

The Lord's Day Morning

December 24, 1944

“The Lessons the Wise Men Teach”

Scripture Lesson – Matthew 2:1-12

Text – Luke 2:11, 12

The Reverend Dr. Girard Lowe

Introduction

1. World in sad state that first Christmas
 - a. Terrible things done in name of religion
 1. Men put to death
 2. Women offered selves as prostitutes
 3. World lay in darkness
 - b. Palestine not much better
 1. Temple desecrated though thronged
 2. Formal prayers offered
 3. Religion mere formalism
 - c. World was in darkness
 1. God unknown or misunderstood
 2. Caesar ordered numbering
 - a. Joseph and Mary left Nazareth
 - b. Came to Bethlehem
 1. No room in inn
 3. Christ born in stable
 - a. Laid in manger
 4. World did not take notice
 5. Heaven did
 - a. Announcement to shepherds
 6. Later wise men came
 - a. Much tradition surrounds them
 1. Bible does not say how many
 - b. Teach us some lessons
- I. They were led to Christ
1. Do not know where came from
 2. Miraculously led to Christ
 - a. Star in East
 3. Sought knowledge from Bible
 - a. To be born in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2
 4. God sent Son into world
 - a. Leads men to Him
 - b. Not left without witness
 5. How are led

- a. Nature
 - 1. Do not understand
 - 2. Shows great and personal person behind
 - b. Heart craves knowledge of great God
 - 1. Philosophy, science, psychology cannot satisfy
 - c. Bible
 - 1. Turn its pages and find revelation of Christ
6. Find this Christ revealed in Scriptures

II. They worshipped Christ

- 1. When came to Him they worshipped
 - a. Had come long distance
 - b. They fell down and worshipped
- 2. Many find Him, but do not worship
 - a. Know all man could know about Him
- 3. Refuse to confess Him as worthy of worship
 - a. All should worship Him
- 4. Worship has two other aspects
 - a. Bring gifts
 - b. Obey

III. They brought gifts

- 1. Worship more than singing or even adoration
 - a. Man at Rotary Club when singing, “Star Spangled Banner” read paper on look all around and seem to pay no attention. This made me ask if they had any love for the flag and our land. They did not seem to respect it. Then the thought came to me – one of those men has a son in the service; and the other has two; one been away from home over two years in a foreign land.
 - b. They do not act as I think they should when singing National Anthem, but none can question their loyalty.
 - c. Wise men fell down and worshipped.
 - d. Arose and offered gifts
- 2. Will be many gifts offered this Christmas time
 - a. Trains overloaded
 - b. Express and post offices crowded
 - c. Some
 - 1. Trifles
 - 2. Expensive
 - 3. Some expediency
 - 4. Some love
- 3. Will we bring a gift to Christ
 - a. Some have
 - 1. Missionaries away from home for first Christmas
 - 2. Gifts under tree could have been more expensive except what given to Christ
 - 3. Horace gave more one year than he could sell his house for

- b. Will be bringing gifts to Christ today
 - 1. Our lives
 - 2. Our time
 - 3. Our money

IV. Obedience

- 1. Wise men did not obey Herod but returned another way
- 2. Worship has an element of obedience
- 3. Boy looking at picture of Christ in Garden, saying, “Oh Man of Galilee, if there is anything that you have left undone anywhere that I can do, you can count on me.”

“The Talking Picture” – from “Christ and the Fine Arts” by Maus – page 640

“He was a little large for his age, and yet he was only a boy; but he was going away from home, away to a distant city to live and to work. His mother could hardly bear to see him go along, not even sure that he was consciously taking God with him, although she had tried as best she could, to lead the boy to Him.

When he came home one evening, a few days before he was to start, his mother said to him: ‘John, I want you to go down to the art gallery tomorrow and see a picture that hangs there.’

‘Oh, mother,’ said the boy, ‘I don’t care anything at all about pictures; and anyway I haven’t got time.’

‘Son,’ replied his mother, ‘in a little while you’ll be a long way from home, where I’ll not be asking you to do things to please me. I want you to do this for me.’

‘Well,’ answered the boy, ‘if you put it that way, of course I’ll go.’ And so on the morrow he went.

He was directed to the room where the picture hung, and he walked down a long corridor and opened the door to enter; but no the threshold he paused. On the platform at the far end of the room a man was kneeling in prayer, so he closed the door and waited. After a few moments he opened the door again, and seeing the man still at prayer, he closed it again and waited. Four or five minutes passed, and when he opened the door again, and saw the man still kneeling, he entered to investigate. And then he saw that the man at prayer was the picture.

It was a life-size painting of Christ in Gethsemane, wonderfully lighted and framed in black velvet. He walked eagerly forward to study a picture that could thus have misled him. What a wonderful face it was! And yet why that look of worry and care? His mother had always taught him that Christ was not afraid to die; then why that look of worry on His brow?

For a long time he stood looking at the picture, and then he went out. But he wanted to see it again; he wanted to ask some questions about it. That evening he said to his mother, 'I should like to see that picture again. Will you come down with me tomorrow and we'll look at it together?' And with a glad heart the mother went to the gallery with her boy.

This time the boy, hat in hand, entered the room reverently, and the two walked quietly down toward where the picture hung. For a long time he stood looking at it; and then he turned to his mother and said: 'Mother, you've always taught me that Jesus was not afraid to die, that He had done no wrong. Then why that look of worry on His face, and why do His hands seem to be pleading so?'

'Son,' answered his mother, with a silent prayer in her heart for guidance, 'He had only been a teacher for three years and there was so much that He wanted to teach and to do. But now, on the 'tomorrow' He was to die and leave it all undone. I think He was worried with the fear that those whom he loved and trusted would forget and leave the work undone, for even now the three that He had asked to watch with Him for one hour were lying asleep at the entrance to this garden. I think that He was afraid that all through the centuries His followers would forget and leave undone the work that He, in going, could not do. I think that this might have caused that look of worry on His brow.'

For a long time the boy stood looking at the picture, his face sinking lower and lower as his eyes looked steadily into the face of the man at prayer. Then he raised his head and straightened his shoulders as he said, 'Oh, Man of Galilee, if there is anything that You have left undone, anywhere, that I can do, You can count on me.'

And he went out, away to that distant city to work and to live a Christ-guided life.

Conclusion

1. Story of Albert Schweitzer – "God's Man in Africa" – from "Christ and the Fine Arts" – page 729.

"A concert crowd thronged that Abbey, one afternoon not long ago, to hear a man named Schweitzer play the organ. They, too, were awed and hushed; awed by the artistry of the greatest organist in Europe; hushed by the golden melody that streamed from his fingertips. He swept them out of themselves, up and out of the grinding, fighting world outside the Abbey doors, held their hearts in moments of high ecstasy, set them dreaming and forgetting and exulting. He stirred again the tender memories of the past, set them marching in dim troops across their minds...The artist was playing from the preludes of Bach. Bach! In Westminster! At the hands of a master of Bach!...

Now this man had just come running out of Africa, to play a few concerts, raise a little money, and go running promptly back again. He could have stayed in

Europe and enjoyed it. Musical Europe, at least, would be glad to sit at the feet of Albert Schweitzer and revel in his Bach. He is an organist famous wherever organs are known. He is the authority per excellence on the life and work of composer Sebastian Bach. As few other men, he makes Bach live beautifully again as he touches his organ keys.

He is a theologian known and marveled at wherever there is theology. His pen has produced a dozen deep and learned volumes of religious subjects that many a famous scholar might well wish he could have written.

He is a surgeon and physician whose skill is worshiped in Africa as the magic of God.

He is according to Bishop Barnes of Birmingham, one of the world's three greatest living men.

Why does a man like this toss over his shoulder the worship and honor of the West, and go trotting off to the tropics of another world?

Thrilled as a boy by stories of the missionary heroes, the 'missionary complex' had probably been working in this youth all across the years. Coupled with that admiration of the missionary was his reverence 'for all who live and breathe,' his loathing of suffering in any form, his entire subjugation of himself to the will of God. But all his brooding and meditation and debate were suddenly ended by a statue – by the sculptured figure of a man at the foot of the statue of Admiral Brust by Bartholdi – the same Bartholdi who gave us our Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. Walking in the Champs de Mars, at Colmar, young Schweitzer caught a glimpse of that stone face and it burned its way into his soul.

The infinite sadness of the eyes, the everlasting tragedy, and the eternal hope that rested on that black brow went to his heart like a knife. Waking and asleep, he could not drive from his mind the figure of this man against the sky. It came over him that 'We are all Dives, while out there in Africa sits wretched Lazarus... We sin against men at our gate... I resolved to study medicine and to put my ideas to the test out there.'

He told his friends. They were horrified. They raved, they pleaded, they stormed, they argued, they wept. But Albert Schweitzer stood with God against the world – and went back to school again. In four years he graduated, a doctor of medicine. And in 1913, with a trained nurse who was also his wife, he set his face toward darkest Africa.

Schweitzer is there now. He made a flying trip to Europe in 1931 for 'rest;' during his vacation he worked on another book and raised more money for the hospital. They tried to keep him home; Prague and St. Andrews Universities made him an honorary Doctor of Philosophy; the city of Frankfurt presented him with their

Goethe Prize, which awarded for distinguished service to humanity. Westminster called him again, and he played. Ramsay MacDonald sent for him to come to Downing Street and talk. But they couldn't hold him. Just before Christmas, that year, he went back. Schweitzer will die in Africa. For he cannot die happily anywhere else on earth. We are sure of this, because Oganga of the Forest, as Africa knows him, has given us this confession of his faith from his own lips: 'For years I have preaching about Christianity. But inwardly I was longing to be practicing Christianity silently. This I do now, or I try to do it.'"