

# JOY



*born at bethlehem*

19 CHRISTMAS SERMONS FROM THE MINISTRY OF

# CHARLES SPURGEON

Foreword by Dr. Ray Pritchard

# JOY BORN AT BETHLEHEM

19 CHRISTMAS SERMONS FROM THE  
MINISTRY OF CHARLES SPURGEON

by Charles Spurgeon

Primedia eLaunch Publishers  
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Joy Born at Bethlehem 19 Christmas Sermons from the Ministry  
of Charles Spurgeon  
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# Introduction

They called him the “Prince of Preachers.”

In the late 1800s, he was the best-known preacher in London and arguably the best-known preacher in the world. Since his death in 1892 Charles Spurgeon’s fame has only increased with the passing of time.

Although Mr. Spurgeon lived in an age before TV, radio and long before the Internet, in his own way he was very media-savvy. During his lifetime his sermons were printed and sold by the tens of thousands. He left behind so many unpublished sermons that new ones were published continuously for 25 years after his death.

The advent of the Internet age has only caused his popularity to rise. Now the whole world has access to his incomparable sermons through the miracle of digital media.

That’s why I’m excited about this collection of Spurgeon’s Christmas sermons. Each year when Christmas rolls around, preachers wonder how they will find a new way to tell the old story of how Christ came to the earth and how his coming changed everything. It would surprise some listeners to know that preaching Christmas sermons is not the easiest task because you are dealing with story that has been told many times before. Sometimes we just need a new set of eyes to help us see things we haven’t seen before.

So here’s a “new” look at Christmas through the eyes of the “Prince of Preachers.”

As you read these sermons, you will see that Spurgeon is not concerned at all with our modern talk about “keeping Christ in Christmas.” Christmas in Victorian England was not the hyper-commercialized affair it has become in the 21st-century.

Mr. Spurgeon focused much more on the who and why of Christmas. He glories in the fact that God gave his one-and-only Son to save us from our sins. That one fact ought to fill our hearts with joy.

Like all of Spurgeon's sermons, these Christmas messages are very clearly outlined and filled with solid biblical truth. It isn't likely that a pastor will preach any of them verbatim because we live in a different time and place, and the world has changed greatly since Spurgeon preached to thousands at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. But if you read these sermons for your own personal profit, you will find your heart stirred and your mind filled with glorious Bible truth. And you may just find inspiration for your own Christmas messages because in an ever-changing world, God's truth remains the same.

Christ came into the world to save sinners.

We need that message more than ever.

So read these sermons and let them lead you back to Bethlehem as you celebrate what Charles Spurgeon called "The Great Birthday."

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Dr. Ray Pritchard  
President, Keep Believing Ministries  
Dallas, Texas

# THE INCARNATION AND BIRTH OF CHRIST

December 23, 1855

“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

**T**HIS is the season of the year when, whether we wish it or not, we are compelled to think of the birth of Christ. I hold it to be one of the greatest absurdities under heaven to think that there is any religion in keeping Christmas-day. There are no probabilities whatever that our Saviour Jesus Christ was born on that day, and the observance of it is purely of Popish origin; doubtless those who are Catholics have a right to hallow it, but I do not see how consistent Protestants can account it in the least sacred. However, I wish there were ten or a dozen Christmas-days in the year; for there is work enough in the world, and a little more rest would not hurt labouring people. Christmas-day is really a boon to us; particularly as it enables us to assemble round the family hearth and meet our friends once more. Still, although we do not fall exactly in the track of



other people, I see no harm in thinking of the incarnation and birth of the Lord Jesus. We do not wish to be classed with those

“Who with more care keep holiday  
The wrong, than others the right way.”

The old Puritans made a parade of work on Christmas-day, just to show that they protested against the observance of it. But we believe they entered that protest so completely, that we are willing, as their descendants, to take the good accidentally conferred by the day, and leave its superstitions to the superstitious.

To proceed at once to what we have to say to you: we notice, first, *who it was that sent Christ forth*. God the Father here speaks, and says, “Out of thee shall he come forth unto *me* that is to be the ruler in Israel.” Secondly, *where did he come to at the time of his incarnation?* Thirdly, *what did he come for?* “To be ruler in Israel.” Fourthly, *had he ever come before?* Yes, he had. “Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

I. First, then, WHO SENT JESUS CHRIST? The answer is returned to us by the words of the text. “Out of thee,” saith Jehovah, speaking by the mouth of Micah, “out of thee shall he come forth unto *me*.” It is a sweet thought that Jesus Christ, did not come forth without his Father’s permission, authority, consent, and assistance. He was sent of the Father, that he might be the Saviour of men. We are, alas! too apt to forget, that while there are distinctions as to the persons in the Trinity, there are no distinctions of honor; and we do very frequently ascribe the honor of our salvation, or at least the depths of its mercy and the extremity of its benevolence, more to Jesus Christ than we

do to the Father. This is a very great mistake. What if Jesus came? Did not his Father send him? If he was made a child did not the Holy Ghost beget him? If he spake wondrously, did not his Father pour grace into his lips, that he might be an able minister of the new covenant? If his Father did forsake him when he drank the bitter cup of gall, did he not love him still? and did he not, by-and-by, after three days, raise him from the dead, and at last receive him up on high, leading captivity captive? Ah! beloved, he who knoweth the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost as he should know them, never setteth one before another; he is not more thankful to one than the other; he sees them at Bethlehem, at Gethsemane, and on Calvary, all equally engaged in the work of salvation. "He shall come forth unto *me*." O Christian, hast thou put thy confidence in the man Christ Jesus? Hast thou placed thy reliance solely on him? And art thou united with him? Then believe that thou art united unto the God of heaven; since to the man Christ Jesus thou art brother, and holdest closest fellowship, thou art linked thereby with God the Eternal, and "the Ancient of days" is thy Father and thy friend. "He shall come forth unto *me*." Did you never see the depth of love there was in the heart of Jehovah, when God the Father equipped his Son for the great enterprise of mercy? There had been a sad day in Heaven once before, when Satan fell, and dragged with him a third of the stars of heaven, and when the Son of God launching from his great right hand the Omnipotent thunders, dashed the rebellious crew to the pit of perdition; but if we could conceive a grief in heaven, that must have been a sadder day, when the Son of the Most High left his Father's bosom, where he had lain from before all worlds. "Go," saith the Father, "and thy Father's blessing on thy head!" Then comes the unrobing.

How do angels crowd around to see the Son of God take off his robes! He laid aside his crown; he said, "My father, I am Lord over all, blessed for ever, but I will lay my crown aside, and be as mortal men are." He strips himself of his bright vest of glory; "Father," he says, "I will wear a robe of clay, just such as men wear." Then he takes off all those jewels wherewith he was glorified; he lays aside his starry mantles and robes of light, to dress himself in the simple garments of the peasant of Galilee. What a solemn disrobing that must have been! And next, can you picture the dismissal! The angels attend the Saviour through the streets, until they approach the doors: when an angel cries, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up ye everlasting doors, and let the king of glory through!" Oh! methinks the angels must have wept when they lost the company of Jesus—when the Sun of Heaven bereaved them of all its light. But they went after him. They descended with him; and when his spirit entered into flesh, and he became a babe, he was attended by that mighty host of angels, who after they had been with him to Bethlehem's manger, and seen him safely laid on his mother's breast, in their journey upwards appeared to the shepherds and told them that he was born king of the Jews. *The Father* sent him! Contemplate that subject. Let your soul get hold of it, and in every period of his life think that he suffered what *the Father* willed; that every step of his life was marked with the approval of the great I AM. Let every thought that you have of Jesus be also connected with the eternal, ever-blessed God; for "he," saith Jehovah, "shall come forth unto *me*." Who sent him, then? The answer is, his Father.

II. Now, secondly, WHERE DID HE COME TO? A word or two concerning Bethlehem. It seemed meet and right that our Saviour should be born in Bethlehem, and that because of

Bethlehem's history, Bethlehem's name, and Bethlehem's position—little in Judah.

1. First, it seemed necessary that Christ should be born in Bethlehem, *because of Bethlehem's history*. Dear to every Israelite was the little village of Bethlehem. Jerusalem might outshine it in splendour; for there stood the temple, the glory of the whole earth, and “beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth was Mount Zion;” yet around Bethlehem there clustered a number of incidents which always made it a pleasant resting-place to every Jewish mind; and even the Christian cannot help loving Bethlehem. The first mention, I think, that we have of Bethlehem is a sorrowful one. There Rachel died. If you turn to the 35th of Genesis you will find it said in the 16th verse—“And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath; and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin. And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave, that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day.” A singular incident this—almost prophetic. Might not Mary have called her own son Jesus, her Ben-oni; for he was to be the child of sorrow? Simeon said to her—“Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” But while she might have called him Ben-oni, what did God his Father call him? Benjamin, the son of my right hand. Ben-oni was he as a man; Benjamin as to his Godhead. This little incident seems to be almost a prophecy that Ben-oni—Benjamin, the Lord Jesus,

should be born in Bethlehem. But another woman makes this place celebrated. That woman's name was Naomi. There lived at Bethlehem in after days, when, perhaps, the stone that Jacob's fondness had raised had been covered with moss and its inscription obliterated, another woman named Naomi. She too was a daughter of joy, and yet a daughter of bitterness. Naomi was a woman whom the Lord had loved and blessed, but she had to go to a strange land; and she said, "Call me not Naomi (pleasant) but let my name be called Mara (bitter) for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." Yet was she not alone amid all her losses, for there cleaved unto her Ruth the Moabitess, whose Gentile blood should unite with the pure untainted stream of the Jew, and should thus bring forth the Lord our Saviour, the great king both of Jews and Gentiles. That very beautiful book of Ruth had all its scenery laid in Bethlehem. It was at Bethlehem that Ruth went forth to glean in the fields of Boaz; it was there that Boaz looked upon her, and she bowed herself before her lord; it was there her marriage was celebrated; and in the streets of Bethlehem did Boaz and Ruth receive a blessing which made them fruitful, so that Boaz became the father of Obed, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David. That last fact gilds Bethlehem with glory—the fact that David was born there—the mighty hero who smote the Philistine giant, who led the discontented of his land away from the tyranny of their monarch, and who afterwards, by a full consent of a willing people, was crowned king of Israel and Judah. Bethlehem was a royal city, because the kings were there brought forth. Little as Bethlehem was, it was much to be esteemed; because it was like certain principalities which we have in Europe, which are celebrated for nothing but for bringing forth the consorts of the royal families

of England. It was right, then, from history, that Bethlehem should be the birth-place of Christ.

2. But again: *there is something in the name of the place.* "Bethlehem Ephratah." The word *Bethlehem* has a double meaning. It signifies "the house of bread," and "the house of war." Ought not Jesus Christ to be born in "the house of bread?" He is the Bread of his people, on which they feed. As our fathers ate manna in the wilderness, so do we live on Jesus here below. Famished by the world, we cannot feed on its shadows. Its husks may gratify the swinish taste of worldlings, for they are swine; but we need something more substantial, and in that blest bread of heaven, made of the bruised body of our Lord Jesus, and baked in the furnace of his agonies, we find a blessed food. No food like Jesus to the desponding soul or to the strongest saint. The very meanest of the family of God goes to Bethlehem for his bread; and the strongest man, who eats strong meat, goes to Bethlehem for it. House of Bread! whence could come our nourishment but from thee? We have tried Sinai, but on her rugged steeps there grow no fruits, and her thorny heights yield no corn whereon we may feed. We have repaired even to Tabor itself, where Christ was transfigured, and yet there we have not been able to eat his flesh and drink his blood. But Bethlehem, thou house of bread, rightly wast thou called; for there the bread of life was first handed down for man to eat. And it is also called "the house of war;" because Christ is to a man "the house of bread," or else "the house of war." While he is food to the righteous he causeth war to the wicked, according to his own word—"Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth; I am not come 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." Sinner! if thou dost not know Bethlehem as "the house of bread," it shall be to thee a "house of war." If from the lips of Jesus thou dost never drink sweet honey—if thou art not like the bee, which sippeth sweet luscious liquor from the Rose of Sharon, then out of the selfsame mouth there shall go forth against thee a two-edged sword; and that mouth from which the righteous draw their bread, shall be to thee the mouth of destruction and the cause of thine ill. Jesus of Bethlehem, house of bread and house of war, we trust we know thee as our bread. Oh! that some who are now at war with thee might hear in their hearts, as well as in their ears the song—

"Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled."

And now for that word *Ephratah*. That was the old name of the place which the Jews retained and loved. The meaning of it is, "fruitfulness," or "abundance." Ah! well was Jesus born in the house of fruitfulness; for whence cometh my fruitfulness and thy fruitfulness, my brother, but from Bethlehem? Our poor barren hearts ne'er produced one fruit, or flower, till they were watered with the Saviour's blood. It is his incarnation which fattens the soil of our hearts. There had been pricking thorns on all the ground, and mortal poisons, before he came; but our fruitfulness comes from him. "I am like a green fir-tree; from thee is my fruit found." "All my springs are in thee." If we be like trees planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth our fruit in our season, it is not because we were naturally fruitful, but because of the rivers of water by which we were planted. It is Jesus that makes us fruitful. "If a man abide in me," he says,

“and my words abide in him, he shall bring forth much fruit.” Glorious Bethlehem Ephratah! Rightly named! Fruitful house of bread—the house of abundant provision for the people of God!

3. We notice, next, *the position of Bethlehem*. It is said to be “little among the thousands of Judah.” Why is this? Because Jesus Christ always goes among little ones. He was born in the little one “among the thousands of Judah.” Not Bashan’s high hill, not on Hebron’s royal mount, not in Jerusalem’s palaces, but in the humble, yet illustrious, village of Bethlehem. There is a passage in Zechariah which teaches us a lesson:—It is said that the man on the red horse stood among the myrtle-trees. Now the myrtle-trees grow at the bottom of the hill; and the man on the red horse always rides there. He does not ride on the mountain-top; he rides among the humble in heart. “With this man will I dwell, saith the Lord, with him who is of a humble and contrite spirit, and who trembleth at my word.” There are some little ones here this morning—“little among the thousands of Judah.” No one ever heard your name, did they? If you were buried, and had your name on your tombstone, it would never be noticed. Those who pass by would say, “It is nothing to me: I never knew him.” You do not know much of yourself, or think much of yourself; you can scarcely read, perhaps. Or if you have some talents and ability, you are despised amongst men; or, if you are not despised by them, you despise yourself. You are one of the little ones. Well, Christ is always born in Bethlehem among the little ones. Big hearts never get Christ inside of them; Christ lieth not in great hearts, but in little ones. Mighty and proud spirits never have Jesus Christ, for he cometh in at low doors, but he will not come in at high ones. He who hath a broken heart, and a low



spirit, shall have the Saviour, but none else. He healeth not the prince and the king, but “the broken in heart, and he bindeth up their wounds.” Sweet thought! He is the Christ of the little ones. “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.”

We cannot pass away from this without another thought here, which is, *how wonderfully mysterious was that providence which brought Jesus Christ’s mother to Bethlehem at the very time when she was to be delivered!* His parents were residing at Nazareth; and what should they want to travel at that time for? Naturally, they would have remained at home; it was not at all likely that his mother would have taken a journey to Bethlehem while in so peculiar a condition; but Cæsar Augustus issues a decree that they are to be taxed. Very well, then, let them be taxed at Nazareth. No; it pleases him that they should all go to their city. But why should Cæsar Augustus think of it just at that particular time? Simply because, while man deviseth his way, the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord. Why, what a thousand chances, as the world has it, met together to bring about this event! First of all, Cæsar quarrels with Herod; one of the Herods was deposed; Cæsar says, “I shall tax Judea, and make it a province, instead of having it for a separate kingdom.” Well, it must be done. But when is it to be done? This taxing, it is said, was first commenced when Cyreneus was governor. But why is the census to be taken at that particular period—suppose, December? Why not have had it last October? and why could not the people be taxed where they were living? Was not their money just as good there as anywhere else? It was Cæsar’s whim; but it was God’s decree. Oh! we love the sublime

doctrine of eternal absolute predestination. Some have doubted its being consistent with the free agency of man. We know well it is so, and we never saw any difficulty in the subject; we believe metaphysicians have made difficulties; we see none ourselves. It is for us to believe, that man does as he pleases, yet notwithstanding he always does as God decrees. If Judas betrays Christ, "thereunto he was appointed;" and if Pharoah hardens his heart, yet, "for this purpose have I raised thee up, for to show forth my power in thee." Man doth as he wills; but God maketh him do as *he* willeth, too. Nay, not only is the will of man under the absolute predestination of Jehovah; but all things, great or little, are of him. Well hath the good poet said, "Doubtless the sailing of a cloud hath Providence to its pilot; doubtless the root of an oak is gnarled for a special purpose, God compasseth all things, mantling the globe like air." There is nothing great or little, that is not from him. The summer dust moves in its orbit, guided by the same hand which rolls the stars along; the dewdrops have their father, and trickle on the rose leaf as God bids them; yea, the sear leaves of the forest, when hurled along by the tempest, have their allotted position where they shall fall, nor can they go beyond it. In the great, and in the little, there is God—God in everything, working all things according to the counsel of his own will; and though man seeks to go against his Maker, yet he cannot. God hath bounded the sea with a barrier of sand; and if the sea mount up wave after wave, yet it shall not exceed its allotted channel. Everything is of God; and unto him who guideth the stars and wingeth sparrows, who ruleth planets and yet moveth atoms, who speaks thunders and yet whispers zephyrs, unto him be glory; for there is God in everything,

III. This brings us to the third point: WHAT DID JESUS COME FOR?

He came to be “ruler in Israel.” A very singular thing is this, that Jesus Christ was said to have been “born the king of the Jews.” Very few have ever been “born king.” Men are born princes, but they are seldom born kings. I do not think you can find an instance in history where any infant was born king. He was the prince of Wales, perhaps, and he had to wait a number of years, till his father died, and then they manufactured him into a king, by putting a crown on his head; and a sacred chrism, and other silly things; but he was not born a king. I remember no one who was born a king except Jesus; and there is emphatic meaning in that verse that we sing—

“Born thy people to deliver;  
Born a child, and yet a king.”

The moment that he came on earth he was a king. He did not wait till his majority that he might take his empire; but as soon as his eye greeted the sunshine he was a king; from the moment that his little hands grasped anything, they grasped a sceptre: as soon as his pulse beat, and his blood began to flow, his heart beat royally, and his pulse beat an imperial measure, and his blood flowed in a kingly current. He was born a king. He came “to be ruler in Israel.” “Ah!” says one, “then he came in vain, for little did he exercise his rule; ‘he came unto his own, and his own received him not;’ he came to Israel and he was not their ruler, but he was ‘despised and rejected of men,’ cast off by them all, and forsaken by Israel, unto whom he came.” Ay, but “they are not all Israel who are of Israel,” neither because they are the seed of Abraham shall they all be called. Ah, no! He is not ruler of Israel after the flesh, but he is the ruler of Israel after the spirit. Many such have obeyed him. Did not the apostles bow before him, and own him as their king?

And now, doth not Israel salute him as their ruler? Do not all the seed of Abraham after the spirit, even all the faithful, for he is “the father of the faithful,” acknowledge that unto Christ belong the shields, of the mighty, for he is the king of the whole earth? Doth he not rule over Israel? Ay, verily he doth; and those who are not ruled over by Christ are not of Israel. He came to be a ruler over Israel. My brother, hast thou submitted to the sway of Jesus? Is he ruler in thine heart, or is he not? We may know Israel by this: Christ is come into their hearts, to be ruler over them. “Oh!” saith one, “I do as I please, I was never in bondage to any man.” Ah! then thou hatest the rule of Christ. “Oh!” says another, “I submit myself to my minister, to my clergyman, or to my priest, and I think that what he tells me is enough, for he is my ruler.” Dost thou? Ah! poor slave, thou knowest not thy dignity; for nobody is thy lawful ruler but the Lord Jesus Christ. “Ay,” says another, “I have professed his religion, and I am his follower.” But doth he rule in thine heart? Doth he command thy will? Doth he guide thy judgment? Dost thou ever seek counsel at his hand in thy difficulties? Art thou desirous to honor him, and to put crowns upon his head? Is he thy ruler? If so, then thou art one of Israel; for it is written, “He shall come to be ruler in Israel.” Blessed Lord Jesus! thou art ruler in thy people’s hearts, and thou ever shalt be; we want no other ruler save thyself, and we will submit to none other. We are free, because we are the servants of Christ; we are at liberty, because he is our ruler, and we know no bondage and no slavery, because Jesus Christ alone is monarch of our hearts. He came “to be ruler in Israel;” and mark you, that mission of his is not quite fulfilled yet, and shall not be till the latter-day glories. In a little while you shall see Christ come again, to be ruler over his people Israel, and ruler over them not only as

spiritual Israel, but even as natural Israel, for the Jews shall be restored to their land, and the tribes of Jacob shall yet sing in the halls of their temple; unto God there shall yet again be offered Hebrew songs of praise, and the heart of the unbelieving Jew shall be melted at the feet of the true Messias. In a short time, he who at his birth was hailed king of the Jews by Easterns, and at his death was written king of the Jews by a Western, shall be called king of the Jews everywhere—yes, king of the Jews and Gentiles also—in that universal monarchy whose dominion shall be co-extensive with the habitable globe, and whose duration shall be coeval with time itself. He came to be a ruler in Israel, and a ruler most decidedly he shall be, when he shall reign among his people with his ancients gloriously.

IV. And now, the last thing is, DID JESUS CHRIST EVER COME BEFORE? We answer, yes: for our text says, “Whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting.”

First, *Christ has had his goings forth in his Godhead.* “From everlasting.” He has not been a secret and a silent person up to this moment. That new-born child there has worked wonders long ere now; that infant slumbering in its mother’s arms is the infant of to-day, but it is the ancient of eternity; that child who is there hath not made its appearance on the stage of this world; his name is not yet written in the calendar of the circumcised; but still though you wist it not, “his goings forth have been of old, from everlasting.”

1. Of old *he went forth as our covenant head in election,* “according as he hath chosen us in *Him*, before the foundation of the world.”

“Christ be my first elect, he said,  
Then chose our souls in Christ our Head.”

2. He had goings forth for his people, *as their representative before the throne, even before they were begotten in the world*. It was from everlasting that his mighty fingers grasped the pen, the stylus of ages, and wrote his own name, the name of the eternal Son of God; it was from everlasting that he signed the compact with his Father, that he would pay blood for blood, wound for wound, suffering for suffering, agony for agony, and death for death, in the behalf of his people; it was from everlasting that he gave himself up, without a murmuring word, that from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot he might sweat blood, that he might be spit upon, pierced, mocked, rent asunder, suffer the pain of death, and the agonies of the cross. His goings forth as our Surety were from everlasting. Pause, my soul, and wonder! Thou hadst goings forth in the person of Jesus from everlasting. Not only when thou wast born into the world did Christ love thee, but his delights were with the sons of men before there were any sons of men. Often did he think of them; from everlasting to everlasting he had set his affection upon them. What! believer, has he been so long about thy salvation, and will he not accomplish it? Has he from everlasting been going forth to save me, and will he lose me now? What! has he had me in his hand, as his precious jewel, and will he now let me slip between his precious fingers? Did he choose me before the mountains were brought forth, or the channels of the deep scooped out, and will he lose me now? Impossible!

“My name from the palms of his hands  
Eternity cannot erase;  
Impress’d on his heart it remains,  
In marks of indelible grace.”

I am sure he would not love me so long, and then leave off loving me. If he intended to be tired of me, he would have been tired of me long before now. If he had not loved me with a love as deep as hell and as unutterable as the grave, if he had not given his whole heart to me, I am sure he would have turned from me long ago. He knew what I would be, and he has had long time enough to consider of it; but I am his choice, and there is an end of it; and unworthy as I am, it is not mine to grumble, if he is but contented with me. But he is contented with me—he must be contented with me—for he has known me long enough to know my faults. He knew me before I knew myself; yea, he knew me before I was myself. Long before my members were fashioned they were written in his book, “when as yet there were none of them,” his eyes of affection were set on them. He knew how badly I would act towards him, and yet he has continued to love me;

“His love in times past forbids me to think,  
He’ll leave me at last in trouble to sink.”

No; since “his goings forth were of old from everlasting,” they will be “to everlasting.”

Secondly, we believe that Christ *has come forth of old, even to men, so that men have beheld him*. I will not stop to tell you that it was Jesus who walked in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day, for his delights were with the sons of men; nor will I detain you by pointing out all the various ways in which Christ came forth to his people in the form of the angel of the covenant, the Paschal Lamb, the brazen serpent, the burning bush, and ten thousand types with which the sacred history is so replete; but I will rather point you to four occasions when Jesus Christ our Lord has appeared on earth as a man, before

his great incarnation for our salvation. And, first, I beg to refer you to the 18th chapter of Genesis, where Jesus Christ appeared to *Abraham*, of whom we read, "The Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; and he lift up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground." But whom did he bow to? He said "My Lord," only to one of them. There was one man between the other two, the most conspicuous for his glory, for he was the God-man Christ; the other two were created angels, who for a time had assumed the appearance of men. But this was the man Christ Jesus. "And he said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree." You will notice that this majestic man, this glorious person, stayed behind to talk with Abraham. In the 22nd verse it is said,—“And the men turned their faces from thence and went towards Sodom;” that is, two of them, as you will see in the next chapter “but Abraham stood yet before the Lord.” You will notice that this man, the Lord, held sweet fellowship with Abraham, and allowed Abraham to plead for the city he was about to destroy. He was in the positive form of man; so that when he walked the streets of Judea it was not the first time that he was a man; he was so before, in “the plain of Mamre, in the heat of the day.” There is another instance—his appearing to *Jacob*, which you have recorded in the 32nd chapter of Genesis and the 24th verse. All his family were gone, “And Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh;



and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, unless thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God." This was a man, and yet God. "For as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." And Jacob knew that this man was God, for he says in the 30th verse: "for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Another instance you will find in the book of *Joshua*. When Joshua had crossed the narrow stream of Jordan, and had entered the promised land, and was about to drive out the Canaanites, lo! this mighty man-God appeared to Joshua. In the 5th chapter, at the 13th verse, we read—"And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went unto him, and (like a brave warrior, as he was,) said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." And Joshua saw at once that there was divinity in him; for Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said to him, "What saith *my lord* unto his servant?" Now, if this had been a created angel he would have reproved Joshua, and said, "I am one of your fellow servants." But no; "the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so." Another remarkable instance is that recorded in the third chapter of the book of Daniel, where we read the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego being cast into the fiery furnace, which was so fierce that it destroyed the men who

threw them in. Suddenly the king said to his counsellors—"Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." How should Nebuchadnezzar know that? Only that there was something so noble and majestic in the way in which that wondrous Man bore himself, and some awful influence about *him*, who so marvellously broke the consuming teeth of that biting and devouring flame, so that it could not so much as singe the children of God. Nebuchadnezzar recognized his humanity. He did not say, "I see three men and an angel," but he said, "I see four positive men, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." You see, then, what is meant by his goings forth being "from everlasting."

Observe for a moment here, that each of these four great occurrences happened to the saints *when they were engaged in very eminent duty, or when they were about to be engaged in it*. Jesus Christ does not appear to his saints every day. He did not come to see Jacob till he was in affliction; he did not visit Joshua before he was about to be engaged in a righteous war. It is only in extraordinary seasons that Christ thus manifests himself to his people. When Abraham *interceded* for Sodom, Jesus was with him, for one of the highest and noblest employments of a Christian is that of intercession, and it is when he is so engaged that he will be likely to obtain a sight of Christ. Jacob was engaged in *wrestling*, and that is a part of a Christian's duty to which some of you never did attain; consequently, you do not have many visits from Jesus. It was when Joshua was *exercising bravery* that the Lord met him. So with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: they were in the high

places of *persecution*, on account of their adherence to duty, when he came to them, and said, "I will be with you, passing through the fire." There are certain peculiar places we must enter, to meet with the Lord. We must be in great trouble, like Jacob; we must be in great labour, like Joshua; we must have great intercessory faith, like Abraham; we must be firm in the performance of duty, like Shadrach Meshach, and Abednego; or else we shall not know him "whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting;" or, if we know him, we shall not be able to "comprehend with all the saints what is the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

Sweet Lord Jesus! thou whose goings forth were of old, even from everlasting, thou hast not left thy goings forth yet. Oh! that thou wouldst go forth this day, to cheer the faint, to help the weary, to bind up our wounds, to comfort our distresses! Go forth, we beseech thee, to conquer sinners, to subdue hard hearts—to break the iron gates of sinners' lusts, and cut the iron bars of their sins in pieces! O Jesus! go forth; and when thou goest forth, come thou to me! Am I a hardened sinner? Come thou to me; I want thee:

"Oh! let thy grace my heart subdue;  
I would be led in triumph too;  
A willing captive to my Lord,  
To sing the honours of thy word."

Poor sinner! Christ has not left going forth yet. And when he goes forth, recollect, he goes to Bethlehem. Have you a Bethlehem in your heart? Are you little? He will go forth to you yet. Go home and seek him by earnest prayer. If you have been made to weep on account of sin, and think yourself too little to

be noticed, go home, little one! Jesus comes to little ones; his goings forth were of old, and he is going forth now. He will come to your poor old house; he will come to your poor wretched heart; he will come, though you are in poverty, and clothed in rags, though you are destitute, tormented, and afflicted; he will come, for his goings forth have been of old from everlasting. Trust him, trust him, trust him; and he will go forth to abide in your heart for ever.

# GOING HOME

December 21, 1856

“Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.”—Mark 5:19

THE case of the man here referred to is a very extraordinary one: it occupies a place among the memorabilia of Christ's life, perhaps as high as anything which is recorded by either of the evangelists. This poor wretch being possessed with a legion of evil spirits had been driven to something worse than madness. He fixed his home among the tombs, where he dwelt by night and day, and was the terror of all those who passed by. The authorities had attempted to curb him; he had been bound with fetters and chains, but in the paroxysms of his madness he had torn the chains in sunder, and broken the fetters in pieces. Attempts had been made to reclaim him; but no man could tame him. He was worse than the wild beasts, for they might be tamed; but his fierce nature would not yield. He was a misery to himself, for he would run upon the mountains by night and day, crying and howling fearfully, cutting himself with the sharp flints, and torturing his poor body in the most frightful manner. Jesus Christ passed by; he said to the devils, “Come out of him.” The man was healed in a moment; he fell

down at Jesus' feet; he became a rational being—an intelligent man, yea, what is more, a convert to the Saviour. Out of gratitude to his deliverer, he said, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest; I will be thy constant companion and thy servant; permit me so to be." "No," said Christ, "I esteem your motive; it is one of gratitude to me; but if you would show your gratitude, 'go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.'"

Now, this teaches us a very important fact, namely, this, that true religion does not break in sunder the bonds of family relationship. True religion seldom encroaches upon that sacred, I had almost said divine institution called *home*; it does not separate men from their families, and make them aliens to their flesh and blood. Superstition has done that; an awful superstition, which calls itself Christianity, has sundered men from their kind; but true religion has never done so. Why, if I might be allowed to do such a thing, I would seek out the hermit in his lonely cavern, and I would go to him and say, "Friend, if thou art what thou dost profess to be, a true servant of the living God, and not a hypocrite, as I guess thou art—if thou art a true believer in Christ, and would show forth what he has done for thee, upset that pitcher, eat the last piece of thy bread, leave this dreary cave, wash thy face, untie thy hempen girdle; and if thou wouldst show thy gratitude, go home to thy friends, and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for thee. Canst thou edify the sere leaves of the forest? Can the beasts learn to adore that God whom thy gratitude should strive to honor? Dost thou hope to convert these rocks, and wake the echoes into songs? Nay, go back; dwell with thy friends, reclaim thy kinship with men, and unite again with thy

fellows, for this is Christ's approved way of showing gratitude." And I would go to every monastery and every nunnery, and say to the monks, "Come out brethren, come out! If you are what you say you are, servants of God, go home to your friends. No more of this absurd discipline; it is not Christ's rule; you are acting differently from what he would have you; go home to your friends!" And to the sisters of mercy we would say, "Be sisters of mercy to your own sisters; go home to your friends; take care of your aged parents; turn your own houses into convents; do not sit here nursing your pride by a disobedience to Christ's rule, which says, "go home to thy friends." "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." The love of a solitary and ascetic life, which is by some considered to be a divine virtue, is neither more nor less than a disease of the mind. In the ages when there was but little benevolence, and consequently few hands to build lunatic asylums, superstition supplied the lack of charity, and silly men and women were allowed the indulgence of their fancies in secluded haunts or in easy laziness. Young has most truly said,—

"The first sure symptoms of a mind in health  
Are rest of heart and pleasure found at home."

Avoid, my friends, above all things, those romantic and absurd conceptions of virtue which are the offspring of superstition and the enemies of righteousness. Be not without natural affection, but love those who are knit to you by ties of nature.

True religion cannot be inconsistent with nature. It never can demand that I should abstain from weeping when my friend

is dead. "Jesus wept." It cannot deny me the privilege of a smile, when providence looks favorably upon me; for once "Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, Father, I thank thee." It does not make a man say to his father and mother, "I am no longer your son." That is not Christianity, but something worse than what beasts would do, which would lead us to be entirely sundered from our fellows, to walk among them as if we had no kinship with them. To all who think a solitary life must be a life of piety, I would say, "It is the greatest delusion." To all who think that those must be good people who snap the ties of relationship, let us say, "Those are the best who maintain them." Christianity makes a husband a better husband, it makes a wife a better wife than she was before. It does not free me from my duties as a son; it makes me a better son, and my parents better parents. Instead of weakening my love, it gives me fresh reason for my affection; and he whom I loved before as my father, I now love as my brother and co-worker in Christ Jesus; and she whom I revered as my mother, I now love as my sister in the covenant of grace, to be mine for ever in the state that is to come. Oh! suppose not, any of you, that Christianity was ever meant to interfere with households; it is intended to cement them, and to make them households which death itself shall never sever, for it binds them up in the bundle of life with the Lord their God, and re-unites the several individuals on the other side of the flood.

Now, I will just tell you the reason why I selected my text. I thought within myself, there are a large number of young men who always come to hear me preach; they always crowd the aisles of my chapel, and many of them have been converted to God. Now, here is Christmas-day come round again, and they are going home to see their friends. When they get home they



will want a Christmas Carol in the evening; I think I will suggest one to them—more especially to such of them as have been lately converted. I will give them a theme for their discourse on Christmas evening; it may not be quite so amusing as “The Wreck of the Golden Mary,” but it will be quite as interesting to Christian people. It shall be this: “Go home and tell your friends what the Lord hath done for your souls, and how he hath had compassion on you.” For my part, I wish there were twenty Christmas days in the year. It is seldom that young men can meet with their friends; it is rarely they can all be united as happy families; and though I have no respect to the religious observance of the day, yet I love it as a family institution, as one of England’s brightest days, the great Sabbath of the year, when the plough rests in its furrow, when the din of business is hushed, when the mechanic and the working man go out to refresh themselves upon the green sward of the glad earth. If any of you are masters you will pardon me for the digression, when I most respectfully beg you to pay your servants the same wages on Christmas-day as if they were at work. I am sure it will make their houses glad if you will do so. It is unfair for you to make them feast or fast, unless you give them wherewithal to feast and make themselves glad on that day of joy.

But now to come to the subject. We are going home to see our friends, and here is the story some of us have to tell. “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.” First, *here is what they are to tell*; then, secondly, *why they are to tell it*; and then thirdly, *how they ought to tell it*.

I. First, then, HERE IS WHAT THEY ARE TO TELL. It is to be a story of *personal experience*. “Go home to thy friends, and tell them

how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.” You are not to repair to your houses and forthwith begin to preach. That you are not commanded to do. You are not to begin to take up doctrinal subjects and expatiate on them, and endeavour to bring persons to your peculiar views and sentiments. You are not to go home with sundry doctrines you have lately learned, and try to teach these. At least you are not commanded so to do; you may, if you please, and none shall hinder you; but you are to go home and tell not what you have believed, but what you have *felt*—what you really know to be your own; not what great things you have read, but what great things the Lord hath *done for you*; not alone what you have seen done in the great congregation, and how great sinners have turned to God, but what the Lord has done for *you*. And mark this: there is never a more interesting story than that which a man tells about himself. The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner derives much of its interest because the man who told it was himself the mariner. He sat down, that man whose finger was skinny, like the finger of death, and began to tell that dismal story of the ship at sea in the great calm, when slimy things did crawl with legs over the shiny sea. The Wedding guest sat still to listen, for the old man was himself a story. There is always a great deal of interest excited by a personal narrative. Virgil, the poet, knew this, and therefore he wisely makes Æneas tell his own story, and makes him begin it by saying, “In which I also had a great part myself.” So if you would interest your friends, tell them what you felt yourself. Tell them how you were once a lost abandoned sinner, how the Lord met with you, how you bowed your knees, and poured out your soul before God, and how at last you leaped with joy, for you thought you heard him say within you, “I, even I, am

he that blotteth out thy transgressions for my name's sake." Tell your friends a story of your own personal experience.

Note, next, it must be a story of *free grace*. It is not, "Tell thy friends how great things thou hast done thyself," but "how great things *the Lord* hath done for thee." The man who always dwells upon free will and the power of the creature, and denies the doctrines of grace, invariably mixes up a great deal of what he has done himself in telling his experience; but the believer in free grace, who holds the great cardinal truths of the gospel, ignores this, and declares, "I will tell what the Lord hath done for me. It is true I must tell how I was first made to pray; but I will tell it thus—

‘Grace taught my soul to pray,  
Grace made my eyes o’erflow.’

It is true, I must tell in how many troubles and trials God has been with me; but I will tell it thus.—

“’Twas grace which kept me to this day,  
And will not let me go.’”

He says nothing about his own doings, or willings, or prayings, or seekings, but he ascribes it all to the love and grace of the great God who looks on sinners in love, and makes them his children, heirs of everlasting life. Go home, young man, and tell the poor sinner's story; go home, young woman, and open your diary, and give your friends stories of grace. Tell them of the mighty works of God's hand which he hath wrought in you from his own free, sovereign, undeserved love. Make it a free grace story around your family fire.

In the next place, this poor man's tale was a *grateful* story. I

know it was grateful, because the man said, "I will tell thee how great things the Lord hath done for me;" and (not meaning a pun in the least degree) I may observe, that a man who is grateful is always full of the greatness of the mercy which God has shown him; he always thinks that what God has done for him is immensely good and supremely great. Perhaps when you are telling the story one of your friends will say, "And what of that?" And your answer will be, "It may not be a great thing to you, but it is to me. You say it is little to repent, but I have not found it so; it is a great and precious thing to be brought to know myself to be a sinner, and to confess it; do you say it is a little thing to have found a Saviour." Look them in the face and say, "If you had found him too you would not think it little. You think it little I have lost the burden from my back; but if you had suffered with it, and felt its weight as I have for many a long year, you would think it no little thing to be emancipated and free, through a sight of the cross." Tell them it is a great story, and if they cannot see its greatness shed great tears, and tell it to them with great earnestness, and I hope they may be brought to believe that you at least are grateful, if they are not. May God grant that you may tell a grateful story. No story is more worth hearing than a tale of gratitude.

And lastly, upon this point: it must be a tale told by a poor sinner who feels himself *not to have deserved* what he has received. "How he hath had *compassion* on thee." It was not a mere act of kindness, but an act of free compassion towards one who was in misery. Oh! I have heard men tell the story of their conversion and of their spiritual life in such a way that my heart hath loathed *them* and their story too, for they have told of their sins as if they did boast in the greatness of their crime, and they have mentioned the love of God not with a tear of

gratitude, not with the simple thanksgiving of the really humble heart, but as if they as much exalted themselves as they exalted God. Oh! when we tell the story of our own conversion, I would have it done with deep sorrow, remembering what we used to be, and with great joy and gratitude, remembering how little we deserve these things. I was once preaching upon conversion and salvation, and I felt within myself, as preachers often do, that it was but dry work to tell this story, and a dull, dull tale it was to me; but on a sudden the thought crossed my mind, "Why, you are a poor lost ruined sinner yourself; tell it, tell it, as you received it; begin to tell of the grace of God as you trust you feel it yourself." Why, then, my eyes began to be fountains of tears; those hearers who had nodded their heads began to brighten up, and they listened, because they were hearing something which the man felt himself, and which they recognised as being true to him, if it was not true to them. Tell your story, my hearers, as lost sinners, Do not go to your home, and walk into your house with a supercilious air, as much as to say, "Here's a saint come home to the poor sinners, to tell them a story;" but go home like a poor sinner yourself; and when you go in, your mother remembers what you used to be, you need not tell her there is a change—she will notice it, if it is only one day you are with her; and perhaps she will say, "John, what is this change that is in you?" and if she is a pious mother, you will begin to tell her the story, and I know, man though you are, you will not blush when I say it, she will put her arms round your neck, and kiss you as she never did before, for you are her twice-born son, hers from whom she shall never part, even though death itself shall divide you for a brief moment. "Go home, then, and tell your friends what great things the Lord hath done for you, and how he hath had

compassion on you.”

II. But now, in the second place, WHY SHOULD WE TELL THIS STORY? For I hear many of my congregation say, “Sir, I could relate that story to any one sooner than I could to my own friends; I could come to your vestry, and tell you something of what I have tasted and handled of the Word of God; but I could not tell my father, nor my mother, nor my brethren, nor my sisters.” Come, then; I will try and argue with you, to induce you to do so, that I may send you home this Christmas-day, to be missionaries in the localities to which you belong, and to be real preachers, thou you are not so by name. Dear friends, do tell this story when you go home.

First, for *your Master's sake*. Oh! I know you love him; I am sure you do, if you have proof that he loved you. You can never think of Gethsemane and of its bloody sweat, of Gabbatha and of the mangled back of Christ, flayed by the whip: you can never think of Calvary and his pierced hands and feet, without loving him; and it is a strong argument when I say to you, for his dear sake who loved you so much, go home and tell it. What! do you think we can have so much done for us, and yet not tell it? Our children, if anything should be done for them, do not stay many minutes before they are telling all the company, “such an one hath given me such a present, and bestowed on me such-and-such a favor.” And should the children of God be backward in declaring how they were saved when their feet made haste to hell, and how redeeming mercy snatched them as brands from the burning? You love Jesus, young man! I put it to you, then, will you refuse to tell the tale of his love to you? Shall your lips be dumb, when his honor is concerned? Will you not, wherever you go, tell of the God who loved you and died for you? This poor man, we are told,

“departed and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him, and all men did marvel.” So with you. If Christ has done much for you, you cannot help it—you must tell it. My esteemed friend, Mr. Oncken, a minister in Germany told us last Monday evening, that so soon as he was converted himself, the first impulse of his new-born soul was to do good to others. And where should he do that good? Well, he thought he would go to Germany. It was his own native land, and he thought the command was, “Go home to thy friends and tell them.” Well, there was not a single Baptist in all Germany, nor any with whom he could sympathise, for the Lutherans had swerved from the faith of Luther, and gone aside from the truth of God. But he went there and preached, and he has now seventy or eighty churches established on the continent. What made him do it? Nothing but love for his Master, who had done so much for him, could have forced him to go and tell his kinsmen the marvellous tale of Divine goodness.

But, in the next place, are your friends pious? Then go home and tell them, in order *to make their hearts glad*. I received last night a short epistle written with a trembling hand by one who is past the natural age of man, living in the county of Essex. His son, under God, had been converted by hearing the Word preached, and the good man could not help writing to the minister, thanking *him*, and blessing most of all, his God, that his son had been regenerated. “Sir,” he begins, “an old rebel writes to thank you, and above all to thank his God, that his dear son has been converted.” I shall treasure up that epistle. It goes on to say, “Go on! and the Lord bless you.” And there was another case I heard some time ago, where a young woman went home to her parents, and when her mother

saw her, she said, "There! if the minister had made me a present of all London, I should not have thought so much of it as I do of this—to think that you have really become a changed character, and are living in the fear of God." Oh! if you want to make your mother's heart leap within her, and to make your father glad—if you would make that sister happy who sent you so many letters, which sometimes you read against a lamp-post, with your pipe in your mouth—go home and tell your mother that her wishes are all accomplished, that her prayers are heard, that you will no longer chaff her about her Sunday-school class, and no longer laugh at her because she loves the Lord, but that you will go with her to the house of God, for you love God, and you have said, "Your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God, for I have a hope that your heaven shall be my heaven for ever." Oh! what a happy thing it would be if some here who had gone astray, should thus go home! It was my privilege a little while ago to preach for a noble institution for the reception of women who had led abandoned lives—and before I preached the sermon I prayed to God to bless it, and in the printed sermon you will notice that at the end of it there is an account of two persons who were blessed by that sermon and restored. Now, let me tell you a story of what once happened to Mr. Vanderkist, a city missionary, who toils all night long to do good in that great work. There had been a drunken broil in the street; he stepped between the men to part them, and said something to a woman who stood there concerning how dreadful a thing it was that men should thus be intemperate. She walked with him a little way, and he with her, and she began to tell him such a tale of woe and sin too—how she had been lured away from her parents' home in Somersetshire, and had been brought up here



to her soul's eternal hurt. He took her home with him, and taught her the fear and love of Christ; and what was the first thing she did, when she returned to the paths of godliness, and found Christ to be the sinner's Saviour? She said, "Now, I must go home to my friends." Her friends were written to; they came to meet her at the station at Bristol, and you can hardly conceive what a happy meeting it was. The father and mother had lost their daughter, they had never heard from her; and there she was, brought back by the agency of this institution,\* and restored to the bosom of her family. Ah! if such an one be here! I know not; among such a multitude there may be such an one. Woman! hast thou strayed from thy family? Hast thou left them long? "Go home to thy friends," I beseech thee, ere thy father totters to his grave, and ere thy mother's grey hairs sleep on the snow-white pillow of her coffin. Go back. I beseech thee! Tell her thou art penitent; tell her that God hath met with thee—that the young minister said, "Go back to thy friends." And if so, I shall not blush to have said these things, though you may think I ought not to have mentioned them; for if I may but win one such soul, I will bless God to all eternity, "Go home to thy friends. Go home and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee." Cannot you imagine the scene, when the poor demoniac mentioned in my text went home? He had been a raving madman; and when he came and knocked at the door, don't you think you see his friends calling to one another in affright, "Oh! there he is again," and the mother running up stairs and locking all the doors, because her son had come back that was raving mad; and the little ones crying because they knew what he had been before—how he cut himself with stones, because he was possessed with devils. And can you picture their joy, when the man said, "Mother!

Jesus Christ has healed me; let me in; I am no lunatic now!" And when the father opened the door, he said, "Father! I am not what I was; all the evil spirits are gone; I shall live in the tombs no longer. I want to tell you how the glorious man who wrought my deliverance accomplished the miracle—how he said to the devils, 'Get ye hence,' and they ran down a steep place into the sea, and I am come home healed and saved." Oh! if such an one, possessed with sin, were here this morning, and would go home to his friends, to tell them of his release, methinks the scene would be somewhat similar.

Once more, dear friends. I hear one of you say. "Ah! Sir, would to God I could go home to pious friends! But when I go home I go into the worst of places; for my home is amongst those who never knew God themselves, and consequently never prayed for me, and never taught me anything concerning heaven." Well, young man, go home to your friends. If they are ever so bad they are your friends. I sometimes meet with young men wishing to join the church, who say, when I ask them about their father, "Oh, sir, I am parted from my father." Then I say, "Young man, you may just go and see your father before I have anything to do with you; if you are at ill-will with your father and mother I will not receive you into the church; if they are ever so bad they are *your parents*." Go home to them, and tell them, not to make them glad, for they will very likely be angry with you; but tell them *for their soul's salvation*. I hope, when you are telling the story of what God did for you, that they will be led by the Spirit to desire the same mercy themselves. But I will give you a piece of advice. Do not tell this story to your ungodly friends when they are all together, for they will laugh at you. Take them one by one, when you can get them alone, and begin to tell it to them, and they will hear

you seriously. There was once a very pious lady who kept a lodging-house for young men. All the young men were very gay and giddy, and she wanted to say something to them concerning religion. She introduced the subject, and it was passed off immediately with a laugh. She thought within herself, "I have made a mistake." The next morning, after breakfast, when they were all going, she said to one of them, "Sir, I should like to speak with you a moment or two," and taking him aside into another room she talked with him. The next morning she took another, and the next morning another, and it pleased God to bless her simple statement, when it was given individually: but, without doubt, if she had spoken to them altogether, they would have backed each other up in laughing her to scorn. Reprove a man alone. A verse may hit him whom a sermon flies. You may be the means of bringing a man to Christ who has often heard the Word and only laughed at it, but who cannot resist a gentle admonition. In one of the states of America there was an infidel who was a great despiser of God, a hater of the Sabbath and all religious institutions. What to do with him the ministers did not know. They met together and prayed for him. But among the rest, one Elder B ——— resolved to spend a long time in prayer for the man; after that he got on horseback, and rode down to the man's forge, for he was a blacksmith. He left his horse outside, and said, "Neighbour, I am under very great concern about your soul's salvation; I tell you I pray day and night for your soul's salvation," He left him, and rode home on his horse. The man went inside to his house after a minute or two, and said to one of his faithful friends, "Here's a new argument; here's Elder B ——— been down here, he did not dispute, and never said a word to me except this, 'I say, I am under great concern about

you soul; I cannot bear you should be lost.' Oh! that fellow," he said, "I cannot answer him;" and the tears began to roll down his cheeks. He went to his wife, and said, "I can't make this out; I never cared about my soul, but here's an elder, that has no connection with me, but I have always laughed at him, and he has come five miles this morning on horseback just to tell me he is under concern about my salvation. After a little while he thought it was time he should be under concern about his salvation too. He went in, shut the door, began to pray, and the next day he was at the deacon's house, telling him that he too was under concern about his salvation, and asking him to tell him what he must do to be saved. Oh! that the everlasting God might make use of some of those now present in the same way, that they might be induced to

"Tell to others round  
What a dear Saviour they have found;  
To point to his redeeming blood,  
And say, Behold the way to God!"

III. I shall not detain you much longer; but there is a third point, upon which we must be very brief. HOW IS THIS STORY TO BE TOLD?

First, *tell it truthfully*. Do not tell more than you know; do not tell John Bunyan's experience, when you ought to tell your own. Do not tell your mother you have felt what only Rutherford felt. Tell her no more than the truth. Tell your experience truthfully; for mayhap one single fly in the pot of ointment will spoil it, and one statement you may make which is not true may ruin it all. Tell the story truthfully.

In the next place, *tell it very humbly*. I have said that before. Do not intrude yourselves upon those who are older, and know

more; but tell your story humbly; not as a preacher, not *ex-cathedra*, but as a friend and as a son.

Next, *tell it very earnestly*. Let them see you mean it. Do not talk about religion flippantly; you will do no good if you do. Do not make puns on texts; do not quote Scripture by way of joke: if you do, you may talk till you are dumb, you will do no good, if you in the least degree give them occasion to laugh by laughing at holy things yourself. Tell it very earnestly.

And then, *tell it very devoutly*. Do not try to tell your tale to man till you have told it first to God. When you are at home on Christmas-day, let no one see your face till God has seen it. Be up in the morning, wrestle with God; and if your friends are not converted, *wrestle with God for them*; and then you will find it easy work to *wrestle with them for God*. Seek, if you can, to get them one by one, and tell them the story. Do not be afraid; only think of the good you may possibly do. Remember, he that saves a soul from death hath covereth a multitude of sins, and he shall have stars in his crown for ever and ever. Seek to be under God—Saviours in your family, to be the means of leading your own beloved brethren and sisters to seek and to find the Lord Jesus Christ, and then one day, when you shall meet in Paradise, it will be a joy and blessedness to think that you are there, and that your friends are there too, whom God will have made you the instrument of saving. Let your reliance in the Holy Spirit be entire and honest. Trust not yourself, but fear not to trust him. He can give you words. He can apply those words to their heart, and so enable you to “minister grace to the hearers.”

To close up, by a short, and I think, a pleasant turning of the text, to suggest another meaning to it. Soon, dear friends, very soon with some of us, the Master will say, “Go home to

thy friends.” You know where the home is. It is up above the stars.

“Where our best friends, our kindred dwell,  
Where God our Saviour reigns.”

You grey-headed man has buried all his friends; he has said, “I shall go to them, but they will not return to me.” Soon his Master will say, “Thou hast had enough tarrying here in this vale of tears: go home to thy friends!” Oh! happy hour! Oh! blessed moment, when that shall be the word—“Go home to thy friends!” And when we go home to our friends in Paradise, what shall we do? Why, first we will repair to that blest seat where Jesus sits, take off our crown and cast it at his feet, and crown him Lord of all. And when we have done that, what shall be our next employ? Why, we will tell the blessed ones in heaven what the Lord hath done for us, and how he hath had compassion on us. And shall such a tale be told in heaven? Shall that be the Christmas Carol of the angels? Yes, it shall be; it has been published there before—blush not to tell it yet again—for Jesus has told it before, “When he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.” And thou, poor sheep, when thou shall be gathered in, wilt thou not tell how thy Shepherd sought thee, and how he found thee? Wilt thou not sit in the grassy meads of heaven, and tell the story of thine own redemption? Wilt thou not talk with thy brethren and thy sisters, and tell them how God loved thee and hath brought thee there? Perhaps thou sayest, “It will be a very short story.” Ah! it would be if you could write now. A little book might be the whole of your biography; but up there when your memory shall be enlarged, when your passion shall be

purified and your understanding clear, you will find that what was but a tract on earth will be a huge tome in heaven. You will tell a long story there of God's sustaining, restraining, constraining grace, and I think that when you pause to let another tell his tale, and then another, and then another, you will at last, when you have been in heaven a thousand years, break out and exclaim, "O saints, I have something else to say." Again they will tell their tales, and again you will interrupt them with "Oh, beloved, I have thought of another case of God's delivering mercy." And so you will go on, giving them themes for songs, finding them the material for the warp and woof of heavenly sonnets. "Go home," he will soon say, "go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." Wait awhile; tarry his leisure, and ye shall soon be gathered to the land of the hereafter, to the home of the blessed, where endless felicity shall be thy portion. God grant a blessing for his name's sake!

# THE FIRST CHRISTMAS CAROL

DECEMBER 20, 1857

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,  
good will toward men.”—Luke 2:14.

**I**T is superstitious to worship angels; it is but proper to love them. Although it would be a high sin, and an act of misdemeanour against the Sovereign Court of Heaven to pay the slightest adoration to the mightiest angel, yet it would be unkind and unseemly, if we did not give to holy angels a place in our heart's warmest love. In fact, he that contemplates the character of angels, and marks their many deeds of sympathy with men, and kindness towards them, cannot resist the impulse of his nature—the impulse of love towards them. The one incident in angelic history, to which our text refers, is enough to weld our hearts to them for ever. How free from envy the angels were! Christ did not come from heaven to save their compeers when they fell. When Satan, the mighty angel, dragged with him a third part of the stars of heaven, Christ did not stoop from his throne to die for them; but he left them to be reserved in chains and darkness until the last great day. Yet angels did not envy men. Though they remembered that he took not up angels, yet they did not murmur when he took up



the seed of Abraham; and though the blessed Master had never condescended to take the angel's form, they did not think it beneath them to express their joy when they found him arrayed in the body of an infant. How free, too, they were from pride! They were not ashamed to come and tell the news to humble shepherds. Methinks, they had as much joy in pouring out their songs that night before the shepherds, who were watching with their flocks, as they would have had if they had been commanded by their Master to sing their hymn in the halls of Cæsar. Mere men—men possessed with pride, think it a fine thing to preach before kings and princes; and think it great condescension now and then to have to minister to the humble crowd. Not so the angels. They stretched their willing wings, and gladly sped from their bright seats above, to tell the shepherds on the plain by night, the marvellous story of an Incarnate God. And mark how well they told the story, and surely you will love them! Not with the stammering tongue of him that tells a tale in which he hath no interest; nor even with the feigned interest of a man that would move the passions of others, when he feeleth no emotion himself; but with joy and gladness, such as angels only can know. They sang the story out, for they could not stay to tell it in heavy prose. They sang, "Glory to God on high, and on earth peace, good will towards men." Methinks, they sang it with gladness in their eyes; with their hearts burning with love, and with breasts as full of joy as if the good news to man had been good news to themselves. And, verily, it was good news to them, for the heart of sympathy makes good news to others, good news to itself. Do you not love the angels? Ye will not bow before them, and there ye are right; but will ye not love them? Doth it not make one part of your anticipation of heaven, that in heaven you

shall dwell with the holy angels, as well as with the spirits of the just made perfect? Oh, how sweet to think that these holy and lovely beings are our guardians every hour! They keep watch and ward about us, both in the burning noon-tide, and in the darkness of the night. They keep us in all our ways; they bear us up in their hands, lest at any time we dash our feet against stones. They unceasingly minister unto us who are the heirs of salvation; both by day and night they are our watchers and our guardians, for know ye not, that “the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him.”

Let us turn aside, having just thought of angels for a moment, to think rather of this song, than of the angels themselves. Their song was brief, but as Kitto excellently remarks, it was “well worthy of angels expressing the greatest and most blessed truths, in words so few, that they become to an acute apprehension, almost oppressive by the pregnant fulness of their meaning”—“Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men.” We shall, hoping to be assisted by the Holy Spirit, look at these words of the angels in a fourfold manner. I shall just suggest some *instructive thoughts* arising from these words; then some *emotional thoughts*; then a few *prophetical thoughts*; and afterwards, one or two *preceptive thoughts*.

I. First then, in the words of our text. There are many INSTRUCTIVE THOUGHTS.

The angels sang something which men could understand—something which men ought to understand—something which will make men much better if they will understand it. The angels were singing about Jesus who was born in the manger. We must look upon their song as being built upon this foundation. They sang of Christ, and the salvation which he came into this

world to work out. And what they said of this salvation was this: they said, first, that it gave glory to God; secondly, that it gave peace to man; and, thirdly, that it was a token of God's good will towards the human race.

1. *First, they said that this salvation gave glory to God.* They had been present on many august occasions, and they had joined in many a solemn chorus to the praise of their Almighty Creator. They were present at the creation: "The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." They had seen many a planet fashioned between the palms of Jehovah, and wheeled by his eternal hands through the infinitude of space. They had sung solemn songs over many a world which the Great One had created. We doubt not, they had often chanted "Blessing and honour, and glory, and majesty, and power, and dominion, and might, be unto him that sitteth on the throne," manifesting himself in the work of creation. I doubt not, too, that their songs had gathered force through ages. As when first created, their first breath was song, so when they saw God create new worlds then their song received another note; they rose a little higher in the gamut of adoration. But this time, when they saw God stoop from his throne, and become a babe, hanging upon a woman's breast, they lifted their notes higher still; and reaching to the uttermost stretch of angelic music, they gained the highest notes of the divine scale of praise, and they sung, "Glory to God *in the highest*," for higher in goodness they felt God could not go. Thus their highest praise they gave to him in the highest act of his godhead. If it be true that there is a hierarchy of angels, rising tier upon tier in magnificence and dignity—if the apostle teaches us that there be "angels, and principalities, and powers, and thrones, and dominions," amongst these blest

inhabitants of the upper world—I can suppose that when the intelligence was first communicated to those angels that are to be found upon the outskirts of the heavenly world, when they looked down from heaven and saw the new-born babe, they sent the news backward to the place whence the miracle first proceeded, singing

“Angels, from the realms of glory,  
Wing your downward flight to earth,  
Ye who sing creation’s story,  
Now proclaim Messiah’s birth;  
Come and worship,  
Worship Christ, the new-born King.

And as the message ran from rank to rank, at last the presence angels, those tour cherubim that perpetually watch around the throne of God—those wheels with eyes—took up the strain, and, gathering up the song of all the inferior grades of angels, surmounted the divine pinnacle of harmony with their own solemn chant of adoration, upon which the entire host shouted, “The highest angels praise thee.”—“Glory to God in the highest.” Ay, there is no mortal that can ever dream how magnificent was that song. Then, note, if angels shouted before and when the world was made, their hallelujahs were more full, more strong, more magnificent, if not more hearty, when they saw Jesus Christ born of the Virgin Mary to be man’s redeemer—“Glory to God in the highest.”

What is the instructive lesson to be learned from this first syllable of the angels’ song? Why this, that salvation is God’s highest glory. He is glorified in every dew drop that twinkles to the morning sun. He is magnified in every wood flower that blossoms in the copse, although it live to blush unseen, and

waste its sweetness in the forest air. God is glorified in every bird that warbles on the spray; in every lamb that skips the mead. Do not the fishes in the sea praise him. From the tiny minnow to the huge Leviathan, do not all creatures that swim the water bless and praise his name? Do not all created things extol him? Is there aught beneath the sky, save man, that doth not glorify God? Do not the stars exalt him, when they write his name upon the azure of heaven in their golden letters? Do not the lightnings adore him when they flash his brightness in arrows of light piercing the midnight darkness? Do not thunders extol him when they roll like drums in the march of the God of armies? Do not all things exalt him, from the least even to the greatest? But sing, sing, oh universe, till thou hast exhausted thyself, thou canst not afford a song so sweet as the song of Incarnation. Though creation may be a majestic organ of praise, it cannot reach the compass of the golden canticle—Incarnation! There is more in that than in creation, more melody in Jesus in the manger, than there is in worlds on worlds rolling their grandeur round the throne of the Most High. Pause Christian, and consider this a minute. See how every attribute is here magnified. Lo! what *wisdom* is here. God becomes man that God may be just, and the justifier of the ungodly. Lo! what *power*, for where is power so great as when it concealeth power? What power, that Godhead should unrobe itself and become man! Behold, what *love* is thus revealed to us when Jesus becomes a man. Behold, ye what *faithfulness*! How many promises are this day kept? How many solemn obligations are this hour discharged? Tell me one attribute of God that is not manifest in Jesus; and your ignorance shall be the reason why you have not seen it so. The whole of God is glorified in Christ; and though some part of the name of God is written in the

universe, it is here best read—in Him who was the Son of Man, and, yet, the Son of God.

But, let me say one word here before I go away from this point. We must learn from this, that if salvation glorifies God, glorifies him in the highest degree, and makes the highest creatures praise him, this one reflection may be added—then, that doctrine, which glorifies man in salvation cannot be the gospel. For salvation glorifies God. The angels were no Arminians, they sang, “Glory to *God* in the highest.” They believe in no doctrine which uncrowns Christ, and puts the crown upon the head of mortals. They believe in no system of faith which makes salvation dependent upon the creature, and, which really gives the creature the praise, for what is it less than for a man to save himself, if the whole dependence of salvation rests upon his own free will? No, my brethren; there may be some preachers, that delight to preach a doctrine that magnifies man; but in their gospel angels have no delight. The only glad tidings that made the angels sing, are those that put God first, God last, God midst, and God without end, in the salvation of his creatures, and put the crown wholly and alone upon the head of him that saves without a helper. “Glory to God in the highest,” is the angels song.

2. When they had sung this, they sang what they had never sung before. “Glory to God in the highest,” was an old, old song; they had sung that from before the foundations of the world. But, now, they sang as it were a new song before the throne of God: for they added this stanza—“*on earth, peace.*” They did not sing that in the garden. There was peace there, but it seemed a thing of course, and scarce worth singing of. There was more than peace there; for there was glory to God there. But, now, man had fallen, and since the day when

cherubim with fiery swords drove out the man, there had been no peace on earth, save in the breast of some believers, who had obtained peace from the living fountain of this incarnation of Christ. Wars had raged from the ends of the world; men had slaughtered one another, heaps on heaps. There had been wars within as well as wars without. Conscience had fought with man; Satan had tormented man with thoughts of sin. There had been no peace on earth since Adam fell. But, now, when the new-born King made his appearance, the swaddling band with which he was wrapped up was the white flag of peace. That manger was the place where the treaty was signed, whereby warfare should be stopped between man's conscience and himself, man's conscience and his God. It was then, that day, the trumpet blew—"Sheathe the sword, oh man, sheathe the sword, oh conscience, for God is now at peace with man, and man at peace with God." Do you not feel my brethren, that the gospel of God is peace to man? Where else can peace be found, but in the message of Jesus? Go legalist, work for peace with toil and pain, and thou shalt never find it. Go, thou, that trustest in the law: go thou, to Sinai; look to the flames that Moses saw, and shrink, and tremble, and despair; for peace is nowhere to be found, but in him, of whom it is said, "This man shall be peace." And what a peace it is, beloved! It is peace like a river, and righteousness like the waves of the sea. It is the peace of God that passeth all understanding, which keeps our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. This sacred peace between the pardoned soul and God the pardoner; this marvellous at-one-ment between the sinner and his judge, this was it that the angels sung when they said, "peace on earth"

3. And, then, they wisely ended their song with a third note. They said, "Good will to man." Philosophers have said that

God has a good will toward man; but I never knew any man who derived much comfort from their philosophical assertion. Wise men have thought from what we have seen in creation that God had much good will toward man, or else his works would never have been so constructed for their comfort; but I never heard of any man who could risk his soul's peace upon such a faint hope as that. But I have not only heard of thousands, but I know them, who are quite sure that God has a good will towards men; and if you ask their reason, they will give a full and perfect answer. They say, he has good will toward man for he gave his Son. No greater proof of kindness between the Creator and his subjects can possibly be afforded than when the Creator gives his only begotten and well beloved Son to die. Though the first note is God-like, and though the second note is peaceful, this third note melts my heart the most. Some think of God as if he were a morose being who hated all mankind. Some picture him as if he were some abstract subsistence taking no interest in our affairs. Hark ye, God has "good will toward men." You know what good will means. Well, all that it means, and more, God has to you, ye sons and daughters of Adam. Swearer, you have cursed God; he has not fulfilled his curse on you; he has good will towards you, though you have no good will towards him. Infidel, you have sinned high and hard against the Most High; he has said no hard things against you, for he has good will towards men. Poor sinner, thou hast broken his laws; thou art half afraid to come to the throne of his mercy lest he should spurn thee; hear thou this, and be comforted—God has good will towards men, so good a will that he has said, and said it with an oath too, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but had rather that he should turn unto me and



live;" so good a will moreover that he has even condescended to say, "Come, now, let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow." And if you say, "Lord, how shall I know that thou hast this good will towards me," he points to yonder manger, and says, "Sinner, if I had not a good will towards thee, would I have parted with my Son? if I had not good will towards the human race, would I have given up my Son to become one of that race that he might by so doing redeem them from death? Ye that doubt the Master's love, look ye to that circle of angels; see their blaze of glory; hear their song, and let your doubts die away in that sweet music and be buried in a shroud of harmony. He has good will to men; he is willing to pardon; he passes by iniquity, transgression, and sin. And mark thee, if Satan shall then add, "But though God hath good will, yet he cannot violate his justice, therefore his mercy may be ineffective, and you may die;" then listen to that first note of the song, "Glory to God in the highest," and reply to Satan and all his temptations, that when God shows good will to a penitent sinner, there is not only peace in the sinner's heart, but it brings glory to every attribute of God, and so he can be just, and yet justify the sinner, and glorify himself.

I do not pretend to say that I have opened all the instructions contained in these three sentences, but I may perhaps direct you into a train of thought that may serve you for the week. I hope that all through the week you will have a truly merry Christmas by feeling the power of these words, and knowing the unction of of them. "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men."

II. Next, I have to present to you some EMOTIONAL THOUGHTS.

Friends, doth not this verse, this song of angels, stir your heart with happiness? When I read that, and found the angels singing it, I thought to myself, "Then if the angels ushered in the gospel's great Head with singing, ought I not to preach with singing? And ought not my hearers to live with singing? Ought not their hearts to be glad and their spirits to rejoice?" Well, thought I, there be some sombre religionists who were born in a dark night in December that think a smile upon the face is wicked, and believe that for a Christian to be glad and rejoice is to be inconsistent. Ah! I wish these gentlemen had seen the angels when they sang about Christ; for if angels sang about his birth, though it was no concern of theirs, certainly men ought to sing about it as long as they live, sing about it when they die, and sing about it when they live in heaven for ever. I do long to see in the midst of the church more of a singing Christianity. The last few years have been breeding in our midst a groaning and unbelieving Christianity. Now, I doubt not its sincerity, but I do doubt its healthy character. I say it may be true and real enough; God forbid I should say a word against the sincerity of those who practise it; but it is a sickly religion.

Watts hit the mark when he said,

"Religion never was designed  
To make our pleasures less."

It is designed to do away with some of our pleasures, but it gives us many more, to make up for what it takes away; so it does not make them less. O ye that see in Christ nothing but a subject to stimulate your doubts and make the tears run down your cheeks; O ye that always say,

“Lord, what a wretched land is this,  
That yields us no supplies,”

Come ye hither and see the angels. Do they tell their story with groans, and sobs, and sighs? Ah, no; they shout aloud, “Glory to God in the highest.” Now, imitate them my dear brethren. If you are professors of religion, try always to have a cheerful carriage. Let others mourn; but

“Why should the children of a king  
Go mourning all their days?”

Anoint your head and wash your face; appear not unto men to fast. Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say unto you rejoice. Specially this week be not ashamed to be glad. You need not think it a wicked thing to be happy. Penance and whipping, and misery are no such very virtuous things, after all. The damned are miserable; let the saved be happy. Why should you hold fellowship with the lost by feelings of perpetual mourning? Why not rather anticipate the joys of heaven, and begin to sing on earth that song which you will never need to end? The first emotion then that we ought to cherish in our hearts is the emotion of *joy and gladness*.

Well, what next? Another emotion is that of confidence. I am not sure that I am right in calling that an emotion, but still in me it is so much akin to it, that I will venture to be wrong if I be so. Now, if when Christ came on this earth God had sent some black creature down from heaven, (if there be such creatures there) to tell us, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men,” and if with a frowning brow and a stammering tongue he delivered his message, if I had been there and heard it, I should have scrupled to believe him, for I should have said, “You don’t look like the messenger that God

would send—stammering fellow as you are—with such glad news as this.” But when the angels came there was no doubting the truth of what they said, because it was quite certain that the angels believed it; they told it as if they did, for they told it with singing, with joy and gladness. If some friend, having heard that a legacy was left you, and should come to you with a solemn countenance, and a tongue like a funeral bell, saying, “Do you know so-and-so has left you £10,000?” Why, you would say, “Ah! I dare say,” and laugh in his face. But if your brother should suddenly burst into your room, and exclaim, “I say, what do you think? You are a rich man; So-and-so has left you £10,000!” Why you would say, “I think it is very likely to be true, for he looks so happy over it.” Well, when these angels came from heaven they told the news just as if they believed it; and though I have often wickedly doubted my Lord’s good will, I think I never could have doubted it while I heard those angels singing. No, I should say, “The messengers themselves are proof of the truth, for it seems they have heard it from God’s lips; they have no doubt about it, for see how joyously they tell the news.” Now, poor soul, thou that art afraid lest God should destroy thee, and thou thinkest that God will never have mercy upon thee, look at the singing angels and doubt if thou darest. Do not go to the synagogue of long-faced hypocrites to hear the minister who preaches with a nasal twang, with misery in his face, whilst he tells you that God has goodwill towards men; I know you won’t believe what he says, for he does not preach with joy in his countenance; he is telling you good news with a grunt, and you are not likely to receive it. But go straightway to the plain where Bethlehem shepherds sat by night, and when you hear the angels singing out the gospel, by the grace of God upon

you, you cannot help believing that they manifestly feel the preciousness of telling. Blessed Christmas, that brings such creatures as angels to confirm our faith in God's goodwill to men!

III. I must now bring before you the third point. There are some PROPHETIC UTTERANCES contained in these words. The angels sang "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men." But I look around, and what see I in the wide, wide world? I do not see God honoured. I see the heathen bowing down before their idols; I mark the Romanist casting himself before the rotten rags of his relics, and the ugly figures of his images. I look about me, and I see tyranny lording it over the bodies and souls of men; I see God forgotten; I see a worldly race pursuing mammon; I see a bloody race pursuing Moloch; I see ambition riding like Nimrod over the land, God forgotten, his name dishonoured. And was this all the angels sang about? Is this all that made them sing "Glory to God in the highest?" Ah! no. There are brighter days approaching. They sang, "Peace on earth." But I hear still the clarion of war; and the cannon's horrid roar: not yet have they turned the sword into a ploughshare, and the spear into a pruning-hook! War still reigns. Is this all that the angels sang about? And whilst I see wars to the ends of the earth, am I to believe that this was all the angels expected? Ah! no, brethren; the angels' song is big with prophecy; it travaileth in birth with glories. A few more years, and he that lives them out shall see why angels sang; a few more years, and he that will come shall come, and will not tarry. Christ the Lord will come again, and when he cometh he shall cast the idols from their thrones; he shall dash down every fashion of heresy and every shape of idolatry; he shall reign from pole to pole with illimitable sway: he shall reign,

when like a scroll, yon blue heavens have passed away. No strife shall vex Messiah's reign, no blood shall then be shed; they'll hang the useless helmet high, and study war no more. The hour is approaching when the temple of Janus shall be shut for ever, and when cruel Mars shall be hooted from the earth. The day is coming when the lion shall eat straw like the ox, when the leopard shall lie down with the kid; when the weaned child shall put his hand upon the cockatrice den and play with the asp. The hour approacheth; the first streaks of the sunlight have made glad the age in which we live. Lo, he comes, with trumpets and with clouds of glory; he shall come for whom we look with joyous expectation, whose coming shall be glory to his redeemed, and confusion to his enemies. Ah! brethren, when the angels sang this there was an echo through the long aisles of a glorious future. That echo was—

“Hallelujah! Christ the Lord  
God Omnipotent shall reign.”

Ay, and doubtless the angels heard by faith the fulness of the song,

“Hark! the song of jubilee  
Loud as mighty thunders' roar,  
Or the fulness of the sea,  
When it breaks upon the shore.”

“Christ the Lord Omnipotent reigneth.”

IV. Now, I have one more lesson for you, and I have done. That lesson is PRECEPTIVE. I wish everybody that keeps Christmas this year, would keep it as the angels kept it. There are many persons who, when they talk about keeping Christmas, mean by that the cutting of the bands of their

religion for one day in the year, as if Christ were the Lord of misrule, as if the birth of Christ should be celebrated like the orgies of Bacchus. There are some very religious people, that on Christmas would never forget to go to church in the morning; they believe Christmas to be nearly as holy as Sunday, for they reverence the tradition of the elders. Yet their way of spending the rest of the day is very remarkable; for if they see their way straight up stairs to their bed at night, it must be by accident. They would not consider they had kept Christmas in a proper manner, if they did not verge on gluttony and drunkenness. They are many who think Christmas cannot possibly be kept, except there be a great shout of merriment and mirth in the house, and added to that the boisterousness of sin. Now, my brethren, although we, as successors of the Puritans, will not keep the day in any religious sense whatever, attaching nothing more to it than to any other day: believing that every day may be a Christmas for ought we know, and wishing to make every day Christmas, if we can, yet we must try to set an example to others how to behave on that day; and especially since the angels gave glory to God: let us do the same.

Once more the angels said, "Peace to men:" let us labour if we can to make peace next Christmas day. Now, old gentleman, you won't take your son in: he has offended you. Fetch him at Christmas. "Peace on earth;" you know: that is a Christmas Carol. Make peace in your family.

Now, brother, you have made a vow that you will never speak to your brother again. Go after him and say, "Oh, my dear fellow, let not this day's sun go down upon our wrath." Fetch him in, and give him your hand. Now, Mr. Tradesman, you have an opponent in trade, and you have said some very hard words

about him lately. If you do not make the matter up to-day, or to-morrow, or as soon as you can, yet do it on that day. That is the way to keep Christmas, peace on earth and glory to God. And oh, if thou hast anything on thy conscience, anything that prevents thy having peace of mind, keep thy Christmas in thy chamber, praying to God to give thee peace; for it is peace on earth, mind, peace in thyself, peace with thyself, peace with thy fellow men, peace with thy God. And do not think thou hast well celebrated that day till thou canst say, "O God,

‘With the world, myself, and thee  
I ere I sleep at peace will be.’ ”

And when the Lord Jesus has become your peace, remember, there is another thing, *good will* towards men. Do not try to keep Christmas without keeping good will towards men. You are a gentleman, and have servants. Well, try and set their chimneys on fire with a large piece of good, substantial beef for them. If you are men of wealth, you have poor in your neighbourhood. Find something wherewith to clothe the naked, and feed the hungry, and make glad the mourner. Remember, it is good will towards men. Try, if you can, to show them goodwill at this special season; and if you will do that, the poor will say with me, that indeed they wish there were six Christmases in the year.

Let each one of us go from this place determined, that if we are angry all the year round, this next week shall be an exception; that if we have snarled at everybody last year, this Christmas time we will strive to be kindly affectionate to others; and if we have lived all this year at enmity with God, I pray that by his Spirit he may this week give us peace with him; and then, indeed, my brother, it will be the merriest Christmas we



ever had in all our lives. You are going home to your father and mother, young men; many of you are going from your shops to your homes. You remember what I preached on last Christmas time. Go home to thy friends, and tell them what the Lord hath done for thy soul, and that will make a blessed round of stories at the Christmas fire. If you will each of you tell your parents how the Lord met with you in the house of prayer; how, when you left home, you were a gay, wild blade, but have now come back to love your mother's God, and read your father's Bible. Oh, what a happy Christmas that will make! What more shall I say? May God give you peace with yourselves; may he give you good will towards all your friends, your enemies, and your neighbours; and may he give you grace to give glory to God in the highest. I will say no more, except at the close of this sermon to wish every one of you, when the day shall come, the happiest Christmas you ever had in your lives.

“Now with angels round the throne,  
Cherubim and seraphim,  
And the church, which still is one,  
Let us swell the solemn hymn;  
Glory to the great I AM!  
Glory to the Victim Lamb.

Blessing, honour, glory, might,  
And dominion infinite,  
To the Father of our Lord,  
To the Spirit and the Word;  
As it was all worlds before,  
Is, and shall be evermore.”

# A CHRISTMAS QUESTION

## DECEMBER 25TH, 1859

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given.”—Isaiah 9:6

UPON other occasions I have explained the main part of this verse—“the government shall be upon his shoulders, his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God.” If God shall spare me, on some future occasion I hope to take the other titles, “The Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” But now this morning the portion which will engage our attention is this, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given.” The sentence is a double one, but it has in it no tautology. The careful reader will soon discover a distinction; and it is not a distinction without a difference. “Unto us a *child* is *born*, unto us a *Son* is *given*.” As Jesus Christ is a child in his human nature, he is born, begotten of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary. He is as truly born, as certainly a child, as any other man that ever lived upon the face of the earth. He is thus in his humanity a child born. But as Jesus Christ is God’s Son, he is not born, but given, begotten of his Father from before all worlds, begotten—not made, being of the same

substance with the Father. The doctrine of the eternal affiliation of Christ is to be received as an undoubted truth of our holy religion. But as to any explanation of it, no man should venture thereon, for it remaineth among the deep things of God—one of those solemn mysteries indeed, into which the angels dare not look, nor do they desire to pry into it—a mystery which we must not attempt to fathom, for it is utterly beyond the grasp of any finite being. As well might a gnat seek to drink in the ocean, as a finite creature to comprehend the Eternal God. A God whom we could understand would be no God. If we could grasp him he could not be infinite: if we could understand him, then were he not divine. Jesus Christ then, I say, as a Son, is not born to us, but given. He is a boon bestowed on us, “For God so loved the world, that he *sent* his only begotten *Son* into the world.” He was not born in this world as God’s Son, but he was *sent*, or was given, so that you clearly perceive that the distinction is a suggestive one, and conveys much good truth to us. “Unto us a *child* is *born*, unto us a *Son* is *given*.”

This morning, however, the principal object of my discourse, and, indeed, the sole one, is to bring out the force of those two little words, “*unto us*.” For you will perceive that here the full force of the passage lies. “For UNTO US a child is born, UNTO US a Son is given.” The divisions of my discourse are very simple ones. First, *is it so?* Secondly, *if it is so, what then?* Thirdly, *if it is not so, what then?*

I. In the first place, Is IT so? Is it true that *unto us* a child is born, *unto us* a Son is given? It is a fact that a child is born. Upon that I use no argument. We receive it as a fact, more fully established than any other fact in history, that the Son of God became man, was born at Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. It is a fact, too, that a Son is

given. About that we have no question. The infidel may dispute, but we, professing to be believers in Scripture, receive it as an undeniable truth, that God has given his only begotten Son to be the Saviour of men. But THE matter of question is this: Is this child born to us? Is he given to us? This is the matter of anxious enquiry. Have we a personal interest in the child that was born at Bethlehem? Do we know that he is our Saviour?—that he has brought glad tidings to us?—that to us he belongs? and that we belong to him? I say this is matter of very grave and solemn investigation. It is a very observable fact, that the very best of men are sometimes troubled with questions with regard to their own interest in Christ, while men who never are troubled at all about the matter are very frequently presumptuous deceivers, who have no part in this matter. I have often observed that some of the people about whom I felt most sure, were the very persons who were the least sure of themselves. It reminds me of the history of a godly man named Simon Brown, a minister in the olden times in the City of London. He became so extremely sad in heart, so depressed in spirit, that at last he conceived the idea that his soul was annihilated. It was all in vain to talk to the good man, you could not persuade him that he had a soul; but all the time he was preaching, and praying, and working, more like a man that had two souls than none. When he preached, his eyes poured forth plenteous floods of tears, and when he prayed, there was a divine fervour and heavenly prevalence in every petition. Now so it is with many Christians. They seem to be the very picture of godliness; their life is admirable, and their conversation heavenly, but yet they are always crying,—“ ’Tis a point I long to know,

Oft it causes anxious thought,

Do I love the Lord or no?  
Am I his or am I not?"

So does it happen, that the best of men will question while the worst of men will presume. Ay, I have seen the men about whose eternal destiny I had serious questioning, whose inconsistencies in life were palpable and glaring, who have prated concerning their sure portion in Israel, and their infallible hope, as though they believed others to be as easily duped as themselves. Now, what reason shall we give for this foolhardiness? Learn it from this illustration: You see a number of men riding along a narrow road upon the edge of the sea. It is a very perilous path, for the way is rugged and a tremendous precipice bounds the pathway on the left. Let but the horse's foot slip once, and they dash downwards to destruction. See how cautiously the riders journey, how carefully the horses place their feet. But do you observe yon rider, at what a rate he dashes along, as if he were riding a steeple-chase with Satan? You hold up your hands in an agony of fear, trembling lest every moment his horse's foot should slip, and he should be dashed down; and you say, why so careless a rider? The man is a blind rider on a blind horse. They cannot see where they are. He thinks he is on a sure road, and therefore it is that he rides so fast. Or to vary the picture; sometimes when persons are asleep, they take to walking, and they will climb where others will not think of venturing. Giddy heights that would turn our brain seem safe enough to them. So there be many spiritual sleep-walkers in our midst, who think that they are awake. But they are not. Their very presumption in venturing to the high places of self-confidence, proves that they are somnambulists; not awake, but men who walk and talk in their

sleep. It is, then, I say, really a matter of serious questioning with all men who would be right at last, as to whether this child is born to *us*, and this Son given to *us*?

I shall now help you to answer the question.

1. If this child who now lies before the eyes of your faith, wrapped in swaddling clothes in Bethlehem's manger, is born *to you*, my hearer, then *you are born again!* For this child is not born to you unless you are born to this child. All who have an interest in Christ are, in the fulness of time, by grace converted, quickened, and renewed. All the redeemed are not yet converted, but they will be. Before the hour of death arrives their nature shall be changed, their sins shall be washed away, and they shall pass from death unto life. If any man tells me that Christ is his Redeemer, although he has never experienced regeneration, that man utters what he does not know; his religion is vain, and his hope is a delusion. Only men who are born again can claim the babe in Bethlehem as being theirs. "But," saith one, "how am I to know whether I am born again or not?" Answer this question also by another: Has there been a change effected by divine grace *within you*? Are your loves the very opposite of what they were? Do you now hate the vain things you once admired, and do you seek after that precious pearl which you at one time despised? Is your heart thoroughly renewed in its object? Can you say that the bent of your desire is changed? that your face is Zionward, and your feet set upon the path of grace? that whereas your heart once longed for deep draughts of sin, it now longs to be holy? and whereas you once loved the pleasures of the world, they have now become as draff and dross to you, for you only love the pleasures of heavenly things, and are longing to enjoy more of them on earth, that you may be prepared to enjoy a fulness of

them hereafter? Are you renewed within? For mark, my hearer, the new birth does not consist in washing the outside of the cup and platter, but in cleansing the inner man. It is all in vain to put up the stone upon the sepulchre, wash it extremely white, and garnish it with the flowers of the season; the sepulchre itself must be cleansed. The dead man's bones that lie in that charnel-house of the human heart must be cleansed away. Nay, they must be made to live. The heart must no longer be a tomb of death, but a temple of life. Is it so with you, my hearer? For recollect, you may be very different in the outward, but if you are not changed in the inward, this child is not born to you.

But I put another question. Although the main matter of regeneration lies within, yet it manifests itself without. Say, then, has there been a change in you in the exterior? Do you think that others who look at you would be compelled to say, this man is not what he used to be? Do not your companions observe a change? Have they not laughed at you for what they think to be your hypocrisy, your puritanism, your sternness? Do you think now that if an angel should follow you into your secret life, should track you to your closet and see you on your knees, that he would detect something in you which he could never have seen before? For, mark, my dear hearer, there must be a change in the outward life, or else there is no change within. In vain you bring me to the tree, and say that the tree's nature is changed. If I still see it bringing forth wild grapes, it is a wild vine still. And if I mark upon you the apples of Sodom and the grapes of Gomorrah, you are still a tree accursed and doomed, notwithstanding all your fancied experience. The proof of the Christian is in the living. To other men, the proof of our conversion is not what you feel, but what you do. To

yourself your feelings may be good enough evidence, but to the minister and others who judge of you, the outward walk is the main guide. At the same time, let me observe that a man's outward life may be very much like that of a Christian, and yet there may be no religion in him at all. Have you ever seen two jugglers in the street with swords, pretending to fight with one another. See how they cut, and slash, and hack at one another, till you are half afraid there will soon be murder done. They seem to be so very much in earnest that you are half in the mind to call in the police to part them. See with what violence that one has aimed a terrific blow at the other one's head, which his comrade dexterously warded off by keeping a well-timed guard. Just watch them a minute, and you will see that all these cuts and thrusts come in a pre-arranged order. There is no heart in the fighting after all. They do not fight so roughly as they would if they were real enemies. So, sometimes I have seen a man pretending to be very angry against sin. But watch him a little while, and you will see it is only a fencer's trick. He does not give his cuts out of order, there is no earnestness in his blows; it is all pretence, it is only mimic stage-play. The fencers, after they have ended their performance, shake hands with one another, and divide the coppers which the gaping throng have given them; and so does this man do, he shakes hands with the devil in private, and the two deceivers share the spoil. The hypocrite and the devil are very good friends after all, and they mutually rejoice over their profits: the devil leering because he has won the soul of the professor, and the hypocrite laughing because he has won his pelf. Take care, then, that your outward life is not a mere stage-play, but that your antagonism to sin is real and intense; and that you strike right and left, as though you meant to slay the monster, and



cast its limbs to the winds of heaven.

I will just put another question. If thou hast been born again, there is another matter by which to try thee. Not only is thy inward self altered, and thy outward self too, but the very root and principle of thy life must become totally new. When we are in sin we live to self, but when we are renewed we live to God. While we are unregenerate, our principle is to seek our own pleasure, our own advancement; but that man is not truly born again who does not live with a far different aim from this. Change a man's principles, and you change his feelings, you change his actions. Now, grace changes the principles of man. It lays the axe at the root of the tree. It does not saw away at some big limb, it does not try to alter the sap; but it gives a new root, and plants us in fresh soil. The man's inmost self, the deep rocks of his principles upon which the topsoil of his actions rest, the soul of his manhood is thoroughly changed, and he is a new creature in Christ. "But," says one, "I see no reason why I should be born again." Ah, poor creature, it is because thou hast never seen thyself. Didst thou ever see a man in the looking-glass of the Word of God—what a strange monster he is. Do you know, a man by nature has his heart where his feet ought to be:—that is to say, his heart is set upon the earth, whereas he ought to be treading it beneath his feet; and stranger mystery still, his heels are where his heart should be:—that is to say, he is kicking against the God of heaven when he ought to be setting his affections on things above. Man by nature when he sees clearest, only looks down, can only see that which is beneath him, he cannot see the things which are above; and strange to say the sunlight of heaven blinds him; light from heaven he looks not for. He asks for his light in darkness. The earth is to him his heaven, and he sees

suns in its muddy pools and stars in its filth. He is, in fact, a man turned upside down. The fall has so ruined our nature, that the most monstrous thing on the face of the earth is a fallen man. The ancients used to paint griffins, gryphons, dragons, chimeras, and all kinds of hideous things; but if a skilful hand could paint *man* accurately, none of us would look at the picture, for it is a sight that none ever saw except the lost in hell; and that is one part of their intolerable pain, that they are compelled always to look upon themselves. Now, then, see you not that ye must be born again, and unless ye are so this child is not born to *you*.

2. But I go forward. If this child is born to you, you are a *child*, and the question arises, are you so? Man grows from childhood up to manhood naturally; in grace men grow from manhood down to childhood; and the nearer we come to true childhood, the nearer we come to the image of Christ. For was not Christ called “a child,” even after he had ascended up to heaven? “Thy holy child Jesus.” Brethren and sisters, can you say that you have been made into children? Do you take God’s Word just as it stands, simply because your heavenly Father says so? Are you content to believe mysteries without demanding to have them explained? Are you ready to sit in the infant class, and be a little one? Are you willing to hang upon the breast of the church, and suck in the unadulterated milk of the Word—never questioning for a moment what your divine Lord reveals, but believing it on his own authority, whether it seemed to be above reason, or beneath reason, or even contrary to reason? Now, “except ye be converted and become as little children,” this child is not born to you; except like a child you are humble, teachable, obedient, pleased with your Father’s will and willing to assign all to him, there is grave

matter of question whether this child is born *to you*. But what a pleasing sight it is to see a man converted and made into a little child. Many times has my heart leaped for joy, when I have seen a giant infidel who used to reason against Christ, who had not a word in his dictionary bad enough for Christ's people, come by divine grace to believe the gospel. That man sits down and weeps, feels the full power of salvation, and from that time drops all his questionings, becomes the very reverse of what he was. He thinks himself meaner than the meanest believer. He is content to do the meanest work for the church of Christ, and takes his station—not with Locke or Newton, as a mighty Christian philosopher—but with Mary as a simple learner, sitting at Jesus' feet, to hear and learn of him. If ye are not children, then this child is not born to you.

3. And now let us take the second sentence and put a question or two upon that. Is this son given to us? I pause a minute to beg your personal attention. I am trying, if I may, so to preach that I may make you all question yourselves. I pray you let not one of you exempt himself from the ordeal, but let each one ask himself, is it true that unto me a Son is given? Now, if this Son is given *to you, you are a son yourself*. "For unto as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God." "Christ became a Son that in all things he might be made like unto his brethren." The Son of God is not mine to enjoy, to love, to delight in, unless I am a son of God too. Now, my hearer, have you a *fear* of God before your eyes—a filial fear, a fear which a child has lest it should grieve its parent? Say, have you a child's *love* to God? Do you *trust* to him as your father, your provider, and your friend? Have you in your breast "The spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father?" Are there times with you when on your

knees you can say, "My Father and my God." Does the Spirit bear witness with your spirit that you are born of God? and while this witness is born, does your heart fly up to your Father and to your God, in ecstasy of delight to clasp him who long ago hath clasped you in the covenant of his love, in the arms of his effectual grace? Now, mark my hearer, if thou dost not sometimes enjoy the spirit of adoption, if thou art not a son or daughter of Zion, then deceive not thyself, this Son is not given to thee.

4. And, then, to put it in another shape. If unto us a Son is given, then *we are given to the Son*. Now, what say you to this question also? Are you given up to Christ? Do you feel that you have nothing on earth to live for but to glorify him? Can you say in your heart, "Great God, if I be not deceived I am wholly thine?" Are you ready to-day to write over again your consecration vow? Canst thou say, "Take me! All that I am and all I have, shall be for ever thine. I would give up all my goods, all my powers, all my time, and all my hours; and thine I would be—wholly thine." "Ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price." And if this Son of God be given to you, you will have consecrated yourself wholly to him; and you will feel that his honour is your life's object, that his glory is the one great desire of your panting spirit. Now is it so, my hearer? Ask thyself the question. I pray thee, and do not deceive thyself in the answer.

I will just repeat the four different proofs again. If unto me a child is born, then I have been born again; and, moreover, I am now in consequence of that new birth, a child. If, again, a Son has been given to me, then I am a son; and again I am given to that Son who is given to me. I have tried to put these tests in the way that the text would suggest them. I pray you carry

them home with you. If you do not recollect the words, yet do recollect to search yourselves, and see, my hearers, whether you can say, "Unto me this Son is given." For, indeed, if Christ is not my Christ, he is of little worth to me. If I cannot say he loved me and gave himself *for me*, of what avail is all the merit of his righteousness, or all the plenitude of his atonement? Bread in the shop is well enough, but if I am hungry and cannot get it, I starve although granaries be full. Water in the river is well enough, but if I am in a desert and cannot reach the stream, if I can hear it in the distance and am yet lying down to die of thirst, the murmuring of the rill, or the flowing of the river, helps to tantalize me, while I die in dark despair. Better for you, my hearers to have perished as Hottentots, to have gone down to your graves as dwellers in some benighted land, than to live where the name of Christ is continually hymned, and where his glory is extolled, and yet to go down to your tombs without an interest in him, unblessed by his gospel, unwashed in his blood, unclothed of his robe of righteousness. God help you, that you may be blessed in him, and may sing sweetly, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given."

II. This brings me to my second head, upon which I shall be brief. Is it so? IF IT IS SO, WHAT THEN? *If it is so, why am I doubtful to-day?* Why is my spirit questioning? Why do I not realize the fact? My hearer, if the Son is given to thee, how is it that thou art this day asking whether thou art Christ's or not? Why dost thou not labour to make thy calling and election sure? Why tarriest thou in the plains of doubt? Get thee up, get thee up to the high mountains of confidence, and never rest till thou canst say without a fear that thou art mistaken, "I know that my Redeemer liveth. I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him." I may have a large number of

persons here to whom it is a matter of uncertainty as to whether Christ is theirs or not. Oh, my dear hearers, rest not content unless you know assuredly that Christ is yours, and that you are Christ's. Suppose you should see in to-morrow's newspaper, (although, by the way, if you believed anything you saw there you would probably be mistaken) but suppose you should see a notification that some rich man had left you an immense estate. Suppose, as you read it, you were well aware that the person mentioned was a relative of yours, and that it was likely to be true. It may be you have prepared to-morrow for a family meeting, and you are expecting brother John and sister Mary and their little ones to dine with you. But I very much question whether you would not be away from the head of the table to go and ascertain whether the fact were really so. "Oh," you would say, "I am sure I should enjoy my Christmas dinner all the better if I were quite sure about this matter;" and all day, if you did not go, you would be on the tip-toe of expectation; you would be as it were, sitting upon pins and needles until you knew whether it were the fact or not. Now there is a proclamation gone forth to-day, and it is a true one, too, that Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners. The question with you is whether he has saved you, and whether you have an interest in him. I beseech you, give no sleep to your eyes, and no slumber to your eyelids, till you have read your "title clear to mansions in the skies." What, man! shall your eternal destiny be a matter of uncertainty to you? What! is heaven or hell involved in this matter, and will you rest until you know which of these shall be your everlasting portion? Are you content while it is a question whether God loves you, or whether he is angry with you? Can you be easy while you remain in doubt as to whether you are

condemned in sin, or justified by faith which is in Christ Jesus? Get thee up, man; I beseech thee by the living God, and by thine own soul's safety, get thee up and read the records. Search and look, and try and test thyself, to see whether it be so or not. For if it be so, why should not we know it? If the Son is given to me, why should not I be sure of it? If the child is born to me, why should I not know it for a certainty, that I may even now live in the enjoyment of my privilege—a privilege, the value of which I shall never know to the full, till I arrive in glory?

Again, if it be so, another question. *Why are we sad?* I am looking upon faces just now that appear the very reverse of gloomy, but mayhap the smile covers an aching heart. Brother and sister, why are we sad this morning, if unto us a child is born, if unto us a Son is given? Hark, hark to the cry! It is "Harvest home! Harvest home!" See the maidens as they dance, and the young men as they make merry. And why is this mirth? Because they are storing the precious fruits of the earth, they are gathering together unto their barns wheat which will soon be consumed. And what, brothers and sisters, have we the bread which endureth to eternal life and are we unhappy? Does the worldling rejoice when his corn is increased, and do we not rejoice when, "Unto us a child is born, and unto us a Son is given?" Hark, yonder! What means the firing of the Tower guns? Why all this ringing of bells in the church steeples, as if all London were mad with joy? There is a prince born; therefore there is this salute, and therefore are the bells ringing. Ah, Christians, ring the bells of your hearts, fire the salute of your most joyous songs, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given." Dance, O my heart, and ring out peals of gladness! Ye drops of blood within my veins, dance every

one of you! Oh! all my nerves become harp strings, and let gratitude touch you with angelic fingers! And thou, my tongue, shout—shout to his praise, who hath said to thee —“Unto thee a child is born, unto thee a Son is given.” Wipe that tear away! Come, stop that sighing! Hush yon murmuring. What matters your poverty? “Unto you a child is born.” What matters your sickness? “Unto you a Son is given.” What matters your sin? For this child shall take the sin away, and this Son shall wash and make you fit for heaven. I say, if it be so, “Lift up the heart, lift up the voice, Rejoice aloud! ye saints rejoice!”

But, once more, if it be so, what then? *Why are our hearts so cold?* and why is it that we do so little for him who has done so much for us? Jesus, art thou mine! Am I saved? How is it that I love thee so little? Why is it that when I preach I am not more in earnest, and when I pray I am not more intensely fervent? How is it that we give so little to Christ who gave himself for us? How is it that we serve him so sadly who served us so perfectly? He consecrated himself wholly; how is it that our consecration is marred and partial? We are continually sacrificing to self and not to him?

O beloved brethren, yield yourselves up this morning. What have you got in the world? “Oh,” saith one, “I have nothing; I am poor and penniless, and all but houseless.” Give thyself to Christ. You have heard the story of the pupils to a Greek philosopher. On a certain day it was the custom to give to the philosopher a present. One came and gave him gold. Another could not bring him gold but brought him silver. One brought him a robe, and another some delicacy for food. But one of them came up, and said, “Oh, Solon, I am poor, I have



nothing to give to thee, but yet I will give thee something better than all these have given; I give thee myself." Now, if you have gold and silver, if you have aught of this world's goods, give in your measure to Christ; but take care, above all, that you give yourself to him, and let your cry be from this day forth, "Do not I love thee dearest Lord?

Oh search my heart and see,  
And turn each cursed idol out  
That dares to rival thee.

Do not I love thee from my soul?  
Then let me nothing love:  
Dead be my heart to every joy,  
When Jesus cannot move."

III. Well, now I have all but done, but give your solemn, very solemn attention, while I come to my last head:—IF IT IS NOT SO, WHAT THEN? Dear hearer, I cannot tell where thou art—but wherever thou mayst be in this hall, the eyes of my heart are looking for thee, that when they have seen thee, they may weep over thee. Ah! miserable wretch, without a hope, without Christ, without God. Unto thee there is no Christmas mirth; for thee no child is born; to thee no Son is given. Sad is the story of the poor men and women, who during the week before last fell down dead in our streets through cruel hunger and bitter cold. But far more pitiable is thy lot, far more terrible shall be thy condition in the day when thou shalt cry for a drop of water to cool thy burning tongue, and it shall be denied thee; when thou shalt seek for death, for grim cold death—seek for him as for a friend, and yet thou shalt not find him. For the fire of hell shall not consume thee, nor its terrors devour thee. Thou shalt long to die, yet shalt thou linger in eternal death—

dying every hour, yet never receiving the much coveted boon of death. What shall I say to thee this morning? Oh! Master, help me to speak a word in season, now. I beseech thee, my hearer, if Christ is not thine this morning, may God the Spirit help thee to do what I now command thee to do. First of all, confess thy sins; not into my ear, nor into the ear of any living man. Go to thy chamber and confess that thou art vile. Tell him thou art a wretch undone without his sovereign grace. But do not think there is any merit in confession. There is none. All your confession cannot merit forgiveness, though God has promised to pardon the man who confesses his sin and forsakes it. Imagine that some creditor had a debtor who owed him a thousand pounds. He calls upon him, and says, "I demand my money." But, says the other, "I owe you nothing." That man will be arrested and thrown into prison. However, his creditor says, "I wish to deal mercifully with you; make a frank confession, and I will forgive you all the debt." "Well," says the man, "I do acknowledge that I owe you two hundred pounds." "No," says he, "that will not do." "Well, sir, I confess I owe you five hundred pounds;" and by degrees he comes to confess that he owes the thousand. Is there any merit in that confession? No; but yet you could see that no creditor would think of forgiving a debt which was not acknowledged. It is the least that you can do, to acknowledge your sin; and though there be no merit in the confession, yet true to his promise, God will give you pardon through Christ. That is one piece of advice. I pray you take it. Do not throw it to the winds; do not leave it as soon as you get out of Exeter Hall. Take it with you, and may this day become a confession-day with many of you. But next, when you have made a confession, I beseech you renounce yourself. You have been resting perhaps in some

hope that you would make yourself better, and so save yourself. Give up that delusive fancy. You have seen the silkworm: it will spin, and spin, and spin, and then it will die where it has spun itself a shroud. And your good works are but a spinning for yourself a robe for your dead soul. You can do nothing by your best prayers, your best tears, or your best works, to merit eternal life. Why, the Christian who is converted to God, will tell you that he cannot live a holy life by himself. If the ship in the sea cannot steer itself aright, do you think the wood that lies in the carpenter's yard can put itself together, and make itself into a ship, and then go out to sea and sail to America? Yet, this is just what you imagine. The Christian who is God's workmanship can do nothing, and yet you think you can do something. Now, give up *self*. God help you to strike a black mark through every idea of what you can do.

Then, lastly, and I pray God help you here my dear hearers, when thou hast confessed thy sin and given up all hope of self-salvation, go to the place where Jesus died in agony. Go then in meditation to Calvary. There he hangs. It is the middle cross of these three. Methinks I see him now. I see his poor face emaciated, and his visage more marred than that of any man. I see the beady drops of blood still standing round his pierced temples—marks of that rugged thorn-crown. Ah, I see his body naked—naked to his shame. We may tell all his bones. See there his hands rent with the rough iron, and his feet torn with the nails. The nails have rent through his flesh. There is now not only the hole through which the nail was driven, but the weight of his body has sunken upon his feet, and see the iron is tearing through his flesh. And now the weight of his body hangs upon his arms, and the nails there are rending through the tender nerves. Hark! earth is startled! He

cries, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” Oh, sinner, was ever shriek like that? God hath forsaken him. His God has ceased to be gracious to him. His soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. But hark, again, he cries, “I thirst!” Give him water! give him water! Ye holy women let him drink. But no, his murderers torture him. They thrust into his mouth the vinegar mingled with gall—the bitter with the sharp, the vinegar and the gall. At last, hear him, sinner, for here is your hope. I see him bow his awful head. The King of heaven dies. The God who made the earth has become a man, and the man is about to expire. Hear him! He cries, “It is finished!” and he gives up the ghost. The atonement is finished, the price is paid, the bloody ransom counted down, the sacrifice is accepted. “It is finished!” Sinner, believe in Christ. Cast thyself on him. Sink or swim, take him to be thy all in all. Throw now thy trembling arms around that bleeding body. Sit now at the feet of that cross, and feel the dropping of the precious blood. And as you go out each one of you say in your hearts, “A guilty, weak, and helpless worm, On Christ’s kind arms I fall,

He is my strength and righteousness, My Jesus,  
and my all.”

God grant you grace to do so for Jesus Christ’s sake. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all, for ever and ever. Amen and Amen.

# **A MERRY CHRISTMAS**

## **DECEMBER 23RD, 1860**

“And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.” —Job 1:4, 5

**J**OB was an exceedingly happy man before his great trial. He was as much blessed in the fruit of his body as in his basket and in his store. Our text gives us a very pleasing picture of Job's family. He was a happy man to have had so many children all comfortably settled in life; for you will perceive that they all had houses; they had left his roof; they had all established themselves, and had so prospered in the world that there was not one of them who had not enough of the world's

goods to entertain all the rest. So that it seemed as if Job's prosperity in his business had attended his children in the different places where they had settled. To add to his comfort, they were an undivided family: not like Abraham's household, where there was an Ishmael who mocked Isaac; nor like Isaac's household, where there was an Esau, and a Jacob who sought to supplant him; nor like Jacob's household, where there was a Joseph, and all the rest of his brethren were envious and jealous of him; nor like David's household, where there was perpetual strife and bickering between the one and the other. Job's descendants were a large tribe; but they were all united and knit together in bonds of perfect happiness; and moreover they seem to have had a great desire to preserve their unity as a family. Perhaps Job and his family were the only ones who feared God in the neighbourhood; they wished therefore to keep themselves together as a little flock of sheep in the midst of wolves, as a cluster of stars in the midst of the thick darkness; and what a brilliant constellation they were, all of them shining forth and proclaiming the truth of God! I say it was their desire not only to enjoy pleasantness and peace, but to maintain it; for I think that these annual meetings at the different houses were intended to knit them together, so that if any little strife had arisen, as soon as they met at the next brother's house all might be settled, and the whole host might go on again shoulder to shoulder, and foot to foot, as one phalanx of soldiers for God. I think Job must have been a right happy man. I do not know that he always went to their feasts; perhaps the soberness of age might have a little disqualified him for joining in their youthful enjoyments; but I am sure he commended their feasting; I am quite certain he did not condemn it. If he had condemned it he would never have

offered sacrifice to God, *lest* they should have sinned, but he would have told them at once it was a sinful thing, and that he could give no countenance to it. I think I see the happy group, so happy and holy that surely if David had been there, he would have said. "Behold how good and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." But Job was a godly man, and so godly, that unlike Eli, he brought up his household in the fear of God, and was not only quick to observe any known sin, but was exceedingly jealous over his children, lest secretly and inadvertently in their hearts, while they were at their loaded tables, they might have said or thought anything which might be termed blaspheming God. He therefore as soon as the feasting was over, called them all together, and then as a preacher, told them of the danger to which they were exposed, and as a priest, (for every patriarch before the law was a priest) he offered burnt sacrifices, lest any sin should by any possibility remain upon his sons and daughters. So saith the text I pray that now we may have grace to listen to it; and may what we shall now head abide with us during the coming week, when some of you shall meet together in your own houses! May God grant that our parents, or we, if we be parents, may be as Jobs, and when the feasting shall be over, may there come the sacrifice and the prayer, lest we should have sinned and blasphemed God in our hearts!

I shall divide my sermon thus. First, *the text*, and that is *festive: so we will ring a merry bell*. Secondly, that which is in the text, and that is *instructive: so we will ring the sermon bell*. And, thirdly, *that which follows the text*, and that is *afflictive: so we will ring the funeral bell*.

I. First, then, the text itself, and that is festive: let us therefore, RING THE MERRY BELL. I think I hear distinctly three notes

in its merry peal. First, the text gives a license; secondly, it suggests a caution; and thirdly, it provides a remedy.

And, first, the text gives a *licence*. Now, ye souls who would deny to your fellow-men all sorts of mirth, come and listen to the merry bell of this text, while it gives a license to the righteous especially—a license that they meet together in their houses, and eat and drink, and praise their God. In Cromwell's days, the Puritans thought it an ungodly thing for men to keep Christmas. They, therefore, tried to put it down, and the common crier went through the street, announcing that Christmas was henceforth no more to be kept, it being a Popish, if not a heathenish ceremony. Now, you do not suppose that after the crier had made the proclamation, any living Englishman took any notice of it; at least, I can scarcely imagine that any did, except to laugh at it; for it is idle thus to strain at gnats and stagger under a feather. Albeit, that we do not keep the feast as Papists, nor even as a commemorative festival, yet there is a something in old associations that makes us like the day in which a man may shake off the cares of business, and disport himself with his little ones. God forbid I should be such a Puritan as to proclaim the annihilation of any day of rest which falls to the lot of the labouring man. I wish there were a half-a-dozen holidays in the year. I wish there were more opportunities for the poor to rest; though I would not have as many saint's days as there are in Romish countries; yet, if we had but one or two more days in which the poor man's household, and the rich man's family might meet together, it might perhaps, be better for us. However, I am quite certain that all the preaching in the world will not put Christmas down. You *will* meet next Tuesday, and you *will* feast, and you *will* rejoice, and each of you, as God has given you substance,



will endeavour to make your household glad. Now, instead of telling you that this is all wrong, I think the merry bell of my text gives you a license so to do. Let us think a minute. Feasting is *not* a wrong thing, or otherwise Job would have forbidden it to his children, he would have talked to them seriously, and admonished them that this was an ungodly and wicked custom, to meet together in their houses. But, instead of this, Job only *feared* lest a wrong thing should be made out of a right thing, and offered sacrifices to remove their iniquity; but he did by no means condemn it. Would any of you ask a blessing upon your children's attendance at the theatre Could you say, when they had been in such a place, "It may be they have sinned?" No, you would only talk thus of a right thing. I think I can prove to you that this was a good thing, for first you will notice, they met in *good houses*; they did not go to an ale-house to feast; they had no need to enter the tavern; but they met in their own houses; houses where prayer and praise were wont to be made. How much better for the working man to spend his money on his family than upon liquor sellers! And then it was *in good company*. They did not scrape together all the ruffians of the place to feast with them; but they kept to their own kith and kin; and feasting is good when good men feast; especially when they spare for the poor, as no doubt Job's children did, or else they were quite unworthy of their generous ancestor. They feasted in good houses, and in good company. And they observed during their feasting, good behaviour. Job never heard of a wrong expression they had used; no one ever told him that they had become riotous, or that they had uttered one wrong word, or else Job could not have said, "It *may* be," but he would have said, "It *is* so." He must be a good son of whom a father could say, "It may be he

has erred.” All that he had was a fear lest secretly they might have done wrong; but it appears that openly their feasting had been such that even the busy tongue of scandal could not find fault with them. And besides, their feasting was a good thing, because it had a good intent; it was for amity, for cheerfulness and family union. It was that they might be bound together as a bundle of rods—strong and unbroken—that they might be as a strongly intertwined cord, interwoven by these their family greetings and meetings. Now, I say, that if in their case the thing was not wrong—and I think I have proved in four respects that it was right,—it was in good houses, in good company, with good behaviour, and for a good purpose,—the text gives a license for us to do the like, and to meet in our houses, in the company of our kith and kin, provided we feast after a good sort, and do it with the good intent of knitting our hearts the one towards the other.

But again: *good men of old have feasted*. Need I remind you of Abraham’s making a great feast in his house, when his child Isaac was weaned? Shall I tell you of Sampson and his feasts, or of David, or of Hezekiah, or of Josiah, and of the kings who gave to every man a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine, and they cheered their hearts, and made merry before God?

But let me remind you, that feasting, so far from being evil, was even an essential part of divine worship under the old law. Do you not read of the feast of trumpets, the feast of tabernacles, the feast of the passover, the feast of the new moons, and how many other feasts besides? Come they not over again and again? Now, if the thing were wrong in itself, God would certainly never employ it as an emblem and token of the divine, the pure, and the heavenly doctrines of his grace. It

is impossible that God should have taken a wrong thing to be the type of a right thing. He might take a common good, and make it the type of a special favour, but not an evil thing. It be far from us to suppose such a thing of our God.

Besides, did not the Saviour himself countenance a feast, and help to provide the guests with the wherewithal that they might have good cheer? Do you think the Saviour out of place, when he went to the wedding feast? and suppose ye that he went there and did not eat and drink? Was it not said of him, "Behold a drunken man and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners?" Not that he was either drunken or a wine bibber, but that he "came eating and drinking," to dash to pieces the Pharisaism which says that that which goeth into a man defileth a man, whereas Christ teacheth "not that which goeth into a man, but that which cometh out of a man, that defileth a man." Jesus Christ, I say, was at the feast; and suppose ye that he bore a sad countenance? Did he sour with the vinegar of a morose behaviour the wine with which he had filled the watering pots? I trow not, but I believe that at that marriage feast he joined with the guests; and if he were indeed "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," as he certainly was, yet did he not keep his griefs to himself, for if he came to suffer himself, he came to make others glad, and I doubt not that at the feast he seemed the gladdest of the guests, most glad because he was really the master of the feast, and because he saw in the wedding the type of his own marriage, his own divine espousals with the Church, which is "the bride, the Lamb's wife."

And, let me add once more, God has certainly made in this world provision for man's feasting. He has not given just dry bread enough for a man to eat, and keep body and soul

together, for the harvests teem with plenty, and often are the barns filled to bursting. O Lord, thou didst not give simply dry bread and water for mankind, but thou hast filled the earth with plenty, and milk and honey hast thou given to us; and thou hast besides this laden the trees with fruit, and given to men dainties. Thou art not illiberal; thou dost not dole out with miserable hand the lean and scanty charity which some men would give to the poor, but thou givest liberally, and thou upbraidest not! And for what purpose is this given? to rot, to mould, to be trodden on, to be spoiled? no, but that men may have more than enough, that they may have all they want, and may rejoice before their God, and may feed the hungry, for this indeed is one essential and necessary part of all true Christian feasting. My text, I say, rings a merry bell, and gives *us* license for sacred feasting.

2. But now the same merry bell suggests a *caution*. Job said —“*It may be.*” They were good sons; good, godly young men, I am sure, or else Job would not have said, “*It may be.*” But “*it may be,*” said he; “*It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts;*” or, as some translate it, “*have blessed God too little in their hearts.*” They may not have been grateful enough for their prosperity, and for the enjoyments which God had given them. “*It may be.*” Well, hearken, brethren, “*it may be,*” too, that you and I may sin, and blaspheme God in our hearts, and be as Job’s sons may have been, too little thankful. If, though they were true men and true women, though they all had a Job for their father, and though their feasting was in their own houses, and after a right sort, and a commendable sort, yet there was a “*may be*” that there might be sin; am I too superstitious or too careful, when I say, brethren, “*it may be,*” *it may be* that in our happiest gathering

of our family together, it *may* be that we shall sin! I think we could not prefer ourselves before the sons and daughters of Job—that were self-righteousness indeed—we are surely not proud enough to think ourselves better than the sons of that “perfect and upright” man, “who feared God and eschewed evil.” I think I am not too severe and too strict, when I say, “It *may* be;” it “*may* be;” look to it; take heed to yourselves, be careful, be on your watch tower. Let me give you some reasons and arguments why this caution is not unnecessary.

And, first, remember there is no place free from sin. You may set bounds about this mount, but the beast *will* touch the mountain. You may endeavour as much as you will to keep out Satan; but wherever there were two met together, Satan was ever the third. There was never a company met, but the Evil One somewhere intruded. Does he not come into your business? Do you not find him entering into your very closet! Yea, and the very table of the Lord, has not Satan sat there and tempted Judas; ay, and tempted you too? How, then, can you hope that when your family are met together, Satan shall not be there? Is it not written, “The sons of God came together, and Satan came also among them?” I am sure they never invited him; but he does not stay for that. And you will find it so. Never invite him by anything ungodly or unchristian-like. But since there are temptations everywhere, however pure and upright your intentions may be, however excellent your company, think you hear my little bell ringing—“It may be, it may be, it may be;” and “it may be” a blessed check to you.

Beside this, remember that there is many a special temptation where there is a loaded table. Old Quarles said, “Snares attend my board;” and certainly they do. More men have perished by fulness of bread than ever died by hunger.

Hunger may break through stone walls, but I have known feasting leap over golden walls—the golden walls of grace. Some men cut their throats with their teeth, and many a man has swam to hell down his own throat. More have been drowned in the bowl, 'tis said, than ever were drowned in the sea. I trust I need not say aught of that to you. I hope not. If there be a man here who falls into drunkenness, in God's name, let him tremble, for there is no admittance for the drunkard into the kingdom of heaven. I am speaking now to Christian men—not to men who fall into *these* vices—and I say to them, where you use the most proper moderation in receiving the things which God gives you, where you even totally abstain from that which might be a temptation, yet even there your table may be a snare unto you. Therefore, take heed to yourself, believer, lest Satan lie in ambush beneath the family table.

Remember also, that they who sit at the table are but men, and the best of men are but men at the best, and men have so little grace, that if they be not on the watchtower, they may soon be overtaken, and they may say or do that which they will have to repent of afterwards. I have heard say that there are men who swallow mouthfuls on earth which they will have to digest in hell, and I do not doubt it. There have been times when a happy company have gathered together, and the conversation has become trifling, then full of levity; perhaps it has gone so far, that afterwards, when they retired to their homes, they would have recalled their words, if it had been possible. Let this caution, then, sound in all our ears, "It may be—it may be—it may be!"—and let us so act, that if Christ were at the feast, we should not be ashamed to see him; let us so speak that if Christ sat at our table, we should not count it a hindrance to our joy, but rather that we should be the more

free, joyous, and glad, because of such thrice-blessed company. Oh! tell me not that Christianity curbs our joy. My brethren, it shuts up one of its channels—that black and filthy kennel into which the sinner’s joy must run; but it opens another channel, wider, broader, deeper, purer, and fills it to the very banks with joy, more lustrous and more full of glory. Think not that we who follow Christ, and seek to walk strictly in our integrity, are miserable. We tell you that our eyes sparkle as much as yours, and that we have not the redness of the eyes in the morning. We can say to the worldling that our heart, despite its sometimes heaviness, *does* rejoice in the Lord, and we have peace which is like a river, and a righteousness which is like the waves of the sea. O Christian men! let not the world think of you that you are shut out *here* from anything like happiness; but so act and so live, at all times, that you may teach men that it is possible to be happy without sin, and to be holy without being morose. This, then, is the caution which our merry bell rings out to us.

But, then, in the third place, having given a license and suggested a caution, the merry bell *provides a remedy*. “It may be”—it may be we have done wrong. What then? Here is a remedy to be used, by parents, and heads of families, and by ourselves.

Job sent for his sons as a father; he sanctified them as a preacher; he sacrificed for them as a priest; by all which I understand, that he first bade them come together, and then he sanctified them: that is, he first spoke to them; commended them for the excellent and admirable manner in which they had met together, told them how pleased he was to see their love, their union; but then he said, “It may be, my sons, you are like your father; there is some sin in you, and it may be you have

sinned; come, let us repent together;" and so, being, as I believe, all godly persons, they sat down and thought over their ways. Then no doubt the good old man bade them kneel down, while he prayed with them; and then he expressed his faith in the great coming Mediator; and so, though one man's faith cannot prevail for another, yet the faith of the father helped to quicken the faith of the sons, and the prayer of the father was the means of drawing forth the prayer of the sons, and so the family was sanctified. Then after that he would say "There is no putting away of sin, except by the shedding of blood; so they fetched the bullocks, a bullock for every son and for every daughter: the old patriarch slew the victims, laid them on the altar, and as the smoke ascended, they all thought, if they had sinned against God, yet the blood shed, and the victim offered could, as the type of Christ, take away their sin. I think I see the good old man, after the sacrifice was all complete. "Now, my children," he says, "return to your homes; if you have sinned, your sin is put away; if you have transgressed, the atonement made has cancelled your transgression; ye may go to your habitations, and take a father's blessing with you."

Call to your recollection, that Job is said to have seen to his sacred work "early in the morning." It is ill lying in bed when we have sin on the conscience. He that hath a sin unforgiven should never travel slowly to the cross, but run to it. So Job would sleep in the morning not an hour, till he had seen his sons and his daughters sanctified, and the sacrifice made. Mark well, that "he offered according to the number of his sons." He did not leave out one. If he prayed for the eldest, he prayed for the youngest too; and if he made supplication for the sons, he did not forget the daughters. Ah! parents, never



forget *any* of your children; carry them *all* before God; let them all be consecrated to him, and let your earnest prayer go up for them all, from your Reuben down to your Benjamin; leave not one of them out, but pray God to grant that they may all be bound up together in the bundle of life.

And notice once again, “So did Job continually.” As often as they visited, so often was there the sacrifice. I suppose they had ten feasts in the year; and it is supposed by the old commentators that they assembled on their birth-days. They were not always feasting; that were sinful. In fact, that was the sin of the old world, for which God drowned it. “They ate and they drank, they married and they were given in marriage,” all which things are right enough in themselves; but if we are wholly immersed in them, always eating, always drinking, always feasting, then they become sins, and indeed at all times they become sin, unless, like Job’s feasts they are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. If our meetings be thus sanctified, we can in everything give thanks, then “he that eateth, eateth to the Lord, and giveth God thanks,” and being accepted in his thankfulness, the eating is to God’s glory. I say, then, my dear friends, that Job did this continually, which teaches to the parent his duty of continually pleading for his sons and daughters.

The aim of my remarks is just this. You will most of you meet together next Tuesday, and keep the household feast. I beg you to imitate Job on the morrow, and make it your special and peculiar business to call your children together, and sanctify them by prayer, and by pleading the precious sacrifice of Christ Jesus. So “it may be” there has been sin; but there will be no “may be” as to the putting away of the sin; for pleading with prayer, and laying hold on the sacrifice by faith,

you shall stand accepted still, both you and your households.

Now, some may think that what I have said upon this point is unnecessary, and that we ought not to speak about such common things as these. Do you suppose that the Christian pulpit was set up by God that we might always talk to you about the millennium, or the antediluvians, or the things that are to happen in Ethiopia or Palestine? I believe that the Christian ministry has to do with you in your daily life, and the more the preacher delivers that which is practically suggestive of profit to our souls, the more closely does he keep to the Master. I am sure, if my Lord Jesus Christ were here, he would say somewhat in these words to you, "Go your way, and eat your bread with a joyous heart, for God hath accepted you through my blood; but watch, and be ye as men that look for their Lord. Still keep your lamps trimmed and your lights burning, and your loins girt about, and be ye stedfast and watch unto prayer, that should I come in the morning, or at cock-crowing, I may find you ready for my appearing."

As for you young men and women, who will be separated on that day from your own parents, having no family circle in which to join, yet perform this pleasant privilege yourselves. Set apart a season the next morning, in which by prayer and supplication you shall make confession of sin; and whenever the feast time comes round, whenever you are invited to a social meeting, or the like, look upon it as a necessary successor of the social gathering, that there be private supplication, private confession of sin, and a personal laying hold anew upon the great sacrifice. If this be done, your meetings, instead of being unprofitable, shall be the beginning of better days to you, and you shall even grow in grace through that prayer, that repentance, and that faith, which have

been suggested by your gatherings together.

I think all this is most fairly in my text; and if I ought not to preach from such a passage, then the text ought not to be in the Bible.

II. And now let us turn to the second head, or what is *in the text*, and that is *instructive*; we must, therefore, ring the SERMON  
BELL.

Well, it will be a short sermon. My sermon shall not be like the bell and preacher of St. Antholin's church, which were said to be both alike, the bell was pulled a long while, and was exceeding dreary in its tone, and the preacher was precisely the same. The sermon which is fairly in my text is this. If Job found it right with a holy jealousy to suspect lest his sons might have sinned, how much more do you think he suspected himself? Depend on it, he who was so anxious to keep his children clean was himself more anxious that he might always fear his God, and eschew evil. God said he was a perfect and an upright man; and yet was he jealous. How much more, then, shall you and I be jealous of ourselves? Say not in thine heart. Christian, "I may go hither and thither and may not sin;" you are never out of danger of sinning. This is a world of mire; it will be hard to pick your path, so as not to soil your garments. This is a world of pitch; you will need to watch often, if in handling it you are to keep your hands clean. There is a robber in every turn of the road to rob you of your jewels; there is a thief behind every bush; there is a temptation in every mercy; there is a snare in every joy; there is not a stone on which you tread under which there is not a viper's nest; and if you shall ever reach heaven it will be a miracle of divine grace; if you shall ever come safely home to your Father's house, it will be because your Father's power brought you there. If Job's sons were in danger at their

own tables, how much more are some of you in danger, Christians, when you have to go among the ungodly! It may be that some of you are called to do business where you hear oaths and blasphemy; your way of life is such that you cannot help being exposed to many temptations. Be on your guard. It was said of a certain great man, that he was so afraid of losing his life, that he always wore armour under his clothes. Take care *you* always wear armour. When a man carries a bomb-shell in his hand, he should mind that he does not go near a candle; and you too must take care that you do not go near temptation. But if you are *called* to go through the temptation, how watchful, how anxious, how careful, how guarded should you be! Brethren, I do not think that we are any of us watchful enough. I have heard of a good woman, who would never do anything till she had sought the Lord in prayer about it. Is that *our* custom? If we do even a common thing without seeking the Lord's direction, we may have to repent it as long as we live. Even our common actions are edged tools; we must mind how we handle them. There is nothing in this world that can foster a Christian's piety, but everything that can destroy it. How anxious should we be, then, to look up—to look up to God, that *He* may keep us! Let your prayer be, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe" let your daily cry be, you young Christians especially, ay, and you old Christians too, be, "Lord, keep me! Keep my heart, I pray thee, for out of it are the issues of my life." Do not expose yourselves unnecessarily: but if called to exposure, if you have to go where the darts are flying, never go abroad without your shield; for if once the devil catches you abroad, and your shield at home, then he will say, "Now is my time," and he will send an arrow which may rattle between the joints of your harness, and you may fall down

wounded, even though you cannot be slain. The Lord grant, then, that this sermon bell of my text may ring in your ears during the next week; and as long as ever you live, may you hear it saying to you, "Be careful; be watchful; be vigilant; danger may be in an hour when all seemeth securest to thee." Inspect the vessel; see to her keel; look to the sails; look to the rudder bands; watch every part of the ship; for the storm may be coming though the calm rule at present, and the rocks may be ahead though the breakers roll not, and the quicksands may underlie thy keel, though thou thinkest all is well. God help thee then, Christian, to watch unto prayer! What we say unto you, we say unto all: Watch!

III. But now what follows the text—and that is afflictive: and here let us ring the FUNERAL BELL.

What follows the text? Why hear ye this, "Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house; and behold there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men and they are dead, and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." Between the table and the coffin there is but a step; between the feast and the funeral there may be but a day, and the very bell that rings the marriage peal tolls the funeral knell. Here is a death's head for you to put on your table. The old Egyptians set a corpse among the guests, that all might know that they must die: I set the bodies of Job's sons and daughters at your table, to make you think that *you* will die. Our very eating is the grave of God's mercies, and should remind us of our own graves. What do we when we eat, but patch the old tenement; put fresh plaister on the delapidated and naked rafters? So, then, we should remember, that the time will come when we can no more do this, but when the tenement

itself shall be shaken and be blown down. Sinner! let no joy cross thy face, till death and thou art friends. Saint I let no joy be in thine heart either, till thou canst say, "Welcome, death; I gladly go with thee." Do nothing that you would not willingly die doing; be found in no position in which you would be unwilling to stand for ever. Be you to-day what you would wish to be in eternity; and so live, and so act, and so sit at the table, that if the wind should come and smite the four corners of the house, and you should die, yet you fall asleep at one feast, to wake up at another feast, where there would be no "may be," about sin, but where you should eat bread in the kingdom of God, and drink the new wine of which Jesus Christ spake, when he rose from the supper, and left his disciples. Ah! my spirit rises on wings of delight at the solemn tones of that funeral knell; for it has more music in it after all than my merry bell. There is a pleasing joy in sorrow, and mirth is akin to sadness. Harken, friends, the bell is speaking, "GONE, GONE, GONE, GONE." Who is that for? Who is dead in this parish? "That is poor So-and-so." My God, when it shall be my turn, may my soul behold thy face with joy. O may my spirit, when it receives the last summons, cry with delight, "Blessed be God for that sound! It was the merriest sound my soul could have desired; for now I sit with Jesus, and eat at his table, and feast with angels, and am satisfied, and have the privilege of John, to lean my head upon my Saviour's breast." Christian! I say, never let the thought of dying plague thee; let it be a comfort to thee; and stand thou so ready, that when the Master shall say, "Arise!" thou wilt have nothing to do but to rise at his bidding, and march to heaven, leading thy captivity captive.

But thou, sinner, when thou art sitting at thy table, think thou hearest my funeral bell tolling in thy ears; and if thou

shouldst step aside, and the rest should say, “What ails you?”—if you should be compelled to rise while they are laughing, and go up stairs to pray, I shall not mind, though some may say I have made thee melancholy, and have marred thy feast; for, sinner, it is no time for thee to be feasting, while God’s sword is furbished, and sharp, and ready to divide soul from body. There is a time to laugh, but it is not till sin is pardoned; there is a time to dance, but it is not till the heart stands with joy before the ark; there is a time to make merry, but it is not till sin is forgiven. Your time is a time to weep, and a time to rend your garments, and a time to sorrow, and a time to repent. May God’s Holy Spirit give you the grace! The time is *now*. And the grace being given, may you fall before the cross, and find pardon and mercy there; and then we may say, in the words of Solomon—“Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.”

# THE TWO ADVENTS OF CHRIST

DECEMBER 22ND, 1861

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” —Hebrews 9:27, 28

WE must begin by noticing the parallel which the apostle here draws. The words “as” and “so” suggest a comparison between two truths the correspondence of which he designed to set forth; the one a fact generally allowed, the other a fact he was anxious to inculcate. Now you will note that he says “It is appointed unto men *once* to die,” and only once. This is a truism. The rule is universal; the exceptions are inconsiderable. One or two persons may have died twice; as, for instance, Lazarus and those others who were raised from the dead by Christ. These, we cannot doubt, after living for a little while, returned again to the tomb. But for the most part, speaking of the race, “It is appointed unto men once to die.” The greatest affairs of life can only be performed once. We are once born naturally; we are once born spiritually; there are not



two natural births, neither are there two spiritual births. We live on earth but once; we die but once; we shall be judged but once; we shall receive the final sentence but once, and then we shall once be received into the joy of our Lord for ever, or once be driven from his presence never to return. Now, a part of the apostle's parallel lies here. As men die but once, so Christ hath died but once. As the law required but one death, so Jesus Christ, having offered that one death as the ransom for his people, achieved his task. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die;"—was the penalty: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures"—was the payment. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." That is *fact* the first. "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." This is *fact* the second. But you have not got the full weight of the comparison yet. After man's spirit has been once on earth, has lived its time, and the body has died, the soul is to re-visit this earth again, for "after this the judgment." Every man will have two advents—the advent which he now enjoys or which he now misuses upon earth; and the advent which lies beyond the present course of probation. After he has descended to the tomb he shall come here again; his bones shall come together, bone to his bone; the flesh shall come upon the skeleton and the spirit shall return, either from the heaven where it rejoices, or from the hell where it howls, to inhabit the body once again and to stand upon the earth. We must all come here again. What though the place that now knows us shall know us no more for ever? Yet, somewhere upon this earth we shall stand. What though we should be unable to recognise any likeness between that and the place in which we lived, and unable to recognise any likeness between us and what we were? Yet,

hither we must return to receive our appointed doom. Now, so is it with Christ. He has once died, and he is to come a second time. A second time is his body to be on earth. After death, the judgment! only when we speak of Christ, he shall come, not to be judged but to be the Judge. After death comes the reward with us; after death the reward with him. After our death comes our resurrection; that has passed already upon Christ. As a resurrection shall come to saint and sinner, the final audit and pronouncement of the sentence; so Christ shall come to the final gathering together of his elect and the final overthrow of all his enemies, to the final crowning of his head, when he shall have put all things under his feet, and reign for ever and ever.

Having thus I think brought out the parallel of the text, I will leave it for you to think over. As it is appointed unto men to die once, and after this the judgment, so it was appointed unto Christ to die but once. That is achieved. The sequel is now pointed out. To them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. We will spend our time to-night, and God grant that we may spend it profitably, by observing, first, *the likeness between the two advents of Christ*; secondly, *the dissimilarity between them*, which is a far more extensive subject, and then we shall make some few remarks *concerning our personal interest in both advents*.

I. The text asserts very plainly that as we are here twice—once in a life of probation, and a second time in the day of judgment; so Christ shall be here twice—once in his life of suffering, and then again in his hour of triumph, THE TWO COMINGS OF CHRIST HAVE SOME DEGREE OF LIKENESS.

First, they are like each other in the fact *that they are both of them personal comings*. Christ came the first time, not as a spirit, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as he had. He was

one who could be pressed to a woman's bosom; one who could be borne in a father's arms. He was one who could afterwards walk in his own person to the temple; one who could bear our sins in his own body on the tree. We have done once for all with the foolish ideas of certain of the early heretics, that Christ's appearance upon earth was but a phantom. We know that he was really, personally, and physically here on earth. But it is not quite so clear to some persons that he is to come really, personally, and literally, the second time. I know there are some who are labouring to get rid of the fact of a personal reign, but as I take it, the coming and the reign are so connected together, that we must have a spiritual coming if we are to have a spiritual reign. Now we believe and hold that Christ shall come a second time suddenly, to raise his saints at the first resurrection; this shall be the commencement of the grand judgment, and they shall reign with him afterwards. The rest of the dead live not till after the thousand years are finished. Then shall they rise from their tombs at the sounding of the trumpet, and their judgment shall come and they shall receive the deeds which they have done in their bodies. Now, we believe that the Christ who shall sit on the throne of his father David, and whose feet shall stand upon Mount Olivet, is as much a personal Christ as the Christ who came to Bethlehem and wept in the manger. We do believe that the very Christ whose body did hang upon the tree shall sit upon the throne; that the very hand that felt the nail shall grasp the sceptre; that the very foot that was fastened to the cross shall tread upon the necks of his foes. We look for the personal advent, the personal reign, the personal session and assize of Christ.

Nor less shall the advents be like each other in the fact *that*

*they shall both be according to promise.* The promise of the first coming of Christ was that which made glad the early believers. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, he saw it and was glad." The epitaph inscribed upon the slab which covers the sepulchre of the early saints has written upon it, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off." And to-day we believe that Christ is to come according to promise. We think we have abundant evidence in the words that were uttered by the lips of inspired prophets and seers, and more especially from the enraptured pen of John in Patmos. Do they not testify that Christ shall surely come? We now, like Abraham of old, do see his day; our eye catches the coming splendour; our soul is overwhelmed with the approaching glory. Did the Jew look for Messiah, the Prince? So do we. Did he expect him to reign? So do we. In fact, the very Prince for whom Israel now looks in all her hardness of heart, is he whom we expect. They doubt Messiah's first advent and they look for him to come as the fairest among ten thousand, the Prince of the Kings of the earth. Hail, Israel! in this thy Gentile sister is agreed. She looks for him to come in the self-same form and fashion, and when his coming shall have removed the scales from the blind eyes of Israel's tribes, then the fulness of the Gentiles shall with Abraham's seed praise and magnify the Lamb once slain, who comes the second time as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. In both cases we think the advent of Christ fully promised.

But we must remark in the next place, that the second advent of Christ will be like the first *in its being unexpected by the mass of people*. When he came before, there were only a few looking for him. Simeon and Anna, and some humble souls of the sort knew that he was about to come. The others knew

that the patriarchs and prophets of their nation had foretold his birth; but the vanity of their thoughts, and the conduct of their lives were at such entire variance with the creed to which they were trained, they cared nothing for him. The Magi might come from the distant East, and the shepherds from the adjacent plains, but how little sensation did they make in the streets of busy Jerusalem, in the halls of kings, or in the homes of business. The kingdom of God came not with observation. In such an hour as they thought not the Son of Man came. And now, though we have the words of Scripture to assure us that he will come quickly, and that his reward is with him and his work before him, yet how few expect him! The coming of some foreign Prince, the approach of some great event is looked for and anticipated from the hour that the purpose is promulgated among the people. But thy coming, Jesu, thy glorious advent—where are they that strain their eyes to catch the first beams of the sun rising? There are a few of thy followers who wait for thine appearing. We meet with a few men who walk as those who know that time is short, and that the Master may come at cock-crowing, or at midnight, or at the day-watch. We know a few beloved disciples who with longing hearts beguile the weary hours, while they prepare songs to greet thee, O Immanuel!

“Strangers on earth, we wait for thee;  
O leave the Father’s throne,  
Come with a shout of victory, Lord,  
And claim us as thine own.

No resting place we seek on earth,  
No loveliness we see,  
Our eye is on the royal throne,  
Prepared for us and thee.”

Lord, increase the number of those who look for thee, and desire, and pray, and wait, and watch through the dreary hours of the night for the morning which thy coming shall usher in!

Yet, mark, when he shall come, there will be this to say about it, that *he will come to bless those who do wait for him just as he did at the first*. Blessed were the eyes that saw him; blessed were the hearts that loved him; blessed were the ears that heard him; blessed were the lips that kissed him; blessed were the hands that broke the tributary alabaster-box upon his glorious head. And blessed shall they be who are counted worthy of the resurrection and of the kingdom which he hath prepared. Blessed are they who, having been born of the Spirit can see the kingdom of God; but doubly blessed are they who, having been born of water as well as of the Spirit, shall enter into the kingdom of God. For unto all this is not given. There be some who see not yet the kingdom, and others who cannot enter because they will not obey the ordinance which makes them Christ's disciples. Thrice blessed shall they be who, with loins girt about, being obedient servants and having done his will, shall hear him say, "Come ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world." He comes to bless his people.

But then there is this further likeness, and with the mention of it, I close this first point: he comes, not only to bless his people, but *to be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to them that believe not upon him*. When he came the first time he was like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. As the refiner's fire burns up the dross, so did he consume the Pharisees and Sadducees; and as the fuller's soap cleanses away the filth, so did he unto that generation when he condemned it, even as Jonah the prophet did unto the men of Nineveh and thereby

condemned the men of Jerusalem because they repented not. Thus too, when he shall come the second time, while he shall bless his people, his fan will be in his hand and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and they who know him not and love him not, shall be driven away like the chaff into fire unquenchable. Long not for Christ's coming if thou lovest him not, for the day of the Lord will be unto thee darkness and not light. Ask not for the world's end; say not, "Come quickly, for his coming will be thy destruction; his advent will be the coming of thine eternal horror. God grant us to love the Saviour and put our trust in him; then, but not till then, we may say, "Come quickly, come quickly, Lord Jesus!"

II. Now we shall turn to the second part of our subject, THE UNLIKENESS BETWEEN THE TWO ADVENTS.

In the prophecy of *his coming* the first and the second time there was disparity as well as correspondence. 'Tis true in both cases he will come attended by angels, and the song shall be, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men." It is true in both cases, shepherds who keep watch over their flocks even by night shall be among the first to hail him with their sleepless eyes—blessed shepherds who watch Christ's folds and therefore shall see the Great Shepherd when he cometh. Still, how different I say will be his coming. At first he came an infant of a span long; now he shall come—

"In rainbow-wreath and clouds of storm,"

the glorious one. Then he entered into a manger, now he shall ascend his throne. Then he sat upon a woman's knees, and did hang upon a woman's breast, now earth shall be at his feet and the whole universe shall hang upon his everlasting shoulders. Then he appeared the infant, now the infinite. Then

he was born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, now he comes to glory as the lightning from one end of heaven to the other. A stable received him then; now the high arches of earth and heaven shall be too little for him. Horned oxen were then his companions, but now the chariots of God which are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels, shall be at his right hand. Then in poverty his parents were too glad to receive the offerings of gold and frankincense and myrrh; but now in splendour, King of kings, and Lord of lords, all nations shall bow before him, and kings and princes shall pay homage at his feet. Still he shall need nothing at their hands, for he will be able to say, "If I were hungry I would not tell ye, for the cattle are mine upon a thousand hills." "Thou hast put all things under his feet; all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field." "The earth is the Lords, and the fulness thereof."

Nor will there merely be a difference in his coming; there will be a most distinct and apparent difference *in his person*. He will be the same, so that we shall be able to recognise him as the Man of Nazareth, but O how changed! Where now the carpenter's smock? Royalty hath now assumed its purple. Where now the toil-worn feet that needed to be washed after their long journeys of mercy? They are sandaled with light, they "are like unto fine brass as if they burned in a furnace." Where now the cry, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have not where to lay my head?" Heaven is his throne; earth is his foot-stool. Methinks in the night visions, I behold the day dawning. And to the Son of Man there is given "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him." Ah! who would think to recognise in the weary man and full of woes, the King eternal, immortal, invisible Who would think



that the humble man, despised and rejected, was the seed-corn out of which there should grow that full corn in the ear, Christ all-glorious, before whom the angels veil their faces and cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth!" He is the same, but yet how changed! Ye that despised him, will ye despise him now? Imagine the judgment-day has come, and let this vast audience represent the gathering of the last dreadful morning. Now ye who despised his cross, come forward and insult his throne! Now ye who said he was a mere man, come near and resist him, while he proves himself to be your Creator! Now, ye who said, "We will not have this *man* to reign over us," say it now if you dare; repeat now if you dare your bold presumptuous defiance! What! are ye silent? Do you turn your backs and flee? Verily, verily, so was it said of you of old. They that hate him shall flee before him. His enemies shall lick the dust. They shall cry to the rocks to cover them, and to the hills to hide them from his face. How changed, I say, will he be in the appearance of his person.

But the difference will be more apparent *in the treatment which he will then receive*. Alas, my Lord, thy reception on earth the first time was not such as would tempt thee here again. "All they that see me laugh me to scorn; they thrust out the lip; they say, He trusted in God that he would deliver him, let him deliver him if he delighteth in him; I am become a reproach; the song of the drunkard, a by-word and a proverb." "When we shall see him, there is no beauty in him that we should desire him." This was the world's opinion of God's Anointed. So they did salute Jehovah's Christ when he came the first time. Blind world, open thine eyes while the thunder-claps of judgment make thee start up in terror and amazement, and look about thee. This is the man in whom thou couldst see

no beauty—darest thou say the same of him now? His eyes are like flames of fire, and out of his mouth goeth a two-edged sword; his head and his hair are white like wool, as white as snow, and his feet like much fine gold. How glorious now! How different now the world's opinion of him! Bad men weep and wail because of him. Good men cry, "All hail! all hail! all hail!" and clap their hands, and bow their heads, and leap for joy. Around him an innumerable company of angels wait; cherubim and seraphim with glowing wheels attend at his feet, and ever unto him they continually, continually, continually do cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts." Let us suppose again that the judgment-day has come, and let us challenge the world to treat the Saviour as it did before. Now, then, crowds, come and drag him down, to hurl him from the hill headlong! Step forward, ye Pharisees, and tempt him, and try to entangle him in his words. Herodians, have ye no penny now, that ye may ask him a difficult question to entrap him? What, Sadducees, have ye no riddles left? Aha! aha! laugh at the Scribes and at the wise men; see how the wise Man of Nazareth hath confounded them all. See how the sufferer hath put to nought the persecutors! Come Judas, arch-traitor, sell him for thirty pieces of silver! Come and give him another kiss and play the traitor o'er again! Pilate, come forward and wash thy hands in innocency and say, "I am clear of the blood of this just person!" See ye to it ye fathers of the Sanhedrim, wake from your long slumbers and say again, if ye dare, "This man blasphemeth." Smite him on the cheek ye soldiers; buffet him again ye prætorians. Set him once more in the chair and spit into his face. Weave your thorn-crown and put it on his head, and put the reed into his right hand. What! have ye ne'er an old cloak to cast about his shoulders again? What, have ye no

songs, no ribald jests, and is there not a man among you that dareth now to pluck his hair? No, see them how they flee! Their loins are loosed; the shields of the mighty have been cast to the winds. Their courage has failed them; the brave Romans have turned cowards, and the haughty bulls of Bashan have hastened away from their pastures. And now ye Jews cry, "Away with him," now let his blood be on you and on your children. Now come forward ye ribald crew, and mock him as ye did upon the cross. Point to his wounds; jeer at his nakedness; mock ye his thirst; revile his prayer; stand ye and thrust out your tongues, and insult his agonies if ye dare. Ye did it once! 'Tis the same person; do it over again. But, no; they throw themselves upon their faces and there goeth up from the assembled mass a wail such as earth never heard before, not even in the day when Mizraim's children felt the angel's sword, and, weeping worse than ever than was known in Bochim, hotter tears than Rachel shed when she would not be comforted for her children. Weep on, 'tis too late for your sorrow now. Oh! if there had been the tear of penitence before, there had not been the weeping of remorse now. Oh! if there had been the glancing of the eye of faith, there had not been the blasting and the scorching of your eyes with horrors that shall utterly consume you. Christ comes, I say, to be treated very differently from the treatment he received before.

The difference appears once more in this; *he will come again for a very different purpose*. He came the first time with, "I delight to do thy will O God." He comes a second time to claim the reward and to divide the spoil with the strong. He came the first time with a sin-offering; that offering having been once made, there is no more sacrifice for sin. He comes the second time to administer righteousness. He was righteous

at his first coming, but it was the righteousness of allegiance. He shall be righteous at his second coming with the righteousness of supremacy. He came to endure the penalty, he comes to procure the reward. He came to serve, he comes to rule. He came to open wide the door of grace, he comes to shut to the door. He comes not to redeem but to judge; not to save but to pronounce the sentence; not to weep while he invites, but to smile while he rewards; not to tremble in heart while he proclaims grace, but to make others tremble while he proclaims their doom. Oh Jesu! how great the difference between thy first and thy second Advent!

III. I must now spend the few minutes that remain in ASKING A FEW QUESTIONS.

What has this to do with us? It has something to do with every one of us, from the oldest bald-head here down to that rosy child who is listening with eyes of wonder to the thought that Christ shall come, and every eye shall see him. There are many spectacles which only a few among the children of men can see, but every eye shall see *him*. Many of us may be gone from this earth before the next great display shall be seen in London, but every eye shall see him. There may be some grand sights which you feel no interest in; you would not see them if you might, but you shall see him. You would not go to a place of worship to hear him, but you shall see him. perhaps you went up to the House of God sometimes, and when there, vowed you would never go again. Ah! but you will be there then, without a question as to your choice. And you will have to remain till the close too, till he pronounces either the benediction or the malediction upon your heads. For every eye shall see him. There is not one of us that will be absent on the day of Christ's appearing; we have all then an interest in it.

Alas! it is a sorrowful thought that many will see him to weep and to wail! Will you be among that number? Nay, do not look round upon your neighbour—will *you* be among that number? Alas for you! You will, if you never weep for sin on earth. If you do not weep for sin on earth you shall weep for it there; and, mark, if you do not fly to Christ and trust in him *now*, you shall be obliged to fly from him and be accursed of him *then*. “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha;” accursed with a curse! Paul said that. In the name of the Church, by its most loving and tender apostle, the soul is cursed that loves not Christ. Heaven on that day shall solemnly ratify the curse with an “Amen;” and the day of judgment brings its thunders to roll in dreadful chorus the sound “Amen; let him be accursed if he loves not Christ.” But there will be some there who, when Christ shall come, shall greatly rejoice to see him. Will you be among that number? Will there be a crown for you? Will you share in that magnificent triumph? Will you make one of that royal court which shall delight to “see the King in his beauty” in “the land that is very far off?” Sister, will you be among the daughters of Jerusalem who shall go forth to meet King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals? Brother, will you be among those who shall go forth to meet the King when he cometh with, “Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord?” “I hope so,” saith one. I hope so, too, but are you sure? Well, I hope so.” Do not be content with having a hope unless you know it is a good hope through grace. What say you to-night—have you been born again? Have you passed from death to life? Are you a new creature in Christ Jesus? Has the Spirit of God had dealings with you? Have you been led to see the fallacy of all human trust? Have

you been led to see that no good works of yours can ever fit you to reign with Christ? Have you been led to discard your righteousness as filthy rags? Soul, can you say to-night—

“My faith doth lay her hand  
On that dear head of thine;  
While like a penitent I stand,  
And there confess my sin.”

Humbly, feebly, but still earnestly, can you say, “Christ is my all; he is all I desire on earth; he is all I need for heaven.” If so, long for his appearing, for you shall see him, and shall be glorified in him. But if you cannot say that! We are getting near to the end of the year. This is the last time I shall have the pleasure of addressing you this year. Oh that God may bring in more in the last week of the year than in all the weeks that have gone! It is possible; nothing is too hard for God. It will certainly be so if God shall stir up your hearts, brothers and sisters, to pray for it. Are there not young men here who are not yet the followers of the Lamb? Oh! that to-night, even to-night, the Spirit of God may say in your heart, “Turn ye; turn ye; why will ye die?” and oh! may you be made so uneasy, that to-night you will not be able to give sleep to your eyes nor slumber to your eyelids, till you have put your trust in Christ, and he is yours. To-morrow probably you will hear the guns betokening the time when the ashes of the Prince are put into their resting-place. May every gun be a sermon to you, and as you hear it booming, let this be its message—

“Come to judgment,  
Come to judgment; come away.”

And may you be able to answer as you hear it, “Yes,

blessed be God, I am not afraid to come to judgment, for—

‘Bold shall I stand in that great day;  
For who aught to my charge shall lay?  
While, through thy blood, absolved I am,  
From sin’s tremendous curse and shame.’ ”

Remember, salvation is by Christ; not of works, nor of the will of man, nor of blood, nor birth; and this is the message which Christ bids us deliver, “Whosoever calleth on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Oh! may you be led to call on his name by prayer and humble faith, and you shall be saved. “Whosoever believeth on him is not condemned.” Oh! may you believe on him to-night if you never have done so before. Touch the hem of his garment, thou with the bloody issue. Say, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me,” thou with the blind eye; say, “Lord save me, or I perish,” thou who art ready to sink; and the ready ears of Jesus, and the ready hands of the Saviour shall now hear and bless if the heart be ready, and if the soul is asking mercy. May God grant you the richest blessings of his grace for Christ Jesu’s sake. Amen.

Perhaps it would be improper in the pulpit to wish you “the compliments of the season,” but I do wish you the blessing of God at all seasons, in season and out of season, and that is my blessing upon you to-night, that you may have the blessing of God living, and his blessing dying; his blessing in his advent, and his blessing at the judgment. The Lord bless you more and more; may he give you a blessed Christmas and the happiest of new years, and to him shall be all the praise and the honour.

# NO ROOM FOR CHRIST IN THE INN

DECEMBER 21ST, 1862

“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” —Luke 2:7

**I**T was needful that it should be distinctly proven, beyond all dispute, that our Lord sprang out of Judah. It was necessary, also, that he should be born in Bethlehem-Ephratah, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by his servant Micah. But how could a public recognition of the lineage of an obscure carpenter and an unknown maiden be procured? What interest could the keepers of registers be supposed to take in two such humble persons? As for the second matter, Mary lived at Nazareth in Galilee, and there seemed every probability that the birth would take place there; indeed, the period of her delivery was so near that, unless absolutely compelled, she would not be likely to undertake a long and tedious journey to the southern province of Judea. How are these two matters to be arranged? Can one turn of the wheel effect two purposes? It can be done! It shall be done! The official stamp of the Roman



empire shall be affixed to the pedigree of the coming Son of David, and Bethlehem shall behold his nativity. A little tyrant, Herod, by some show of independent spirit, offends the greater tyrant, Augustus. Augustus informs him that he shall no longer treat him as a friend, but as a vassal; and albeit Herod makes the most abject submission, and his friends at the Roman court intercede for him, yet Augustus, to show his displeasure, orders a census to be taken of all the Jewish people, in readiness for a contemplated taxation, which, however, was not carried out till some ten years after. Even the winds and waves are not more fickle than a tyrant's will; but the Ruler of tempests knoweth how to rule the perverse spirits of princes. The Lord our God has a bit for the wildest war horse, and a hook for the most terrible leviathan. Autocratical Cæsars are but puppets moved with invisible strings, mere drudges to the King of kings. Augustus must be made offended with Herod; he is constrained to tax the people; it is imperative that a census be taken; nay, it is of necessity that inconvenient, harsh, and tyrannical regulations should be published, and every person must repair to the town to which he was reputed to belong; thus. Mary is brought to Bethlehem, Jesus Christ is born as appointed, and, moreover, he is recognised officially as being descended from David by the fact that his mother came to Bethlehem as being of that lineage, remained there, and returned to Galilee without having her claims questioned, although the jealousy of all the women of the clan would have been aroused had an intruder ventured to claim a place among the few females to whom the birth of Messiah was now by express prophecies confined. Remark here the wisdom of a God of providence, and believe that all things are ordered well.

When all persons of the house of David were thus driven to Bethlehem, the scanty accommodation of the little town would soon be exhausted. Doubtless friends entertained their friends till their houses were all full, but Joseph had no such willing kinsmen in the town. There was the caravanseraï, which was provided in every village, where free accommodation was given to travellers; this, too, was full, for coming from a distance, and compelled to travel slowly, the humble couple had arrived late in the day. The rooms within the great brick square were already occupied with families; there remained no better lodging, even for a woman in travail, than one of the meaner spaces appropriated to beasts of burden. The stall of the ass was the only place where the child could be born. By hanging a curtain at its front, and perhaps tethering the animal on the outer side to block the paassge, the needed seclusion could be obtained, and here, in the stable, was the King of Glory born, and in the manger was he laid.

My business this morning is to lead your meditations to the stable at Bethlehem, that you may see this great sight—the Saviour in the manger, and think over the reason for this lowly couch—“because there was no room for them in the inn.”

I. I shall commence by remarking that THERE WERE OTHER REASONS WHY CHRIST SHOULD BE LAID IN THE MANGER.

1. I think it was intended thus *to show forth his humiliation*, He came, according to prophecy, to be “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” he was to be “without form or comeliness,” “a root out of a dry ground.” Would it have been fitting that the man who was to die naked on the cross should be robed in purple at his birth? Would it not have been inappropriate that the Redeemer who was to be buried in a borrowed tomb should be born

anywhere but in the humblest shed, and housed anywhere but in the most ignoble manner? The manger and the cross standing at the two extremities of the Saviour's earthly life seem most fit and congruous the one to the other. He is to wear through life a peasant's garb; he is to associate with fishermen; the lowly are to be his disciples; the cold mountains are often to be his only bed; he is to say, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head;" nothing, therefore, could be more fitting than that in his season of humiliation, when he laid aside all his glory, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and condescended even to the meanest estate, he should be laid in a manger.

2. By being in a manger *he was declared to be the king of the poor*. They, doubtless, were at once able to recognise his relationship to them, from the position in which they found him. I believe it excited feelings of the tenderest brotherly kindness in the minds of the shepherds, when the angel said—"This shall be a sign unto you; you shall find the child wrapped in swaddling-clothes and lying in a manger." In the eyes of the poor, imperial robes excite no affection, but a man in their own garb attracts their confidence. With what pertinacity will working-men cleave to a leader of their own order, believing in him because he knows their toils, sympathizes in their sorrows, and feels an interest in all their concerns. Great commanders have readily won the hearts of their soldiers by sharing their hardships and roughing it as if they belonged to the ranks. The King of Men who was born in Bethlehem, was not exempted in his infancy from the common calamities of the poor, nay, his lot was even worse than theirs. I think I hear the shepherds comment on the manger-birth, "Ah!" said one to his

fellow, "then he will not be like Herod the tyrant; he will remember the manger and feel for the poor; poor helpless infant, I feel a love for him even now, what miserable accommodation this cold world yields its Saviour; it is not a Cæsar that is born to-day; he will never trample down our fields with his armies, or slaughter our flocks for his courtiers, he will be the poor man's friend, the people's monarch; according to the words of our shepherd-king, he shall judge the poor of the people; he shall save the children of the needy." Surely the shepherds, and such as they—the poor of the earth, perceived at once that here was the plebeian king; noble in descent, but still as the Lord hath called him, "one chosen out of the people." Great Prince of Peace! the manger was thy royal cradle! Therein wast thou presented to all nations as Prince of our race, before whose presence there is neither barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but thou art Lord of all. Kings, your gold and silver would have been lavished on him if ye had known the Lord of Glory, but inasmuch as ye knew him not he was declared with demonstration to be a leader and a witness to the people. The things which are not, under him shall bring to nought the things that are, and the things that are despised which God hath chosen, shall under his leadership break in pieces the might, and pride, and majesty of human grandeur.

3. Further, in thus being laid in a manger, he did, as it were, *give an invitation to the most humble to come to him*. We might tremble to approach a throne, but we cannot fear to approach a manger. Had we seen the Master at first riding in state through the streets of Jerusalem with garments laid in the way, and the palm-branches strewed, and the people crying, "Hosanna!" we might have thought, though even the thought would have been wrong, that he was not approachable. Even

there, riding upon a colt the foal of an ass, he was so meek and lowly, that the young children clustered about him with their boyish “Hosanna!” Never could there be a being more approachable than Christ. No rough guards pushed poor petitioners away; no array of officious friends were allowed to keep off the importunate widow or the man who clamoured that his son might be made whole; the hem of his garment was always trailing where sick folk could reach it, and he himself had a hand always ready to touch the disease, an ear to catch the faintest accents of misery, a soul going forth everywhere in rays of mercy, even as the light of the sun streams on every side beyond that orb itself. By being laid in a manger he proved himself a priest taken from among men, one who has suffered like his brethren, and therefore can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities. Of him it was said “He doth eat and drink with publicans and sinners;” “this man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.” Even as an infant, by being laid in a manger, he was set forth as the sinner’s friend. Come to him, ye that are weary and heavy-laden! Come to him, ye that are broken in spirit, ye who are bowed down in soul! Come to him, ye that despise yourselves and are despised of others! Come to him, publican and harlot! Come to him, thief and drunkard! In the manger there he lies, unguarded from your touch and unshielded from your gaze. Bow the knee, and kiss the Son of God; accept him as your Saviour, for he puts himself into that manger that you may approach him. The throne of Solomon might awe you, but the manger of the Son of David must invite you.

4. Methinks there was yet another mystery. You remember, brethren, that this place was *free to all*; it was an inn, and please to remember the inn in this case was not like our hotels, where accommodation and provision must be paid for. In the

early and simple ages of the world every man considered it an honour to entertain a stranger; afterwards, as travelling became more common, many desired to shift the honour and pleasure upon their neighbours; wherefore should they engross all the dignity of hospitality? Further on still, some one person was appointed in each town and village, and was expected to entertain strangers in the name of the rest; but, as the ages grew less simple, and the pristine glow of brotherly love cooled down, the only provision made was the erection of a huge square block, arranged in rooms for the travellers, and with lower stages for the beasts, and here, with a certain provision of water and in some cases chopped straw for the cattle, the traveller must make himself as comfortable as he could. He had not to purchase admittance to the caravanserai, for it was free to all, and the stable especially so. Now, beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ was born in the stable of the inn to show how free he his to all comers. The Gospel is preached to every creature and shuts out none. We may say of the invitations of Holy Scripture,

“None are excluded hence but those  
Who do themselves exclude;  
Welcome the learned and polite,  
The ignorant and rude.

Though Jesus’ grace can save the prince,  
The poor may take their share;  
No mortal has a just pretence  
To perish in despair.”

Class exclusions are unknown here, and the prerogatives of caste are not acknowledged. No forms of etiquette are required in entering a stable; it cannot be an offence to enter the stable

of a public caravanserai. So, if you desire to come to Christ you may come to him just as you are; you may come *now*. Whosoever among you hath the desire in his heart to trust Christ is free to do it. Jesus is free to you; he will receive you; he will welcome you with gladness, and to show this, I think, the young child was cradled in a manger. We know that sinners often imagine that they are shut out. Oftentimes the convicted conscience will write bitter things against itself and deny its part and lot in mercy's stores. Brother, if *God* hath not shut thee out, do not shut thyself out. Until thou canst find it written in the Book that thou mayest not trust Christ; till thou canst quote a positive passage in which it is written that he is not able to save thee, I pray thee take that other word wherein it is written—"He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him." Venture on that promise: come to Christ in the strength and faith of it, and thou shalt find him free to all comers.

5. We have not yet exhausted the reasons why the Son of Man was laid in a manger. It was at the manger that *the beasts were fed*; and does the Saviour lie where weary beasts receive their provender, and shall there not be a mystery here? Alas, there are some men who have become so brutal through sin, so utterly depraved by their lusts, that to their own consciences every thing manlike has departed, but even to such the remedies of Jesus, the Great Physician, will apply. We are constantly reading in our papers of men who are called incorrigible, and it is fashionable just now to demand ferociously, that these men should be treated with unmingled severity. Some few years ago all the world went mad with a spurious humanity, crying out that gentleness would reform the brutal thief whom harsh punishments would harden

hopelessly; now the current has turned, and everybody is demanding the abandonment of the present system. I am no advocate for treating criminals daintily; let their sin bring them a fair share of smart; but if by any means they can be reformed, pray let the means be tried. The day will come when the paroxysm of this garrotting fever is over, we shall blush to think that we were frightened by silly fears into a dangerous interference with a great and good work which hitherto has been successfully carried on. It is a fact that under the present system, which (abating some faults that it may be well to cure) is an admirable one, crime is growing less frequent, and the class of gross offenders has been materially lessened. Whereas in 1844 18,490 convicts were transported, in 1860 the corresponding number was 11,533, and that notwithstanding the increase of the population. The ticket-of-leave system, when the public would employ the convicts and so give them a chance of gaining a new character, worked so well that little more than one per cent. in a year were re-convicted, and even now only five per cent. per annum are found returning to crime and to prison. Well, now, if the five per cent. receive no good, or even become worse, ought we not to consider the other ninety-five, and pause awhile before we give loose to our vengeance and exchange a Christian system of hopeful mercy for the old barbarous rule of unmitigated severity. Beware, fellow-citizens, beware of restoring the old idea that men can sin beyond hope of reformation, or you will generate criminals worse than those which now trouble us. The laws of Draco must ever be failures, but fear not for the ultimate triumph of plans which a Christian spirit has suggested. I have wandered from the subject,—I thought I might save some from the crime of opposing true philanthropy on account of a sudden panic;



but I will return at once to the manger and the babe. I believe our Lord was laid in the manger where the beasts were fed, to show *that even beast-like men may come to him and live*. No creature can be so degraded that Christ cannot lift it up. Fall it may, and seem to fall most certainly to hell, but the long and strong arm of Christ can reach it even in its most desperate degradation; he can bring it up from apparently hopeless ruin. If there be one who has strolled in here this morning whom society abhors, and who abhors himself, my Master in the stable with the beasts presents himself as able to save the vilest of the vile, and to accept the worst of the worst even now. Believe on him and he will make thee a new creature.

6. But as Christ was laid where beasts were fed, you will please to recollect that after he was gone *beasts fed there again*. It was only his presence which could glorify the manger, and here we learn that if Christ were taken away *the world would go back to its former heathen darkness*. Civilisation itself would die out, at least that part of it which really civilises man, if the religion of Jesus could be extinguished. If Christ were taken away from the human heart, the most holy would become debased again, and those who claim kinship with angels would soon prove that they have relationship to devils. The manger, I say, would be a manger for beasts still, if the Lord of Glory were withdrawn, and we should go back to our sins and our lusts if Christ should once take away his grace and leave us to ourselves. For these reasons which I have mentioned, methinks, Christ was laid in a manger.

II. But still the text says that he was laid in a manger because there was no room for him in the inn, and this leads us to the second remark, THAT THERE WERE OTHER PLACES BESIDES THE INN WHICH HAD NO ROOM FOR CHRIST.

*The palaces of emperors and the halls of kings afforded the royal stranger no refuge?* Alas! my brethren, seldom is there room for Christ in palaces! How could the kings of earth receive the Lord? He is the Prince of Peace, and they delight in war! He breaks their bows and cuts their spears in sunder; he burneth their war-chariots in the fire. How could kings accept the humble Saviour? They love grandeur and pomp, and he is all simplicity and meekness. He is a carpenter's son, and the fisherman's companion. How can princes find room for the new-born monarch? Why he teaches us to do to others as we would that they should do to us, and this is a thing which kings would find very hard to reconcile with the knavish tricks of politics and the grasping designs of ambition. O great ones of the earth, I am but little astonished that amid your glories, and pleasures, and wars, and councils, ye forget the Anointed, and cast out the Lord of All. There is no room for Christ with the kings. Look throughout the kingdoms of the earth now, and with here and there an exception it is still true—"The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed." In heaven we shall see here and there a monarch; but ah! how few; indeed a child might write them. "Not many great men after the flesh, not many mighty are chosen." State-chambers, cabinets, throne-rooms, and royal palaces, are about as little frequented by Christ as the jungles and swamps of India by the cautious traveller. He frequents cottages far more often than regal residences, for there is no room for Jesus Christ in regal halls.

"When the Eternal bows the skies  
To visit earthly things,  
With scorn divine he turns his eyes  
From towers of haughty kings.

He bids his awful chariot roll  
Far downward from the skies,

To visit every humble soul  
With pleasure in his eyes.”

But there were *senators*, there were *forums of political discussion*, there were the places where the representatives of the people make the laws, was there no room for Christ there? Alas! my brethren, none, and to this day there is very little room for Christ in parliaments. How seldom is religion recognised by politicians! Of course a State-religion, if it will consent to be a poor, tame, powerless thing, a lion with its teeth all drawn, its mane all shaven off, and its claws all trimmed—yes, that may be recognised; but the true Christ and they that follow him and dare to obey his laws in an evil generation, what room is there for such? Christ and his gospel—oh! this is sectarianism, and is scarcely worthy of the notice of contempt. Who pleads for Jesus in the senate? Is not his religion, under the name of sectarianism, the great terror of all parties? Who quotes his golden rule as a direction for prime ministers, or preaches Christ-like forgiveness as a rule for national policy? One or two will give him a good word, but if it be put to the vote whether the Lord Jesus should be obeyed or no, it will be many a day before the *ayes* have it. Parties, policies, place-hunters, and pleasure-seekers exclude the Representative of Heaven from a place among representatives of Earth.

Might there not be found some room for Christ *in what is called good society*? Were there not in Bethlehem some people that were very respectable, who kept themselves aloof from the common multitude; persons of reputation and standing—could not they find room for Christ? Ah! dear friends, it is too much the case that there is no room for Him in what is called good

society. There is room for all the silly little forms by which men choose to trammel themselves; room for the vain niceties of etiquette; room for frivolous conversation; room for the adoration of the body; there is room for the setting up of this and that as the idol of the hour, but there is too little room for Christ, and it is far from fashionable to follow the Lord fully. The advent of Christ would be the last thing which gay society would desire; the very mention of his name by the lips of love would cause a strange sensation. Should you begin to talk about the things of Christ in many a circle, you would be tabooed at once. "I will never ask that man to my house again," so-and-so would say—"if he must bring his religion with him." Folly and finery, rank and honour, jewels and glitter, frivolity and fashion, all report that there is no room for Jesus in their abodes.

But is there not room for him *on the exchange*? Cannot he be taken to the marts of commerce? Here are the shop-keepers of a shop-keeping nation—is there not room for Christ here? Ah! dear friends, how little of the spirit, and life, and doctrine of Christ can be found here! The trader finds it inconvenient to be too scrupulous; the merchant often discovers that if he is to make a fortune he must break his conscience. How many there are—well, I will not say they tell lies directly, but still, still, still—I had better say it plainly—they do lie indirectly with a vengeance. Who does not know as he rides along that there must be many liars abroad? for almost every house you see is "The cheapest house in London," which can hardly be; full sure they cannot all be cheapest! What sharp practise some indulge in! What puffery and falsehood! What cunning and sleight of hand! What woes would my Master pronounce on some of you if he looked into your shop-windows, or stood

behind your counters. Bankruptcies, swindlings, frauds are so abundant that in hosts of cases there is no room for Jesus in the mart or the shop.

Then there are *the schools of the philosophers*, surely they will entertain him. The wise men will find in him incarnate wisdom; he, who as a youth is to become the teacher of doctors, who will sit down and ask them questions and receive their answers, surely he will find room at once among the Grecian sages, and men of sense and wit will honour him. "Room for him, Socrates and Plato! Stoics and Epicurians give ye way; and you, ye teachers of Israel, vacate your seats; if there is no room for this child without your going, go; we must have him in the schools of philosophy if we put you all forth." No, dear friends, but it is not so; there is very little room for Christ in colleges and universities, very little room for him in the seats of learning. How often learning helps men to raise objections to Christ! Too often learning is the forge where the nails are made for Christ's crucifixion; too often human wit has become the artificer who has pointed the spear and made the shaft with which his heart should be pierced. We must say it, that philosophy, falsely so called, (for true philosophy, if it were handled aright, must ever be Christ's friend) philosophy, falsely so called, hath done mischief to Christ, but seldom hath it served his cause. A few with splendid talents, a few of the erudite and profound have bowed like children at the feet of the Babe of Bethlehem, and have been honoured in bowing there, but too many, conscious of their knowledge, stiff and stern in their conceit of wisdom, have said,—“Who is Christ, that we should acknowledge him?” They found no room for him in the schools.

But there was surely one place where he could go—it was

*the Sanhedrim*, where the elders sit. Or could he not be housed in the priestly chamber where the priests assemble with the Levites. Was there not room for him in the temple or the synagogue? No, he found no shelter there; it was there, his whole life long, that he found his most ferocious enemies. Not the common multitude, but the priests were the instigators of his death; the priests moved the people to say "Not this man, but Barabbas." The priests paid out their shekels to bribe the popular voice, and then Christ was hounded to his death. Surely there ought to have been room for him in the Church of his own people; but there was not. Too often in the priestly church, when once it becomes recognised and mounts to dignity, there is no room for Christ. I allude not now to any one denomination, but take the whole sweep of Christendom, and it is strange that when the Lord comes to his own his own receives him not. The most accursed enemies of true religion have been the men who pretended to be its advocates. It is little marvel when bishops undermine the popular faith in revelation; this is neither their first nor last offence. Who burned the martyrs, and made Smithfield a field of blood, a burning fiery furnace, a great altar for the Most High God? Why, those who professed to be anointed of the Lord, whose shaven crowns had received episcopal benediction. Who put John Bunyan in prison? Who chased such men as Owen and the Puritans from their pulpits? Who harried the Covenanters upon the mountains? Who, Sirs, but the professed messengers of heaven and priests of God? Who have hunted the baptized saints in every land, and hunt them still in many a Continental state? The priests ever; the priests ever; there is no room for Christ with the prophets of Baal, the servants of Babylon. The false hirelings that are not Christ's shepherds, and love not his

sheep, have ever been the most ferocious enemies of our God and of his Christ. There is no room for him where his name is chanted in solemn hymns and his image lifted up amid smoke of incense. Go where ye will, and there is no space for the Prince of peace but with the humble and contrite spirits which by grace he prepares to yield him shelter.

III. But now for our third remark, THE INN ITSELF HAD NO ROOM FOR HIM; and this was the main reason why he must be laid in a manger.

What can we find in modern times which stands in the place of the inn? Well, there is *public sentiment free to all*. In this free land, men speak of what they like, and there is a public opinion upon every subject; and you know there is free toleration in this country to everything—permit me to say, toleration to everything but Christ. You will discover that the persecuting-spirit is now as much abroad as ever. There are still men at whom it is most fashionable to sneer. We never scoff at Christians now-a-days; we do not sneer at that respectable title, lest we should lose our own honour; we do not now-a-days, talk against the followers of Jesus under that name. No; but we have found out a way of doing it more safely. There is a pretty word of modern invention—a very pretty word—the word “*Sectarian*.” Do you know what it means? A sectarian means a true Christian; a man who can afford to keep a conscience, and does not mind suffering for it; a man who, whatever he finds to be in that old Book, believes it, and acts upon it, and is zealous for it. I believe that the men aimed at under the term, “sectarians,” are the true followers of Christ, and that the sneers and jeers, and all the nonsense that you are always reading and hearing, is really aimed at the Christian, the true Christian, only he is disguised and nick-named by the



word sectarian. I would give not a farthing for your religion, nay, not even the turn of a rusty nail, unless you will sometimes win that title. If God's Word be true, every atom of it, then we should act upon it; and whatsoever the Lord commandeth, we should diligently keep and obey, remembering that our Master tells us if we break one of the least of his commandments, and teach men so, we shall be least in his kingdom. We ought to be very jealous, very precise, very anxious, that even in the minutiae of our Saviour's laws, we may obey, having our eyes up to him as the eyes of servants are to their mistresses. But if you do this, you will find you are not tolerated, and you will get the cold shoulder in society. A zealous Christian will find as truly a cross to carry now-a-days, as in the days of Simon the Cyrenian. If you will hold your tongue, if you will leave sinners to perish, if you will never endeavour to propagate your faith, if you will silence all witnessing for truth, if, in fact, you will renounce all the attributes of a Christian, if you will cease to be what a Christian must be, then the world will say, "Ah! that is right; this is the religion we like." But if you will believe, believe firmly, and if you let your belief actuate your life, and if your belief is so precious that you feel compelled to spread it, then at once you will find that there is no room for Christ even in the inn of public sentiment, where everything else is received. Be an infidel, and none will therefore treat you contemptuously; but be a Christian, and many will despise you. "There was no room for him in the inn."

How little room is there for Christ, too, *in general conversation*, which is also like an inn. We talk about many things; a man may now-a-days talk of any subject he pleases; no one can stop him and say, "There is a spy catching your

words; he will report you to some central authority." Speech is very free in this land; but, ah! how little room is there for Christ in general talk! Even on Sunday afternoon how little room there is for Christ in some professed Christian's houses. They will talk about ministers, tell queer anecdotes about them—perhaps invent a few, or, at least, garnish the old ones, and add to them, and make them a little more brilliant; they will talk about the Sunday school, or the various agencies in connection with the Church, but how little they say about Christ! And if some one should in conversation make this remark, "Could we not speak upon the Godhead and manhood, the finished work and righteousness, the ascension, or the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ," why we should see many, who even profess to be followers of Christ, who would hold up their heads and say, "Why, dear, that man is quite a fanatic, or else he would not think of introducing such a subject as that into general conversation." No, there is no room for him in the inn; to this day he can find but little access there.

I address many who are working-men. You are employed among a great many artisans day after day; do you not find, brethren—I know you do—that there is very little room for Christ *in the workshop*? There is room there for everything else; there is room for swearing; there is room for drunkenness; there is room for lewd conversation; there is room for politics, slanders, or infidelities; but there is no room for Christ. Too many of our working men think religion would be an incumbrance, a chain, a miserable prison to them. They can frequent the theatre, or listen in a lecture-hall, but the house of God is too dreary for them. I wish I were not compelled to say so, but truly in our factories, workshops, and foundries, there is no room for Christ. The world is elbowing and pushing for

more room, till there is scarce a corner left where the Babe of Bethlehem can be laid.

*As for the inns of modern times*—who would think of finding Christ there? Putting out of our catalogue those hotels and roadside houses which are needed for the accommodation of travellers, what greater curse have we than our taverns and pot-houses? What wider gates of hell? Who would ever resort to such places as we have flaring with gas light at the corners of all our streets to find Christ there? As well might we expect to find him in the bottomless pit! We should be just as likely to look for angels in hell, as to look for Christ in a gin palace! He who is separate from sinners, finds no fit society in the reeking temple of Bacchus. There is no room for Jesus in the inn. I think I would rather rot or feed the crows, than earn my daily bread by the pence of fools, the hard-earnings of the poor man, stolen from his ragged children, and his emaciated wife. What do many publicans fatten upon but the flesh, and bones, and blood, and souls of men. He who grows rich on the fruits of vice is a beast preparing for the slaughter. Truly, there is no room for Christ among the drunkards of Ephraim. They who have anything to do with Christ should hear him say—“Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive yon, and be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters.” There is no room for Christ now-a-days even in the places of public resort.

IV. This brings me to my fourth head, which is the most pertinent, and the most necessary to dwell upon for a moment. HAVE YOU ROOM FOR CHRIST? HAVE YOU ROOM FOR CHRIST?

As the palace, and the forum, and the inn, have no room for Christ, and as the places of public resort have none, have *you* room for Christ? “Well,” says one, “I have room for him, but I

am not worthy that he should come to me.” Ah! I did not ask about worthiness; have you room for him? “Oh,” says one, “I have an empty void the world can never fill!” Ah! I see you have room for him. “Oh! but the room I have in my heart is so base!” So was the manger. “But it is so despicable!” So was the manger a thing to be despised. “Ah! but my heart is so foul!” So, perhaps, the manger may have been. “Oh! but I feel it is a place not at all fit for Christ!” Nor was the manger a place fit for him, and yet there was he laid. “Oh! but I have been such a sinner; I feel as if my heart had been a den of beasts and devils!” Well, the manger had been a place where beasts had fed. Have you room for him? Never mind what the past has been; he can forget and forgive. It mattereth not what even the present state may be if thou mournest it. If thou hast but room for Christ he will come and be thy guest. Do not say, I pray you, “I hope *I shall have* room for him;” the time is come that he shall be born; Mary cannot wait months and years. Oh! sinner, if thou hast room for him let him be born in thy soul to-day. “To day if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts as in the provocation.” “To-day is the accepted time; to-day is the day of salvation.” Room for Jesus! Room for Jesus now! “Oh!” saith one, “I have room for him, but will he come?” Will he come indeed! Do you but set the door of your heart open, do but say, “Jesus, Master, all unworthy and unclean I look to thee; come, lodge within my heart,” and he will come to thee, and he will cleanse the manger of thy heart, nay, will transform it into a golden throne, and there he will sit and reign for ever and for ever. Oh! I have such a free Christ to preach this morning! I would I could preach him better. I have such a precious loving Jesus to preach, he is willing to find a home in humble hearts. What! are there no hearts here this morning that

will take him in? Must my eye glance round these galleries and look at many of you who are still without him, and are there none who will say, "Come in, come in?" Oh! it shall be a happy day for you if you shall be enabled to take him in your arms and receive him as the consolation of Israel! You may then look forward even to death with joy, and say with Simeon—"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." My Master wants room! Room for him! Room for him! I, his herald, cry aloud, Room for the Saviour! Room! Here is my royal Master—have you room for him? Here is the Son of God made flesh—have you room for him? Here is he who can forgive all sin—have you room for him? Here is he who can take you up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay—have you room for him? Here is he who when he cometh in will never go out again, but abide with you for ever to make your heart a heaven of joy and bliss for you—have you room for him? 'Tis all I ask. Your emptiness, your nothingness, your want of feeling, your want of goodness, your want of grace—all these will be but room for him. Have you room for him? Oh! Spirit of God, lead many to say, "Yes, my heart is ready." Ah! then he will come and dwell with you.

"Joy to the world the Saviour comes,  
The Saviour promised long;  
Let every heart prepare a throne  
And every voice a song."

V. I conclude with the remark, that if you have room for Christ, then from this day forth remember THE WORLD HAS NO ROOM FOR YOU; for the text says not only that there was no room for him, but look—"There was no room *for them*,"—no room for Joseph, nor for Mary, any more than for the babe. Who are his

father, and mother, and sister, and brother, but those that receive his word and keep it? So, as there was no room for the blessed Virgin, nor for the reputed father, remember henceforth there is no room in this world for any true follower of Christ. There is no room for you to take your *ease*; no, you are to be a soldier of the cross, and you will find no ease in all your life-warfare. There is no room for you to sit down *contented with your own attainments*, for you are a traveller, and you are to forget the things that are behind, and press forward to that which is before; no room for you *to hide your treasure* in, for here the moth and rust doth corrupt; no room for you *to put your confidence*, for “Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.” From this day there will be no room for you in *the world’s good opinion*—they will count you to be an offscouring; no room for you in the world’s *polite society*—you must go without the camp, bearing his reproach. From this time forth, I say, if you have room for Christ, the world will hardly find room of *sufferance* for you; you must expect now to be laughed at; now you must wear the fool’s cap in men’s esteem; and your song must be at the very beginning of your pilgrimage.

“Jesus, I thy cross have taken,  
All to leave and follow thee;

Naked, poor, despised, forsaken,  
Thou from hence my all shall be.”

There is no room for you in the worldling’s love. If you expect that everybody will praise you, and that your good actions will all be applauded, you will quite be mistaken. The world, I say, has no room for the man who has room for Christ. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

“Woe unto you when all men speak well of you.” “Ye are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world.” Thank God, you need not ask the world’s hospitality. If it will give you but a stage for action, and lend you for an hour a grave to sleep in, ’tis all you need; you will require no permanent dwelling-place here, since you seek a city that is to come, which hath foundations; whose builder and maker is God. You are hurrying through this world as a stranger through a foreign land, and you rejoice to know that though you are an alien and a foreigner here, yet you are a fellow citizen with the saints, and of the household to God.

What say you, young soldier, will you enlist on such terms as these? Will you give room for Christ when there is to be henceforth no room for you—when you are to be separated for ever, cut off from among the world’s kith and kin mayhap—cut off from carnal confidence for ever? Are you willing, notwithstanding all this, to receive the traveller in? The Lord help you to do so, and to him shall be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

# THE HOLY CHILD, JESUS

## DECEMBER 20TH, 1863

“That signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child, Jesus.”—Acts 4:30

THE opposition of the world is often a very great blessing to the Church. If it be met by holy boldness, it is sure to yield a glorious triumph to the servants of God. Sanctified by the Holy Ghost, out of the eater cometh forth honey, for it becomes an incentive to greater zeal. Now that the foeman is determined to conquer, the Church will be resolved to hold its own. Pressure from without drives the members of the Church together, and so promotes holy love, and when love and zeal come together, then there is such a blessed unity of action, and such a power in every effort that great success must follow. Woe unto the world when it persecutes the Church, for it kicks with its naked foot against the pricks; it stirs up a nest of hornets about its own ears; yea, it provokes the Lion of the tribe of Judah to spring upon his enemies.

Our text is a portion of an apostolic song, which celebrated the release of Peter and John and the confusion of the priests and scribes. Every persecution shall yield psalms of victory to the people of God. There is one sweet result which always



flows from the opposition of the world, namely, that it draws true disciples nearer to their Master. You will perceive that they sing concerning the birth, and death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the Lord is the theme of their grateful song. The title by which they salute him, "Thy holy child, Jesus," is most appropriate to their case. The history of the Church is Christ's life written out in length. Our Lord enters upon the world a holy child: when the Church begins her history, she is as a holy child too, and therefore rejoices in the childhood of her gracious Lord. How precious is it to see Jesus as made in all points like unto his people, and how rapturous for his people to see their Redeemer's features drawn by the pencil of fellowship in themselves. Trial is often sanctified to this noble end. Let the world oppress the Church; let the members of that Church be thoroughly weaned from any other ground of comfort; let the Lord Jesus be their only rock and refuge, and they will soon perceive analogies in the history of Christ beautifully explaining their own—analogies which they never would have discovered except in the glare of the furnace. In the chapter before us, the apostles are thrown back upon the person of Jesus for comfort, and they revel in the thought of his being a child, because they discover in this his likeness to the Church, which, in its infancy, the enemy sought to destroy, even as Herod sought to slay the new-born King of the Jews.

Brethren, whenever we endure adversities, or tribulations, or distresses, be it ours to turn to Christ, and consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession; for we may rest assured that the black finger of our distresses will often point out beauties in the person of Immanuel hitherto unseen. There is a certain spot from which alone each glorious trait in the Saviour's character can be seen, and many of our most painful

positions are ordained for us in order that we may from their vantage ground behold the Lamb of God.

Our subject, this morning, may perhaps be suitable to the experience of some; the Lord make it useful to all. Taking the text as we find it, we shall, first of all, meditate upon *the humanity of Christ as here declared*; secondly, we shall *view it as here described*—"A holy child;" and thirdly, we shall then *behold it in the glory which surrounds it*—signs and wonders are wrought by the name of the holy child, Jesus.

I. First, then, dear friends, may our hearts be enlightened to see, as the apostles did, the beauty and excellence of THE REAL HUMANITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.

While we always contend that Christ is God, very God of very God, let us never lose the firm conviction he is most certainly and truly a man. He is not a God humanized, nor yet a human being deified; but, as to his Godhead, pure Godhead, equal and co-eternal with the Father; as to his manhood, perfect manhood; made in all respects like unto the rest of mankind, sin alone excepted. His humanity was real, for *he was born*. He lay hidden in the virgin's womb, and in due time was born into a world of suffering. The gate by which we enter upon the first life, he passed through also; he was not created, nor transformed, but his humanity was begotten and born. As he was born, so *in the circumstances of his birth*, he is completely human; he is as weak and feeble as any other babe. He is not even royal, but human. Those who were born in marble halls of old were wrapped in purple garments, and were thought by the vulgar to be a superior race; but this babe is wrapped in swaddling clothes and hath a manger for his cradle, that the true humanness of his being may come out. More a man than he is a Prince of the House of David, he knows the

woes of a peasant's child. As he grows up, the very *growth* shows how completely human he is. He does not spring into full manhood at once, but he grows in stature, and in favour both with God and man. When he reaches man's estate, he gets the common stamp of manhood upon his brow. "In the *sweat* of thy brow shalt thou eat bread" is the common heritage of us all, and he receives no better. The carpenter's shop must witness to the toils of a Saviour, and when he becomes the preacher and the prophet, still we read such significant words as these—"Jesus, being weary, sat thus on the well." We find him needing to betake himself to rest in *sleep*, he slumbers at the stern of the vessel when it is tossed in the midst of the tempest. Brethren, if *sorrow* be the mark of real manhood, and "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," certainly Jesus Christ has the truest evidence of being a man. If to hunger and to thirst be signs that he was no shadow, and his manhood no fiction, you have these. If to associate with his fellow men, and eat and drink as they did, will be proof to your mind that he was none other than a man, you see him sitting at a feast one day, at another time he graces a marriage supper, and on another occasion he is hungry, and "hath not where to lay his head." Since the day when the prince of the power of the air obtained dominion in this world, men are *tempted*, and he, though he is born pure and holy, must not be delivered from temptation.

"The desert his temptation knew  
His conflict and his victory  
too."

The garden marked the bloody sweat, as it started from every pore while he endured the agony of conflict with the prince of this world. If, since we have fallen and must endure

temptation, we have need *to pray*, so had he— “Cold mountains and the midnight air Witnessed the fervour of his prayer.”

Strong crying and tears go up to heaven mingled with his pleas and entreaties, and what clearer proof could we have of his being man of the substance of his mother, and man like ourselves, than this, that he was heard in that he feared. There appeared unto him an angel strengthening him; to whom but men are angels ministering spirits? Brethren, we have never discovered the weakness of our manhood more than when God has deserted us. When the spiritual consolations which comforted us have been withdrawn, and the light of God's face has been hidden from us, then we have said, “I am a worm and no man,” and out of the dust and ashes of human weakness have we cried unto the most high God. Let “Eloi! Eloi! lama sabachthani” assure you that Christ has felt the same. Follow man wherever you will and you find the footprint of the Son of Mary. Go after man where you will, into scenes of sorrow of every hue, and you shall find traces of Jesus' pilgrimage there. You shall find in whatever struggle and conflict of which man is capable, the Captain of our salvation has had a share. Leave out sin, and Christ is the perfect picture of humanity. Simple as the truth is, and lying as it does at the very basis of our Christianity, yet let us not despise it, but try to get a personal grip of it if we can. Jesus, my mediator, is a man, “Immanuel, God with us.” He is a child born, he is better than that, for “unto *us* a child is born, unto *us* a son is given.” He is to us a brother; he is bone of our bone to-day. As a man leaves his father and mother and cleaveth unto his wife, and they twain become one flesh, so hath he left the glory of his Father's house and become one flesh with his people. Flesh, and bone,

and blood, and heart, that may ache and suffer, and be broken and be bruised, yea, and may die, such is Jesus; for herein he completes the picture. As the whole human race must yield its neck to the great iron-crowned monarch, so must Christ himself say, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit, Father," and he, too, must yield up the ghost. Oh, Christian, see your nearness to him and be glad this morning! Oh, sinner, see his nearness to you! Come to him with confidence, for in body and soul he is completely human.

Having thus insisted upon the humanity of Christ, let us gather a few reflections from it. There are a thousand things which it indicates, but as the garden is too full of flowers for us to bring them all, we have gathered but a handful.

As the first meditation, let us marvel at his *condescension*. It is the greatest miracle that was ever heard or read of, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Cyprian well said, "I do not wonder at any miracle, but I do marvel at this, which is a miracle among miracles, that God should become man." That God should make a creature out of nothing is certainly a marvellous manifestation of power, but that God should enter into that creature, and should take it into intimate union with his own nature—this is the strangest of all acts of condescending love. Indeed, so marvellous is it, that in all the heathen mythologies—strange freaks though imagination has there played, though we do find instances of the gods appearing in the likeness of men—yet never do we find anything like the hypostatical union of the two natures in the person of Christ. Human wisdom in its most happy moments has never risen to anything like the thought of deity espousing manhood, that man might be redeemed. To you and to me the marvel lieth in the motive which prompted the incarnation.

What could it have been that brought Immanuel to such a stoop as this? What unrivalled, indescribable, unutterable love was this that made him leave his Father's glory, the adoration of angels and all the hallowed joy of heaven, that he might be made a man like ourselves, to suffer, to bleed, to die? "He was seen of angels," saith the apostle, and this was a great wonder, for the angels had worshipped at his throne, but their created eyes could not bear to look upon the brightness of his person. They veiled their faces with their wings when they cried "Holy! Holy! Holy!" But angels saw the Son of God lying in a manger! The Lord of all wrestling with a fallen spirit in the wilderness! The Prince of Peace hanging upon the tree on Calvary! "Seen of angels" was one of the wonders concerning the incarnation of Christ; but that he should be seen of men—nay that he should be the associate of the worst of men, that he should be called the friend of publicans and sinners, so perfectly incarnating himself, and condescending so low that he comes to the very lowest state of humanity—all this, my brethren, is condescension concerning which words fail me to speak. A prince who puts aside his crown, and clothes himself with beggar's rags to investigate the miseries of his country, is but a worm condescending to his fellow worm. An angel that should lay aside his beauty, and become decrepit and lame, and walk the streets in pain and poverty to bless the race of man, were nothing, for this were but a creature humbling himself to creatures a little lower than himself; but here is the Creator taking the creature into union with himself, the Immortal becoming mortal, the Infinite an infant, the Omnipotent taking weakness, even human weakness into union with his own person. We may truly say of Jesus, that he was weak as the dust, and yet as mighty as the Eternal God; liable to suffer, and

yet God over all blessed for ever. O the depth of the love of Jesus!

Let us reflect upon another theme. *See the fitness of Christ for his work!* He is a perfect man—he could not be a priest if he were not. But now, “He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, seeing he was tempted in all points like as we are.” Being not ashamed to call us brethren, he can compassionate the ignorant and those who are out of the way. O brethren, if he were no man, he could not have been our substitute; man sinned, and man must pay the penalty: he must be perfect man to make atonement. If he were not man, his righteousness would not have availed us; for while we want a righteousness divine to cover the infiniteness of God’s demands, we want a righteousness which is human, for it is that which the law requires. O soul, if thou art in sadness and sickness to-day, let thine arms embrace the man Christ Jesus. Feel in the fact that he is thy brother, how suitable is such a Saviour to thy poverty, thy weakness, and thy sin.

Let us think, too, of another thought. Behold, inasmuch as Christ is man, *his near relationship and union to his people.* He is no stranger of whom we speak—he is our Brother; nay, more than that, he has become our Head. Not a head of gold, and feet of clay, or limbs of baser metal; but as we are, so was he, that as he is so might we be. It is manhood which is at the head of the Church, as it is manhood which constitutes the members. Union to Jesus is, methinks, the sweetest doctrine in revelation. There are other doctrines which possess a more transcendant grandeur, but the doctrine of union is the quintessence of all delights. What is heaven but union to Christ realized; and what shall be the foretaste of heaven but union to Christ believed? As thou seest him then completely,

such as thou art, know, Christian, how near, how dear, how intimately one with him thou art, and be thou glad this day.

Let me give thee another flower. *See the glory of manhood now restored!* Man was but a little lower than the angels, and had dominion over the fowl of the air, and over the fish of the sea. That royalty he lost; the crown was taken from his head by the hand of sin, and the beauty of the image of God was dashed by his rebellion. But all this is given back to us. We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; and at this day all things are put under him, waiting, as he does, and expecting the time when all his enemies shall be beneath his feet, and the last enemy, Death, shall be destroyed by man—by the very man whom he boasted that he had destroyed. It is our nature, brethren, Jesus in our manhood, who is now Lord of providence; it is our nature which has hanging at its girdle the sovereign keys of heaven, and earth, and hell; it is our nature which sits upon the throne of God at this very day. No angel ever sat upon God's throne, but a man has done it, and is doing it now. Of no angel was it ever said, "Thou shalt be King of kings and Lord of lords, they that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before thee, and thine enemies shall lick the dust;" but this is said of a *man*. It is a *man* who shall judge the world in righteousness; a man who shall distribute crowns of reward; a man who shall denounce, "Depart, ye cursed;" a man, the thunder of whose words shall make hell shrink with affright. Oh, how glorious is renovated manhood! What an honour is it, my brethren, to be man, not of the fallen first Adam, but man made in the image in the second Adam? Let us with all our weakness, and infirmity, and imperfection, yet bless and praise God, who made us what we are by his grace, for man, in the



person of Christ, is second only to God—nay, is in such union with God, that he cannot be nearer to him.

When we think of the true and proper manhood of Christ, ought we not to rejoice that *a blessed channel is opened by which God's mercy can come to us*? “How can God reach man?” was once the question; but now, brethren, there is another question. “How can God refuse to bless those men who are in Christ?” The everlasting Father must bless his only-begotten Son, and in blessing him he has blessed a man, and that man having all the elect in his loins, they are necessarily all blessed in him. Look upon the person of Christ as that of a representative individual. Whatever Christ is, all his elect are, just as whatever Adam was all men who were in him became. If Adam fell, all manhood fell; if Christ stands and is honoured and glorified, then all who are in Christ, that is the goodly fellowship of his elect, are all blessed in him. Now, it is utterly impossible but that God should bless Jesus Christ, for Jesus Christ is for ever one with God, and his manhood is also one with Godhead. As an old writer observes, “The nearest union that we know of is the union between the humanity and the divinity in the person of Christ. That of the three persons in the Trinity may rather be called a unity than a union—but this is the closest union we know of—the union between humanity and deity in Christ.” So complete is it, that you cannot think of Christ aright as a man apart from God, nor as God apart from man. The very idea of Christ hath in it the two natures, and it is a clear impossibility that the Godhead should not impart of its blessedness to the manhood, and that manhood being thus blessed, every elect soul is necessarily blessed also. O see what a channel is thus opened; a channel through which the stream cannot but flow; a golden pipe through which grace

cannot but come. The laws of nature might be reversed, but not the laws of God's nature, and it is a law of God's nature that in the person of Christ the deity must bless the manhood, and that manhood being blessed, it is another law that elect manhood must be blessed, since that elect manhood is for ever indissolubly bound up with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. See what a river deep and broad is here opened for us, and what a fulness there is in that river, for all the fulness of the deity dwells in Christ, and the fulness of that deity thus flows to man.

See again, beloved, *what a door of access is thus opened between us and God!* I am a man; Christ is a man. I come to the man Christ Jesus—no I have not even to do that—I am *in* the man Christ. If I am a believer, I am a portion of him. Well, being a portion of the man Christ, and God being united with him, I am very near unto God. I have such nearness of access then to God, that whatever may be my desires and my prayers, I have no need to climb to heaven nor to descend into the depth in order to obtain my desire, for God's ear must be near to me inasmuch as God is in Christ, and my soul being in Christ I am very, very near to God. Christ's body is the veil that hangs before the majesty of God, that veil was rent; and whoever by a living faith knows how to come through the rent body of the man, Christ, comes at once into the presence of God. Such communion, such sacred commerce, such blessed interchanges between mankind and God could never have taken place on any other plan. That ladder which Jacob saw was but a faint and dreamy picture of this. This is no ladder, but the access is such as though God, who was at the top of Jacob's ladder, had come down to Jacob as he lay sleeping there. There is no ladder wanted now, the person of Christ brings God to man,

brings man to God in closer contact than the ladder can ever picture. Brethren, let us come boldly unto the throne of the heavenly grace, to obtain grace to help in every time of need.

Another thing I cannot leave out, is this—beloved, do see it, do see it—*how safe we are!* Our soul's estate was once put in the hands of Adam; he was a fallible man; how unsafe our salvation was then! The salvation of every believer now is in the hand of a man; it is the man Christ Jesus! But what a man! Can he fail? Can he sin? Can he fall? O no, beloved, for the deity is in intimate union with the manhood, and the man Christ Jesus, since he can never sin, can never fall, and is therefore a sure foundation for the perpetual salvation of all the elect. When the angels were all in heaven, before the fall of Satan, methinks they could never be perfectly happy, because they knew that if they sinned they would perish, and this surely would mar their bliss, because there was a fear of their losing all their glory; but, beloved, our salvation does not rest with ourselves, we may have all the joy of perfect security, because it rests in the hand of one who cannot by any possibility sin, who cannot err, cannot fail, but who standeth fast for ever, from everlasting to everlasting, God. See then, the comfort and security of God's people, but indeed there are so many sheaves in this field of incarnation that I cannot possibly unbind them all for you. You must come and pluck an ear or two for yourselves, and rub them in your hands on this Sabbath day, that your hunger may be relieved.

Beloved, do you not see that *here is your adoption?* You become sons of God, because Christ becomes a son of man. Do you not perceive that *here is your acceptance?* The man, Christ, is accepted, and you, since he stands for you, are accepted in him. Nay, there is not a mercy in the covenant,

there is not a single stream of blessing which flows to the believer, that does not spring from the fact that Christ is to be called the “holy child Jesus,” being most certainly and properly a man. Thus much, then, upon the first point.

II. Now let us VIEW THE HUMANITY AS IT IS HERE DESCRIBED. The words teach it to us—*holy child*.

Christ’s humanity was *perfectly holy*. Upon this doctrine you are well established; but you may well wonder that Jesus was always holy. He is *conceived* of a woman, and yet no sort of sin cometh from his birth. “That holy thing which is born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” He is *educated* in the midst of sinful persons. It could not be otherwise, for there were none on earth that could be called good—all having become unprofitable, and yet, though tabernacling in the midst of sinners, in him is no taint or trace of sin. He *goes into the world*, and as a physician must mingle with the sick, so he is found in the very worst of society. The harlot may speak to him, and from the publican he turns not away, yet from none of these did he receive any corrupt influence. He is *tempted*, and it is usually supposed that a man can scarcely be tempted, even should he overcome the temptation, without receiving some injury to his innocency; but the prince of this world came and had nothing in Christ; his fiery darts fell upon the nature of Christ as upon water, and were quenched at once. Satan was but as one who should whip the sea; he left no mark upon the perfect holiness of Christ. *Imputation of sin* would be the nearest approach to making our Lord a sinner; but let it ever be remembered that though Jehovah made him to be sin for us, yet he knew no sin. The world’s sin was put upon the shoulders of Christ, and yet he had no sin for all that; the imputation was accomplished in such a manner that it did not in any sense or

in any degree derogate from his title to perfect holiness. I have read sermons upon the imputation of sin to Christ, which have left painful impressions upon my mind, because I remember to have met with the expression that Christ was the greatest sinner that ever lived, because he stood in the room of millions of sinners. Now it is true that Jesus took the sinner's place, but yet he never was a sinner, nor ever can in any sense be thought of as unholy. Perfect, pure, spotless, the great Redeemer stood; and even in the conflict, when all the powers of hell were let loose against him, and when *God himself had withdrawn*—that withdrawal of God from us would have hardened our hearts, but it did not harden his heart. The taking away of God's grace from us is the ruin of our graces; but he had a well-spring of grace within himself, and his purity lived on when God had withdrawn from him. From the first dawn of his humanity in the womb to the time when he is laid in the new tomb, he is "holy."

The next word is one that requires most attention. Why is Christ called a "holy *child*?" We can understand his being called a child while he was so, but why a "holy *child*" now that he is ascended up on high? Why, dear friends, because the character of Christ is more aptly pictured by that of a child than that of a man. If you conceive of a perfectly holy child, you have then before you a representation of Christ. There is that in childhood, in holy childhood, which you cannot find even in holy manhood. You note in childhood its *simplicity*, the absence of all cunning. We dare not in manhood usually wear our heart upon our sleeve as children do; we have lost the trustfulness of our youth and are upon our guard in society. We have learned by very painful experience to suspect others, and we walk among our fellow men often with our heart locked

up with many locks, thinking that when thieves are abroad, good housekeepers must not leave the door on the latch. We have to practise the wisdom of serpents, as well as the harmlessness of doves.

But a child is perfectly guileless; it prattles out its little heart; it has no caution or reserve; it cannot scheme, for it cannot go round about with the skilful words of the politician; it knows not how to spin the web of sophistry; it is plain, transparent, and you see through it. Now, such was Christ. Not foolish, for there is much difference between simplicity and folly. He was never foolish; they who mistook him for such, and sought to entrap him, soon discovered that the child was a wise child. Still he is ever a child—he tells his heart out everywhere. He eats, he drinks like other men. They call him a drunken man and a wine-bibber; does he, then, from prudential motives, therefore, cease to eat and drink as other men? O no! He is quite a child. In every thing that he does there is an artless simplicity. You see through him and you can trust him, because there is a trustfulness about his whole nature; he knows what is in man, yet he does not act with suspicion towards men, but ever with simplicity.

In a child we expect to see much *humbleness*. There is a humbleness of association. There is a little child yonder—it is a king's daughter, and here is another little child belonging to a gipsy woman. Leave the two in a room and see if they will not be at play together in five minutes. If it had been the queen and the gipsy woman they would have sat as far apart as possible. O no! They do not associate together at all! Distinctions of rank and all that kind of thing they studiously maintain, and, therefore, remain isolated; but the two children will be down on the floor together, and if there happen to be some little heap of

dust or a few pieces of broken crock, the princess will find in them almost as much mirth as the beggar-woman's child. Here is humbleness of mind. So with Christ; he is King of kings and Prince of the house of David, yet he is always with the poor and needy, and sympathizes with them just as heartily as though he were altogether such as they were. You do not find little children sitting down and planning how they shall win crowns—in what way they shall obtain popularity or applause. O no! They are quite satisfied to do their father's will, and live on his smile. It is so with Christ. What a childlike act that was—when they would have made him a king, he went and hid himself, and how childlike does he seem when he rides upon the colt, the foal of an ass, through the streets of Jerusalem, and must have the mother ass there too, lest either of the two creatures should be distressed. He is the friend of the brute creation as well as of man in general; so thoughtful and so kind, so simple, so humble in all that he does.

We picture a holy child as being all *obedient*. You have but to say to it “Do this,” and it doeth it. It asketh no questions. Was it not so with Jesus his whole life long? “My meat and my drink is to do the will of him that sent me.” “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?”

So, again, we look in holy children for a *forgiving temper*. We know that sometimes the blood comes up in the little face, and a little angry quarrel ensues, but it is soon over, and with their arms about each other's neck, and many a loving kiss, it is soon made up again by the little ones. Well, with Jesus this characteristic of childhood is carried out to the fullest extent, for his latest words are, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Ah! holy child! no fire from heaven dost thou call, like John; no denunciations come from thy lips

against sinners. "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more," saith he to the woman taken in adultery. He is the child all through. Scripture calls him the man-child, and what if we call him the great child-man! He was a child when he had become a man. He never had childish things to put away in the sense in which the apostle speaks of it, for as to all the folly, and the littleness, and giddiness of youth, Christ knew not these, but everything that is beautiful, and lovely, and just, in the virgin innocence of a pure and holy child—such as children would have been, if their parents had not fallen—all this you see in the person of Christ Jesus.

Beloved, I think there is something very sweet in this picture of Christ's humanity, because we are none of us afraid to approach a child. Men that are childlike men—we are never afraid of. You know certain people in the world—you could not tell your trouble to them; they have a haughty manner, they look down upon you, you feel that you can never reach their hearts. There are certain others with an open and honest face, and you instinctively feel, "There, I can tell that man anything, I know I can. If I were in any kind of distress, or trouble, I would go to him—I know he would help me if he could." Well, that is because such a man has a degree of childlikeness about him. Now in the person of Christ there is all this carried out to the fullest degree. Come then, and tell Jesus everything. Whatever your trouble or difficulty may be, stand not back through shame or fear. Wilt thou fear Immanuel, or dread the Lamb of God? Wilt thou be afraid of a holy child? Nay, rather come, and like Simeon take him in thine arms and own him as thy consolation and thy trust. I would I could get a hold this morning on those timid ones who always say, "I am afraid of Jesus." Why, dear friends, how can you talk so? You do him



wrong. You know him not, or you would not thus speak. This is the unkindest cut of all, to think that he is unwilling to forgive. Dying for you living as a holy child for you, O can it be, can it be possible that he should be hard to forgive and receive you?

Thinking of a holy child while I looked through this verse, I turned to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's story of Eva and little Topsy. She gives a graphic picture there of a holy child indeed. There is the law in the person of Miss Ophelia: she whips the child, but the more she whips her, the worse she is; she gets no further than, "I's so wicked, I can't help it; I's so wicked." That is all the law can do; it can only make a man feel he is "so wicked," that he cannot help it, and he goes on sinning still. But what a picture is that when St. Clair draws the curtain and sees the two little children sitting with their cheeks together. Eva says, "What does make you so bad, Topsy? Why won't you try and be good? Don't you love *anybody*, Topsy?" "Donno nothing 'bout love; I loves candy and sich; that's all," said Topsy. "But you love your father and mother?" "Never had none, ye know; I telled ye that, Miss Eva." "Oh, I know," said Eva sadly; "but hadn't you any brother, or sister, or aunt, or—" "No, none on 'em—never had nothing nor nobody." "But, Topsy, if you'd only try to be good, you might—" "Couldn't never be nothin' but a nigger, if I was ever so good," said Topsy. "O Topsy, poor child, *I* love you!" said Eva, with a sudden burst of feeling, and laying her little thin, white hand on Topsy's shoulder, "I love you, because you haven't had any father, or mother, or friends—because you've been a poor, abused child! I love you, and I want you to be good. I am very unwell, Topsy, and I think I shan't live a great while; and it really grieves me to have you be so naughty. I wish you would try to be good, for my sake; it's only a little while I shall be with

you.” The round, keen eyes of the black child were overcast with tears; large, bright drops rolled heavily down, one by one, and fell on the little white hand. Yes, in that moment, a ray of real belief, a ray of heavenly love had penetrated the darkness of her heathen soul! She laid her head down between her knees, and wept, and sobbed; while the beautiful child, bending over her, looked like the picture of some bright angel stooping to reclaim a sinner. Now something like this, only in a far nobler style, Jesus Christ has behaved towards us. He sees us lost and ruined, wicked, hopelessly wicked, and he comes as a holy child and sits down by our ruined humanity, and he says, “I love you—I love you because you are so lost, so ruined, so hopelessly ruined; because I know the dreadful doom into which you will fall. There is nothing in you that makes me loves you, but I do love you; I cannot bear to see you die like this. I would sooner die than you should remain a sinner. I would sooner die and bear my Father’s wrath for you, than that you should be a sinner, and disobedient to him.” The holy child sits down by you this morning and weeps for you. Will you grieve Immanuel? Will you break the heart of Jesus, your soul’s lover? Oh, will you open his wounds afresh and crucify him again? If ye would not, then trust him now; fly to him, give yourselves up to him. He waiteth to be gracious to you; his loving arms are wide open to receive you. “Whosoever will,” saith he, “let him come, and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” Such is the coming of the “holy child Jesus.”

III. To conclude: it seems that the name of this holy child is to work great wonders. Only for one second let us turn aside and behold THE GLORY OF HIS HUMANITY.

Although Christ was a man, all the powers of nature knew

their Master and crouched at his feet. He could command the sea or the boisterous wind; diseases, the myrmidons of death, and death their prince, all owned allegiance to him who is immortality and life. After his resurrection he endowed his disciples with his own power, and more than his own power—"For greater works than these shall ye do, because I go unto my Father." The name of Jesus was uttered, uttered by feeble men, and devils fled apace; dumb mouths began to sing, lame men leaped like a hart, and the blind began to see; nay in several instances the grave itself yielded up its prey when the name of Jesus sounded through its hollow vaults. The age of miracles passed off, it was well it should. Miracles are but the cradle in which the man-child, the Church, must be rocked. When the Church becomes strong enough to stand alone, she leaves her swaddling bands behind her; but the name of Jesus hath not less power to-day because no risen dead, no opened eyes follow in our train. At this hour, dead *souls* hear the voice of God and live. At this moment, spiritual eyesight is restored; hearts that were stone are turned to flesh, and tongues that were ready enough at cursing begin to sing. The miracles of the spirit world are infinitely greater than those of the natural. It is little to turn a stone into bread; but it is much to turn a stony heart into flesh. It is comparatively little to open a blind eye, but it is divine indeed to enlighten the understanding and illuminate the dark heart. The name of Jesus is just as mighty in this Tabernacle to-day, as it was in the lips of Paul upon Mars Hill, or when he stood in his own hired house in Rome. Do not say that you entertain a doubt concerning it. Look around, and see the proofs. O men and brethren, you and I have been the willing trophies of the power of that great name. In this house, or in the Surrey Music Hall, and elsewhere, where that name

was proclaimed, we received a broken heart—we who once had hearts hard as adamant. There the tears of repentance began to flow; there the griefs, the heavy glooms of our spirit, were scattered by the Sun of Righteousness. If we have been made to walk in holiness, this is one of the signs and wonders of his name. If drunkenness and lust have been shaken off, this, too, is to his praise. If the demoniac, the man who was full of devilry, has been clothed and made to sit in his right mind at the feet of Jesus, this is another of the signs and wonders. In this place—not only in this great chamber, but below-stairs in our classes, and in our Sabbath-schools too, signs and wonders are wrought by the name of the holy child, Jesus. And in other places of worship in London, wherever Christ is lifted up—wherever his sacrifice is made the prominent theme, the dry bones in the valley come together, the Spirit breathes upon them, and they live as an exceeding great army. We defy the whole world to show anything comparable to the power of Jesus' name. There is more magic in it than ever was in Moses' rod; it is more mighty even than his voice, though he divided the Red Sea and brought water out of the rock. Brethren, let us spread his name; let it be always on our tongues. Let us each in our proper sphere, declare his glory, and we shall see his kingdom come, and his will shall be done on earth even as it is in heaven. I wonder whether there is anyone here who will be a sign and wonder of the love of Christ! Do you wish to be? Ah! then, I hope you are. Do you wish to be? Then, the door is open. "Whosoever believeth in him is not condemned." One look at Jesus, and you are saved—a trustful casting of yourself on him, and you are delivered. God enable you to do this now, and you shall see in the change which is wrought within you, an internal evidence of the majesty of Christ's person, which

shall never fail you. You shall be established by that which you feel within, in so sure and certain a manner, that the arguments of infidelity or deism shall never be able to shake you off the rock. May God grant this for his holy name's sake. Amen.

# MARY'S SONG DECEMBER 25TH, 1864

“And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,  
and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.”

—Luke 1:46, 47

M<sup>ARY</sup> was on a visit when she expressed her joy in the language of this noble song. It were well if all our social intercourse were as useful to our hearts as this visit was to Mary. “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend:” Mary, full of faith, goes to see Elizabeth, who is also full of holy confidence, and the two are not long together before their faith mounts to full assurance, and their full assurance bursts forth in a torrent of sacred praise. This praise aroused their slumbering powers, and instead of two ordinary village women, we see before us two prophetesses and poetesses, upon whom the Spirit of God abundantly rested. When we meet with our kinsfolk and acquaintance, let it be our prayer to God that our communion may be not only pleasant, but profitable; that we may not merely pass away time and spend a pleasant hour, but may advance a day’s march nearer heaven, and acquire greater

fitness for our eternal rest.

Observe, this morning, the sacred joy of Mary that you may imitate it. This is a season when all men expect us to be joyous. We compliment each other with the desire that we may have a "Merry Christmas." Some Christians who are a little squeamish, do not like the word "merry." It is a right good old Saxon word, having the joy of childhood and the mirth of manhood in it, it brings before one's mind the old song of the waits, and the midnight peal of bells, the holly and the blazing log. I love it for its place in that most tender of all parables, where it is written, that, when the long-lost prodigal returned to his father safe and sound, "They began to be merry." This is the season when we are expected to be happy; and my heart's desire is, that in the highest and best sense, you who are believers may be "merry." Mary's heart was merry within her; but here was the mark of her joy, it was all holy merriment, it was every drop of it sacred mirth. It was not such merriment as worldlings will revel in to-day and to-morrow, but such merriment as the angels have around the throne, where they sing, "Glory to God in the highest," while we sing "On earth peace, goodwill towards men." Such merry hearts have a continual feast. I want you, ye children of the bride-chamber, to possess to-day and to-morrow, yea, all your days, the high and consecrated bliss of Mary, that you may not only read her words, but use them for yourselves, ever experiencing their meaning: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

Observe, first, that *she sings*; secondly, *she sings sweetly*; thirdly, *shall she sing alone*?

I. First observe, that MARY SINGS.

*Her subject is a Saviour*; she hails the incarnate God. The

long-expected Messiah is about to appear. He for whom prophets and princes waited long, is now about to come, to be born of the virgin of Nazareth. Truly there was never a subject of sweeter song than this—the stooping down of Godhead to the feebleness of manhood. When God manifested his power in the works of his hands, the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy; but when God manifests *himself*, what music shall suffice for the grand psalm of adoring wonder? When wisdom and power are seen, these are but attributes; but in the incarnation it is the divine person which is revealed wrapt in a veil of our inferior clay: well might Mary sing, when earth and heaven even now are wondering at the condescending grace. Worthy of peerless music is the fact that “the word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” There is no longer a great gulf fixed between God and his people; the humanity of Christ has bridged it over. We can no more think that God sits on high, indifferent to the wants and woes of men, for God has visited us and come down to the lowliness of our estate. No longer need we bemoan that we can never participate in the moral glory and purity of God, for if God in glory can come down to his sinful creature, it is certainly less difficult to bear that creature, blood-washed and purified, up that starry way, that the redeemed one may sit down for ever on his throne. Let us dream no longer in sombre sadness that we cannot draw near to God so that he will really hear our prayer and pity our necessities, seeing that Jesus has become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, born a babe as we are born, living a man as we must live, bearing the same infirmities and sorrows, and bowing his head to the same death. O, can we not come with boldness by this new and living way, and have access to the throne of the heavenly grace, when Jesus



meets us as Immanuel, God with us? Angels sung, they scarce knew why. Could they understand why God had become man? They must have known that herein was a mystery of condescension; but all the loving consequences which the incarnation involved even their acute minds could scarce have guessed; but *we* see the whole, and comprehend the grand design most fully. The manger of Bethlehem was big with glory; in the incarnation was wrapped up all the blessedness by which a soul, snatched from the depths of sin, is lifted up to the heights of glory. Shall not our clearer knowledge lead us to heights of song which angelic guesses could not reach? Shall the lips of cherubs move to flaming sonnets, and shall we who are redeemed by the blood of the incarnate God be treacherously and ungratefully silent!

“Did archangels sing thy coming?

Did the shepherds learn their lays?— Shame would  
cover me ungrateful, Should my tongues refuse to  
praise.”

This, however, was not the full subject of her holy hymn. Her peculiar delight was not that there was a Saviour to be born, but that *he was to be born of her*. Blessed among women was she, and highly favoured of the Lord; but *we* can enjoy the same favour; nay, we *must* enjoy it, or the coming of a Saviour will be of no avail to us. Christ on Calvary, I know, takes away the sin of his people; but none have ever known the virtue of Christ upon the cross, unless they have the Lord Jesus formed in them as the hope of glory. The stress of the virgin’s canticle is laid upon God’s special grace to her. Those little words, the personal pronouns, tell us that it was truly a personal affair with her. “*My* soul doth magnify the Lord, and *my* spirit hath

rejoiced in God *my* Saviour.” The Saviour was peculiarly, and in an especial sense, hers. She sung no “Christ for all;” but “*Christ for me,*” was her glad subject Beloved, is Christ Jesus in your heart? Once you looked at him from a distance, and that look cured you of all spiritual diseases, but are you now living upon him, receiving him into your very vitals as your spiritual meat and drink? In holy fellowship you have oftentimes fed upon his flesh and been made to drink of his blood; you have been buried with him in baptism unto death; you have yielded yourselves a sacrifice to him and you have taken him to be a sacrifice for you; you can sing of him as the spouse did, “His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me ... My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies.” This is a happy style of living, and all short of this poor slavish work. Oh! you can never know the joy of Mary unless Christ becomes truly and really yours; but oh! when he is yours, yours within, reigning in your heart, yours controlling all your passions, yours changing your nature, subduing your corruptions, inspiring you with hallowed emotions; yours within, a joy unspeakable and full of glory—oh! then you *can* sing, you *must* sing, who can restrain your tongue? If all the scoffers and mockers upon earth should bid you hold your peace, you *must* sing; for your spirit *must* rejoice in God your Saviour.

We should miss much instruction if we overlooked the fact that the choice poem before us is a *hymn of faith*. As yet there was no Saviour born, nor, as far we can judge had the virgin any evidence such as carnal sense requireth to make her believe that a Saviour would be born of her. How can this thing be? was a question which might very naturally have suspended her song until it received an answer convincing to

flesh and blood; but no such answer had been given. She knew that with God all things are possible, she had his promise delivered by an angel, and this was enough for her: on the strength of the Word which came forth from God, her heart leaped with pleasure and her tongue glorified his name. When I consider what it is which she believed, and how unhesitatingly she received the word, I am ready to give her, as a woman, a place almost as high as that which Abraham occupied as a man; and if I dare not call her the mother of the faithful, at least let her have due honour as one of the most excellent of the mothers in Israel. The benediction of Elizabeth, Mary right well deserved, "Blessed is she that believeth." To her the "substance of things hoped for" was her faith, and that was also her "evidence of things not seen;" she knew, by the revelation of God, that she was to bear the promised seed who should bruise the serpent's head; but other proof she had none. This day there are these among us who have little or no conscious enjoyment of the Saviour's presence; they walk in darkness and see no light; they are groaning over inbred sin, and mourning because corruptions prevail; let them now trust in the Lord, and remember that if they believe on the Son of God, Christ Jesus is within them; and by faith they may right gloriously chant the hallelujah of adoring love. What though the sun gleam not forth to-day, the clouds and mists have not quenched his light; and though the Sun of Righteousness shine not on thee at this instant, yet he keeps his place in yonder skies, and knows no variableness, neither shadow of a turning. If with all thy digging, the well spring not up, yet there abideth a constant fulness in that deep, which croucheth beneath in the heart and purpose of a God of love. What, if like David, thou art much cast down, yet like him do thou say unto

thy soul, "Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." Be glad then with Mary's joy: it is the joy of a Saviour completely hers, but evidenced to be so, not by sense, but by faith. Faith has its music as well as sense, but it is of a diviner sort: if the viands on the table make men sing and dance, feastings of a more refined and etherial nature can fill believers with a hallowed plenitude of delight.

Still listening to the favoured virgin's canticle, let me observe that *her lowliness does not make her stay her song*; nay, it imports a sweeter note into it. "For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden." Beloved friend, you are feeling more intensely than ever the depth of your natural depravity, you are humbled under a sense of your many failings, you are so dead and earth-bound even in this house of prayer, that you cannot rise to God; you are heavy and sad, while our Christmas carols have been ringing in your ears; you feel yourself to be to-day so useless to the Church of God, so insignificant, so utterly unworthy, that your unbelief whispers, "Surely, surely, you have nothing to sing for." Come, my brother, come my sister, imitate this blessed virgin of Nazareth, and turn that very lowliness and meanness which you so painfully feel, into another reason for unceasing praise; daughters of Zion, sweetly say in your hymns of love, "He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden." The less worthy I am of his favours, the more sweetly will I sing of his grace. What if I be the most insignificant of all his chosen; then will I praise him who with eyes of love has sought me out, and set his love upon me. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that whilst thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, thou hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight." I am sure, dear friends, the remembrance

that there is a Saviour, and that this Saviour is *yours*, must make you sing; and if you set side by side with it the thought that you were once sinful, unclean, vile, hateful, and an enemy to God, then your notes will take yet a loftier flight, and mount to the third heavens, to teach the golden harps the praise of God.

It is right well worthy of notice, that *the greatness of the promised blessing* did not give the sweet songstress an argument for suspending her thankful strain. When I meditate upon the great goodness of God in loving his people before the earth was, in laying down his life for us, in pleading our cause before the eternal throne, in providing a paradise of rest for us for ever, the black thought has troubled me, "Surely this is too high a privilege for such an insect of a day as this poor creature, man." Mary did not look at this matter unbelievably; although she appreciated the greatness of the favour, she did but rejoice the more heartily on that account. "For he that is mighty hath done to me great things." Come, soul, it is a great thing to be a child of God, but thy God doeth great wonders, therefore be not staggered through unbelief, but triumph in thine adoption, great mercy though it be. Oh! it is a mighty mercy, higher than the mountains, to be chosen of God from all eternity, but it is true that even so are his redeemed chosen, and therefore sing thou of it. It is a deep and unspeakable blessing to be redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, but thou art so redeemed beyond all question. Therefore doubt not, but shout aloud for gladness of heart. It is a rapturous thought, that thou shalt dwell above, and wear the crown, and wave the palm branch for ever; let no mistrust interrupt the melody of thy psalm of expectation, but— "Loud to the praise of love divine, Bid every string awake."

What a fulness of truth is there in these few words: "He that is mighty hath done to me great things." It is a text from which a glorified spirit in heaven might preach an endless sermon. I pray you, lay hold upon the thoughts which I have in this poor way suggested to you, and try to reach where Mary stood in holy exultation. The grace is great, but so is its giver; the love is infinite, but so is the heart from which it wells up; the blessedness is unspeakable, but so is the divine wisdom which planned it from of old. Let our hearts take up the Virgin's magnificat, and praise the Lord right joyously at this hour.

Still further, for we have not exhausted the strain, *the holiness of God has sometimes damped the ardour of the believer's joy*; but not so in Mary's case. She exults in it; "And holy is his name." She weaves even that bright attribute into her song. Holy Lord! when I forget my Saviour, the thought of thy purity makes me shudder; standing where Moses stood upon the holy mountain of thy law, I do exceeding fear and quake. To me, conscious of my guilt, no thunder could be more dreadful than the seraph's hymn of "Holy! holy! holy! Lord God of Sabaoth." What is thy holiness but a consuming fire which must utterly destroy me—a sinner? If the heavens are not pure in thy sight and thou chargedst thine angels with folly, how much less then canst thou bear with vain, rebellious man, that is born of woman? How can man be pure, and how can thine eyes look upon him without consuming him quickly in thine anger? But, O thou Holy One of Israel, when my spirit can stand on Calvary and see thy holiness vindicate itself in the wounds of the man who was born at Bethlehem, then my spirit rejoices in that glorious holiness which was once her terror. Did the thrice holy God stoop down to man and take man's flesh? then is there hope indeed! Did a holy God bear the

sentence which his own law pronounced on man? Does that holy God incarnate now spread his wounded hands and plead for me? Then my soul, the holiness of God shall be a consolation to thee. Living waters from this sacred well I draw; and I will add to all my notes of joy this one, "and holy is his name." He hath sworn by his holiness, and he will not lie, he will keep his covenant with his anointed and his seed for ever.

When we take to ourselves the wings of eagles, and mount towards heaven in holy praise, the prospect widens beneath us; even so as Mary poises herself upon the poetic wing, she looks adown the long aisles of the past, and beholds the mighty acts of Jehovah in the ages long back. Mark how her strain gathers majesty; it is rather the sustained flight of the eagle-winged Ezekiel, than the flutter of the timid dove of Nazareth. She sings, "His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation." She looks beyond the captivity, to the days of the kings, to Solomon, to David, along through the Judges into the wilderness, across the Red Sea to Jacob, to Isaac, to Abraham, and onward, till, pausing at the gate of Eden, she hears the sound of the promise, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." How magnificently she sums up the book of the wars of the Lord, and rehearses the triumphs of Jehovah, "He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." How delightfully is mercy intermingled with judgment in the next canto of her psalm: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away." My brethren and sisters, let us, too, sing of the past, glorious in faithfulness, fearful in judgment, teeming with wonders. Our own lives shall furnish us with a hymn of

adoration. Let us speak of the things which we have made touching the King. We were hungry, and he filled us with good things; we crouched upon the dunghill with the beggar, and he has enthroned us among princes; we have been tossed with tempest, but with the Eternal Pilot at the helm, we have known no fear of shipwreck; we have been cast into the burning fiery furnace, but the presence of the Son of Man has quenched the violence of the flames. Tell out, O ye daughters of music, the long tale of the mercy of the Lord to his people in the generations long departed. Many waters could not quench his love, neither could the floods drown it; persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword—none of these have separated the saints from the love of God which is in Christ our Lord. The saints beneath the wing of the Most High have been ever safe; when most molested by the enemy, they have dwelt in perfect peace: “God is their refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Ploughing at times the blood red wave, the ship of the Church has never swerved from her predestined path of progress. Every tempest has favoured her: the hurricane which sought her ruin has been made to bear her the more swiftly onward. Her flag has braved these eighteen hundred years the battle and the breeze, and she fears not what may yet be before her. But, lo! she nears the haven; the day is dawning when she shall bid farewell to storms; the waves already grow calm beneath her; the long-promised rest is near at hand; her Jesus himself meets her, walking upon the waters; she shall enter into her eternal haven, and all who are on board shall, with their Captain, sing of joy, and triumph, and victory through him who hath loved her and been her deliverer.

When Mary thus tuned her heart to glory in her God for his wonders in the past, she particularly dwelt upon the note of



*election*. The highest note in the scale of my praise is reached when my soul sings, "I love him because he first loved me." Well does Kent put it— "A monument of grace, A sinner saved by blood; The streams of love I trace, Up to the fountain, GOD; And in his mighty breast I see, Eternal thoughts of love to me."

We can scarcely fly higher than the source of love in the mount of God. Mary has the doctrine of election in her song: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away." Here is distinguishing grace, discriminating regard; here are some suffered to perish; here are others, the least deserving and the most obscure, made the special objects of divine affection. Do not be afraid to dwell upon this high doctrine, beloved in the Lord. Let me assure you that when your mind is most heavy and depressed, you will find this to be a bottle of richest cordial. Those who doubt these doctrines, or who cast them into the cold shade, miss the richest clusters of Eshcol; they lose the wines on the lees well refined, the fat things full of marrow; but you who by reason of years have had your senses exercised to discern between good and evil, you know that there is no honey like this, no sweetness comparable to it. If the honey in Jonathan's wood, when but touched enlightened the eyes to see, this is honey that will enlighten your heart to love and learn the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Eat, and fear not a surfeit; live upon this choice dainty, and fear not that you shall grow weary of it, for the more you know, the more you will want to know; the more your soul is filled, the more you will desire to have your mind enlarged, that you may comprehend more and more the eternal, everlasting,

discriminating love of God.

But one more remark upon this point. You perceive she does not finish her song till she has reached *the covenant*. When you mount as high as election, tarry on its sister mount, the covenant of grace. In the last verse of her song, she sings, "As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever." To her, that was *the covenant*; to us who have clearer light, the ancient covenant made in the council chamber of eternity, is the subject of the greatest delight. The covenant with Abraham was in its best sense only a minor copy of that gracious covenant made with Jesus, the everlasting Father of the faithful, ere the blue heavens were stretched abroad. Covenant engagements are the softest pillows for an aching head; covenant engagements with the surety, Christ Jesus, are the best props for a trembling spirit.

"His oath, his covenant, his blood, Support me in the  
raging flood; When every earthly prop gives way,  
This still is all my strength and stay."

If Christ did swear to bring me to glory, and if the Father swore that he would give me to the Son to be a part of the infinite reward for the travail of his soul; then, my soul, till God himself shall be unfaithful, till Christ shall cease to be the truth, till God's eternal council shall become a lie, and the red roll of his election shall be consumed with fire, thou art safe. Rest thou, then, in perfect peace, come what will; take thy harp from the willows, and never let thy fingers cease to sweep it to strains of richest harmony. O for grace from first to last to join the Virgin in her song.

II. Secondly, SHE SINGS SWEETLY. She praises her God right *heartily*. Observe how she plunges into the midst of the

subject. There is no preface, but “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” When some people sing, they appear to be afraid of being heard. Our poet puts it— “With all my powers of heart and tongue I’ll praise my Maker in my song; Angels shall hear the notes I raise, Approve the song, and join the praise.”

I am afraid angels frequently do not hear those poor, feeble, dying whisperings, which often drop from our lips merely by force of custom. Mary is all heart; evidently her soul is on fire; while she muses, the fire burns; then she speaks with her tongue. May we, too, call home our wandering thoughts, and wake up our slumbering powers to praise redeeming love. It is a noble word that she uses here: “My soul doth *magnify* the Lord.” I suppose it means, “My soul doth endeavour to make God great by praising him.” He is as great as he can be in his being; my goodness cannot extend to him; but yet my soul would make God greater in the thoughts of others, and greater in my own heart. I would give the train of his glory wider sweep; the light which he has given me I would reflect; I would make his enemies his friends; I would turn hard thoughts of God into thoughts of love. “My soul would magnify the Lord.” Old Trapp says, “My soul would make greater room for him.” It is as if she wanted to get more of God into her, like Rutherford, when he says, “Oh! that my heart were as big as heaven, that I might hold Christ in it;” and then he stops himself—“But heaven and earth cannot contain him. Oh, that I had a heart as big as seven heavens, that I might hold the whole of Christ within it.” Truly this is a larger desire than we can ever hope to have gratified; yet still our lips shall sing, “My soul doth magnify the Lord.” Oh! if I could crown him; if I could lift him

higher! If my burning at the stake would but add a spark more light to his glory, happy should I be to suffer. If my being crushed would lift Jesus an inch higher, happy were the destruction which should add to his glory! Such is the hearty spirit of Mary's song.

Again, her praise is very *joyful*: "My spirit hath *rejoiced* in God my Saviour." The word in the Greek is a remarkable one. I believe it is the same word which is used in the passage, "Rejoice ye in that day and leap for joy." We used to have an old word in English which described a certain exulting dance, "a galliard." That word is supposed to have come from the Greek word here used. It was a sort of leaping dance; the old commentators call it a *levalto*. Mary in effect declares, "My spirit shall dance like David before the ark, shall leap, shall spring, shall bound, shall rejoice in God my Saviour." When we praise God, it ought not to be with dolorous and doleful notes. Some of my brethren praise God always on the minor key, or in the deep, deep bass: they cannot feel holy till they have the horrors. Why cannot some men worship God except with a long face? I know them by their very walk as they come to worship: what a dreary pace it is! how solemnly proper and funereal indeed! They do not understand David's Psalm:—"Up to her courts with joys unknown, The sacred tribes repair."

No, they come up to their Father's house as if they were going to jail, and worship God on the Sunday as if it were the most doleful day in the week. It is said of a certain Highlander, when the Highlanders were very pious, that he once went to Edinburgh, and when he came back again he said he had seen a dreadful sight on Sabbath, he had seen people at Edinburgh going to kirk with happy faces. He thought it wicked to look

happy on Sunday; and that same notion exists in the minds of certain good people hereabouts; they fancy that when the saints get together they should sit down, and have a little comfortable misery, and but little delight. In truth, moaning and pining is not the appointed way for worshipping God. We should take Mary as a pattern. All the year round I recommend her as an example to fainthearted and troubled ones. "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." Cease from rejoicing in sensual things, and with sinful pleasures have no fellowship, for all such rejoicing is evil. But you cannot rejoice too much in the Lord. I believe that the fault with our public worship is that we are too sober, too cold, too formal. I do not exactly admire the ravings of our Primitive-Methodist friends when they grow wild; but I should have no objection to hear a hearty "Hallelujah!" now and then. An enthusiastic burst of exultation might warm our hearts; the shout of "Glory!" might fire our spirits. This I know, I never feel more ready for true worship than when I am preaching in Wales, when the whole sermon throughout, the preacher is aided rather than interrupted by shouts of "Glory to God!" and "Bless his name!" Why then one's blood begins to glow, and one's soul is stirred up, and this is the true way of serving God with joy. "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice." "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

She sings sweetly, in the third place, because she sings *confidently*. She does not pause while she questions herself, "Have I any right to sing?" but no, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden." "If" is a sad enemy to all Christian happiness; "but," "peradventure," "doubt," "surmise," "suspicion," these are a race of

highwaymen who waylay poor timid pilgrims and steal their spending money. Harps soon get out of tune, and when the wind blows from the doubting quarter, the strings snap by wholesale. If the angels of heaven could have a doubt, it would turn heaven into hell. "If thou be the Son of God," was the dastardly weapon wielded by the old enemy against our Lord in the wilderness. Our great foe knows well what weapon is the most dangerous. Christian, put up the shield of faith whenever thou seest that poisoned dagger about to be used against thee. I fear that some of you foster your doubts and fears. You might as well hatch young vipers, and foster the cockatrice. You think that it is a sign of grace to have doubts, whereas it is a sign of infirmity. It does not prove that you have no grace when you doubt God's promise, but it does prove that you want more; for if you had more grace, you would take God's Word as he gives it, and it would be said of you as of Abraham, that "he staggered not at the promise of God, through unbelief, being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to perform." God help you to shake off your doubts. Oh! these are devilish things. Is that too hard a word? I wish I could find a harder. These are felons; these are rebels, who seek to rob Christ of his glory; these are traitors who cast mire upon the escutcheon of my Lord. Oh! these are vile traitors; hang them on a gallows, high as Haman's; cast them to the earth, and let them rot like carrion, or bury them with the burial of an ass. Abhorred of God are doubts; abhorred of men let them be. They are cruel enemies to your souls, they injure your usefulness, they despoil you in every way. Smite them with the sword of the Lord and of Gideon! By faith in the promise seek to drive out these Canaanites and possess the land. O ye men of God, speak with confidence, and sing with sacred joy.

There is something more than confidence in her song. She sings with great *familiarity*, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name." It is the song of one who draws very near to her God in loving intimacy. I always have an idea when I listen to the reading of the Liturgy, that it is a slave's worship. I do not find fault with its words or sentences, perhaps of all human compositions, the Liturgical service of the Church of England is, with some exceptions, the noblest; but it is only fit for slaves, or at the best for subjects. The whole service through, one feels that there is a bound set round about the mountain, just as at Sinai. Its Litany is the wail of a sinner, and not the happy triumph of a saint. The service gendereth unto bondage, and has nothing in it of the confident spirit of adoption. It views the Lord afar off, as one to be feared rather than loved, and to be dreaded rather than delighted in. I have no doubt it suits those whose experience leads them to put the ten commandments near the communion table, for they hereby evidence that their dealings with God are still on the terms of servants and not of sons. For my own part I want a form of worship in which I may draw near to my God, and come even to his feet, spreading my case before him, and ordering my cause with arguments; talking with him as a friend talketh with his friend, or a child with its father; otherwise the worship is little worth to me. Our Episcopalian friends, when they come here, are naturally struck with our service, as being irreverent, because it is so much more familiar and bold than theirs. Let us carefully guard against really deserving such a criticism, and then we need not fear it; for a renewed soul yearns after that very intercourse which the formalist calls irreverent. To talk with God as my Father, to deal

with him as with one whose promises are true to me, and to whom I, a sinner washed in blood, and clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ, may come with boldness, not standing afar off; I say this is a thing which the outer-court worshipper cannot understand. There are some of our hymns which speak of Christ with such familiarity that the cold critic says, "I do not like such expressions, I could not sing them." I quite agree with you, Sir Critic, that the language would not befit you, a *stranger*; but a *child* may say a thousand things which a servant must not. I remember a minister altering one of our hymns— "Let those refuse to sing Who never knew our God; But favourites of the heavenly king May speak their joys abroad."

He gave it out— "But *subjects* of the heavenly king."

Yes; and when he gave it out I thought, "That is right; you are singing what you feel; you know nothing of discriminating grace and special manifestations, and therefore you keep to your native level, *Subjects* of the heavenly king.' " But oh, my heart wants a worship in which I can feel, and express the feeling that I am a favourite of the heavenly king, and therefore can sing his special love, his manifested favour, his sweet relationships, his mysterious union with my soul. You never get right till you ask the question, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" There is a secret which is revealed to us, and not to the outside world; an understanding which the sheep receive and not the goats. I appeal to any of you who during the week are in an official position; a judge, for instance. You have a seat on the bench, and you wear no small dignity when you are there. When you get home there is a little fellow who has very little fear of your judgship, but much love for your person, who climbs your



knee, who kisses your cheek, and says a thousand things to you which are meet and right enough as they come from *him*, but which you would not tolerate in court from any man living. The parable needs no interpretation. When I read some of the prayers of Martin Luther they shock me, but I argue with myself thus: "It is true I cannot talk to God in the same way as Martin, but then perhaps Martin Luther felt and realized his adoption more than I do, and therefore was not less humble because he was more bold. It may be that he used expressions which would be out of place in the mouth of any man who had not known the Lord as he had done." Oh my friends, sing this day of our Lord Jesus as one near to us. Get close to Christ, read his wounds, thrust your hand into his side, put your finger into the print of the nails, and then your song shall win a sacred softness and melody not to be gained elsewhere.

I must close by observing that while her song was all this, yet *how very humble* it was, and how full of gratitude. The Papist calls her, "Mother of God," but she never whispers such a thing in her song. No, it is "God *my Saviour*;" just such words as the sinner who is speaking to you might use, and such expressions as you sinners who are hearing me can use too. She wants a Saviour, she feels it; her soul rejoices because there is a Saviour for her. She does not talk as though she could commend herself to him, but she hopes to stand accepted in the beloved. Let us then take care that our familiarity has always blended with it the lowliest prostration of spirit, when we remember that He is God over all, blessed for ever, and we are nothing but dust and ashes; He fills all things, and we are less than nothing and vanity.

III. The last thing was to be—SHALL SHE SING ALONE? Yes, she must, if the only music we can bring is that of carnal delights

and worldly pleasures. There will be much music to-morrow which would not chime in with hers. There will be much mirth to-morrow, and much laughter, but I am afraid the most of it would not accord with Mary's song. It will not be, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." We would not stop the play of the animal spirits in young or old; we would not abate one jot of your relish of the mercies of God, so long as ye break not his command by wantonness, or drunkenness, or excess: but still, when you have had the most of this bodily exercise, it profiteth little, it is only the joy of the fleeting hour, and not the happiness of the spirit which abideth; and therefore Mary must sing alone, as far as you are concerned. The joy of the table is too low for Mary; the joy of the feast and the family grovels when compared with hers. But shall she sing alone? Certainly not, if this day any of us by simple trust in Jesus can take Christ to be our own. Does the Spirit of God this day lead thee to say, "I trust my soul on Jesus?" My dear friend, then thou hast conceived Christ: after the mystical and best sense of that word, Christ Jesus is conceived in thy soul. Dost thou understand him as the sin-bearer, taking away transgression? Canst thou see him bleeding as the substitute for men? Dost thou accept him as such? Does thy faith put all her dependence upon what he did, upon what he is, upon what he does? Then Christ is conceived in thee, and thou mayest go thy way with all the joy that Mary knew; and I was half ready to say, with something more; for the natural conception of the Saviour's holy body was not one-tenth so meet a theme for congratulation as the spiritual conception of the holy Jesus within your heart when he shall be in you the hope of glory. My dear friend, if Christ be thine, there is no song on earth too high, too holy for thee to sing;

nay, there is no song which thrills from angelic lips, no note which thrills Archangel's tongue in which thou mayest not join. Even this day, the holiest, the happiest, the most glorious of words, and thoughts, and emotions belong to thee. Use them! God help thee to enjoy them; and his be the praise, while thine is the comfort evermore. Amen.

# HOLY WORK FOR CHRISTMAS

DECEMBER 24TH, 1865

“And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.” Luke 2:17–20

EVERY season has its own proper fruit: apples for autumn, holly berries for Christmas. The earth brings forth according to the period of the year, and with man there is a time for every purpose under heaven. At this season, the world is engaged in congratulating itself and in expressing its complimentary wishes for the good of its citizens; let me suggest extra and more solid work for Christians. As we think to-day of the birth of the Saviour, let us aspire after a fresh birth of the Saviour in

our hearts; that as he is already “formed in us the hope of glory,” we may be “renewed in the spirit of our minds;” that we may go again to the Bethlehem of our spiritual nativity and do our first works, enjoy our first loves, and feast with Jesus as we did in the holy, happy, heavenly days of our espousals. Let us go to Jesus with something of that youthful freshness and excessive delight which was so manifest in us when we looked to him at the first; let him be crowned anew by us, for he is still adorned with the dew of his youth, and remains “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” The citizens of Durham, though they dwell not far from the Scotch border, and consequently in the olden times were frequently liable to be attacked, were exempted from the toils of war because there was a cathedral within their walls, and they were set aside to the bishop’s service, being called in the olden times by the name of “holy work-folk.” Now, we citizens of the New Jerusalem, having the Lord Jesus in our midst, may well excuse ourselves from the ordinary ways of celebrating this seasons and considering ourselves to be “holy work-folk,” we may keep it after a different sort from other men, in holy contemplation and is blessed service of that gracious God whose unspeakable gift the new-born King is to us.

I selected this text this morning because it seemed to indicate to me four ways of serving God, four methods of executing holy work and exercising Christian thought. Each of the verses sets Wore us a different way of sacred service. Some, it appears, published abroad the news, told to others what they had seen and heard; some wondered with a holy marvelling and astonishment; one, at least, according to the third of the verses, pondered, meditated, thought upon these things; and others, in the fourth place, glorified God and gave

him praise. I know not which of these four did God best service, but I think if we could combine all these mental emotions and outward exercises, we should be sure to praise God after a most godly and acceptable fashion.

I. To begin then, in the first place, we find that Some celebrated the Saviour's birth by PUBLISHING ABROAD what they had heard and seen; and truly we may say of them *that they had something* to rehearse in men's ears well worth the telling. That for which prophets and kings had waited long, had at last arrived and arrived to them. They had found out the answer to the perpetual riddle. They might have run through the streets with the ancient philosopher, crying, "Eureka! Eureka!" for their discovery was far superior to his. They had found out no solution to a mechanical problem or metaphysical dilemma, but their discovery was second to none ever made by men in real value, since it has been like the leaves of the tree of life to heal the nations, and a river of water of life to make glad the city of God. They had seen angels; they had heard them sing a song all strange and new. They had seen more than angels,—they had beheld the angel's King, the Angel of the Covenant whom we delight in. They had heard the music of heaven, and when near that manger the ear of their faith had heard the music of earth's hope, a mystic harmony which should ring all down the ages,—the grave sweet melody of hearts attuned to praise the Lord, and the glorious swell of the holy joy of God and man rejoicing in glad accord. They had seen God incarnate,—such a sight that he who gazeth on it must feel his tongue unloosed, unless indeed an unspeakable astonishment should make him dumb. Be silent when their eyes had seen such a vision! Impossible! To the first person they met outside that lowly stable door they began to tell their matchless tale, and they

wearied not till nightfall, crying, “Come and worship! Come and worship Christ, the new-born King!” As for us, beloved, have we also not something to relate which demands utterance? If we talk of Jesus, who can blame us? This, indeed, might make the tongue of him that sleeps to move,—the mystery of God incarnate for our sake, bleeding and dying that we might neither bleed nor die, descending that we might ascend, and wrapped in swaddling bands that we might be unwrapped of the grave-clothes of corruption. Here is such a story, so profitable to all hearers that he who repeats it the most often does best, and he who speaks the least hath most reason to accuse himself for sinful silence.

They had something to tell, and *that something had in it the inimitable blending which is the secret sign and royal mark of Divine authorship; a peerless marrying of sublimity and simplicity*; angels singing!—singing to shepherds! Heaven bright with glory! bright at midnight! God! A Babe!! The Infinite! An Infant of a span long!! The Ancient of Days! Born of a woman!! What more simple than the inn, the manger, a carpenter, a carpenter’s wife, a child? What more sublime than a “multitude of the heavenly host” waking the midnight with, their joyous chorales, and God himself in human flesh made manifest. A child is but an ordinary sight; but what a marvel to see that Word which was “in the beginning with God, tabernacling among us that we might behold his glory—the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth?” Brethren, we have a tale to tell, as simple as sublime. What simpler?—“Believe and live.” What more sublime?—“God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself!” A system of salvation so wonderful that angelic minds cannot but adore as they meditate upon it; and yet so simple that the

children in the temple may fitly hymn its virtues as they sing. "Hosanna! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." What a splendid combining of the sublime and the simple have we in the great atonement offered by the incarnate Saviour! Oh make known to all men this saving truth!

The shepherds need no excuse for making everywhere the announcement of the Saviour's birth, *for what they told they first received from heaven*. Their news was not muttered in their ears by Sybilline oracles, not brought to light by philosophic search, not conceived in poetry nor found as treasure trove among the volumes of the ancient; but it was revealed to them by that notable gospel preacher who led the angelic host, and testified, "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." When heaven entrusts a man with a merciful revelation, he is bound to deliver the good tidings to others. What, keep that a secret whose utterance eternal mercy makes to charm the midnight air? To what purpose were angels sent, if the message were not to be spread abroad? According to the teaching of our own beloved Lord we must not be silent, for he bids us "What ye hear in secret that reveal ye in public; and what I tell you in the ear in closets, that proclaim ye upon the house-tops." Beloved, you have heard a voice from heaven—you twice-born men, begotten again unto a lively hope, you have heard the Spirit of God bearing witness of God's truth with you, and teaching you of heavenly things. You then must keep this Christmas by telling to your fellow-men what God's own holy Spirit has seen fit to reveal to you.

But though the shepherds told what they heard from heaven, remember that *they spoke of what they had seen below*. They had, by observation, made those truths most



surely their own which had first been spoken to them by revelation. No man can speak of the things of God with any success until the doctrine which he finds in the book he finds also in his heart. We must bring down the mystery and make it plain, by knowing, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, its practical power on the heart and conscience. My brethren, the gospel which we preach is most surely revealed to us by the Lord; but, moreover, our hearts have tried and proved, have grasped, have felt, have realized its truth and power. If we have not been able to understand its heights and depths, yet we have felt its mystic power upon our heart and spirit. It has revealed sin to us better; it has revealed to us our pardon. It has killed the reigning power of sin, it has given us Christ to reign over us, the Holy Spirit to dwell within our bodies as in a temple. Now *we must* speak. I do not urge any of you to speak of Jesus who merely know the Word as you find it in the Bible, your teaching can have but little power; but I do speak earnestly to you who know its mighty influence upon the heart, who have not only heard of the babe but have seen him in the manger, taken him up in your own arms and received him as being born to you, a Saviour to you, Christos, the anointed for you, Jesus the Saviour from sin for you. Beloved, can you do otherwise than speak of the things which you have seen and heard. God has made you to taste and to handle of this good word of life, and you must not, you dare not hold your peace but you *must* tell to friends and neighbours what you have felt within.

These were shepherds, *unlettered men*. I will warrant you they could not read in a book; there is no probability that they even knew a single letter. They were shepherds, but they preached right well; and, my brethren, whatever some may

think, preaching is not to be confined to those learned gentlemen who have taken their degrees at Oxford or at Cambridge, or at any College or University. It is true that learning need not be an impediment to grace, and may be a fitting weapon in a gracious hand, but often the grace of God has glorified itself by the plain clear way in which unlettered men have understood the gospel and have proclaimed it. I would not mind asking the whole world to find a Master of Arts now living who has brought more souls to Christ Jesus than Richard Weaver. If the whole bench of bishops have done a tenth as much in the way of soul-winning as that one man, it is more than most of us give them credit for. Let us give to our God all the glory, but still let us not deny the fact that this sinner saved, with the brogue of the collier still about him, fresh from the coal pit, tells the story of the cross by God's grace in such a way that Right Reverend Fathers in God might humbly sit at his feet to learn the way to reach the heart and melt the stubborn soul. It is true an uneducated brother is not fitted for all work—he has his own sphere—but he is quite able to tell of what he has seen and heard, and so it strikes me is every man in a measure. If you have seen Jesus and heard his saving voice, if you have received truth as from the Lord, felt its tremendous power as coming from God to you, and if you have experienced its might upon your own spirit, why you can surely tell out what God has written within. If you cannot get beyond that into the deeper mysteries, into the more knotty points, well, well, there are some who can, and so you need not be uneasy; but you can at least reveal the first and foundation truths, and they are by far the most important. If you cannot speak in the pulpit, if as yet your cheek would mantle with a blush, and your tongue would refuse to do her office in the

presence of many, there are your children, you are not ashamed to speak before them; there is the little cluster round the hearth on Christmas night, there is the little congregation in the workshop, there is a little audience somewhere to whom you might tell out of Jesu's love to lost ones. Do not get beyond what you know; do not plunge into what you have not experienced, for if you do you will be out of your depth, and then very soon you will be floundering and making confusion worse confounded. Go as far as you know; and since you do know yourself a sinner and Jesus a Saviour, and a great one too, talk about those two matters, and good will come of it. Beloved, each one in his own position, tell what you have heard and seen; publish that abroad among the sons of men.

But *were they authorized?* It is a great thing to be authorized! Unauthorized ministers are most shameful intruders! Unordained men entering the pulpit, who are not in the apostolical succession—very horrible! Very horrible indeed! The Puseyite mind utterly fails to fathom the depth of horror which is contained in the idea of an unauthorized man preaching, and a man out of the apostolical succession daring to teach the way of salvation. To me this horror seems very like a schoolboy's fright at a hobgoblin which his fears had conjured up. I think if I saw a man slip through the ice into a cold grave, and I could rescue him from drowning, it would not be so very horrible to me to be the means of saving him, though I may not be employed by the Royal Humane Society. I imagine if I saw a fire, and heard a poor woman scream at an upper window, and likely to be burned alive, if I should wheel the fire-escape up to the window, and preserve her life, it would not be so very dreadful a matter though I might not belong to the regular Fire Brigade. If a company of brave volunteers

should chase an enemy out of their own county, I do not know that it would be anything so shocking, although a whole army of mercenaries might be neglecting their work in obedience to some venerable military rubric which rendered them incapable of effective service. But mark you, the shepherds and others like them are in the apostolical succession, and they are authorized by divine ordinance, for every man who hears the gospel is authorized to tell it to others. Do you want authority? here it is in confirmation strong from Holy Writ: "Let him that heareth say, Come"—that is, let every man who truly hears the gospel bid others come to drink of the water of life. This is all the warrant you require for preaching the gospel according to your ability. It is not every man who has ability to preach the Word; and it is not every man that we should like to hear preach it in the great congregation, for if all were mouth, what a great vacuum the Church would be; yet every Christian in some method should deliver the glad tidings. Our wise God takes care that liberty of prophesying shall not run to riot, for he does not give efficient pastoral and ministerial gifts to very many; yet every man according to his gifts, let him minister. Every one of you though not in the pulpit, yet in the pew, in the workshop, somewhere, anywhere, everywhere, do make known the savour of the Lord Jesus. Be this your authority: "Let him that heareth say, Come." I never thought of asking any authority for crying "Fire," when I saw a house burning; I never dreamed of seeking any authority for doing my best to rescue a poor perishing fellow-man, nor do I mean to seek it now! All the authority you want, any of you, is not the authority which can stream from prelates decorated with lawn sleeves, but the authority which comes direct from the great Head of the Church, who gives authority to every one of those

who hear the gospel, to teach every man his fellow, saying, "Know the Lord."

Here, dear brethren, is one way for you to keep a right holy, and in some sense a right merry, Christmas. Imitate these humble men, of whom it is said, "When they had seen it they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child."

II. We set before you, now, another mode of keeping Christmas, by HOLY WONDER, ADMIRATION, AND ADORATION. "And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds." We shall have little to say of those persons who merely wondered, and did nothing more. Many are set a wondering by the Gospel. They are content to hear it, pleased to hear it; if not in itself something new, yet there are new ways of putting it, and they are glad to be refreshed with the variety. The preacher's voice is unto them as the sound of one that giveth a goodly tune upon an instrument. They are glad to listen. They are not sceptics, they do not cavil, they raise no difficulties; they just say to themselves, "It is an excellent gospel, it is a wonderful plan of salvation. Here is most astonishing love, most extraordinary condescension." Sometimes they marvel that these things should be told them by shepherds; they can hardly understand how unlearned and ignorant men should speak of these things, and how such things should ever get into these shepherds' heads, where they can have learned them, how it is that they seem so earnest about them, what kind of operation they must have passed through to be able to speak as they do. But after holding up their hands and opening their mouths for about nine days, the wonder subsides, and they go their way and think no more about it. There are many of you who are set a wondering

whenever you see a work of God in your district. You hear of somebody converted who was a very extraordinary sinner, and you say, "It is very wonderful!" There is a revival; you happen to be present at one of the meetings when the Spirit of God is working gloriously: you say, "Well, this is a singular thing! very astonishing!" Even the newspapers can afford a corner at times for very great and extraordinary works of God the Holy Spirit; but there all emotion ends; it is all wondering, and nothing more. Now, I trust it will not be so with any of us; that we shall not think of the Saviour and of the doctrines of the gospel which he came to preach simply with amazement and astonishment, for this will work us but little good. On the other hand, there is another mode of wondering which is akin to adoration, if it be not adoration. I think it would be very difficult to draw a line between holy wonder and real worship, for when the soul is overwhelmed with the majesty of God's glory, though it may not express itself in song, or even utter its voice with bowed head in humble prayer, yet it silently adores. I am inclined to think that the astonishment which sometimes seizes upon the human intellect at the remembrance of God's greatness and goodness is, perhaps, the purest form of adoration which ever rises from mortal men to the throne of the Most High. This kind of wonder I recommend to those of you who from the quietness and solitariness of your lives are scarcely able to imitate the shepherds in telling out the tale to others: you can at least fill up the circle of the worshippers before the throne by wondering at what God has done.

Let me suggest to you that holy wonder at what God has done should be very natural to you. That God should consider his fallen creature, man, and instead of sweeping him away with the besom of destruction should devise a wonderful scheme

for his redemption, and that he should himself undertake to be man's Redeemer, and to pay his ransom price, is, indeed, marvellous! Probably it is most marvellous to you in its relation to yourself, that *you* should be redeemed by blood; that God should forsake the thrones and royalties above to suffer ignominiously below for you. If you know yourself you can never see any adequate motive or reason in your own flesh for such a deed as this. "Why such love to me?" you will say. If David sitting in his house could only say, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" what should you and I say? Had we been the most meritorious of individuals, and had unceasingly kept the Lord's commands, we could not have deserved such a priceless boon as incarnations but sinners, offenders, who revolted and went from God, further and further, what shall we say of this incarnate God dying for us, but "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us." Let your soul lose itself in wonder, for wonder, dear friends, is in this way a very practical emotion. Holy wonder will lead you to grateful worship: being astonished at what God has done, you will pour out your soul with astonishment at the foot of the golden throne with the song, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and majesty, and power, and dominion, and might be unto Him who sitteth on the throne and doeth these great things to me." Filled with this wonder it will cause you a godly watchfulness: you will be afraid to sin against such love as this. Feeling the presence of the mighty God in the gift of his dear Son, you will put off your shoes from off your feet, because the place whereon you stand is holy ground. You will be moved at the same time to a glorious hope. If Jesus has given himself to you, if he has done this marvellous thing on your behalf, you will feel that heaven

itself is not too great for your expectation, and that the rivers of pleasure at God's right hand are not too sweet or too deep for you to drink thereof. Who can be astonished at anything when he has once been astonished at the manger and the cross? What is there wonderful left after one has seen the Saviour? The nine wonders of the world! Why, you may put them all into a nutshell—machinery and modern art can excel them all; but this one wonder is not the wonder of earth only, but of heaven and earth, and even hell itself. It is not the wonder of the olden time, but the wonder of all time and the wonder of eternity. They who see human wonders a few times, at last cease to be astonished; the noblest pile that architect ever raised, at last fails to impress the onlooker; but not so this marvellous temple of incarnate Deity; the more we look the more we are astonished, the more we become accustomed to it, the more have we a sense of its surpassing splendour of love and grace. There is more of God, let us say, to be seen in the manger and the cross, than in the sparkling stars above, the rolling deep below, the towering mountain, the teeming valleys, the abodes of life, or the abyss of death. Let us then spend some choice hours of this festive season in holy wonder, such as will produce gratitude, worship, love, and confidence.

III. A third manner of holy work, namely, HER SACRED HEART PONDERING AND PRESERVING, you will find in the next verse.

One at least, and let us hope there were others, or at any rate let us ourselves be others—one kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. She wondered: she did more—she pondered. you will observe there was an exercise on the part of this blessed woman of the three great parts of her being; her memory—she kept all these things; her affections—she kept them in her heart; her intellect—she pondered them,



considered them, weighed them, turned them over; so that memory, affection, and understanding, were all exercised about these things. We delight to see this in Mary, but we are not at all surprised when we recollect that she was in some sense the most concerned of all on earth, for it was of her that Jesus Christ had been born. Those who come nearest to Jesus and enter the most closely into fellowship with him, will be sure to be the most engrossed with him. Certain persons are best esteemed at a distance, but not the Saviour; when you shall have known him to the very full, then shall you love him with the love which passeth knowledge; you shall comprehend the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of his love; and when you shall do so, then your own love shall swell beyond all length and breadth, all height and depth. The birth most concerned Mary, and therefore she was the most impressed with it. Note the way in which her concern was shown; she was a woman, and the grace which shines best in the female is not boldness—that belongs to the masculine mind; but affectionate modesty is a feminine beauty, and hence we do not read so much of her telling abroad as pondering within. No doubt she had her circle, and her word to speak in it; but for the most part she, like another Mary, sat still in the house. She worked, but her work was most directly for *him*, her heart's joy and delight. Like other children, the holy child needed care, which only a mother's hand and heart could exercise; she was therefore engrossed with him. blessed engrossment! Sweet engagement! Count not that to be unacceptable service which occupies itself rather with Jesus than with his disciples or his wandering sheep. That woman who broke the alabaster box and poured the ointment upon our Jesus himself was blamed by Judas, and even the rest of the disciples thought that the

poor had lost a benefit, but “she hath wrought a good work on me” was the Saviour’s answer. I desire to bring you to this thought, that if during this season you retiring quiet ones cannot speak to others, or have no desirable opportunity or suitable gift for that work, you may sit still with Jesus and honour him in peace. Mary took the Lord in her arms; oh that you may bear him in yours! She executed works for his person directly; do you imitate her. You can love him, bless him, praise him, study him, ponder him, comprehend his character, study the types that set him forth, and imitate his life; and in this way, though your worship will not blaze forth among the sons of men, and scarcely benefit them as some other forms of work, yet it will both benefit you and be acceptable to your Lord. Beloved, remember what you have heard of Christ, and what he has done for you; make your heart the golden cup to hold the rich recollections of his past loving-kindness; make it a pot of manna to preserve the heavenly bread whereon saints have fed in days gone by. Let your memory treasure up everything about Christ which you have either heard, or felt, or known, and then let your fond affections hold him fast evermore. Love him! Pour out that alabaster box of your heart, and let all the precious ointment of your affection come streaming on his feet. If you cannot do it with joy do it sorrowfully, wash his feet with tears, wipe them with the hairs of your head; but do love him, love the blessed Son of God, your ever tender Friend. Let your intellect be exercised concerning the Lord Jesus. Turn over and over by meditation what you read. Do not be lettermen—do not stop at the surface; dive into the depths. Be not as the swallow which toucheth the brook with her wing, but as the fish which penetrates the lowest wave. Drink deep draughts of love; do not sip and away, but dwell at the well as Isaac did at

the well Lahai-roi. Abide with your Lord: let him not be to you as a wayfaring man that tarrieth tor a night, but constrain him, saying, "Abide with us, for the day is far spent." Hold him, and do not let him go. The word "ponder," as you know, means to weigh. Make ready the scales of judgment. Oh, but where are the scales that can weigh the Lord Christ? "He taketh up the isles as a very little thing"—who shall take *him* up? "He weigheth the mountains in scales." In what scales shall we weigh *him*? Be it so, if your understanding cannot comprehend, let your affections apprehend; and if your spirit cannot compass the Lord Jesus in the arms of its understanding, let it embrace him in the arms of your affection. Oh, beloved, here is blessed Christmas work for you, if, like Mary, you lay up all these things in your heart and ponder upon them.

IV. The last piece of holy Christmas work is to come. "The shepherds returned," we read in the twentieth verse," GLORIFYING AND PRAISING GOD for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them." Returned to what? *Returned to business* to look after the lambs and sheep again. Then if we desire to glorify God we need not give up our business.

Some people get the notion into their heads that the only way in which they can live for God is by becoming ministers, missionaries, or Bible women. Alas! how many of us would be shut out from any opportunity of magnifying the Most High if this were the case. The shepherds went back to the sheep-pens glorifying and praising God. Beloved, it is not office, it is earnestness; it is not position, it is grace which will enable us to glorify God. God is most surely glorified in that cobbler's stall where the godly worker as he plies the awl sings of the Saviour's love, ay, glorified far more than in many a prebendal

stall where official *religiousness* performs its scanty duties. The name of Jesus is glorified by yonder carter as he drives his horse and blesses his God, or speaks to his fellow labourer by the roadside as much as by yonder divine who, throughout the country like Boanerges, is thundering out the gospel. God is glorified by our abiding in our vocation. Take care you do not fall out of the path of duty by leaving your calling, and take care you do not dishonour your profession while in it; think not much of yourselves, but do not think too little of your callings. There is no trade which is not sanctified by the gospel. If you turn to the Bible, you will find the most menial forms of labour have been in some way or other connected either with the most daring deeds of faith, or else with persons whose lives have been otherwise illustrious; keep to your calling, brother, keep to your calling! Whatever God has made thee, when he calls thee abide in that, unless thou art quite sure, mind that, unless thou art quite sure that he calls thee to something else. The shepherds glorified God though they went to their trade.

They glorified God *though they were shepherds*. As we remarked, they were not men of learning. So far from having an extensive library full of books, it is probable they could not read a word; yet they glorified God. This takes away all excuse for you good people who say, "I am no scholar; I never had any education, I never went even to a Sunday-school." Ah, but if your heart is right, you can glorify God. Never mind, Sarah, do not be cast down because you know so little; learn more if you can, but make good use of what you do know. Never mind, John; it is indeed a pity that you should have had to toil so early, as not to have acquired even the rudiments of knowledge; but do not think that you cannot glorify God. If

you would praise God, live a holy life; you can do that by his grace, at any rate, without scholarship. If thou wouldst do good to others, be good thyself; and that is away which is as open to the most illiterate as it is to the best taught. Be of good courage! Shepherds glorified God, and so may you. Remember there is one thing in which they had a preference over the wise men. The wise men wanted a star to lead them; the shepherds did not. The wise men went wrong even with a star, stumbled into Jerusalem; the shepherds went straight away to Bethlehem. Simple minds sometimes find a glorified Christ where learned heads, much puzzled with their lore, miss him. A good doctor used to say, "Lo, these simpletons have entered into the kingdom, while we learned men have been fumbling for the latch." It is often so; and so, ye simple minds, be ye comforted and glad.

The way in which these shepherds honoured God is worth noticing. They did it by praising him. Let us think more of sacred song than we sometimes do. When the song is bursting in full chorus from the thousands in this house, it is but a noise in the ear of some men; but inasmuch as many true hearts, touched with the love of Jesus, are keeping pace with their tongues, it is not a mere noise in God's esteem, there is a sweet music in it that makes glad his ear. What is the great ultimatum of all Christian effort? When I stood here the other morning preaching the gospel, my mind was fully exercised with the winning of souls, but I seemed while preaching to get beyond that. I thought, Well, that is not the chief end after all—the chief end is to glorify God, and even the saving of sinners is sought by the right-minded as the means to that end. Then it struck me all of a sudden, "If in psalm singing and hymn singing we do really glorify God, we are doing more than in the

preaching; because we are not then in the means, we are close upon the great end itself.” If we praise God with heart and tongue we glorify him in the surest possible manner, we are really glorifying him then. “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me,” saith the Lord. Sing then, my brethren! Sing not only when you are together but sing alone. Cheer your labour with psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. Make glad the family with sacred music. We sing too little, I am sure, yet the revival of religion has always been attended with the revival of Christian psalmody. Luther’s translations of the psalms were of as much service as Luther’s discussions and controversies; and the hymns of Charles Wesley, and Cennick, and Toplady, and Newton, and Cowper, aided as much in the quickening of spiritual life in England as the preaching of John Wesley and George Whitefield. We want more singing. Sing more and murmur less, sing more and slander less, sing more and cavil less, sing more and mourn less. God grant us to-day, as these shepherds did, to glorify God by praising him.

I have not quite done with them. What was the subject of their praise? It appears that they *praised God for what they had heard*. If we think of it, there is good reason for blessing God every time we hear a gospel sermon. What would souls in hell give if they could hear the gospel once more, and be on terms in which salvation grace might come to them? What would dying men give whose time is all but over if they could once more come to the house of God, and have another warning and another invitation? My brethren, what would you give sometimes when you are shut up by sickness and cannot meet with the great congregation, when your heart and your flesh cry out for the living God? Well, praise God for what you have heard. you have heard the faults of the preacher; let him

mourn them. You have heard his Master's message, do you bless God for that? Scarcely will you ever hear a sermon which may not make you sing if you are in a right mind. George Herbert says, "Praying is the end of preaching." So it is, but praising is its end too. Praise God that you hear there is a Saviour! Praise God that you hear that the plan of salvation is very simple! Praise God that you have a Saviour for your own soul! Praise God that you are pardoned, that you are saved! Praise him for what you have heard, but observe, *they also praised God for what they had seen*. Look at the twentieth verse—"heard and seen." There is the sweetest music—what we have experienced, what we have felt within, what we have made our own—the things that we have made touching the King. Mere hearing may make some music, but the soul of song must come from seeing with the eye of faith. And, dear friends, you who have seen with that God-giving eyesight, I pray you, let not your tongues be steeped in sinful silence, but loud to the praise of sovereign grace, wake up your glory and awake psaltery and harp. One point for which they praised God was *the agreement between what they had heard and what they had seen*. Observe the last sentence. "As it was told them." Have you not found the gospel to be in yourselves just what the Bible said it would be? Jesus said he would give you grace—have you not had it? He promised you rest—have you not received it? He said that you should have joy, and comfort, and life through believing in him—have you not had all these? Are not his ways ways of pleasantness, and his paths paths of peace? Surely you can say with the queen of Sheba, "The half has not been told me." I have found Christ more sweet than his servants could set him forth as being. I looked upon the likeness as they painted it, but it was a mere daub as compared

with himself—the King in his beauty. I have heard of the goodly land, but oh! it floweth with milk and honey more richly and sweetly than men were ever able to tell me when in their best trim for speech. Surely, what we have seen keeps pace with what we have heard. Let us then glorify and praise God for what he has done.

This word to those who are not yet converted, and I have done. I do not think you can begin at the seventeenth verse, but I wish you Would begin at the eighteenth. You cannot begin at the seventeenth—you cannot tell to others what you have not felt; do not try it. Neither teach in the Sunday-school, nor attempt to preach if you are not converted. Unto the wicked God saith, “What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?” But I would to God you would begin with the eighteenth verse—wondering! Wondering that you are spared—wondering that you are out of hell—wondering that still doth his good Spirit strive with the chief of sinners. Wonder that this morning the gospel should have a word for you after all your rejections of it and sins against God. I should like you to begin there, because then I should have good hope that you would go on to the next verse and change the first letter, and so go from wondering to pondering. Oh sinner, I wish you would ponder the doctrines of the cross. Think of thy sin, God’s wrath, judgment, hell, thy Saviour’s blood, God’s love, forgiveness, acceptance, heaven—think on these things. Go from wondering to pondering. And then I would to God thou couldst go on to the next verse, from pondering to glorifying. Take Christ, look to him, trust him. Then sing “I am forgiven,” and go thy way a believing sinner, and therefore a sinner saved, washed in the blood, and clean. Then go back after that to the seventeenth verse, and begin to tell to others.



But as for you Christians who are saved, I want you to begin this very afternoon at the seventeenth.

“Then will I tell to sinners round  
What a dear Saviour I have found:  
I’ll point to thy redeeming blood,  
And say—‘Behold the way to God!’”

Then when the day is over get up to your chambers and wonder, admire and adore; spend half an hour also like Mary in pondering and treasuring up the day’s work and the day’s hearing in your hearts, and then close all with that which never must close—go on to-night, to-morrow, and all the days of your life, glorifying and praising God for all the things that you have seen and heard. May the Master bless you for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

# GOD INCARNATE, THE END OF FEAR

DECEMBER 23<sup>RD</sup>, 1866

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not.”—Luke  
2:10

No sooner did the angel of the Lord appear to the shepherds, and the glory of the Lord shine round about them, than they were sore afraid. It had come to this, that man was afraid of his God, and when God sent down his loving messengers with tidings of great joy, men were filled with as much fright as though the angel of death had appeared with uplifted sword. The silence of night and its dreary gloom caused no fear in the shepherds' hearts, but the joyful herald of the skies, robed in mildest glories of grace, made them sore afraid. We must not condemn the shepherds on this account as though they were peculiarly timid or ignorant, for they were only acting as every other person in that age would have done under the same circumstances. Not because they were simple shepherds were they amazed with fear, but it is probable that if they had been well-instructed prophets they would have displayed the same feeling; for there are many instances recorded in Scripture, in which the foremost men of their time trembled and felt a horror of great darkness when special manifestations of God were

vouchsafed to them. In fact, a slavish fear of God was so common, that *a tradition* had grown out of it, which was all but universally received as nothing less than truth. It was generally believed that every supernatural manifestation was to be regarded as a token of speedy death. "We shall surely die because we have seen God" was not only Manoah's conclusion, but that of most men of his period. Few indeed were those happy minds who, like Manoah's wife, could reason in a more cheerful style, "If the Lord had meant to destroy us he would not have shewed us such things as these." It became *the settled conviction* of all men, whether wise or simple, whether good or bad, that a manifestation of God was not so much to be rejoiced in as to be dreaded; even as Jacob said, "How dreadful is this place! it is none other but the house of God." Doubtless the spirit which originated this tradition was much fostered by the *legal dispensation*, which is better fitted for trembling servants than for rejoicing sons. It was of the bondwoman, and it gendered into bondage. The solemn night in which its greatest institution was ordained was a night of trembling, death was there in the slaughter of the lamb; blood was there sprinkled on a conspicuous part of the house; fire was there to roast the lamb, all the emblems of judgment were there to strike the mind with awe. It was at the dread hour of midnight when the solemn family conclave was assembled, the door being shut; the guests themselves standing in an uneasy attitude, and awestricken, for their hearts could hear the wings of the destroying angel as he passed by the house. Afterwards, when Israel came into the wilderness, and the law was proclaimed, do we not read that the people stood afar off, and that bounds were set about the mount, and if so much as a beast touched the mountain it must be stoned, or thrust

through with a dart? It was a day of fear and trembling when God spake unto them out of the fire. Not with the melting notes of harp, psaltery, or dulcimer, did God's law come to his people's ears; no soft wings of angels brought the message, and no sunny smiles of heaven sweetened it to the mind; but with sound of trumpet and thunder, out of the midst of blazing lightnings, with Sinai altogether on a smoke, the law was given. The law's voice was, "Come not nigh hither!" The spirit of Sinai is fear and trembling. The legal ceremonies were such as rather to inspire fear than to beget trust. The worshipper at the temple saw bloodshed from the first of the year to the end of the year; the morning was ushered in with the blood-shedding of the lamb, and the evening shades could not gather without blood again being spilt upon the altar. God was in the midst of the camp, but the pillar of cloud and fire was his unapproachable pavilion. The emblem of his glory was concealed behind the curtain of blue and scarlet and fine twined linen; behind which only one foot might pass, and that but once in the year. Men spake of the God of Israel with bated breath, and with voices hushed and solemn. They had not learned to say, "Our Father which art in heaven." They had not received the spirit of adoption, and were not able to say Abba; they smarted under the spirit of bondage, which made them sore afraid when by any peculiar glory the Lord displayed his presence among them. At the bottom of all this slavish dread lay *sin*. We never find Adam afraid of God, nor of any manifestation of Deity while he was in Paradise an obedient creature, but no sooner had he touched the fatal fruit than he found that he was naked, and hid himself. When he heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, Adam was afraid and hid himself from the presence of the

Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. Sin makes miserable cowards of us all. See the man who once could hold delightful converse with his Maker, now dreading to hear his Maker's voice and skulking in the grove like a felon, who knows his guilt, and is afraid to meet the officers of justice.

Beloved, in order to remove this dread nightmare of slavish fear from the breast of humanity, where its horrible influence represses all the noblest aspirations of the soul, our Lord Jesus Christ came in the flesh. This is one of the works of the devil which he was manifested to destroy. Angels came to proclaim the good news of the advent of the incarnate God, and the very first note of their song was a foretaste of the sweet result of his coming to all those who shall receive him. The angel said, "Fear not," as though the times of fear were over, and the days of hope and joy had arrived. "Fear not." These words were not meant for those trembling shepherds only, but were intended for you and for me, yea all nations to whom the glad tidings shall come. "Fear not." Let God no longer be the object of your slavish dread! Stand not at a distance from him any more. The Word is made flesh. God has descended to tabernacle among men, that there may be no hedge of fire, no yawning gulf between God and man.

Into this subject I wish to go this morning as God may help me. I am sensible of the value of the theme, and am very conscious that I cannot do it justice. I would earnestly ask God the Holy Spirit to make you drink of the golden cup of the incarnation of Christ such draughts as I have enjoyed in my quiet meditations. I can scarce desire more delight for my dearest friends. There is no antidote for fear more excellent than the subject of that midnight song, the first and best of Christmas chorales, which from its first word to its last note

chimes out the sweet message, which begins with, “Fear not:”

“It is my sweetest comfort, Lord,  
And will for ever be,  
To muse upon the gracious truth  
Of thy humanity.

“Oh joy! there sitteth in our flesh,  
Upon a throne of light,  
One of a human mother born,  
In perfect Godhead bright!

“Though earth’s foundations should be moved,  
Down to their lowest deep;

Though all the trembling universe  
Into destruction sweep;

“For ever God, for ever man,  
My Jesus shall endure;  
And fix’d on Him, my hope remains  
Eternally secure.”

Dear friends, I shall first detain your attention with a few remarks upon *the fear* of which I have already spoken; then, secondly, we shall invite your earnest attention to *the remedy* which the angels came to proclaim; and then, thirdly, as we may have time, we shall endeavour to *make an application of this remedy to various cases*.

I. Turning to THE FEAR of the text, it may be well to discriminate. There is a kind of fear towards God from which we must not wish to be free. There is that lawful, necessary, admirable, excellent fear which is always due from the creature to the Creator, from the subject to the king, ay, and from the child toward the parent. That holy, filial fear of God, which makes us dread sin, and constrains us to be obedient to his command, is to be cultivated; “we had fathers of our flesh, and we gave them reverence, shall we not be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?” This is the “fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.” To have a holy awe of our most holy, just, righteous, and tender Parent is a privilege, not a bondage. Godly fear is not the “fear which hath torment;” perfect love doth not cast out, but dwells with it in joyful harmony. The angels perfectly love God, and yet with holy fear they veil their faces with their wings as they approach him; and when we shall in glory behold the face of God, and shall be filled with all his fulness, we shall not cease humbly and

reverently to adore the Infinite Majesty. Holy fear is a work of the Holy Ghost, and woe unto the man who does not possess it; let him boast as he may, his “feeding himself without fear” is a mark of his hypocrisy.

The fear which is to be avoided is *slavish fear*; the fear which perfect love casts out, as Sarah cast out the bondwoman and her son. That trembling which keeps us at a distance from God, which makes us think of him as a Spirit with whom we can have no communion; as a being who has no care for us except to punish us, and for whom consequently we have no care except to escape if possible from his terrible presence. This fear sometimes arises in men’s hearts from their *thoughts dwelling exclusively upon the divine greatness*. Is it possible to peer long into the vast abyss of Infinity and not to fear? Can the mind yield itself up to the thought of the Eternal, Self-existent, Infinite One without being filled, first with awe and then with dread? What am I? An aphid creeping upon a rosebud is a more considerable creature in relation to the universe of beings than I can be in comparison with God. What am I? A grain of dust, that does not turn the scale of the most delicate balance is a greater thing to man than a man is to Jehovah. At best we are less than nothing and vanity. But there is more to abase us than this. We have had the impertinence to be disobedient to the will of this great One; and now the goodness and greatness of his nature are as a current against which sinful humanity struggles in vain, for the irresistible torrent must run its course, and overwhelm every opponent. What does the great God seem to us out of Christ but a stupendous rock, threatening to crush us, or a fathomless sea, hastening to swallow us up? The contemplation of the divine greatness may of itself fill man with horror, and cast him into unutterable misery! Dwell long upon



such themes, and like Job, you will tremble before Jehovah, who shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble.

*Each one of the sterner attributes of God* will cause the like fear. Think of his power by which he rolls the stars along, and lay thine hand upon thy mouth. Think of his wisdom by which he numbers the clouds, and settles the ordinances of heaven. Meditate upon any one of these attributes, but especially upon his justice, and upon that devouring fire which burns unceasingly against sin, and it is no wonder if the soul becomes full of fear. Meanwhile let *a sense of sin* with its great whip of wire, flagellate the conscience, and man will dread the bare idea of God. For this is the burden of the voice of conscience to guilty man, "If thou wert an obedient creature, this God were still terrible to thee, for the heavens are not pure in his sight, and he charged his angels with folly. What art thou that thou shouldst be just with God, or have any claims upon him; for thou hast offended, thou hast lifted the hand of thy rebellion against the infinite majesty of omnipotence—what can become of thee? what can be thy portion but to be set up for ever as a monument of his righteous wrath?"

Now such a fear as that being very easily created in the thoughtful mind, and being indeed, as it seems to me, the natural heritage of man, as the result of sin is most doleful and injurious. For wherever there is a slavish dread of the Divine Being, *it alienates man most thoroughly from his God*. We are by our evil nature enemies to God, and the imagination that God is cruel, harsh, and terrible, adds fuel to the fire of our enmity. Those whom we slavishly dread we cannot love. You could not make your child show forth love to you if its little heart was full of fear; if it dreaded to hear your footstep, and

was alarmed at the sound of your voice, it could not love you. You might obey some huge ogre because you were afraid of him, but to love him would be impossible. It is one of the master-pieces of Satan to deceive man by presenting to his mind a hateful picture of God. He knows that men cannot love that which terrifies them, and therefore he paints the God of grace as a hard, unforgiving being who will not receive the penitent and have pity upon the sorrowful. God is love! Surely if men had but grace enough to see the beauty of that portrait of God—that miniature sketched with a single line, “God is love!” they would willingly serve such a God. When the Holy Ghost enables the mind to perceive the character of God, the heart cannot refuse to love him. Base, fallen, depraved as men are, when they are illuminated from on high so as to judge rightly of God, their hearts melt under the genial beams of divine love, and they love God because he has first loved them. But here is the master-piece of Satan, that he will not let the understanding perceive the excellence of God’s character, and then the heart cannot love that which the understanding does not perceive to be loveable.

In addition to alienating the heart from God, this fear *creates a prejudice against God’s gospel of grace*. There are persons in this place this morning who believe that if they were religious they would be miserable. It is the settled conviction of half London that to trust in Jesus and to be obedient to God, which is the essence of all true religion, would be wretchedness itself. “Oh,” says the worldly man, “I should have to give up my pleasure if I were to become a Christian.” Now, this is one of the most wicked slanders that ever was invented, and yet it has current belief everywhere. It is the popular theology that to be an enemy to God is happiness, but

to be the friend of God is misery. What an opinion men must have of God, when they believe that to love him is to be wretched! Oh, could they comprehend, could they but know how good God is, instead of imagining that his service would be slavery, they would understand that to be his friends is to occupy the highest and happiest position which created beings can occupy.

This fear in some men *puts them out of all heart of ever being saved*. Thinking God to be an ungenerous being, they keep at a distance from him, and if there be some sweet attractions now and then in a sermon, some gentle meltings of conscience, the good desire never matures into the practical resolve. They do not say, "I will arise and go unto my Father," because they do not know him as a Father, they only know him as a consuming fire. A man does not say, "I will arise and go unto a consuming fire." Nay, but, like Jonah, he would fain pay his fare, regardless of the expense, and go to Tarshish to flee from the presence of the Lord. This it is that makes calamity of being a man at all to most men, that they cannot get away from God, since they imagine that if they could but escape from his presence they would then wander into bliss; but being doomed to be where God is, then they conceive that for them wretchedness and misery alone remain. The soft warnings of mercy and the thunderings of justice are alike powerless upon men so long as their hearts are seared and rendered callous by an unholly dread of God.

This wicked dread of God frequently *drives men to extremities of sin*. The man says, "There is no hope for me; I have made one fatal mistake in being God's enemy, and I am irretrievably ruined. There is no hope that I shall ever be restored to happiness or peace. Then what will I do? I will cast

the reins upon the neck of my passions, I will defy fate and take my chance. I will get such happiness as may be found in sin. If I cannot be reconciled to heaven I will be a good servant of hell." Hence men have been known to hasten from one crime to another with a malicious inventiveness of rebellion against God, as if they could never be satisfied nor contented till they had heaped up more and more rebellions against the majesty of God whom in their hearts they dreaded with a burning Satanic dread mingled with hate. If they could but comprehend that he is still willing to receive the rebellious, that his bowels yearn towards sinners; if they could but once believe that he is love and willeth not the death of a sinner but had rather that he should turn unto him and live, surely the course of their lives must be changed; but the god of this world blindeth them, and maligns the Lord until they count it folly to submit to him.

Dear friends, this evil which works a thousand ills, operates in ways of evil quite innumerable. *It dishonours God.* Oh, it is infamous, it is villainous to make out our God, who is light and in whom is no darkness at all, to be an object of horrible fear. It is infernal; I may say no less; it is devilish to the highest degree to paint him as a demon, who is Jehovah, the God of Love. Oh, the impertinence of the prince of darkness, and the madness of man to consent thereunto, that God should be depicted as being unwilling to forgive, unkind, untender, hard, cruel; whereas he is love; supremely and above all things, love. He is just, but all the more truly loving because he is just. He is true, and therefore sure to punish sin, yet even punishing sin because it were not good to let sin go unpunished. This is base ingratitude on the part of a much-receiving creature that he should malign his benefactor.

The evil which is thus done to God recoils upon man, for

this *fear hath torment*. No more tormenting misery in the world than to think of God as being our implacable foe. You Christians who have lost for a while the spirit of adoption, you who have wandered to a distance from God, nothing can be more tormenting to you than the fear that the Lord has cast you away and will not again receive you. You backsliders, nothing can hold you back from your heavenly Father like a dread of him. If you can but really know that he is not to be dreaded with slavish fear, you will come to him as your child does to you, and you will say, "My Father, I have offended—pity me! My Father, I am vexed and grieved for my sin—forgive me, receive me again to thine arms, and help me by thy mighty grace that henceforth I may walk in thy commandments, and be obedient to thy will." My dear friends, you who know anything about spiritual life, do not you feel that when you have sweet thoughts of God breathed into you from above, and have his special love to you shed abroad in your hearts, it is then that you are holiest! Have you not perceived that the only way in which you can grow in that which is morally and spiritually lovely, is by having your gracious God high in your esteem, and feeling his precious love firing your hearts?

That they may be like little children is the very thing which God desires for his elect ones. It is this which his Spirit works in his chosen; it is to this that we must come if we are to be meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Slavish fear is so opposed to the child-like spirit that it is as the poison of asps to it. Dread and fear bring out everything in us that is of the man rather than of the child, for it stirs us up to resist the object of our fear. An assured confidence in the goodness of God casts out fear and brings forth everything that is child-like in us. Have you never seen a child trust to

some big rough man, and melt him down by its trustfulness? It trusted where there was no ground for trust apparently, and made ground for itself. That same child simply and implicitly trusting in a good and generous father is a noble picture, and if I, a poor, weak, feeble child, conscious that I am such, knowing that I am all folly and weakness, can just believe in my good, great God, through Jesus Christ, and come and trust myself with him, and leave him to do as he likes with me, believing that he will not be unkind, and cannot be unwise; if I can wholly repose in his love and be obedient to his will, why then I shall have reached the highest point that the creature can reach; the Holy Ghost will then have wrought his finished work in me, and I shall be fit for heaven. Beloved, it is because fear opposes this, and prevents this, that I would say with the angel, "Fear not."

II. I fear I weary you while I speak upon this somewhat dolorous theme, and therefore with as much brevity as the abundance of the matter may permit, let us notice in the second place, THE CURE FOR THIS FEAR, which the angel came to proclaim. It lies in this:—"Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

"Till God in human flesh I see,  
My thoughts no comfort find;  
The holy, just and sacred Three,  
Are terrors to my mind.

"But if Immanuel's face appear,  
My hope, my joy begins;  
His name forbids my slavish fear,  
His grace removes my sins."

That is the remedy—God with us—God made flesh. Let us

try and show this from the angel's song.

According to the text they were not to fear, first of all, because *the angel had come to bring them good news*. How does it run? It says, "I bring you good tidings of great joy." But what was this gospel? Further on we are told that the gospel was the fact that Christ was born. So, then, it is good news to men that Christ is born, that God has come down and taken manhood into union with himself. Verily this is glad tidings. He who made the heavens slumbers in a manger. What then? Why then God is not of necessity an enemy to man, because here is God actually taking manhood into alliance with Deity. There cannot be permanent, inveterate, rooted enmity between the two natures, or otherwise the divine nature could not have taken the human into hypostatical union with itself. Is there not comfort in that? Thou art a poor, erring, feeble man, and that which makes thee afraid of the Lord is this fear that there is an enmity between God and man; but there need not be such enmity, for thy Maker has actually taken manhood into union with himself.

Dost thou not see another thought? The Eternal seems to be so far away from us. He is infinite, and we are such little creatures. There appears to be a great gulf fixed between man and God, even on the ground of creatureship. But observe, he who is God has also become man. We never heard that God took the nature of angels into union with himself; we may therefore say that between Godhead and angelhood there must be an infinite distance still; but here the Lord has actually taken manhood into union with himself; there is therefore no longer a great gulf fixed, on the contrary, here is a marvellous union; Godhead has entered into marriage bonds with manhood. O my soul, thou dost not stand now like a poor lone orphan wailing

across the deep sea after thy Father who has gone far away and cannot hear thee; thou dost not now sob and sigh like an infant left naked and helpless, its Maker having gone too far away to regard its wants or listen to its cries. No, thy Maker has become like thyself. Is that too strong a word to use? He without whom was not anything made that was made is that same Word who tabernacled among us and was made flesh, made flesh in such a way that he was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. O manhood, was there ever such news as this for thee! Poor manhood, thou weak worm of the dust, far lower than the angels, lift up thy head, and be not afraid! Poor manhood, born in weakness, living in toil, covered with sweat, and dying at last to be eaten by the worms, be not thou abashed even in the presence of seraphs, for next to God is man, and not even an archangel can come in between; nay, not next to God, there is scarcely that to be said, for Jesus who is God is man also; Jesus Christ, eternally God, was born, and lived and died as we also do. That is the first word of comfort to expel our fear.

The second point that takes away fear is that this man who was also God was actually *born*. Observe the angel's word, "Unto you is *born*."

Our Lord Jesus Christ is in some senses more man than Adam. Adam was not born; Adam never had to struggle through the risks and weaknesses of infancy; he knew not the littlenesses of childhood—he was full grown at once. Father Adam could not sympathize with me as a babe and a child. But how man-like is Jesus! he is cradled with us in the manger; he does not begin with us in mid-life, as Adam, but he accompanies us in the pains and feebleness and infirmities of infancy, and he continues with us even to the grave. Beloved,



this is such sweet comfort. He that is God this day was once an infant: so that if my cares are little and even trivial and comparatively infantile, I may go to him, for he was once a child. Though the great ones of the earth may sneer at the child of poverty, and say, "You are too mean, and your trouble is too slight for pity;" I recollect with humble joy, that the King of heaven did hang upon a woman's breast, and was wrapped in swaddling bands, and therefore I tell him all my griefs. How wonderful that he should have been an infant, and yet should be God over all, blessed for ever! I am not afraid of God now; this blessed link between me and God, the holy child Jesus, has taken all fear away.

Observe, the angel told them somewhat of his *office*, as well as of his birth. "Unto you is born this day a *Saviour*." The very object for which he was born and came into this world was that he might deliver us from sin. What, then, was it that made us afraid? Were we not afraid of God because we felt that we were lost through sin? Well then, here is joy upon joy. Here is not only the Lord come among us as a man, but made man in order to save man from that which separated him from God. I feel as if I could burst out into a weeping for some here who have been spending their living riotously and gone far away from God their Father by their evil ways. I know they are afraid to come back. They think that the Lord will not receive them, that there is no mercy for such sinners as they have been. Oh, but think of it—Jesus Christ has come to seek and to save that which was lost. He was born to save. If he does not save he was born in vain, for the object of his birth was salvation. If he shall not be a Saviour, then the mission of God to earth has missed its end, for its design was that lost sinners might be saved. Lost One, lost one, if there were news that an angel had come to

save thee there might be some cheer in it; but there are better tidings still. God has come; the Infinite, the Almighty, has stooped from the highest heaven that he may pick thee up, a poor undone and worthless worm. Is there not comfort here? Does not the incarnate Saviour take away the horrible dread which hangs over men like a black pall?

Note that the angel did not forget to describe *the person* of this Saviour—"A Saviour which is *Christ*." There is his manhood. As man he was anointed. "*The Lord*." There is his Godhead. Yes, this is the solid truth upon which we plant our foot. Jesus of Nazareth is God; he who was conceived in the womb of the virgin and born in Bethlehem's manger is now, and always was, God over all, blessed for ever. There is no gospel if he be not God. It is no news to me to tell me that a great prophet is born. There have been great prophets before; but the world has never been redeemed from evil by mere testimony to the truth, and never will be. Tell me that God is born, that God himself has espoused our nature, and taken it into union with himself, then the bells of my heart ring merry peals, for now may I come to God since God has come to me.

You will observe, dear friends, however, that the pith of what the angel said lay in this. "*Unto you*." You will never get true comfort from the incarnate Saviour till you perceive your personal interest in him. Christ as man was a representative man. There never were but two thoroughly representative men; the first is Adam: Adam obedient the whole race stands, Adam disobedient the whole race falls. "In Adam all die." Now, the man Jesus is the second great representative man. He does not represent the whole human race, he represents as many as his Father gave him; he represents a chosen company. Now, whatever Christ did, if you belong to those who are in him he

did for you. So that Christ circumcised or Christ crucified, Christ dead or Christ living, Christ buried or Christ risen, you are a partaker of all that he did and all that he is, for you are reckoned as one with him. See then, the joy and comfort of the incarnation of Christ. Does Jesus, as man, take manhood up to heaven? He has taken me up there. Father Adam fell, and I fell for I was in him. The Lord Jesus Christ rises, and I rise if I am in him. See, beloved, when Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross all his elect were nailed there, and they suffered and died in him. When he was put into the grave the whole of his people lay slumbering there in him, for they were in the loins of Jesus as Levi was in the loins of Abraham; and when he rose they rose and received the foretaste of their own future resurrection, because he lives they shall live also; and now that he has gone up on high to claim the throne, he has claimed the throne for every soul that is in him. Oh, this is joy indeed! Then how can I be afraid of God, for this day, by faith, I, a poor undeserving sinner, having put my trust in Jesus, am bold to say that I sit upon the throne of God. Think not that we have said too much, for in the person of Christ every believer is raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Because as Jesus is there, representatively, we are each one of us there in him.

I wish that I had power to bring out this precious doctrine of the incarnation as I could desire, but the more one muses upon it, the more happy one becomes. Let us view it as an all-important truth, that Jesus, the Son of God, has really come in the flesh. It is so important a truth, that we have three witnesses appointed to keep it before us upon earth. We have been insisting many times in this place upon the spirituality of Christian worship. We have shown that the outward in religion,

by itself, availeth nothing; it is the inward spirit that is the great thing. I must confess that I have sometimes said in myself, I hope not rebelliously, "What is this Baptism for, and what is this Communion of the Lord's Supper for?" These two outward ordinances, whatever may be their excellent uses, have been the two things around which more errors have clustered than around anything else; and I have heard it said, by friends inclined to follow more fully the teachings of the Quakers, "Why not put aside the outward and visible altogether? Let it be the Spirit Baptism, and not the water; let there be no bread and wine, but let there be fellowship with Christ without the outward sign." I must confess, though I dare not go with it, because I hope to be held fast by the plain testimony of Scripture, yet my heart has somewhat gone with the temptation, and I have half said, "Men always will pervert these two ordinances, would not it be as well to have done with them?" While I have been exercised upon the point, conscious that the ordinances must be right, and must be held, I have rested upon that text, "There are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood." And what do they bear witness to? They bear witness to the mission of Jesus as the Christ, in other words to the real incarnation of God. They bear witness to the materialism of Christ. Have you ever noticed that when people have given up the two outward ordinances, they have usually betrayed a tendency to give up the literal fact that "God was made flesh"? The literal fact that Christ was really a man has generally been doubted or thrown into the background when the two outward ordinances have been given up, and I believe that these two symbolical ordinances, which are a link between the spiritual and the material, are set up on purpose to show that Christ Jesus,

though most gloriously a spirit, was also a man clothed in a body of real flesh and blood like our own; so that he could be touched and handled even as he said, "Handle me and see; a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." When I think of the Holy Spirit who bears witness that Christ was really a man, I thank him for that witness; then I turn to the water, and when I read that Christ was publicly baptized in Jordan, I perceive that he could not have been a phantom; he could not have been a mere spectral appearance, for he was immersed in water; he must have been a solid substantial man. The preservation of the ordinance of baptism is a witness to the reality of the incarnate God. Then comes the blood, he could not have shed blood on Calvary if he had been a spectre. There could have been no blood streaming down from his side when the spear pierced him if he had been only a ghostly apparition; he must have been solid flesh and blood like ourselves; and as often as we come to his table, and we take the cup and hear it said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood," there is a third witness on earth to the fact that Jesus did appear in very flesh and blood among men. So that the Spirit, the water, and the blood, are the three standing testimonies in the church of God, that Christ was God, and that he was also really, solidly, and substantially man. I shall delight in the ordinances all the more because of this. Those two ordinances serve to make us recollect that Christ was really flesh and blood, and that religion has something to do with this flesh and blood of ours. This very body is to rise again from the tomb; Jesus came to deliver this poor flesh from corruption; and so, while we must ever keep the spiritual uppermost, we are prevented from casting away the material body as though that were of the devil. Christ purified as well the realm of matter as

the realm of spirit; and in both he reigns triumphant. There is much comfort here.

III. Lastly, we can only occupy a few seconds in APPLYING THE CURE TO VARIOUS CASES.

Child of God, you say, "I dare not come to God to-day, I feel so weak." Fear not, for he that is born in Bethlehem said, "A bruised reed I will not break, and the smoking flax I will not quench." "I shall never get to heaven," says another; "I shall never see God's face with acceptance; I am so tempted." "Fear not," for ye have not an high priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of your infirmities, for he was tempted in all points like as ye are." "But I am so lonely in the world," says another, "no man cares for me." There is one man at any rate who does so care; a true man like yourself. He is your brother still, and does not forget the lonely spirit.

But I hear a sinner say, "I am afraid to go to God this morning and confess that I am a sinner." Well, do not go to God but go to Christ. Surely you would not be afraid of him. Think of God *in* Christ, not out of Christ. If you could but know Jesus you would go to him at once; you would not be afraid to tell him your sins, for you would know that he would say, "Go, and sin no more." "I cannot pray," says one, "I feel afraid to pray." What, afraid to pray when it is a man who listens to you! You might dread the face of God, but when God in human flesh you see why be alarmed? Go, poor sinner, go to Jesus. "I feel," says one, "unfit to come." You may be unfit to come to God, but you cannot be unfit to come to Jesus. There is a fitness necessary to stand in the holy hill of the Lord, but there is no fitness needed in coming to the Lord Jesus. Come as you are, guilty, and lost, and ruined. Come just as you are, and he will receive you. "Oh," says another, "I cannot trust." I can

understand your not being able to trust the great invisible God, but cannot you trust that dying, bleeding Son of Man who is also the Son of God?" "But I cannot hope," says another, "that he would even look on me:" and yet he used to look on such as you are. He received publicans and sinners and ate with them, and even harlots were not driven from his presence. Oh, since God has thus taken man into union with himself be not afraid! If I speak to one who by reason of sin has wandered so far away from God that he is even afraid to think of God's name, yet inasmuch as Jesus Christ is called "the sinner's Friend," I pray thee think of *him*, poor soul, as *thy* friend. And, oh! may the Spirit of God open thy blind eyes to see that there is no cause for thy keeping away from God, except thine own mistaken thoughts of him! May you believe that he is able and willing to save to the uttermost! May you understand his good and gracious character, his readiness to pass by transgression, iniquity, and sin! And may the sweet influences of grace constrain you to come to him this very morning! God grant that Jesus Christ may be formed in you, the hope of glory; and then you may well sing, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, and goodwill toward men." Amen.

# GOOD CHEER FOR CHRISTMAS

DECEMBER 20TH, 1868

“And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.”—Isaiah 25:6

WE have nearly arrived at the great merry-making season of the year. On Christmas-day we shall find all the world in England enjoying themselves with all the good cheer which they can afford. Servants of God, you who have the largest share in the person of him who was born at Bethlehem, I invite you to the best of all Christmas fare—to nobler food than makes the table groan—bread from heaven, food for your spirit. Behold, how rich and how abundant are the provisions which God has made for the high festival which he would have his servants keep, not now and then, but all the days of their lives!

God, in the verse before us, has been pleased to describe the provisions of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although many other interpretations have been suggested for this verse, they are all flat and stale, and utterly unworthy of such expressions



as those before us. When we behold the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed—when we see him offered up upon the chosen mountain, we then discover a fulness of meaning in these gracious words of sacred hospitality, “The Lord shall make a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow.” Our Lord himself was very fond of describing his gospel under the selfsame image as that which is here employed. He spoke of the marriage-supper of the king, who said “My oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready;” and it did not seem as if he could even complete the beauty of the parable of the prodigal son without the killing of the fat calf and the feasting and the music and dancing. As a festival on earth is looked forward to and looked back upon as an oasis amid a desert of time, so the gospel of Jesus Christ is to the soul its sweet release from bondage and distress, its mirth and joy. Upon this subject we intend to speak this morning, hoping to be helped by the great Master of the feast.

Our first head will be *the feast*; the second will be *the banqueting-hall*—“in this mountain;” the third will be *the Host*—“The Lord shall make a feast; and the fourth shall be *the guests*—he shall make it “unto all people.”

I. First, then, we have to consider THE FEAST.

It is described as consisting of viands of the best, nay, of the best of the best. They are fat things, but they are also fat things full of marrow. Wines are provided of the most delicious and invigorating kind, wines on the lees, which retain their aroma, their strength, and their flavour; but these are most ancient and rare, having been so long kept that they have become well refined; by long standing they have purified, clarified themselves, and brought themselves to the highest

degree of brightness and excellence. The best of the best God has provided in the gospel for the sons of men.

Let us attentively survey *the blessings of the gospel*, and observe that they are fat things, and fat things full of marrow.

One of the first gospel blessings is that of *complete justification*. A sinner, though guilty in himself, no sooner believes in Jesus than all his sins are pardoned. The righteousness of Christ becomes his righteousness, and he is accepted in the Beloved. Now, this is a delicious dish indeed. Here is something for the soul to feed upon. To think that I, though a deeply guilty one, am absolved of God, and set free from the bondage of the law! To think that I, though once an heir of wrath, am now as accepted before God as Adam was when he walked in the Garden without a sin; nay, more accepted still, for the divine righteousness of Christ belongs to me, and I stand complete in him, beloved in the Beloved, and accepted in him too! Beloved, this is such a precious truth, that when the soul feeds on it, it experiences a quiet peace, a deep and heavenly calm, to be found nowhere on earth besides. This is a kind of honey which never cloy, to be assured by the word of God, and by the witness of the Holy Ghost within you, that you are reconciled and brought nigh by the blood and the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is a choice mercy. This is a fat thing indeed; but this is not all, it is a fat thing full of marrow too. There is an inner lusciousness in it when you reach the heart and soul of the matter, transcendent in richness; for remember that this righteousness, this acceptance, this justification, becomes ours in a perfectly legal way, one against which Satan himself cannot raise a demurrer, for our Substitute has paid our debt, therefore are we righteously discharged. Christ has fulfilled the law, and made it

honourable for us, and therefore are we justly accepted and beloved. Here is marrow indeed when we perceive the truth and reality of the substitution of Jesus, and grasp with heart and soul the fact of our great Surety standing in our stead at the bar of justice, that we might stand in his stead in the place of honour and love. What bliss it is to cry with the apostle, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Come hither, all ye whose spiritual tastes are purified by grace, and feed upon this choice provision, which shall be sweet to your taste, sweeter, also, than honey and the honeycomb.

Meditate upon a second blessing of the covenant of grace, namely, that of *adoption*. It is plainly revealed to us, that as many as have believed in Christ Jesus unto the salvation of their souls, are the sons of God. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." Here, indeed, is a fat thing. What, shall a worm of the dust become a child of God? A rebel be adopted into the heavenly family? A condemned criminal not only forgiven, but actually made a child of God? Wonder of wonders! "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God!" To which of the kings and princes of this earth did he ever say, "Thou art my son"? He has not spoken thus to the great ones and to the mighty, but God hath chosen the base things of this world and things that are despised, yea, and things that are not, and made these to be of the seed royal. The wise and prudent are passed over, but babes receive the revelation of his love. Lord, whence is this to me? What am I and what is my father's house, that thou shouldst speak of making me thy child? This gloriously

fat thing is also “full of marrow.” There is an inner richness in adoption, for, “if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” Well does the apostle remind us that if children, then heirs, for we are thus assured of our blessed heritage. “All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” Here are royal dainties of which the Word has said most truly, “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house.”

Passing on from the blessing of adoption, let us remember that every child of God is the object of eternal love without beginning and without end. This is one of the fat things full of marrow. Is it so, that I, a believer in Jesus, unworthy as I am, am the object of the eternal love of God? What transport lies in that thought! Long before the Lord began to create the world, he had thought of me. Long ere Adam fell or Christ was born, and the angels sung their first choral over Bethlehem’s miracle, the eye and the heart of God were towards his elect people. He never *began* to love them, they were always “a people near unto him.” Is it not so written, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore, with lovingkindness have I drawn thee”? Some kick at the doctrine of election, but they are ill advised, since they labour to overturn one of the noblest dishes of the feast; they would dam up one of the coolest streams that flow from Lebanon; they would cover over with rubbish one of the richest veins of golden ore that make rich the people of God. For this doctrine of a love that hath no

commencement, is the best wine of our Beloved, and “that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of them that are asleep to speak.” How joyously doth the heart exult and leap for very joy when this truth is brought home by the witness of the Spirit of God! then the soul is satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the Lord.

Equally delightful is the corresponding reflection that this love which had no beginning shall have no end. He is a God that changeth not. “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” Where he has once set his heart of love upon a man, he never turns away from doing him good. He saith by the mouth of his servant the prophet, that he hateth putting away. Though we sin against him often, and provoke him to jealousy, yet still, as the waters of Noah, so is his covenant to us; for as the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so he swears that he will not be wroth with us nor rebuke us. “The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.” Why, beloved, this indeed is a fat thing; and I may add that it is full of marrow when you remember that not merely has the Lord thought of you from everlasting, but *loved* you. Oh! the depth of that word “love,” as it applies to the infinite Jehovah, whose name, whose essence, whose nature is love! He has loved you with all the immutable intensity of his heart, never more and never less;

loved you so much that he gave his only begotten Son for you; loved you so well that nothing could content him but making you to be conformed into the image of his dear Son, and causing you to partake of his glory that you may be with him where he is! Come, feed on this, ye heirs of eternal life, for here are fat things full of marrow.

We should not, beloved, have completed this list if we had omitted one precious doctrine, which needs a refined taste perhaps, but which, when a man hath once learned to feed on it, seemeth to him to be best of all—I mean the great truth of *union to Christ*. We are plainly taught in the word of God that as many as have believed are one with Christ: they are married to him, there is a conjugal union based upon mutual affection. The union is closer still, for there is a vital union between Christ and his saints. They are in him as the branches are in the vine; they are members of the body of which he is the head. They are one with Jesus in such a true and real sense that with him they died, with him they have been buried, with him they are risen, with him they are raised up together and made to sit together in heavenly places. There is an indissoluble union between Christ and all his people: “I in them and they in me.” Thus the union may be described:—Christ is in his people the hope of glory, and they are dead and their life is hid with Christ in God. This is a union of the most wonderful kind, which figures may faintly set forth, but which it were impossible for language completely to explain. Oneness to Jesus is one of the fat things full of marrow. For if it be so, indeed, that we are one with Christ, then because he lives we must live also; because he was punished for sin, we also have borne the wrath of God in him; because he was justified by his resurrection, we also are justified in him; because he is rewarded and for ever sits down

at his Father's right hand, we also have obtained the inheritance in him and by faith grasp it now, and enjoy its earnest. Oh, can it be that this aching head already has a right to a celestial crown! That this palpitating heart has a claim to the rest which remaineth for the people of God! That these weary feet have a title to tread the sacred halls of the New Jerusalem! It is so, for if we are one with Christ, then all he has belongs to us, and it is but a matter of time, and of gracious arrangement when we shall come into the full enjoyment thereof. Truly, in meditation upon this topic, we may each of us exclaim, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips."

I cannot bring forth all the courses of my Lord's banquet; one serving man cannot bear before you the riches of such a surpassing feast; but I would remind you of one more, and that is the doctrine of *resurrection and everlasting life*. This poor world dimly guessed at the immortality of the soul, but it knew nothing of the resurrection of the body: the gospel of Jesus has brought life and immortality to light, and he himself has declared to us of Jesus, that he that believeth in him shall never die. "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet should he live." Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Not the soul only, but the body also shall partake of immortality, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. We expect to die, but we are assured of living again. If the Lord come not, we know that our bodies shall see corruption; but here is our comfort, we dread no annihilation, that dark shadow never crosses our spirits; we dread no hell, no purgatory, no judgment—Christ hath perfected for ever them that are set apart; none can condemn whom he absolves. The saints shall judge the angels, and sit

with their Lord in the day of the great assize. To us the coming of Christ will be a day of joy and of rejoicing: we shall be caught up together with him; his reign shall be our reign, his glory our glory. Wherefore comfort one another with these words, and as ye see your brethren and your sisters departing one by one from among you, sorrow not as those that are without hope, but say unto each other, "They are not lost, but they have gone before," for, "blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." Here are fat things full of marrow, for ours is a glorious hope, and full of immortality. Our expected immortality is not that of mere existence, it is not the barren privilege of life without bliss, existence without happiness—it is full of glory; for "we shall be like him when we shall see him as he is;" we shall be with God, at whose right hand there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. He shall make us to drink of the river of his pleasures; songs and everlasting joy shall be upon our heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

"Oh, for the no more weeping,  
Within that land of love!



The endless joy of keeping  
The bridal feast above!

Oh, for the hour of seeing  
My Saviour face to face!

The hope of ever being  
In that sweet meeting-place.”

Thus I have set before you a few of the fat things full of marrow which the King of kings has set before his guests at the wedding feast of his love.

Changing the run of the thought, and yet really keeping to the same subject, let me now bring before you the goblets of wine. “Wines on the lees—wines on the lees well refined.” These we shall consider as symbolising the joys of the gospel. What are these? I can only speak of those which I have myself been permitted to sip at. One of the dearest joys of the Christian life is *a sense of perfect peace with God*. Oh, I tell you when one is quiet for awhile, and the din and noise of business is out of one’s ears, it is one of the most delicious things in all the world to meditate upon God, and to feel he is no enemy to me, and I am no enemy to him. It is beyond comparison cheering, musingly to feel, I love him. If there be anything that I can do to serve him, I will do it. If there be any suffering which would honour him, if he would give me the strength to endure it, it should be my happiness, though it caused me to die a martyr’s death a thousand times. If I could but honour my God, my Father, and my Friend, all should be acceptable to me. There is nothing between the Lord and me by way of difference or alienation; I am brought nigh through the blood of his dear and only begotten Son. He is my God, my Father, and my all, and I am his child. Some of us have tried the imaginary happiness of laughter; we have mixed with the giddy throng, and tasted the wines of the house of carnal merriment, but our honest experience is that one single draught from the cup of salvation is worth rivers of worldly mirth.

“Solid joys and lasting pleasures  
Only Zion’s children know.”

A quiet heart, resting in the love of God, dwelling in perfect peace, hath a royalty about it which cannot for a moment be matched by the fleeting joys of this world.

Our joy sometimes flashes with a brighter light, but even then it is not less pure and safe. You may look upon this wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it moveth itself aright, for there is no woe, no redness of the eyes reserved for those who drink even to inebriation of this sacred wine. This sacred exhilaration is caused by *a sense of security*. A child of God, when he has looked well to his Redeemer, and seen the merit of the precious blood, and the power of the never-ceasing plea, feels himself safe, perfectly safe. I do not understand the child o God reading his Bible and yet being afraid of being cast into hell. I can understand that the fear may cross his mind lest after all he should prove a castaway; but as he approaches once again to the foot of the cross, and looks up to Jesus, he feels that it cannot be. None were ever cast away who stood at the cross foot; for it is written, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” A child of God, with no hope but what he finds in Christ, has no cause to think his eternal state to be insecure. All are safe who are in Christ, even as all were safe who were in Noah’s ark. No flood, no storm could hurt the man of whom it was said, “The Lord shut him in.” The Lord has shut in all his people in Christ, and they are eternally safe in Christ. When the spirit knows that “there is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,” then is it replenished with delight. When one feels that live or die, or work or suffer, all is well, how free from care is the heart! How

divinely joyful to know that if one should lose all his earthly substance, the Lord will provide; that if one should be tempted, tempted greatly, yet with the temptation the way of escape shall be made! here is assurance rich with consolation. When one feels that all is safe, all safe eternally, for life or death all secured, I tell you that this is wine on the lees, wine on the lees well refined, and he who wins a draught thereof need not envy the angels their celestial banquets.

This joy of ours will sometimes rise to an elevation yet more sublime, when it is caused by *communion with God*. Believers, while engaged in prayer and praise, in service and in suffering, are enabled by the Holy Spirit to hold high converse with their Lord. Do not imagine that Abraham's speech with God was an unusual privilege. The father of the faithful did but enjoy what all the faithful ones participate in according to the grace given them. We tell to God our griefs; discoursing upon our sorrows not in fiction, but declaring them in real conversation, as when a man speaketh with his neighbour: meanwhile the Lord's Spirit whispers to us with the still small voice of the promise, such words as calm our minds and guide our feet. Yes, and when our Beloved takes us into the banqueting-house of real conscious fellowship with himself, and waves the love-banner over us, our holy joy is as much superior to all merely human mirth, as the heavens are above the earth. Then do we speak and sing with sacred zest, and feel as if we could weep for very joy of heart, for our Beloved is ours and we are his. His left hand is under our head, and his right hand doth embrace us, and our only fear is lest anything should grieve our Beloved and cause him to withdraw himself from us; for it is heaven on earth, and the fair antepast of heaven above to see his face, to taste his love. Communion with Christ is as the wine on the lees well

refined.

We will place on the table one goblet more, of which you may drink as much as you will. We have provided for us *the pleasures of hope*, a hope most sure and steadfast, most bright and glorious—the hope that what we know to-day shall be outdone by what we shall know to-morrow; the hope that by-and-by what we now see, as in a glass darkly, shall be seen face to face. We shall say, as in heaven, as the Queen of Sheba did in Jerusalem, “The half hath not been told us.” We are looking forward to a speedy day when we shall be unburdened of this creaking tabernacle, and being absent from the body shall be present with the Lord. Our hope of future bliss is elevated and confident. Oh, the vision of his face! Oh, the sight of Jesus in his exaltation! Oh, the kiss of his lips—the word, “Well done, good and faithful servant” from that dear mouth! and then for ever to lie in his bosom. Begone, ye cares, begone, ye sorrows; if heaven be so near, ye shall not molest us. The inn may be a rough and poverty-stricken one, but we are only travellers, not tenants upon lease. This is not our place of resting; we are on our journey home! Beloved, in the prospect of the quiet resting-places in the land which floweth with milk and honey, you have wines on the lees well refined.

If we were not limited to time this morning, as, alas! we are, I should have reminded you that these joys of the believer are *ancient in their origin*, for that is shown in the text. *Old wines* are intended by “wines well refined;” they have stood long on the lees, have drawn out all the virtue from them, and have been cleared of all the coarser material. In the East, wine will be improved by keeping even more than the wines of the West! and even so the mercies of God are the sweeter to our meditations because of their antiquity. From old eternity, or

ever the earth was, the covenant engagements of everlasting love have been resting like wines on the lees, and to-day they bring to us the utmost riches of all the attributes of God. I should also have reminded you of *the fulness of their excellence*, because the wine on the lees holds its flavour, and retains its aroma; and there is a fulness and richness about the blessings of divine grace which endears them to our hearts. The joys of grace are not fantastical emotions, or transient flashes of a meteoric excitement, they are based on substantial truth; are reasonable, fit, and proper. They belong not to the superficial and frothy emotions of mere feeling, but are deep, solemn, earnest motions, justified by the clearest judgment. Our bliss is not of the foam and the surge, it dwells in the innermost caverns of our heart. I would also remind you of *their refined nature*. No sin mingled with the joys of the gospel and the delights of communion—they are well refined. Gospel joys are elevating, they make men like angels. As in the gospel God comes down to men, so by the gospel men go up to God. I might also have shown you how *absolutely peerless* are the provisions of grace. There is no feast like that of the gospel, no meat like the flesh of Jesus, no drink like his blood, no joys like that which crowns the gospel feast.

II. I can say no more: the table is before you, and now we must pass on with great brevity to notice THE BANQUETING-HALL.

“In this mountain.” There is a reference here to three things—the same symbol bearing three interpretations. First, literally, the mountain upon which Jerusalem is built. I do not doubt that the reference is here to *the hill of the Lord upon which Jerusalem stood*; the great transaction which was fulfilled at Jerusalem upon Calvary hath made to all nations a great feast. It was there where that centre cross bore upon it One who

joined earth and heaven in mysterious union; it was there where amidst thick darkness the Son of God was made a curse for men; it was there where sorrow culminated that joy was consummated. On that very mountain where Jews and Gentiles met together, and with clamorous wrath cried, "Let him be crucified"—it was there in the giving up of the Only-begotten, whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed, that the Lord made a feast of fat things. Everything I have spoken of this morning is found in Christ. He is the resurrection and the life: in him we are justified, adopted, and made secure; every drop of joy we drink streams from his flowing veins.

A second meaning is *the church*. Frequently Jerusalem is used as the symbol of the church of God, and it is within the pale of the church that the great feast of the Lord is made unto all nations. I am in the truest sense a very sound churchman. I am indeed a high churchman; a most determined stickler for the church. I do not believe in salvation outside of the pale of the church. I believe that the salvation of God is confined to the church, and to the church alone. "But," says one, "what church?" Ay! that's the question: God forbid I should mean by that either the Baptist church, or the Independent church, or the Episcopalian church, or the Presbyterian, or any other—I mean the church of Jesus Christ, the company of God's chosen, the fellowship of the blood-bought, the family of believers, be they where they may, for them is provided the feast of fat things. Whatever outward and visible church they may have associated themselves with, they shall drink of the wines on the lees well refined; but the feast is only to be found where they are found who put their trust in Jesus. There is but one church in heaven and earth, composed of men called by

the Holy Ghost, and made to live anew by his quickening power; and it is through the ministry of this church that an abundant feast is spread for all nations, a feast to which the nations are summoned by chosen herald, whom God calls to proclaim the good news of salvation by Jesus Christ.

But, brethren, the mountain sometimes means the church of God exalted to its latter-day glory. This mountain is to be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. This text will have its grandest fulfilment in the day of the appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Then shall the glory of the gospel be unveiled more clearly than at this present. Men shall have a fuller perception of the glory of the Lord, and a deeper enjoyment of his grace; while happiness and peace shall reign with unmolested quiet. Soon shall come the golden age which has been so long foretold, for which we cry with unceasing expectation. The Lord send it speedily, and his be the praise.

III. Thirdly, let us think of THE HOST of the feast.

“In this mountain shall *the Lord of hosts* make unto all people a feast of fat things.” Mark well the truth that in the gospel banquet there is not a single dish brought by man. *The Lord* makes it, and he makes it all. I know some would like to bring a little with them to the banquet, something at least by way of trimming and adornment, so that they might have a share of the honour; but it must not be, the Lord of hosts makes the feast, and he will not even permit the guests to bring their own wedding garments—they must stop at the door and put on the robe which the Lord has provided, for salvation is all grace from first to last, and all of him who is wondrous in working, and who doeth all things according to the counsels of his will. Out of all the precious truths which I spoke of at the



beginning of this sermon, there is not one which comes from any source but a divine one; and of all the joys which I tried feebly to picture there is not one which takes its rise from earth's springs; they all flow from the eternal fount. The Lord makes the feast; and, observe, he does it, too, *as Lord of hosts*, as a sovereign, as a ruler, doing as he wills amongst the sons of men, preparing what he wills for the good of his creatures, and constraining whom he wills to come to the marriage-feast. The Lord provides sovereignly as Lord of hosts, and all-sufficiently as Jehovah. It needed the all-sufficiency of God to provide a feast for hungry sinners. No other than the infinite "I AM" could provide a feast substantial enough to supply the wants of immortal spirits; but he has done it, and you may guess of the value of the viands by the nature of our entertainer. If God spread the feast it is not to be despised; if the Lord has put forth all the omnipotence of his eternal power and Godhead in preparing the banquet for the multitude of the sons of men, then depend upon it it is a banquet worthy of *him*, one to which they may come with confidence, for it must be such a banquet as their souls require, and such as the world never saw before. O my soul, rejoice thou in thy God and King. If he provides the feast, let him have all the glory of it. "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." O King immortal, eternal, invisible, thou feddest thy children in the wilderness with manna which dropped from heaven, and with water that flowed out of the flinty rock, and they gave thanks unto thy name; but now thou fillest us with nobler food. They did eat manna and are dead, but we live on the immortal bread, even Jesus, and therefore we can never die. They drank of the water which flowed from the rock, and yet they thirsted again, but we shall never thirst, but for ever abide near to thyself, while the

Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed us, and lead us unto living fountains of water. Therefore, blessed by thy name, yea, a thousand times blessed be thy name, O thou Most High! Let all heaven say "Amen" to the praises of our hearts, and let the multitude of thy children here on earth, for whom this feast is spread, laud and magnify and bless thy name from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same.

IV. Lastly, a word or two upon THE GUESTS.

The Lord has made this banquet "for all people." What a precious word this is! "For all people." Then this includes not merely the chosen people, the Jews, whose were the oracles, but it encompasses the poor uncircumcised Gentiles, who by Jesus are brought nigh. The barbarian is invited to this feast; the Scythian is not rejected. The polished Greek finds an open door; the hardy Roman shall meet with an equal welcome. Cæsar's household, if they come, shall receive a portion, and so shall the beggar's brethren. Blessed be God for that word, "unto all people," for it permits missionary enterprise in every land; however degraded a race may be, we have here provision made for it. This feast of fat things is made as much for the Sudra as for the Brahmin; the gospel is as much to be preached to the degraded Bushman as to the civilised Chinese. Dwell on that word, "all people," and you will see it includes the rich, for there is a feast of fat things for them, such as their gold could never buy; and it includes the poor, for they being rich in faith shall have fellowship with God. "All people." This takes in the man of enlarged intelligence and extensive knowledge; but it equally encompasses the illiterate man who cannot read. The Lord makes this feast "for *all* people;" for you old people, if you come to Jesus you shall find that he is suitable to you; for you young men and maidens, and you little children, if you put

your trust in God's appointed Saviour, there shall be much joy and happiness for you—"For *all* people"? Methinks, if I were now seeking and had not laid hold on Christ, this word, "all people" would be a great comfort to me, because it gives hope to all who desire to come. None have ever been rejected of all who have ever come to Christ and asked for mercy. Still is it true, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Some very odd people have come to him, some very wicked people, some very hardened people, but the door was never closed in any one's face. Why should Jesus begin hard dealings with you? He cannot, because he cannot change. If he says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," make one of the "hims" that come, and he cannot cast you out. There is another thought, namely, that between the covers of the Bible there is no mention made of one person who may not come. There is no description given of a person who is forbidden to trust Christ. I should like you to look the book through, you who dream that Jesus will reject you, and find where it is said, "Such a one I will reject; such a one I will refuse." When you find such a rejecting clause, then you will have a right to be unbelieving, but till you do I beseech you do not needlessly torment yourself. Why needlessly sow doubts and fears? There will be enough of them without your making them for yourself. Do not limit what the Lord does not limit I know he has an elect people; I rejoice in it—I hope you will rejoice in it too one day; and I know that his people have this marrow and fatness provided for them and for them alone; but still this does not at all conflict with the other precious truth that whosoever believeth in the Son of God hath everlasting life. If you believe in Jesus Christ, all these things are yours. Come, poor trembler, the silver trumpet soundeth, and this is the note it rings, "Come

and welcome, come and welcome, come and welcome.” The harsher trumpet of the law which waxed exceedingly loud and long at Sinai had this for its note, “Set bounds about the mount: let none touch it lest they die.” But the trumpet for Calvary sounds with the opposite note; it is, “Come and welcome, come and welcome, sinner, come! Come as you are, sinful as you are, hardened as you are, careless as you think you are, and having no good thing whatsoever, come to your God in Christ!” O may you come to him who gave his Son to bleed in the sinner’s stead, and casting yourself on what Christ has done, may you resolve, “If I perish, I will trust in him; if I be cast away, I will rely on him.” You shall not perish, but for you there shall be the feast of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. The Lord bless you very richly, for his name’s sake. Amen.

# THE SAGES, THE STAR AND THE SAVIOUR

DECEMBER 25<sup>TH</sup>, 1870

“Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”  
—Matthew 2:2

THE incarnation of the Son of God was one of the greatest events in the history of the universe. Its actual occurrence was not, however, known to all mankind, but was specially revealed to the shepherds of Bethlehem and to certain wise men of the east. To shepherds—the illiterate, men little versed in human learning—the angels in choral song made known the birth of the Saviour, Christ the Lord, and they hastened to Bethlehem to see the great sight; while the Scribes, the writers of the law and expounders of it, knew nothing concerning the long-promised birth of the Messiah. No angelic bands entered the assembly of the Sanhedrim and proclaimed that the Christ was born; and when the chief priests and Pharisees were met together, though they gathered around copies of the law to consider where Christ should be born, yet it was not known to them that he was actually come, nor do they seem to have

taken more than a passing interest in the matter, though they might have known that then was the time spoken of by the prophets when the great Messiah should come. How mysterious are the dispensations of grace; the base things are chosen and the eminent are passed by! The advent of the Redeemer is revealed to the shepherds who kept their flocks of sheep by night, but not to the shepherds whose benighted sheep were left to stray. Admire therein the sovereignty of God.

The glad tidings were made known also to wise men, magi, students of the stars and of old prophetic books from the far-off east. It would not be possible to tell how far off their native country lay; it may have been so distant that the journey occupied nearly the whole of the two years of which they spake concerning the appearance of the star. Travelling was slow in those days, surrounded with difficulties and many dangers. They may have come from Persia, or India, or Tartary, or even from the mysterious land of Sinim, now known to us as China. If so, strange and uncouth must have been the speech of those who worshipped around the young Child at Bethlehem, yet needed he no interpreter to understand and accept their adoration. Why was the birth of the King of the Jews made known to these foreigners, and not to those nearer home? Why did the Lord select those who were so many hundreds of miles away, while the children of the kingdom, in whose very midst the Saviour was brought forth, were yet strangely ignorant of his presence? See here again another instance of the sovereignty of God. Both in shepherds and in Eastern magi gathering around the young Child, I see God dispensing his favours as he wills, and, as I see it, I exclaim, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast

revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.” Herein we see again another instance of God’s sovereign will; for as of old there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elias the prophet, but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto the woman of Sarepta; so many there were who were called wise men among the Jews, but unto none of them did the star appear; but it shone on Gentile eyes, and led a chosen company from the ends of the earth to bow at Emmanuel’s feet.

Sovereignty in these cases clothed itself in the robes of mercy. It was great mercy that regarded the low estate of the shepherds, and it was far-reaching mercy which gathered from lands which lay in darkness a company of men made wise unto salvation. Mercy wearing her resplendent jewels was present with divine sovereignty in the lowly abode of Bethlehem. Is it not a delightful thought, that around the cradle of the Saviour, as well as around his throne in the highest heaven, these two attributes meet? He makes known himself—and herein is mercy; but it is to those whom he has chosen—and herein he shows that he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion.

We will now endeavour to learn a practical lesson from the story of the wise men who came from the east to worship Christ. We may, if God the Holy Spirit shall teach us, gather such instruction as may lead us also to become worshippers of the Saviour, and joyful believers in him.

Notice, first, *their enquiry*; may many of us become enquirers upon the same matter—“Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” Notice, secondly, *their encouragement*—“We have seen his star.” Because they had seen his star

they felt bold to ask, "Where is he?" And then, thirdly, *their example*—"We have come to worship him."

I. THEIR ENQUIRY—"Where is he?"

Many things are evident in this question. It is clear that when the wise men thus enquired, there was in their minds *interest awakened*. The King of the Jews was born, but Herod did not ask, "Where is he?" until his jealousy was excited, and then he asked the question in a malicious spirit. Christ was born at Bethlehem, near to Jerusalem; yet throughout all the streets of the holy city there were no enquirers, "Where is he?" He was to be the glory of Israel, and yet in Israel there were few indeed who, like these wise men, asked the question, "Where is he?" My dear hearers, I will believe that there are some here this morning whom God intends to bless, and it will be a very hopeful sign that he intends to do so, if there be an interest awakened in your mind concerning the work and person of the incarnate God. Those who anxiously desire to know of him, are but a slender company. Alas! when we preach most earnestly of him, and tell of his sorrows as the atonement for human sin, we are compelled to lament most bitterly the carelessness of mankind, and enquire mournfully—

"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by;  
Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die?"

He is despised and rejected of men, men see in him no beauty that they should desire him; but there are a chosen number who enquire diligently, and who come to receive him; to these he gives power to become the sons of God. A happy circumstance it is, therefore, when there is interest evinced. Interest is not always evinced in the things of Christ, even by our regular hearers. It gets to be a mere mechanical habit to



attend public worship; you become accustomed to sit through such a part of the service, to stand and sing at such another time, and to listen to the preacher with an apparent attention during the discourse; but to be really interested, to long to know what it is all about, to know especially whether you have a part in it, whether Jesus came from heaven to save you, whether for you he was born of the virgin, to make such personal enquiries with deep anxiety, is far from being a general practice: would God that all who have ears to hear would hear in truth. Wherever the word is heard with solemn interest, it is a very encouraging sign. It was said of old, "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." When a man listens with deep attention to the word of God, searches God's book, and engages in thoughtful meditation with the view of understanding the gospel, we have much hope of him. When he feels that there is something weighty and important, something worth the knowing, in the gospel of Jesus, then are we encouraged to hope good things of him.

But in the case of the wise men we see not only interest evinced, but *belief avowed*. They said, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" They were, therefore, fully convinced that he was the King of the Jews, and had lately been born. As a preacher I feel it to be a great mercy that I have to deal generally with persons who have some degree of belief concerning the things of God. Would to God we had more missions to those who have no sort of faith and no knowledge of Christ; and may the day come when everywhere Jesus Christ shall be known. But here at home with the most of you we have something to begin with. You do believe somewhat concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was born King of the Jews. Set much store by that which you have already believed. I count it no

small advantage to a young man to believe his Bible true. There are some who have a hard fight to reach so far as that, for infidel training has warped their minds. It is not, of course, an advantage which will save you, for many go down to hell believing the Scriptures to be true, and thus they accumulate guilt upon themselves from that very fact; but it is a fine vantage ground to occupy, to be assured that you have God's word before you, and not to be troubled with questions about its inspiration and authenticity. O that you may go from that point of faith to another, and become a hearty believer in Jesus. These wise men were so far advanced that they had some leverage for a further lift of faith, for they believed that Christ was born, and born a King. Many who are not saved, yet know that Jesus is the Son of God. We have not to argue with you this morning to bring you out of Socinianism—no, you believe Jesus to be the divine Saviour; nor have we to reason against doubts and scepticisms concerning the atonement, for these do not perplex you. This is a great mercy. You certainly stand in the position of highly favoured persons. I only trust you may have grace given you to avail yourselves of the favourable position in which God has placed you. Value what you have already received. When a man's eyes have long been closed in darkness, if the oculist gives him but a little light he is very thankful for it, he is hopeful that the eye is not destroyed, that perhaps by another operation further scales may be removed, and the full light may yet stream in upon the darkened eyeball. So, dear friend, be thankful for any light. O soul, so soon to pass into another world, so sure to be lost except thou have the light divine, so certain to be cast into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, be thankful for a spark of heavenly light; prize it, treasure it, be

anxious about it that it may come to something more, and who knows but yet the Lord will bless thee with the fulness of his truth? When the great bridge across the Niagara was made, the difficulty was to pass the first rope across the broad stream. I have read that it was accomplished by flying a kite, and allowing it to fall on the opposite bank. The kite carried across a piece of string, then to the string was tied a line, and to the line a rope, and to the rope a stronger rope, and by-and-by Niagara was spanned, and the bridge was finished. Even thus by degrees God works. It is a fair sight to see in human hearts a little interest concerning things divine, a little desire after Christ, a feeble wish to know who he is and what he is, and whether he is available to the sinner's case. This hunger will lead to a craving after more, and that craving will be followed by another, till at last the soul shall find her Lord and be satisfied in him. In the wise men's case therefore we have, as I trust we have in some here, interest evinced, and a measure of belief avowed.

Furthermore, in the case of the wise men, we see *ignorance admitted*. Wise men are never above asking questions, because they are wise men; so the magi asked, "Where is he?" Persons who have taken the name and degree of wise men, and are so esteemed, sometimes think it beneath them to confess any degree of ignorance, but the really wise think not so; they are too well instructed to be ignorant of their own ignorance. Many men might have been wise if they had but been aware that they were fools. The knowledge of our ignorance, is the doorstep of the temple of knowledge. Some think they know, and therefore never know. Had they known that they were blind, they would soon have been made to see, but because they say, "We see," therefore their blindness remains upon

them. Beloved hearer, dost thou want to find a Saviour? Wouldst thou fain have all thy sins blotted out? Wouldst thou be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ? Then blush not to enquire, admit that thou dost not know. How shouldst thou know if heaven teach thee not? How should any man attain the knowledge of divine things, unless it be given him from above? We must all be taught of the Spirit of God, or be fools for ever. To know that we need to be taught of the Holy Ghost is one of the first lessons that the Holy Ghost himself teaches us. Admit that thou needest a guide, and diligently enquire for one. Cry to God to lead thee, and he will be thine instructor. Be not high-minded and self-sufficient. Ask for heavenly light, and thou shalt receive it. Is it not better to ask God to teach thee, than to trust to thine own unaided reason? Bow, then, the knee, confess thine aptness to err, and say, "What I know not, teach thou me."

Notice, however, that the wise men were not content with admitting their ignorance, but in their case there was *information entreated*. I cannot tell where they began to ask. They thought it likeliest that Jesus would be known at the metropolitan city. Was he not the King of the Jews? where would he be so certain to be known as at the Capital? They went, therefore, to Jerusalem. Perhaps they asked the guards at the gate, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" and the guards laughed them to scorn, and replied, "We know no king but Herod." Then they met a loiterer in the streets, and to him they said, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" and he answered, "What care I for such crazy questions? I am looking for a drinking companion." They asked a trader, but he sneered, and said, "Never mind kings, what will you buy, or what have you to sell?" Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" said

they to a Sadducee, and he replied, "Be not such fools as to talk in that fashion, or if you do, pray call on my religious friend the Pharisee." They passed a woman in the streets, and asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" but she said, "My child is sick at home, I have enough to do to think of my poor babe; I care not who is born, or who may die beside." When they went to the very highest quarters, they obtained but poor information, but they were not content till they had learned all that could be known. They did not know at first where the newborn King was, but they used every means to find him, and asked information on all hands. It is delightful to see the holy eagerness of a soul which God has quickened; it cries, "I must be saved; I know something of the way of salvation, I am grateful for that, but I do not know all I want to know, and I cannot rest satisfied till I do. If beneath the canopy of heaven a Saviour is to be found, I will have him; if that book can teach me how to be saved, I will turn its pages day and night; if any book within my reach may help me, I will spare no midnight oil if I may but in the reading thereof find out Christ my Saviour. If there be one whose preaching has been blessed to the souls of others, I will hang on his lips, if perhaps the word may be blessed to me, for Christ I must have: it is not I may or I may not have him, but I *must* have him; my hunger is great for this bread of heaven, my thirst insatiable for this water of life; tell me, Christians, tell me, wise men, tell me, good men, tell me any of you who can tell, where is he that is born King of the Jews? for Christ I must have, and I long to have him now."

Notice further, that in reference to these wise men from the east, there was for their search after Christ *a motive declared*. "Where is he," said they, "that we may go and worship him?" Ah! soul, and if thou wouldst find Christ, let it be thy motive

that thou mayst be saved by him, and that then henceforth and for ever thou mayst live to his glory. When it comes to this, that you do not hear the gospel merely as a habit, but because you long to obtain its salvation, it will not be long before you will find it. When a man can say, "I am going up to the house of God this morning, and O may God meet with me there," he will not long go there in vain. When a hearer can declare, "As soon as I take my seat in the congregation, my one thought is, "Lord, bless my soul this day?" he cannot for long be disappointed. Usually in going up to God's house we get what we go for. Some come because it is the custom, some to meet a friend, some they scarce know why; but when you know what you come for, the Lord who gave you the desire will gratify it. I was pleased with the word of a dear sister this morning when I came in at the back gate; she said to me, "My dear sir, my soul is very hungry this morning. May the Lord give you bread for me." I believe that food convenient will be given. When a sinner is very hungry after Christ, Christ is very near to him. The worst of it is, many of you do not come to find Jesus, it is not him you are seeking for; if you were seeking him, he would soon appear to you. A young woman was asked during a revival, "How is it you have not found Christ?" "Sir," said she, "I think it is because I have not sought him." It is so. None shall be able to say at the last, "I sought him, but I found him not." In all cases at the last, if Jesus Christ be not found, it must be because he has not been devoutly, earnestly, importunately sought, for his promise is, "Seek, and ye shall find." These wise men are to us a model in many things, and in this among the rest—that their motive was clear to themselves, and they avowed it to others. May all of us seek Jesus that we may worship him.

All through there was about the wise men an intense earnestness, which we would delight to see in any who as yet have not believed in Jesus. They were evidently not triflers. They came a long way, they underwent many fatigues, they spoke about finding the new-born King in a practical, common-sense way; they were not put off with this rebuff or that; they desired to find him, and find him they would. It is most blessed to see the work of the Spirit in men's hearts impelling them to long for the Saviour to be their Lord and King; and so to long for him that they mean to have him, and will leave no stone unturned, by the Holy Spirit's help, but what they will be able to say, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, and he is become our salvation."

Am I at this moment speaking to anybody in particular? I trust I am. Some years ago there was a young man, who, upon much such a morning as this—cold, snowy, dark—entered a house of prayer, as you have done to-day. I thought as I came here, this morning, of that young man. I said to myself, "This morning is so very forbidding that I shall have a very small congregation, but perhaps among them there will be one like that young man." To be plain with you, it comforted me to think that the morning when God blessed my soul, the preacher had a very small congregation, and it was cold and bitter, and therefore I said to myself this morning, "Why should not I go up merrily to my task, and preach if there should only be a dozen there?" for Jesus may intend to reveal himself to some one as he did to me, and that some one may be a soul-winner, and the means of the salvation of tens of thousands in years to come. I wonder if that will occur to that young man yonder, for I trust he has the enquiry of the wise men upon his lips. I trust he will not quench those desires which now burn within him,

but rather may the spark be fanned to a flame, and may this day witness his decision for Jesus. Oh, has the Lord looked on that young woman, or on that dear child, or on yonder aged man? “I know not who it may be, but I shall indeed bless God this morning, if the cry may be heard from many a lip, “Sir, what must I do to be saved? Where is he that is born King of the Jews?”

II. Having spoken of their enquiry, I shall now notice THEIR ENCOURAGEMENT. Something encouraged these wise men to seek Jesus. It was this, “We have seen his star.”

Now, the most of you seekers after Christ have a great encouragement in the fact that you have heard his gospel; you live in a land where you have the Scriptures, where the ordinances of God’s house are freely dispensed. These are, as it were, Jesus Christ’s star; they are meant to lead you to himself. Here, observe, that to see his star was *a great favour*. It was not given to all the dwellers in the east or west to see his star. These men, therefore, were highly privileged. It is not given to all mankind to hear the gospel, Jesus is not preached in all our streets; his cross is not lifted high even in every place that is dedicated to his worship. You are highly favoured, O my friend, if you have seen the star, the gospel, which points to Jesus.

To see the star involved these wise men in *great responsibility*. For, suppose they had seen his star and had not set out to worship him, they would have been far more guilty than others, who, not having received such an indication from heaven, would not have been able to set it at nought. Oh, think of the responsibility of some of you, who in your childhood heard of a Saviour, for whom a mother has wept many tears; you know the truth, in the theory of it at any rate; you have the



responsibility of having seen his star.

The wise men *did not regard the favour of seeing the star as a matter to be rested in*. They did not say, "We have seen his star, and that is enough." Many say, "Well, we attend a place of worship regularly, is not that enough?" There are those who say, "We were baptised, baptism brought regeneration with it; we come to the sacrament, and do we not get grace through it?" Poor souls! the star which leads to Christ they mistake for Christ himself, and worship the star instead of the Lord. O may none of you ever be so foolish as to rest in outward ordinances! God will say to you, if you depend upon sacraments or upon public worship, "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me. Who hath required this at your hands, to tread my courts?" What careth God for outward forms and ceremonies? When I see men putting on white gowns, and scarfs and bands, and singing their prayers, and bowing and scraping, I wonder what sort of god it is they worship. Surely he must have more affinity with the gods of the heathen than with the great Jehovah who has made the heavens and the earth. Mark ye well the exceeding glory of Jehovah's works on sea and land; behold the heavens and their countless hosts of stars, hark to the howling of the winds and the rush of the hurricane, think of him who maketh the clouds his chariot, and rideth on the wings of the wind, and then consider whether this infinite God is like unto that being to whom it is a matter of grave consequence whether a cup of wine is lifted in worship as high as a man's hair or only as high as his nose! O foolish generation, to think that Jehovah is contained in your temples made with hands, and that he cares for your vestments, your processions, your postures, and your genuflexions. Ye fight over your ritual, even to its jots and

tittles do ye consider it. Surely ye know not the glorious Jehovah, if ye conceive that these things yield any pleasure to him. Nay, beloved, we desire to worship the Most High in all simplicity and earnestness of spirit, and never to stop in the outward form, lest we be foolish enough to think that to see the star is sufficient, and therefore fail to find the incarnate God.

Note well, that these wise men *did not find satisfaction in what they had themselves done to reach the child*. As we have observed, they may have come hundreds of miles, but they did not mention it; they did not sit down and say, "Well, we have journeyed across deserts, over hills, and across rivers, it is enough." No, they must find the new-born King, nothing else would satisfy them. Do not say, dear hearer, "I have been praying now for months, I have been searching the Scriptures for weeks, to find the Saviour." I am glad you have done so, but do not rest in it; you must get Christ, or else you perish after all your exertion and your trouble. Jesus you want, nothing more than Jesus, but nothing less than Jesus. Nor must you be satisfied with travelling in the way the star would lead you, you must reach HIM. Do not stop short of eternal life. Lay hold on it, not merely seek it and long for it, but lay hold on eternal life, and do not be content until it is an ascertained fact with you that Jesus Christ is yours.

I should like you to notice how these wise men were not satisfied with merely getting to Jerusalem. They might have said, "Ah! now we are in the land where the Child is born, we will be thankful and sit down." No, but "Where is he?" He is born at Bethlehem. Well, they get to Bethlehem, but we do not find that when they reached that village they said, "This is a favoured spot, we will sit down here." Not at all, they wanted to know where the house was. They reached the house, and

the star got over it. It was a fair sight to see the cottage with the star above it, and to think that the new-born King was there, but that did not satisfy them. No, they went right into the house; they rested not till they saw the Child himself, and had worshipped him. I pray that you and I may always be so led by the Spirit of God that we may never put up with anything short of a real grasping of Christ, a believing sight of Christ as a Saviour, as our Saviour, as our Saviour even now. If there be one danger above another that the young seeker should strive against, it is the danger of stopping short of a hearty faith in Jesus Christ. While thy heart is tender like wax, take care that no seal but the seal of Christ be set on thee. Now that thou art uneasy and out of comfort, make this thy vow, "I will not be comforted till Jesus comfort me." It would be better for thee never to be awakened than to be lulled to sleep by Satan—for a sleep that follows upon a partial conviction is generally a deeper slumber than any other that falls upon the sons of men. My soul, I charge thee get to the blood of Christ, and be washed in it; get to the life of Christ, and let that life be in thee, that thou be indeed God's child; put not up with suppositions, be not satisfied with appearances and perhapses; rest nowhere till thou hast said—God having given thee the faith to say it, "He loved me and gave himself for me, he is all my salvation and all my desire. See, then, how these wise men were not made by the sight of the star to keep away from Christ, but they were encouraged by it to come to Christ, and do you be encouraged, dear seeker, this morning to come to Jesus by the fact that you are blessed with the gospel. You have an invitation given you to come to Jesus, you have the motions of God's Spirit upon your conscience, awakening you; O come, come and welcome, and let this strange winter's day be a day of brightness and of

gladness to a many a seeking soul.

I have turned my thoughts on this last head into verse, and  
I will repeat the lines—

O where is Christ my King?  
I languish for the sight,  
Fain would I fall to worshipping,  
For he's my soul's delight.

Himself, himself alone,  
I seek no less, no more,  
Or on his cross, or on his throne,  
I'd equally adore.

The sages saw his star,  
But rested not content,  
The way was rough, the distance far,  
Yet on that way they went.

And now my thoughts discern  
The sign that Christ is nigh,  
With love unquenchable I burn,  
T' enjoy his company.

No star nor heavenly sign  
My soul's desire can fill,  
For him, my Lord, my King divine,  
My soul is thirsting still.

III. And now we shall conclude, by considering THE EXAMPLE of these wise men. They came to Jesus, and in so doing, they did three things: they saw, they worshipped, they gave. Those are three things which every believer here may do this morning over again, and which every seeker should do for the first time.

First, *they saw* the young Child. I do not think they merely said, "There he is," and so ended the matter, but they stood still and looked. Perhaps for some minutes they did not speak. About his very face I do not doubt there was a supernatural beauty. Whether there was a beauty to everyone's eye I know not, but to theirs there was assuredly a superhuman attraction. The incarnate God! They gazed with all their eyes. They looked, and looked, and looked again. They glanced at his mother, but they fixed their eyes on him. "They saw the young Child." So, too, this morning let us think of Jesus with fixed and continuous thought. He is God, he is man, he is the substitute for sinners; he is willing to receive all who trust him. He will save, and save this morning, every one of us who will rely upon him. Think of him. If you are at home this afternoon, spend the time in thinking upon him. Bring him before your mind's eye, consider and admire him. Is it not a wonder that God should enter into union with man and come to this world as an infant? He who made heaven and earth hangs on a woman's breast for us! For our redemption the Word was made flesh. This truth will breed the brightest hope within your soul. If you follow that babe's wondrous life till it ends at the cross, I trust you may there be able to give such a look at him that, like

as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, and they that looked were healed, so you looking may be healed of all your spiritual diseases. Though it is many a year since I first looked to him, I desire to look to Jesus again. The incarnate God! My eyes swim with tears to think that he who might have crushed me into hell for ever, becomes a young child for my sake? See him, all of you, and seeing worship.

What did the wise men next? They *worshipped* him. We cannot properly worship a Christ whom we do not know. "To the unknown God" is poor worship. But, oh, when you think of Jesus Christ, whose goings forth were of old from everlasting, the eternally-begotten Son of the Father, and then see him coming here to be a man of the substance of his mother, and know and understand why he came and what he did when he came, then you fall down and worship him.

"Son of God, to thee we bow,  
Thou art Lord, and only thou;  
Thou the woman's promised seed;  
Thou who didst for sinners bleed."

We worship Jesus. Our faith sees him go from the manger to the cross, and from the cross right up to the throne, and there where Jehovah dwells, amidst the insufferable glory of the divine presence stands the man, the very man who slept at Bethlehem in the manger; there he reigns as Lord of lords. Our souls worship him again. Thou art our Prophet, every word thou sayest, Jesu, we believe and desire to follow: thou art our Priest, thy sacrifice hath made us clean, we are washed in thy blood; thou art our King, command, we will obey, lead on, and we will follow: We worship thee. We should spend much time in worshipping the Christ, and he should ever have the highest

place in our reverence.

After worshipping, the wise men presented *their gifts*. One broke open his casket of gold, and laid it at the feet of the newborn King. Another presented frankincense—one of the precious products of the country from which they came; and others laid myrrh at the Redeemer's feet; all these they gave to prove the truth of their worship. They gave substantial offerings with no niggard hand. And now, after you have worshipped Christ in your soul, and seen him with the eye of faith, it will not need that I should say to you, give him yourself, give him your heart, give him your substance. Why, you will not be able to help doing it. He who really loves the Saviour in his heart, cannot help devoting to him his life, his strength, his all. With some people, when they give Christ anything, or do anything for him, it is dreadfully forced work. They say, "The love of Christ ought to constrain us." I do not know that there is any such text as that in the Bible, however. I do remember one text that runs thus—"The love of Christ constraineth us." If it does not constrain us, it is because it is not in us. It is not merely a thing which ought to be, it must be. If any man love Christ, he will very soon be finding out ways and means of proving his love by his sacrifices. Go home, Mary, and fetch the alabaster box, and pour the ointment on his head, and if any say, "Wherefore is this waste?" thou wilt have a good reply, thou hast had much forgiven thee, and therefore thou lovest much. If thou hast gold, give it; if thou hast frankincense, give it; if thou hast myrrh, give it to Jesus; and if thou hast none of these things, give him thy love, all thy love, and that will be gold and spices all in one; give him thy tongue, speak of him; give him thy hands, work for him; give him thy whole self. I know thou wilt, for he loved thee, and gave



himself for thee. The Lord bless you, and may this Christmas Sabbath morning be a very memorable day to many out of the crowd assembled here. I am surprised to see so vast a number present, and I can only hope the blessing will be in proportion, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

# JOY BORN AT BETHLEHEM DECEMBER 24TH, 1871

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”—Luke 2:10, 11, 12

WE have no superstitious regard for times and seasons. Certainly we do not believe in the present ecclesiastical arrangement called *Christmas*: first, because we do not believe in the *mass* at all, but abhor it, whether it be said or sung in Latin or in English; and, secondly, because we find no Scriptural warrant whatever for observing any day as the birthday of the Saviour; and, consequently, its observance is a superstition, because not of divine authority. Superstition has fixed most positively the day of our Saviour’s birth, although

there is no possibility of discovering when it occurred. Fabricius gives a catalogue of 136 different learned opinions upon the matter; and various divines invent weighty arguments for advocating a date in every month in the year. It was not till the middle of the third century that any part of the church celebrated the nativity of our Lord; and it was not till very long after the Western church had set the example, that the Eastern adopted it. Because the day is not known, therefore superstition has fixed it; while, since the day of the death of our Saviour might be determined with much certainty, therefore superstition shifts the date of its observance every year. Where is the method in the madness of the superstitious? Probably the fact is that the holy days were arranged to fit in with heathen festivals. We venture to assert, that if there be any day in the year, of which we may be pretty sure that it was not the day on which the Saviour was born, it is the twenty-fifth of December. Nevertheless, since, the current of men's thoughts is led this way just now, and I see no evil in the current itself, I shall launch the bark of our discourse upon that stream, and make use of the fact, which I shall neither justify nor condemn, by endeavouring to lead your thoughts in the same direction. Since it is lawful, and even laudable, to meditate upon the incarnation of the Lord upon any day in the year, it cannot be in the power of other men's superstitions to render such a meditation improper for to-day. Regarding not the day, let us, nevertheless, give God thanks for the gift of his dear Son.

In our text we have before us the sermon of the first evangelist under the gospel dispensation. The preacher was an angel, and it was meet it should be so, for the grandest and last of all evangels will be proclaimed by an angel when he shall

sound the trumpet of the resurrection, and the children of the regeneration shall rise into the fulness of their joy. The keynote of this angelic gospel is *joy*—"I bring unto you good tidings of great joy." Nature fears in the presence of God—the shepherds were sore afraid. The law itself served to deepen this natural feeling of dismay; seeing men were sinful, and the law came into the world to reveal sin, its tendency was to make men fear and tremble under any and every divine revelation. The Jews unanimously believed that if any man beheld supernatural appearances, he would be sure to die, so that what nature dictated, the law and the general beliefs of those under it also abetted. But the first word of the gospel ended all this, for the angelic evangelist said, "Fear not, behold I bring you good tidings." Henceforth, it is to be no dreadful thing for man to approach his Maker; redeemed man is not to fear when God unveils the splendour of his majesty, since he appears no more a judge upon his throne of terror, but a Father unbending in sacred familiarity before his own beloved children.

The joy which this first gospel preacher spoke of was no mean one, for he said, "I bring you good tidings"—that alone were joy: and not good tidings of joy only, but "good tidings of *great* joy." Every word is emphatic, as if to show that the gospel is above all things intended to promote, and will most abundantly create the greatest possible joy in the human heart wherever it is received. Man is like a harp unstrung, and the music of his soul's living strings is discordant, his whole nature wails with sorrow; but the son of David, that mighty harper, has come to restore the harmony of humanity, and where his gracious fingers move among the strings, the touch of the fingers of an incarnate God brings forth music sweet as that of the spheres, and melody rich as a seraph's canticle.

Would God that all men felt that divine hand.

In trying to open up this angelic discourse this morning, we shall note three things: *the joy which is spoken of*; next, *the persons to whom this joy comes*; and then, thirdly, *the sign*, which is to us a sign as well as to these shepherds—a sign of the birth and source of joy.

I. First, then, *THE JOY*, which is mentioned in our text—whence comes it, and what is it?

We have already said it is a “*great joy*”—“good tidings of great joy.” Earth’s joy is small, her mirth is trivial, but heaven has sent us joy immeasurable, fit for immortal minds. Inasmuch as no note of time is appended, and no intimation is given that the message will ever be reversed, we may say that it is a *lasting joy*, a joy which will ring all down the ages, the echoes of which shall be heard until the trumpet brings the resurrection; aye, and onward for ever and for ever. For when God sent forth the angel in his brightness to say, “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people,” he did as much as say, “From this time forth it shall be joy to the sons of men; there shall be peace to the human race, and goodwill towards men for ever and for ever, as long as there is glory to God in the highest.” O blessed thought! the Star of Bethlehem shall never set. Jesus, the fairest among ten thousand, the most lovely among the beautiful, is a joy for ever.

Since this joy is expressly associated with the glory of God, by the words, “Glory to God in the highest,” we may be quite clear that it is a *pure and holy joy*. No other would an angel have proclaimed, and, indeed, no other joy is joy. The wine pressed from the grapes of Sodom may sparkle and foam, but it is bitterness in the end, and the dregs thereof are death; only that which comes from the clusters of Eschol is the true wine of

the kingdom, making glad the heart of God and man. Holy joy is the joy of heaven, and that, be ye sure, is the very cream of joy. The joy of sin is a fire-fountain, having its source in the burning soil of hell, maddening and consuming those who drink its fire-water; of such delights we desire not to drink. It were to be worse than damned to be happy in sin, since it is the beginning of grace to be wretched in sin, and the consummation of grace to be wholly escaped from sin, and to shudder even at the thought of it. It is hell to live in sin and misery, it is a deep lower still when men could fashion a joy in sin. God save us from unholy peace and from unholy joy! The joy announced by the angel of the nativity is as pure as it is lasting, as holy as it is great. Let us then always believe concerning the Christian religion that it has its joy within itself, and holds its feasts within its own pure precincts, a feast whose viands all grow on holy ground. There are those who, to-morrow, will pretend to exhibit joy in the remembrance of our Saviour's birth, but they will not seek their pleasure in the Saviour: they will need many additions to the feast before they can be satisfied. Joy in Immanuel would be a poor sort of mirth to them. In this country, too often, if one were unaware of the name, one might believe the Christmas festival to be a feast of Bacchus, or of Ceres, certainly not a commemoration of the Divine birth. Yet is there cause enough for holy joy in the Lord himself, and reasons for ecstasy in his birth among men. It is to be feared that most men imagine that in Christ there is only seriousness and solemnity, and to them consequently weariness, gloom, and discontent; therefore, they look out of and beyond what Christ allows, to snatch from the tables of Satan the delicacies with which to adorn the banquet held in honour of a Saviour. Let it not be so among you. The joy which

the gospel brings is not borrowed but blooms in its own garden. We may truly say in the language of one of our sweetest hymns— “I need not go abroad for joy, I have a feast *at home*, My sighs are turned into songs, My heart has ceased to roam.

Down from above the Blessed Dove Has come into my  
breast, To witness his eternal love, And give my spirit  
rest.”

Let our joy be living water from those sacred wells which the Lord himself has digged; may his joy abide in us, that our joy may be full. Of Christ’s joy we cannot have too much; no fear of running to excess when his love is the wine we drink. Oh to be plunged in this pure stream of spiritual delights!

But why is it that the coming of Christ into the world is the occasion of joy? The answer is as follows:—First, because *it is evermore a joyous fact that God should be in alliance with man*, especially when the alliance is so near that God should in very deed take our manhood into union with his godhead; so that God and man should constitute one divine, mysterious person. Sin had separated between God and man; but the incarnation bridges the separation: it is a prelude to the atoning sacrifice, but it is a prelude full of the richest hope. From henceforth, when God looks upon man, he will remember that his own Son is a man. From this day forth, when he beholds the sinner, if his wrath should burn, he will remember that his own Son, as man, stood in the sinner’s place, and bore the sinner’s doom. As in the case of war, the feud is ended when the opposing parties intermarry, so there is no more war between God and man, because God has taken man into intimate union with himself. Herein, then, there was cause for joy.

But there was more than that, for the shepherds were aware

that *there had been promises made of old* which had been the hope and comfort of believers in all ages, and these *were now to be fulfilled*. There was that ancient promise made on the threshold of Eden to the first sinners of our race, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head; another promise made to the Father of the faithful that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed, and promises uttered by the mouths of prophets and of saints since the world began. Now, the announcement of the angel of the Lord to the shepherds was a declaration that the covenant was fulfilled, that now in the fulness of time God would redeem his word, and the Messiah, who was to be Israel's glory and the world's hope, was now really come. Be glad ye heavens, and be joyful O earth, for the Lord hath done it, and in mercy hath he visited his people. The Lord hath not suffered his word to fail, but hath fulfilled unto his people his promises. The time to favour Zion, yea the set time, is come. Now that the sceptre is departed from Judah, behold the Shiloh comes, the Messenger of the covenant suddenly appears in his temple!

But the angel's song had in it yet fuller reason for joy; for our Lord who was born in Bethlehem came as *a Saviour*. "Unto you is born this day a Saviour." God had come to earth before, but not as a Saviour. Remember that terrible coming when there went three angels into Sodom at night-fall, for the Lord said, "I will go now and see whether it be altogether according to the cry thereof." He had come as a spy to witness human sin, and as an avenger to lift his hand to heaven, and bid the red fire descend and burn up the accursed cities of the plain. Horror to the world when God thus descends. If Sinai smokes when the law is proclaimed, the earth itself shall melt when the breaches of the law are punished. But now not as an angel of vengeance,



but as a man in mercy God has come; not to spy out our sin, but to remove it; not to punish guilt, but to forgive it. The Lord might have come with thunderbolts in both his hands, he might have come like Elias to call fire from heaven; but no, his hands are full of gifts of love, and his presence is the guarantee of grace. The babe born in the manger might have been another prophet of tears, or another son of thunder, but he was not so: he came in gentleness, his glory and his thunder alike laid aside.

“’Twas mercy filled the throne, And wrath stood silent by,  
When Christ on the kind errand came To sinners doomed  
to die.”

Rejoice, ye who feel that ye are lost; your Saviour comes to seek and save you. Be of good cheer ye who are in prison, for he comes to set you free. Ye who are famished and ready to die, rejoice that he has consecrated for you a Bethlehem, a house of bread, and he has come to be the bread of life to your souls. Rejoice, O sinners, everywhere for the restorer of the castaways, the Saviour of the fallen is born. Join in the joy, ye saints, for he is the preserver of the saved ones, delivering them from innumerable perils, and he is the sure prefecter of such as he preserves. Jesus is no partial Saviour, beginning a work and not concluding it; but, restoring and upholding, he also prefects and presents the saved ones without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing before his Father's throne. Rejoice aloud all ye people, let your hills and valleys ring with joy, for a Saviour who is mighty to save is born among you.

Nor was this all the holy mirth, for the next word has also in it a fulness of joy:—“a Saviour, who is *Christ*,” or the Anointed. Our Lord was not an amateur Saviour who came

down from heaven upon an unauthorised mission; but he was chosen, ordained, and anointed of God; he could truly say, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me." Here is great comfort for all such as need a Saviour; it is to them no mean consolation that God has himself authorised Christ to save. There can be no fear of a jar between the mediator and the judge, no peril of a nonacceptance of our Saviour's work; because God has commissioned Christ to do what he has done, and in saving sinners he is only executing his Father's own will. Christ is here called "*the* anointed." All his people are anointed, and there were priests after the order of Aaron who were anointed, but he is *the* anointed, "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows;" so plenteously anointed that, like the unction upon Aaron's head, the sacred anointing of the Head of the church distils in copious streams, till we who are like the skirts of his garments are made sweet with the rich perfume. He is "the anointed" in a threefold sense: as prophet to preach the gospel with power; as priest to offer sacrifice; as king to rule and reign. In each of these he is preeminent; he is such a teacher, priest, and ruler as was never seen before. In him was a rare conjunction of glorious offices, for never did prophet, priest, and king meet in one person before among the sons of men, nor shall it ever be so again. Triple is the anointing of him who is a priest after the order of Melchisedec, a prophet like unto Moses, and a king of whose dominion there is no end. In the name of Christ, the Holy Ghost is glorified, by being seen as anointing the incarnate God. Truly, dear brethren, if we did but understand all this, and receive it into our hearts, our souls would leap for joy on this Sabbath day, to think that there is born unto us a Saviour who is anointed of the Lord.

One more note, and this the loudest, let us sound it well and hear it well—"which is Christ *the Lord*." Now the word Lord, or *Kurios*, here used is tantamount to Jehovah. We cannot doubt that, because it is the same word used twice in the ninth verse, and in the ninth verse none can question that it means Jehovah. Hear it, "And, lo, the angel of the *Lord* came upon them, and the glory of the *Lord* shone round about them." And if this be not enough, read the 23rd verse, "As it is written in the law of the *Lord*, every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the *Lord*." Now the word Lord here assuredly refers to Jehovah, the one God, and so it must do here. Our Saviour is Christ, God, Jehovah. No testimony to his divinity could be plainer; it is indisputable. And what joy there is in this; for suppose an angel had been our Saviour, he would not have been able to bear the load of my sin or yours; or if anything less than God had been set up as the ground of our salvation, it might have been found too frail a foundation. But if he who undertakes to save is none other than the Infinite and the Almighty, then the load of our guilt can be carried upon such shoulders, the stupendous labour of our salvation can be achieved by such a worker, and that with ease: for all things are possible with God, and he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. Ye sons of men perceive ye here the subject of your joy. The God who made you, and against whom you have offended, has come down from heaven and taken upon himself your nature that he might save you. He has come in the fulness of his glory and the infinity of his mercy that he might redeem you. Do you not welcome this news? What! will not your hearts be thankful for this? Does this matchless love awaken no gratitude? Were it not for this divine Saviour, your life here would have been wretchedness, and

your future existence would have been endless woe. Oh, I pray you adore the incarnate God, and trust in him. Then will you bless the Lord for delivering you from the wrath to come, and as you lay hold of Jesus and find salvation in his name, you will tune your songs to his praise, and exult with sacred joy. So much concerning this joy.

II. Follow me while I briefly speak of THE PEOPLE to whom this joy comes. Observe how the angel begins, “Behold, I bring *you* good tidings of great joy, for *unto you* is born this day.” So, then, the joy began with the first who heard it, the shepherds. “*To you*,” saith he; “for *unto you* is born.” Beloved hearer, shall the joy begin with you to-day?—for it little avails you that Christ was born, or that Christ died, unless *unto you* a child is born, and for you Jesus bled. A personal interest is the main point. “But I am poor,” saith one. So were the shepherds. O ye poor, to you this mysterious child is born. “The poor have the gospel preached unto them.” “He shall judge the poor and needy, and break in pieces the oppressor.” But I am obscure and unknown,” saith one. So were the watchers on the midnight plain. Who knew the men who endured hard toil, and kept their flocks by night? But you, unknown of men, are known to God: shall it not be said, that “unto you a child is born? The Lord regardeth not the greatness of men, but hath respect unto the lowly. But you are illiterate, you say, you cannot understand much. Be it so, but unto the shepherds Christ was born, and their simplicity did not hinder their receiving him, but even helped them to it. Be it so with yourself: receive gladly the simple truth as it is in Jesus. The Lord hath exalted one chosen out of the people. No aristocratic Christ have I to preach to you, but the Saviour of the people, the friend of publicans and sinners. Jesus is the true “poor

man's friend;" he is "a covenant for the people," given to be "a leader and commander to the people." To you is Jesus given. O that each heart might truly say, to me is Jesus born; for if I truly believe in Jesus, unto me Christ is born, and I may be as sure of it as if an angel announced it, since the Scripture tells me that if I believe in Jesus He is mine.

After the angel had said "to you," he went on to say, "it shall be *to all people*." But our translation is not accurate, the Greek is, "it shall be to all *the* people." This refers most assuredly to the Jewish nation; there can be no question about that; if any one looks at the original, he will not find so large and wide an expression as that given by our translators. It should be rendered "to all *the* people." And here let us speak a word for the Jews. How long and how sinfully has the Christian church despised the most honorable amongst the nations! How barbarously has Israel been handled by the so-called church! I felt my spirit burn indignantly within me in Rome when I stood in the Jew's quarter, and heard of the cruel indignities which Popery has heaped upon the Jews, even until recently. At this hour there stands in the Jew's quarter a church built right in front of the entrance to it, and into this the unhappy Jews were driven forcibly on certain occasions. To this church they were compelled to subscribe—subscribe, mark you, as worshippers of the one invisible God, to the support of a system which is as leprous with idolatry as were the Canaanites whom the Lord abhorred. Paganism is not more degrading than Romanism. Over the door of this church is placed, in their own tongue in the Hebrew, these words:—"All day long have I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying generation;" how, by such an insult as that, could they hope to convert the Jew. The Jew saw everywhere idols

which his soul abhorred, and he loathed the name of Christ, because he associated it with idol worship, and I do not wonder that he did. I praise the Jew that he could not give up his own simple theism, and the worship of the true God, for such a base, degrading superstition as that which Rome presented to him. Instead of thinking it a wonder of unbelief that the Jew is not a Christian, I honour him for his faith and his courageous resistance of a fascinating heathenism. If Romanism be Christianity I am not, neither could I be, a Christian. It were a more manly thing to be a simple believer in one God, or even an honest doubter upon all religion, than worship such crowds of gods and goddesses as Popery has set up, and to bow, as she does, before rotten bones and dead men's winding sheets. Let the true Christian church think lovingly of the Jew, and with respectful earnestness tell him the true gospel; let her sweep away superstition, and set before him the one gracious God in the Trinity of his divine Unity; and the day shall yet come when the Jews, who were the first apostles to the Gentiles, the first missionaries to us who were afar off, shall be gathered in again. Until that shall be, the fulness of the church's glory can never come. Matchless benefits to the world are bound up with the restoration of Israel; their gathering in shall be as life from the dead. Jesus the Saviour is the joy of all nations, but let not the chosen race be denied their peculiar share of whatever promise holy writ has recorded with a special view to them. The woes which their sins brought upon them have fallen thick and heavily; and even so let the richest blessings distil upon them.

Although our translation is not literally correct, it, nevertheless, expresses a great truth, taught plainly in the context; and, therefore, we will advance another step. The

coming of Christ is a joy to *all people*. It is so, for the fourteenth verse says: "On earth peace," which is a wide and even unlimited expression. It adds, "Good will towards"—not Jews, but "men"—all men. The word is the generic name of the entire race, and there is no doubt that the coming of Christ does bring joy to all sorts of people. It brings a measure of joy even to those who are not Christians. Christ does not bless them in the highest and truest sense, but the influence of his teaching imparts benefits of an inferior sort, such as they are capable of receiving; for wherever the gospel is proclaimed, it is no small blessing to all the population. Note this fact: there is no land beneath the sun where there is an open Bible and a preached gospel, where a tyrant long can hold his place. It matters not who he be, whether pope or king; let the pulpit be used properly for the preaching of Christ crucified, let the Bible be opened to be read by all men, and no tyrant can long rule in peace. England owes her freedom to the Bible; and France will never possess liberty, lasting and well-established, till she comes to reverence the gospel, which too long she has rejected. There is joy to all mankind where Christ comes. The religion of Jesus makes men think, and to make men think is always dangerous to a despot's power. The religion of Jesus Christ sets a man free from superstition; when he believes in Jesus, what cares he for Papal excommunications, or whether priests give or withhold their absolution? The man no longer cringes and bows down; he is no more willing, like a beast, to be led by the nose; but, learning to think for himself, and becoming a man, he disdains the childish fears which once held him in slavery. Hence, where Jesus comes, even if men do not receive him as the Saviour, and so miss the fullest joy, yet they get a measure of benefit; and I pray God that everywhere his

gospel may be so proclaimed, and that so many may be actuated by the spirit of it, that it may be better for all mankind. If men receive Christ, there will be no more oppression: the true Christian does to others as he would that they should do to him, and there is no more contention of classes, nor grinding of the faces of the poor. Slavery must go down where Christianity rules, and mark you, if Romanism be once destroyed, and pure Christianity shall govern all nations, war itself must come to an end; for if there be anything which this book denounces and counts the hugest of all crimes, it is the crime of war. Put up thy sword into thy sheath, for hath not he said, "Thou shalt not kill," and he meant not that it was a sin to kill one but a glory to kill a million, but he meant that bloodshed on the smallest or largest scale was sinful. Let Christ govern, and men shall break the bow and cut the spear in sunder, and burn the chariot in the fire. It is joy to all nations that Christ is born, the Prince of Peace, the King who rules in righteousness.

But, beloved, the greatest joy is to those who know Christ *as a Saviour*. Here the song rises to a higher and sublimer note. Unto us indeed a child is born, if we can say that he is our "Saviour who is Christ the Lord." Let me ask each of you a few personal questions. Are your sins forgiven you for his name's sake? Is the head of the serpent bruised in your soul? Does the seed of the woman reign in sanctifying power over your nature? Oh then, you have the joy that is to all the people in the truest form of it; and, dear brother, dear sister, the further you submit yourself to Christ the Lord, the more completely you know him, and are like him, the fuller will your happiness become. Surface joy is to those who live where the Saviour is preached; but the great deeps, the great fathomless deeps of solemn joy which glisten and sparkle with delight, are for such



as know the Saviour, obey the anointed one, and have communion with the Lord himself. He is the most joyful man who is the most Christly man. I wish that some Christians were more truly Christians: they are Christians and something else; it were much better if they were altogether Christians. Perhaps you know the legend, or perhaps true history of the awakening of St. Augustine. He dreamed that he died, and went to the gates of heaven, and the keeper of the gates said to him, "Who are you?" And he answered, "*Christianus sum*," I am a Christian. But the porter replied, "No, you are not a Christian, you are a Ciceronian, for your thoughts and studies were most of all directed to the works of Cicero and the classics, and you neglected the teaching of Jesus. We judge men here by that which most engrossed their thoughts, and you are judged not to be a Christian but a Ciceronian." When Augustine awoke, he put aside the classics which he had studied, and the eloquence at which he had aimed, and he said, "I will be a Christian and a theologian;" and from that time he devoted his thoughts to the word of God, and his pen and his tongue to the instruction of others in the truth. Oh I would not have it said of any of you, "Well, he may be somewhat Christian, but he is far more a keen money-getting tradesman." I would not have it said, "Well, he may be a believer in Christ, but he is a good deal more a politician." Perhaps he is a Christian, but he is most at home when he is talking about science, farming, engineering, horses, mining, navigation, or pleasure-taking. No, no, you will never know the fulness of the joy which Jesus brings to the soul, unless under the power of the Holy Spirit you take the Lord your Master to be your All in all, and make him the fountain of your intensest delight. "He is my Saviour, my Christ, my Lord," be this your loudest boast. Then will you

know the joy which the angel's song predicts for men.

III. But I must pass on. The last thing in the text is THE SIGN. The shepherds did not ask for a sign, but one was graciously given. Sometimes it is sinful for us to require as an evidence what God's tenderness may nevertheless see fit to give as an aid to faith. Wilful unbelief shall have no sign, but weak faith shall have compassionate aid. The sign that the joy of the world had come was this,—they were to go to the manger to find the Christ in it, and he was to be the sign. Every circumstance is therefore instructive. The babe was found “wrapped in swaddling clothes.” Now, observe, as you look at this infant, that there is not the remotest appearance of *temporal power* here. Mark the two little puny arms of a little babe that must be carried if it go. Alas, the nations of the earth look for joy in military power. By what means can we make a nation of soldiers? The Prussian method is admirable; we must have thousands upon thousands of armed men and big cannon and ironclad vessels to kill and destroy by wholesale. Is it not a nation's pride to be gigantic in arms? What pride flushes the patriot's cheek when he remembers that his nation can murder faster than any other people. Ah, foolish generation, ye are groping in the flames of hell to find your heaven, raking amid blood and bones for the foul thing which ye call glory. A nation's joy can never lie in the misery of others. Killing is not the path to prosperity; huge armaments are a curse to the nation itself as well as to its neighbours. The joy of a nation is a golden sand over which no stream of blood has ever rippled. It is only found in that river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God. The weakness of submissive gentleness is true power. Jesus founds his eternal empire not on force but on love. Here, O ye people, see your hope; the mild pacific prince,

whose glory is his self-sacrifice, is our true benefactor.

But look again, and you shall observe *no pomp* to dazzle you. Is the child wrapped in purple and fine linen? Ah, no. Sleeps he in a cradle of gold? The manger alone is his shelter. No crown is upon the babe's head, neither does a coronet surround the mother's brow. A simple maiden of Galilee, and a little child in ordinary swaddling bands, it is all you see.

“Bask not in courtly bower, Or sunbright hall of power, Pass  
Babel quick, and seek the holy land.

From robes of Tyrian dye, Turn with undazzled eye To  
Bethlehem's glade, and by the manger stand.”

Alas, the nations are dazzled with a vain show. The pomp of empires, the pageants of kings are their delight. How can they admire those gaudy courts, in which too often glorious apparel, decorations, and rank stand in the stead of virtue, chastity, and truth. When will the people cease to be children? Must they for ever crave for martial music which stimulates to violence, and delight in a lavish expenditure which burdens them with taxation? These make not a nation great or joyous. Bah! how has the bubble burst across you narrow sea. A bubble empire has collapsed. Ten thousand bayonets and millions of gold proved but a sandy foundation for a Babel throne. Vain are the men who look for joy in pomp; it lies in truth and righteousness, in peace and salvation, of which yonder newborn prince in the garments of a peasant child is the true symbol.

Neither was there *wealth* to be seen at Bethlehem. Here in this quiet island, the bulk of men are comfortably seeking to acquire their thousands by commerce and manufactures. We are the sensible people who follow the main chance, and are

not to be deluded by ideas of glory; we are making all the money we can, and wondering that other nations waste so much in fight. The main prop and pillar of England's joy is to be found, as some tell us, in the Three per Cents., in the possession of colonies, in the progress of machinery, in steadily increasing our capital. Is not Mammon a smiling deity? But, here, in the cradle of the world's hope at Bethlehem, I see far more of poverty than wealth; I perceive no glitter of gold, or spangle of silver. I perceive only a poor babe, so poor, so very poor, that he is in a manger laid; and his mother is a mechanic's wife, a woman who wears neither silk nor gem. Not in your gold, O Britons, will ever lie your joy, but in the gospel enjoyed by all classes, the gospel freely preached and joyfully received. Jesus, by raising us to spiritual wealth, redeems us from the chains of Mammon, and in that liberty gives us joy.

And here, too, I see *no superstition*. I know the artist paints angels in the skies, and surrounds the scene with a mysterious light, of which tradition's tongue of falsehood has said that it made midnight as bright as noon. This is fiction merely; there was nothing more there than the stable, the straw the oxen ate, and perhaps the beasts themselves, and the child in the plainest, simplest manner, wrapped as other children are; the cherubs were invisible and of haloes there were none. Around this birth of joy was no sign of superstition: that demon dared not intrude its tricks and posturings into the sublime spectacle: it would have been there as much out of place as a harlequin in the holy of holies. A simple gospel, a plain gospel, as plain as that babe wrapped in the commonest garments, is this day the only hope for men. Be ye wise and believe in Jesus, and abhor all the lies of Rom, and inventions of those who ape her detestable abominations.

Nor does the joy of the world lie in *philosophy*. You could not have made a schoolmen's puzzle of Bethlehem if you had tried to do so; it was just a child in the manger and a Jewish woman looking on and nursing it, and a carpenter standing by. There was no metaphysical difficulty there, of which men could say, "A doctor of divinity is needed to explain it, and an assembly of divines must expound it." It is true the wise men came there, but it was only to adore and offer gifts; would that all the wise had been as wise as they. Alas, human subtlety has disputed over the manger, and logic has darkened counsel with its words. But this is one of man's many inventions; God's work was sublimely simple. Here was "The Word made flesh" to dwell among us, a mystery for faith, but not a football for argument. Mysterious, yet the greatest simplicity that was ever spoken to human ears, and seen by mortal eyes. And such is the gospel, in the preaching of which our apostle said, "we use great plainness of speech." Away, away, away with your learned sermons, and your fine talk, and your pretentious philosophies; these never created a jot of happiness in this world. Fine spun theories are fair to gaze on, and to bewilder fools, but they are of no use to practical men, they comfort not the sons of toil, nor cheer the daughters of sorrow. The man of common sense, who feels the daily rub and tear of this poor world, needs richer consolation than your novel theologies, or neologies, can give him. In a simple Christ, and in a simple faith in that Christ, there is a peace deep and lasting; in a plain, poor man's gospel there is a joy and a bliss unspeakable, of which thousands can speak, and speak with confidence, too, for they declare what they do know, and testify what they have seen.

I say, then, to you who would know the only true peace and lasting joy, come ye to the babe of Bethlehem, in after days the

Man of Sorrows, the substitutionary sacrifice for sinners. Come, ye little children, ye boys and girls, come ye; for he also was a boy. "The holy child Jesus" is the children's Saviour, and saith still, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not. Come hither, ye maidens, ye who are still in the morning of your beauty, and, like Mary, rejoice in God your Saviour. The virgin bore him on her bosom, so come ye and bear him in your hearts, saying, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." And you, ye men in the plenitude of your strength, remember how Joseph cared for him, and watched with reverent solicitude his tender years; be you to his cause as a Father and a helper; sanctify your strength to his service. And ye women advanced in years, ye matrons and widows, come like Anna and bless the Lord that you have seen the salvation of Israel, and ye hoar heads, who like Simeon are ready to depart, come ye and take the Saviour in your arms, adoring him as your Saviour and your all. Ye shepherds, ye simple hearted, ye who toil for your daily bread, come and adore the Saviour; and stand not back ye wise men, ye who know by experience and who by meditation peer into deep truth, come ye, and like the sages of the East bow low before his presence, and make it your honour to pay honour to Christ the Lord. For my own part, the incarnate God is all my hope and trust. I have seen the world's religion at the fountain head, and my heart has sickened within me; I come back to preach, by God's help, yet more earnestly the gospel, the simple gospel of the Son of Man. Jesus, Master, I take thee to be mine for ever! May all in this house, through the rich grace of God, be led to do the same, and may they all be thine, great Son of God, in the day of thine appearing, for thy love's sake. Amen.



# JESUS, THE KING OF TRUTH

DECEMBER 19TH, 1872

“Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”—John 18:37

THE season is almost arrived when by the custom of our fellow-citizens we are led to remember the birth of the holy child Jesus, who was born “king of the Jews.” I shall not, however, conduct you to Bethlehem, but to the foot of Calvary; there we shall learn, from the Lord’s own lips, something concerning the kingdom over which he rules, and thus we shall be led to prize more highly the joyous event of his nativity.

We are told, by the apostle Paul, that our Lord Jesus Christ before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession. It was a good confession as to the manner of it, for our Lord was truthful, gentle, prudent, patient, meek, and yet, withal, uncompromising, and courageous. His spirit was not cowed by



Pilate's power, nor exasperated by his sneers. In his patience he possessed his soul, and remained the model witness for the truth—both in his silence and in his speech. He witnessed a good confession also, as to the matter of it; for, though he said but little, that little was all that was needful. He claimed his crown rights, and, at the same time, declared that his kingdom was not of this world, nor to be sustained by force. He vindicated both the spirituality and the essential truthfulness of his sovereignty. If ever we should be placed in like circumstances, may we be able to witness a good confession too! We may never, like Paul, be made to plead before Nero; but, if we should, may the Lord stand by us, and help us to play the man before the lion! In our families, or among our business acquaintances, we may have to meet some little Nero, and answer to some petty Pilate; may we then also be true witnesses. O that we may have grace to be prudently silent or meekly outspoken, as the matter may require, in either case being faithful to our conscience and our God! May the sorrowful visage of Jesus, the faithful and true witness, the Prince of the kings of the earth, be often before our eye, to check the first sign of flinching, and to inspire us with dauntless courage!

We have before us, in the words of the text, a part of our Saviour's good confession touching his kingdom.

I. Note, first of all, that OUR LORD CLAIMED TO BE A KING. Pilate said, "Art thou a king, then?" asking the question with a sneering surprise that so poor a being should put forth a claim to royalty. Do you wonder that he should have marvelled greatly to find kingly claims associated with such a sorrowful condition? The Saviour answered, in effect, "It is even as thou sayest, I am a king." The question was but half earnest; the

answer was altogether solemn: "I am a king." Nothing was ever uttered by our Lord with greater certainty and earnestness.

Now, notice, that our Lord's claim to be a king was made without the slightest ostentation or desire to be advantaged thereby. There were other times when, if he had said "I am a king," he might have been carried upon the shoulders of the people, and crowned amid general acclamations. His fanatical fellow countrymen would gladly have made him their leader at one time; and we read that they would have "taken him by force and made him a king." At such times he said but little about his kingdom, and what he did say was uttered in parables, and explained only to his disciples when they were alone. Little enough did he say in his preaching concerning his birthright as the Son of David and a scion of the royal house of Judah; for he shrank from worldly honours, and disdained the vain glories of a temporal diadem. He who came in love to redeem men, had no ambition for the gewgaws of human sovereignty. But now, when he is betrayed by his disciple, accused by his countrymen, and in the hands of an unjust ruler; when no good can come of it to himself; when it will bring him derision rather than honour; he speaks out plainly and replies to his interrogator, "Thou sayest that I am a king."

Note well the clearness of our Lord's avowal; there was no mistaking his words: "I am a king." When the time has come for the truth to be spoken, our Lord is not backward in declaring it. Truth has her times most meet for speech, and her seasons for silence. We are not to cast our pearls before swine, but when the hour has come for speech we must not hesitate, but speak as with the voice of a trumpet, giving forth a certain sound, that no man may mistake us. So, though a prisoner given up to die, the Lord boldly declares his royalty, though Pilate would

pour derision upon him in consequence thereof. O, for the Master's prudence to speak the truth at the right time, and for the Master's courage to speak it when the right time has come. Soldiers of the cross, learn of your Captain.

Our Lord's claim to royalty must have sounded very singularly in Pilate's ear. Jesus was, doubtless, very much careworn, sad, and emaciated in appearance. He had spent the first part of the night in the garden in an agony; in the midnight hours he had been dragged from Annas to Caiaphas, and from Caiaphas to Herod; neither at daybreak had he been permitted to rest, so that, from sheer weariness, he must have looked very unlike a king. If you had taken some poor ragged creature in the street, and said to him, "Art thou a king, then?" the question could scarcely have been more sarcastic. Pilate, in his heart, despised the Jews as such, but here was a poor Jew, persecuted by his own people, helpless and friendless; it sounded like mockery to talk of a kingdom in connection with him. Yet never earth saw truer king! None of the line of Pharaoh, the family of Nimrod, or the race of the Cæsars, was so intrinsically imperial in himself as he, or so deservedly reckoned a king among men by virtue of his descent, his achievements, or his superior character. The carnal eye could not see this, but to the spiritual eye it is clear as noonday. To this day, pure Christianity, in its outward appearance, is an equally unattractive object, and wears upon its surface few royal tokens. It is without form or comeliness, and when men see it, there is no beauty that they should desire it. True, there is a nominal Christianity which is accepted and approved of men, but the pure gospel is still despised and rejected. The real Christ of to-day, among men, is unknown and unrecognised as much as he was among his own nation eighteen hundred years

ago. Evangelical doctrine is at a discount, holy living is censured, and spiritual-mindedness is derided. "What," say they, "This evangelical doctrine, call you it the royal truth? Who believes it now-a-days? Science has exploded it. There is nothing great about it; it may afford comfort to old women, and to those who have not capacity enough for free thought, but its reign is over, never to return." As to living in separation from the world, it is called Puritanism, or worse. Christ in doctrine, Christ in spirit, Christ in life—the world cannot endure as king. Christ chanted in cathedrals, Christ personified in lordly prelates, Christ surrounded by such as are in king's houses, *he* is well enough; but Christ honestly obeyed, followed, and worshipped in simplicity, without pomp or form, they will not allow to reign over them. Few now-a-days will side with the truth their fathers bled for. The day for covenanting to follow Jesus through evil report and shame appears to have gone by. Yet, though men turn round upon us, and say, "Do you call your gospel divine? Are you so preposterous as to believe that your religion comes from God and is to subdue the world?"—we boldly answer; "Yes!" Even as beneath the peasant's garb and the wan visage of the Son of Mary we can discern the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father! so beneath the simple form of a despised gospel we perceive the royal lineaments of truth divine. We care nothing about the outward apparel or the external housing of truth; we love it for its own sake. To us, the marble halls and the alabaster columns are nothing, we see more in the manger and the cross. We are satisfied that Christ is the king still where he was wont to be king, and that is not among the great ones of the earth, nor among the mighty and the learned, but amongst the base things of the world and the things which are

not, which shall bring to nought the things that are, for these hath God from the beginning chosen to be his own.

Let us add, that our Lord's claim to be a king shall be acknowledged one day by all mankind. When Christ said to Pilate, according to our version, "Thou sayest that I am a king," he virtually prophesied the future confession of all men. Some, taught by his grace, shall in this life rejoice in him as their altogether lovely King. Blessed be God, the Lord Jesus might look into the eyes of many of us, and say, "Thou sayest that I am a king," and we would reply, "We do say it joyfully." But the day shall come when he shall sit upon his great white throne, and then, when the multitudes shall tremble in the presence of his awful majesty, even such as Pontius Pilate, and Herod, and the chief priests, shall own that he is a king! Then to each of his astounded and overwhelmingly convinced enemies he might say, "Now, O despiser, thou sayest that I am a king," for to him every knee shall bow, and every tongue, shall confess that he is Lord!

Let us remember, here, that when our Lord said to Pilate, "Thou sayest that I am king," he was not referring to his divine dominion. Pilate was not thinking of that at all, nor did our Lord, I think, refer to it: yet, forget not that, as divine, he is the King of kings and Lord of lords. We must never forget that, though he died in weakness as man, yet he ever lives and rules as God. Nor do I think he referred to his mediatorial sovereignty, which he possesses over the earth for his people's sake; for the Lord has all power committed unto him in heaven and in earth, and the Father has given him power over all flesh, that he may give eternal life to as many as are given him. Pilate was not alluding to that, nor our Lord either, in the first place; but he was speaking of that rule which he

personally exercises over the minds of the faithful, by means of the truth. You remember Napoleon's saying, "I have founded an empire by force, and it has melted away; Jesus Christ established his kingdom by love, and it stands to this day, and will stand." That is the kingdom to which our Lord's word refers, the kingdom of spiritual truth in which Jesus reigns as Lord over those who are of the truth. He claimed to be a king, and the truth which he revealed, and of which he was the personification, is, therefore, the sceptre of his empire. He rules by the force of truth over those hearts which feel the power of right and truth, and therefore willingly yield themselves to his guidance, believe his word, and are governed by his will. It is as a spiritual Lord that Christ claims sovereignty among men; he is king over minds that love him, trust him, and obey him, because they see in him the truth which their souls; pine for. Other kings rule our bodies, but Christ our souls, they govern by force, but he by the attractions of righteousness; theirs is, to a great extent, a fictitious royalty, but his is true, and finds its force in truth.

So much, then, upon Christ's claims to be a king.

II. Now, observe, secondly, that OUR LORD DECLARED THIS KINGDOM TO BE HIS MAIN OBJECT IN LIFE. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world." To set up his kingdom was the reason why he was born of the virgin. To be King of men, it was necessary for him to be born. He was always the Lord of all; he needed not to be born to be a king in that sense, but to be king through the power of truth, it was essential that he should be born in our nature. Why so? I answer, first, because it seems unnatural that a ruler should be alien in nature to the people over whom he rules. An angelic king of men would be unsuitable; there could not exist the sympathy

which is the cement of a spiritual empire. Jesus, that he might govern by force of love and truth alone, became of one nature with mankind; he was a man among men, a real man—but a right noble and kingly man, and so a King of men.

But, again, the Lord was born that he might be able to save his people. Subjects are essential to a kingdom; a king cannot be a king if there be none to govern. But all men must have perished through sin, had not Christ come into the world and been born to save. His birth was a necessary step to his redeeming death; his incarnation was necessary to the atonement.

Moreover, truth never exerts such power as when it is embodied. Truth spoken may be defeated, but truth acted out in the life of a man is omnipotent, through the Spirit of God. Now, Christ did not merely speak the truth, but he *was* truth. Had he been truth embodied in an angelic form, he had possessed small power over our hearts and lives; but perfect truth in a human form has royal power over renewed humanity. Truth embodied in flesh and blood has power over flesh and blood. Hence, for this purpose was he born. So when ye hear the bells ringing out at Christmas, think of the reason why Jesus was born; dream not that he came to load your tables and fill your cups; but in your mirth look higher than all earth-born things. When you hear that in certain churches there are pompous celebrations and ecclesiastical displays, think not for this purpose was Jesus born. No; but look within your hearts, and say, for this purpose was he born: that he might be a King, that he might rule through the truth in the souls of a people who are by grace made to love the truth of God.

And then he added, "For this cause came I into the world;" that is, he came out of the bosom of the Father that he might

set up his kingdom, by unveiling the mysteries which were hid from the foundation of the world. No man can reveal the counsel of God, but one who has been with God; and the Son who has come forth of the ivory palaces of gladness, announces to us tidings of great joy! For this cause also came he into the world, from the obscure retirement of Joseph's workshop, where, for many years he was hidden like a pearl in its shell. It was needful that he should be made known, and that the truth to which he witnessed should be sounded in the ears of the crowd. Since he was to be a King, he must leave seclusion, and come forth to do battle for his throne; he must address the multitudes on the hill-side; he must speak by the sea-shore; he must gather disciples, and send them forth by two and two to publish on the housetops the secrets of mighty truth! He came not forth because he loved to be seen of men, or courted popularity; but for this purpose—that, the truth being published, he might set up his kingdom. It was needful that he should come out into the world and teach, or truth would not be known, and consequently could not operate. The sun must come forth, like a bridegroom out of his chamber, or the kingdom of light will never be established; the breath must come forth from the hiding-place of the winds, or life will never reign in the valley of dry bones. During three years, our Lord lived conspicuously, and emphatically "came into the world." He was seen of men so closely as to be beheld, looked upon, touched, and handled. He was intended to be a pattern, and therefore, it was needful that he should be seen. The life of a man who lives in absolute retirement may be admirable for himself and acceptable with God, but it cannot be exemplary to men: for this cause the Lord came forth into the world, that all he did might influence mankind. His enemies were permitted to



watch his every action, and to endeavour to entrap him in his speech, by way of test; his friends saw him in privacy, and knew what he did in solitude; thus his whole life was reported—he was observed on the cold mountain-side at midnight, as well as in the midst of the great congregation. This was permitted to make the truth known, for every action of his life was truth, and tended to set up the kingdom of truth in the world.

Let us pause here. Christ is a king, a king by force of truth in a spiritual kingdom; for this purpose was he born; for this cause came he into the world. My soul, ask thyself this question:—Has this purpose of Christ's birth and life been answered in thee? If not, what avails Christmas to thee? The choristers will sing, "Unto us a child is born; unto us a Son is given." Is that true to thee? How can it be unless Jesus reigns in thee, and is thy Saviour and thy Lord? Those who can in truth rejoice in his birth are those who know him as their bosom's Lord, ruling their understanding by the truth of his doctrine; their admiration by the truth of his life; their affections by the truth of his person. To such he is not a personage to be pourtrayed with a crown of gold and a robe of purple, like the common theatrical kings of men; but one brighter and more heavenly, whose crown is real, whose dominion is unquestionable, who rules by truth and love! Do we know this King?

This question may well come home to us, for, beloved, there are many who say, "Christ is my King," who know not what they say, for they do not obey him. He is the servant of Christ who trusts in Christ, who walks according to Christ's mind, and loves the truth which Jesus has revealed: all others are mere pretenders.

III. But now I must pass on. Our Lord, in the third place, REVEALED THE NATURE OF HIS ROYAL POWER. I have already spoken on that, but I must do so again. We should have thought the text would have run thus: "Thou sayest that I am a king; to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should establish my kingdom." It is not so in words, but so it must mean, for Jesus was not incoherent in his speech. We conclude that the words employed have the same meaning as that which the context suggests, only it is differently expressed. If our Lord had said, "That I might establish a kingdom," he might have misled Pilate; but when he availed himself of the spiritual explanation, and said that his kingdom was truth, and that the establishment of his kingdom was by bearing witness to the truth, then, though Pilate did not understand him—for it was far above his comprehension—yet, at any rate, he was not misled.

Our Lord, in effect, tells us that truth is the pre-eminent characteristic of his kingdom, and that his royal power over men's hearts is through the truth. Now, the witness of our Lord among men was emphatically upon real and vital matters. He dealt not with fiction, but with facts; not with trifles, but with infinite realities. He speaks not of opinions, views, or speculations, but of infallible verities. How many preachers waste time over what may be or may not be! Our Lord's testimony was pre-eminently practical and matter-of-fact, full of verities and certainties. I have sometimes, when hearing sermons, wished the preacher would come to the point, and would deal with something that really concerned our soul's welfare. What concern have dying men with the thousand trivial questions which are flitting around us? We have heaven or hell before us, and death within a stone's-throw; for God's

sake do not trifle with us, but tell us the truth at once! Jesus is king in his people's souls, because his preaching has blessed us in the grandest and most real manner, and set us at rest upon points of boundless importance. He has not given us well-chiselled stones, but real bread. There are a thousand things which you may not know, and you shall be very little the worse for not knowing them; but O, if you do not know that which Jesus has taught, it shall go ill with you. If you are taught of the Lord Jesus, you shall have rest for your cares, balm for your sorrows, and satisfaction for your desires. Jesus gives sinners who believe in him the truth which they need to know; the assurance of sin forgiven through his blood, favour ensured by his righteousness, and heaven secured by his eternal life.

Moreover, Jesus has power over his people because he testifies not to symbols, but to the very substance of truth. The Scribes and Pharisees were very fluent upon sacrifices, offerings, oblations, tithes, fastings, and the like; but what influence could all that exert over aching hearts? Jesus has imperial power over contrite spirits, because he tells them of his one real sacrifice and of the perfection which he has secured to all believers. The priests lost their power over the people because they went no further than the shadow, and sooner or later all will do so who rest in the symbol. The Lord Jesus retains his power over his saints because he reveals the substance, for grace and truth are by Jesus Christ. What a loss of time it is to debate upon the fashion of a cope, or the manner of celebrating communion, or the colour suitable for the clergyman's robes in Advent, or the precise date of Easter. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity! Such trifles will never aid in setting up an everlasting kingdom in men's hearts. Let us take

care lest we also set great store by externals, and miss the essential, spiritual life of our holy faith. Christ's kingdom is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost!

The power of King Jesus in the hearts of his people lies much in the fact that he brings forth unalloyed truth, without mixture of error. He has delivered to us pure light and no darkness; his teaching is no combination of God's word and man's inventions; no mixture of inspiration and philosophy; silver without dross is the wealth which he gives his servants. Men taught of his Holy Spirit to love the truth, recognise this fact and surrender their souls to the royal sway of the Lord's truth, and it makes them free, and sanctifies them; nor can anything make them disown such a sovereign, for as the truth lives and abides in their hearts, so Jesus, who is the truth, abides also. If you know what truth is, you will as naturally submit yourselves to the teachings of Christ as ever children yield to a father's rule.

The Lord Jesus taught that worship must be true, spiritual, and of the heart, or else it would be nothing worth. He would not take sides with the temple at Gerizim or that on Zion, but he declared that the time was come when those who worshipped God would worship him in spirit and in truth. Now, regenerate hearts feel the power of this, and rejoice that it emancipates them from the beggarly elements of carnal ritualism. They accept gladly the truth that pious words of prayer or praise are vanity, unless the heart has living worship within it. In the great truth of spiritual worship, believers possess a Magna Charta, dear as life itself. We refuse to be again subject to the yoke of bondage, and cleave to our emancipating king.

Our Lord taught, also, that all false living was base and

loathsome. He poured contempt on the phylacteries of hypocrites and the broad borders of the garments of oppressors of the poor. With him, ostentatious alms, long prayers, frequent fasts, and the tithe of mint and cummin, were all nothing when practised by those who devoured widows' houses. He cared nothing for white-washed sepulchres and platters with outsides made clean, he judged the thoughts and intents of the heart. What woes were those which he denounced upon the formalists of his day! It must have been a grand sight to have seen the lowly Jesus roused to indignation, thundering forth peal on peal his denunciations of hypocrisy. Elias never called fire from heaven one half so grandly. "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," is the loudest roll of heaven's artillery! See how, like another Samson, Jesus slays the shams of his age, and piles them heaps upon heaps to rot for ever. Shall not he who teaches us true living be king of all the sons of truth? Let us even now salute him as Lord and King.

Besides, beloved, our Lord came not only to teach us the truth, but a mysterious power goes forth from him, through that Spirit which rests on him without measure—which subdues chosen hearts to truthfulness, and then guides truthful hearts into fullness of peace and joy. Have you never felt when you have been with Jesus, that a sense of his purity has made you yearn to be purged of all hypocrisy and every false way? Have you not been ashamed of yourself when you have come forth from hearing his word, from watching his life, and, above all, from enjoying his fellowship—quite ashamed that you have not been more real, more sincere, more true, more upright, and so a more loyal subject of the truthful King? I know you have. Nothing about Jesus is false or even dubious; he is transparent

—from head to foot he is truth in public, truth in private, truth in word, and truth in deed. Hence it is that he has a kingdom over the pure in heart, and is vehemently extolled by all those whose hearts are set upon righteousness.

IV. And now, in the fourth place, our Lord DISCLOSED THE METHOD OF HIS CONQUEST. “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, *that I should bear witness for the truth.*” Christ never yet set up his kingdom by force of arms. Mahomet drew the sword, and converted men by giving them the choice of death or conversion; but Christ said to Peter, “Put up thy sword into its sheath.” No compulsion ought to be used with any man to lead him to receive any opinion, much less to induce him to espouse the truth. Falsehood requires the rack of the Inquisition, but truth needs not such unworthy aid; her own beauty, and the Spirit of God, are her strength. Moreover, Jesus used no arts of priestcraft, or tricks of superstition. The foolish are persuaded of a dogma, by the fact that it is promulgated by a learned doctor of high degree, but our Rabboni wears no sounding titles of honour; the vulgar imagine that a statement must be correct if it emanates from a person who wears lawn sleeves, or from a place where the banners are of costly workmanship, and the music of the sweetest kind: these things are arguments with those who are amenable to no other; but Jesus owes nothing to his apparel, and influences none by artistic arrangements. None can say that he reigns over men by the glitter of pomp, or the fascination of sensuous ceremonies. His battle-axe is the truth; truth is both his arrow and his bow, his sword and his buckler. Believe me, no kingdom is worthy of the Lord Jesus but that which has its foundations laid in indisputable verities; Jesus would scorn to reign by the help of a lie.

True Christianity was never promoted by policy or guile, by doing a wrong thing, or saying a false thing. Even to exaggerate truth is to beget error, and so to pull down the truth we would set up. There are some who say, "Bring out one line of teaching, and nothing else, lest you should seem inconsistent." What have I to do with that? If it be God's truth, I am bound to deliver it all, and to keep back none of it. Policy, like a sailing vessel, dependant on the wind, tacks about hither and thither; but the true man, like a vessel having its motive power within, goes straight onward in the very teeth of the hurricane. When God puts truth into men's souls, he teaches them never to tack or trim, but to hold to truth at all hazards. This is what Jesus always did. He bore witness to the truth, and there left the matter; being guileless as a lamb.

Here it will be fit to answer the question, "What truth did he witness to?" Ah, my brethren what truth did he *not* witness to? Did he not mirror all truth in his life? See how clearly he set forth the truth that God is love. How melodious, how like a peal of Christmas bells, was his witness to the truth that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish but have everlasting life." He also bore witness that God is just. How solemnly he proclaimed that fact! His flowing wounds, his dying agonies rang out that solemn truth, as with a knell which even the dead might hear. He bore witness to God's demand for truth in the inward parts; for he often dissected men and laid them bare, and opened up their secret thoughts and discovered them to themselves, and made them see that only sincerity could bear the eye of God. Did he not bear witness to the truth that God had resolved to make for himself a new people and a true people? Was he not always telling of his sheep who heard

his voice, of the wheat which would be gathered into the garner, and of the precious things which would be treasured up when the bad would be thrown away? Therein he was bearing witness that the false must die, that the unreal must be consumed, that the lie must rust and rot; but that the true, the sincere, the gracious, the vital, shall stand every test, and outlast the sun. In an age of shams, he was always sweeping away pretences and establishing truth and right by his witness. And now, beloved, this is the way in which Christ's kingdom is to be set up in the world. For this cause was the church born, and for this end came she into the world, that she might set up Christ's kingdom by bearing witness to the truth. I long, my beloved, to see you all witness-bearers. If you love the Lord, bear witness to the truth. You must do it personally; you must also do it collectively. Never join any church whose creed you do not entirely and unfeignedly believe, for if you do you act a lie, and are, moreover, a partaker in the error of other men's testimonies. I would not for a moment say anything to retard Christian unity, but there is something before unity, and that is, "truth in the inward parts" and honesty before God. I dare not be a member of a church whose teaching I knew to be false in vital points. I would sooner go to heaven alone than belie my conscience for the sake of company. You may say, "But I protest against the error of my church." Dear friends, how can you consistently protest against it when you profess to agree with it, by being a member of the church which avows it? If you are a minister of a church, you do in effect say before the world, "I believe and teach the doctrines of this church;" and if you go into the pulpit and say you do not believe them, what will people conclude? I leave you to judge that. I saw a church tower the other day, with a clock upon it, which startled me by



pointing to half-past ten when I thought it was only nine; I was, however, quite relieved when I saw that another face of the clock indicated a quarter past eight. "Well," thought I, "whatever time it may be, that clock is wrong, for it contradicts itself." So if I hear a man say one thing by his church-membership and another by his private protest, why, whatever may be right, he certainly is not consistent with himself.

Let us bear witness to the truth, since there is great need of doing so just now, for witnessing is in ill repute. The age extols no virtue so much as "liberality," and condemns no vice so fiercely as bigotry, *alias* honesty. If you believe anything and hold it firmly, all the dogs will bark at you. Let them bark: they will have done when they are tired! You are responsible to God, and not to mortal men. Christ came into the world to bear witness to the truth, and he has sent you to do the same; take care that you do it, offend or please; for it is only by this process that the kingdom of Christ is to be set up in the world.

Now, the last thing is this. Our Saviour, having spoken of his kingdom and the way of establishing it, DESCRIBED HIS SUBJECTS: "Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice." That is to say, wherever the Holy Spirit has made a man a lover of truth, he always recognises Christ's voice and yields himself to it. Where are the people who love the truth? Well, we need not enquire long. We need not Diogenes' lantern to find them, they will come to the light; and where is light but in Jesus? Where are those that would not seem to be what they are not? Where are the men who desire to be true in secret and before the Lord? They may be discovered where Christ's people are discovered; they will be found listening to those who bear witness to the truth. Those who love pure truth, and know what Christ is, will be sure to fall in love with him and hear his

voice. Judge ye, then, this day, brethren and sisters, whether ye are of the truth or not; for if you love the truth, you know and obey the voice which calls you away from your old sins, from false refuges, from evil habits, from everthing which is not after the Lord's mind. You have heard him in your conscience rebuking you for that of the false which remains in you; encouraging in you that of the true which is struggling there. I have done, when I have urged on you one or two reflections.

The first is, beloved, Dare we avow ourselves on the side of truth at this hour of its humiliation? Do we own the royalty of Christ's truth when we see it every day dishonoured. If gospel truth were honoured everywhere, it would be an easy thing to say "I believe it;" but now, in these days, when it has no honour among men, dare we cleave to it at all costs? Are you willing to walk with the truth through the mire and through the slough? Have you the courage to profess unfashionable truth? Are you willing to believe the truth against which science, falsely so-called, has vented her spleen? Are you willing to accept the truth although it is said that only the poor and uneducated will receive it? Are you willing to be the disciple of the Galilean, whose apostles were fishermen? Verily, verily, I say unto you, in that day in which the truth in the person of Christ shall come forth in all its glory, it shall go ill with those who were ashamed to own it and its Master.

In the next place, if we have heard Christ's voice, do we recognise our life-object? Do we feel, "For this end were we born, and for this cause came we into the world, that we might bear witness to the truth?" I do not believe that you, my dear brother, came into the world to be a linendraper, or an auctioneer, and nothing else. I do not believe that God created you, my sister, to be merely and only a sempstress, a nurse, or

a housekeeper. Immortal souls were not created for merely mortal ends. For this purpose was I born, that, with my voice in this place, and everywhere else, I might bear witness to the truth. You acknowledge that: then I beg you, each one, to acknowledge that you have a similar mission. "I could not occupy the pulpit," says one. Never mind that: bear witness for the truth where you are, and in your own sphere. O waste no time or energy, but at once testify for Jesus.

And now, last of all, do you own Christ's superlative dignity, beloved? Do you see what a King, Christ is? Is he such a King to you as none other could be? It was but yesterday a prince entered one of our great towns, and they crowded all their streets to welcome him—yet he was but a mortal man. And then at night they illuminated their city, and made the heavens glow as though the sun had risen before his appointed hour. Yet what had this prince done for them? Loyal subjects were they, and that was the reason of their joy. But O, beloved, we need not ask, "What has Christ done for us?"—we will ask, "What has he not done for us?" Emmanuel, we owe all to thee! Thou art our new creator, our Redeemer from the lowest pit of hell! In thyself resplendent and altogether lovely, thy beauties command our adoration! Thou hast lived for us, thou hast bled for us, thou hast died for us; and thou art preparing a kingdom for us, and thou art coming again to take us to be with thee where thou art! All this commands our love. All hail! all hail! Thou art our King, and we worship thee with all our soul!

Beloved, I beseech you love Christ, and live for him while you can. Work while opportunity serves. While I have been laid aside, and able to do nothing, the great sorrow of my heart has been my inability to do him service. I heard my brethren

shouting in the battle-field, and I saw my comrades marching to the fight, and I lay like a wounded soldier in the ditch, and could not stir, save that I breathed a prayer that you might all be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. This was my thought: "Oh, that I had preached better while I could preach, and lived more for the Master while I could serve him!" Don't incur such regrets in the future by present sluggishness, but live now for him who died for you!

If any present in this assembly have never obeyed our King, may they come to trust in him to-night; for he is a tender Saviour, and is willing to receive the biggest and blackest sinner who will come to him. Whosoever trusts in him, will never find him fail; for he will save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. May he bring you to his feet, and reign over you in love. Amen.

# “GOD WITH US”

DECEMBER 26TH, 1875

“They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”—Matthew 1:23

THOSE words, “being interpreted,” salute my ear with much sweetness. Why should the word “Emmanuel” in the Hebrew, be interpreted at all? Was it not to show that it has reference to us Gentiles, and therefore it must needs be interpreted into one of the chief languages of the then existing Gentile world, namely, the Greek. This “being interpreted” at Christ’s birth, and the three languages employed in the inscription upon the cross at his death, show that he is not the Saviour of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. As I walked along the quay at Marseilles, and marked the ships of all nations gathered in the port, I was very much interested by the inscriptions upon the shops and stores. The announcements of refreshments or of goods to be had within were not only printed in the French language, but in English, in Italian, in German, in Greek, sometimes in Russian and Swedish. Upon the shops of the sail-makers, the boat-builders, the ironmongers, or the dealers in ship stores, you read a polyglot announcement, setting forth the information to men of many lands. This was a clear indication that persons of all nations were invited to come

and purchase, that they were expected to come, and that provision was made for their peculiar wants. "Being interpreted" must mean that different nations are addressed. We have the text put first in the Hebrew "Emmanuel," and afterwards it is translated into the Gentile tongue, "God with us;" "being interpreted," that we may know that we are invited, that we are welcome, that God has seen our necessities and has provided for us, and that now we may freely come, even we who were sinners of the Gentiles, and far off from God. Let us preserve with reverent love both forms of the precious name and wait the happy day when our Hebrew brethren shall unite their "Emmanuel" with our "God with us."

Our text speaks of a *name* of our Lord Jesus. It is said, "They shall call his name Emmanuel." In these days we call children by names which have no particular meaning. They are the names, perhaps, of father or mother or some respected relative, but there is no special meaning as a general rule in our children's names. It was not so in the olden times. Then names meant something. Scriptural names, as a general rule, contain teaching, and especially is this the case in every name ascribed to the Lord Jesus. With him names indicate things. "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace," because he really is all these. His name is called Jesus, but not without a reason. By any other name Jesus would not be so sweet, because no other name could fairly describe his great work of saving his people from their sins. When he is said to be called this or that, it means that he really is so. I am not aware that anywhere in the New Testament our Lord is afterwards called Emmanuel. I do not find his apostles, or any of his disciples, calling him by that name literally; but we find them all doing so in effect, for they

speak of him as “God manifest in the flesh”, and they say, “The word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” They do not use the actual word, but they again interpret and give us free and instructive renderings, while they proclaim the sense of the august title and inform us in divers ways what is meant by God being with us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a glorious fact, of the highest importance, that since Christ was born into the world God is with us.

You may divide the text, if you please, into two portions: —“GOD,” and then “God WITH US.” We must dwell with equal emphasis upon each word. Never let us for a moment hesitate as to the Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ, for his Deity is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. It may be we shall never understand fully how God and man could unite in one person, for who can by searching find out God. These great mysteries of godliness, these “deep things of God,” are beyond our measurement: our little skiff might be lost if we ventured so far out upon this vast, this infinite ocean, as to lose sight of the shore of plainly revealed truth. But let it remain as a matter of faith that Jesus Christ, even he who lay in Bethlehem’s manger, and was carried in a woman’s arms, and lived a suffering life and died on a malefactor’s cross, was, nevertheless, “God over all, blessed for ever,” “upholding all things by the word of his power.” He was not an angel—that the apostle has abundantly disproved in the first and second chapters of the epistle to the Hebrews: he could not have been an angel, for honours are ascribed to him which were never bestowed on angels. He was no subordinate deity or being elevated to the Godhead, as some have absurdly said—all

these things are dreams and falsehoods; he was as surely God as God can be, one with the Father and the ever-blessed Spirit. If it were not so, not only would the great strength of our hope be gone, but as to this text the sweetness had evaporated altogether. The very essence and glory of the incarnation is that he was God who was veiled in human flesh: if it was any other being who thus came to us in human flesh, I see nothing very remarkable in it, nothing comforting, certainly. That an angel should become a man is a matter of no great consequence to me: that some other superior being should assume the nature of man brings no joy to my heart, and opens no well of consolation to me. But “God with us” is exquisite delight. “God with us”: all that “God” means, the Deity, the infinite Jehovah with us; this, this is worthy of the burst of midnight song, when angels startled the shepherds with their carols, singing “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.” This was worthy of the foresight of seers and prophets, worthy of a new star in the heavens, worthy of the care which inspiration has manifested to preserve the record. This, too, was worthy of the martyr deaths of apostles and confessors who counted not their lives dear unto them for the sake of the incarnate God; and this, my brethren, is worthy at this day of your most earnest endeavours to spread the glad tidings, worthy of a holy life to illustrate its blessed influences, and worthy of a joyful death to prove its consoling power. Here is the first truth of our holy faith—“Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh.” He who was born at Bethlehem is God and “God with us.” God—there lies the majesty; “God with us,” there lies the mercy. *God*—therein is glory; “God *with us*,” therein is grace. God alone might well strike us with terror;



but “God with us” inspires us with hope and confidence. Take my text as a whole, and carry it in your bosoms as a bundle of sweet spices to perfume your hearts with peace and joy. May the Holy Spirit open to you the truth, and the truth to you. I would joyfully say to you in the words of one of our poets—

“Vèil’d in flesh the Godhead see:  
Hail the incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with men to appear,  
Jesus our Immanuel here.”

First, *let us admire this truth*; then *let us consider it more at length*; and after that *let us endeavour personally to appropriate it*.

I. LET US ADMIRE THIS TRUTH. “God with us.” Let us stand at a reverent distance from it as Moses when he saw God in the bush stood a little back, and put his shoes from off his feet, feeling that the place whereon he stood was holy ground. This is a wonderful fact, God the Infinite once dwelt in the frail body of a child, and tabernacled in the suffering form of a lowly man. “God was in Christ.” “He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.”

Observe first, the wonder of *condescension* contained in this fact, that God who made all things should assume the nature of one of his own creatures, that the self-existent should be united with the dependent and derived, and the Almighty linked with the feeble and mortal. In the case before us the Lord descended to the very depth of humiliation, and entered into alliance with a nature which did not occupy the chief place in the scale of existence. It would have been great condescension for the infinite and incomprehensible Jehovah to have taken

upon himself the nature of some noble spiritual being, such as a seraph or a cherub; the union of the divine with a created spirit would have been an unmeasurable stoop, but for God to be one with man is far more. Remember that in the person of Christ manhood was not merely quickening spirit, but also suffering, hungering, dying, flesh and blood. There was taken to himself by our Lord all that materialism which makes up a body, and a body is after all but the dust of the earth, a structure fashioned from the materials around us. There is nothing in our bodily frame but what is to be found in the substance of the earth on which we live. We feed upon that which groweth out of the earth, and when we die we go back to the dust from whence we were taken. Is not this a strange thing that this grosser part of creation, this meaner part, this dust of it, should nevertheless be taken into union, with that pure, marvellous, incomprehensible, divine being of whom we know so little, and can comprehend nothing at all? Oh, the condescension of it! I leave it to the meditations of your quiet moments. Dwell on it with awe. I am persuaded that no man has any idea how wonderful a stoop it was for God thus to dwell in human flesh, and to be "God with us."

Yet, to make it appear still more remarkable, remember that the creature whose nature Christ took was a being that had sinned. I can more readily conceive the Lord's taking upon himself the nature of a race which had never fallen; but, lo, the race of man stood in rebellion against God, and yet a man did Christ become, that he might deliver us from the consequences of our rebellion, and lift us up to something higher than our pristine purity. "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, has condemned sin in the flesh." "Oh, the depths," is all that we can say, as we look on and marvel at this stoop of

divine love.

Note, next, as you view this marvel at a distance, what *a miracle of power* is before us. Have you ever thought of the power displayed in the Lord's fashioning a body capable of union with Godhead? Our Lord was incarnate in a body, which was truly a human body, but yet in some wondrous way was prepared to sustain the indwelling of Deity. Contact with God is terrible; "He looketh on the earth and it trembleth; he toucheth the hills and they smoke." He puts his feet on Paran, and it melts, and Sinai dissolves in flames of fire. So strongly was this truth inwrought into the minds of the early saints, that they said, "No man can see God's face and live;" and yet here was a manhood which did not merely see the face of God, but which was inhabited by Deity. What a human frame was this which could abide the presence of Jehovah! "A body hast thou prepared me." This was indeed a body curiously wrought, a holy thing, a special product of the Holy Spirit's power. It was a body like our own, with nerves as sensitive, and muscles as readily strained, with every organization as delicately fashioned as our own, and yet God was in it. It was a frail barque to bear such a freight. Oh, man Christ, how couldst thou bear the Deity within thee! We know not how it was, but God knoweth. Let us adore this hiding of the Almighty in human weakness, this comprehending of the Incomprehensible, this revealing of the Invisible, this localization of the Omnipresent. Alas, I do but babble! What are words when we deal with such an unutterable truth? Suffice it to say, that the divine power was wonderfully seen in the continued existence of the materialism of Christ's body, which else had been consumed by such a wondrous contact with divinity. Admire the power which dwelt in "God with us."

Again, as you gaze upon the mystery, consider what *an ensign of good will* this must be to the sons of men. When the Lord takes manhood into union with himself in this matchless way it must mean good to man. God cannot mean to destroy that race which he thus weds unto himself. Such a marriage as this, between man and God, must mean peace; war and destruction are never thus predicted. God incarnate in Bethlehem, to be adored by shepherds, augurs nothing but “peace on earth and mercy mild.” O ye sinners who tremble at the thought of the divine wrath, as well you may, lift up your heads with joyful hope of mercy and favour, for God must be full of grace and mercy to that race which he so distinguishes above all others by taking it into union with himself. Be of good cheer, O men of women born, and expect untold blessings for “unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given.” If you look at rivers you can often tell whence they come, and the soil over which they have flowed by their colour: those which flow from melting glaciers are known at once. There is a text concerning a heavenly river which you will understand if you look at it in this light: “He showed me a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God, and *of the Lamb*.” Where the throne is occupied by Godhead, and the appointed Mediator, the incarnate God, the once bleeding Lamb, then the river must be pure as crystal, and be a river, not of molten lava of devouring wrath, but a river of the water of life. Look you to “God with us” and you will see that the consequences of incarnation must be pleasant, profitable, saving, and ennobling to the sons of men.

I pray you to continue your admiring glance, and look upon God with us once more *as a pledge of our deliverance*. We are a fallen race, we are sunken in the mire, we are sold under sin,

in bondage and in slavery to Satan; but if God comes to our race, and espouses its nature, why then we must retrieve our fall, it cannot be possible for the gates of hell to keep those down who have God with them. Slaves under sin and bondsmen beneath the law, hearken to the trump of jubilee, for one has come among you, born of a woman, made under the law, who is also mighty God, pledged to set you free. He is a Saviour, and a great one: able to save, for he is Almighty, and pledged to do it, for he has entered the lists and put on the harness for the battle. The champion of his people is one who will not fail nor be discouraged till the battle is fully fought and won. Jesus coming down from heaven is the pledge that he will take his people up to heaven, his taking our nature is the seal of our being lifted up to his throne. Were it an angel that had interposed, we might have some fears; were it a mere man, we might go beyond fear, and sit down in despair; but if it be “God with us,” and God has actually taken manhood into union with himself, then let us “ring the bells of heaven” and be glad; there must be brighter and happier days, there must be salvation to man, there must be glory to God. Let us bask in the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, who now has risen upon us, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of his people Israel.

Thus we have admired at a distance.

II. And, now, in the second place, let us come nearer and CONSIDER THE SUBJECT MORE CLOSELY. What is this? What means this, “God with us”? I do not expect this morning to be able to set forth all the meaning of this short text, “God with us,” for indeed, it seems to me to contain the whole history of redemption. It hints at man’s being without God, and God’s having removed from man on account of sin. It seems to tell me

of man's spiritual life, by Christ's coming to him, and being formed in him the hope of glory. God communes with man, and man returns to God, and receives again the divine image as at the first. Yea, heaven itself is "God with us." This text might serve for a hundred sermons without any wire drawing; yea, one might continue to expatiate upon its manifold meanings for ever. I can only at this time give mere hints of lines of thought which you can pursue at your leisure, the Holy Spirit enabling you.

This glorious word Emmanuel means, first, that God in Christ is *with us in very near association*. The Greek particle here used is very forcible, and expresses the strongest form of "*with*." It is not merely "in company with us" as another Greek word would signify, but "with," "together with," and "sharing with." This preposition is a close rivet, a firm bond, implying, if not declaring, close fellowship. God is peculiarly and closely "with us." Now, think for a while, and you will see that God has in very deed come near to us in very close association. He must have done so, for *he has taken upon himself our nature*, literally our nature,—flesh, blood, bone, everything that made a body; mind, heart, soul, memory, imagination, judgment, everything that makes a rational man. Christ Jesus was the man of men, the second Adam, the model representative man. Think not of him as a deified man any more than you would dare to regard him as a humanized God, or demigod. Do not confound the natures nor divide the person: he is but one person, yet very man as he is also very God. Think of this truth then, and say, "He who sits on the throne is such as I am, sin alone excepted." No, 'tis too much for speech, I will not speak of it; it is a theme which masters me, and I fear to utter rash expressions. Turn the truth over and over, and see if it be not

sweeter than honey and the honey-comb.

“Oh joy! There sitteth in our flesh,  
Upon a throne of light,  
One of a human mother born,  
In perfect Godhead bright!”

Being with us in our nature, God was with us in *all our life's pilgrimage*. Scarcely can you find a halting-place in the march of life at which Jesus has not paused, or a weary league which he has not traversed. From the gate of entrance even to the door which closes life's way the footprints of Jesus may be traced. Were you in the cradle? He was there. Were you a child under parental authority? Christ was also a boy in the home at Nazareth. Have you entered upon life's battle? Your Lord and Master did the same; and though he lived not to old age, yet through incessant toil and suffering he bore the marred visage which attends a battered old age. Are you alone? So was he, in the wilderness, and on the mountain's side, and in the garden's gloom. Do you mix in public society? So did he labour in the thickest press. Where can you find yourself, on the hill top, or in the valley, on the land or on the sea, in the daylight or in darkness,—where, I say, can you be without discovering that Jesus has been there before you? What the world has said of her great poet we might with far more truth say of our Redeemer—

“A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome.”

One harmonious man he was, and yet all saintly lives seem to be condensed in his. Two believers may be very unlike each other, and yet both will find that Christ's life has in it points of

likeness to their own. One shall be rich and another shall be poor, one actively laborious and another patiently suffering, and yet each man in studying the history of the Saviour shall be able to say—his pathway ran hard by my own. He was made in all points like unto his brethren. How charming is the fact that our Lord is “God with us,” not here and there, and now and then, but evermore.

Especially does this come out with sweetness in his being “God with us” *in our sorrows*. There is no pang that rends the heart, I might almost say not one which disturbs the body, but what Jesus Christ has been with us in it all. Feel you the sorrows of poverty? He “had not where to lay his head.” Do you endure the griefs of bereavement? Jesus “wept” at the tomb of Lazarus. Have you been slandered for righteousness’ sake, and has it vexed your spirit? He said “Reproach hath broken mine heart.” Have you been betrayed? Do not forget that he too had his familiar friend, who sold him for the price of a slave. On what stormy seas have you been tossed which have not also roared around his boat? Never glen of adversity so dark, so deep, apparently so pathless, but what in stooping down you may discover the footprints of the Crucified One. In the fires and in the rivers, in the cold night and under the burning sun, he cries, “I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am both thy companion and thy God.”

Mysteriously true is it that when you and I shall come to *the last, the closing scene*, we shall find that Emmanuel has been there. He felt the pangs and throes of death, he endured the bloody sweat of agony and the parching thirst of fever. He knew the separation of the tortured spirit from the poor fainting flesh, and cried, as we shall, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Ay, and the grave he knew, for there he slept, and



left the sepulchre perfumed and furnished to be a couch of rest, and not a charnel-house of corruption. That new tomb in the garden makes him God with us till the resurrection shall call us from our beds of clay to find him God with us in newness of life. We shall be raised up in his likeness, and the first sight our opening eyes shall see shall be the incarnate God. "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and though after my skin worms devour this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" "God with us." I in my flesh shall see him as the man, the God. And so *to all eternity* he will maintain the most intimate association with us. As long as ages roll he shall be "God with us." Has he not said, "Because I live ye shall live also"? Both his human and divine life will last on for ever, and so shall our life endure. He shall dwell among us and lead us to living fountains of waters, and "so shall we be for ever with the Lord."

Now, my brethren, if you will review these thoughts, you shall find good store of food; in fact, a feast even under that one head. God in Christ is with us in the nearest possible association.

But, secondly, *God in Christ is with us in the fullest reconciliation*. This, of course, is true, if the former be true. There was a time when we were parted from God; we were without God, being alienated from him by wicked works, and God also was removed from us by reason of the natural rectitude of character which thrusts iniquity far from him. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, neither can evil dwell with him. That strict justice with which he rules the world requires that he should hide his face from a sinful generation. A God who looks with complacency upon guilty men is not the God of the Bible, who is in multitudes of places set forth as burning with indignation against the wicked. "The wicked and

him that loveth violence his soul hateth.” But, now the sin which separated us from God has been put away by the blessed sacrifice of Christ upon the tree, and the righteousness, the absence of which must have caused a gulf between unrighteous man and righteous God, that righteousness, I say, has been found, for Jesus has brought in everlasting righteousness. So that now in Jesus God is with us, reconciled to us, the sin which caused his wrath being for ever put away from his people. There are some who object to this view of the case, and I, for one, will not yield one jot to their objections. I do not wonder that they cavil at certain unwise statements, which I like no better than they do; but, nevertheless, if they oppose the atonement as making a recompense to injured justice, their objections shall have no force with me. It is most true that God is always love, but his stern justice is not opposed thereto. It is also most certainly true that towards his people he always was, in the highest sense, love, and the atonement is the result and not the cause of divine love; yet, still viewed in his rectoral character, as a judge and lawgiver, God is “angry with the wicked every day,” and apart from the reconciling sacrifice of Christ, his own people were “heirs of wrath even as others.” There was anger in the heart of God, as a righteous judge, against those who have broken his holy law, and the reconciliation has a bearing upon the position of the judge of all the earth as well as upon man. I for one shall never cease to say, “O Lord, I will praise thee, for though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me.” God can now be with man, and embrace sinners as his children, as he could not have righteously done had not Jesus died. In this sense, and in this sense only, did Dr. Watts write some of his hymns which have

been so fiercely condemned. I take leave to quote two verses, and to commend them as setting forth a great truth if the Lord be viewed as a judge, and represented as the awakened conscience of man rightly perceives him. Our poet says of the throne of God:

“Once ’twas the seat of dreadful wrath,  
And shot devouring flame;  
Our God appeared, consuming fire,  
And vengeance was his name.

“Rich were the drops of Jesus’ blood,  
Which calmed his frowning face,  
Which sprinkled o’er the burning throne,  
And turn’d the wrath to grace.”

So that now Jehovah is not God against us, but “God with us,” he has “reconciled us to himself by the death of his Son.”

A third meaning of the text “God with us” is this, *God in Christ is with us in blessed communion*. That is to say, now he has come so near to us as to enter into commerce with us, and this he does in part by hallowed conversation. Now he speaks to us and in us. He has in these last days spoken to us by his Son and by the Divine Spirit with the still small voice of warning, consolation, instruction, and direction. Are you not conscious of this? Since your souls have come to know Christ, have you not also enjoyed intercourse with the Most High? Now, like Enoch, you “walk with God,” and, like Abraham, you talk with him as a man talketh with his friend. What are those prayers and praises of yours but the speech which you are permitted to have with the Most High; and he replies to you when his Spirit seals home the promise or applies the precept, when with fresh light he leads you into the doctrine or bestows

brighter confidence as to good things to come. Oh yes, God is with us now, so that when he cries, "Seek ye my face" our heart says to him, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." These Sabbath gatherings, what mean they to many of us but "God with us." That communion table, what means it but "God with us"? Oh, how often in the breaking of bread and the pouring forth of the wine in the memory of his atoning death have we enjoyed his real presence, not in a superstitious, but in a spiritual sense, and found the Lord Jesus to be "God with us." Yes, in every holy ordinance, in every sacred act of worship, we now find that there is a door opened in heaven and a new and living way by which we may come to the throne of grace. Is not this a joy better than all the riches of earth could buy?

And it is not merely in speech that the Lord is with us, but God is with us now by powerful *acts* as well as words. "God with us," why it is the inscription upon our royal standard which strikes terror to the heart of the foe, and cheers the sacramental host of God's elect. Is not this our war cry, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." As to our foes within, God is with us to overcome our corruptions and frailties; and as to the adversaries of truth without, God is with his church and Christ has promised that he ever will be with her "even to the end of the world" We have not merely God's word and promise but we have seen his acts of grace on our behalf, both in providence and in the working of his blessed Spirit. "The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the people." "In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle." "God with us"—oh, my brethren, it makes our hearts leap for joy, it fills us with

dauntless courage. How can we be dismayed when the Lord of hosts is on our side?

Nor is it merely that God is with us in acts of power on our behalf, but in emanations of his own life into our nature by which we are at first new born, and afterwards sustained in spiritual life. This is more wonderful still. By the Holy Spirit the divine seed which “liveth and abideth for ever” is sown in our souls, and from day to day we are strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.

Nor is this all, for as the masterpiece of grace, the Lord, by his Spirit, even dwells in his people. God is not incarnate in us as in Christ Jesus, but only second in wonder to the incarnation is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers. Now is it “God with us” indeed, for God dwelleth in us. “Know ye not,” says the apostle, “that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost.” “As it is written, I will dwell in them, and I will walk in them.” Oh, the heights and depths then comprehended in those few words, “God with us.”

I had many more things to say unto you, but time compels me to sum them up in brief. The Lord becomes “God with us” *by the restoration of his image in us*. “God with us” was seen in Adam when he was perfectly pure, but Adam died when he sinned, and God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Now we, in receiving back the new life and being reconciled to God in Christ Jesus, receive also the restored image of God, and are renewed in knowledge and true holiness. “God with us” means sanctification, the image of Jesus Christ imprinted upon all his brethren.

God is with us, too, let us remember, and leave the point, *in deepest sympathy*. Brethren, are you in sorrow? God is in Christ sympathetic to your grief. Brethren, have you a grand object? I

know what it is, it is God's glory: therein also you are sympathetic with God, and God with you. What, let me inquire, is your greatest joy? Have you not learned to rejoice in the Lord? Do you not joy in God by Jesus Christ? Then God also joyeth in you. He rests in his love, and rejoices over you with singing, so that there is God with us in a very wonderful respect, inasmuch as through Christ our aims and desires are like those of God. We desire the same thing, press forward with the same aim, and rejoice in the same objects of delight. When the Lord says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," our heart answers, "Ay, and in him we are well pleased too." The pleasure of the Father is the pleasure of his own chosen children, for we also joy in Christ; our very soul exults at the sound of his name.

III. I must leave this delightful theme when I have said two or three things about OUR PERSONAL APPROPRIATION of the truth before us.

"God with us." Then, if Jesus Christ be "God with us," let us come to God without any question or hesitancy. Whoever you may be you need no priest or intercessor to introduce you to God, for God has introduced himself to you. Are you children? Then come to God in the child Jesus, who slept in Bethlehem's manger. Oh, ye grey-heads, ye need not keep back, but like Simeon come and take him in your arms, and say, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." God sends an ambassador who inspires no fear: not with helmet and coat of mail, bearing lance, does heaven's herald approach us, but the white flag is held in the hand of a child, in the hand of one chosen out of the people, in the hand of one who died in the hand of one who though he sits in glory wears the nail-

print still. O man, God comes to you as one like yourself. Do not be afraid to come to the gentle Jesus. Do not imagine that you need to be prepared for an audience with him, or that you want the intercession of a saint, or the intervention of priest or minister. Anyone could have come to the babe in Bethlehem. The horned oxen, methinks, ate of the hay on which he slept and feared not. Jesus is the friend of each one of us, sinful and unworthy though we be. You, poor ones, you need not fear to come, for, see, in a stable he is born, and in a manger he is cradled. You have not worse accommodation than his, you are not poorer than he. Come and welcome to the poor man's Prince, to the peasants' Saviour. Stay not back through fear of your unfitness; the shepherds came to him in all their deshabelle. I read not that they tarried to put on their best garments, but in the clothes in which they wrapped themselves that cold midnight they hastened just as they were to the young child's presence. God looks not at garments, but at hearts, and accepts men when they come to him with willing spirits, whether they be rich or poor. Come, then; come, and welcome, for God indeed is "God with us."

But, oh, let there be no delay about it. It did seem to me, as I turned this subject over, yesterday, that for any man to say, "I will not come to God," after God has come to man in such a form as this, were an unpardonable act of treason. Peradventure, you knew not God's love when you sinned, as you did; peradventure, though you persecuted his saints, you did it ignorantly in unbelief; but, behold your God extends the olive branch of peace to you, extends it in a wondrous way, for he himself comes here to be born of a woman, that he may meet with you who were born of women too, and save you from your sin. Will you not hearken now that he speaks by his Son?

I can understand that you ask to hear no more of his words when he speaks with the sound of a trumpet, waxing exceeding loud and long, from amidst the flaming crags of Sinai; I do not wonder that you are afraid to draw near when the earth rocks and reels before his awful presence; but now he restrains himself and veils the splendour of his face, and comes to you as a child of humble mien, a carpenter's son. Oh, if he comes so, will you turn your backs upon him? Can ye spurn him? What better ambassador could you desire? This embassy of peace is so tenderly, so gently, so kindly, so touchingly put, that surely you cannot have the heart to resist it. Nay, do not turn away, let not your ears refuse the language of his grace, but say, "If God is with us, we will be with him." Say it, sinner, say, "I will arise and go to my Father and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned."

And as for you who have given up all hope, you that think yourselves so degraded and fallen that there can be no future for you,—there is hope for you yet, for you are a man, and the next being to God is a man. He that is God is also man, and there is something about that fact which ought to make you say, "Yes, I may yet discover, mayhap, brotherhood to the Son of man who is the Son of God, I, even I, may yet be lifted up to be set among princes, even the princes of his people, by virtue of my regenerated manhood which brings me into relation with the manhood of Christ, and so into relation with the Godhead." Fling not yourself away, oh man, you are something too hopeful after all to be meat for the worm that never dies, and fuel for the fire that never can be quenched. Turn you to your God with full purpose of heart, and you shall find a grand destiny in store for you.

And now my brethren to you the last word is, let us be with



God since God is with us. I give you for a watchword through the year to come, "Emmanuel, God with us." You, the saints redeemed by blood, have a right to all this in its fullest sense, drink into it and be filled with courage. Do not say, "We can do nothing." Who are ye that can do nothing? God is with you. Do not say "The church is feeble and fallen upon evil times,"—nay, "God is with us." We need the courage of those ancient soldiers who were wont to regard difficulties only as whetstones upon which to sharpen their swords. I like Alexander's talk—when they said there were so many thousands, so many millions perhaps of Persians. "Very well," says he, "it is good reaping where the corn is thick. One butcher is not afraid of a thousand sheep." I like even the talk of the old Gascon, who said when they asked him, "Can you and your troops get into that fortress? it is impregnable." "Can the sun enter it?" said he. "Yes." "Well, where the sun can go we can enter." Whatever is possible or whatever is impossible, Christians can do at God's command, for God is with us. Do you not see that the word, "God with us," puts impossibility out of all existence? Hearts that never could else be broken will be broken if God be with us. Errors which never else could be confuted can be overthrown by "God with us." Things impossible with men are possible with God. John Wesley died with that upon his tongue, and let us live with it upon our hearts.—"The best of all is God with us." Blessed Son of God, we thank thee that thou hast brought us that word. Amen.

# THE GREAT BIRTHDAY

DECEMBER 24TH, 1876

“The angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”—Luke 2:10

THERE is no reason upon earth beyond that of ecclesiastical custom why the 25th of December should be regarded as the birthday of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ any more than any other day from the first of January to the last day of the year; and yet some persons regard Christmas with far deeper reverence than the Lord's-day. You will often hear it asserted that “The Bible and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants,” but it is not so. There are Protestants who have absorbed a great deal beside the Bible into their religion, and among other things they have accepted the authority of what they call “the Church,” and by that door all sorts of superstitions have entered. There is no authority whatever in the word of God for the keeping of Christmas at all, and no reason for keeping it just now except that the most superstitious section of Christendom has made a rule that December 25th shall be observed as the birthday of the Lord, and the church by law established in this land has agreed to follow in the same track. You are under no bondage whatever

to regard the regulation. We owe no allegiance to the ecclesiastical powers which have made a decree on this matter, for we belong to an old-fashioned church which does not dare to make laws, but is content to obey them. At the same time the day is no worse than another, and if you choose to observe it, and observe it unto the Lord, I doubt not he will accept your devotion: while if you do not observe it, but unto the Lord observe it not, for fear of encouraging superstition and will-worship, I doubt not but what you shall be as accepted in the non-observance as you could have been in the observance of it. Still, as the thoughts of a great many Christian people will run at this time towards the birth of Christ, and as this cannot be wrong, I judged it meet to avail ourselves of the prevailing current, and float down the stream of thought. Our minds will run that way, because so many around us are following customs suggestive of it, therefore let us get what good we can out of the occasion. There can be no reason why we should not, and it may be helpful that we should, now consider the birth of our Lord Jesus. We will do that voluntarily which we would refuse to do as a matter of obligation: we will do that simply for convenience sake which we should not think of doing because enjoined by authority or demanded by superstition.

The shepherds were keeping their flocks by night; probably a calm, peaceful night, wherein they felt the usual difficulty of keeping their weary eyelids still uplifted as sleep demanded its due of them. On a sudden, to their amazement, a mighty blaze lit up the heavens, and turned midnight into midday. The glory of the Lord, by which, according to the idiom of the language, is meant the greatest conceivable glory as well as a divine glory, surrounded and alarmed them, and in the midst of it they saw a

shining spirit, a form the like of which they had never beheld before, but of which they had heard their fathers speak, and of which they had read in the books of the prophets, so that they knew it to be an angel. It was indeed no common messenger from heaven, but “the angel of the Lord,” that choice presence angel, whose privilege it is to stand nearest the heavenly majesty, “mid the bright ones doubly bright,” and to be employed on weightiest errands from the eternal throne. “The angel of the Lord came upon them.” Are you astonished that at first they were afraid? Would not you be alarmed if such a thing should happen to you? The stillness of the night, the suddenness of the apparition, the extraordinary splendour of the light, the supernatural appearance of the angel—all would tend to astound them, and to put them into a quiver of reverential alarm; for I doubt not there was a mixture both of reverence and of fear in that feeling which is described as being “sore afraid.” They would have fallen on their faces to the ground in fright, had there not dropped out of that “glory of the Lord” a gentle voice, which said, “Fear not.” They were calmed by that sweet comfort, and enabled to listen to the announcement which followed. Then that voice, in accents sweet as the notes of a silver bell, proceeded to say, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” They were bidden to shake off all thoughts of fear, and to give themselves up to joy. Doubtless they did so, and amongst all mankind there were none so happy at that dead of night as were these shepherds, who had seen an amazing sight, which they would never forget, and now were consulting whether they should not haste away to gaze upon a sight which would be more

delightful still, namely, the Babe whereof the angel spoke.

May great joy be upon us also while our thought shall be that *the birth of Christ is the cause of supreme joy*. When we have spoken upon this we shall have to enquire, *to whom does that joy belong*; and thirdly, we shall consider, *how they shall express that joy* while they possess it. May the Holy Spirit now reveal the Lord Jesus to us, and prepare us to rejoice in him.

I. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST SHOULD BE THE SUBJECT OF SUPREME JOY. Rightly so. We have the angelic warrant for rejoicing because Christ is born. It is a truth so full of joy that it caused the angel who came to announce it to be filled with gladness. He had little to do with the fact, for Christ took not up angels, but he took up the seed of Abraham; but I suppose that the very thought that the Creator should be linked with the creature, that the great Invisible and Omnipotent should come into alliance with that which he himself had made, caused the angel as a creature to feel that all creatureship was elevated, and this made him glad. Beside, there was a sweet benevolence of spirit in the angel's bosom which made him happy because he had such gladsome tidings to bring to the fallen sons of men. Albeit they are not our brethren, yet do angels take a loving concern in all our affairs. They rejoice over us when we repent, they are ministering spirits when we are saved, and they bear us aloft when we depart; and sure we are that they can never be unwilling servants to their Lord, or tardy helpers of his beloved ones. They are friends of the Bridegroom and rejoice in his joy, they are household servants of the family of love, and they wait upon us with an eager diligence, which betokens the tenderness of feeling which they have towards the King's sons. Therefore the angel delivered his message cheerfully, as became the place from which he came, the theme which

brought him down, and his own interest therein. He said, “I bring you good tidings of great joy,” and we are sure he speak in accents of delight. Yea, so glad were angels at this gospel, that when the discourse was over, one angel having evangelized and given out the gospel for the day, suddenly a band of choristers appeared and sang an anthem loud and sweet that there might be a full service at the first propounding of the glad tidings of great joy. A multitude of the heavenly host had heard that a chosen messenger had been sent to proclaim the newborn King, and, filled with holy joy and adoration, they gathered up their strength to pursue him, for they could not let him go to earth alone on such an errand. They overtook him just as he had reached the last word of his discourse, and then they broke forth in that famous chorale, the only one sung of angels that was ever heard by human ears here below, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Thus, I say, they had full service; there was gospel ministry in rich discourse concerning Christ, and there was hearty and devout praise from a multitude all filled with heavenly joy. It was so glad a message that they could not let it be simply spoken by a solitary voice, though that were an angel’s, but they must needs pour forth a glad chorus of praise, singing unto the Lord a new song. Brothers, if the birth of Jesus was so gladsome to our cousins the angels, what should it be to us? If it made our neighbours sing who had comparatively so small a share in it, how should it make us leap for joy? Oh, if it brought heaven down to earth, should not our songs go up to heaven? If heaven’s gate of pearl was set open at its widest, and a stream of shining ones came running downward to the lower skies, to anticipate the time when they shall all descend in solemn pomp at the glorious advent of the

great King; if it emptied heaven for a while to make earth so glad, ought not our thoughts and praises and all our loves to go pouring up to the eternal gate, leaving earth a while that we may crowd heaven with the songs of mortal men? Yea, verily, so let it be.

“Glory to the newborn King!  
Let us all the anthem sing,  
‘Peace on earth, and mercy mild;  
God and sinners reconciled.’ ”

For, first, *the birth of Christ was the incarnation of God*: it was God taking upon himself human nature—a mystery, a wondrous mystery, to be believed in rather than to be defined. Yet so it was that in the manger lay an infant, who was also infinite, a feeble child who was also the Creator of heaven and earth. How this could be we do not know, but that it was so we assuredly believe, and therein do we rejoice: for if God thus take upon himself human nature, then manhood is not abandoned nor given up as hopeless. When manhood had broken the bonds of the covenant, and snatched from the one reserved tree the fruit forbidden, God might have said, “I give thee up, O Adam, and cast off thy race. Even as I gave up Lucifer and all his host, so I abandon thee to follow thine own chosen course of rebellion!” But we have now no fear that the Lord has done this, for God has espoused manhood and taken it into union with himself. Now manhood is not put aside by the Lord as an utterly accursed thing, to be an abomination unto him for ever, for Jesus, the Well-beloved, is born of a virgin. God would not so have taken manhood into union with himself if he had not said, “Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it.” I know the curse has fallen upon men because they have

sinned, but evidently not on manhood in the abstract, for else had not Christ come to take upon himself the form of man and to be born of woman. The word made flesh means hope for manhood, notwithstanding its fall. The race is not to be outlawed, and marked with the brand of death and hell, and to be utterly abandoned to destruction, for, lo, the Lord hath married into the race, and the Son of God has become the Son of man. This is enough to make all that is within us sing for joy.

Then, too, if God has taken manhood into union with himself, he loves man and means man's good. Behold what manner of love God hath bestowed upon us that he should espouse our nature! For God had never so united himself with any creature before. His tender mercy had ever been over all his works, but they were still so distinct from himself that a great gulf was fixed between the Creator and the created, so far as existence and relationship are concerned. The Lord had made many noble intelligences, principalities, and powers of whom we know little; we do not even know what those four living creatures may be who are nearest the eternal presence; but God had never taken up the nature of any of them, nor allied himself with them by any actual union with his person. But, lo, he has allied himself with man, that creature a little lower than the angels, that creature who is made to suffer death by reason of his sin; God has come into union with man, and therefore full sure he loves him unutterably well, and has great thoughts of good towards him. If a king's son doth marry a rebel, then for that rebel race there are prospects of reconciliation, pardon, and restoration. There must be in the great heart of the Divine One wondrous thoughts of pity and condescending love, if He deigns to take human nature into union with himself. Joy, joy for ever, let us sound the loud



cymbals of delight, for the incarnation bodes good to our race.

If God has taken manhood into union with himself then God will feel for man, he will have pity upon him, he will remember that he is dust, he will have compassion upon his infirmities and sicknesses. You know, beloved, how graciously it is so, for that same Jesus who was born of a woman at Bethlehem is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, having been tempted in all points like as we are. Such intimate practical sympathy would not have belonged to our great High Priest if he had not become man. Not even though he be divine could he have been perfect in sympathy with us if he had not also become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. The Captain of our salvation could only be made perfect through suffering; it must needs be that since the children were partakers of flesh and blood he himself also should take part of the same. For this again we may ring the silver bells, since the Son of God now intimately sympathizes with man because he is made in all points like unto his brethren.

Further, it is clear that if God condescends to be so intimately allied with manhood, he intends to deliver man, and to bless him. Incarnation prophesies salvation. Oh, believing soul, thy God cannot mean to curse thee. Look at God incarnate! What readest thou there but salvation? God in human flesh must mean that God intends to set man above all the works of his hands, and to give him dominion, according to his first intent, over all sheep and oxen and all that pass through the paths of the sea and the air; yea it must mean that there is to be a man beneath whose feet all things shall be placed, so that even death itself shall be subject unto him. When God stoops down to man it must mean that man is to be lifted up to God. What joy there is in this! Oh that our hearts

were but half alive to the incarnation! Oh that we did but know a thousandth part of the unutterable delight which is hidden in this thought, that the Son of God was born a man at Bethlehem! Thus you see that there is overflowing cause for joy in the birth of Christ, because it was the incarnation of the Deity.

But further, the angel explained our cause for joy by saying that *he who was born was unto us a Saviour*. “Unto you is born this day a Saviour.” Brothers and sisters, I know who will be gladdest to-day to think that Christ was born a Saviour. It will be those who are most conscious of their sinnership. If you would draw music out of that ten-stringed harp, the word “Saviour,” pass it over to a sinner. “Saviour” is the harp, but “sinner” is the finger that must touch the strings and bring forth the melody. If thou knowest thyself lost by nature and lost by practice, if thou feelest sin like a plague at thy heart, if evil wearies and worries thee, if thou hast known of iniquity the burden and the shame, then will it be bliss to thee even to hear of that Saviour whom the Lord has provided. Even as a babe, Jesus the Saviour will be precious to thee, but most of all because he has now finished all the work of thy salvation. Thou wilt look to the commencement of that work, and then survey it even to its close, and bless and magnify the name of the Lord. Unto you, O ye who are of sinners the chief, even unto you, ye consciously guilty ones, is born a Saviour. He is a Saviour by birth: for this purpose is he born. To save sinners is his birthright and office. It is henceforth an institution of the divine dominion, and an office of the divine nature to save the lost! Henceforth God has laid held upon One that is mighty, and exalted One chosen out of the people, that he may seek and save that which was lost. Is there not joy in this? Where

else is there joy if not here?

Next the angel tells us that *this Saviour is Christ the Lord*, and there is much gladness in that fact. "Christ" signified *anointed*. Now when we know that the Lord Jesus Christ came to save, it is most pleasant to perceive in addition that the Father does not let him enter upon his mission without the necessary qualification. He is anointed of the Highest that he may carry out the offices which he has undertaken: the Spirit of the Lord rested upon him without measure. Our Lord is anointed in a threefold sense, as prophet, priest, and king. It has been well observed that this anointing, in its threefold power, never rested upon any other man. There have been kingly prophets, David to wit; there was one kingly priest, even Melchisedec; and there have also been priestly prophets, such as Samuel. Thus it has come to pass that two of the offices have been united in one man, but the whole three,—prophet, priest, and king, never met in one thrice anointed being until Jesus came. We have the fullest anointing conceivable in Christ, who is anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows, and as the Messiah, the sent One of God, is completely prepared and qualified for all the work of our salvation. Let our hearts be glad. We have not a nominal Saviour, but a Saviour fully equipped; one whom all points is like ourselves, for he is man, but in all points fit to help the feebleness which he has espoused, for he is the anointed man. See what an intimate mingling of the divine and human is found in the angel's song. They sing of him as "a Saviour," and a Saviour must of necessity be divine, in order to save from death and hell; and yet the title is drawn from his dealings with humanity. Then they sing of him as "Christ," and that must be human, for only man can be anointed, yet that unction comes from the

Godhead. Sound forth the jubilee trumpets for this marvellously Anointed One, and rejoice in him who is your priest to cleanse you, your prophet to instruct you, and your king to deliver you. The angels sang of him as Lord, and yet as born; so here again the godlike in dominion is joined with the human in birth. How well did the words and the sense agree.

The angel further went on to give these shepherds cause for joy by telling them that while their Saviour was born to be the Lord yet he was so *born in lowliness* that they would find him a babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Is there cause of joy there? I say, ay, indeed there is, for it is the terror of the Godhead which keeps the sinner oftentimes away from reconciliation; but see how the Godhead hath graciously concealed itself in a babe, a little babe, a babe that needed to be wrapped' in swaddling bands like any other newborn child. Who feareth to approach him? Who ever heard of trembling in the presence of a babe? Yet is the Godhead there. My soul, when thou canst not for very amazement stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire, when the divine glory is like a consuming fire to thy spirit, and the sacred majesty of heaven is altogether overpowering to thee, then come thou to this babe, and say, "Yet God is here, and here can I meet him in the person of his dear Son, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Oh, what bliss there is in incarnation if we remember that herein God's omnipotence cometh down to man's feebleness, and infinite majesty stoops to man's infirmity.

Now mark, the shepherds were not to find this babe wrapped in Tyrian purple nor swathed in choicest fabrics fetched from afar.

“No crown bedecks his forehead fair,  
No pearl, nor gem, nor silk is there.”

Nor would they discover him in the marble halls of princes, nor guarded by prætorian legionaries, nor lackied by vassal sovereigns, but they would find him the babe of a peasant woman, of princely lineage it is true, but of a family whose stock was dry and forgotten in Israel. The child was reputed to be the son of a carpenter. If you looked on the humble father and mother, and at the poor bed they had made up, where aforetime oxen had come to feed, you would say “This is condescension indeed.” O ye poor, be glad, for Jesus is born in poverty, and cradled in a manger. O ye sons of toil rejoice, for the Saviour is born of a lowly virgin, and a carpenter is his foster father. O ye people, oftentimes despised and downtrodden, the Prince of the Democracy is born, one chosen out of the people is exalted to the throne. O ye who call yourselves the aristocracy, behold the Prince of the kings of the earth, whose lineage is divine, and yet there is no room for him in the inn. Behold, O men, the Son of God, who is bone of your bone, intimate with all your griefs, who in his after life hungered as ye hunger, was weary as ye are weary, and wore humble garments like your own; yea, suffered worse poverty than you, for he was without a place whereon to lay his head. Let the heavens and the earth be glad, since God hath so fully, so truly come down to man.

Nor is this all. The angel called for joy, and I ask for it too, on this ground, that *the birth of this child was to bring glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men.* The birth of Christ has given such glory to God as I know not that he could ever have had here by any other means. We must

always speak in accents soft and low when we talk of God's glory; in itself it must always be infinite and not to be conceived by us, and yet may we not venture to say that all the works of God's hands do not glorify him so much as the gift of his dear Son, that all creation and all providence do not so well display the heart of Deity as when he gives his Only Begotten and sends him into the world that men may live through him? What wisdom is manifested in the plan of redemption of which the incarnate God is the centre! What love is there revealed! What power is that which brought the Divine One down from glory to the manger; only omnipotence could have worked so great a marvel! What faithfulness to ancient promises! What truthfulness in keeping covenant! What grace, and yet what justice! For it was in the person of that newborn child that the law must be fulfilled, and in his precious body must vengeance find recompense for injuries done to divine righteousness. All the attributes of God were in that little child most marvellously displayed and veiled. Conceive the whole sun to be focussed to a single point and yet so softly revealed as to be endurable by the tenderest eye, even thus the glorious God is brought down for man to see him born of a woman. Think of it. The express image of God in mortal flesh! The heir of all things cradled in a manger! Marvellous is this! Glory to God in the highest! He has never revealed himself before as he now manifests himself in Jesus.

It is through our Lord Jesus being born that there is already a measure of peace on earth and boundless peace yet to come. Already the teeth of war have been somewhat broken, and a testimony is borne by the faithful against this great crime. The religion of Christ holds up its shield over the oppressed, and declares tyranny and cruelty to be loathsome before God.

Whatever abuse and scorn may be heaped upon Christ's true minister he will never be silent while there are downtrodden nationalities and races needing his advocacy, nor will God's servants anywhere, if faithful to the Prince of Peace, ever cease to maintain peace among men to the utmost of their power. The day cometh when this growing testimony shall prevail, and nations shall learn war no more. The Prince of Peace shall snap the spear of war across his knee. He, the Lord of all, shall break the arrows of the bow, the sword and the shield and the battle, and he shall do it in his own dwelling-place, even in Zion, which is more glorious and excellent than all the mountains of prey. As surely as Christ was born at Bethlehem he will yet make all men brothers, and establish a universal monarchy of peace, of which there shall be no end. So let us sing if we value the glory of God, for the newborn child reveals it; and let us sing if we value peace on earth, for he is come to bring it. Yea, and if we love the link which binds glorified heaven with pacified earth,—the good will towards men which the Eternal herein manifests, let us give a third note to our hallelujah and bless and magnify Immanuel, God with us, who has accomplished all this by his birth among us. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

I think I have shown you that there was room enough for joy to the shepherds, but you and I, who live in later days, when we understand the whole business of salvation, ought to be even more glad than they were, though they glorified and praised God for all the things that they had heard and seen. Come, my brethren, let us at least do as much as these simple shepherds, and exult with our whole souls.

II. Secondly, let us consider TO WHOM THIS JOY BELONGS. I was very heavy yesterday in spirit, for this dreary weather tends

greatly to depress the mind.

“No lark could pipe to skies so dull and grey.”

But a thought struck me and filled me with intense joy. I tell it out to you, not because it will seem anything to you, but as having gladdened myself. It is a bit all for myself to be placed in a parenthesis; it is this, that the joy of the birth of Christ in part *belongs to those who tell it*, for the angels who proclaimed it were exceedingly glad, as glad as glad could be. I thought of this and whispered to my heart, “As I shall tell of Jesus born on earth for men, I will take license to be glad also, glad if for nothing else that I have such a message to bring to them.” The tears stood in my eyes, and stand there even now, to think that I should be privileged to say to my fellow men, “God has condescended to assume your nature that he might save you.” These are as glad and as grand words as he of the golden mouth could have spoken. As for Cicero and Demosthenes, those eloquent orators had no such theme to dwell upon. Oh, joy, joy, joy! There was born into this world a man who is also God. My heart dances as David danced before the ark of God.

This joy was meant, not for the tellers of the news alone, but *for all who heard it*. The glad tidings “shall be unto all people.” Read “all *the* people,” if you like, for so, perhaps, the letter of the original might demand. Well, then, it meant that it was joy to all the nation of the Jews; but assuredly our version is truer to the inner spirit of the text; it is joy to all people upon the face of the earth that Christ is born. There is not a nation under heaven but what has a right to be glad because God has come down among men. Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem. Take up the strain, O ye dwellers in the wilderness, and let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof! Ye who



beneath the frigid zone feel in your very marrow all the force of God's north wind, let your hearts burn within you at this happy truth. And ye whose faces are scorched by the heat of the torrid sun, let this be as a well of water unto you. Exult and magnify Jehovah that his Son, his Only Begotten, is also brother to mankind.

“O wake our hearts, in gladness sing!  
And hail each one the newborn King,  
Till living song from loving souls  
Like sound of mighty waters rolls.”

But brethren they do not all rejoice, not even all of those who know this glorious truth, nor does it stir the hearts of half mankind. To whom, then, is it a joy? I answer, *to all who believe it*, and especially to all who believe it as the shepherds did, with that faith which staggers not through unbelief. The shepherds never had a doubt: the light, the angels, and the song were enough for them; they accepted the glad tidings without a single question. In this the shepherds were both happy and wise, ay, wiser than the would-be wise whose wisdom can only manifest itself in cavilling. This present age despises the simplicity of a childlike faith, but how wonderfully God is rebuking its self-conceit. He is taking the wise in their own craftiness. I could not but notice in the late discovery of the famous Greek cities and the sepulchres of the heroes, the powerful rebuke which the spirit of scepticism has received. These wise doubters have been taken on their own ground and put to confusion. Of course they told us that old Homer was himself a myth, and the poem called by his name was a mere collection of unfounded legends and mere tales. Some ancient songster did but weave his dreams into poetry and foist them

upon us as the blind minstrel's song: there was no fact in it, they said, nor indeed in any current history; everything was mere legend. Long, ago these gentlemen told us that there was no King Arthur, no William Tell, no anybody indeed. Even as they questioned all sacred records, so have they cast suspicion upon all else that common men believe. But lo, the ancient cities speak, the heroes are found in their tombs; the child's faith is vindicated. They have disinterred the king of men, and this and other matters speak in tones of thunder to the unbelieving ear, and say, "Ye fools, the simpletons believed and were wiser than your 'culture' made you. Your endless doubts have led you into falsehood and not into truth."

The shepherds believed and were glad as glad could be, but if Professor —— (never mind his name) had been there on that memorable night he would certainly have debated with the angel, and denied that a Saviour was needed at all. He would coolly have taken notes for a lecture upon the nature of light, and have commenced a disquisition upon the cause of certain remarkable nocturnal phenomena, which had been seen in the fields near Bethlehem. Above all he would have assured the shepherds of the absolute non-existence of anything superhuman. Have not the learned men of our age proved that impossibility scores of times with argument sufficient to convince a wooden post? They have made it as plain as that three times two are eighteen that there is no God, nor angel, nor spirit. They have proved beyond all doubt, as far as their own dogmatism is concerned, that everything is to be doubted which is most sure, and that nothing is to be believed at all except the infallibility of pretenders to science. But these men find no comfort, neither are they so weak as to need any, so they say. Their teaching is not glad tidings but a wretched

negation, a killing frost which nips all noble hopes in the bud, and in the name of reason steals away from man his truest bliss. Be it ours to be as philosophical as the shepherds, for they did not believe too much, but simply believed what was well attested, and this they found to be true upon personal investigation. In faith lies joy. If our faith can realize we shall be happy now. I want this morning to feel as if I saw the glory of the Lord still shining in the heavens, for it was there, though I did not see it. I wish I could see that angel, and hear him speak; but, failing this, I know he did speak, though I did not hear him. I am certain that those shepherds told no lies, nor did the Holy Ghost deceive us when he bade his servant Luke write this record. Let us forget the long interval between and only recollect that it was really so. Realize that which was indeed matter of fact, and you may almost hear the angelic choir up in yonder sky singing still, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." At any rate, our hearts rehearse the anthem and we feel the joy of it, by simply believing, even as the shepherds did.

Mark well, that believing what they did these simple-minded shepherds *desired to approach nearer* the marvellous babe. What did they do but consult together and say, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass"? O beloved, if you want to get the joy of Christ, come near to him. Whatever you hear about him from his own book, believe it; but then say, "I will go and find him." When you hear the voice of the Lord from Sinai draw not nigh unto the flaming mountain, the law condemns you, the justice of God overwhelms you. Bow at a humble distance and adore with solemn awe. But when you hear of God in Christ hasten hither. Hasten hither with all confidence, for you are not come unto

the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, but ye are come unto the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel. Come near, come nearer, nearer still. "Come," is his own word to those who labour and are heavy laden, and that selfsame word he will address to you at the last—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world." If you want joy in Christ come and find it in his bosom, or at his feet; there John and Mary found it long ago.

And then, my brethren, do what the shepherds did when they came near. *They rejoiced to see the babe of whom they had been told.* You cannot see with the physical eye, but you must meditate, and so see with the mental eye this great, and grand, and glorious truth that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. This is the way to have joy to-day, joy such as fitly descends from heaven with the descent of heaven's King. Believe, draw near, and then fixedly gaze upon him, and so be blest.

"Hark how all the welkin rings  
Glory to the King of kings!  
Peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.

"Veil'd in flesh the Godhead see;  
Hail the incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as man with men to appear,  
Jesus our Immanuel here."

III. My time has fled, else I desired to have shown, in the third place, HOW THAT JOY SHOULD BE MANIFESTED. I will only give a hint or two. The way in which many believers in Christmas keep the feast we know too well. This is a Christian country, is

it not? I have been told so so often that I suppose it must be true. It is a Christian country! But the Christianity is of a remarkable kind! It is not only that in the olden time “Christmas broached the mightiest ale,” but nowadays Christmas keepers must needs get drunk upon it. I slander not our countrymen when I say that drunkenness seems to be one of the principal items of their Christmastide delight. If Bacchus were born at this time I do think England keeps the birthday of that detestable deity most appropriately, but tell me not that it is the birth of the holy child Jesus that they thus celebrate. Is he not crucified afresh by such blasphemy? Surely to the wicked, Jesus saith, “What hast thou to do to keep my birthday and mention my name in connection with thy gluttony and drunkenness?” Shame that there should be any cause for such words. Tenfold shame that there should be so much.

You may keep his birthday all the year round, for it were better to say he was born every day of the year than on any one, for truly in a spiritual sense he is born every day of every year in some men’s hearts, and that to us is a far weightier point than the observation of holy days. Express your joy, first, as the angels did, by public ministry. Some of us are called to speak to the many. Let us in the clearest and most earnest tones proclaim the Saviour and his power to rescue man. Others of you cannot *preach*, but you can *sing*. Sing then your anthems, and praise God with all your hearts. Do not be slack in the devout use of your tongues, which are the glory of your frames, but again and again and again lift up your joyful hymns unto the newborn King. Others of you can neither preach nor sing. Well, then, you must do what the shepherds did, and what did they? You are told twice that they *spread the news*. As soon as they had seen the babe they made known abroad

the saying that was told them, and as they went home they glorified God. This is one of the most practical ways of showing your joy. Holy conversation is as acceptable as sermons and anthems. There was also one who said little, but thought the more: "Mary *pondered* all these things in her heart." Quiet, happy spirit, weigh in thy heart the grand truth that Jesus was born at Bethlehem. Immanuel, God with us;—weigh it if you can; look at it again and again, examine the varied facets of this priceless brilliant, and bless, and adore, and love, and wonder, and yet adore again this matchless miracle of love.

Lastly, *go and do good to others*. Like the wise men, bring your offerings, and offer to the newborn King your heart's best gold of love, and frankincense of praise, and myrrh of penitence. Bring everything of your heart's best, and somewhat of your substance also, for this is a day of good tidings, and it were unseemly to appear before the Lord empty. Come and worship God manifest in the flesh, and be filled with his light and sweetness by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

# THE GREAT BIRTHDAY AND OUR COMING OF AGE

DECEMBER 21ST, 1884

“Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” —Galatians 4:3–6

THE birth of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world is a wellspring of pure, unmingled joy. We associate with his crucifixion much of sorrowful regret, but we derive from his birth at Bethlehem nothing but delight. The angelic song was a fit accompaniment to the joyful event, and the filling of the whole earth with peace and good will is a suitable consequence

of the condescending fact. The stars of Bethlehem cast no baleful light: we may sing with undivided joy, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." When the Eternal God stooped from heaven and assumed the nature of his own creature who had rebelled against him, the deed could mean no harm to man. God in our nature is not God against us but God with us. We may take up the young child in our arms and feel that we have seen the Lord's salvation; it cannot mean destruction to men. I do not wonder that the men of the world celebrate the supposed anniversary of the great birthday as a high festival with carols and banquets. Knowing nothing of the spiritual meaning of the mystery, they yet perceive that it means man's good, and so in their own rough way they respond to it. We who observe no days which are not appointed of the Lord, rejoice continually in our Prince of Peace, and find in our Lord's manhood a fountain of consolation.

To those who are truly the people of God the incarnation is the subject of a thoughtful joy, which ever increases with our knowledge of its meaning, even as rivers are enlarged by many trickling brooks. The Birth of Jesus not only brings us hope, but the certainty of good things. We do not merely speak of Christ's coming into relation with our nature, but of his entering into union with ourselves, for he has become one flesh with us for purposes as great as his love. He is one with all of us who have believed in his name.

Let us consider by the light of our text the special effect produced upon the church of God by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in human flesh. You know, beloved, that his coming a second time will produce a wonderful change upon the church. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun."



We are looking forward to his second advent for the uplifting of the church to a higher platform than that upon which it now stands. Then shall the militant become triumphant, and the labouring become exultant. Now is the time of battle, but the second advent shall bring both victory and rest. To-day our King commands us to conflict, but soon he shall reign upon Mount Zion, with his ancients gloriously. When he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Then shall the bride adorn herself with her jewels, and stand ready for her Husband. The whole waiting creation which now groaneth and travaileth together in harmony with the birth-pangs of the church shall then come to her time of deliverance, and enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God. This is the promise of the second advent; but what was the result of the first advent? Did that make any difference in the dispensation of the church of God? Beyond all doubt it did. Paul here tells us that we were minors, in bondage under the elements of the world, until the fulness of time was come, when "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." Some will say, "He is speaking here of the Jews"; but he expressly guards us in the previous chapter against dividing the church into Jews and Gentiles. To him it is only one church, and when he says we were in bondage he is talking to the Galatian Christians, who were many of them Gentiles; but in truth he regards them neither as Jews nor Gentiles, but as part of the one and indivisible church of God. In those ages in which election mainly embraced the tribes of Israel there were always some chosen ones beyond that visible line, and in the mind of God the chosen people were always regarded as neither Jews nor Gentiles, but as one in Christ Jesus. So Paul lets us know that the church up to the time of the coming of

Christ was like a child at school under tutors and governors; or like a young man not yet arrived at years of discretion, and therefore most fitly kept under restraint. When Jesus came his great birthday was the day of the coming of age of the church: then believers remained no more children, but became men in Christ Jesus. Our Lord by his first advent brought the church up out of her nonage and her pupilage into a condition of maturity, in which it was able to take possession of the inheritance, and claim and enjoy its rights and liberties. It was a wonderful step from being under the law as a schoolmaster, to come from under its rod and rule into the freedom and power of a full-grown heir; but such was the change for believers of the old time, and in consequence there was a wonderful difference between the highest under the Old Testament and the lowest under the New. Of them that are born of woman there was not born a greater than John the Baptist, and yet the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he. John the Baptist may be compared to a youth of nineteen, still an infant in law, still under his guardian, still unable to touch his estate; but the least believer in Jesus has passed his minority, and is “no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”

May the Holy Spirit bless the text to us while we use it thus. First, let us *consider in itself the joyful mission of the Son of God*, and then let us consider *the joyful result which has come of that mission*, as it is expressed in our text.

I. I invite you to CONSIDER THE JOYFUL MISSION OF THE SON OF GOD. The Lord of heaven has come to earth; God has taken upon himself human nature. Halleluiah!

*This great transaction was accomplished at the right time:* “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his

Son, made of a woman.” The reservoir of time had to be filled by the inflowing of age after age, and when it was full to the brim the Son of God appeared. Why the world should have remained in darkness for four thousand years, why it should have taken that length of time for the church to attain her full age, we cannot tell; but this we are told, that Jesus was sent forth when the fulness of time was come. Our Lord did not come before his time nor behind his time: he was punctual to his hour, and cried to the moment,—“Lo, I come.” We may not curiously pry into the reasons why Christ came when he did; but we may reverently muse thereon. The birth of Jesus is the grandest light of history, the sun in the heavens of all time. It is the pole-star of human destiny, the hinge of chronology, the meeting-place of the waters of the past and the future. Why happened it just at that moment? Assuredly it was so predicted. There were prophecies many which pointed exactly to that hour. I will not detain you just now with them; but those of you who are familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures well know that, as with so many fingers, they pointed to the time when the Shiloh should come, and the great sacrifice should be offered. He came at the hour which God had determined. The infinite Lord appoints the date of every event; all times are in his hand. There are no loose threads in the providence of God, no stitches are dropped, no events are left to chance. The great clock of the universe keeps good time, and the whole machinery of providence moves with unerring punctuality. It was to be expected that the greatest of all events should be most accurately and wisely timed, and so it was. God willed it to be when and where it was, and that will is to us the ultimate reason.

If we might suggest any reasons which can be appreciated

by ourselves, we should view the date in reference to the church itself as to the time of her coming of age. There is a measure of reason in appointing the age of twenty-one as the period of a man's majority, for he is then mature, and full grown. It would be unwise to make a person to be of age while only ten, eleven, or twelve; everybody would see that such boyish years would be unsuitable. On the other hand, if we were detained from being of age till we were thirty, every one would see that it was a needless and arbitrary postponement. Now, if we were wise enough, we should see that the church of God could not have endured gospel light earlier than the day of Christ's coming; neither would it have been well to keep her in gloom beyond that time. There was a fitness about the date which we cannot fully understand, because we have not the means of forming so decided an estimate of the life of a church as of the life of a man. God alone knows the times and seasons for a church, and no doubt to him the four thousand years of the old dispensation made up a fit period for the church to abide at school, and bear the yoke in her youth.

The time of coming of age of a man has been settled by law with reference to those that are round about him. It were not meet for servants that the child of five or six should be master: it were not meet in the world of commerce that an ordinary boy of ten or twelve should be a trader on his own account. There is a fitness with reference to relatives, neighbours, and dependants. So was there a fitness in the time when the church should come to her age with regard to the rest of mankind. The world must know its darkness that it might value the light when it should shine forth; the world must grow weary of its bondage that it might welcome the great Emancipator. It was God's plan that the world's wisdom should prove itself to be

folly; he meant to permit intellect and skill to play themselves out, and then he would send his Son. He would allow man to prove his strength to be perfect weakness, and then he would become his righteousness and strength. Then, when one monarch governed all lands, and when the temple of war was shut after ages of bloodshed, the Lord whom the faithful sought suddenly appeared. Our Lord and Saviour came when time was full, and like a harvest ready for his reaping, and so will he come again when once more the age is ripe and ready for his presence.

Observe, concerning the first advent, that *the Lord was moving in it towards man*. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son." We moved not towards the Lord, but the Lord towards us. I do not find that the world in repentance sought after its Maker. No; but the offended God himself in infinite compassion broke the silence, and came forth to bless his enemies. See how spontaneous is the grace of God. All good things begin with him.

It is very delightful that God should take an interest in every stage of the growth of his people from their spiritual infancy to their spiritual manhood. As Abraham made a great feast when Isaac was weaned, so doth the Lord make a feast at the coming of age of his people. While they were as minors under the law of ceremonial observances, he led them about and instructed them. He knew that the yoke of the law was for their good, and he comforted them in the bearing of it; but he was glad when the hour came for their fuller joy. Oh, how truly did the Psalmist say, "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!" Tell it out with joy and gladness, that the blessings of the new dispensation under which we dwell are the spontaneous gifts of God, thoughtfully

bestowed in great love, wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. When the fulness of time was come, God himself interposed to give his people their privileges; for it is not his will that any one of his people should miss a single point of blessedness. If we are babes it is not his wish; he would have us men. If we are famished it is not by his desire, he would fill us with the bread of heaven.

*Mark the divine interposition*,—"God sent forth his Son." I hope it may not seem wearisome to you if I dwell upon that word "sent,"—"God *sent* forth his Son." I take great pleasure in that expression, for it seals the whole work of Jesus. Everything that Christ did was done by commission and authority of his Father. The great Lord, when he was born at Bethlehem, and assumed our nature, did it under divine authorization; and when he came and scattered gifts with both his hands among the sons of men he was the messenger and ambassador of God. He was the Plenipotentiary of the Court of Heaven. At the back of every word of Christ there is the warrant of the Eternal; at the back of every promise of Christ there is the oath of God. The Son doeth nothing of himself, but the Father worketh with him and in him. O soul, when thou dost lean on Christ thou dost rely upon no amateur Saviour, no uncommissioned Redeemer; but upon One who is sent of the Most High, and therefore is authorised in everything that he does. The Father saith, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him;" for in hearing him you are hearing the Most High. Let us find joy, then, in the coming of our Lord to Bethlehem, because he was sent.

Now run your eye to the next word: "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth *his Son*." *Observe the Divine person who was sent*. God sent not an angel, nor any exalted

creature, but “his Son.” How there can be a Son of God we know not. The eternal filiation of the Son must for ever remain one of those mysteries into which we must not pry. It were something like the sin of the men of Beth-shemesh if we were to open the ark of God to gaze upon the deep things of God. It is quite certain that Christ is God; for here he is called “his Son.” He existed before he was born into this world; for God “sent” his Son. He was already in being or he could not have been “sent.” And while he is one with the Father, yet he must be distinct from the Father, and have a personality separate from that of the Father, otherwise it could not be said that God sent his Son. God the Father was not made of a woman, nor made under the law, but only God the Son; therefore, while we know and are assured that Christ is one with the Father, yet is his distinctness of personality most clearly to be observed.

Admire that God should have only one begotten Son, and should have sent him to uplift us. The messenger to man must be none other than God’s own Son. What dignity is here! It is the Lord of angels that is born of Mary; it is he without whom was not anything made, who deigns to hang at a woman’s breast and to be wrapped in swaddling bands. Oh, the dignity of this, and consequently, oh, the efficiency of it! He that has come to save us is no weak creature like ourselves; he that has taken upon himself our nature is no being of limited strength, such as an angel or a seraph might have been; but he is the Son of the Highest. Glory be to his blessed name! Let us dwell on this with delight.

some prophet had been sent  
    With salvation’s joyful news,  
o that heard the blest event  
    Could their warmest love refuse?

'twas he to whom in heaven  
Hallelujahs never cease;  
the mighty God, was given—  
Given to us—a Prince of Peace.

ie but he who did create us  
Could redeem from sin and hell;  
ie but he could reinstate us  
In the rank from which we fell.”

Press on, still keeping to the very words of the text, for they are very sweet. *God sent his Son in real humanity*—“made of a woman.” The Revised Version properly hath it, “born of a woman.” Perhaps you may get nearer to it if you say, “Made to be born of a woman,” for both ideas are present, the *factum* and the *natum*, the being made and the being born. Christ was really and truly of the substance of his mother, as certainly as any other infant that is born into the world is so. God did not create the human nature of Christ apart, and then transmit it into mortal existence by some special means; but his Son was made and born of a woman. He is, therefore, of our race, a man like ourselves, and not man of another stock. You are to make no mistake about it; he is not only of humanity, but of your humanity; for that which is born of a woman is brother to us, be it born when it may. Yet there is an omission, I doubt not intentional, to show how holy was that human nature, for he is born of a woman, not of a man. The Holy Spirit overshadowed the Virgin, and “that holy thing” was born of her without the original sin which pertains to our race by natural descent. Here is a pure humanity though a true humanity; a true humanity though free from sin. Born of a woman, he was of few days and full of trouble; born of a woman, he was compassed with our physical infirmities; but as he was not born of man he was



altogether without tendency to evil or delight therein. I beg you to rejoice in this near approach of Christ to us. Ring out the glad bells, if not in the spires and steeples, yet within your own hearts; for gladder news did never greet your ear than this, that he that is the Son of God was also “made of a woman.”

Still further it is added, that God sent his Son “*made under the law*,” or born under the law; for the word is the same in both cases; and by the same means by which he came to be of a woman he came under the law. And now admire and wonder! The Son of God has come under the law. He was the Law-maker and the Law-giver, and he is both the Judge of the law and the Executioner of the law, and yet he himself came under the law. No sooner was he born of a woman than he came under the law: this voluntarily and yet necessarily. He willed to be a man, and being a man he accepted the position, and stood in the place of man as subject to the law of the race. When they took him and circumcised him according to the law, it was publicly declared that he was under the law. During the rest of his life you will observe how reverently he observed the commands of God. Even to the ceremonial law as it was given by Moses he had scrupulous regard. He despised the traditions and superstitions of men, but for the rule of the dispensation he had a high respect.

By way of rendering service unto God on our behalf, he came under the moral law. He kept his Father’s commandments. He obeyed to the full both the first and the second tables; for he loved God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself. “I delight to do thy will, O my God,” saith he, “yea, thy law is within my heart.” He could truly say of the Father, “I do always those things that please him.” Yet it was a marvellous thing

that the King of kings should be under the law; and especially that he should come under the penalty of the law as well as the service of it. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." As our Surety and Substitute he came under the curse of the law; being made a curse for us. Having taken our place and espoused our nature, though without sin himself, he came under the rigorous demands of justice, and in due time he bowed his head to the sentence of death. "He laid down his life for us." He died the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. In this mystery of his incarnation, in this wonderful substitution of himself in the place of sinful men, lies the ground of that wonderful advance which believers made when Jesus came in the flesh. His advent in human form commenced the era of spiritual maturity and freedom.

II. I ask you now, therefore, in the second place, to CONTEMPLATE THE JOYOUS RESULT WHICH HAS COME OF OUR LORD'S INCARNATION.

I must return to what I have said before—*this coming of Christ has ended the minority of believers*. The people of God among the Jews were before Christ came the children of God; but they were mere babes or little children. They were instructed in the elements of divine knowledge by types, emblems, shadows, symbols: when Jesus was come there was an end of that infantile teaching. The shadows disappear when the substance is revealed; the symbols are not wanted when the person symbolized is himself present. What a difference between the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ when he shows them plainly of the Father and the teaching of the priests when they taught by scarlet wool and hyssop and blood! How different the teaching of the Holy Ghost by the apostles of our

Lord, and the instruction by meats and drinks and holy days. The old economy is dim with smoke, concealed with curtains, guarded from too familiar an approach; but now we come boldly to the throne, and all with unveiled face behold as in a glass the glory of God. The Christ has come, and now the Kindergarten school is quitted for the college of the Spirit, by whom we are taught of the Lord to know even as we are known. The hard governorship of the law is over. Among the Greeks, boys and youths were thought to need a cruel discipline: while they went to school they were treated very roughly by their pedagogues and tutors. It was supposed that a boy could only imbibe instruction through his skin, and that the tree of knowledge was originally a birch; and therefore there was no sparing the rod, and no mitigation of self-denials and hardships. This fitly pictures the work of the law upon those early believers. Peter speaks of it as a yoke, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear (Acts 15:10). The law was given amid thunder and flaming fire; and it was more fitted to inspire a wholesome dread than a loving confidence. Those sweeter truths, which are our daily consolation, were hardly known, or but seldom spoken. Prophets did speak of Christ, but they were more frequently employed in pouring out lamentations and denunciations against children that were corrupters. Methinks, one day with Christ was worth a half century with Moses. When Jesus came, believers began to hear of the Father and his love, of his abounding grace, and the kingdom which he had prepared for them. Then the doctrines of eternal love, and redeeming grace, and covenant faithfulness were unveiled; and they heard of the tenderness of the Elder Brother, the grace of the great Father, and the indwelling of the ever-blessed Spirit. It was as if they

had risen from servitude to freedom, from infancy to manhood. Blessed were they who in their day shared the privilege of the old economy, for it was wonderful light as compared with heathen darkness; yet, for all that, compared with the noontide that Christ brought, it was mere candle-light. The ceremonial law held a man in stern bondage: you must not eat this, and you must not go there, and you must not wear this, and you must not gather that. Everywhere you were under restraint, and walked between hedges of thorn. The Israelite was reminded of sin at every turn, and warned of his perpetual tendency to fall into one transgression or another. It was quite right that it should be so, for it is good for a man that, while he is yet a youth, he should bear the yoke, and learn obedience; yet it must have been irksome. When Jesus came what a joyful difference was made. It seemed like a dream of joy, too glad to be true. Peter could not at first believe in it, and needed a vision to make him sure that it was even so. When he saw that great sheet let down, full of all manner of living creatures and four-footed things, and was bidden to kill and eat, he said, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." He was startled indeed when the Lord said, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." That first order of things "stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation;" but Paul saith, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself." Prohibition upon mere ceremonial points, and commands upon carnal matters are now abolished, and great is our liberty: we shall be foolish indeed if we suffer ourselves to be again entangled with the yoke of bondage. Our minority was ended when the Lord, who had aforetime spoken to us by his

prophets, at last sent his Son to lead us up to the highest form of spiritual manhood.

Christ came, we are told next, *to redeem those who were under the law*; that is to say, the birth of Jesus, and his coming under the law, and his fulfilling the law, have set all believers free from it as a yoke of bondage. None of us wish to be free from the law as a rule of life; we delight in the commands of God, which are holy, and just, and good. We wish that we could keep every precept of the law, without a single omission or transgression. Our earnest desire is for perfect holiness; but we do not look in that direction for our justification before God. If we be asked to-day, are we hoping to be saved by ceremonies? we answer, "God forbid." Some seem to fancy that baptism and the Lord's Supper have taken the place of circumcision and the Passover, and that while Jews were saved by one form of ceremonial we are to be saved by another. Let us never give place to this idea; no, not for an hour. God's people are saved, not by outward rites, nor forms, nor priestcraft, but because "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law," and he has so kept the law that by faith his righteousness covers all believers, and we are not condemned by the law. As to the moral law, which is the standard of equity for all time, it is no way of salvation for us. Once we were under it, and strove to keep it in order to earn the divine favour; but we have now no such motive. The word was, "This do and thou shalt live," and we therefore strove like slaves to escape the lash, and earn our wage; but it is so no longer. Then we strove to do the Lord's will that he might love us, and that we might be rewarded for what we did; but we have no design of purchasing that favour now, since we freely and securely enjoy it on a very different ground. God loves us

out of pure grace, and he has freely forgiven us our iniquities, and this out of gratuitous goodness. We are already saved, and that not by works of righteousness which we have done, or by holy acts which we hope to perform, but wholly of free grace. If it be of grace it is no more of works, and that it is all of grace from first to last is our joy and glory. The righteousness that covers us was wrought out by him that was born of a woman, and the merit by which we enter heaven is the merit, not of our own hands or hearts, but of him that loved us, and gave himself for us. Thus are we redeemed from the law by our Lord's being made under the law; and we become sons and no more servants, because the great Son of God became a servant in our stead.

“What!” saith one; “then do you not seek to do good works?” Indeed we do. We talked of them before, but we actually perform them now. Sin shall not have dominion over us, for we are not under law, but under grace. By God's grace we desire to abound in works of holiness, and the more we can serve our God the happier we are. But this is not to save ourselves, for we are already saved. O sons of Hagar, ye cannot understand the freedom of the true heir, the child born according to promise! Ye that are in bondage, and feel the force of legal motives, ye cannot understand how we should serve our Father who is in heaven with all our heart and all our soul, not for what we get by it, but because he has loved us, and saved us, irrespective of our works. Yet it is even so; we would abound in holiness to his honour, and praise, and glory, because the love of Christ constraineth us. What a privilege it is to cease from the spirit of bondage by being redeemed from the law! Let us praise our Redeemer with all our hearts.

We are redeemed from the law in its operation upon our

mind: it breeds no fear within us now. I have heard children of God say sometimes, "Well, but don't you think if we fall into sin we shall cease to be in God's love, and so shall perish?" This is to cast a slur upon the unchangeable love of God. I see that you make a mistake, and think a child is a servant. Now, if you have a servant, and he misbehaves himself, you say, "I give you notice to quit. There is your wage; you must find another master." Can you do that to your son? Can you do that to your daughter? "I never thought of such a thing," say you. Your child is yours for life. Your boy behaved very badly to you: why did you not give him his wages and start him? You answer, that he does not serve you for wages, and that he is your son, and cannot be otherwise. Just so. Then always know the difference between a servant and a son, and the difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

I know how a base heart can make mischief out of this; but I cannot help it: the truth is the truth. Will a child rebel because he will always be a child? Far from it; it is this which makes him feel love in return. The true child of God is kept from sin by other and better forces than a slavish fear of being turned out of doors by his Father. If you are under the covenant of works, then, mind you, if you do not fulfil all righteousness you will perish: if you are under that covenant, unless you are perfect you are lost; one sin will destroy you, one sinful thought will ruin you. If you have not been perfect in your obedience, you must take your wages and be gone. If God deals with you according to your works, there will be nothing for you but, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son." But if you are God's child, that is a different matter; you will still be his child even when he corrects you for your disobedience.

"Ah," saith one, "then I may live as I like." Listen! If you

are God's child, I will tell you how you will like to live. You will desire to live in perfect obedience to your Father, and it will be your passionate longing from day to day to be perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. The nature of sons which grace implants is a law unto itself: the Lord puts his fear into the hearts of the regenerate so that they do not depart from him. Being born again and introduced into the family of God, you will render to the Lord an obedience which you would not have thought of rendering to him if you had only been compelled by the idea of law and penalty. Love is a master force, and he that feels its power will hate all evil. The more salvation is seen to be all of grace, the deeper and more mighty is our love, and the more does it work towards that which is pure and holy. Do not quote Moses for motives of Christian obedience. Do not say, "The Lord will cast me away unless I do this and that." Such talk is of the bondwoman and her son; but it is very unseemly in the mouth of a true-born heir of heaven. Get it out of your mouth. If you are a son you disgrace your Father when you think that he will repudiate his own; you forget your spiritual heirship and liberty when you dread a change in Jehovah's love. It is all very well for a mere babe to talk in that ignorant fashion, and I don't wonder that many professors know no better, for many ministers are only half-evangelical; but you that have become men in Christ, and know that he has redeemed you from the law, ought not to go back to such bondage. "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law."

What else has he come for? Notice further, "*That we might receive the adoption of sons.*" The Lord Jesus Christ has come in human flesh that his people might to the full realise, grasp, and enjoy, "the adoption of sons." I want you this morning to



see if you can do that. May the Holy Spirit enable you. What is it to receive the adoption of sons? Why to feel, Now I am under the mastery of love, as a dear child, who is both loved and loving. I go in and out of my Father's house not as a casual servant, called in by the day or the week, but as a child at home. I am not looking for hire as a servant, for I am ever with my Father, and all that he has is mine. My God is my Father, and his countenance makes me glad. I am not afraid of him, but I delight in him, for nothing can separate me from him. I feel a perfect love that casteth out fear, and I delight myself in him. Try now and enter into that spirit this morning. That is why Christ has come in the flesh—on purpose that you, his people, may be to the full the adopted children of the Lord, acting out and enjoying all the privileges which sonship secures to you.

And then, next, exercise your heirship. One who is a son, and knows he is an heir of all his father's estates, does not pine in poverty, nor act like a beggar. He looks upon everything as his own; he regards his father's wealth as making him rich. He does not feel that he is stealing if he takes what his father has made to be his own, but he makes free with it. I wish believers would make free with the promises and blessings of their God. Help yourselves, for no good thing will the Lord withhold from you. All things are yours: you only need to use the hand of faith. Ask what thou wilt. If you appropriate a promise it will not be pilfering: you may take it boldly and say, "This is mine." Your adoption brings with it large rights: be not slow to use them. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Among men, sons are only heirs, heirs in possession, when the father is dead; but our Father in heaven lives, and yet we have full heirship in him. The Lord Jesus Christ was made of

a woman on purpose that his dear people might at once enter into their heirship.

You ought to feel a sweet joy in the perpetual relationship which is now established between you and God, for Jesus is still your brother. You have been adopted, and God has never cancelled adoption yet. There is such a thing as regeneration, but there is not such a thing as the life then received dying out. If you are born unto God you are born unto God. The stars may turn to coals, and the sun and moon may become clots of blood, but he that is born of God has a life within him which can never end: he is God's child, and God's child he shall be. Therefore let him walk at large like a child, an heir, a prince of the blood royal, who bears a relationship to the Lord which neither time nor eternity can ever destroy. This is why Jesus was made of a woman and made under the law, that he might give us to enjoy the fulness of the privilege of adopted sons.

Follow me a minute a little further. The next thing that Christ has brought us by being made of a woman is, "Because ye are sons, God *hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.*" Here are two sendings. God sent his Son, and now he sends his Spirit. Because Christ has been sent, therefore the Spirit is sent; and now you shall know the Holy Ghost's indwelling because of Christ's incarnation. The Spirit of light, the Spirit of life, the Spirit of love, the Spirit of liberty, the same Spirit that was in Christ Jesus is in you. That same Spirit which descended upon Jesus in the waters of baptism has also descended upon you. You, O child of God, have the Spirit of God as your present guide and Comforter; and he shall be with you for ever. The life of Christ is your life, and the Spirit of Christ is your Spirit; wherefore, this day be exceeding glad, for you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but

ye have received the Spirit of adoption.

There we finish, for Jesus has come *to give us the cry* as well as the spirit of adoption, “whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” According to ancient traditions no slave might say, “Abba, Father,” and according to the truth as it is in Jesus none but a man who is really a child of God, and has received the adoption, can truly say, “Abba, Father.” This day my heart desires for every one of you, my brethren, that because Christ has been born into the world you may at once come of age, and may at this hour confidently say, “Abba, Father.” The great God, the Maker of heaven and earth, is my Father, and I dare avow it without fear that he will disown the kindred. The Thunderer, the ruler of the stormy sea, is my Father, and notwithstanding the terror of his power I draw near to him in love. He who is the Destroyer, who says, “Return, ye children of men,” is my Father, and I am not alarmed at the thought that he will call me to himself in due time. My God, thou who shalt call the multitudes of the slain from their graves to live, I look forward with joy to the hour when thou shalt call and I shall answer thee. Do what thou wilt with me, thou art my Father. Smile on me; I will smile back and say, “My Father.” Chasten me, and as I weep I will cry, “My Father.” This shall make everything work good to me, be it never so hard to bear. If thou art my Father all is well to all eternity. Bitterness is sweet, and death itself is life, since thou art my Father, Oh, trip ye merrily home, ye children of the living God, saying each one within himself, “I have it, I have it. I have that which cherubim before the throne have never gained; I have relationship with God of the nearest and the dearest kind, and my spirit for her music hath this word, ‘Abba, Father; Abba, Father.’”

Now, dear children of God, if any of you are in bondage

under the law, why do you remain so? Let the redeemed go free. Are you fond of wearing chains? Are you like Chinese women that delight to wear little shoes which crush their feet? Do you delight in slavery? Do you wish to be captives? You are not under the law, but under grace; will you allow your unbelief to put you under the law? You are not a slave. Why tremble like a slave? You are a child; you are a son; you are an heir; live up to your privileges. Oh, ye banished seed, be glad! You are adopted into the household of God; then be not as a stranger. I hear Ishmael laughing at you: let him laugh. Tell your Father of him, and he will soon say, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son." Free grace is not to be mocked by human merit; neither are we to be made sad by the forebodings of the legal spirit. Our soul rejoices, and, like Isaac, is filled with holy laughter; for the Lord Jesus has done great things for us whereof we are glad. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

# THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

DECEMBER 23<sup>RD</sup>, 1894

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.”—Isaiah 7:14–15

THE kingdom of Judah was in a condition of imminent peril. Two monarchs had leagued themselves against her, two nations had risen up for her destruction. Syria and Israel had come up against the walls of Jerusalem, with full intent to raze them to the ground, and utterly to destroy the monarchy of Judah. Ahaz the king, in great trouble, exerted all his ingenuity to defend the city; and amongst the other contrivances which his wisdom taught him, he thought it fit to cut off the waters of the upper pool, so that the besiegers might be in distress for want of water. He goes out in the morning, no doubt attended by his courtiers, makes his way to the conduit of the upper pool, intending to see after the stopping of the stream of water; but lo! he meets with something which sets aside his plans, and renders them needless. Isaiah steps forward, and tells him not to be afraid for the smoke of those two firebrands, for God should utterly destroy both the nations that had risen up against Judah. Ahaz need not fear the present invasion, for

both himself and his kingdom should be saved. The king looked at Isaiah with an eye of incredulity, as much as to say, "If the Lord were to send chariots from heaven, could such a thing as this be? Should he animate the dust, and quicken every stone in Jerusalem to resist my foes, could this be done?"

The Lord, seeing the littleness of the king's faith, tells him to ask a sign. "Ask it," says he, "either in the depth, or in the height above. Let the sun go backward ten degrees, or let the moon stop in her midnight marches; let the stars move athwart the sky in grand procession; ask any sign you please in the heaven above, or, if you wish, choose the earth beneath, let the depths give forth the sign, let some mighty waterspout lose its way across the pathless ocean, and travel through the air to Jerusalem's very gates; let the heavens shower a golden rain, instead of the watery fluid which usually they distil; ask that the fleece may be wet upon the dry floor, or dry in the midst of dew; whatsoever you please to request, the Lord will grant it you for the confirmation of your faith." Instead of accepting this offer with all gratitude, as Ahaz should have done, he, with a pretended humility, declares that he will not ask, neither will he tempt the Lord his God; whereupon Isaiah, waxing indignant, tells him that, since he will not in obedience to God's command ask a sign, behold, the Lord himself will give him one, —not simply a sign, but *the* sign, the sign and wonder of the world, the mark of God's mightiest mystery and of his most consummate wisdom, for, "a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

It has been said that the passage I have taken for my text is one of the most difficult in all the Word of God. It may be so; I certainly did not think it was until I saw what the commentators

had to say about it, and I rose up from reading them perfectly confused. One said one thing, and another denied what the other had said; and if there was anything that I liked, it was so self-evident that it had been copied from one to the other, and handed through the whole of them.

One set of commentators tells us that this passage refers entirely to some person who was to be born within a few months after this prophecy, “for,” say they, “it says here, ‘Before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.’ Now,” say they, “this was an immediate delivery which Ahaz required, and there was a promise of a speedy rescue, that, before a few years had elapsed, before the child should be able to know right from wrong, Syria and Israel should both lose, their kings.” Well, that seems a strange frittering away of a wonderful passage, full of meaning, and I cannot see how they can substantiate their view, when we find the Evangelist Matthew quoting this very passage in reference to the birth of Christ, and saying, “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.” It does strike me that this Immanuel, who was to be born, could not be a mere simple man, and nothing else, for if you turn to the next chapter, at the eighth verse, you will find it said, “He shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.” Here is a government ascribed to Immanuel which could not be his if we were to suppose that the Immanuel here spoken of was either Shear-Jashub, or Maher-shalal-hash-baz, or any other of the

sons of Isaiah. I therefore reject that view of the matter; it is, to my mind, far below the height of this great argument; it does not speak or allow us to speak one half of the wondrous depth which coucheth beneath this mighty passage.

I find, moreover, that many of the commentators divide the sixteenth verse from the fourteenth and fifteenth verses, and they read the fourteenth and fifteenth verses exclusively of Christ, and the sixteenth verse of Shear-Jashub, the son of Isaiah. They say that there were two signs, one was the conception by the virgin of a son, who was to be called Immanuel, who is none other than Christ; but the second sign was Shear-Jashub, the prophet's son, of whom Isaiah said, "Before this child, whom I now lead before you,—before this son of mine shall be able to know good and evil, so soon shall both nations that have now risen against you lose their kings." But I do not like that explanation, because it does seem to me to be pretty plain that the same child is spoken of in the one verse as in the others. "Before the child"—the same child, it does not say that child in one verse and then this child in another verse, but before the child, this one of whom I have spoken, the Immanuel, before he "shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings."

Then another view, which is the most popular of all, is to refer the passage first of all to some child that was then to be born, and afterwards, in the highest sense, to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps that is the true sense of it, perhaps that is the best way of smoothing difficulties; but I do think that if I had never read those books at all, but had simply come to the Bible, without knowing what any man had written upon it, I should have said, "There is Christ here as plainly as possible;



never could his name have been written more legibly than I see it here. 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.' It is an unheard-of thing, it is a miraculous thing, and therefore it must be a God-like thing. She 'shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good;' and before that child, the Prince Immanuel, shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings, and Judah shall smile upon their ruined palaces."

This morning, then, I shall take my text as relating to our Lord Jesus Christ, and we have three things here about him; first, *the birth*, secondly, *the food*, and, thirdly, *the name of Christ*.

I. Let us commence with THE BIRTH OF CHRIST: "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son."

"Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass," said the shepherds. "Let us follow the star in the sky," said the Eastern Magi, and so say we this morning. Hard by the day when we, as a nation, celebrate the birthday of Christ, let us go and stand by the manger to behold the commencement of the incarnation of Jesus. Let us recall the time when God first enveloped himself in mortal form, and tabernacled amongst the sons of men. Let us not blush to go to so humble a spot, let us stand by that village inn, and let us see Jesus Christ, the God-man, become an infant of a span long.

And, first, we see here, in speaking of this birth of Christ, *a miraculous conception*. The text says expressly, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son." This expression is unparalleled even in Sacred Writ; of no other woman could it be said beside the Virgin Mary, and of no other man could it be written that his mother was a virgin. The Greek word and the

Hebrew are both very expressive of the true and real virginity of the mother, to show us that Jesus Christ was born of woman, and not of man. We shall not enlarge upon the thought, but still it is an important one, and ought not to be passed over without mentioning. Just as the woman, by her venturous spirit, stepped first into transgression,—lest she should be despised and trampled on, God in his wisdom devised that the woman, and the woman alone, should be the author of the body of the God-man who should redeem mankind. Albeit that she herself first tasted the accursed fruit, and tempted her husband (it may be that Adam out of love to her tasted that fruit), lest she should be degraded, lest she should not stand on an equality with him, God hath ordained that so it should be, that his Son should be sent forth “born of a woman,” and the first promise was that the seed of the woman, not the seed of the man, should bruise the serpent’s head.

Moreover, there was a peculiar wisdom ordaining that Jesus Christ should be the son of the woman, and not of the man, because, had he been born of the flesh, “that which is born of the flesh is flesh,” and merely flesh, and he would naturally, by carnal generation, have inherited all the frailties and the sins and the infirmities which man hath from his birth; he would have been conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity, even as the rest of us. Therefore he was not born of man; but the Holy Ghost overshadowed the Virgin Mary, and Christ stands as the one man, save one other, who came forth pure from his Maker’s hands, who could ever say, “I am pure.” Ay, and he could say far more than that other Adam could say concerning his purity, for he maintained his integrity, and never let it go, and from his birth down to his death he knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Oh, marvellous sight! Let us stand and

look at it. A child of a virgin, what a mixture! There is the finite and the infinite, there is the mortal and the immortal, corruption and incorruption, the manhood and the Godhead, time married to eternity, God linked with a creature, the infinity of the august Maker come to tabernacle on this speck of earth, the vast unbounded One, whom earth could not hold, and the heavens cannot contain, lying in his mother's arms, he who fastened the pillars of the universe, and riveted the nails of creation, hanging on a mortal breast, depending on a creature for nourishment. Oh, marvellous birth! Oh, miraculous conception! We stand and gaze and admire. Verily, angels may wish to look into a subject too dark for us to speak of; there we leave it, a virgin hath conceived, and borne a son.

In this birth, moreover, having noticed the miraculous conception, we must notice, next, *the humble parentage*. It does not say, "A princess shall conceive, and bear a son," but a virgin. Her virginity was her highest honour, she had no other. True, she was of royal lineage, she could reckon David amongst her forefathers, and Solomon amongst those who stood in the tree of her genealogy. She was a woman not to be despised, albeit that I speak of humble parentage, for she was of the blood-royal of Judah. O babe, in thy veins there runs the blood of kings; the blood of an ancient monarchy findeth its way from thy heart, all through the courses of thy body! Thou wast born, not of mean parents, if we look at their ancient ancestry, for thou art the son of him who ruled the mightiest monarchy in his day, even Solomon, and thou art the descendant of one who devised in his heart to build a temple for the mighty God of Jacob.

Nor was Christ's mother, in point of intellect, an inferior woman. I take it that she had great strength of mind, otherwise

she could not have composed so sweet a piece of poetry as that which is called the Virgin's Song, beginning, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." She is not a person to be despised. I would this morning especially utter my thoughts on one thing which I consider to be a fault among us Protestants. Because Roman Catholics pay too much respect to the Virgin Mary, and offer prayer to her, we are too apt to speak of her in a slighting manner. She ought not to be placed under the ban of contempt, for she could truly sing, "From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." I suppose Protestant generations are amongst the "all generations" who ought to call her blessed. Her name is Mary, and quaint George Herbert wrote an anagram upon it:

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"How well her name an ARMY doth present,  
In whom the Lord of Hosts did pitch his tent."

Though she was not a princess, yet her name, Mary, by interpretation, signifies a princess; and though she is not the queen of heaven, yet she has a right to be reckoned amongst the queens of earth; and though she is not the lady of our Lord, she does walk amongst the renowned and mighty women of Scripture.

Yet Jesus Christ's birth was a humble one. Strange that the Lord of glory was not born in a palace! Princes, Christ owes you nothing! Princes, Christ is not your debtor; ye did not swaddle him, he was not wrapped in purple, ye had not prepared a golden cradle for him to be rocked in! Queens, ye did not dandle him upon your knees, he hung not at your breasts! And ye mighty cities, which then were great and famous, your marble halls were not blessed with his little footsteps! He came out of a village, poor and despised, even

Bethlehem; when there, he was not born in the governor's house, or in the mansion of the chief man, but in a manger. Tradition tells us that his manger was cut in the solid rock; there was he laid, and the oxen likely enough came to feed from the selfsame manger, the hay and the fodder of which was his only bed. Oh! wondrous stoop of condescension, that our blessed Jesus should be girded with humility, and stoop so low! Ah! if he stooped, why should he bend to such a lowly birth? And if he bowed, why should he submit not simply to become the son of poor parents, but to be born in so miserable a place?

Let us take courage here. If Jesus Christ was born in a manger in a rock, why should he not come and live in our rocky hearts? If he was born in a stable, why should not the stable of our souls be made into a habitation for him? If he was born in poverty, may not the poor in spirit expect that he will be their Friend? If he thus endured degradation at the first, will he count it any dishonour to come to the very poorest and humblest of his creatures, and tabernacle in the souls of his children? Oh, no! we can gather a lesson of comfort from his humble parentage, and we can rejoice that not a queen, or an empress, but that a humble woman became the mother of the Lord of glory.

We must make one more remark upon this birth of Christ before we pass away from it, and that remark shall be concerning *a glorious birthday*. With all the humility that surrounded the birth of Christ, there was yet very much that was glorious, very much that was honourable. No other man ever had such a birthday as Jesus Christ had. Of whom had prophets and seers ever written as they wrote of him? Whose name is graven on so many tablets as his? Who had such a

scroll of prophecy, all pointing to him as Jesus Christ, the God-man? Then recollect, concerning his birth, when did God ever hang a fresh lamp in the sky to announce the birth of a Cæsar? Cæsars may come, and they may die, but stars shall never prophesy their birth. When did angels ever stoop from heaven, and sing choral symphonies on the birth of a mighty man? Nay, all others are passed by; but see, in heaven there is a great light shining, and a song is heard, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Christ's birth is not despicable, even if we consider the visitors who came around his cradle. Shepherds came first, and, as it has been quaintly remarked by an old divine, the shepherds did not lose their way, and the wise men did. Shepherds came first, unguided and unled, to Bethlehem; the wise men, directed by the star, came next. The representative men of the two bodies of mankind, the rich and the poor, knelt around the manger; and gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, and all manner of precious gifts, were offered to the child, who was the Prince of the kings of the earth, who, in ancient times was ordained to sit upon the throne of his father David, and in the wondrous future to rule all nations with his rod of iron.

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son." Thus have we spoken of the birth of Christ.

II. The second thing that we have to speak of is, THE FOOD OF CHRIST: "Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good."

Our translators were certainly very good scholars, and God gave them much wisdom, so that they craned up our language to the majesty of the original, but here they were guilty of very great inconsistency. I do not see how butter and honey can make a child choose good, and refuse evil. If it is so, I am sure

butter and honey ought to go up greatly in price, for good men are very much required. But it does not say, in the original, "Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good," but, "Butter and honey shall he eat, till he shall know how to refuse the evil, and choose the good," or, better still, "Butter and honey shall he eat, when he shall know how to refuse the evil, and choose the good."

We shall take that translation, and just try to elucidate the meaning couched in the words. They should teach us, first of all, *Christ's proper humanity*. When he would convince his disciples that he was flesh, and not spirit, he took a piece of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb, and ate as others did. "Handle me," he said, "and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Some heretics taught, even a little after the death of Christ, that his body was a mere shadow, that he was not an actual, real man; but here we are told he ate butter and honey just as other men did. While other men were nourished with food, so was Jesus; he was very man as certainly as he was verily and eternally God. "In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Therefore we are told that he ate butter and honey, to teach us that it was actually a real man, who afterwards on Calvary died.

The butter and honey teach us, again, that Christ was to be *born in times of peace*. Such products are not to be found in Judæa in times of strife; the ravages of war sweep away all the fair fruits of industry, the unwatered pastures yield no grass, and therefore there could be no butter. The bees may make their hive in the lion's carcase, and there may be honey there; but when the land is disturbed, who shall go to gather the

sweetness? How shall the babe eat butter when its mother flees away, even in the winter time, with the child clinging to her breast? In times of war, we have no choice of food; then men eat whatever they can procure, and the supply is often very scanty. Let us thank God that we live in the land of peace, and let us see a mystery in this text, that Christ was born in times of peace. The temple of Janus was shut ere the temple of heaven was opened. Ere the king of peace came to the temple of Jerusalem, the horrid mouth of war was stopped. Mars had sheathed his sword, and all was still. Augustus Cæsar was emperor of the world, none other ruled it, and therefore wars had ceased, the earth was still, the leaves quivered not upon the trees of the field, the ocean of strife was undisturbed by a ripple, the hot winds of war blew not upon man to trouble him, all was peaceful and quiet, and then came the Prince of peace, who in after days shall break the bow and cut the spear in sunder, and burn the chariot in the fire.

There is another thought here. "Butter and honey shall he eat when he shall know how to refuse the evil, and choose the good." This is to teach us *the precocity of Christ*, by which I mean that, even when he was a child, even when he lived upon butter and honey, which is the food of children, he knew the evil from the good. It is, usually, not until children leave off the food of their infancy that they can discern good from evil in the fullest sense. It requires years to ripen the faculties, to develop the judgment, to give full play to the man, in fact, to make him a man; but Christ, even while he was a babe, even while he lived upon butter and honey, knew the evil from the good, refused the one, and chose the other. Oh! what a mighty intellect there was in that brain! While he was an infant, surely there must have been sparklings of genius from his eyes; the fire of



intellect must have often lit up that brow. He was not an ordinary child; how would his mother talk about the wonderful things the little prattler said! He played not as others did; he cared not to spend his time in idle amusements; his thoughts were lofty and wondrous; he understood mysteries; and when he went up to the temple, in early days, he was not found, like the other children, playing about the courts or the markets, but sitting among the doctors, both hearing and asking them questions. His was a master-mind: "Never man spake like this man." So, never child thought like this child; he was an astonishing one, the wonder and the marvel of all children, the prince of children; the God-man, even when he was a child. I think this is taught us in the words, "Butter and honey shall he eat when he shall know how to refuse the evil, and choose the good."

Perhaps it may seem somewhat playful; but, ere I close speaking upon this part of the subject, I must say how sweet it is to my soul to believe that, as Christ lived upon butter and honey, surely *butter and honey drop from his lips*. Sweet are his words unto our souls, more to be desired than honey or the honeycomb. Well might he eat butter whose words are smooth to the tried, whose utterances are like oil upon the waters of our sorrows. Well might he eat butter, who came to bind up the broken-hearted; and well did he live upon the fat of the land, who came to restore the earth to its old fertility, and make all flesh soft with milk and honey, ah, honey in the heart.

"Where can such sweetness be  
As I have tasted in thy love,  
As I have found in thee?"

Thy words, O Christ, are like honey! I, like a bee, have flown

from flower to flower to gather sweets, and concoct some precious essence that shall be fragrant to me; but I have found honey drop from thy lips, I have touched thy mouth with my finger, and put the honey to my lips, and mine eyes have been enlightened, sweet Jesus; every word of thine is precious to my soul; no honey can with thee compare, well didst thou eat butter and honey!

And perhaps I ought not to have forgotten to say, that the effect of Christ's eating butter and honey was to show us that *he would not in his lifetime differ from other men* in his outward guise. Other prophets, when they came, were dressed in rough garments, and were austere and solemn in manner. Christ came not so; he came to be a man amongst men, a feaster with those that feast, an eater of honey with eaters of honey. He differed from none, and hence he was called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. Why did Christ do so? Why did he so commit himself, as men said, though it was verily a slander? It was because he would have his disciples not regard meats and drinks, but despise these things, and live as others do; because he would teach them that it is not that which goeth into a man, but that which cometh out, that defileth him. It is not what a man eats, with temperance, that does him injury, it is what a man says and thinks; it is not abstaining from meat, it is not the carnal ordinance of "Touch not, taste not, handle not," that makes the fundamentals of our religion, albeit it may be good addenda thereunto. Butter and honey Christ ate, and butter and honey may his people eat; nay, whatsoever God in his providence gives unto them, that is to be the food of the child Christ.

III. Now we come to close with THE NAME OF CHRIST: "And shall call his name Immanuel."

I did hope, dear friends, that I should have my voice this morning, that I might talk about my Master's name: I did hope to be allowed to drive along in my swift chariot; but, as the wheels are taken off, I must be content to go as I can. We sometimes creep when we cannot go, and go when we cannot run; but oh! here is a sweet name to close up with: "She shall call his name Immanuel." Mothers in the olden time called their children by names which had meaning in them; they did not give them the names of eminent persons, whom they would very likely grow up to hate, and wish they had never heard of. They had names full of meaning, which recorded some circumstance of their birth. There was Cain: "I have gotten a man from the Lord," said his mother; and she called him Cain, that is, "Gotten," or "Acquired." There was Seth,—that is, "Appointed," for his mother said, "God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel." Noah means "Rest," or "Comfort." Ishmael was so called by his mother because God had heard her. Isaac was called "Laughter" because he brought laughter to Abraham's home. Jacob was called the supplanter, or the crafty one, because he would supplant his brother. We might point out many similar instances; perhaps this custom was a good one amongst the Hebrews, though the peculiar formation of our language might not allow us to do the same, except in a certain measure.

We see, therefore, that the Virgin Mary called her son Immanuel, that there might be *a meaning in his name*, "God with us." My soul, ring these words again, "God with us." Oh! it is one of the bells of heaven, let us strike it yet again: "God with us." Oh! it is a stray note from the sonnets of paradise: "God with us." Oh! it is the lispings of a seraph: "God with us." Oh! it is one of the notes of the singing of Jehovah, when he

rejoices over his Church with singing: "God with us." Tell it, tell it, tell it; this is the name of him who is born to-day.

"Hark, the herald angels sing!"

This is his name, "God with us,"—God with us, by his incarnation, for the august Creator of the world did walk upon this globe; he who made ten thousand orbs, each of them more mighty and more vast than this earth, became the inhabitant of this tiny atom. He, who was from everlasting to everlasting, came to this world of time, and stood upon the narrow neck of land betwixt the two unbounded seas. "God with us:" he has not lost that name, Jesus had that name on earth, and he has it now in heaven. He is now "God with us." Believer, he is God with thee, to protect thee; thou art not alone, because the Saviour is with thee. Put me in the desert, where vegetation grows not; I can still say, "God with us." Put me on the wild ocean, and let my ship dance madly on the waves; I would still say, "Immanuel, God with us." Mount me on the sunbeam, and let me fly beyond the western sea; still I would say, "God with us." Let my body dive down into the depths of the ocean, and let me hide in its caverns; still I could, as a child of God, say, "God with us." Ay, and in the grave, sleeping there in corruption, still I can see the footmarks of Jesus; he trod the path of all his people, and still his name is "God with us."

But would you know this name most sweetly, you must *know it by the teaching of the Holy Spirit*. Has God been with us this morning? What is the use of coming to chapel, if God is not there? We might as well be at home if we have no visits of Jesus Christ, and certainly we may come, and come, and come, as regularly as that door turns on its hinges, unless it is "God with us" by the influence of the Holy Ghost. Unless the Holy

Spirit takes the things of Christ, and applies them to our heart, it is not “God with us.” Otherwise, God is a consuming fire. It is “God with us” that I love.

“Till God in human flesh I see,  
My thoughts no comfort find.”

Now ask yourselves, do you know what “God with us” means? Has it been God with you in your tribulations, by the Holy Ghost’s comforting influence? Has it been God with you in searching the Scriptures? Has the Holy Spirit shone upon the Word? Has it been God with you in conviction, bringing you to Sinai? Has it been God with you in comforting you, by bringing you again to Calvary? Do you know the full meaning of that name Immanuel, “God with us”? No; he who knows it best knows little of it. Alas, he who knows it not at all is ignorant indeed; so ignorant that his ignorance is not bliss, but will be his damnation. Oh! may God teach you the meaning of that name Immanuel, “God with us”!

Now let us close. “Immanuel.” It is wisdom’s mystery, “God with us.” Sages look at it, and wonder; angels desire to see it; the plumb-line of reason cannot reach half-way into its depths; the eagle-wing of science cannot fly so high, and the piercing eye of the vulture of research cannot see it. “God with us.” It is hell’s terror. Satan, trembles at the sound of it; his legions fly apace, the black-winged dragon of the pit quails before it. Let him come to you suddenly, and do you but whisper that word, “God with us,” back he falls, confounded and confused. Satan trembles when he hears that name, “God with us.” It is the labourer’s strength; how could he preach the gospel, how could he bend his knees in prayer, how could the missionary go into foreign lands, how could the martyr stand at the stake,

how could the confessor own his Master, how could men labour if that one word were taken away? "God with us." 'Tis the sufferer's comfort, 'tis the balm of his woe, 'tis the alleviation of his misery, 'tis the sleep which God giveth to his beloved, 'tis their rest after exertion and toil. Ah! and to finish, "God with us,"—'tis eternity's sonnet, 'tis heaven's hallelujah, 'tis the shout of the glorified, 'tis the song of the redeemed, 'tis the chorus of angels, 'tis the everlasting oratorio of the great orchestra of the sky. "God with us."

"Hail thou Immanuel, all divine,  
In thee thy Father's glories shine,  
Thou brightest, sweetest, fairest One,  
That eyes have seen or angels known."

Now, a happy Christmas to you all; and it will be a happy Christmas if you have God with you. I shall say nothing to-day against festivities on this great birthday of Christ. I hold that, perhaps, it is not right to have the birthday celebrated, but we will never be amongst those who think it as much a duty to celebrate it the wrong way as others the right. But we will to-morrow think of Christ's birthday; we shall be obliged to do it, I am sure, however sturdily we may hold to our rough Puritanism. And so, "let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Do not feast as if you wished to keep the festival of Bacchus; do not live to-morrow as if you adored some heathen divinity. Feast, Christians, feast; you have a right to feast. Go to the house of feasting to-morrow, celebrate your Saviour's birth; do not be ashamed to be glad, you have a right to be happy. Solomon says, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry

heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment.”

“Religion never was designed  
To make our pleasures less.”

Recollect that your Master ate butter and honey. Go your way, rejoice to-morrow; but, in your feasting, think of the Man in Bethlehem; let him have a place in your hearts, give him the glory, think of the virgin who conceived him, but think most of all of the Man born, the Child given. I finish by again saying,—

“A HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO YOU ALL!”

# A VISIT TO BETHLEHEM

DECEMBER 22ND, 1904

“Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.”—Luke 2:15

NOT to Bethlehem *as it now is*, but to Bethlehem *as it once was*, I would lead your meditation this evening.

Were you to visit the site of that ancient city of Judah *as it is at present*, you would find little enough to edify your hearts. About six miles south of Jerusalem, on the declivity of a hill, lies a small, irregular village, never at any time considerable either in its extent or because of the wealth of its inhabitants. The only building worthy of notice is a convent. Should your fancy paint, as you approach it, a courtyard, a stable, or a manger, you would be sorely disappointed on your arrival. Tawdry decorations are all that would greet your eyes,—rather adapted to obliterate than to preserve the sacred interest with which a Christian would regard the place. You might walk upon the marble floor of a chapel, and gaze on walls bedecked with pictures, and studded with the fantastic dolls and other nicknacks which are usually found in Popish places of worship. Within a small grotto, you might observe the exact spot that superstition has assigned to the nativity of our Lord; there, a



star, composed of silver and precious stones, surrounded by golden lamps, might remind you, but merely as a parody, of the simple story of the Evangelists. Truly, Bethlehem was ever little, if not the least, among the thousands of Judah, and famous only for its historic associations.

So, beloved, “let us now go even unto Bethlehem” *as it was*;—let us, if possible, bring the wondrous story of that “Child born”, that “Son given”, down to our own times. Imagine the event to be occurring just now. I will try to paint the picture for you with vivid colours, that you may apprehend afresh the great truth, and be impressed, as you ought to be, with the facts concerning the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I propose now to make A VISIT TO BETHLEHEM, and I want five companions to render the visit instructive; so I would have, first, *an aged Jew*; next, *an ancient Gentile*; then, *a convinced sinner*; then, *a young believer*; and, last of all, *an advanced Christian*. Their remarks can scarcely fail to please and profit us. Afterwards, I should like to take *a whole family* to the manger, let them all look at the Divine Infant, and hear what each one has to say about him.

I. To begin, then, I WOULD GO TO BETHLEHEM WITH AN AGED JEW.

Come on, my venerable, long-bearded brother; thou art an Israelite, indeed, for thy name is Simeon. Dost thou see the Babe “wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger”? Yes, he does; and, overpowered by the sight, he clasps the Child in his arms, and exclaims, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” “Here,” says this faithful son of Abraham, “is the fulfilment of a thousand prophecies and promises, the hope, the expectation, and the joy of my noble ancestry; here is

the Antitype of all those mystic symbols and typical offerings enjoined in the laws of Moses. Thou, O Son of the Highest, art Abraham's promised Seed, the Shiloh whose coming Jacob foretold, great David's greater Son, and Israel's rightful King. Our prophets did herald thy coming in each prophetic page; our bards vied with one another which should chant thy praise in sweetest stanzas; and now, O happy hour, these poor dim eyes do greet thy beauteous form! It is enough,—and more than enough;—O God, I ask not that I may live any longer on earth!" So speaks the aged Jew; and, as he speaks, I mark the rapturous smile that lights up every feature of his face, and listen to the deep, mellow tones of his tremulous voice. As he gazes on the tender Babe, I hear him quote Isaiah's words, "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant;" and then, as he glances aside at the virgin-mother, descendant of the royal house of David, he quickly looks back to the sinless Babe, and says, "A root out of a dry ground." Farewell, venerable Jew, thy talk sounds sweetly in mine ears; may the day soon dawn when all thy brethren shall return to their fatherland, and there confess our Jesus as their Messiah and their King!

II. My next companion shall be AN ANCIENT GENTILE.

He is an intelligent man. Do not ask me any questions concerning his creed. Deeply versed in the works of God in nature, he has glimmering, flickering light enough to detect the moral darkness by which he is surrounded, albeit the truth of the gospel has not yet found an entrance into his heart. Call him a sceptic, from the heathen point of view, if you please; but his is not a wilful perversion of the heart, it is rather that transition state of the mind wherein false hopes are rejected, but the true hope has not yet been espoused. This Gentile brother is staying at Jerusalem, and we walk and talk together

as we bend our steps toward Bethlehem. He has told me what pleasure he feels in reading the Jewish Scriptures, and how he has often longed for the dawn of that day which their seers predict. Now we enter the house,—a star shines brightly in the sky, and hovers over the stable;—we look at the Child, and my comrade exclaims in ecstasy, “a light to lighten the Gentiles!” “Fair Child of promise,” says he, “thy birth shall be a joy to all people! Prince of peace, thine shall be a peaceful reign! Kings shall bring presents unto thee; all nations shall serve thee. The poor shall rejoice in thine advent, for justice shall be done to them by thee; and oppressors shall tremble at thy coming, for judgment upon them shall be pronounced by thy lips.” Then sweetly did he speak of the hopes which had bloomed in that birth-chamber. He looked as if, in that self-same hour, he saw the application of many an ancient promise, with the letter of which he was already acquainted, to the wonderful Child he there saw. It was refreshing to hear that Gentile quote, from the evangelical prophet, words like these, “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; *and a little child shall lead them.*”

As I bid adieu to this friend, you must allow me to offer you one or two of my own reflections. When God, in his anger, hid his face from the house of Jacob, he lifted up the light of his countenance on the Gentiles. When the fruitful land became a desert, the wilderness, at the same time, began to blossom as the garden of the Lord. Moses had anticipated both of these events, and the inspired prophets had foreseen one as much as the other. The heart of the Jewish people made gross, the heaviness of their eyes, and the dulness of their ears, are not more striking, as an exact fulfilment of divine judgment, than

the extreme susceptibility of the Gentile mind to receive the evidence of our Lord's Messiahship, and to embrace his gospel. Thus had Jehovah said, fifteen hundred years before, "I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation." Marvel not, then, but admire the crisis in history when Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to say to the Jews who rejected the gospel, "*Lo, we turn to the Gentiles.*" I have consulted the map, and looked, with intense emotion, at the route which Paul and Barnabas took on their first missionary journey. Antioch, the city from which they went forth, is situated directly North of Jerusalem, and there, in no very unequal proportions, they could find both Jews and Gentiles. "To the Jew first," was according to the divine injunction; and, on their own nation rejecting the grace of God, lo, they turned to the Gentiles, with a result immediately following that greatly cheered them, for the Gentiles heard with gladness, and glorified the Word of the Lord. As you follow the various journeys of the apostle Paul, you will see that his course was ever Northward, or, rather, in a North-Westerly direction, and so the tidings of the gospel travelled on until the Church of the redeemed found a central point in our highly-favoured isle.

I think I hear some of you say, "We are not antiquarian enough to appreciate the society of your two venerable companions." Well then, beloved, the three that follow shall be drawn from among yourselves, and it may be that you will discover your own thoughts expressed in the sketches I am about to add.

### III. Next in order is THE AWAKENED SINNER.

Come here, my sister, I am glad to see you, and I shall have much pleasure in your company to Bethlehem. Why do you

start back? Do not be afraid; there is nothing to terrify you here. Come in; come in. With trembling apprehension, my sister advances to the rough crib, where the young Child lies. She looks as if she feared to rejoice, and is beyond measure astonished at herself that she does not faint. She says to me, "And is this, sir, really and truly the great mystery of godliness? Do I, in that manger, behold 'God manifest in the flesh'? I expected to see something very different." Looking into her face, I clearly perceived that she could scarcely believe for joy. A humble, but not uninteresting visitor to the birthplace of my Lord is this trembling penitent. I wish I could have many like her out of this congregation to-night. You would see how mystery is dissolved in mercy. No flaming sword, turning every way, obstructs your entrance; no ticket of admission is demanded by a surly menial at the door; no favour is shown to rank or title; you may go freely in to see the noblest Child of woman born in the humblest cot wherein infant ever nestled. Nor does a visible tiara of light encircle his brow. Too humble, I assure you, for the fancy of the poet to describe, or the pencil of the artist to sketch,—like a poor man's child, he is wrapped in swaddling clothes, and cradled in a manger. It needs faith to believe what the eye of sense never could discern as you look upon "the Prince of life" in such humble guise.

#### IV. My fourth companion is A YOUNG BELIEVER.

Well, my brother, you and I have often had sweet communion together concerning the things of the kingdom; "let *us* now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." I mark the sacred cheerfulness of my young friend's countenance as he approaches the incarnate mystery. Often have I heard him discussing curious doctrinal subtleties; but

now, with calmness of spirit, he looks on the face of the Divine Child, and says, "Truth is sprung out of the earth, for a woman hath brought forth her Son; and righteousness hath looked down from heaven, for God hath, of a truth, revealed himself in that Babe." He looks so wistfully at the young Child, as if a fresh spring of holy gratitude had been opened in his heart. "No vision, no imagination, no myth here," he says, "but a real partaker of our flesh and blood; he has not taken on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham. Heaven and earth have united to make us blessed. Might and weakness have joined hands here!" He pauses to worship, then speaks again, "In what a small, weak, slender tabernacle dost thou, O glorious God, now deign to dwell! Surely, mercy and truth have here met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. O Jesus, Saviour, thou art mercy itself,—the tender mercy of our God is embodied in thee. Thou art the Truth,—the very Truth which the prophets longed to see, and into which the angels desire to look,—the Truth my soul so long sought for, but never found till I beheld thy face. Once I thought that the Truth was hidden in some profound treatise, or in some learned book; but now I know that it is revealed in thee, O Jesus, my Kinsman, yet thy Father's equal! And, sweet Babe, thou art also righteousness,—the only righteousness that God can accept. What condescension, yet what patience! Ah, dear Child, how still thou dost lie! I wonder that, conscious of thy divine power, thou canst thus endure the weary, lingering hours of infancy with humility so strange, so rare! Methinks, if thou hadst stood by me, and watched over me, in my infant weakness, that would have been a service that I could well admire; but 'tis past imagination's utmost stretch to realize what it must be for thee to be thus feeble, thus helpless, thus

needing to be fed and waited upon by an earthly mother. For the Wonderful, the mighty God, to stoop thus, is humility profound!"

So spake the young believer, and I liked his speech much, for I saw in him how faith could work by love, and how the end of controversy and argument is reached at Bethlehem, for "without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh."

V. Now I will go to Bethlehem with AN ADVANCED CHRISTIAN, such an one as Paul the aged, or John the divine; nay, rather with such an one as I might find among the circle of my own church-members.

Calm, peaceful, and benignant, he seems as if his training in the school of Christ, and the sacred anointing of the Holy Spirit, have made him like a child himself, as his character is ripening, and his fitness for the kingdom of heaven is becoming more apparent. Tears glistened in the old man's eyes as he looked with expressive fondness on that "Infant of eternal days." He spake not much, and what he said was not exactly like what any of my other companions had spoken. It was his manner to quote short sentences, with great exactness, from the Word of God. He uttered them slowly, pondered them deeply, and there was much spiritual unction in the accent with which he spake. I will just mention a few of the profitable sentences that he uttered. First he said, "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even *the Son of Man which is in heaven;*" and he really appeared to see more in that passage than I had ever seen there;—Jesus, the Son of man, in heaven even while he was on earth! Then he looked at the Child, and said, "The same was in the beginning with God." After that, he uttered these three

short sentences in succession, "In the beginning was the Word,"—"all things were made by him," "and the Word was made flesh." He looked as if he realized what a great mystery it was that our Lord Jesus first made all things, and afterwards was himself "made flesh." Then he reverently bent his knee, clasped his hands, and exclaimed, "My Father's gift—'Behold, what manner of love!'"

As we retire from that manger and stable, that aged Christian puts his hand on my shoulder, and says, "Young man, I have often been to Bethlehem; it was a much-loved haunt of mine before thou wast born, and one sweet lesson I have learnt there which I should like to pass on to thee. The Infinite became finite; the Almighty consented to become weak; he, that upheld all things by the word of his power, willingly became helpless; he, that spake all worlds into existence, resigned for a while even the power of speech. In all these things, he fulfilled the will of his Father; so be not thou afraid, nor surprised with any amazement, if thou shouldst be dealt with in like manner, for his Father is also thy Father. Thou, who hast revelled in the ancient settlements of the everlasting covenant, mayest yet have to hang feebly on the mercies of the hour. Thou hast leaned on thy Saviour's breast at his table; but thou mayest presently be so weak that thou must rely on the nursing of a woman. Thy tongue has been touched as with a coal from the heavenly altar, but thy lips may yet be sealed as are those of an infant. If thou shouldst sink still deeper in humiliation, thou wilt never reach the depth to which Jesus descended in this one act of his condescension." "True, true," I replied, "my young brother hinted at the wondrous condescension of the Son of God; you have explained it to me more fully."



Thus, then, beloved, I have endeavoured to carry out my purpose of going to Bethlehem with five separate companions,—all representative persons. Alas, that some of you are not represented by any one of these characters! “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Care ye not for this blessed nativity which marked of old “the fulness of time”? If ye die without a knowledge of this mystery, your lives will indeed be a fearful blank, and your eternal portion will be truly terrible.

VI. Give me your earnest attention, a little longer, while I try to change the line of meditation. It may please God that, while I attempt to CONDUCT A WHOLE FAMILY TO BETHLEHEM, some hearts, which have thus far resisted all my appeals, may yet yield to the Lord Jesus Christ.

A familiar picture will serve my purpose. Imagine this to be the evening of Christmas-day, and that a Christian father has all his household gathered with him around the fire. Desirous of blending instruction with pleasure, he proposes that “the birth of Christ” shall be the subject of their conversation, that every one of the children shall say something about it, and he will preach them a short sermon on each of their remarks. He calls Mary, their servant, into the room, and when all are comfortably seated they commence.

(1) After a simple sketch of the facts, the father turns to his youngest boy, and asks, “What have you to say, Willy?” The little fellow, who is just old enough to go to the Sunday-school, repeats two lines that he has learnt to sing there,—many of you, no doubt, know them,—

“Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour,  
Once became a child like me.”

“Good, my dear,” says the father,—“once became a child

like me.” Yes; Jesus was born into the world as other little babies are born. He was as little, as delicate, as weak, as other infants, and needed to be nursed as they do.

“ ‘Almighty God became a man,  
A babe like others seen:  
As small in size, and weak of frame,  
As babes have always been.

“ ‘From thence he grew an infant mild,  
By fair and due degrees;  
And then became a bigger child,  
And sat on Mary’s knees.

“ ‘At first held up for want of strength,  
In time alone he ran;  
Then grew a boy; a lad; at length,  
A youth; at last, a man.’ ”

“It is wrong to draw pictures of the little Jesus, and then say that they are like him. Wicked idolaters do that. But we ought to think of Jesus Christ as made in all things like unto his brethren. There was never a thing in which he was not like us, except that he had no sin. He used to eat, and drink, and sleep, and wake, and laugh, and cry, and fondle his mother, just as other children do. So it is quite right for you, Willy, to say, ‘once became a child like me.’ ”

(2) “Now, John,” said the father, addressing a lad rather older, “what have you to say?” “Well, father,” said John, “if Jesus Christ was like us in some things, I do not think he could have had so many comforts as we have;—not such a nice nursery, nor such a snug bed. Was he not disturbed by the horses, and cows, and camels? It seems to me shocking that he had to live in a stable.”

“That is a very proper remark, John,” said his father. “We ought all of us to think how our blessed Lord cast in his lot with the poor. When those wise men came from the East, I daresay they were surprised, at first, to find that Jesus was a poor man’s child; yet they fell down and worshipped him, and they opened their treasury, and presented to him very costly gifts,—gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Ah! when the Son of God made that great stoop from heaven to earth, he passed the glittering palaces of kings, and the marble halls of the rich and the noble, and took up his abode in the lodgings of poverty. Still, he was ‘born King of the Jews.’ Now, John, did you ever read of a child being born a king before? Of course, you never did; children have been born princes, and heirs to a throne, but no other than Jesus was ever born a king. The poverty of our Saviour’s circumstances is like a foil which sets off the glorious dignity of his person. You have read of good kings, such as David, and Hezekiah, and Josiah; yet, if they had not been kings, we should never have heard of them; but it was quite otherwise with Jesus Christ. He was possessed of more true greatness in a stable than any other king ever possessed in a palace; but do not imagine it was only in his childhood that Jesus was the Kinsman of the poor. When he grew up to be a man, he said, ‘The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.’ Do you know, my children, that our comforts were purchased at the expense of his sufferings? ‘He became poor that we, through his poverty, might be rich.’ We ought, therefore, to thank and praise the blessed Jesus every time we remember how much worse off he was in this world than we are.”

(3) “It is your turn now,” said the father, as he looked at his

little daughter,—an intelligent girl, who was just beginning to be of some assistance to her mother in the discharge of her daily domestic duties. Poor girl, she modestly hung down her head, for she remembered, just then, how frequently little acts of carelessness had exposed her to tender but faithful rebukes from her parents. At last, she said, “Oh, father, how good Jesus Christ was! He never did anything wrong.” “Very true, my love,” the father replied. “It is a sweet subject for meditation that you suggest. His nature was sinless, his thoughts were pure, his heart was transparent, and all his actions just and right. You have read of the lambs, which Moses in the law commanded the Jews to offer in sacrifice to God. They were all to be without spot or blemish; and if there had been one taint of impurity in the Child that was born of Mary, he could never have been our Saviour. Sometimes, we think naughty thoughts, and nobody knows it but God; and, sometimes, we do what is evil, but we are not found out. It was not so with the meek and lowly Saviour; he never had even one fault. His delight was in the law of the Lord, and in that law did he meditate day and night. Even when we do not commit any positive sin, we often forget to do our duty; but Jesus never did. He was like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season. He never disappointed any hopes that were set upon him.”

“There now,” said the father, “we have had three beautiful thoughts already,—Jesus Christ took our nature, he condescended to be very poor, and he was without sin.”

(4) There was, in the room, a big boy, who had just come home from boarding school, to spend his Christmas holidays, so his father turned to this son, and said, “Fred, we must hear your remark next.” Very short, very significant was Master

Fred's response: "That Child had a wonderful mind."

"Indeed he had," said the father, "and it would be well for all of us if that mind were in us which was also in Christ Jesus. His mind was infinite, for he took part in the eternal counsels of God; but I would rather suggest to you another line of thought: 'In him was light.' The mind of Jesus was like light for its clearness and purity. We often see things through a misleading medium; we form wrong impressions, which we find it trouble enough afterwards to correct; but Jesus was of quick understanding to discern between good and evil. His mind was never warped by prejudice; he saw things just as they are. Never had he to borrow other people's eyes, and the ideas hatched in other people's brains never guided his judgment. He had light in himself, and that light was the life of men, so capable was he ever of instructing the ignorant, and guiding their feet in the paths of peace. His heart was likewise pure, and that has more to do with the development of the mind, and the improvement of the understanding, than we are apt to suppose. No corrupt imagination ever tarnished the brightness of his vision. He was always in harmony with God, and always felt good-will toward man. You might well say, Fred, that he had a wonderful mind."

(5) The children having each made some observation, the father next addressed Mary, the servant. "Do not be timid," said he, "but speak out, and let us know your thought." "I was just a-thinking, sir," said Mary, "how humble it was of him to take upon himself the form of a servant." "Right, Mary, quite right; and it is always profitable to consider how Jesus came down to our low estate. We may well be reconciled to any 'lot' which Jesus voluntarily chose for himself. But there is more in your remark, as applicable to Bethlehem, and the nativity, than

you perhaps imagined; for, according to Dr. Kitto's account of the inn, or *Caravanserai*, it was the servant's place that the holy family occupied. Imagine now a square pile of strong and lofty walls, built of brick upon a basement of stone, with one great archway entrance. These walls enclose a large open area with a well in the middle. In the centre is an inner quadrangle, consisting of a raised platform on all four sides covered with a kind of *piazza*, and then, in the wall behind, there are small doors leading to the little cells which form the lodgings. Such we may suppose to have been the 'inn' in which there was 'no room' for Mary and Joseph. Now for a description of the stable. It is formed of a covered avenue between the back wall of the lodging apartments and the outer wall of the whole building; thus it is on a level with the court, and three or four feet below the raised platform. The side walls of those cells, in the inner quadrangle, projecting behind into the courtyard, form recesses, or stalls, which servants and muleteers used for shelter in bad weather. Joseph and Mary seem to have found a retreat in one of these. There, it is supposed, the infant Jesus was born; and if it be so, how literally true is it that he took on him the form of a servant, and occupied the servant's apartment!"

(6) Once more the father seeks a fresh text, and, looking at his wife, he says, "My dear, you have taken a quiet interest in our conversations this evening; let us now hear your reflection. I am sure you can say something we shall all be pleased to hear." The mother looked absorbed in thought, she appeared to have a vivid picture of the whole scene before her, and her eye kindled as if she could actually see the little darling lying in the manger. She spoke most naturally and most maternally, too. "What a lovely Child! And yet," she added,

with a deep sigh, “he, who is thus fairer than the children of men in his cradle, after a few short years, was so overwhelmed with anxiety, suffering, and anguish, that his visage was more marred than that of any other man, and his form more than that of the sons of men.”

A pensive sadness stole over every countenance as that godly mother offered her reflections. Woman’s tenderness seemed to be sanctified by grace divine in her heart, and to give forth its richest fragrance. The father presently broke the stillness as he said, “Ah, my love, you have spoken best of all! His heart was broken with reproach; that humble birth was but the prelude to a life still more humble, and a death even more abased. Your feeling, my love, is a most precious evidence of your close relationship to him.

“ ‘A faithful friend of grief partakes;

But union can be none  
Betwixt a heart that melts like wax  
And hearts as hard as stone;



Betwixt a head diffusing blood  
And members sound and whole,  
Betwixt an agonizing God.  
And an unfeeling soul.' ”

(7) “To close up now,” said the father, glancing round with animated expression upon his household, “I suppose you will expect a few words from me. Much as I like your mother’s observations, I think it would be hardly right, on such an auspicious day, to finish with anything melancholy and sad. You know that fathers are generally most thoughtful about the prospects of their children. I can look at you boys, and think, ‘Never mind if you have a few hardships so long as you can struggle successfully against them.’ Well now, I have been picturing to myself the manger, the Baby that lay in it, and Mary his mother watching lovingly over him; and I’ll tell you what I thought. Those little hands will one day grasp the sceptre of universal empire; those little arms will one day grapple with the monster ‘Death’, and destroy it; those little feet shall tread on the serpent’s neck, and crush that old deceiver’s head; yea, and that little tongue, which hath not yet learned to articulate a word, shall, ere long, pour from his sweet lips such streams of eloquence as shall fertilize the minds of the whole human race, and infuse his teaching into the literature of the world; and again a little while, and that tongue shall pronounce the judgments of heaven on the destinies of all mankind. We have all thought it wonderful that the God of glory should stoop so low; but we shall one day think it more wonderful that the Man of sorrows should be exalted so high. Earth could find no place too base for him; heaven will scarcely find a place lofty enough for him. Then there is just this one thing to be said about Jesus Christ, he is ‘the same yesterday,

and to-day, and for ever.' We may change with circumstances, Jesus never did, and never will. When we look at him in the manger, we may say, 'He is the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the mighty God.' And when we see him exalted to his Father's right hand, we may exclaim, 'Behold the Man!'

“ ‘His human heart be still retains,  
Though 'throned in highest bliss,  
And feels each tempted member's pains,  
For our affliction's his.' ”

So closed the series of observations by the various members of a Christian family around the Christmas fire. The father said it was time to retire, and bade them all “Good night;” and as the father said, so say I, “Good-night, and God bless you all!” Amen.