the houses of the time of Christ. The Mount of Olives is still there, sprinkled over with olive trees, and is familiar to modern people of Jerusalem. Gethsemane is still a garden about seventy yards in diameter and an irregular quadrangle in shape. That the scene of Christ's betrayal was at Gethsemane garden, there is but very little doubt, though there is a divergence of opinion as to the exact spot. Some centuries ago it was believed that Judas gave Him the betrayal kiss at the Cavern of the Sweet, across the road from the garden. Just outside the gate leading into Gethsemane, however, there has stood for ages a stone pillar, which has been pointed out as the true spot, and believing pilgrims have kissed it by the millions until it is as smooth as the toe of St. Peter, in St. Peter's Cathedral at Rome, and so greasy that a penniless person would almost wish to kiss it through a handkerchief or a bit of paper.

IMPRESSIVE SCENE. It is not easy to visit the place and think over its powerful associations without being impressed. It contains several tall cypress trees and eight olive trees of great antiquity. Their trunks have burst and split with age, and they are said to date from the time of Christ Himself. The olive oil produced from them is sold at a fabulous price, and the olive stones are made into rosaries. The garden abounds with flowers, and around the walls are the stans of the cypress. It is in charge of the Franciscans, one of a more of whom may always be found there, and a splendid view of the east wall of Jerusalem is to be had from the garden, though to see over the wall and view the city houses one must climb much higher up the Mount of Olives. The monks make little silk bags about as big as the finger of a glove and fill them with soil from the garden. These are sold as mementoes and bring in a considerable revenue which is devoted to the maintenance of the place. In recent times a wall had been built outside the garden, passing over the betrayal post, which is now a part of that wall, though easily distinguished from its other portions by its darker color, due, as mentioned above, to the persistent kissing of pilgrims.

Quite near to the garden is the traditional tomb of the Virgin Mary, where, the legend states, she was buried by the apostles. It is a curious place. One enters the door of a stone building of no great size or architectural pretensions, and finds himself confronted with a flight of marble steps, nineteen feet broad and forty-seven in number. These lead to a subterranean church, thirty-five feet below the surface of the earth. On the way down are the tombs of St. Joachim and St. Anne, the parents of the Virgin. In the middle of the last wing of the church is the sarcophagus of Mary, which is naturally accorded extraordinary veneration by devout Roman Catholics.

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Do it now. (Sam Kiser.) If you chance to have a duty that is waiting to be done, Do it now.

What about your Christmas shopping? Better start out on the run—Do it now.

If you haven't bought that sled for little Willie, don't delay; The crowds are getting bigger, the stock smaller every day.

If you must go forth to battle with the shoppers, haste away—Do it now.

If you've planned to buy a necktie for your dear old Uncle John, Do it now.

There's a crowd around the counter, and your chance will soon be gone—Do it now.

The Noah's ark for little Ted, the doll for Marguerite—You had better buy them early, or by many, many feet

You'll be trampled when you battle with your bundles in the street—Do it now.

You can aid the busy people who must serve while you decide—Do it now.

Why delay, to get bedraggled when the last ones in collide? Do it now.

Why not turn new leaf over—why not try the better way? In this matter, as in others, there is danger in delay.

If you must do Christmas shopping, what's the matter with to-day? Do it now.

Sentiments in Season. The crop of there-is-no-Santa-Claus fools is unusually large this season. At this time of the year it is a wise boy who believes in Santa Claus.

Some Christmas presents make the heart grow fonder—fonder of the other fellow.

Santa Claus must divide his honors with the Stork. The latter has received, according to the postal authorities, as many letters as the former, requesting that a present be left at different homes.

The greatest need of the day, according to the American Inventor, is a Christmas tree that may be folded up and used again. Such an invention would be a godsend to those who live in city flats.

It is doubtless true that the use of mistletoe as a decoration for Christmas was forbidden by the early English Church. It may be that the Christmas tree is a heathen custom. But the Sunday School that has no Christmas tree and the maiden that hangs up no mistletoe will be—in the same boat.—Judge.

"A Merry Christmas." Hark, throughout Christendom joy bells are ringing. From mountain and valley, o'er land and o'er sea, Echoes of songs from far Galilee. Christmas is here. Merry old Christmas, Gift-bearing, heart-touching, joy-bringing. Christmas, Day of grand memories, King of the year.

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Stomach and digestive preventive, no matter how hours at any age are infected or "cramped." Liquid, given the stomach acts on the food and keeps the stomach clean and healthy. Cures indigestion, flatulence, heartburn, acid, and all the troubles of the stomach. It is a better, faster and safer remedy than any other. Free booklet, "Disterper," on request. Write to: DISTERPER, 100, Queen's Road, London, W. 1, U.S.A.

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We remit same day shipment is received, in any form you request. If you so desire we will hold shipment separate until we hear whether our price is satisfactory. If not, we will return goods, express charges paid both ways.
Write for price list and shipping tags, which will be cheerfully furnished.
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