

THE GREAT BIRTHDAY

“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 Savior Jesus Christ anymore 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 there is certainly 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, established by State Law 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 that He will accept your devotion. But, 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 use 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 open as sleep demanded its due of them. All of 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 of God. “The angel of the Lord came upon them.” Are you astonished that at first they were afraid? Would you not be alarmed if such a thing should happen to you? The stillness of the night, the suddenness of the apparition, the extraordinary splendor 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 “sorely 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 Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” They were bid to shake off all thoughts of fear and to give themselves up to joy! Doubtless they did so and, among all mankind, there were none so happy at that dead of night as were these shepherds who had seen an amazing sight!

They would never forget that night and now were consulting whether they should not hasten away to gaze upon a sight which would be more delightful still, namely, the Babe of which 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.

1. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST SHOULD BE THE SUBJECT OF SUPREME JOY. Rightly so. We have the angelic guarantee for rejoicing because Christ is born! It is a Truth of God 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.

Besides, 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! Although 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 we are sure 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 spoke in accents of delight. Yes, 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, there suddenly appeared a band of choristers 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 new-born 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 a 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 pour forth a glad chorus of praise, singing unto the Lord a new song!

Brothers and Sisters, if the birth of Jesus was so gladsome to our cousins, the angels, what should it be to us? If it made our neighbors, who had comparatively so small a share in it, sing, 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, awhile, that we may crowd Heaven with the songs of mortal men? Yes, verily, so let it be!—

“Glory to the new born 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! If God thus takes 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 forbidden fruit, God might have said, “I give you up, O Adam, and cast off your race. Even as I gave up Lucifer and all his host, so I abandon you to follow your 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 forever, for Jesus, the Well-Beloved, is born of a virgin! God would not 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 the Fall!

The race is not to be outlawed and marked with the brand of death and Hell, or to be utterly abandoned to destruction, for, lo, the Lord has 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 has 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 does 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 forever! Let us sound the fond 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 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 is 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 is necessary 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, your God cannot mean to curse you! Look at God Incarnate! What do you see 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! Yes, 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 Savior. “Unto you is born this day a Savior.” Brothers and Sisters, I know who will be most glad, today, to think that Christ was born a Savior. It will be those who are most conscious of their sinnership! If you would draw music out of that ten-stringed harp—the word, “Savior”—pass it over to a sinner. “Savior” is the harp, but “sinner” is the finger that must touch the strings and bring forth the melody. If you know yourself lost by nature and lost by practice. If you feel sin like a plague at your heart. If evil wearies and worries you. If you have known the burden and the shame of iniquity, then will it be bliss to you even to hear of that Savior whom the Lord has provided!

Even as a Babe, Jesus, the Savior, will be precious to you! But most of all because He has now finished all the work of your salvation! You will 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 you who are the chief of sinners, even unto you, you consciously guilty ones, is born a Savior! He is a Savior by birth—for this purpose is He born! To save sinners is His birthright and office! It is from now on an institution of the Divine dominion and an office of the Divine Nature to save the lost! Henceforth God has laid help 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 joy if not here?

Next, the angel tells us that this Savior 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 qualifications. 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, Jesus Christ is completely prepared and qualified for all the work of our salvation. Let our hearts be glad! We have not a nominal Savior, but a Savior fully equipped! He is One who in 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 Savior," and a Savior 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 marvelously 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 Savior was born to be the Lord, yet He was so born in lowliness that they would find Him a Babe, wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. Is there cause of joy there? I say, yes, indeed, there is, for it is the terror of the Godhead which keeps the sinner, oftentimes, away from reconciliation! But see how the Godhead has graciously concealed itself in a Babe, a little Babe—a Babe that needed to be wrapped in swaddling bands like any other new-born child! Who fears to approach Him? Who ever heard of trembling in the presence of a babe? Yet is the Godhead there!

My Soul, when you cannot, for very amazement, stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire. When the Divine Glory is like a consuming fire to your spirit and the sacred majesty of Heaven is altogether overpowering to you, then come to this Babe, and say, "Yet God is here, and here can I meet Him in the Person of His dear Son, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Oh, what bliss there is in Incarnation if we remember that herein God's Omnipotence comes 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 praetorian legionaries, nor pampered by vassal sovereigns. 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 earlier oxen had come to feed, you would say, "This is condescension, indeed."

O you poor, be glad, for Jesus is born in poverty and cradled in a manger! O you sons of toil, rejoice, for the Savior is born of a lowly virgin and a carpenter is His foster father. O you people, oftentimes despised and downtrodden, the Prince of the Democracy is born—one chosen out of the people is exalted to the throne! O you 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 life was hungry as you are hungry, was weary as you are weary and wore humble garments like your own! Yes, He suffered

worse poverty than you, for He was without a place where to lay His head! Let the heavens and the earth be glad since God has 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 center! What love is there revealed! What power is that which brought the Divine One down from Glory to a 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 marvelously displayed and veiled. Conceive the whole sun to be focused to a single point and yet so softly revealed as to be endurable by the most tender eyes—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! Marvelous 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 comes 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 new-born Child reveals it! And let us sing if we value peace on earth, for He is come to bring it! Yes, 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 for 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 Brothers and Sisters, 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 gray.”

But a thought struck me and filled me with intense joy. I tell it 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 of 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, you waste places of Jerusalem! Take up the strain, O you dwellers in the wilderness, and let the multitude of the isles be glad! You, 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 you 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, Brothers and Sisters, they do not all rejoice, not even all of those who know this glorious Truth of God. Nor does it stir the hearts of half of 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, yes, wiser than the would-be wise whose wisdom can only manifest itself in quibbling.

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 sepulchers of the heroes, the powerful rebuke which the spirit of skepticism 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! 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, "You fools! The simpletons believed and herds 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 Savior 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 sufficient arguments to convince a wooden post? They have made it as plain as that three times two are 18 that there is no God, nor angel, nor spirit! They have proven 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.

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 Spirit deceive us when He bade His servant, Luke, write this record! Let us forget the long interval between and only remember 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 still singing, "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 marvelous Babe. What did they do but consult together and say, "Let us now go to 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 near 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 there! Hasten there with all confidence, for you are not come unto the mountain that might not be touched, and that burned with fire—you are come unto the blood of sprinkling, which speaks better things than that of Abel! Come near, come nearer, nearer still! "Come," is His own word to those who labor and are heavy laden, and that same word He will address to you at the last—"Come, you 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 Brothers and Sisters, 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 eyes this great, grand and glorious Truth of God that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us! This is the way to have joy today, 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 vault of Heaven rings
Glory to the King of kings!
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Veiled 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 times, “Christmas broached the mightiest ale,” but nowadays Christmas keepers must 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 says, “What have you to do to keep My birthday and mention My name in connection with your 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 Savior 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 new-born King! Others of you can neither preach nor sing. Well, then, you must do what the shepherds did, and what did they do? 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 your heart the grand Truth of God 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 diamond 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, frankincense of praise and myrrh of penitence.

Bring everything of your heart's best and something 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. PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke 2:1-21.

HYMN FROM OUR OWN HYMN BOOK—249, 260, 256.

END OF VOLUME 22.