

Mr. Bryan's Bible Talks

THE BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF CHRIST

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR OCTOBER 8 (Luke 11:40-52)

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

And when they saw him, they were amazed; and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

One of the most wonderful and richest chapters in all the Bible is the second chapter of Luke.

It is the chapter that gives us the most detailed and beautiful account of the birth of Jesus.

It is the chapter that tells of the good tidings of great joy brought to the shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night.

It is the chapter that records the most beautiful hymn of praise angels and men have ever sung:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

And it is the chapter that records what we know of a certainty of Christ's childhood.

THE ONLY UNIVERSALLY OBSERVED BIRTHDAY

It is with His childhood that our Talk today deals, but His entrance into life upon earth is too important to pass over in silence. His is the only birthday widely celebrated throughout the civilized world.

Each nation has its great characters to whom succeeding generations pay homage. In this country we have the birthday of Washington, the Father of His Country.

He has been dead but a little more than a century and yet but a small part of the nation's population observes the day set apart by statute in remembrance of his services.

Many cease from ordinary work because it is a holiday, but comparatively few give serious thought to the virtues and accomplishments of the Father of His Country.

Lincoln's birthday is also a national holiday and yet a still smaller number observe it in the spirit which prompted the passage of the law. Lincoln was the greatest of Republicans, as Jefferson was the greatest of Democrats, and yet while these names are invoked in campaigns for political purposes the birthdays of these two great statesmen attract little attention.

Even the Fourth of July, the birthday of the nation, is given over to amusement rather than to sober reflection on the nation's past struggles, its present problems and its future greatness.

But Christ's birthday is looked forward to by the children throughout the Christian world—not by the children of Christians alone but by the children of unbelievers as well. No other babe has ever brought so much joy into the world.

"And since the Child of Nazareth

Set on it thus His seal and sign,

Who—till man's sin hath marred it—saith

That childhood is not still divine?"

We compute time from His advent—the

Christian era starts with His birth. Is it not strange that any should speak disrespectfully of One who has so profoundly impressed the world? It is more than strange—it is amazing—that some children to whom Christmas was once the great day of the year should, even before they reach maturity, begin to speak lightly of One at whose coming the angels sang the song of peace on earth, good will to men; whose star led the wise men to the manger at Bethlehem.

JESUS' HUMBLE BIRTH

The fact that He was sent into a humble home and surrounded in His youth by everyday people is not without significance.

Man's birth, so far as he is concerned, is a matter of chance. He is not consulted as to the age in which he shall be born or as to the nation or the race or the family. Because man is thus the child of chance, both as to his birth and as to his going hence, he has never been able to solve the riddle of life without revelation.

It is only when he learns that he was created, not as other things were made but in the image of God, put in charge of all the earth and made responsible for the wise use of every moment of his life, every atom of his power and every ounce of his influence, that he is able to account for his presence here.

Christ, coming into the world with a heavenly mission, becomes the divinely conceived child of a virgin mother and spends His youth among the plain folk of Nazareth. He was to present a simple gospel to which the common people would listen gladly and appeal to the mass of mankind. In what other environment could He have passed from infancy to the days of His ministry?

CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE

"And the Child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him."

At the age of 12 He went with his parents to Jerusalem to the Feast of the Passover, a day which the children of Israel observed for nearly 20 centuries.

When the parents started back home Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem. As there was quite a company of these devout Jews returning together, the absence of the Child was not noticed until the end of a day's journey when they sought Him among the kinsfolk and acquaintances.

As soon as they found that He was not with them they hurried back to Jerusalem and after three days found Him in the temple, "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions." Luke tells us that all that heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

His parents were astonished at what they saw and the mother, remembering with what alarm they had searched for Him, chided Him for causing them so much anxiety. The answer made by Jesus showed at what an early age He entered upon the serious business of His life:

"Wilt ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

They did not catch the full meaning of His words; but the mother—as mothers are wont to do—"kept all these sayings in her heart."

THE HOME'S BEST PICTURE

The picture of Christ in the temple is the best child's picture for the home. It will be found in many homes today, and should be in more. The picture is the most impressive lesson that there is, because it teaches all the time. The lessons that are taught weekly in the Sunday Schools and daily at the fireside are sometimes nullified by the lessons that are hourly spoken by the pictures that hang upon the walls.

Jesus returned to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary and was subject unto them, and He "increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." His growth was harmonious and well-rounded. As He grew in stature He grew in wisdom; as He found favor with God he also found favor with man. There is an important lesson in that single verse.

MAN IS A TRINITY

Civilization might be defined as the harmonious development of body and mind and heart. Some give all the attention to the body, some give all the attention to the mind and a few are so absorbed in spiritual development that they slight both body and mind. Man is a trinity—

body, mind and soul; the same Creator gave all three and gave them to be used.

The Christian life unites intellectual strength to physical perfection and then places both mind and body under spiritual supervision. Christ, though supernatural in birth and divine in His mission, was natural in His development.

And so it was intended that each individual should find "favor with God and man." There is no inconsistency between righteousness and popularity. Righteousness brings one into harmony with God and Christ-like sympathy gives him the good will of his fellows.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE BOY CHRIST

Christ, even in His boyhood, gives us an example of growth in body, in mind and in grace. A boy, as well as a man, can be Christ-like. Jesus as a boy is an example to boys and girls, just as He, when grown, is an example to men and women.

Our Sunday Schools and parents are not living up to their possibilities and duties unless they impress upon the children the practical character of Christ's teachings. They are for the present life as well as for the life to come. Christ brought life as well as immortality to light. He came that men might have life and have it more abundantly.

The wise men welcomed Him at His birth; the wise men in the temple were astonished as the child Christ questioned and answered questions; the wise of today may well stand in awe as they witness the spread of Christ's teachings. He is the only growing figure in all the world.

A SERMON GOOD FOR ALL TIME

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR OCTOBER 15 (Luke 3:7-17)

Then he said to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

And the people asked him, saying, What shall we shall we do then?

He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?

And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;

John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:

Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

"The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

Thus Luke, greatest of Gospel writers, begins his graphic account of the ministry of John the Baptist, forerunner of the Christ.

Repentance was John's message to the Hebrew world. "Ye offspring of vipers," or "generation of vipers," as the authorized version has it, was the way in which he addressed "the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him."

A child of the desert, where he lived on locusts and wild honey, and clothed himself with camel's hair, "and with a girdle of skin about his loins," John dressed his thought in the language with which he was familiar.

"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

But it was not sufficient that the people should flee from this wrath; John told them bluntly they must repent and "bring forth fruits worthy of repentance."

It was a sermon good for all time that John the Baptist, appearing unexpectedly from his desert fastness, preached nineteen hundred years ago to the Hebrew multitude.

THE BEGINNING OF REFORM

Repentance is the beginning of reform. No one can begin a new life until he recognizes that he has sinned, and turns from sin. Such a man may reflect upon his past; he may