

SUNDAY SCHOOLS

LESSON

LESSON I.—JANUARY 1.

GOLDEN TEXT.—In him was life; and the life was the light of men.—John 1:4.

1. "In the beginning." Before the world was made (John 17: 5). At the beginning of created things the Word "was." Already existed. "The Word." The Greek Logos means "not only the spoken word, but the thought expressed by the spoken word; it is the spoken word expressive of thought." It is "the will of God manifested in personal action." Hence here it refers to "the Son of God existing from all eternity, and manifested in space and time in the person of Jesus Christ." "He is the living expression of the nature, purposes, and will of God."—Prof. Plummer in Cambridge Bible. The Word "denotes the personal revealer of God."—Biblical World. "The Word was with God." The Greek preposition expresses not merely being beside, but a living union and communion; implying the active notion of intercourse. "The divine Word not only abode with the Father from all eternity, but was in the living, active relation of communion with him."—M. R. Vincent.—"The Word was God." There is only one God, and this statement guards against the error which the phrase "with God" might suggest, that there is more than one. In unfolding this main proposition we note:

I. He Was the Creator.—Vs. 2, 3. 2. "The same was in the beginning." The relation was not new with the coming of Christ. "Ask the sun if ever it were without its beams. Ask the fountain if ever it were without its streams. So God was never without his Son."—Arrowsmith.

3. "All things were made by him." Through him. Creation was his work, his department. "And without him." Apart from him. "Made." Brought into being. All creation was a revelation of God and of his Son.

II. He Is the Source of Life.—V. 4. Read vs. 3 and 4 as in margin of Am. R. "Without him was not anything made. That which hath been made was life in him. "In him was life." Compare the Genesis account of creation, where the first movement of life in dead matter came from the Spirit of God brooding upon the face of the waters, the unorganized material which thus became organized through life.

III. He Was the Source of Light. 4. "And the life was the light of men." Compare Genesis, And God said: (The Word) "Let there be light, and there was light."

5. "And the light shineth in darkness." Sin is both death and darkness. As life destroys death, so light destroys darkness, moral darkness arising from absence of moral life, and the darkness of ignorance of those things we most need to know. According to the Expositor's Greek Test., "darkness was the expression naturally used by secular Greek writers to describe the world's condition. Thus Lucian (A. D. 120) 'We all seem like those wandering in darkness.' Compare Lucretius (B. C. 55) 'In what darkness of life, in how many dangers, this age is passed.'" "And the darkness comprehended (R. V., "apprehended") it not." Did not admit or receive the light so that the darkness would be removed. This explains why the light has not seemed to shine as brightly as would be expected from such a light. The sun was shining with all its glory, but the clouds intercepted it.

Practical Conclusion.—The Son of God thus portrayed is the only being perfectly adapted to be the Saviour of the world, able to reveal the will of God, and the infinite heart of his love; with perfect knowledge of the laws of creation, and the nature of man; with

power to impart spiritual life and light.

I. The Witness Sent to Announce His Advent on Earth.—Vs. 6-8. 6. "There was (came, appeared) a man sent from God." "An historical appearance sent to fulfill a definite divine purpose."—Expositor's Greek Test. How he came and was sent is described in Luke and Matthew. He was foretold in Mal. 3: 1; 4: 5. John's name expresses this fact, as it means "the grace (or gracious gift) of God."

7. "Came for a witness." "The whole of this gospel is a citing of witnesses, but John comes first, and is of most importance."—Expositor's Greek Test. The word "witness" occurs forty-seven times in this gospel."—W. W. White.

How John Bore Witness. (1) By his testimony to a fact which had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit (John 1: 33, 34). (2) By showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. (3) By fulfilling the prophecy that Elijah was to come before the Messiah and prepare the way before him. (4) By awakening the religious nature of men, and arousing their spiritual activities, leading them to feel their sins and needs, he turned their eyes to the light which would help them. (5) He pointed out Jesus to the people.

"That all men through him might believe." This was his purpose, and he was, in fact, the means of the general belief in Jesus, which will finally be universal.

8. "He was not that Light" (the light). Said lest some should mistake his great message of law, conviction of sin, condemnation of wrong, to be the gospel of the Messiah.

II. How the True Light Could Be Known.—V. 9. "That was the true Light." True, not as opposed to false, but to the symbolical or imperfect; hence the real, the ideal, the genuine light, the light of the world. "Which lighteth every man." The test of the true religion is that it is adapted to all needs, all circumstances, all ages, all races, all degrees of intelligence. "That cometh into the world." In the common version this is construed with "every man." In the R. V., with "Light."

III. How the True Light Was Received.—Vs. 10-13. Rejected by Some. Four strong reasons are given why he should be received.

First Reason. He was the light for all men, needed by every one.

Second Reason. 10. "He was in the world." In all the past ages, in every manifestation of God, in the history of the chosen nation, but especially when he appeared as the man Christ Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

Third Reason. "And the world was made by him." All they possessed or enjoyed was his gift. They were his creatures, made in his image, made to be like him in character and destiny, and under the deepest obligations to him.

"And (yet) the world (the great body of men) knew him not." Did not recognize him as their Saviour and King, and as the Light of the world.

Fourth Reason. II. "He came unto his own." Those in whom he had a special ownership, his peculiar people, the Jews, whom he had created, whom he had chosen from the rest of the world, whom he had trained and cared for as his peculiar people, and who were his brethren according to the flesh. "And (even) his own received him not." The nation, as a whole, did not receive him as their promised Messiah, their King, their Redeemer. They might to-day be walking as kings and princes, the central power and glory of the world, had they only

received him. Compare the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matt. 21: 33-44).

Received by Others. 12. "Gave he power." R. V. and Am. R., "the right." The original word combines the two ideas, both the right and the power. "To become the sons (better "children" with both Revs.) of God." See Rom. 8: 16, 17, "the children and heirs of God," heirs of his character, his home, his training, his blessedness. "The last and highest realization of this ideal, a realization for the present fathomless, lies only in the future consummation."—Weiss, Bib. Theology, § 150. "Even to them that believe on his name."

"And the Word was made Flesh." 14. Became flesh, "human nature, as a whole, under the aspect of its present corporeal embodiment."—Expositor's Greek Test. Through the Virgin Mary and the miraculous conception, the worthy and fitting way in which the Son of God should become flesh. See Luke 1: 26-38; Matt. 1: 18-25.

"And Dwelt among us." "Tabernacled" among us, dwelt as in a tent, as the Shekinah, the glory, the divine Presence dwelt in the Tabernacle in the wilderness. "Tabernacled" expresses two thoughts: (1) That Christ really dwelt among us, and did not merely appear to some person, or come in a vision, as in the previous ages. (2) That his abode among us in this form was temporary, only a few years.

"And we." John, the disciples, and the people of Palestine, as the representatives of man. There were numberless witnesses. "His glory." Not the physical glory which shone from God's presence in the tabernacle, but the real glory which that glory foreshadowed and symbolized. "Glory as of the only begotten of the Father." Glory worthy of the eternal Son, who was the express image of the Father. It was the glory of goodness, of wisdom, of love, of power controlled by these qualities. When Moses saw the glory of God, it was the goodness of God that passed before him (Ex. 33: 18, 19).

"Full of Grace and Truth." Overflowing with, able to bestow them without measure. "Grace" primarily means that which gives joy; the beauty, loveliness, goodness, which bring delight; then kindness, favor, good-will. Hence the gifts and favors which are the expression of good-will, and thence, still more fully, the free, loving bestowal of this favor and these good gifts upon those who do not deserve them. "And truth." "As being the perfect revelation of God the Father, combining in himself and manifesting all divine reality, whether in the being, the law, or the character of God. He embodies what men ought to know and believe of God; what they should do as children of God, and what they should be."—M. R. Vincent.

The Witness of John at the Public Appearance of Jesus.—15. "John bare witness." By pointing him out to the people (Luke 3: 15-18); to the rulers (John 1: 19-27); to his disciples (John 1: 35, 36). "Cometh after me." Jesus entered upon his mission several months later than John. "Is preferred (is become) before me." Superior to me, in nature, in character, in work.

The Witness of Christians. 16. John the apostle's words. "And (for) of," as the source. "Have all we received." John, and all Christians. The proof that Jesus is the Word, the true light, is found in what he does for his disciples, the light and the life and the grace he produces in them, the fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5: 22, 23). "And grace for grace." Either (1) grace corresponding to each grace in the Master; or (2) grace upon grace, cumulative grace (Beza).

The Witness of the Message of Jesus. 17. "For the law." Moral and ceremonial. "But grace and truth," as described under v. 14. These characterized the message of Jesus, and his gospel of the kingdom of God. These characteristics were the witness that Jesus who brought them was the Son of God.

Continuous Performance.

Diggsby—Poor old Meeker! I feel sorry for him. After his first wife died he married her dressmaker.

Wagsby—Thought he would get rid of paying dressmaker bills, I suppose.

Diggsby—Yes; but the plan didn't work. He not only has to pay them, but they are larger than ever.

Good Boy!

Lady in the Coach—I wish you wouldn't smoke in here.

Gentleman with Cigar—I suppose you dislike the smell of tobacco?

Lady—I do decidedly.

Gentleman—H'm! I thought you were actuated by selfish motives in your objection to smoking.—Boston Transcript.

A Difficult Case.



"You must avoid everything that would excite or irritate you."

"Anything else, doctor?"

"And drink only water!"

"Impossible!"

"Why?"

"That would irritate me more'n anything else!"—Fliegende Blaetter.

Feminine Amenities.

Visitor—Your governess seems very good natured.

Lady of the House—Yes, poor thing, her father lost a lot of money, so I took her as governess for the children.

Visitor—Poor, poor thing. Isn't it terrible how unfortunate some people are!—London Punch.

When Greek Meets Greek.

The One—Say, what's your business?

The Other—I'm a burglar; what's yours?

The One—Same line; I'm a pick-pocket.

The Other—Good! Come on; let's take something.

Worried About the Future.

The Minister—My dear madam, let this thought console you for your husband's death. Remember that other and better men than he have gone the same way.

Bereaved Widow—They haven't all gone, have they?—Tit-Bits.

Difference.

Gunner—"So she has refused you on account of your poverty?"

Guy—"She has, indeed."

Gunner—"Perhaps there is another Richmond in the field."

Guy—"No, there is another rich man in the field."

His Ambition.

"How do you like this social atmosphere?"

"Well," answered Mr. Cumrox, after some hesitation, "to tell you the honest truth, I'd like to get back to a town where the ladies recognize only two kinds of society, sewing and literary."—Washington Star.

Yes, Verily!

He—A man usually treats a woman right.

She—Yes; but there are exceptions to all rules, you know.

He—What's the exception to this one?

She—He sometimes marries her.

An Insinuation.

The spiritual seance was in full blast.

"The spirit of Deacon Skinner is present," said the medium.

"Hello, deacon," exclaimed one of his ex-neighbors, "it is hot enough for you?"