

A MAN, A MOMENT, A MISSION

The International Sunday School Lesson for July 20th is: "The Baptism of Jesus."—Mark 1:1-11, and Parallel Passages.

By WILLIAM T. ELLIS

Few travelers ever cross the Jordan to what Syria calls "the East," where the ancient ways still survive. Nobody really knows the Holy Land until he has gone to the desert; and to the rich, windy uplands which lie between the Jordan Valley and Arabia proper. Up and down the length of the Jordan, especially in the northern stretches, just below the Lake of Galilee, are wild, rocky, rugged wildernesses, which the untutored imagination easily peoples with spirits. This western world could not devise a more spectacular setting for the wilderness experiences of Jesus and John and Paul than the traveller may find east of the Jordan.

Two men in sacred history are visualized as desert men, dwellers apart in the stern solitudes in rigorous self-denial and abstemiousness, accompanied only by their own austere meditations. These were Elijah and John the Baptist, whom Jesus declared to be one in spirit. Hard circumstances developed hardy souls. John, the Nazarene, vowed to a life of asceticism, grew up in the wilderness, a hairy man and uncouth, and a fearsome figure in his single camel's hair garment, tied around the middle with a leather thong. He was a man apart, an inhabitant of the solitudes, where he was made ready for his unique mission as the herald of the Coming One.

The Cousin of the Christ. In our western world we have gone daft over individualism; we accept each person by himself, regardless of his family. Not so the Orient, which deeply understands the truth, "He setteth the solitary in families." A man finds his staunchest allies in his family and

clan in the East; and it is worth noting that John, the forerunner of Jesus, was also his cousin, a blood relative. The kinship of their mothers, Mary and Elizabeth, is sometimes overlooked in studying the relationship of the two. Doubtless they had met in boyhood: Certainly, each knew the story of the other's peculiar attestation before birth, and his unique call and preparation. Both began and continued life under a strange sense of a mission — which is still the surest road for any boy or girl to great service.

Some sensational preachers think to show themselves, like John, an original, by the way they dress and wear their hair; which is cheap theatrics. The Baptist was big, and utterly himself, because he scorned to imitate the rabbis of his time. He had heard the Voice; and so he knew himself to be a voice and not an echo of other men's messages. John was so great that he realized that he was only a second-place man; for it is possible to be a first-class man in a second place. He had a clear voice call to his own work; and blessed is the person who has found his mission, whatever it may be.

Ask the average celebrity — especially the second-rater — to talk about himself, and he will tell you a bookful of stuff. This John the Baptist called himself only an oriental SAIS: The servant who runs ahead of the horse or carriage of the great one and clears the road for him. I've seen this "forerunner" in Egypt and Syria and Bagdad and India. John was merely a herald, an announcer, a preparer. All his effort merely indicated the Coming One. He was a finger-board to Christ; and any stick may point, so long as it is straight. High in the little gallery of the world's immortals is the Baptist because he was what he was, greatly and without pretence. A fearless protestant, a preacher of repentance, an arraigner of the rich and the powerful offenders of his day, a social reformer after the pattern of the Hebrew prophets, the Baptist is a model for every editor and teacher and preacher.

Fitness and a Job. There was more to John's mission than even he knew. He had spurned the sycophant arts of a court preacher; and he had become the vogue, first with the rabble and then with all classes. His work was mighty, merely as a preacher of righteousness. (Parenthetically, it may be remarked that no man is called to any pulpit who is not first of all a preacher of sheer and simple righteousness.) Yet, like all sensitive souls, he had his moods of depression and wonderment. Was it only for this that he had made ready so strenuously? Was not the Christ to be attested?

In this case, as in countless others, we see worked out the principle that opportunity waits upon fitness. Man's part is to get ready; God's part is to find the task. If there were more young people intent upon becoming fully prepared, and fewer merely seeking positions, the work of the world would be better done. John got ready for the greatest work in the world and in the fulness of time his hour of opportunity came. This Lesson should drive home to the hearts of youth the all important message of pre-

paration, preparation, PREPARATION!

A High Hour By The River. While John was faithfully carrying on, destiny drew near. He had dealt faithfully with the pharisees, with the king, with the soldiers, with the workmen, with the rabble. In the very midst of his Jordan preaching of repentance, and the

practice of his new rite or symbol of baptism, Jesus appeared amidst the multitude.

We pause to think of the great hours in the life of Christ, of which this was one. Like everybody else who has really lived our Lord knew his periods of exaltation—the mountain-peaks of experience that rose memorably above the plain of everydayness. This was the first of them

all. His baptism, whereby he formally identified himself with the common lot, and demonstrated that he had come to share the experiences of all of us, was a period of immeasurable spiritual exhilaration. What this formal commencement of his career meant to the sensitive Christ we cannot imagine. The baptism by John, and his testimony; and the attestation from the clouds, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," were only parts of a single overwhelming experience, which made this one of the mighty moments in the life of Jesus.

Other transcendent experiences were the Passion of the North, when Peter acclaimed him the Messiah; the transfiguration, the triumphal entry; the night in the Garden of Gethsemane; and the Crucifixion itself. From a purely human standpoint, Jesus could say, "I have lived." And surely God wants all his other children to have their high hours, also to impart a profound significance to life.

Regarding the Rites. A wholesome swing away from mere ritualism and a stressing of the inner spirit of religion, marks our day. Questions over which our fathers quarrelled interests us but slightly. Theological niceties and ecclesiastical ceremonials — and usages leave this generation cold. Our search is more for the spirit of Christ, and for the mind and works of Christ.

Nevertheless, it is easy to overlook the place of rites in righteousness. Symbols do signify. Nobody can be so blind to the historic facts of the life of Christ as to ignore the meaning of the simple record which shows him, from his circumcision to his last passover, fulfilling the ceremonial requirements of the law. At Jordan he signalled the beginning of his mission — his commencement, his inauguration, his initiation, as it were — by taking on John's outward seal of membership in the fellowship of righteousness. Although he did not stand in need of the cleansing from sin which baptism represented, yet it was one bond of fellowship, one more token of membership in the kingdom, and so Jesus joined John the Baptist's church by the sacrament of baptism.

As the Master whose very sandals John proclaimed himself unworthy to unloose, identified himself with the best religious institutions of his time; so we, however superior the most unlit of us feel ourselves to be to the membership of the body,

should openly and fully align ourselves with the Christian church, accepting its symbols and sacraments. "Join the Church!" is the practical exhortation of the story of the baptism of Jesus.

GOOD CROPS ANTICIPATED.

Reports From the Farmers About Tichborne.

Tichborne, July 14.—The showers of last week were welcomed by all as rain was badly needed. The farmers are busily engaged in repairing their machines for haying. T. H. Swerbrick has a gang of men grading on the road between Tichborne and Oconto. The L.O.L. and L. O. B. A. look in the celebration at Perth, on Saturday. Prospects says good crops for farmers this year. The quarterly communion service was held in the Presbyterian church

on Sunday by Rev. Mr. Moyse. The camps and boarding houses are kept busy with tourists this summer. John Kennedy who has been poorly for some time is somewhat better.

Visitors: A. O. Kennedy, Franklin, N.H., Robert Kennedy, Warrington, Ont., Mrs. Simon Keller, Williamston, N.Y., and Mrs. S. M. McKerron, Toronto, at their brother's, John Kennedy, Mr. and Mrs. Leslie and family, Oak Flats at Joseph Steele's; Mrs. Bailey and daughter, Kingston, at Mrs. J. Robinson's; Mr. and Mrs. Ross Steele, Toronto, at Mrs. A. Kennedy's, Sr.; Mrs. H. Campbell and Miss Mary at Mrs. William Steele's; Mr. and Mrs. Harold Smith have returned to their home in Webster, N.Y. Mr. and Mrs. Sam Kennedy, Trenton, at William Kennedy's. Miss Georgina Jeffrey is spending a few days with her sister, Mrs. George Goodfellow.



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MIDSUMMER GOWNS

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