Christmas Lesson

The Child and The Kingdom

Mathew 1: 18-25; 18: 1-14; 19: 13-15.

PRINTED TEXT, Matt. 1: 18-25; 18: 1-6; 19: 13-15

GOLDEN TEXT—A little child shall lead them. Isa. 11: 6.

THE LESSON IN ITS SETTING

TIME—The annunciation to Joseph, the conception of the Virgin Mary, and the birth of Jesus all took place, probably, in the year 5 B.C. The teaching of Jesus concerning childhood was given in the autumn of A.D. 20.

PLACE—Mary's conception and the annunciation to Joseph occurred in Nazareth. The birth of Jesus took place in Bethlehem. The teaching of Christ found in this lesson was given in Capernaum.

Matthew 1: 18. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. The divine conception of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit is given with much greater detail in Luke's Gospel (1: 26-38). Mark has written nothing whatever concerning the birth and childhood of Jesus. Only Matthew and Luke tell the story of the supernatural birth, though John seems to refer to it (1: 14). Matthew tells it to us from the standpoint of Joseph, who was betrothed to Mary, and therefore legally her husband.

Message To Joseph

19. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. 20. But when he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21. And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins. "Jesus" was a very common Hebrew name (Joshua) in its Greek form. It means "Jehovah's Salvation." God took hold of a name perfectly familiar, which set the new-born Child among the children of men.

Birth of Jesus

22. Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 23. Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us. This prophecy is found in Isa. 7: 14. 24. And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took unto him his wife; 25. and knew her not till she had brought forth a son: and he called his name JESUS.

The Little Child

Matt. 18: 1. In that hour came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 2. And he called to him a little child, and set him in the midst of them. 3. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. No one has yet given the perfect and exclusive interpretation of this profound idea — it has been suggested that Christ here means that we should be like children in humility, in obedience, in indifference to the distinctions of rank and wealth, pure-hearted. 5. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. Let us receive and cherish children in Jesus' name, just as he would receive himself.

Let No Harm Come

6. But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea. How can we cause little children to stumble? By letting them see our own unbelief, cynicism; by letting them have their own way, by failing to restrain or discipline them. Children cannot have a full knowledge of Christian doctrines, but they can know Jesus as one who loves them, whom they can trust and pray to.

Christ's Blessing

13. Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should lay his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. 14. But Jesus said, Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven. 15. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.

Palestine Has 11 Christmases

Different Dates Marked By Religious Groups in Country

Note to little boys and girls who are sorry that Christmas comes but once a year: Palestine has 11 Christmas days, the only country in the world to have so many.

They extend from the Latin services on December 25 to the Abyssinian liturgy on March 25 and result from a fourth century dispute, within the Christian church over adoption of a unified calendar.

Julian, Gregorian Calendars

Some Christians adopted the Gregorian calendar, which puts Christmas on December 25th, while others retained the Julian calendar and still others chose their own dates for Christendom's great festivals.

The Abyssinian church celebrates the birth of Christ on the 25th of every month, but the greatest celebration is the solemn liturgy on March 25th.

On January 6th, under the Julian calendar, comes the Greek Orthodox celebration. As Latin Christians did on December 25, members of the Greek Orthodox community will make a pilgrimage to the Bethlehem shrine and re-enact the drama of Christ's birth.

The British mandate government of Palestine has recognized all of these denominations and has given them equal rights and privileges in all Christian shrines, throughout the Holy Land.

The Christ Child

MADONNA AND CHILD - MURILLO

IN THE STABLE

The little bulls drew together
With the doves softly whispering,
While the ass wondered whether
He wanted out or in,
Pulling at his rope and starting to paw
His stall, scattering the straw.
Each in his gentle way, uneasy, not at rest,
Not knowing why oppressed.

And then the light!
Not day or night,
But something different and strange—
So that they stopped all movement, waited—
As if each moment now were freighted
With some new thing beyond their vision's range,
Till clearer, by the manger, they all saw
Mother and child.
And now no longer timid, stumbling, wild,
They stooped above them—seeing how they smiled—
Knowing in some mute, kindly way that all was well,
Not knowing what but feeling love was there.
And Mary, raising happy eyes to them
Ranged round her as if holden by some spell.
Lifted the babe with care,
And blessed them gently—dumb,
Inarticulate, yet getting each his share
Of that great love which to the world had come.

Christmas Day

Flooded river and frosted roads,
Creaking carts with heaped-up loads,
Wild duck winging through leaden sky,
Christmas day is drawing night.

Holly and mistletoe on the stalls
Lanterns, streamers and colored balls,
Short the day and long the night,
Merry games by candlelight.

Silken snowflakes quivering down,
Silent footsteps in the town,
Icicles on the window pane,
Christmas day is here again.

T. Lovatt Williams

Moderation At Christmas Time

"Too Much Christmas" Is To Be Avoided

Even at Christmas time it is possible to have "too much of a good thing" say authorities of the Department of Pensions and National Health at Ottawa.

"Have a Christmas without regrets. The health-angle of Christmastide is important. Glowing faces of children and gladdened hearts of adults are signs of upsurging spirits. There is a close relationship between happiness and health. Christmas gives everyone an opportunity to discard unhealthy moods and repressions, and to let the spirit of joy have full rein."

Spirit of Joy

Fire marshals warn against accidents setting fire to Christmas trees by the use of lighted candles, and, since medical authorities are interesting themselves in accident prevention, this further word of advice comes from National Health headquarters, "If you must celebrate away from home, leave your car in the garage, and take a taxi."

Pagan Evergreens

Decorating the house with evergreens at Christmas is a pagan custom and an edict compiled at the Council o Bracara forbade the people to deck their homes with bay leaves and green boughs. Pagans believed that the sylvan spirits would repair to them in very cold weather, shelter beneath their leaves and remain unnipped by frost and cold. Houses used to be decked with holm, ivy, bay, laurel, box, and holly.

Mistletoe was forbidden in English churches as it was a heathen emblem, the sole exception being York Cathedral. Dr. Stukeley tells us that it was customary to carry a branch of mistletoe in procession to the high altar and proclaim a general indulgence and pardon of sins at the city gates.

MISTLETOPICS

One naturally thinks of Christmas-trees, holly, and mistletoe.

Mistletoe gets its name from the German mist, expelled matter. The hard seeds are dispersed by birds passing them undigested through their bodies. Missel-thrushes often function so.

Mistletoe grows most commonly on apple and other rosaceous trees, very rarely on oaks. It gets its nourishment by putting suckers into the branches of its host. The sucker-bearing shoots display a weird kind of intelligence, actually groping their way along the branch for the best food-supply.

"O Little Town Of Bethlehem"

There, Was Born A "Saviour Who Is Christ the Lord"

Bethlehem or The House of Bread, was more anciently known as Ephrath or Fruitful, but in modern times is called Beit-lahm or "House of Flesh."

All three names are significant to Christians whose interest in it arises from the tremendous fact that in that little town was born Him Who was rightly called "The Bread of Life;" Who was to be the fruitful Head of a new race, widespread as the world itself; and Who was there born in human flesh, though the Almighty Son of God.

"House of Bread"

Its history was by no means all bright and holy. Jacob hurrying along with a deathly sick wife, was compelled to halt nearby, while his greatly beloved Rachel gave birth to the little Benjamin, and then in her husband's arms died there.

Her grave is still marked by a rough stone monument!

It was in Bethlehem that the young Levite lived, who Micah hired to be his chaplain, and with whom is connected the tragic story in the last chapters of the book of Judges. The terrible tale of wrong doing and reprisals came perilously near to the destroying of the whole tribe of Benjamin, within whose limits Bethlehem was situated.

Its Past History

Thither came the widow Naomi, and her daughter-in-law Ruth, the Moabitess, mourners, bereft of all they had held dear. There the young widow Ruth was wedded to her wealthy kinsman Boaz, thereby becoming great-grandmother of the Psalmist-King David, and also one of the progenitors of the Christmas King, the Lord and saviour of Mankind.

Rehoboam, son of Solomon, made a fortified city of Bethlehem (2 Chronicles XI, 16) and later a famous khan (corresponding to our hotel) was built there probably by Chimham, son of Barzillai the Gileadite who befriended David (2 Samuel XVII.) when in trouble and was named after him (Jeremiah XLI, 17). This khan appears to have been a place where caravans were made up for long journeys, and it was from thence that the rebellious Jews, disregarding God's orders set off for Egypt, carrying the prophet Jeremiah with them. It may have been that same khan, or in New Testament terms that inn, at which Joseph and Mary (Luke 11) applied for lodging, but could find no other accommodation than a stable in a grotto under, or near to it, wherein to spend the first of all Christmas Eves, although they were both of royal descent, descendants of King David himself!

That poor stable became the most famous bed-chamber in the whole world, for there amidst the cattle was born the holy Baby, Who was God, the Creator of all things, clothed in mortal flesh, that He might become the Saviour of all who wished it from their sins!

The Poor Stable

To the stable came the shepherds called away from their own sheep-folds by a herald in the heavens, accompanied by singing choirs of angels, who made the thrilling momentous announcement: "unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Saviour who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 11, 11).

Countless thousands have knelt in sacred worship before that most holy shrine, once "a lowly cattle shed," the only shelter this evil world could provide for its Maker, Redeemer and King, when in pitying love and tender saving mercy He came to visit it, at the Christmas tide!

Legend Surrounds Christmas Fairy

Gossamer Creature Was Once A Poor Unhappy Little Girl

Have you ever wondered why the graceful, little fairies dressed in the loveliest of gossamer garments, with gleaming ornaments in their hair and dainty wands in their hands, figure so prominently in Christmas decorations and festivities? An old Yuletide legend is the origin of this. Let me tell you the story.

Many, many years ago on a Christmas Eve a poor little girl named Mary was very unhappy. Mary was an orphan, which means she had neither a mother nor a father, and the old woman she lived with made her very miserable by her cruel treatment. Snow lay deep on the ground, in the forest where Mary and the old woman lived.

"I want some strawberries," said the old woman. "Go fetch me some."

Mary said that there could be no strawberries growing in the snow but she was pushed out of doors into the forest. She sat down beneath a tree and began to cry, and while she cried there came a little gnome carrying a lantern. Night had come on, and it was very dark.

"Tell me why you are crying," said the gnome. Mary told him, and then the gnome said: "I am on my way to meet Santa Claus who is coming from Toyland."

This made Mary very happy, but all at once a dark cloud covered the moon, and the gnome turned pale.

"I know this is the work of the wicked underground gnomes. They have, by their magi made the cloud over the moon so that Santa Claus cannot find the way to the earth.

"Quick!" said the gnome, "take this lantern and hold tight to that fir tree!" Mary did as she was asked, while the gnome muttered some magic words and the little tree grew. It grew so quickly that it reached right up to the sky, and on top was Mary, holding the lantern. And by this means Santa was able to find his way.

"Make the tree its proper size once more," said Santa Claus afterwards. But when the tree became small again, on the top was — no, not Mary, but a beautiful fairy! The little girl had been transformed.

And she never had to go back to the cross old woman but instead remained in Fairyland where she lived happily ever after.