

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.”—Isaiah vii. 14, 15.

THE kingdom of Judah was in a condition of imminent peril. Two monarchs had leagued themselves against her, two nations had risen up for her destruction. Syria and Israel had come up against the walls of Jerusalem, with full intent to raze them to the ground, and utterly to destroy the monarchy of Judah. Ahaz the king, in great trouble, exerted all his ingenuity to defend the city; and amongst the other contrivances which his wisdom taught him, he thought it fit to cut off the waters of the upper pool, so that the besiegers might be in distress for want of water. He goes out in the morning, no doubt attended by his courtiers, makes his way to the conduit of the upper pool, intending to see after the stopping of the stream of water; but lo! he meets with something which sets aside his plans, and renders them needless. Isaiah steps forward, and tells him not to be afraid for the smoke of those two firebrands, for God should utterly destroy both the nations that had risen up against Judah. Ahaz need not fear the present invasion, for both himself and his kingdom should be saved. The king looked at Isaiah with an eye of incredulity, as much as to say, “If the Lord were to send chariots from heaven, could such a thing as this be? Should he animate the dust, and quicken every stone in Jerusalem to resist my foes, could this be done?”

The Lord, seeing the littleness of the king's faith, tells him to ask a sign. “Ask it,” says he, “either in the depth, or in the height above. Let the sun go backward ten degrees, or let the moon stop in her midnight marches; let the stars move athwart the sky in grand procession; ask any sign you please in the heaven above, or, if you wish, choose the earth beneath, let the depths give forth the sign, let some mighty waterspout lose its way across the pathless ocean, and travel through the air to Jerusalem's very gates; let the heavens shower

a golden rain, instead of the watery fluid which usually they distil; ask that the fleece may be wet upon the dry floor, or dry in the midst of dew; whatsoever you please to request, the Lord will grant it you for the confirmation of your faith." Instead of accepting this offer with all gratitude, as Ahaz should have done, he, with a pretended humility, declares that he will not ask, neither will he tempt the Lord his God; whereupon Isaiah, waxing indignant, tells him that, since he will not in obedience to God's command ask a sign, behold, the Lord himself will give him one,—not simply a sign, but *the* sign, the sign and wonder of the world, the mark of God's mightiest mystery and of his most consummate wisdom, for, "a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

It has been said that the passage I have taken for my text is one of the most difficult in all the Word of God. It may be so; I certainly did not think it was until I saw what the commentators had to say about it, and I rose up from reading them perfectly confused. One said one thing, and another denied what the other had said; and if there was anything that I liked, it was so self-evident that it had been copied from one to the other, and handed through the whole of them.

One set of commentators tells us that this passage refers entirely to some person who was to be born within a few months after this prophecy, "for," say they, "it says here, 'Before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.' Now," say they, "this was an immediate delivery which Ahaz required, and there was a promise of a speedy rescue, that, before a few years had elapsed, before the child should be able to know right from wrong, Syria and Israel should both lose their kings." Well, that seems a strange frittering away of a wonderful passage, full of meaning, and I cannot see how they can substantiate their view, when we find the Evangelist Matthew quoting this very passage in reference to the birth of Christ, and saying, "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel." It does strike me that this Immanuel, who was to be born, could not be a mere simple man, and nothing else, for if you turn to the next chapter, at the eighth verse, you will find it said, "He shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel." Here is a government ascribed to Immanuel which could not be his if we were to suppose that the Immanuel here spoken of was either Shear-Jashub, or Maher-shalal-hash-baz, or any other of the sons of Isaiah. I therefore reject that view of the matter; it is, to my mind, far below the height of this great argument; it does not speak or allow us to speak one half of the wondrous depth which coucheth beneath this mighty passage.

I find, moreover, that many of the commentators divide the sixteenth verse from the fourteenth and fifteenth verses, and they read the fourteenth and fifteenth verses exclusively of Christ, and the sixteenth verse of Shear-Jashub, the son of Isaiah. They say that

there were two signs, one was the conception by the virgin of a son, who was to be called Immanuel, who is none other than Christ; but the second sign was Shear-Jashub, the prophet's son, of whom Isaiah said, "Before this child, whom I now lead before you,—before this son of mine shall be able to know good and evil, so soon shall both nations that have now risen against you lose their kings." But I do not like that explanation, because it does seem to me to be pretty plain that the same child is spoken of in the one verse as in the others. "Before the child"—the same child, it does not say that child in one verse and then this child in another verse, but before the child, this one of whom I have spoken, the Immanuel, before he "shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings."

Then another view, which is the most popular of all, is to refer the passage first of all to some child that was then to be born, and afterwards, in the highest sense, to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps that is the true sense of it, perhaps that is the best way of smoothing difficulties; but I do think that if I had never read those books at all, but had simply come to the Bible, without knowing what any man had written upon it, I should have said, "There is Christ here as plainly as possible; never could his name have been written more legibly than I see it here. 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son.' It is an unheard-of thing, it is a miraculous thing, and therefore it must be a God-like thing. She 'shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good;' and before that child, the Prince Immanuel, shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings, and Judah shall smile upon their ruined palaces."

This morning, then, I shall take my text as relating to our Lord Jesus Christ, and we have three things here about him; first, *the birth*, secondly, *the food*, and, thirdly, *the name of Christ*.

I. Let us commence with THE BIRTH OF CHRIST: "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son."

"Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass," said the shepherds. "Let us follow the star in the sky," said the Eastern Magi, and so say we this morning. Hard by the day when we, as a nation, celebrate the birthday of Christ, let us go and stand by the manger to behold the commencement of the incarnation of Jesus. Let us recall the time when God first enveloped himself in mortal form, and tabernacled amongst the sons of men. Let us not blush to go to so humble a spot, let us stand by that village inn, and let us see Jesus Christ, the God-man, become an infant of a span long.

And, first, we see here, in speaking of this birth of Christ, *a miraculous conception*. The text says expressly, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son." This expression is unparalleled even in Sacred Writ; of no other woman could it be said beside the Virgin Mary, and of no other man could it be written that his mother was a virgin. The Greek word and the Hebrew are both very expressive of the true and real virginity of the mother, to show us that Jesus

Christ was born of woman, and not of man. We shall not enlarge upon the thought, but still it is an important one, and ought not to be passed over without mentioning. Just as the woman, by her venturesome spirit, stepped first into transgression,—lest she should be despised and trampled on, God in his wisdom devised that the woman, and the woman alone, should be the author of the body of the God-man who should redeem mankind. Albeit that she herself first tasted the accursed fruit, and tempted her husband (it may be that Adam out of love to her tasted that fruit), lest she should be degraded, lest she should not stand on an equality with him, God hath ordained that so it should be, that his Son should be sent forth “born of a woman,” and the first promise was that the seed of the woman, not the seed of the man, should bruise the serpent’s head.

Moreover, there was a peculiar wisdom ordaining that Jesus Christ should be the son of the woman, and not of the man, because, had he been born of the flesh, “that which is born of the flesh is flesh,” and merely flesh, and he would naturally, by carnal generation, have inherited all the frailties and the sins and the infirmities which man hath from his birth; he would have been conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity, even as the rest of us. Therefore he was not born of man; but the Holy Ghost overshadowed the Virgin Mary, and Christ stands as the one man, save one other, who came forth pure from his Maker’s hands, who could ever say, “I am pure.” Ay, and he could say far more than that other Adam could say concerning his purity, for he maintained his integrity, and never let it go, and from his birth down to his death he knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Oh, marvellous sight! Let us stand and look at it. A child of a virgin, what a mixture! There is the finite and the infinite, there is the mortal and the immortal, corruption and incorruption, the manhood and the Godhead, time married to eternity, God linked with a creature, the infinity of the august Maker come to tabernacle on this speck of earth, the vast unbounded One, whom earth could not hold, and the heavens cannot contain, lying in his mother’s arms, he who fastened the pillars of the universe, and riveted the nails of creation, hanging on a mortal breast, depending on a creature for nourishment. Oh, marvellous birth! Oh, miraculous conception! We stand and gaze and admire. Verily, angels may wish to look into a subject too dark for us to speak of; there we leave it, a virgin hath conceived, and borne a son.

In this birth, moreover, having noticed the miraculous conception, we must notice, next, *the humble parentage*. It does not say, “A princess shall conceive, and bear a son,” but a virgin. Her virginity was her highest honour, she had no other. True, she was of royal lineage, she could reckon David amongst her forefathers, and Solomon amongst those who stood in the tree of her genealogy. She was a woman not to be despised, albeit that I speak of humble parentage, for she was of the blood-royal of Judah. O babe, in thy veins there runs the blood of kings; the blood of an ancient monarchy findeth its way from thy heart, all through the courses of thy body! Thou wast born, not of mean parents, if we look at their ancient ancestry, for thou art the son of him who ruled the mightiest monarchy in his day,

even Solomon, and thou art the descendant of one who devised in his heart to build a temple for the mighty God of Jacob.

Nor was Christ's mother, in point of intellect, an inferior woman. I take it that she had great strength of mind, otherwise she could not have composed so sweet a piece of poetry as that which is called the Virgin's Song, beginning, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." She is not a person to be despised. I would this morning especially utter my thoughts on one thing which I consider to be a fault among us Protestants. Because Roman Catholics pay too much respect to the Virgin Mary, and offer prayer to her, we are too apt to speak of her in a slighting manner. She ought not to be placed under the ban of contempt, for she could truly sing, "From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." I suppose Protestant generations are amongst the "all generations" who ought to call her blessed. Her name is Mary, and quaint George Herbert wrote an anagram upon it:—

"How well her name an ARMY doth present,
In whom the Lord of Hosts did pitch his tent."

Though she was not a princess, yet her name, Mary, by interpretation, signifies a princess; and though she is not the queen of heaven, yet she has a right to be reckoned amongst the queens of earth; and though she is not the lady of our Lord, she does walk amongst the renowned and mighty women of Scripture.

Yet Jesus Christ's birth was a humble one. Strange that the Lord of glory was not born in a palace! Princes, Christ owes you nothing! Princes, Christ is not your debtor; ye did not swaddle him, he was not wrapped in purple, ye had not prepared a golden cradle for him to be rocked in! Queens, ye did not dandle him upon your knees, he hung not at your breasts! And ye mighty cities, which then were great and famous, your marble halls were not blessed with his little footsteps! He came out of a village, poor and despised, even Bethlehem; when there, he was not born in the governor's house, or in the mansion of the chief man, but in a manger. Tradition tells us that his manger was cut in the solid rock; there was he laid, and the oxen likely enough came to feed from the self-same manger, the hay and the fodder of which was his only bed. Oh! wondrous stoop of condescension, that our blessed Jesus should be girded with humility, and stoop so low! Ah! if he stooped, why should he bend to such a lowly birth? And if he bowed, why should he submit not simply to become the son of poor parents, but to be born in so miserable a place?

Let us take courage here. If Jesus Christ was born in a manger in a rock, why should he not come and live in our rocky hearts? If he was born in a stable, why should not the stable of our souls be made into a habitation for him? If he was born in poverty, may not the poor in spirit expect that he will be their Friend? If he thus endured degradation at the first, will he count it any dishonour to come to the very poorest and humblest of his creatures, and tabernacle in the souls of his children? Oh, no! we can gather a lesson of comfort from his humble parentage, and we can rejoice that not a queen, or an empress, but that a humble woman became the mother of the Lord of glory.

We must make one more remark upon this birth of Christ before we pass away from it, and that remark shall be concerning *a glorious birthday*. With all the humility that surrounded the birth of Christ, there was yet very much that was glorious, very much that was honourable. No other man ever had such a birthday as Jesus Christ had. Of whom had prophets and seers ever written as they wrote of him? Whose name is graven on so many tablets as his? Who had such a scroll of prophecy, all pointing to him as Jesus Christ, the God-man? Then recollect, concerning his birth, when did God ever hang a fresh lamp in the sky to announce the birth of a Cæsar? Cæsars may come, and they may die, but stars shall never prophesy their birth. When did angels ever stoop from heaven, and sing choral symphonies on the birth of a mighty man? Nay, all others are passed by; but see, in heaven there is a great light shining, and a song is heard, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Christ's birth is not despicable, even if we consider the visitors who came around his cradle. Shepherds came first, and, as it has been quaintly remarked by an old divine, the shepherds did not lose their way, and the wise men did. Shepherds came first, unguided and unled, to Bethlehem; the wise men, directed by the star, came next. The representative men of the two bodies of mankind, the rich and the poor, knelt around the manger; and gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, and all manner of precious gifts, were offered to the child, who was the Prince of the kings of the earth, who, in ancient times was ordained to sit upon the throne of his father David, and in the wondrous future to rule all nations with his rod of iron.

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son." Thus have we spoken of the birth of Christ.

II. The second thing that we have to speak of is, THE FOOD OF CHRIST: "Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good."

Our translators were certainly very good scholars, and God gave them much wisdom, so that they craned up our language to the majesty of the original, but here they were guilty of very great inconsistency. I do not see how butter and honey can make a child choose good, and refuse evil. If it is so, I am sure butter and honey ought to go up greatly in price, for good men are very much required. But it does not say, in the original, "Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good," but, "Butter and honey shall he eat, till he shall know how to refuse the evil, and choose the good," or, better still, "Butter and honey shall he eat, when he shall know how to refuse the evil, and choose the good."

We shall take that translation, and just try to elucidate the meaning couched in the words. They should teach us, first of all, *Christ's proper humanity*. When he would convince his disciples that he was flesh, and not spirit, he took a piece of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb, and ate as others did. "Handle me," he said, "and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Some heretics taught, even a little after the death of Christ, that his body was a mere shadow, that he was not an actual, real man; but here we are told he ate butter and honey just as other men did. While other men were nourished

with food, so was Jesus; he was very man as certainly as he was verily and eternally God. "In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Therefore we are told that he ate butter and honey, to teach us that it was actually a real man, who afterwards on Calvary died.

The butter and honey teach us, again, that Christ was to be *born in times of peace*. Such products are not to be found in Judæa in times of strife; the ravages of war sweep away all the fair fruits of industry, the unwatered pastures yield no grass, and therefore there could be no butter. The bees may make their hive in the lion's carcase, and there may be honey there; but when the land is disturbed, who shall go to gather the sweetness? How shall the babe eat butter when its mother flees away, even in the winter time, with the child clinging to her breast? In times of war, we have no choice of food; then men eat whatever they can procure, and the supply is often very scanty. Let us thank God that we live in the land of peace, and let us see a mystery in this text, that Christ was born in times of peace. The temple of Janus was shut ere the temple of heaven was opened. Ere the king of peace came to the temple of Jerusalem, the horrid mouth of war was stopped. Mars had sheathed his sword, and all was still. Augustus Cæsar was emperor of the world, none other ruled it, and therefore wars had ceased, the earth was still, the leaves quivered not upon the trees of the field, the ocean of strife was undisturbed by a ripple, the hot winds of war blew not upon man to trouble him, all was peaceful and quiet, and then came the Prince of peace, who in after days shall break the bow and cut the spear in sunder, and burn the chariot in the fire.

There is another thought here. "Butter and honey shall he eat when he shall know how to refuse the evil, and choose the good." This is to teach us *the precocity of Christ*, by which I mean that, even when he was a child, even when he lived upon butter and honey, which is the food of children, he knew the evil from the good. It is, usually, not until children leave off the food of their infancy that they can discern good from evil in the fullest sense. It requires years to ripen the faculties, to develop the judgment, to give full play to the man, in fact, to make him a man; but Christ, even while he was a babe, even while he lived upon butter and honey, knew the evil from the good, refused the one, and chose the other. Oh! what a mighty intellect there was in that brain! While he was an infant, surely there must have been sparklings of genius from his eyes; the fire of intellect must have often lit up that brow. He was not an ordinary child; how would his mother talk about the wonderful things the little prattler said! He played not as others did; he cared not to spend his time in idle amusements; his thoughts were lofty and wondrous; he understood mysteries; and when he went up to the temple, in early days, he was not found, like the other children, playing about the courts or the markets, but sitting among the doctors, both hearing and asking them questions. His was a master-mind: "Never man spake like this man." So, never child thought like this child; he was an astonishing one, the wonder and the marvel of all children, the

prince of children; the God-man, even when he was a child. I think this is taught us in the words, "Butter and honey shall he eat when he shall know how to refuse the evil, and choose the good."

Perhaps it may seem somewhat playful; but, ere I close speaking upon this part of the subject, I must say how sweet it is to my soul to believe that, as Christ lived upon butter and honey, surely *butter and honey drop from his lips*. Sweet are his words unto our souls, more to be desired than honey or the honeycomb. Well might he eat butter whose words are smooth to the tried, whose utterances are like oil upon the waters of our sorrows. Well might he eat butter, who came to bind up the broken-hearted; and well did he live upon the fat of the land, who came to restore the earth to its old fertility, and make all flesh soft with milk and honey, ah, honey in the heart.

"Where can such sweetness be
As I have tasted in thy love,
As I have found in thee?"

Thy words, O Christ, are like honey! I, like a bee, have flown from flower to flower to gather sweets, and concoct some precious essence that shall be fragrant to me; but I have found honey drop from thy lips, I have touched thy mouth with my finger, and put the honey to my lips, and mine eyes have been enlightened, sweet Jesus; every word of thine is precious to my soul; no honey can with thee compare, well didst thou eat butter and honey!

And perhaps I ought not to have forgotten to say, that the effect of Christ's eating butter and honey was to show us that *he would not in his lifetime differ from other men* in his outward guise. Other prophets, when they came, were dressed in rough garments, and were austere and solemn in manner. Christ came not so; he came to be a man amongst men, a feaster with those that feast, an eater of honey with eaters of honey. He differed from none, and hence he was called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. Why did Christ do so? Why did he so commit himself, as men said, though it was verily a slander? It was because he would have his disciples not regard meats and drinks, but despise these things, and live as others do; because he would teach them that it is not that which goeth into a man, but that which cometh out, that defileth him. It is not what a man eats, with temperance, that does him injury, it is what a man says and thinks; it is not abstaining from meat, it is not the carnal ordinance of "Touch not, taste not, handle not," that makes the fundamentals of our religion, albeit it may be good addenda thereunto. Butter and honey Christ ate, and butter and honey may his people eat; nay, whatsoever God in his providence gives unto them, that is to be the food of the child Christ.

III. Now we come to close with THE NAME OF CHRIST: "And shall call his name Immanuel."

I did hope, dear friends, that I should have my voice this morning, that I might talk about my Master's name: I did hope to be allowed to drive along in my swift chariot; but, as the wheels are taken off, I must be content to go as I can. We sometimes creep when we cannot go, and go when we cannot run; but oh! here is a sweet name to

close up with: "She shall call his name Immanuel." Mothers in the olden time called their children by names which had meaning in them; they did not give them the names of eminent persons, whom they would very likely grow up to hate, and wish they had never heard of. They had names full of meaning, which recorded some circumstance of their birth. There was Cain: "I have gotten a man from the Lord," said his mother; and she called him Cain, that is, "Gotten," or "Acquired." There was Seth,—that is, "Appointed," for his mother said, "God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel." Noah means "Rest," or "Comfort." Ishmael was so called by his mother because God had heard her. Isaac was called "Laughter" because he brought laughter to Abraham's home. Jacob was called the supplanter, or the crafty one, because he would supplant his brother. We might point out many similar instances; perhaps this custom was a good one amongst the Hebrews, though the peculiar formation of our language might not allow us to do the same, except in a certain measure.

We see, therefore, that the Virgin Mary called her son Immanuel, that there might be *a meaning in his name*, "God with us." My soul, ring these words again, "God with us." Oh! it is one of the bells of heaven, let us strike it yet again: "God with us." Oh! it is a stray note from the sonnets of paradise: "God with us." Oh! it is the lisping of a seraph: "God with us." Oh! it is one of the notes of the singing of Jehovah, when he rejoices over his Church with singing: "God with us." Tell it, tell it, tell it; this is the name of him who is born to-day.

"Hark, the herald angels sing!"

This is his name, "God with us,"—God with us, by his incarnation, for the august Creator of the world did walk upon this globe; he who made ten thousand orbs, each of them more mighty and more vast than this earth, became the inhabitant of this tiny atom. He, who was from everlasting to everlasting, came to this world of time, and stood upon the narrow neck of land betwixt the two unbounded seas. "God with us:" he has not lost that name, Jesus had that name on earth, and he has it now in heaven. He is now "God with us." Believer, he is God with thee, to protect thee; thou art not alone, because the Saviour is with thee. Put me in the desert, where vegetation grows not; I can still say, "God with us." Put me on the wild ocean, and let my ship dance madly on the waves; I would still say, "Immanuel, God with us." Mount me on the sunbeam, and let me fly beyond the western sea; still I would say, "God with us." Let my body dive down into the depths of the ocean, and let me hide in its caverns; still I could, as a child of God, say, "God with us." Ay, and in the grave, sleeping there in corruption, still I can see the foot-marks of Jesus; he trod the path of all his people, and still his name is "God with us."

But would you know this name most sweetly, you must *know it by the teaching of the Holy Spirit*. Has God been with us this morning? What is the use of coming to chapel, if God is not there? We might as well be at home if we have no visits of Jesus Christ, and certainly

we may come, and come, and come, as regularly as that door turns on its hinges, unless it is "God with us" by the influence of the Holy Ghost. Unless the Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ, and applies them to our heart, it is not "God with us." Otherwise, God is a consuming fire. It is "God with us" that I love.

"Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find."

Now ask yourselves, do you know what "God with us" means? Has it been God with you in your tribulations, by the Holy Ghost's comforting influence? Has it been God with you in searching the Scriptures? Has the Holy Spirit shone upon the Word? Has it been God with you in conviction, bringing you to Sinai? Has it been God with you in comforting you, by bringing you again to Calvary? Do you know the full meaning of that name Immanuel, "God with us"? No; he who knows it best knows little of it. Alas, he who knows it not at all is ignorant indeed; so ignorant that his ignorance is not bliss, but will be his damnation. Oh! may God teach you the meaning of that name Immanuel, "God with us"!

Now let us close. "Immanuel." It is wisdom's mystery, "God with us." Sages look at it, and wonder; angels desire to see it; the plumb-line of reason cannot reach half-way into its depths; the eagle-wing of science cannot fly so high, and the piercing eye of the vulture of research cannot see it. "God with us." It is hell's terror. Satan trembles at the sound of it; his legions fly apace, the black-winged dragon of the pit quails before it. Let him come to you suddenly, and do you but whisper that word, "God with us," back he falls, confounded and confused. Satan trembles when he hears that name, "God with us." It is the labourer's strength; how could he preach the gospel, how could he bend his knees in prayer, how could the missionary go into foreign lands, how could the martyr stand at the stake, how could the confessor own his Master, how could men labour if that one word were taken away? "God with us." 'Tis the sufferer's comfort, 'tis the balm of his woe, 'tis the alleviation of his misery, 'tis the sleep which God giveth to his beloved, 'tis their rest after exertion and toil. Ah! and to finish, "God with us,"—'tis eternity's sonnet, 'tis heaven's hallelujah, 'tis the shout of the glorified, 'tis the song of the redeemed, 'tis the chorus of angels, 'tis the everlasting oratorio of the great orchestra of the sky. "God with us."

"Hail thou Immanuel, all divine,
In thee thy Father's glories shine,
Thou brightest, sweetest, fairest One,
That eyes have seen or angels known."

Now, a happy Christmas to you all; and it will be a happy Christmas if you have God with you. I shall say nothing to-day against festivities on this great birthday of Christ. I hold that, perhaps, it is not right to have the birthday celebrated, but we will never be amongst those who think it as much a duty to celebrate it the wrong way as others the right. But we will to-morrow think of Christ's birthday; we shall be obliged to do it, I am sure, however sturdily we may hold to our rough Puritanism. And so, "let us keep

the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Do not feast as if you wished to keep the festival of Bacchus; do not live to-morrow as if you adored some heathen divinity. Feast, Christians, feast; you have a right to feast. Go to the house of feasting to-morrow, celebrate your Saviour's birth; do not be ashamed to be glad, you have a right to be happy. Solomon says, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment."

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

Recollect that your Master ate butter and honey. Go your way, rejoice to-morrow; but, in your feasting, think of the Man in Bethlehem; let him have a place in your hearts, give him the glory, think of the virgin who conceived him, but think most of all of the Man born, the Child given. I finish by again saying,—

"A HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO YOU ALL!"

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

MATTHEW II. 1—12.

Verse 1. *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,*

Our Lord was born in Bethlehem, an inconsiderable village of Judæa. Its name, however, is significant; it means, "the house of bread." Truly, Bethlehem has become, in a spiritual sense, the house of bread to all who feed on Christ. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,—

2. *Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews?*

There was another king, of whom we have just read: "Herod the king," but he was an Idumean, an Edomite. He had no right to the throne; but here is born the true heir to the throne of David, and the Magi from the east have come to ask for him.

2, 3. *For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

Tidings of the arrival of these strangers in the Jewish capital, asking for the new-born King, would be sure to spread rapidly. The news soon reached the palace; and Herod, one of the most suspicious and cruel of tyrants, and therefore the most cowardly of men, "was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

4. *And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.*

They could tell him if they wished to do so, for they were deeply versed in the Scriptures. The Scribes copied the Sacred Writings. The Pharisees had counted the very letters of the Word; they could tell which was the middle letter of the Old Testament. They were great at the letter; but, alas, they had missed the spirit! Men may know a great deal about the Bible, and yet really know nothing of it. The husks of Scripture yield small profit; we need to come to the kernel, the real corn, the spiritual meaning of the Inspired Word.

5—7. *And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.*

He half suspected that he should not see them again; so he determined to get all the information he possibly could out of them.

8. *And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.*

It was like his deep, cunning spirit to try to find out where the child was, that he might kill him. He looked upon him as a rival, as one who might rob him of his throne; so he would put him to death if he could; and, meanwhile, he would pretend that he wanted to worship him.

9. *When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.*

It was probably not a star in the sense in which we use the word: that is, a planet, or a fixed star; but a meteoric brightness, which moved in the sky, and so guided the wise men. They do not appear to have seen its light after they set out on their journey; it directed them to the region of Judæa, so they came to the capital city, Jerusalem. When they departed from Herod, the star appeared again, and guided them to the little town of Bethlehem, where they found the Christ. God may sometimes send us stars, bright lights of joy, to guide us on our way; he may also take them away again, and then we must walk by faith. When they reappear, we shall be glad to have them once more, as the wise men were.

10, 11. *When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house,*

For it would seem that the mother and child had moved out of the stable into a house. The town was, perhaps, not now quite so crowded, and there was more room for Mary and her blessed babe: "When they were come into the house,"—

11. *They saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.*

These were the products of their country, such as they would give to princes. Such treasures must have been of great use to Mary and Joseph, to help them take care of the wondrous child who had been entrusted to their charge.

12. *And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.*

I remember a long disquisition, by a learned man, to show that we may sometimes break our promise, if, upon further consideration, we find we did wrong in making it, saying that these wise men, though they had promised to go and tell Herod all about the young child, did not do so when warned of God by a dream. After reading his very ingenious dissertation, I turned to the text, and there discovered that the wise men never made any promise of the kind; so that it was a sermon on a non-existent text. They never agreed to return; Herod told them to do so, which is one thing; they did not promise to do so, that would have been quite another thing. They broke no promise, and hence needed no excuse. They were in supernatural communication with God; he had guided them by a star, and now he speaks to them in a dream, and bids them go back to their own country another way. May we all be under like unerring guidance! Amen.