

Joy Born at Bethlehem

A Sermon

(No. 1026)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, December 24th, 1871, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, 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 Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”—[Luke 2:10-12](#).

WE HAVE NO superstitious regard for times and seasons. Certainly we do not believe in the present ecclesiastical arrangement called *Christmas*: first, because we do not believe in the *mass* at all, but abhor it, whether it be said or sung in Latin or in English; and, secondly, because we find no Scriptural warrant whatever for observing any day as the birthday of the Saviour; and, consequently, its observance is a superstition, because not of divine authority. Superstition has fixed most positively the day of our Saviour's birth, although there is no possibility of discovering when it occurred. Fabricius gives a catalogue of 136 different learned opinions upon the matter; and various divines invent weighty arguments for advocating a date in every month in the year. It was not till the middle of the third century that any part of the church celebrated the nativity of our Lord; and it was not till very long after the Western church had set the example, that the Eastern adopted it. Because the day is not known, therefore superstition has fixed it; while, since the day of the death of our Saviour might be determined with much certainty, therefore superstition shifts the date of its observance every year. Where is the method in the madness of the superstitious? Probably the fact is that the holy days were arranged to fit in with heathen festivals. We venture to assert, that if there be any day in the year, of which we may be pretty sure that it was not the day on which the Saviour was born, it is the twenty-fifth of December. Nevertheless since, the current of men's thoughts is led this way just now, and I see no evil in the current itself, I shall launch the bark of our discourse upon that stream, and make use of the fact, which I shall neither justify nor condemn, by endeavoring to lead your thoughts in the same direction. Since it is lawful, and even laudable, to meditate upon the incarnation of the Lord upon any day in the year, it cannot be in the power of other men's superstitions to render such a meditation improper for to-day. Regarding not the day, let us, nevertheless, give God thanks for the gift of his dear son.

In our text we have before us the sermon of the first evangelist under the gospel dispensation. The preacher was an angel, and it was meet it should be so, for the grandest and last of all evangels will be proclaimed by an angel when he shall sound the trumpet of the resur-

rection, and the children of the regeneration shall rise into the fullness of their joy. The keynote of this angelic gospel is *joy*—"I bring unto you good tidings of great joy." Nature fears in the presence of God—the shepherds were sore afraid. The law itself served to deepen this natural feeling of dismay; seeing men were sinful, and the law came into the world to reveal sin, its tendency was to make men fear and tremble under any and every divine revelation. The Jews unanimously believed that if any man beheld supernatural appearances, he would be sure to die, so that what nature dictated, the law and the general beliefs of those under it also abetted. But the first word of the gospel ended all this, for the angelic evangelist said, "Fear not, behold I bring you good tidings." Henceforth, it is to be no dreadful thing for man to approach his Maker; redeemed man is not to fear when God unveils the splendor of his majesty, since he appears no more a judge upon his throne of terror, but a Father unbending in sacred familiarity before his own beloved children.

The joy which this first gospel preacher spoke of was no mean one, for he said, "I bring you good tidings"—that alone were joy: and not good tidings of joy only, but "good tidings of *great* joy." Every word is emphatic, as if to show that the gospel is above all things intended to promote, and will most abundantly create the greatest possible joy in the human heart wherever it is received. Man is like a harp unstrung, and the music of his soul's living strings is discordant, his whole nature wails with sorrow; but the son of David, that mighty harper, has come to restore the harmony of humanity, and where his gracious fingers move among the strings, the touch of the fingers of an incarnate God brings forth music sweet as that of the spheres, and melody rich as a seraph's canticle. Would God that all men felt that divine hand.

In trying to open up this angelic discourse this morning, we shall note three things: *the joy which is spoken of*; next, *the persons to whom this joy comes*; and then, thirdly, *the sign*, which is to us a sign as well as to these shepherds—a sign of the birth and source of joy.

I. First, then, THE JOY, which is mentioned in our text—whence comes it, and what is it?

We have already said it is a "*great* joy"—"good tidings of great joy." Earth's joy is small, her mirth is trivial, but heaven has sent us joy immeasurable, fit for immortal minds. Inasmuch as no note of time is appended, and no intimation is given that the message will ever be reversed, we may say that it is a *lasting* joy, a joy which will ring all down the ages, the echoes of which shall be heard until the trumpet brings the resurrection; aye, and onward for ever and for ever. For when God sent forth the angel in his brightness to say, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which be to all people," he did as much as say, "From this time forth it shall be joy to the sons of men; there shall be peace to the human race, and goodwill towards men for ever and for ever, as long as there is glory to God in the highest." O blessed thought! the Star of Bethlehem shall never set. Jesus, the fairest among ten thousand, the most lovely among the beautiful, is a joy for ever.

Since this joy is expressly associated with the glory of God, by the Words, “Glory to God in the highest,” we may be quite clear that it is a *pure and holy* joy. No other would an angel have proclaimed, and, indeed, no other joy is joy. The wine pressed from the grapes of Sodom may sparkle and foam, but it is bitterness in the end, and the dregs thereof are death; only that which comes from the clusters of Eschol is the true wine of the kingdom, making glad the heart of God and man. Holy joy is the joy of heaven, and that, be ye sure, is the very cream of joy. The joy of sin is a fire-fountain, having its source in the burning soil of hell, maddening and consuming those who drink its fire-water; of such delights we desire not to drink. It were to be worse than damned to be happy in sin, since it is the beginning of grace to be wretched in sin, and the consummation of grace to be wholly escaped from sin, and to shudder even at the thought of it. It is hell to live in sin and misery, it is a deep lower still when men could fashion a joy in sin. God save us from unholy peace and from unholy joy! The joy announced by the angel of the nativity is as pure as it is lasting, as holy as it is great. Let us then always believe concerning the Christian religion that it has its joy within itself, and holds its feasts within its own pure precincts, a feast whose viands all grow on holy ground. There are those who, to-morrow, will pretend to exhibit joy in the remembrance of our Saviour’s birth, but they will not seek their pleasure in the Saviour: they will need many additions to the feast before they can be satisfied. Joy in Immanuel would be a poor sort of mirth to them. In this country, too often, if one were unaware of the name, one might believe the Christmas festival to be a feast of Bacchus, or of Ceres, certainly not a commemoration of the Divine birth. Yet is there cause enough for holy joy in the Lord himself, and reasons for ecstasy in his birth among men. It is to be feared that most men imagine that in Christ there is only seriousness and solemnity, and to them consequently weariness, gloom, and discontent; therefore, they look out of and beyond what Christ allows, to snatch from the tables of Satan the delicacies with which to adorn the banquet held in honor of a Saviour. Let it not be so among you. The joy which the gospel brings is not borrowed but blooms in its own garden. We may truly say in the language of one of our sweetest hymns—

“I need not go abroad for joy,
I have a feast *at home*,
My sighs are turned into songs,
My heart has ceased to roam.
Down from above the Blessed Dove
Has come into my breast,
To witness his eternal love,
And give my spirit rest.”

Let our joy be living water from those sacred wells which the Lord himself has digged; may his joy abide in us, that our joy may be full. Of Christ’s joy we cannot have too much;

no fear of running to excess when his love is the wine we drink. Oh to be plunged in this pure stream of spiritual delights!

But why is it that the coming of Christ into the world is the occasion of joy? The answer is as follows:—First, because *it is evermore a joyous fact that God should be in alliance with man*, especially when the alliance is so near that God should in very deed take our manhood into union with his godhead; so that God and man should constitute one divine, mysterious person. Sin had separated between God and man; but the incarnation bridges the separation: it is a prelude to the atoning sacrifice, but it is a prelude full of the richest hope. From henceforth, when God looks upon man, he will remember that his own Son is a man. From this day forth, when he beholds the sinner, if his wrath should burn, he will remember that his own Son, as man, stood in the sinner's place, and bore the sinner's doom. As in the case of war, the feud is ended when the opposing parties intermarry, so there is no more war between God and man, because God has taken man into intimate union with himself. Herein, then, there was cause for joy.

But there was more than that, for the shepherds were aware that *there had been promises made of old* which had been the hope and comfort of believers in all ages, and these *were now to be fulfilled*. There was that ancient promise made on the threshold of Eden to the first sinners of our race, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head; another promise made to the Father of the faithful that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed, and promises uttered by the mouths of prophets and of saints since the world began. Now, the announcement of the angel of the Lord to the shepherds was a declaration that the covenant was fulfilled, that now in the fullness of time God would redeem his word, and the Messiah, who was to be Israel's glory and the world's hope; was now really come. Be glad ye heavens, and be joyful O earth, for the Lord hath done it, and in mercy hath he visited his people. The Lord hath not suffered his word to fail, but hath fulfilled unto his people his promises. The time to favor Zion, yea the set time, is come. Now that the scepter is departed from Judah, behold the Shiloh comes, the Messenger of the covenant suddenly appears in his temple!

But the angel's song had in it yet fuller reason for joy; for our Lord who was born in Bethlehem came as a *Saviour*. "Unto you is born this day a Saviour." God had come to earth before, but not as a Saviour. Remember that terrible coming when there went three angels into Sodom at night-fall, for the Lord said, "I will go now and see whether it be altogether according to the cry thereof." He had come as a spy to witness human sin, and as an avenger to lift his hand to heaven, and bid the red fire descend and burn up the accursed cities of the plain. Horror to the world when God thus descends. If Sinai smokes when the law is proclaimed, the earth itself shall melt when the breaches of the law are punished. But now not as an angel of vengeance, but as a man in mercy God has come; not to spy out our sin, but to remove it; not to punish guilt, but to forgive it. The Lord might have come with

thunderbolts in both his hands he might have come like Elias to call fire from heaven; but no, his hands are full of gifts of love, and his presence is the guarantee of grace. The babe born in the manger might have been another prophet of tears, or another son of thunder, but he was not so: he came in gentleness, his glory and his thunder alike laid aside.

“‘Twas mercy filled the throne,
And wrath stood silent by,
When Christ on the kind errand came
To sinners doomed to die.”

Rejoice, ye who feel that ye are lost; your Saviour comes to seek and save you. Be of good cheer ye who are in prison, for he comes to set you free. Ye who are famished and ready to die, rejoice that he has consecrated for you a Bethlehem, a house of bread, and he has come to be the bread of life to your souls. Rejoice, O sinners, everywhere for the restorer of the castaways, the Saviour of the fallen is born. Join in the joy, ye saints, for he is the preserver of the saved ones, delivering them from innumerable perils, and he is the sure prefecter of such as he preserves. Jesus is no partial Saviour, beginning a work and not concluding it; but, restoring and upholding, he also prefects and presents the saved ones without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing before his Father’s throne. Rejoice aloud all ye people, let your hills and valleys ring with joy, for a Saviour who is mighty to save is born among you.

Nor was this all the holy mirth, for the next word has also in it a fullness of joy:—“a Saviour, who is *Christ*,” or the Anointed. Our Lord was not an amateur Saviour who came down from heaven upon an unauthorized mission; but he was chosen, ordained, and anointed of God; he could truly say, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me.” Here is great comfort for all such as need a Saviour; it is to them no mean consolation that God has himself authorized Christ to save. There can be no fear of a jar between the mediator and the judge, no peril of a nonacceptance of our Saviour’s work; because God has commissioned Christ to do what he has done, and in saving sinners he is only executing his Father’s own will. Christ is here called “*the* anointed.” All his people are anointed, and there were priests after the order of Aaron who were anointed, but he is *the* anointed, “anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows;” so plenteously anointed that, like the unction upon Aaron’s head, the sacred anointing of the Head of the church distils in copious streams, till we who are like the skirts of his garments are made sweet with the rich perfume. He is “the anointed” in a threefold sense: as prophet to preach the gospel with power; as priest to offer sacrifice; as king to rule and reign. In each of these he is preeminent; he is such a teacher, priest, and ruler as was never seen before. In him was a rare conjunction of glorious offices, for never did prophet, priest, and king meet in one person before among the sons of men, nor shall it ever be so again. Triple is the anointing of him who is a priest after the order of Melchisedec, a prophet like unto Moses, and a king of whose dominion

there is no end. In the name of Christ, the Holy Ghost is glorified, by being seen as anointing the incarnate God. Truly, dear brethren, if we did but understand all this, and receive it into our hearts, our souls would leap for joy on this Sabbath day, to think that there is born unto us a Saviour who is anointed of the Lord.

One more note, and this the loudest, let us sound it well and hear it well— “which is Christ *the Lord*.” Now the word Lord, or *Kurios*, here used is tantamount to Jehovah. We cannot doubt that, because it is the same word used twice in the ninth verse, and in the ninth verse none can question that it means Jehovah. Hear it, “And, lo, the angel of the *Lord* came upon them, and the glory of the *Lord* shone round about them.” And if this be not enough, read the 23rd verse, “As it is written in the law of the *Lord*, every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the *Lord*.” Now the word Lord here assuredly refers to Jehovah, the one God, and so it must do here. Our Saviour is Christ, God, Jehovah. No testimony to his divinity could be plainer; it is indisputable. And what joy there is in this; for suppose an angel had been our Saviour, he would not have been able to bear the load of my sin or yours; or if anything less than God had been set up as the ground of our salvation, it might have been found too frail a foundation. But if he who undertakes to save is none other than the Infinite and the Almighty, then the load of our guilt can be carried upon such shoulders, the stupendous labor of our salvation can be achieved by such a worker, and that with ease: for all things are possible with God, and he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. Ye sons of men perceive ye here the subject of your joy. The God who made you, and against whom you have offended, has come down from heaven and taken upon himself your nature that he might save you. He has come in the fullness of his glory and the infinity of his mercy that he might redeem you. Do you not welcome this news? What! will not your hearts be thankful for this? Does this matchless love awaken no gratitude? Were it not for this divine Saviour, your life here would have been wretchedness, and your future existence would have been endless woe. Oh, I pray you adore the incarnate God, and trust in him. Then will you bless the Lord for delivering you from the wrath to come, and as you lay hold of Jesus and find salvation in his name, you will tune your songs to his praise, and exult with sacred joy. So much concerning this joy.

II. Follow me while I briefly speak of THE PEOPLE to whom this joy comes. Observe how the angel begins, “Behold, I bring *you* good tidings of great joy, for *unto you* is born this day.” So, then, the joy began with the first who heard it, the shepherds. “*To you*,” saith he; “for unto you is born.” Beloved hearer, shall the joy begin with you to-day?—for it little avails you that Christ was born, or that Christ died, unless unto *you* a child is born, and for you Jesus bled. A personal interest is the main point. “But I am poor,” saith one. So were the shepherds. O ye poor, to you this mysterious child is born. “The poor have the gospel preached unto them.” “He shall judge the poor and needy, and break in pieces the oppressor.” But I am obscure and unknown,” saith one. So were the watchers on the midnight plain.

Who knew the men who endured hard toil, and kept their flocks by night? But you, unknown of men, are known to God: shall it not be said, that “unto you a child is born?” The Lord regardeth not the greatness of men, but hath respect unto the lowly. But you are illiterate you say, you cannot understand much. Be it so, but unto the shepherds Christ was born, and their simplicity did not hinder their receiving him, but even helped them to it. Be it so with yourself: receive gladly the simple truth as it is in Jesus. The Lord hath exalted one chosen out of the people. No aristocratic Christ have I to preach to you, but the Saviour of the people, the friend of publicans and sinners. Jesus is the true “poor men’s friend;” he is “a covenant for the people,” given to be “a leader and commander to the people.” To you is Jesus given. O that each heart might truly say, to me is Jesus born; for it I truly believe in Jesus, unto me Christ is born, and I may be as sure of it as if an angel announced it, since the Scripture tells me that if I believe in Jesus He is mine.

After the angel had said “to you,” he went on to say, “it shall be *to all people*.” But our translation is not accurate, the Greek is, “it shall be to all *the* people.” This refers most assuredly to the Jewish nation; there can be no question about that; if any one looks at the original, he will not find so large and wide an expression as that given by our translators. It should be rendered “to all *the* people.” And here let us speak a word for the Jews. How long and how sinfully has the Christian church despised the most honorable amongst the nations! How barbarously has Israel been handled by the so-called church! I felt my spirit burn indignantly within me in Rome when I stood in the Jew’s quarter, and heard of the cruel indignities which Popery has heaped upon the Jews, even until recently. At this hour there stands in the Jew’s quarter a church built right in front of the entrance to it, and into this the unhappy Jews were driven forcibly on certain occasions. To this church they were compelled to subscribe—subscribe, mark you, as worshippers of the one invisible God, to the support of a system which is as leprous with idolatry as were the Canaanites whom the Lord abhorred. Paganism is not more degrading than Romanism. Over the door of this church is placed, in their own tongue in the Hebrew, these words: —“All day long have I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying generation;” how, by such an insult as that, could they hope to convert the Jew. The Jew saw everywhere idols which his soul abhorred, and he loathed the name of Christ, because he associated it with idol worship, and I do not wonder that he did. I praise the Jew that he could not give up his own simple theism, and the worship of the true God, for such a base, degrading superstition as that which Rome presented to him. Instead of thinking it a wonder of unbelief that the Jew is not a Christian, I honor him for his faith and his courageous resistance of a fascinating heathenism. If Romanism be Christianity I am not, neither could I be, a Christian. It were a more manly thing to be a simple believer in one God, or even an honest doubter upon all religion, than worship such crowds of gods and goddesses as Popery has set up, and to bow, as she does, before rotten bones and dead men’s winding sheets. Let the true Christian

church think lovingly of the Jew, and with respectful earnestness tell him the true gospel; let her sweep away superstition, and set before him the one gracious God in the Trinity of his divine Unity; and the day shall yet come when the Jews, who were the first apostles to the Gentiles, the first missionaries to us who were afar off; shall be gathered in again. Until that shall be, the fullness of the church's glory can never come. Matchless benefits to the world are bound up with the restoration of Israel; their gathering in shall be as life from the dead. Jesus the Saviour is the joy of all nations, but let not the chosen race be denied their peculiar share of whatever promise holy writ has recorded with a special view to them. The woes which their sins brought upon them have fallen thick and heavily; and even so let the richest blessings distil upon them.

Although our translation is not literally correct, it, nevertheless, expresses a great truth, taught plainly in the context; and, therefore, we will advance another step. The coming of Christ is a joy to *all people*. It is so, for the fourteenth verse says: "On earth peace," which is a wide and even unlimited expression. It adds, "Good will towards"—not Jews, but "men"—all men. The word is the generic name of the entire race, and there is no doubt that the coming of Christ does bring joy to all sorts of people. It brings a measure of joy even to those who are not Christians. Christ does not bless them in the highest and truest sense, but the influence of his teaching imparts benefits of an inferior sort, such as they are capable of receiving; for wherever the gospel is proclaimed, it is no small blessing to all the population. Note this fact: there is no land beneath the sun where there is an open Bible and a preached gospel, where a tyrant long can hold his place. It matters not who he be, whether pope or king; let the pulpit be used properly for the preaching of Christ crucified, let the Bible be opened to be read by all men, and no tyrant can long rule in peace. England owes her freedom to the Bible; and France will never possess liberty, lasting and well-established, till she comes to reverence the gospel, which too long she has rejected. There is joy to all mankind where Christ comes. The religion of Jesus makes men think, and to make men think is always dangerous to a despot's power. The religion of Jesus Christ sets a man free from superstition; when he believes in Jesus, what cares he for Papal excommunications, or whether priests give or withhold their absolution? The man no longer cringes and bows down; he is no more willing, like a beast, to be led by the nose; but, learning to think for himself and becoming a man, he disdains the childish fears which once held him in slavery. Hence, where Jesus comes, even if men do not receive him as the Saviour, and so miss the fullest joy, yet they get a measure of benefit; and I pray God that everywhere his gospel may be so proclaimed, and that so many may be actuated by the spirit of it, that it may be better for all mankind. If men receive Christ, there will be no more oppression: the true Christian does to others as he would that they should do to him, and there is no more contention of classes, nor grinding of the faces of the poor. Slavery must go down where Christianity rules, and mark you, if Romanism be once destroyed, and pure Christianity shall govern all nations, war itself

must come to an end; for if there be anything which this book denounces and counts the hugest of all crimes, it is the crime of war. Put up thy sword into thy sheath, for hath not he said, "Thou shalt not kill," and he meant not that it was a sin to kill one but a glory to kill a million, but he meant that bloodshed on the smallest or largest scale was sinful. Let Christ govern, and men shall break the bow and cut the spear in sunder, and burn the chariot in the fire. It is joy to all nations that Christ is born, the Prince of Peace, the King who rules in righteousness.

But, beloved, the greatest joy is to those who know Christ *as a Saviour*. Here the song rises to a higher and sublimer note. Unto us indeed a child is born, if we can say that he is our "Saviour who is Christ the Lord." Let me ask each of you a few personal questions. Are your sins forgiven you for his name's sake? Is the head of the serpent bruised in your soul? Does the seed of the woman reign in sanctifying power over your nature? Oh then, you have the joy that is to all the people in the truest form of it; and, dear brother, dear sister, the further you submit yourself to Christ the Lord, the more completely you know him, and are like him, the fuller will your happiness become. Surface joy is to those who live where the Saviour is preached; but the great deeps, the great fathomless deeps of solemn joy which glisten and sparkle with delight, are for such as know the Saviour, obey the anointed one, and have communion with the Lord himself. He is the most joyful man who is the most Christly man. I wish that some Christians were more truly Christians: they are Christians and something else; it were much better if they were altogether Christians. Perhaps you know the legend, or perhaps true history of the awakening of St. Augustine. He dreamed that he died, and went to the gates of heaven, and the keeper of the gates said to him, "Who are you?" And he answered, "*Christianus sum*," I am a Christian. But the porter replied, "No, you are not a Christian, you are a Ciceronian, for your thoughts and studies were most of all directed to the works of Cicero and the classics, and you neglected the teaching of Jesus. We judge men here by that which most engrossed their thoughts, and you are judged not to be a Christian but a Ciceronian." When Augustine awoke, he put aside the classics which he had studied, and the eloquence at which he had aimed, and he said, "I will be a Christian and a theologian;" and from that time he devoted his thoughts to the word of God, and his pen and his tongue to the instruction of others in the truth. Oh I would not have it said of any of you, "Well, he may be somewhat Christian, but he is far more a keen money-getting tradesman." I would not have it said, "Well, he may be a believer in Christ, but he is a good deal more a politician." Perhaps he is a Christian, but he is most at home when he is talking about science, farming, engineering, horses, mining, navigation, or pleasure-taking. No, no, you will never know the fullness of the joy which Jesus brings to the soul, unless under the power of the Holy Spirit you take the Lord your Master to be your All in all, and make him the fountain of your intensest delight. "He is my Saviour, my Christ, my Lord," be this your loudest boast. Then will you know the joy which the angel's song predicts for men.

III. But I must pass on. The last thing in the text is The SIGN. The shepherds did not ask for a sign, but one was graciously given. Sometimes it is sinful for us to require as an evidence what God's tenderness may nevertheless see fit to give as an aid to faith. Wilful unbelief shall have no sign, but weak faith shall have compassionate aid. The sign that the joy of the world had come was this,—they were to go to the manger to find the Christ in it, and he was to be the sign. Every circumstance is therefore instructive. The babe was found “wrapped in swaddling clothes.” Now, observe, as you look at this infant, that there is not the remotest appearance of *temporal power* here. Mark the two little puny arms of a little babe that must be carried if it go. Alas, the nations of the earth look for joy in military power. By what means can we make a nation of soldiers? The Prussian method is admirable; we must have thousands upon thousands of armed men and big cannon and ironclad vessels to kill and destroy by wholesale. Is it not a nation's pride to be gigantic in arms? What pride flushes the patriot's cheek when he remembers that his nation can murder faster than any other people. Ah, foolish generation, ye are groping in the flames of hell to find your heaven, raking amid blood and bones for the foul thing which ye call glory. A nation's joy can never lie in the misery of others. Killing is not the path to prosperity; huge armaments are a curse to the nation itself as well as to its neighbors. The joy of a nation is a golden sand over which no stream of blood has ever rippled. It is only found in that river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God. The weakness of submissive gentleness is true power. Jesus founds his eternal empire not on force but on love. Here, O ye people, see your hope; the mild pacific prince, whose glory is his self-sacrifice, is our true benefactor.

But look again, and you shall observe *no pomp* to dazzle you. Is the child wrapped in purple and fine linen? Ah, no. Sleeps he in a cradle of gold? The manger alone is his shelter. No crown is upon the babe's head, neither does a coronet surround the mother's brow. A simple maiden of Galilee, and a little child in ordinary swaddling bands, it is all you see.

“Bask not in courtly bower,
Or sunbright hall of power,
Pass Babel quick,
and seek the holy land.
From robes of Tyrian dye,
Turn with undazzled eye
To Bethlehem's glade, and by the manger stand.”

Alas, the nations are dazzled with a vain show. The pomp of empires, the pageants of kings are their delight. How can they admire those gaudy courts, in which too often glorious apparel, decorations, and rank stand in the stead of virtue, chastity, and truth. When will the people cease to be children? Must they for ever crave for martial music which stimulates to violence, and delight in a lavish expenditure which burdens them with taxation? These make not a nation great or joyous. Bah! how has the bubble burst across yon narrow sea. A

bubble empire has collapsed. Ten thousand bayonets and millions of gold proved but a sandy foundation for a Babel throne. Vain are the men who look for joy in pomp; it lies in truth and righteousness, in peace and salvation, of which yonder new-born prince in the garments of a peasant child is the true symbol.

Neither was there *wealth* to be seen at Bethlehem. Here in this quiet island, the bulk of men are comfortably seeking to acquire their thousands by commerce and manufactures. We are the sensible people who follow the main chance, and are not to be deluded by ideas of glory; we are making all the money we can, and wondering that other nations waste so much in fight. The main prop and pillar of England's joy is to be found, as some tell us, in the Three per Cents., in the possession of colonies, in the progress of machinery, in steadily increasing our capital. Is not Mammon a smiling deity? But, here, in the cradle of the world's hope at Bethlehem, I see far more of poverty than wealth; I perceive no glitter of gold, or spangle of silver. I perceive only a poor babe, so poor, so very poor, that he is in a manger laid; and his mother is a mechanic's wife, a woman who wears neither silk nor gem. Not in your gold, O Britons, will ever lie your joy, but in the gospel enjoyed by all classes, the gospel freely preached and joyfully received. Jesus, by raising us to spiritual wealth, redeems us from the chains of Mammon, and in that liberty gives us joy.

And here, too, I see *no superstition*. I know the artist paints angels in the skies, and surrounds the scene with a mysterious light, of which tradition's tongue of falsehood has said that it made midnight as bright as noon. This is fiction merely; there was nothing more there than the stable, the straw the oxen ate, and perhaps the beasts themselves, and the child in the plainest, simplest manner, wrapped as other children are; the cherubs were invisible and of haloes there were none. Around this birth of joy was no sign of superstition: that demon dared not intrude its tricks and posturings into the sublime spectacle: it would have been there as much out of place as a harlequin in the holy of holies. A simple gospel, a plain gospel, as plain as that babe wrapped in the commonest garments, is this day the only hope for men. Be ye wise and believe in Jesus, and abhor all the lies of Rome, and inventions of those who ape her detestable abominations.

Nor does the joy of the world lie in *philosophy*. You could not have made a schoolmen's puzzle of Bethlehem if you had tried to do so; it was just a child in the manger and a Jewish woman looking on and nursing it, and a carpenter standing by. There was no metaphysical difficulty there, of which men could say, "A doctor of divinity is needed to explain it, and an assembly of divines must expound it." It is true the wise men came there, but it was only to adore and offer gifts; would that all the wise had been as wise as they. Alas, human subtlety has disputed over the manger, and logic has darkened counsel with its words. But this is one of man's many inventions; God's work was sublimely simple. Here was "The Word made flesh" to dwell among us, a mystery for faith, but not a football for argument. Mysterious, yet the greatest simplicity that was ever spoken to human ears, and seen by mortal

eyes. And such is the gospel, in the preaching of which our apostle said, “we use great plainness of speech.” Away, away, away with your learned sermons, and your fine talk, and your pretentious philosophies; these never created a jot of happiness in this world. Fine-spun theories are fair to gaze on, and to bewilder fools, but they are of no use to practical men, they comfort not the sons of toil, nor cheer the daughters of sorrow. The man of common sense, who feels the daily rub and tear of this poor world, needs richer consolation than your novel theologies, or neologies, can give him. In a simple Christ, and in a simple faith in that Christ, there is a peace deep and lasting; in a plain, poor man’s gospel there is a joy and a bliss unspeakable, of which thousands can speak, and speak with confidence, too, for they declare what they do know, and testify what they have seen.

I say, then, to you who would know the only true peace and lasting joy, come ye to the babe of Bethlehem, in after days the Man of Sorrows, the substitutionary sacrifice for sinners. Come, ye little children, ye boys and girls, come ye; for he also was a boy. “The holy child Jesus” is the children’s Saviour, and saith still, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not. Come hither, ye maidens, ye who are still in the morning of your beauty, and, like Mary, rejoice in God your Saviour. The virgin bore him on her bosom, so come ye and bear him in your hearts, saying, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.” And you, ye men in the plenitude of your strength, remember how Joseph cared for him, and watched with reverent solicitude his tender years; be you to his cause as a Father and a helper; sanctify your strength to his service. And ye women advanced in years, ye matrons and widows, come like Anna and bless the Lord that you have seen the salvation of Israel, and ye hoar heads, who like Simeon are ready to depart, come ye and take the Saviour in your arms, adoring him as your Saviour and your all. Ye shepherds, ye simple hearted, ye who toil for your daily bread, come and adore the Saviour; and stand not back ye wise men, ye who know by experience and who by meditation peer into deep truth, come ye, and like the sages of the East bow low before his presence, and make it your honor to pay honor to Christ the Lord. For my own part, the incarnate God is all my hope and trust. I have seen the world’s religion at the fountain head, and my heart has sickened within me; I come back to preach, by God’s help, yet more earnestly the gospel, the simple gospel of the Son of Man. Jesus, Master, I take thee to be mine for ever! May all in this house, through the rich grace of God, be led to do the same, and may they all be thine, great Son of God, in the day of thine appearing, for thy love’s sake. Amen.