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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON
by Rev. R. C. Todd
THE COMING OF CHRIST
LESSON: Isa. 9:2-7, Rev. 11:15; 16:2-4

In the Old Testament we find expressed the hope of a coming Messiah. "Messiah" is a Hebrew word, designating the Representative, the Agent, the Revealer of God. The Greek translation of the world is "Christ". The Old Testament prophets looked forward to his coming and tried to depict what he would be like. The New Testament is the story of how he actually came. It is his coming that Christmas celebrates.

The Book of Isaiah was written about 790 years before Christ, at a time when the little country of Judah and its capital fortress Jerusalem was besieged by Assyria. Despair reigned among the inhabitants at the sight of the mighty army of Assyrians, and even the King gave way to it, Isaiah the prophet, however, was confident of national deliverance, and the text for this lesson from Isaiah is probably part of a speech which he delivered during the siege. In it he declares that God will send aid in the person of a divinely-endowed leader whose wisdom, goodness and power is described. God vindicated the faith of this prophet, although not in the way he anticipated. Judah was indeed delivered from Assyria, had a few years of independence, but later fell prey to the Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian and Roman Empires in succession. The divine leader pictured by Isaiah did not come until many centuries had passed. When he did come, men of faith, who remembered and cherished the prophecies of old, recognized his likeness in the descriptions of Isaiah. Indeed, there are passages in the book, particularly in the latter part of it, which it would almost seem, Jesus of Nazareth went out of his way to fulfil literally. Take, for instance, the well-known chapter 53.

The coming of the Messiah, says Isaiah, is a time of great joy. The King James translation of 9:3 is unfortunate, for it should read: "Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased their joy." It is a time of joy because the people that formerly "lived" in the darkness of oppression, misery and poverty, have had a great light brought into that darkness, a light that means deliverance. Compare this with the description of what the coming of Jesus into the world meant, in the Gospel of John Chap. 1. "The light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehended (overcame) it not." Oppressors and tyrants will be destroyed and all their implements of war burned in fire (9:4,5).

In succeeding verses, the prophet describes the character of the Messiah by giving him descriptive titles. "Wonderful Counsellor" indicates that he is possessed of the practical knowledge which makes for a wise ruler. "Mighty God", implies that his power is far more than an earthly power, and that he has a peculiar relation to God. "Everlasting Father" suggests the same; also that his reign and his concern for the people is not limited to the ordinary life-span. He is not to die and relinquish his authority as mortal rulers do. Finally, he is "Prince of Peace", for peace shall come with his reign and last as long as the reign.

The Book of Revelation from which the other passages of this week's lesson are taken, pictures as does the whole New Testament, the fact that the Messiah has come; he has begun his reign, and is even now waging war on his enemies and extending his empire. But it is a reign of love and brotherhood, and his weapons are love and brotherhood — heavenly weapons, not earthly, for his Kingdom is not of this world. Christians are suffering terrible persecution, but they are meeting it bravely in the spirit of the Christ and under his leadership. It is significant that in Rev. 11:15 the writer uses the present tense — the kingdoms of this world have already become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. He speaks as though it were already accomplished. Faith believes that there is no more doubt about the future than about the past because God has determined it. John believed God had made the promise, and that was all that was needed for faith and assurance. Faith is built upon the promises of God.

In chap. 15 John's vision concerns a beast, his image, and his mark. (vs. 2) The beast stood for the power of Rome, possibly the emperor himself. The image stands for those statues of the emperor before which subjects of the empire were ordered to make a sacrifice on pain of death. As we said last week, this the Christians refused to do. They would give loyalty to their earthly

ruler, but not blind worship. The mark probably refers to the seal bearing the likeness of the emperor which appeared on official documents, possibly on the decrees commanding the worship of the emperor, on those commanding the destruction of the hated Christian sect. What is "the number of his name?" John gives his number as 666. Since letters of the alphabet were used for numerals by both the Greeks and the Hebrews, every name has its numerical equivalent. If the letters used in the name of Nero are regarded as numerals, the sum of 666 is obtained. Nero was the first of the persecuting emperors, so it is probably him to which the number refers, for he did become a symbol of the pagan power of Rome. Those that have gotten the victory over the beast," and sing "the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb" are the Christians he has martyred and slain and who are as he pictures them, forever in the presence of God. Caesar's throne might seem strong, and his reign powerful, but to the Christians it was only transient compared to the everlasting reign of Christ already begun.

That is the message of Christmas. The Messiah is come; his work is done; he has trampled underfoot the power of evil and darkness; his reign has begun. Hallelujah, the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! And His Church is called upon to witness to the power of His Love, in spite of dungeon, fire and sword. "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth his successive journey's run." In that day, and in that day only, shall there be justice and peace on earth. Upon this mighty work and promise of God, Christian faith is built.

CELEBRATES THIRD BIRTHDAY
Stephen Saxe, son of Mr. and Mrs. David Saxe, Edith Street, entertained a number of his friends at a party last Thursday to celebrate his third birthday. His little guests included Barbara and John Finlay, David McNally, Christine Sargent, Carolyn and Ellen Biehn, Judy Honathan, Donald Maveal, Lynn, Monty and Pat Hyde, Pauline Watson, Jocelyn Bell and her sister Catharine.

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