

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPELS

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Mortimer's devotional commentary on the Gospel narratives, providing spiritual reflections on each passage. She examines Christ as 'the Word' who reveals the invisible God to humanity, making the Father known through His life and teaching.

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01 - Introduction

Can there be any account in the world so interesting to us as the history of our Lord and Savior, while he spent thirty-three years upon earth? There were people with him who heard his sayings and observed his actions. Four holy men, as you are aware, wrote accounts of his life. It might well be supposed that these histories would not contradict each other, for they were all true. But the writers not only wrote what they knew to be true—the Holy Spirit instructed them what to relate. They were inspired of God. When we read their writings, we read the words of God himself. With what reverence should we attend! As some of these four Evangelists related one event, and some related another, it is interesting to place their accounts together, endeavoring to observe, as well as we can, the order of time in which the events occurred. Such an arrangement is called a "Harmony of the gospels."

We shall begin with the words of John, because he speaks of Jesus before he came into the world, even when he was with his Father in heaven. We shall find that the Son of God made the world. He did not appear in it as a man, until four thousand years had rolled away; but long before he came, he was promised by God, and described by the prophets, such as Moses, David, Isaiah, and many others—of whom Malachi was the last. At length he appeared, and fulfilled all that had been said of Him.

Let us read of Him, as of one that came into the world to save us. Everything that concerns him is of the greatest importance to us; for if we do not believe on him, and love him above all, we shall perish forever. Let us, therefore, always before we read, lift up our hearts to God in prayer. "O Lord, grant unto us your Holy Spirit, that our souls may be saved by the knowledge of your blessed Son!"

We shall not always meet together to worship God as we do now. A day will come when each of us will unite with the rest in reading and prayer for the last time. But if we believe in Jesus, we shall not part forever. We shall meet again in Heaven. Then how delightful it will be to look back upon the time, when as one family, we used to assemble to hear about our beloved Lord. Many hours which we spent below may then be remembered with regret; but not those precious moments devoted to hearing about Him, whose presence will make us happy through eternity!

02 - January

January 1 John 1:1-5. The Word. Who is the Word spoken of in these verses? He is the Son of God. He is called the WORD, because he makes God his Father known to us. How is it that our thoughts are made known to our fellow creatures? By our words. Thus the unseen Father is made known to men by his Son Jesus Christ. No man can know the Father, but by the Son. The Son and the Father are distinct persons, for it is written in the first verse, "The Word was with God;" that is, the Son was with the Father. Yet the Son and the Father are one God, for it is added, "The Word was God." But even if we had not found this sentence, "The Word was God," we would have known that he was God, by the things that are said of him in the following verses.

First, it is declared that he was from the beginning with God. Now God is the First, and if the Son of God is from everlasting, then he is First, and he must be God.

Again it is declared that all things were made by him. Thus we know the Son is the Creator of the world. He cannot then be a creature; for no creature can "create." God alone can create.

Then again it is said, He is the "Life." He gives life. All the angels in heaven cannot give life to the smallest insect, or even to the lowest flower—but the Son can give life to the creatures he has made; not only natural life, but spiritual and eternal life.

Lastly, it is declared that he is the Light of men—a brighter light than the sun, a light which shines into the heart and enlightens the dark mind. And what is MAN called? Observe the name that is given to him. He is called "Darkness." In verse the fifth it is written, "The light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehends it not." Ever since Satan, the prince of darkness, tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, the minds of men have been dark; they have neither known what is right, nor loved what is good. Christ came into the world to bring light to the dark minds of men. But alas! how few receive him! Most people are so much pleased with the trifles of time, or so much taken up with the cares of the world, that they turn away from the Son of God. This blessed book which we hold in our hands tells us about Him. Does not each of us wish to be happy forever? Then let us listen attentively, and let us entreat God to give us faith that we may believe and be saved.

January 2 John 1:6-11. The Witness.

Before the Lord Jesus came into the world, God sent a man called John to be a witness to him. He is called the Baptist, and was not the same John who wrote the history we are now reading.

John the Baptist was a faithful preacher, a burning and a shining light, but he was not that light; he was not the Son of God.

He was only a man; but he loved the Son of God, and he desired that all men through him, that is, "through his preaching," might believe in Jesus. It is the desire of every faithful minister, that through him men should believe in Christ. God does make men the instruments of turning the hearts of their fellow-creatures to God. Many of the children of Israel did John turn to the Lord their

God. It is not ministers only who turn the hearts of sinners; but other Christians also. There is an account of a poor gipsy woman who, by her conversation, converted no less than twelve people. What an honor it would be to us if God should cause any one to believe in Jesus through us—through what we said or did! May our light so shine before men, that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father who is in heaven! In the ninth verse it is said that Jesus lights every man that comes into the world. This means that Jesus is the only light—just as there is only one sun in the sky to give us light—so there is only one Savior to save us. But Jesus does not light those who never heard of him. The heathen sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Neither does he enlighten all who have heard of him. He shines around us—but if we are blind, he does not give light even to us.

How striking it is to read that his own world did not know him when he appeared, that his own nation the Jews, his brethren according to the flesh, did not receive him! "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." As if a mother were to appear among her children, and they should deny that she was their mother. How many people are there now who are not ashamed to say, "I do not pretend to be religious," which means, "I do not pretend to love God," as if they had nothing to do with God, as if he had not made them, and did not feed them, and watch over them continually. What would we think of a child who would say of an affectionate parent, "I do not pretend to care for him?" What would a parent feel, who heard a child speak thus? There is no parent who feels so tender an interest in his children, as Christ felt for his people the Jews. Remember the tears he shed over Jerusalem, when he uttered those touching words, "How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not!" Are there any here who now refuse to receive the loving Savior into their hearts? Let me entreat you no longer to grieve him by treating him thus. You are the work of his hands. He longs to make you happy. Open your hearts to him, and receive him as your Lord.

January 3 John 1:12-13. The sons of God.

We know that when the Lord Jesus came into the world, the greater part of men despised and rejected him; but there were a few who received him. They believed in him; that is, they received Jesus into their hearts. And now observe what a glorious privilege God bestowed upon these believers. He gave them "power to become the sons of God." He adopted them as his sons and heirs. It is written in Romans 8:15, "You have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father;" and again, "If children, then heirs." God will bestow upon his adopted children his riches in glory. "He who overcomes shall inherit all things. I will be his God, and he shall be my son."—Revelation 21:7. But what is the reason that some believed in Jesus? Were they by nature better than others? Were their hearts softer, so that they could not reject their dying Savior? No—they were by nature like others—but they were born of God. As it is written in the thirteenth verse, "Who were born of God;" that is, of the Spirit of God.

We are also told what they were NOT born of. Let us consider each of the expressions—

"Not of blood," that is, they did not believe because they were of the blood of any good man, such as Abraham. Many who were of the blood of Abraham did not believe in Christ! Neither were they born of the will of the flesh. They did not believe, because it was the will of their flesh, or of their nature to believe. They did not choose Christ from their own power. If they had been left to themselves, they would have refused him; for the natural man does not receive the things of the

Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 2:14. Neither were they born of the will of man. They did not believe because it was the will of any man that they should believe. Such people are not converted as a minister most desires to convert, or as he thinks it most likely will be converted. It is the will of God that makes a man believe.

If we have been born of God, we see that it was not because we were of the blood of any pious parents or ancestors; it was not because it was the will of our flesh to believe, for we were dead in sins. It was not because it was the will of man. No pious minister or friend could have made us believe. But if we have been raised from the death of sin, it was the power of God that raised us. Therefore to God be all the glory!

If we have not been born again, then let us go to God, who alone can convert us, and entreat him to put forth his great power to make us believe that we may become the children of God and heirs of the kingdom of glory. For it is dreadfully true, that until we believe in Christ, we are the children of Satan, and not the children of God. Who can bear the thought of being the child of the devil, and an heir of wrath! Yet what does the Apostle Paul say to the Ephesians? He says of himself and of them, "We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." But we may be born again; we must be born again. Then we shall belong to the family of God, and be the heirs of heaven.

January 4 John 1:14-18. The testimony of John. In the beginning of this chapter we read of a great wonder, that the Word was with God, and yet was God. We cannot understand how this could be. In this passage we read of another wonder, yet we are so much accustomed to hear it, that we almost forget to consider the greatness of the wonder, "The Word was made flesh." God became man; he "dwelt among us." When we look around us at this great world, and at the heavens spangled with stars, and think that He who made all these things became a weak man, who ate, drank, and slept like ourselves—do we not feel amazed? We may well inquire why God became a man, and dwelt among us?

It was to save us from everlasting misery. We are told in verse 14, "He was full of grace and truth." He came to bring grace to sinners, to pardon their sins by his free grace. He came to suffer all he had said he would suffer. He had said he would suffer our punishment, and he was full of truth, and suffered it all, showing that God hated sin, and that he would punish it with death.

Now, John the Evangelist, when he speaks of Jesus, breaks out into an exclamation at the remembrance of his glory. He says in verse 14, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." John had really seen Jesus. As he says in his First Epistle, speaking of Jesus, "that which our eyes have seen, which we have looked upon."

"We beheld his glory." What glory does he here refer to? Does he refer to the glory which shone on the mount, when "his face shone as the sun, and his clothing was white as the light?"—Matthew 17:2. Perhaps it is to this glory he refers, or perhaps it is to the glory of holiness which always shone in Jesus, and which the world could not see; for they saw "no beauty in him, that they should desire him."—Isaiah 53:2. But those who believed in him saw this glory. Do we see it? Has the Spirit opened our inward eyes, so that we see Christ to be worthy of all our love?

There was a man who saw this glory, and pointed Jesus out to others. His name was John the Baptist.

He spoke of Jesus long before he saw him. At last he saw him, and said to the people, "This is he of whom I spoke. He who comes after me existed before me; for he was before me." Jesus was six months younger than John the Baptist, therefore John said he came after him. Yet he was before him, because he was with his Father before he came into the world. Who is speaking in verse 16? Not John the Baptist, but John the writer of this history. He speaks in the highest terms of love and praise of our great Savior. How happy are they who can say with John, "Of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace." In Jesus there is a full store of grace, sufficient for every believer. And do we not need these graces? Do we not often lament our lack of patience, meekness, kindness, and charity? Jesus is willing to bestow them all upon us. Moses was a great lawgiver; but he could not bestow grace. Moses appointed many forms and ceremonies, to represent the way of salvation, but Jesus brought salvation. Therefore it is written, "Truth came by Jesus Christ." The Father dwells in light which no man can approach unto; but he spared his Son from his bosom that we might behold him. Though we have not seen him ourselves, we have heard enough about him to make us love him. If our hearts were not like stones by nature, we would have loved him from the first moment we heard of him; and yet perhaps there may be some here who had lived twenty or thirty years in the world before they began to love him; and there may be others who do not love him yet. May the Lord soften their hearts.

January 5 Luke 1:1-4. The Preface to Luke. The holy Evangelist Luke writes a short preface before his history of the Lord Jesus Christ. This preface is a kind of letter to Theophilus, for whose use especially he wrote the history. Let us inquire who Luke was, and who Theophilus was. Luke is not mentioned in any of the Gospels; but Paul speaks of him in his epistle to the Colossians, as, "the beloved physician," Colossians 4:14. There is reason also to suppose he was not a Jew, but a converted heathen; yet he had the honor of writing a part of the holy Word of God. Theophilus was probably a governor; therefore he was called "most excellent," as dukes are now styled "your grace," and kings "your majesty." Theophilus, though a nobleman, had been instructed in religion by some of God's servants; but Luke wished him to know the history of the Lord still more perfectly. He says in the fourth verse, that he had written this account that "you (Theophilus) might know the certainty of those things wherein you have been instructed."

It appears that other people had written histories of Christ. These people had not been directed by the Holy Spirit, as the Evangelists had; neither had they themselves witnessed the events they had related. They had written from "report," and their accounts contained errors. It is happy for us that these erroneous accounts have not been handed down to us, but only the inspired histories of the four Evangelists.

Luke himself had not been an eye-witness of the events he records; yet we cannot say he wrote from "report," for he was directed by the Spirit of God. He had enjoyed great opportunities of knowing about Jesus—he declares in v. 3, that he had had perfect understanding of all things from the "very first," or from the very earliest part of our Savior's life. Still his history would not have been reckoned a part of the holy Bible, if the Holy Spirit had not directed him what to write. This book has always been read in the assemblies of Christians, and called the word of God.

Let us thank God for this part of his word. How many interesting events and parables are related by Luke, which we would never have known, had he not written! How we ought to value everything that concerns the Lord Jesus! When we love a friend, we desire to know everything about him, and

to hear what he did even when he was a child! When we have lost him, we think over his dying words, and lay them up in our hearts! How much more should we delight in knowing all that concerns the best of friends! When we consider who he was—the Lord of Glory, we can compare no earthly friend to him; all which relates to him is wonderful.

It is affecting to hear how the poor heathen, when first converted, value the word of God! Before the missionaries in the South Sea Islands could print the Bible in the language of the people, the poor natives eagerly listened to all that was read aloud on the Sabbath, and many wrote down upon the leaves of trees the texts they had heard, and studied them wherever they went until they knew them by heart. We are without excuse if we remain ignorant of the history of our Lord. Let us not, however, forget for what purpose we read—that we may learn to love Jesus. We are apt to become fond of human creatures whom we know intimately. How much more might it be expected that hearing of Jesus would make us love him; for he is far more excellent than any creature, and far more full of love to us than our dearest friend. Yet our hearts are naturally so much hardened against God, that unless the Holy Spirit soften them, we shall not love him. May that Spirit be with us, while we read day after day the history of our blessed Lord.

January 6 Luke 1:5-14. The Angel's visit to Zacharias.

Luke said in his preface, that he had perfect understanding of all things from the very first; so we find that his history begins very early indeed, and describes events that happened before the birth of Jesus.

John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus. In this chapter we have an account of his parents. His father was a priest named Zacharias. His mother Elizabeth also was of the family of the priests, the descendants of Aaron.

Zacharias and Elizabeth "were righteous before God." How could they be righteous? Is it not written, "There is none righteous; no, not one?" God, who knows all hearts, has made this declaration. But when a man believes in Christ, he becomes righteous, for the righteousness of Christ becomes his. Jesus bore our sins that we might obtain his righteousness. But it may be said, "How could Zacharias and Elizabeth believe in Christ? Did they not live before he came into the world?" They did. But they believed in the promise of a Savior; and thus they became partakers of his righteousness. It was in this way Abraham was righteous. It is written, "He believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Faith is the means by which sinners receive the righteousness of Christ. It has often been compared to the hand; and righteousness to a treasure. As the hand grasps the treasure, so faith lays hold of Christ's righteousness.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were pardoned sinners. Therefore they were sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Though still subject to sin, they indulged in no sinful habits. They were not satisfied (as hypocrites are) with observing those commandments that it was convenient to obey, while they neglected those that were more difficult—but they walked in all the commandments of the Lord blameless. We shall soon have a proof that they were still subject to sin; for we shall soon read how Zacharias was overtaken by unbelief.

Zacharias and Elizabeth had no child; and the lack of children was considered by the Jews as a heavy affliction. Yet at length they became the parents of one of the greatest prophets that ever appeared in the world. All the circumstances connected with this event were very remarkable. As Zacharias was a priest, it was his office at certain times to burn incense in the temple. The priests were so numerous, that they could not all live at Jerusalem. They were divided into twenty-four courses; and each course came up to Jerusalem in its turn, to serve for one week in the temple. It was determined by lot every morning who was to enjoy the privilege of burning incense that day at the golden altar. The priest, on whom the lot fell, went alone into the temple both morning and evening, to burn sweet spices as an offering to God, while the people remained in the court repeating public prayers for a blessing upon all nations. On the day when God purposed to speak to Zacharias, he caused the lot to fall upon him. The most minute circumstances are under his control, and are often the beginnings of very great events. When Zacharias beheld the angel standing by the altar, he was troubled. We always find that men are troubled at the presence of angels. Yet Zacharias had no reason to fear, for the heavenly messenger came not to destroy him, but to bless. He said, "Your prayer is heard." What prayer? Was it for a son that Zacharias had prayed? Or was it that the Savior might soon come into the world? Both these blessings were soon to be bestowed. A son was to be born to Zacharias, to prepare the way for the Savior that was to be given to men. Well might a father rejoice at the birth of such a son! His very name showed that God would bless him and make him a blessing. The word "John" signifies "the grace or favor of God." When a child has been born, it has very seldom been known whether he would become a curse or a blessing. There has often been joy at the birth of children, who have lived to do great harm, and even to break their parents' hearts. When Cain was born, Eve rejoiced; saying, "I have gotten a son from the Lord," little thinking how wicked a man he would be. Other children have been born undesired; perhaps the family was already numerous and badly provided for; yet some of those unwelcome little strangers have lived, not only to rejoice their parents' hearts, but to save souls from eternal death. Did Christians know when a faithful minister was born into the world, how much they would rejoice! We cannot tell, when we look upon a helpless baby, what it will become; but we may offer up our earnest prayers that it may be a blessing and not a curse.

January 7 Luke 1:15-17. The Prophecy concerning John the Baptist.

How happy was Zacharias to hear such a character of his promised son from the lips of an angel! His son was to be "great in the sight of the Lord." It would not be a blessing to have a son great in the sight of the world. Those who are great in the sight of the Lord are despised by the world. Men said of John the Baptist, "He has a devil," and they counted the apostles as the offscouring of all things. The angel said that John was to drink neither wine nor strong drink. He would be filled with the Holy Spirit, and many of the children of Israel he would turn to the Lord their God. Why then was John to drink no wine? Because he was a Nazarite. A Nazarite was a person separated unto the Lord in a very singular manner. Sometimes the Israelites made vows thus to separate themselves for a week, or a month, or a longer space of time. During that time they tasted neither wine nor grapes; and they allowed the locks of hair on their heads to grow long. Some children were made Nazarites from their birth. Samuel was thus devoted to the Lord by his praying mother; and Samson by the appointment of an angel. John the Baptist was also a Nazarite from his birth. Jewish ceremonies have ceased since the Lord Jesus has made known his Gospel. But though we ought not to become Nazarites, we ought, like them, to be devoted to the service of God, and

separated from the sinful pleasures of an ungodly world. The angel also declared that the child soon to be born would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah. If we read the history of the prophet Elijah, we shall see a great resemblance between him and John the Baptist.

They were like each other in spirit. Both were faithful and courageous. Elijah prophesied in the court of the wicked king Ahab, and his more wicked queen; and by his boldness endangered his life. John reproved King Herod so faithfully for his sins, that he was imprisoned, and at length murdered at the request of the cruel Herodias. In spirit therefore John resembled Elijah.

He came also in the power of that great prophet; and, like him, he had great success. At one time Elijah thought there was not a single pious prophet in all Israel; and he complained to God, saying, "I, even I, only am left," but such power accompanied his instructions, that before he was taken up to heaven, there were numerous young men, called sons of the prophets, all over the land, training up for the ministry. John the Baptist also had great success; and some of his disciples were numbered among the apostles of the Lamb. But the most delightful part of the angel's message to Zacharias was the promise that the Savior should soon come. He spoke of the Savior as the Lord God of Israel; for he said, "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God; and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah." The Son of God was coming into the world to shed his blood to save sinners; yet it was necessary that one should go before him to turn the hearts of men towards him. What a proof this is of the wickedness of the human heart! It is turned against God! Satan, in the garden of Eden, turned the heart of Eve against her best friend. Now everyone is an enemy of God, until he is converted. God sends his faithful preachers to turn our hearts towards himself. Have not some tried to persuade us to turn to the Lord? Have they succeeded in persuading us? It is an dreadful thing to hear sermons, and to disregard what we hear. Time is passing swiftly away—Jesus will come again in power and great glory. If, when he comes, he finds us unprepared, we shall be shut out of his presence forever!

January 8 Luke 1:18-23. The Unbelief of Zacharias.

Zacharias was so much astonished at the message of the angel, that he wanted to see some sign or miracle to prove that the angel came from God. Why was it wrong in Zacharias to desire a sign? Because he had already had one. The glorious appearance of the angel, which had filled him with fear, was a sufficient sign. God does not wish us to believe things without any proof. If he were to send a prophet to speak to us, he would give us some sign to show us that the prophet really came from him. When Moses spoke to the Israelites in Egypt, he gave them two signs; his rod was turned into a serpent, and his hand was made white with the leprosy, (Exod. 4) God is angry when men will not believe, after he has given them a sign. It was sinful in Zacharias not to believe after he had seen the glorious angel. Thus we find that though he was righteous before God, he was still subject to sin.

Unbelief is a great sin; for it is an insult to the truth of God. The angel rebuked the unbelieving priest, saying, "You shall be speechless." This gentle chastisement would at once remove the doubts of Zacharias, and remind him of his sin. In this way, God deals with his own people, when they forget what a great God He is.

Zacharias at length came out of the temple. It was now expected that he should bless the people in those beautiful words recorded in Numbers 6:24-27, beginning, "May the Lord bless you and

keep you;" but he could not speak, and he made signs to show the people what he had seen in the temple.

Each division of priests remained to serve in the temple from one Sabbath to the next; in a few days, therefore, Zacharias returned to his own house among the hills. What a history he had to unfold to Elizabeth! For he was able to inform her in writing. What a proof she beheld of the power of God in the silence of her husband! We should take notice of God's dealings with others. "Whoever is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."—Psalms 107:43.

How humbly and gratefully Elizabeth behaved on this occasion! She acknowledged the goodness of the Lord in having condescended to look upon her affliction; for she had been exposed to much reproach on account of having no child. When troubles are removed, we are apt to overlook the Lord's merciful hand! Perhaps we have been suffering under some trial; the unkindness of a relative, the dread of sickness, or the pressure of poverty—God removes the trial, and we forget how much it weighed us down before, and so we omit to thank the Lord heartily. A holy minister named Rutherford, in one of his letters, written two hundred years ago, says, that one of the things which most showed him his own wickedness by nature, was his feeling more disposed to call upon the Lord in trouble, than to thank him when delivered. Let us think over the things that troubled us a few years ago, and bless the hand which has lightened our load.

January 9 Luke 1:26-33. The Angel's visit to Mary.

God appointed that his Son should be born six months after John. So six months after the angel had spoken to Zacharias, he came to Mary. She was a poor woman, of a low, poor city, called Nazareth. She was indeed descended from King David, who had lived more than a thousand years before, and she was engaged to be married to a man called Joseph, also descended from King David. It had been prophesied that the Son of God would be born among David's family. Isaiah calls the Savior "A branch out of the stem of Jesse," (Isaiah 11:1,) for Jesse was the father of David. Jesse was like a tree, of which Jesus was a branch.

It seems probable that the angel visited Mary when she was alone. He said, "Greetings!" bidding her rejoice because a wonderful favor was about to be conferred on her. The Roman Catholics pretend that the words "highly favored" mean "full of grace;" and say, that Mary can now impart grace, and that the angel worshiped her. But we know that Mary was but a creature, and even a sinful creature, and that it is idolatry to treat her as the Lord.

Mary was full of humility; and God loves to honor the humble. She was alarmed at the greeting of the angel; but she was told not to fear, and was informed of the wonderful event about to happen. The Savior so long expected was to be her son. He was to be called "Jesus," which signifies Savior, and is the same name as Joshua. The angel said this Savior would be a great king. Perhaps you will inquire, Was he not equal with God? was he not King of kings from everlasting? Yes—but the angel spoke of his greatness in his human nature. As a man, he was to be king; therefore it was said that "the Lord would give unto him the throne of his father David." He was to be King over the house of Jacob, that is, over the Jews, the descendants of Jacob. The words that were afterwards written over the cross were true, "The King of the Jews." But is he not King of the Gentiles also? Yes; he is—and the day shall come when every tongue will confess that he is Lord;

and when every knee will bow to him. (Phil. 2.) Of his kingdom there shall be no end. Other kingdoms have come to an end. Nebuchadnezzar saw in a dream an image which represented all the kingdoms of the world—and he saw a little stone overthrow this image, and this stone become a mountain. (Dan. 2.) The stone represented Christ. He will bring all kingdoms to an end; and then he will be King over all the earth. (Zechariah 14:9.) Then there will be no more war, nor famine, nor misery; men will obey Christ's laws, and live in holiness and peace. That day has not come yet. Very few people have submitted to Christ; very few seek to do his will. Christ is a king against whom his subjects have rebelled. But do you not think that a king loves his faithful subjects at such a time? How dear to him is their obedience, when others scorn him! Does our King and Savior count us among his faithful subjects? Then he will acknowledge us when he comes in glory. This song shall soon be sung in heaven by believers—"We give you thanks, O Lord God Almighty, who is, and was, and is to come; because you have taken to you your great power and have reigned." (Rev. 11.) Then He will give reward to those who fear his name, small and great.

January 10 Luke 1:34-45. Mary's visit to Elizabeth. The angel had told Mary of the great power and glory of the Son she should have. He next told her of the holiness of his nature. His body was to be miraculously formed by the power of the Holy Spirit; though born of a human mother. Jesus had flesh and blood like ourselves, (Hebrews 2:14;) and he was subject to all our bodily weaknesses; he needed food and sleep; he suffered pain; he shed tears and sweat drops of blood; but he was without sin; (Hebrews 4:15 :) he was "holy, harmless, undefiled." (Hebrews 7:26.) Such was the child of whom Mary was to be the mother! Were such wonderful tidings ever delivered to any human creature, as were then spoken to Mary? Yet she believed. Her faith was greater than that of Zacharias; and she received no rebuke from the angel.

What a prospect lay before her! Many would disbelieve her story, and treat her with contempt. Yet Mary was willing to bear the trial. She said, "Be it unto me according to your word." God often makes those suffer most deeply whom he designs to honor most highly. When God intends that people should do much good to souls, (and this is one of the highest honors,) he often permits suspicion to be cast upon their characters; but at length he clears their innocence.

Mary had heard from the angel of the mercy shown to Elizabeth; and she went immediately to see her.

How interesting it is to hear what happened when these two holy women met! There was a great difference between their ages. Elizabeth was very old—Mary was not old—it is probable she was very young. Yet she was far more highly honored than her aged relative. The old are often envious of the young; but the pious Elizabeth was ready to do honor to Mary. When she saw her, she spoke by the power of the Holy Spirit, and acknowledged her as the mother of the Lord.

It must have comforted Mary to find that Elizabeth also believed in the things that were coming to pass. How it must have rejoiced her, to hear her say, "Blessed is she who has believed."

These words do not apply to Mary alone; but to everyone that believes. What ought we to believe? All the promises of God.

He has promised to cast out none who come to him, but to give them everlasting life. If we believe this promise, we shall come to him. If we have come to him, how many precious promises belong to us! God has promised to hear our prayers, to make all things work together for our good, to

deliver us out of every temptation, and to give us, even in this life, peace which passes all understanding. Those who trust in these promises find there is a performance of the things that were told them. It was a good answer that was once given by a poor woman to a minister who asked her, "What is faith?" She replied, "I am ignorant—I cannot answer well—but I think faith is taking God at his word."

January 11 Luke 1:46-56. The Song of Mary. This beautiful song shows us what was Mary's state of mind at this time. We must remember that there was much to try her in her present circumstances, for many people would not believe her account of the angel's visit, and would treat her with scorn. Yet she was filled with joy, because she enjoyed the favor of the Lord. She said, "My soul magnifies the Lord—and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." How great was Mary's faith! Faith enables us to rejoice in the midst of trials. Paul had this faith when he said, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed."

Mary knew that whatever men thought of her then, that all generations would "call her blessed," as the mother of the Savior. Do we not think her blessed? Surely we do. Let us not forget that we may be blessed also; for Jesus said that "Whoever shall do the will of my Father, which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12:50.) And at another time, when a woman said how blessed his mother was, Jesus answered, "Rather blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it." (Luke 11:28.)

It is sad to think what a wrong use the Roman Catholics have made of the words of Mary. They not only call her "blessed," (and she is blessed,) but they worship her, as if she were equal to him, "who is over all, God blessed forever." (Romans 9:5.) No—Mary was but a creature like ourselves; though she was made, by the grace of God, a holy creature, and was honored in so remarkable a manner.

We see in her song how great a value she set upon the blessings of redemption. She would not have done so, if she had not felt her need of a Savior. How she delights in praising God! She calls him mighty—"He who is mighty." She calls him holy—"Holy is his name." She speaks of his mercy—"His mercy is on those who fear him."

What does she mean in verse 51, when she says, "He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts?" Pharaoh and his proud captains once desired to destroy Israel—this was "the imagination of their hearts," but God drowned them in the Red Sea. Thus God at last will destroy all the enemies of Christ and his people. From this song we may learn to what people the Lord is merciful; "He fills the hungry with good things." He fed the poor Israelites, when they were hungry, with manna. But it is another sort of hunger which Jesus delights to satisfy. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." Such hungry souls shall never be sent empty away. If a beggar is sent empty away from one house, he can go to another; but if God were to send us empty away, and refuse to give us everlasting life, there is no other being to whom we could go. Will he send us empty away? No—he will not, if we feel our need of pardon; but if we imagine ourselves rich in goodness, He will give us none of His goodness or righteousness. Only those who know they are poor blind miserable sinners, will obtain anything from the Savior. Let us go now to his throne of grace to ask for mercy, and to obtain help in this our time of need; let us go with lowly hearts, feeling our unworthiness and

confessing our sins, and He will not send us "empty away."

January 12 Luke 1:57-66. The birth of John. When Elizabeth's son was born, her relations and friends came to rejoice with her. Worldly people, when they are prosperous, are often envied by their friends—but pious people, when they have received any great mercy, generally have friends who really rejoice with them.

How richly were Elizabeth's friends rewarded for their sympathy! During their visit they witnessed a wonderful proof of God's power.

It appears that Elizabeth knew what the angel had told Zacharias; for she said that the child was to be called "John," or "the grace of God." The friends, by signs, asked the father what the child should be called. We see by their making signs to him that he was deaf as well as mute. He asked for a writing tablet. These tablets were often spread with wax, and written upon with a piece of steel. Zacharias wrote, "His name is John," not "he shall be called John;" but his name is John, for the angel had already given the child that name. As soon as he had written these words, his tongue was loosed; and he made that use of it for which it had first been given him—he praised God. The angel had sentenced him to be mute until the day that the things he had told him of, would be performed, (verse 20.) That day was now come.

We perceive in this event how God can bring good out of evil—Zacharias by unbelief had become mute; but his gaining his speech again, must have helped others to believe. His friends related the things they had seen; so that people all around wondered what sort of a man John would become. Thus many were prepared to pay attention to his preaching when he grew up. We shall hear little of the childhood of John; but we know that he was holy from his birth. How acceptable to God is the offering up of our early years! as the poet says—"A flower, when offered in the bud, is no small sacrifice."

How bitter is the remembrance of a childhood and youth of wickedness! Paul could never remember without grief that he had once persecuted God's people.

Let not those who are young imagine that if they are at length converted, it will be of no consequence having long resisted the gracious offers of God. It is delightful to be able to sing with David, "You are my trust from my youth." Those who have not turned to God until their youth was past, often think within themselves, "O that I could pass my time over again! Had I loved God sooner, what sins I would have avoided! what sorrows I should have escaped! how much good I might have done! how much glory I might have brought to God!"

It is wicked, because we know that God is willing to receive the returning prodigal, to go far from him, not intending to return until all worldly pleasures are exhausted. Yet many who would be ashamed to treat an earthly friend in this manner, act thus towards their best, their heavenly Friend.

January 13 Luke 1:67-80. The Prophecy of Zacharias.

What great mercy God showed to Zacharias! Not only He restored his speech, but He enabled him to prophesy. Zacharias in his song does not speak so much about his own son, as about the Savior whom his son was to serve. This shows that his heart was fixed upon spiritual blessings, and not upon his own earthly comfort, or honor. In the beginning of his song, he speaks of the

Savior under the name of "A horn of salvation," (verse 69.) Why does he give him that name? With its horn an animal destroys its enemies. Christ came to destroy the devil and his works. Why then is He not called a horn of destruction? Because he destroys his enemies in order that he may save his people—therefore he is called "a horn of salvation." In the latter part of his song, Zacharias calls the Savior by another name, "The dayspring," (verse 78.) The world sat in darkness and the shadow of death until Christ appeared. They were like travelers, who had lost their way among dangerous cliffs and precipices, and were suddenly overtaken by the darkness; so that they dare not stir, lest they would fall into some deep pit. All at once the sun arose "to guide their feet into the way of peace." Our native land once sat in this darkness, and was filled with idols, until missionaries came and preached the gospel. But even now that Christ's name is known in every town and village, each soul sits in darkness until the "Dayspring from on high" shines into the heart. In the midst of his song, Zacharias addresses his own infant son, saying, "And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High." At the time he uttered these words, John was a helpless infant; but his father knew how great he would become. Very little is related of his childhood. In the last verse of this chapter it is declared that he grew like other children; and also that he became strong in spirit. We know what it is to become strong in body. But what is it to become strong in spirit? It is to have faith in God's word, and to resist in God's strength the temptations of Satan. The apostle John in his first Epistle says, "I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one," (1 John 2:14.) Believers who are strong in spirit are called "young men." How then did John become thus strong in spirit? No doubt it was by secret prayer and meditation in the deserts. It is written that "He was in the deserts until the days of his showing unto Israel;" or until the time when he began to preach publicly, which he did either at twenty-seven or thirty years of age. Those who teach others must be prepared by learning first of God. And what did John the Baptist teach? His father declares in his song what he taught, (76, 77) "You shall go before the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto the people by the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God."

It was 'salvation through Christ' that John proclaimed. None of the old prophets showed the way as clearly as the holy Baptist. But we have heard it still more clearly described by Jesus and his apostles. Have we rejoiced in hearing that sins are pardoned through the blood of the Lamb? None ever rejoiced in hearing these tidings, except those who knew that they needed pardon.

If a man were to enter this room with a pardon from the governor in his hand, we would feel neither joy nor gratitude. We would say, "There must be some mistake; we have never been brought to court, nor convicted, nor sentenced to death. What is the use of this pardon to us?" The reason that most people hear the Gospel with such indifference is, that they do not know that they are condemned by God's law. They say, "Our sins can easily be forgiven; they are neither many nor great; others have sinned more than we; surely we shall escape punishment." But when a sinner feels that he deserved to die, then he thanks God for his tender mercy, in having sent the Savior into the world.

January 14 Matthew 1. The Angel's visit to Joseph.

Matthew wrote his gospel before any of the other evangelists. He wrote it for the Jews especially; and therefore he very often refers to the Old Testament, (held in such reverence by the Jews,) and

shows that Jesus fulfilled what the prophets had said. Luke and Mark, who wrote for the Gentiles especially, often explain Jewish customs, but Matthew always alludes to them, as customs well understood. Matthew himself had been a tax-collector, before he was called to be one of the apostles of the Lord. His other name was Levi. Luke speaks of him by that name. Luke 5:27.

Matthew begins his history with an account of the forefathers of our Savior—to show that Jesus was descended from Abraham, and from David, as God had promised the Messiah should be. This account is called a genealogy. It is Joseph's descent, and not Mary's, which is here recorded. Luke in his third chapter gives us another genealogy. That genealogy is a little different from Matthew's; it must therefore be the genealogy of Mary. It is true the name of Joseph is mentioned there also; but the names of women were never inserted in public registers.

There is one seeming contradiction between the two genealogies. Matthew says that Jacob was the father of Joseph. Luke says that Heli was the father of Joseph. We must conclude that Heli was the father-in-law of Joseph, and the father of Mary. How easily the difference is explained to an honest mind! And yet it has been taken up by unbelievers and brought forward as an objection against the Christian religion. How much at a loss must those be for an objection, who lay hold of such a one as this!

We will now proceed to the interesting history itself—Joseph is not blamed for his suspicions of Mary, for it appears he had no proof that a miracle had been wrought. Still the kindness of his heart made him unwilling to expose her publicly. God in his great mercy sent an angel to tell him the whole truth. Thus our gracious Father will keep us from falling into errors through ignorance, if we desire earnestly to know what is right.

Mary probably suffered much grief from Joseph's suspicions—but God cleared up her innocence. Every person who is falsely suspected may trust in His fulfilling His promise in Psalm 37; "Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass—and he shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday." When falsely accused, we should not make a loud and angry defense; but commit our cause to God, and He will defend us. The concluding words of the angel are very remarkable. They are written in verse 21, "You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." The name "Jesus" means God the Savior. Observe, however, the nature of this salvation. It is not a salvation in sin, but a salvation from sin. "He shall save his people from their sins." If we knew what sin was, we would feel what a great salvation this is. Sin has ruined this world; and it will ruin each of us eternally, unless we are saved from it. There is only one who is able to save us. That is Immanuel—God with us. Jesus, the Son of God, came down to dwell with us that he might save us from dwelling forever with Satan. How does he save? By shedding his own blood as an atonement for sin, and then by washing all who believe in him in that blood. Therefore his people sing this song of praise to his name—"Unto him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever! Amen."

January 15 Luke 2:1-7. The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is very interesting to observe the providence of God with regard to the place of Christ's birth. The prophet Isaiah had said that the Savior should be born in Bethlehem, (v. 2.) Yet Mary lived in Nazareth, about seventy miles distance from Bethlehem. God could easily have commanded Mary

to go to Bethlehem—but instead of doing this, he caused circumstances to happen which induced her to go there. The great emperor of Rome, who possessed all the chief countries in the world, and among the rest, Canaan, the land of the Jews, desired at this time to number his subjects. He sent forth an order to have their names enrolled in a census. Joseph being descended from King David, went to the city of Bethlehem, (whence David came,) to have his name enrolled, and Mary his wife accompanied him.

Caesar Augustus, the Emperor of Rome, little knew that by this decree he was causing a prophecy concerning the Son of God to be fulfilled; for he knew nothing of the true God, or of his word. But we, who read the history, ought to admire the ways of God—how easily he can bring everything to pass which he has determined to do; for he is "great in counsel" (or in making plans) "and mighty in work," Jeremiah 32:19, (or in bringing his plans to pass.) It is therefore very unbelieving in us to trouble ourselves about the future, for there is nothing we can desire that God could not easily cause to happen; and if he does not bring it to pass, it is because the thing we desire does not agree with his own wise and gracious designs. When Mary arrived at Bethlehem, she was obliged to lodge in a stable; for the inn was full, many people having come to have their names enrolled also. Thus it happened, that her holy baby was born in a stable, and laid in a feeding trough. Are we surprised that the glorious Son of God should thus be received into this world? Let us remember why he came. Not to enjoy himself, but to save us. In order to save us, two things were necessary. That he should obey the law of God, which we had broken, and that he should suffer the punishment due to us for breaking it. In order that he might do these things, he was always placed in suffering circumstances. Poverty and contempt nursed him in his infancy. The most splendid palace on earth would have been too humble an abode for him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain. But instead of opening his infant eyes in a palace, he opened them in a stable. It was wonderful condescension in him who was equal with God, to dwell with men, but in the stable he was surrounded by animals. What must the angels who had worshiped him in heaven have felt when they saw him thus degraded! Yet this treatment was not to be compared to that which he afterwards endured on Calvary. As he walked through this world at each step his way became rougher; his first bed was a feeding trough, but his last was a cross. And it was men, whom he came to redeem, who treated him in this manner. And have we not all treated him in the same, casting him out of our thoughts, and crucifying him by our sins? Yes, we are all guilty before God, and Jesus alone is righteous. But he is not righteous for himself, but for us; neither did he suffer for himself, but for us. He was cast out, that we might be brought in. He was rejected of men, that we might be accepted of God.

January 16 Luke 2:8-14. The Angels' appearance to the Shepherds. In the circumstances of our Savior's birth, there was a great mixture of lowliness and glory. Jesus was laid in a feeding trough; yet angels announced his appearance. But to whom did angels announce it? not to princes, but to shepherds; thus showing that God had chosen the poor of this world. Through all our Savior's life, there was the same mixture of lowliness and glory—he lived with fishermen, yet was sometimes visited by angels; he had a sorrowful countenance, yet once it shone brighter than the sun; he was poorly clothed, yet, on one occasion, his clothing was whiter than any launderer on earth could whiten it; he was so weak that he could not bear his cross, yet so strong that he could raise the dead from their graves.

Christ's people are like their master—they are often poor and afflicted, yet there is a glory about them that makes them as the sons of God; for their minds are filled with nobler thoughts than those which occupy the kings of the earth. While princes are thinking of their sumptuous feasts, their high titles, and glittering crowns; the children of God are meditating upon the wedding supper of the Lamb, the thrones of light; and the God of glory.

How much astonished the poor shepherds were, with the appearance of the angel, who turned the darkness into day! How much his message must also have surprised them! He told them that the Son of God was now come into the world, and was in the city of David, (or Bethlehem.) Was not this news hard to believe? But what the angel added made it harder still; for he said that this glorious baby was lying in a feeding trough. Immediately, however, God confirmed his words by causing a multitude of angels to appear in the heavens; not two or three witnesses, but, perhaps, two or three million.

These angels were not silent witnesses; they sang a song, whose very words are handed down to us. It is the only song sung by angels upon earth that we ever heard. In the book of Revelation some of their songs in heaven are recorded; such as "Worthy is the Lamb to receive honor, power, and glory;" and "You have created all things, for your pleasure they are and were created." But here we read of a song to which poor shepherds listened. It is a short song, but contains much; for it explains the purpose for which the Savior was come into the world, and the reason he was sent. The purpose was to bring glory to God, and peace on earth. The reason he was sent was because God had good-will towards men. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." Has not Christ's coming brought glory to God? Since Christ came into the world, how many redeemed sinners have glorified God for the gift of his Son! But what are these praises compared to the songs of believers and angels throughout eternity! Never will they cease to praise the God of love for sending his only Son to die for wretched men. But we may ask, "Is there peace on earth?" Not yet; but there will be. This earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, and then war shall cease; the swords shall be turned into ploughshares, and the spears into pruning-hooks, (see Isaiah 2;) because the Prince of Peace shall reign. And are these God's gracious promises to men? Let us not doubt the Lord's good-will towards us. It hurts a tender parent, if he perceives that his children doubt his good-will towards them—he tries to convince them of it by numerous acts of kindness; and he is much disappointed if he cannot succeed in winning their confidence. Has not the Lord done enough to convince us of his good-will? Ought we not always to say, "If God spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not with him freely give us all things."

January 17 Luke 2:15-20. The Shepherds' Visit to Bethlehem.

We find that the shepherds believed the news they had heard. They did not say, "Let us go and see whether this thing is come to pass;" but they said, "Let us now go and see this thing which has come to pass." They believed before they had seen. "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." They spoke also as if they felt grateful for having heard the tidings; for they added, "which the Lord has made known to us." Truly they had reason to be grateful—for God had shown them very great favor. Let us not forget that we also are among those to whom the Lord has made known the birth of his Son. There are millions on this earth who have never heard of the love of God, in sending a Savior; but we have heard of it from our infant days. Do we, like these

shepherds, long to see our blessed Redeemer?

How much Joseph and Mary must have been delighted at the entrance of the shepherds! Though overlooked by the world, the holy child was honored by these poor men. Even now there are only a few who acknowledge him as their Lord and Master, and these few are generally poor, like the shepherds of Bethlehem.

These good men did not keep the things they had heard and seen, a secret. The angel had said that he brought glad tidings which should be to all people; therefore the shepherds told the news to all. Like them, if we believe in Christ ourselves, we shall speak of him to those who know him not.

How did the people receive the tidings the shepherds brought? They wondered; but probably they soon forgot what they had heard—while Mary "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." This is the way in which sermons should be heard, and in which the Bible should be read. All who get good from what they hear, keep it, and ponder it in their hearts. But how many cast from their minds what they hear!

There are two comparisons used in the Scriptures to show the careless way in which people hear the word of God. One of these comparisons is contained in Ezekiel 33:31-32. The Israelites listened to the preaching of Ezekiel as people listen to one who can play well on an instrument, and who can sing a lovely song. It is not necessary to think of the music we have heard; it is enough if it pleases us while we are hearing it—but we should not listen to sermons in this manner, and think it enough, if they amuse us. The other comparison may be found in the first chapter of James's Epistle. It is there said that some listen to God's word as a person looks in a mirror, and then goes away and forgets what he has seen. Such listeners soon lose the good impressions they have received, and continue worldly-minded, and ungodly.

There is a beautiful description in the first Psalm, of the right manner of receiving the word. The godly man is represented as meditating in God's law, day and night.

One verse of God's holy word laid up in the heart, will do us more good than a whole chapter hastily read, and little considered. Are there any passages of the Scriptures which are dear to our hearts? Has any verse strengthened us in the hour of temptation; or comforted us in the day of trouble? Have we laid up any in store against the day when we shall walk through the valley of the shadow of death, when flesh and heart will fail, and when no mortal arm can sustain our sinking souls?

January 18 Luke 2:21-32. The Song of Simeon.

We read that when the Savior was eight days old, he was circumcised, and named Jesus. It was not necessary that he should be brought to Jerusalem for that purpose; but at the end of forty days, when he was nearly six weeks old, he was brought to Jerusalem, for two purposes. His mother was then first permitted, after the birth of her son, to enter the temple. She went there with an offering of thanksgiving. If she could have afforded it, she would have brought a lamb of a year old; but being very poor, she presented two doves, or pigeons. (See Lev. 12.) In the second place, Jesus as a firstborn son was presented to the Lord; for, ever since the slaying of the firstborn of the people of Egypt, and the passing over the firstborn of Israel, God had claimed all the firstborn as his own. (Ex. 13.) The firstborn of cows, sheep, and goats were offered in sacrifice—the

firstborn of other animals were not offered, but money was presented in their place, and this money was used in buying sacrifices. Neither did God allow firstborn children to be offered in sacrifice; but he permitted them to be redeemed with money.

Mary accordingly came to the temple to present her firstborn son to the Lord. When was so acceptable an offering made to the Father! His only beloved Son was brought to his Father's house, and given into his Father's bosom. The priest supposed that he was redeemed by money; but this holy child could not be redeemed by money; he was a Lamb without blemish, and upon the altar of the cross he was soon to be laid, a willing, a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. When Mary brought her child into the temple, a most interesting event took place. An aged prophet appeared, and acknowledged the infant Savior as his Lord.

Prophets had almost ceased to prophesy for many years before Jesus came into the world. Malachi, who had prophesied four hundred years before his coming, was the last whose name is recorded. But at the time of Jesus' coming, the spirit of prophecy was again shed upon some holy people. We have read the prophecies of Elizabeth, and Mary, and Zacharias, in the first chapter of Luke, and we now read the prophecy of Simeon. God had informed him that he would not die until Christ came; and He had also let him know the precise moment when the parents had brought the divine infant into the temple. Simeon entered and found Joseph and Mary doing for their child after the custom of the law, that is, presenting him to the Lord before God's priest. At this interesting juncture, the aged believer first beheld his Savior, took him in his arms and blessed him; for his faith was so strong that he was able to believe that the infant of the poor woman he saw, was the Lord of glory. The words that he uttered as he held the child are very beautiful. We perceive that it had been his earnest desire to see his Lord with his bodily eyes before he died. This was a very natural desire; and some people who do not really love Christ might desire the same; they might desire it from curiosity, but Simeon desired it from affection. And why did Simeon love the Savior? Because he valued his great salvation; he was waiting for the "consolation of Israel," (the name given to Christ in verse 25.) He was a penitent sinner, and it was a consolation to him to know that God had provided a Savior. He calls Jesus "his salvation," in verse 30. "My eyes have seen your salvation." He rejoiced also to think that other men would be saved through Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles; for he said, (verses 31, 32,) that God had given him to all people, a light to enlighten the Gentiles, as well as the glory of Israel. This shows the love to others which dwelt in Simeon's heart. He longed that all should know his Savior. It is recorded of a celebrated minister, named John Howe, that in his latter days he greatly desired to attain such a knowledge of Christ, and feel such a sense of his love, as might be a foretaste of the joys of heaven. After his death, a paper was found in his Bible recording how God had answered his prayer. One morning, (and he noted the day,) he awoke, his eyes swimming with tears, overwhelmed with a sense of God's goodness in shedding down his grace into the hearts of men. He never could forget the joy of these moments—they made him long still more ardently for that heaven, which, from his youth, he had panted to behold. How happy thus to see Jesus by faith before we die! then we too shall behold him some day with our bodily eyes; for though we die without that sight, we shall be raised again to gaze upon our glorious Redeemer, coming in the clouds of heaven!

All true believers may now say, with Job—"But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God! I will see him for myself. Yes, I will see him with my own eyes. I am overwhelmed at the

thought!" Job 19:25-27

January 19 Luke 2:33-35. The words of Simeon to Mary.

Both Joseph and Mary marveled at the things spoken of Christ by Simeon. The things that made them marvel were that he should be "a light to enlighten the Gentiles," as well as the glory of Israel; for God's goodness to the Gentiles was a mystery long hidden from the Jewish nation. But we happy Gentiles have experienced it, and some among us have found Christ to be a light to enlighten our darkness.

Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary—and then he addressed Mary in particular, and prepared her for all the shame and sorrow that her Son should undergo; for what he had said before might have led her to think that joy only was to be his portion, and that all men would immediately do him honor. But this was not to be the case. So great would be the agonies of the Son, that a sword would pierce through the mother's heart. And was not the soul of Mary thus pierced, when she beheld her Son expiring on the cross?

Simeon's words concerning the child demand attentive consideration—"This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel." Let us inquire into their meaning, for all that concerns our Savior is very important to us. How was he the fall of many in Israel? Does Christ make men fall? Simeon here compares Christ to a stone over which many stumble and fall. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 1:23, that Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, or something over which they fell. How was it they fell over him? Through pride. They would not believe that their own righteousness was worthless in God's sight, and that Christ's righteousness alone could be accepted. This is the account Paul gives of Christ's rejection by the Jews. His words are, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God—for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes." Romans 10:3-4. And what is the reason that any still refuse Christ? Is it not because they do not feel their need of his righteousness? Is it not because they feel satisfied with their own performances, and imagine that God is satisfied also? And when they are told that they are sinners, they answer in their hearts, if not with their lips, "We are not such great sinners as others are!" People in this state of mind fall over Christ as over a stumbling-stone—they cannot receive him, because they do not desire his salvation. Peter, in his Epistle, says that Christ was to such people, "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to those who stumble at the word, being d

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