

Life Of Christ

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Introduction.

JESUS CHRIST, whose first name means “Savior” and whose second name means “Anointed” or “Consecrated,” was born, not when our calendar says He was, but about six years earlier.

Our present calendar was drawn up by Dionysius Exiguus in the 6th century A.D., and we know that he was some six years out in his calculations.

The mistake of Dionysius, of course, has nothing to do with the historical fact of Our Lord’s birth. It only means that what we thought of as, say, 1950 A.D., was really more like 1956 A.D.

For the actual facts about Christ, we are mainly dependent upon the four gospels. These, however, have been subjected to an exhaustive examination such as no other documents have had to undergo, and their authenticity as documents is beyond reasonable dispute.

The authors were in a position to write thoroughly good history. Were the documents concerned with an ordinary man, and did they deal with none but ordinary utterances and events, no one would dream of doubting their reliability.

It is what they contain that unbelievers declare incredible; and that, only when the gospels mention things beyond the range of normal human experience. When they deal with all that belongs to the ordinary and natural sphere, research has shown them to be accuracy itself whether in regard to persons, places or things.

It is sheer prejudice against any religious revelation by God, and above all against the possibility of confirming such a revelation by miracles, which makes men regard the evangelists as either having taken leave of their senses, or else as having been positively dishonest, whenever they recorded as actual fact anything savoring of the supernatural or miraculous. These unbelievers have not approached the gospels with open minds, despite their boasting that they have done precisely that.

There is no room in this little book to discuss their position. Nor is there need to do so. It will be enough to set out briefly the life of Christ as depicted in the gospels, necessarily omitting much for purposes of condensation, but taking care in all that is said to remain strictly faithful to the basic facts recorded in our unimpeachable sources.

1. The Setting.

Jesus was born in the little town of Bethlehem, in Palestine, a small country only 150 miles long and from 50 to 80 miles wide, on the extreme East coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Palestine, therefore, is only about half the size of Tasmania. It is larger than Massachusetts but smaller than Maryland in size.

It takes its name from the Philistines, a pagan people who settled on the coast of the country at about the same time as the Hebrews or People of Israel conquered the mountain land some 1300 years before the birth of Jesus.

At the time of His birth the People of Israel, called Jews after the main tribe of Judah, had themselves been conquered by the Romans. True, they had a king named Herod the Great; but he had been appointed by Rome and was subject to the Roman Emperor.

Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., about two years after Jesus was born.

Then the Romans divided Palestine into four parts. One of Herod's sons, Archelaus, was to rule over Judea and Samaria, in the South; another, Philip was given Iturea in the North-East; a third son, Herod Antipas, ruled over Galilee in the North-West and Perea in the South-East; whilst Rome directly ruled over Decapolis, an area East of the Jordan.

When Jesus was a boy of about twelve, Archelaus was deposed by the Romans for being too despotic, and Roman Governors were appointed instead, to rule over Judea and Samaria.

One of these Governors was Pontius Pilate, who was in charge from 26 A.D. until 36 A.D.

It was under Pontius Pilate that Jesus was to die.

The Jews were a very religious people. All the nations around them were pagans, but they worshipped the one true God, carefully observing the laws given to them by Moses. The main centre of their worship was the great Temple in Jerusalem, the capital of Judea. In the different villages, they had synagogues or meeting-places for prayer and the reading of the Scriptures; but sacrifice could be offered to God only in the one Temple at Jerusalem. Because of this, on great religious festivals thousands of Jews would flock there from all parts of Palestine, and even from other countries overseas.

Among the Jews, there were several parties, two of which are very often mentioned in the gospels, the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Pharisees, or "Separated Ones," claimed to observe the Mosaic Law perfectly, much better than the rest of the Jews. But whilst they were most exact outwardly, most of them were proud and very hard and uncharitable towards others. Not all were like that, of course. There were some really good, sincere and holy men among them.

The Sadducees, or "Descendants of Sadoc" ("Sadoc" means "Justice"), belonged to the richer classes. They were very worldly and, although they did not deny that the Law of Moses should be observed, they were not very strict about it.

Many of them denied the existence of a future life and other orthodox teachings. Most of the Jewish priests belonged to these Sadducees.

The Jews, generally, were not very contented under the rule of the Romans; and as their religion taught them to look forwards towards a Messiah or divinely sent Savior, most of them hoped he would be a great political and military leader who would defeat the Romans and make themselves the greatest nation in the world.

Such was the setting in Palestine when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

2. Birth of Jesus.

Most biographies of people begin with an account of their birth and, perhaps, of their family history. But whilst the life of Jesus as born into this world began in Bethlehem, it cannot be said that He personally began to exist only then. Before the Incarnation, He had always lived in Heaven; and it would be impossible to get back to the beginning of His life there, for He is the Eternal Son of God. To be eternal is to be without a beginning at all! But that aspect of His life would take us beyond history as we know it.

St. John's gospel, however, tells us that one day He made this world, and indeed the whole universe, ages before He came into it Himself; and when He did come into our midst as Man to redeem and save us, He told us that He still belonged to Heaven; and always, He spoke of it as only one could speak who is perfectly familiar with everything there. We shall meet with many such utterances in the course of His life on earth within our historical framework, the aspect of His life with which this booklet is concerned.

We have already said that Herod the Great died in the year 4 B.C., according to our present calendar. Now about three years before that, there was living at Nazareth, a little town in the hills of Galilee, a young Jewish girl named Mary.

In the same town, there dwelt a carpenter named Joseph to whom she was betrothed, and to whom she was soon to bind herself in the final marriage ceremonies. Both Mary and Joseph belonged to the tribe of Judah and were descendants of King David, although they were in poor circumstances, as were so many others of David's line.

One day, whilst Mary was alone at prayer, God sent the angel Gabriel to her, with the tremendous news that the great Hope of Israel was to be fulfilled at last, and that she was to be the Mother of the Messiah. "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you," the angel said, appearing before her. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the Holy One to be born of you shall be called the Son of God."

Mary replied: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to your word." And in that moment, Jesus was miraculously conceived in her womb. The Divine Son, eternally generated of the Divine Father in Heaven without a mother, was to be born in a human nature of a human Mother without the intervention of any earthly father.

This would be incredible were it a question of any ordinary person. But Jesus, the Child of Mary, was not an ordinary person. The study of His character and of His subsequent career in this world is enough to show this, and that a miraculous entry into this world is the most fitting and natural thing to be expected in His case.

Nor have we only Mary's word for the fact of the miraculous conception of Jesus. The truth about it was independently revealed to Joseph. "Joseph, son of David," an angel said to him also, "fear not to take Mary as your wife, for it is by the power of the Holy Ghost that she has conceived this child."

So the formalities of the marriage were completed; and when her time was come, Joseph having taken her to Bethlehem, she brought forth her Child there, in the village known as the city of David. They had gone there in obedience to a Decree of Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, ordering all to report at that time in their home towns for purposes of a census.

Divine notification of the coming of the Messiah had already been given to Elizabeth, Mary's cousin; and now that He had come, the fact was revealed to a little group of shepherds out on the

nearby hills. Angels appeared to them, bringing them the news, “this day is born to you a Savior,” and delighting them with the lovely song of praise and consolation:

“Glory to God in the Highest, and peace on earth to men of goodwill.”

Needless to say, the shepherds went at once with great joy to visit Him.

Magi, or wise men from the East, came also, under heavenly guidance; but their coming alarmed the old king Herod the Great, who was half mad with suspicions of possible rivals in his last distraught days. As a precaution, he ordered the murder of all male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and its vicinity. But Joseph had been divinely warned to take the Child and His Mother to Egypt, in order to escape the slaughter.

3. Childhood at Nazareth.

After the death of Herod in 4 B.C., the little family returned. Joseph had intended to settle at Bethlehem; but since the brutal Archelaus, one of Herod’s sons, had been appointed ruler of Judea, he thought it wiser to go back to Nazareth in Galilee, which was under the control of another of Herod’s sons, Herod Antipas.

At Nazareth Jesus was brought up as a pious Jewish Child; and He was the only Child. Those called “brothers and sisters” in the gospels were but cousins at most. It was customary among the Jews to call any relatives within the same tribe “brethren.”

From the age of six or seven, children would attend the local synagogue where they were taught their religion and the other ordinary subjects, reading, writing and simple arithmetic. Jesus became deeply versed both in Jewish traditions and in the Scriptures. In His discourses later on, quotations are to be found from many books of the Old Testament. Owing to the presence of so many Gentiles in Galilee, He would almost certainly have learned to speak Greek; but Greek philosophical and religious ideas contributed in no way towards His education. There are no traces of them in His later utterances.

Of the sheer goodness and virtue which reigned in that little home at Nazareth, there is no need to speak. There, St. Luke tells us, “Jesus grew in wisdom and grace with God and men.”

One incident only is given us concerning the childhood of Jesus at Nazareth. Every year Joseph and Mary used to make the eighty-mile journey to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover, a great religious festival like our Easter, celebrating the “exodus” or delivery of the Jews by Moses from slavery in Egypt about 1300 B.C. or thereabouts.

Children were allowed to attend the ceremonies from about the age of twelve; and we are told that at that age Jesus went with Joseph and Mary to Jerusalem for the festival. There He became separated from them in the immense crowds, and they searched for Him for three days before finding Him in the Temple discussing religion with the Jewish teachers, whom He had astonished by manifesting an understanding of the Scriptures far greater than was natural to any boy of twelve. And still more characteristically supernatural, if anything, was the way in which He spoke to His Mother when she found Him.

She had exclaimed: “My Son, why have you behaved like this, causing your father and myself so much anxiety in searching for you?” To which He replied: “What need had you to search for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father’s house?” As the Eternal Son of God who had come into this world, He stressed that His duty to His heavenly Father was above all lesser loyalties; and

these first recorded words of Jesus were a veiled declaration of His Divinity, the implications of which not even Joseph and Mary had yet fully grasped.

He at once went down to Nazareth with them, however, and was subject to them.

Of the next eighteen years, we are told nothing, except that He followed Joseph's trade, so that He was spoken of as "the carpenter, the son of Mary." At some time during those eighteen years, Joseph died and Jesus worked on, putting a little by to provide for His Mother's future against the time when He Himself would have to leave her.

4. John the Baptist.

When Jesus was about thirty, in the 15th year of the reign of the Roman Emperor, Tiberius Caesar, a prophet who had been living like a hermit in the desert came to the River Jordan some miles East of Jerusalem and just North of the Dead Sea. There he began to preach to the people, baptizing in the river waters all whom he converted.

He was known as John the Baptist, the son of Zachary and Mary's relative Elizabeth, and was, therefore a relative of Jesus Himself.

We know nothing of John between his birth and his sudden appearance on the banks of the Jordan. His father, however, had told him of the revelation at his birth that he was to prepare the way of the Lord.

At that time, there was keen excitement among the Jews. Everyone was talking about the promised Messiah; and, although the leaders took no notice of John, the common people were deeply impressed by him.

Ever-growing crowds flocked to hear him, and he did his utmost to bring them to a sincere repentance of their sins. He demanded humility instead of pride, genuine goodness instead of empty talk about it; and he did not spare the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Constantly he had to reply to questions the people kept asking about himself. Was he the prophet? Was he the Christ, the Messiah? Was he the Great One, promised of old? But to them all John said no, he was not. He described himself as only a voice crying in the wilderness. The Messiah was to come, and very soon. He, John, was but a poor messenger, preparing the way for him.

5. Jesus Begins His Ministry.

John's mission was the sign that it was time for Jesus to begin His public life. He therefore left Nazareth and went to the Jordan where John was preaching and asked to be baptized. John protested, but Jesus insisted; and as He was baptized the Holy Spirit descended upon Him from Heaven in the form of a dove, and a voice came, saying: "You are my beloved Son. In You I am well pleased." Jesus had not come to receive John's Baptism as a sinner needing to be cleansed, but He had come to receive the divine approval for the solemn beginning of His mission as the Teacher and Savior of mankind.

After His baptism, Jesus at once went into the barren hill-country of Judea to give Himself to prayer and fasting for forty days, at the end of which time the devil came to tempt Him.

In the Incarnation the Eternal Son of God had taken as His own a truly human nature, and He allowed the devil to suggest the use of His miraculous powers to satisfy His own bodily craving for food after so long a fast, and even to adopt the ways of the world in order to win the world,

performing startling prodigies and doing homage to Satan at the expense of His heavenly Father's claim upon Him.

The devil's idea was to offer an easy road to success in founding an earthly kingdom in accordance with popular Jewish aspirations at the time.

But Jesus had come neither to seek His own comfort, nor to establish a kingdom of this world. He rejected the temptations, three times declaring simply that the Will of God, with which the devil's suggestions could not possibly be reconciled, was the one thing of supreme importance.

Defeated, the devil left Him; and angels came and ministered to Him.

Jesus then returned to John the Baptist, whom he had left six weeks ago, in order to begin His Ministry side by side with the Precursor. But the holy prophet, seeing Him coming towards the place where he was baptizing, said to the bystanders: "This is He of whom I have been speaking to you. Behold the Lamb of God."

Two of John's disciples, one of them also named John, and the other Andrew, followed Jesus later as He was returning to His lodgings, and spent the evening with Him. He told them of the Kingdom of God He had come to establish, and answered all their eager questions.

Next day Andrew went to find his brother Simon. "We have found the Messiah," he told Simon, and brought him to Jesus. As soon as He met him, Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, in Aramaic "Kepha," a word meaning "rock." But Simon was not told at that time why his name was changed.

Later, James the brother of John joined the little group; then Philip; and he in turn brought Nathanael (Bartholomew) also. In those first few days, therefore, Jesus had won six disciples, all of whom were later to be numbered among His twelve Apostles.

6. Journey to Galilee.

At about this same time Jesus set out for Galilee, taking His new disciples, who were all Galileans with Him.

On the way, they came to the village of Cana, in Galilee. They arrived in time for a wedding-feast to which He and His disciples had been invited; and there He met His Mother who had been invited also, and who had come from Nazareth, four miles away, in order to be present.

It was there, at His Mother's request, that He performed His first miracle, after declaring that the time for such manifestations of His divine power had really not yet come. But the wine had given out, and His Mother was concerned about the embarrassment this would be to their hosts. In order to please His Mother, then, and spare them the embarrassment, He turned water into a plentiful supply of wine. Only a week ago He had refused to turn stones into bread.

Here, however, it was not a matter of satisfying His own hunger, but of providing for the needs of others.

From Cana He went to Capharnaum, then a flourishing village on the shores of the Lake of Galilee.

Capharnaum was to become the centre for His work in Galilee, but this time He did not stay long. Almost a week later, He was in Jerusalem, having journeyed eighty miles to be present in the Holy City for the Feast of the Passover.

There, indignant at the desecration of the Temple by the trading that was going on within its precincts, He gave the first display of His prophetic authority in public, flogging the merchants and all the animals out of the premises with a whip, and overturning the tables of the money-changers. "It is written: My House is a House of Prayer," He said, "but you have made it a den of thieves."

The Scribes and Pharisees and Priests were very angry at this and crowded round Him, demanding what right He had to act in such a way. He wrought no miracle then to justify His divine authority, but merely said: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." He was referring to the temple of His Body, knowing that eventually they would kill Him, but that on the third day after that He would rise again from the dead. For the time being, however, He left them to puzzle it out for themselves.

One of the Pharisees, a member of the Sanhedrin or Council of the Jews, a man named Nicodemus, was deeply impressed by the majesty and power of Jesus. So he came to Him at night, being afraid to do so openly, wanting to know just what new teaching He had to give.

Jesus explained to him that the Messianic kingdom was not to be one of political and worldly power. It was to be one of God's rule within souls lifted to a higher plane of life than any earthly parents could give. This new life would require a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit. Jesus here spoke of the new, greater and sacramental rite of baptism which John the Baptist had said would far surpass his own and be proper to the Messiah.

The very idea of such a baptismal re-birth was quite beyond Nicodemus and he frankly admitted it. Jesus therefore said to him: "If you cannot understand that God's Spirit is needed to give a spiritual life, how can you grasp even deeper heavenly mysteries? But at least believe Me when I tell you of them. I am speaking of what I know, for I have come from heaven, even as I am still in heaven. No other man on earth can speak of them from personal experience, for no man has been to heaven and back to be able to do so."

And He continued: "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son; and He must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that all who look to Him may be saved."

Nicodemus went away, thoughtful and profoundly moved; and there could be no doubt that eventually he, too, would become a disciple. In fact, it was he who, after the Crucifixion, assisted Joseph of Arimathea in providing honorable burial for the body of Christ, and he has been revered by the Church through the ages as St. Nicodemus.

The bitter hostility of the Scribes and Pharisees generally, however, made it quite clear that the message of Jesus had no chance of acceptance in Jerusalem; but He had at least offered Himself to the Jewish authorities there as the Messiah.

Now He withdrew from the Holy City, exercising His ministry among the country people of Judea.

After a few months there came the sad news that John the Baptist had been cast into prison by Herod Antipas, who was angered by John's denunciation of his immorality. This meant the end of the Precursor's mission, and Jesus at once began in earnest His own great life-work.

Taking His disciples with Him, He left for Galilee, passing through Samaria on the way.

He preached the actual arrival of the Kingdom of God, urging people to repent of their sins and to accept the good news or gospel being offered to them from heaven.

Usually in His discourses, He was silent about His own Messiahship because of the prevalence of so many wrong ideas about the coming of a political leader to make of the Jews the greatest nation on earth.

To the Samaritans, however, who were not so deeply affected by these notions as were the Jews, He spoke plainly.

Thus, at Jacob's well, He replied, "I am He" to the woman of Samaria who had mentioned the Messiah whom God had promised to send. Elsewhere He called Himself, as a rule, the "Son of Man;" but He spoke always as a prophet and teacher of marvelous authority, shown equally in His words and work.

On His journey through Galilee He stopped at Cana where He had wrought the miracle of water turned into wine, and whilst He was there one of King Herod's officers came to Him from Capharnaum, twenty miles away, begging Him to come and save his dying son.

Jesus told him simply not to worry, for the boy was cured. On the way home, met by servants who had run to tell him the good news that the boy had suddenly recovered, the officer asked when, only to be told that it was precisely at 1 p.m., the very time when Jesus had spoken to him. He and his whole family, therefore, believed in the claims of Jesus.

7. The Kingdom and the Apostles.

St. Luke tells us that Jesus, having "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, the fame of Him went out through the whole country. And He taught in their synagogues and was magnified by all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up."

Here particularly was verified the declaration in St. John's gospel that "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." His claim in the synagogue at Nazareth to be the One whose advent had been predicted by Isaiah the prophet was rejected with the scornful remark that He was but the son of Joseph the carpenter; and sadly exclaiming that "no prophet is accepted in his own country," He went down to Capharnaum on the lakeside, making that town headquarters for His Galilean ministry.

On the first Sabbath after His arrival in Capharnaum, He spoke in the synagogue and met with a very different reception from that given Him in Nazareth. The people were enthusiastic about His teaching, sensing a divine authority in His words far beyond anything they had experienced in those of the Scribes and Pharisees. Moreover, at the end of His discourse, Jesus with a word cast the evil spirit out of a possessed man so that the people, amazed, spread far and wide the story of the incident.

Leaving the synagogue for the home of Peter and Andrew, He there found the mother of Peter's wife ill with fever, but He cured her at once and she prepared a meal for them all.

That evening crowds of sick people were brought to Him and He healed their diseases, working late into the night; yet, tired as He must have been, He rose before daybreak and went off to a lonely place in the hills to pray, a habit of His all His life.

From Capharnaum, He made many preaching tours through Galilee, meeting with ever-growing success.

He had come, however, to establish a Kingdom, as He Himself declared, saying: "I must preach the Kingdom of God, for therefore am I sent." Although this Kingdom was not of this world, it was to be in this world and to last till the end of time, long after He Himself had returned to the Heaven from which He came. For the foundation of this Kingdom He was to choose from among His disciples twelve men whom He would train personally before sending them out to continue His work.

One evening, therefore, in preparation for this, He went alone into the mountains and prayed all through the night.

Next morning He called His disciples together and chose the twelve, conferring upon them the title of Apostles.

The chosen ones were Simon Peter; Andrew; James; John; Philip; Nathanael, known also as Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, the son of Alphaeus; Simon Zelotes (the Zealot); Jude, the brother of James; and Judas Iscariot, who eventually was to betray Him.

This was one of the greatest events of history, the beginning of the Church as the Kingdom of God on Earth. And it was followed by one of the most important utterances ever to come from human lips. For immediately afterwards, with His newly-chosen Apostles about Him, He gave to the people the great discourse known as the "Sermon on the Mount."

So Jesus, who had come, as He said, not to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to usher in their perfect fulfillment, laid the foundations of the "Kingdom of God" or the "Kingdom of Heaven" (He spoke of it in both ways), which He called His Church.

8. Manifestations of Divine Power.

At about this same time Jesus made a brief visit to Jerusalem for one of the festival days. Whilst there, to the scandal of the Scribes and Pharisees once more, He healed a man on the Sabbath who had been crippled for thirty-eight years.

In answer to their complaints, He asserted that He had all the rights of God over the Sabbath, that He was equally God with His Father, and that some day at His bidding all men would rise from their graves and that He would be their judge.

This filled His critics with still more anger and strengthened their determination to find ways and means to kill Him.

Leaving Jerusalem, He returned to Galilee and continued preaching in various synagogues; but representatives of the Scribes and Pharisees followed Him wherever He went, spying upon Him, interrupting Him, disputing with Him, and gathering all the Information which they thought they could later use against Him. But Jesus went on teaching and doing good.

One day, as He entered a village, a poor leper met Him and cried out piteously: "Lord, if You will, You can make me clean." Jesus reached out and touched him, saying: "I will. Be you cleansed." The leprosy at once vanished and the man was bidden to go and to report himself to the priest as cured.

The fame of the miracle quickly spread and when Jesus arrived at last in Capharnaum people came in such numbers to the house where He was staying that the room was overflowing, with crowds outside trying, yet unable to get in.

As He was teaching them, a paralyzed man was brought by some friends. These tore away the tiles of the roof since there was no other means of entry, and let the patient down by ropes to the feet of Jesus. Far from being angry, Jesus was deeply moved and said to the sick man: "Your sins are forgiven you."

The Scribes and Pharisees present thought: "This, at any rate, is blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Jesus, however, reading their minds, said: "You think I have not that power? Then see this!"

Turning to the palsied man, He said: "Take up your bed and go home." The man at once did so, to the amazement of all. And on all sides, people glorified God, saying: "We have never seen anything like this before!"

A few days later, He healed the sick servant of a Roman centurion at the request of the Jewish people who urged that, although he was a heathen, the centurion had built a synagogue for them.

One morning after that, He left at daybreak for Naim, a village some twenty-four miles away. He arrived there in the evening — the time when funerals usually took place — and met that of a dead boy, the only son of a poor widow. "Weep not," He said to the mother; and with a word, He restored her son to life, to her great consolation and the further astonishment of all who saw or heard of it.

The news spread like wildfire; the excitement was intense; the popularity of Jesus with the people was at its height.

9. Speaking in Parables.

With the Twelve, Jesus travelled through the towns and villages of Galilee preaching everywhere the Kingdom of God.

Much of His teaching He gave in the form of parables or stories, in accordance with Jewish ways at the time. And all kinds of subjects were dealt with in this way.

It is not possible to discuss all the parables at any length in this small book, nor to treat of them in the order in which they were given. We can but touch briefly on some of the many aspects of His teaching given at different times by this means, referring readers to the gospels themselves for a more extensive study of them.

In the parable of the "Sower and the Seed" (Mk. 4:1-20), He warned His listeners that if His teaching awakened no response within them, the fault would lie in their own evil dispositions.

Of such evil dispositions, they should repent, confident that God, on His part, will welcome them with infinite mercy. A "Shepherd seeking a Lost Sheep," a "Woman seeking a Lost Coin," a "Father" rejoicing in the return of a "Prodigal Son" (Luke 15:1-32), are but faint images of God's attitude towards souls repenting of the sins separating them from Him.

Think, He begged them, of what is at stake. It is no less than the "Kingdom of Heaven," for which no sacrifice is too great; even as a man will sell all to buy a "Field containing buried Treasure," or a merchant will barter everything to gain a "Pearl of Great Price" (Matt. 13:44-46).

That Kingdom of Heaven is brought within their reach by His Church, small now as a "Mustard Seed," but to grow into an immense and spreading tree affording shelter for all who seek rest within it (Matt. 13:31-32). Scandals will arise, yes; for the Church will be in a world like to a "Field sown with Good Grain," but which enemies will oversow with "Cockle or Tares." It will be like a "Net

holding Good and Bad Fish.” (Matt. 13:24-50). Nevertheless, there is nothing wrong with the “Net,” and the Church is indeed the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

Sadly, however, Jesus warned the Jews that their official leaders and their nation as a whole would reject the grace being offered to them, as the “Invited Guests” made all kinds of excuses for refusing to attend the “Great Supper” (Luke 14:17-24). They would even eventually put Him to death, as the “Wicked Husbandmen” in the vineyard planned to murder the very son of the proprietor (Mk. 12:1-12).

Of those who do come to the Kingdom, despite this national rejection of it, much will be expected.

They must be the enemies of sin, making sure that they are clothed in the “Wedding Garment” of divine grace (Matt. 22:11-14). As “Leaven” transforms bread, that grace will transform their souls (Luke 13:21).

But they must co-operate generously with this grace, making good use of whatever “Talents” God has given them (Matt. 25:14-30).

Above all, charity will be required of them; forgiving others, instead of behaving like the “Unmerciful Servant” (Matt. 18:23-35); relieving the needs of the poor, not imitating the attitude of the selfish “Rich Man” towards “Lazarus the Beggar” (Luke 16:19-31); being a “Good Samaritan” to all in distress, of whatever kind it might be (Luke 10:25-37).

Nor must any quarter be given to the pride of the “Pharisee” who thought himself such a paragon of virtue in comparison with the “Publican” (Luke 18:9-14).

Surely they should be as earnest in preparing for their eternal destiny as was the “Unjust Steward” in looking to his merely temporal future (Luke 18:1-8), and in taking every care to avoid the fate that overtook the “Rich Fool” (Luke 12:13-21).

Always to be kept in mind is the fact that there will most certainly be a Last Judgment, when the good and the wicked will be divided as the “Sheep and the Goats” (Matt. 25:31-46); and that it is essential not to be found then as the “Foolish Virgins” who were taken by surprise only to find no oil in their lamps (Matt. 25:1-13).

10. Increasing Popularity.

For almost a year, Jesus had been teaching, mighty in word and work, throughout Galilee, His popularity increasing daily. More and more widespread became the conviction that He was indeed a great prophet, and even perhaps the Messiah. But the people were soon to learn that He was definitely not the kind of Messiah they were expecting.

How hard He was working at this time can be gathered from the following typical incidents.

One day, near Capharnaum, He had been explaining His doctrine and persuading the people almost from daylight till dark; and, as evening fell, seeing how great the constantly increasing crowd was, He took pity on them and miraculously feed them from a few loaves and a couple of small fish. (In fact, he was to perform this prodigy on at least two separate occasions; but more of that later.)

To the disciples, however, the lesson was one of great significance. Acting as only God could do, He wrought miracles such as had not been heard of “from the beginning of the world,” proving His dominion over the whole of creation, not only over inanimate things, not only over the vegetative

and animal worlds, but over those evil spirits also from whose power He had come to deliver mankind.

Making their way back to the boat, (on one occasion), they set out across the Lake once more. It was broad daylight, and as the people of Capharnaum could easily see them coming, a great crowd gathered to welcome them.

Among those anxiously waiting to see Jesus and talk to Him was an official of the synagogue named Jairus. As soon as Jesus landed, therefore, he begged Him to come and heal his dying daughter. Jesus set out with him for the house, the people thronging around them.

A woman in the crowd, suffering from a twelve-years' old disease, edged her way towards Him, touched the hem of His garment, and was instantly cured. Divinely aware of this, Jesus proclaimed for the benefit of all present both the fact of her cure and that it was her great spirit of faith which had won for her so wonderful a favor. It was a faith He was asking of them all.

There had been some delay, and before they arrived at the house of Jairus, a servant came to say that his daughter had died and that it was now useless for Jesus to come any farther. But Jesus consoled the poor father, told him to believe firmly still, and that all would be well.

At the house, He allowed only Peter, James and John, together with the father and the mother, to enter the dead girl's room with Him. In their presence, He merely took her hand and said: "Talitha Cumi." ("Little girl, get up.") Then He bade the parents to see that she had something to eat, adding that they were not to broadcast the news of what He had done.

The excitement of the enthusiastic crowd outside could easily give rise to charges against Him of causing a tumult. Such charges would come soon enough!

So Jesus gave Himself to all who needed Him, and not only preached the gospel of His new spiritual Kingdom, confirming His mission by signs and miracles in village after village throughout the country, but gave authority and power to His Apostles also, sending them out in twos to do the same.

11. Death of John the Baptist.

During the absence of the Apostles on their mission, as He Himself continued His labors, news came to Him which was a kind of portent of what was to be His own fate.

John the Baptist had been put to death by Herod Antipas who, in a drunken moment during a scandalous banquet, had yielded to the demand of the woman with whom he was living in incest and adultery for "the head of John the Baptist in a dish."

John was the last of the prophets of the Old Testament and the first of the New. He stands like the dividing-line between the two great Covenants.

What Jesus thought of him we know: "A prophet?" He had said of him. "Truly, I tell you, more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written: 'Behold I send my angel before your face, who shall prepare your way before you'. For I say to you:

'Amongst those born of woman, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist'."

To the astonishment of His listeners, He then took occasion to add that the least of those actually received into the Church He Himself was establishing and who enjoyed the full blessing of His Kingdom, would be greater than John the Baptist!

12. Miracle of the Loaves.

Shortly after John's death, the twelve Apostles returned to Jesus from a month's hard work, excited, but very tired; and Jesus said to them: "Come apart with Me and rest awhile." So they took a boat and went some distance along the shore of the Lake to find a quiet place away from the crowds.

The people, however, were not so easily shaken off. Seeing the direction in which the boat was going, they hurried round by land, and when Jesus got to the place He had in mind He found an immense throng already there.

Taking pity on these "sheep without a shepherd," He spent the rest of the day instructing them. They had brought no food with them, but they were so entranced by all He had to say to them that they did not dream of leaving so long as He continued speaking.

At last, it began to grow dark and the Apostles suggested to Him that they should be told to go to nearby villages and buy food for themselves. Jesus replied: "There's no need for them to go. You give them food." Philip said to Him: "We'd have to get several pounds' worth of provisions, to give them a mere pittance each!"

There were over five thousand people present, Capharnaum being full of visitors at the time from all parts of the country, who were making their way to Jerusalem for the rapidly approaching Feast of the Passover.

Andrew, the brother of Peter, interjected, saying: "There's a boy here, with five barley loaves and two fishes; but what are these among so many?"

Jesus was in no way perturbed. "Tell the people," He said, "to sit down." The people sat down on the grass, in rows of hundred-and-fifties.

He then took the loaves, raised His eyes to heaven, offered a prayer, broke the bread, gave some to each of the Apostles, and told them to distribute it among their guests. As they did so, they must have felt like men in a dream, for the supply in their hands kept increasing. The same thing happened also with the fish; and after all had had enough, there were twelve baskets of fragments remaining.

The meal finished, Jesus told the Apostles to set out for home by boat, leaving Him to dismiss the people.

The people, however, were reluctant to go, and in their enthusiasm decided to proclaim Him as their King there and then. But Jesus wanted something better than a faith bound up with miraculous temporal benefits and the triumphant nationalism they had in mind. So He refused their offer and escaped from them into the neighboring hills, to their great displeasure — a displeasure which, with many, was to turn to open hostility within twenty-four hours!

13. The Bread of Life.

For next day, in the synagogue at Capharnaum, having returned to the town during the night, Jesus told the people that the bread with which He had miraculously fed them the day before was not worth having compared with that which He intended to give them later on.

This other bread would be Himself, and in receiving it, they would be eating His very flesh and drinking His very blood.

Moreover, this food would give eternal life and not merely keep them alive for a little longer in this world, which is all that ordinary food can do.

Most of those present were horrified by these words. Talking among themselves, they said that He was going altogether too far, making it impossible for them to accept His teaching. And many, who had been His disciples till then, abandoned Him altogether.

Needless to say, the Scribes and Pharisees were delighted at the turn things were taking, and worked among the discontented people to make them active enemies of Jesus with themselves.

This marked a critical change in the life of Jesus in this world. Between the approaching Passover and that of next year, which was to be His last, He never again met with enthusiasm from vast crowds as He had up till then, except on one isolated occasion. Henceforth, thrown back more and more upon the twelve Apostles, He concentrated on training them for their future work.

One stormy encounter with Scribes and Pharisees who had come from Jerusalem marked the closing of His ministry in Galilee. They attacked Him for violating their traditions, whereupon He denounced their hypocrisy and their man-made traditions, declaring them to be “blind leaders of the blind.”

Then, taking the twelve, He shook the dust of Galilee off His feet and went elsewhere.

14. Peter the Rock.

Jesus and the Apostles, having left the territory of Herod Antipas, spent some time travelling through Phoenicia and Decapolis, eventually coming to Caesarea Philippi, at one of the sources of the Jordan, beyond the northern boundaries of Galilee. There an event of the utmost importance for His Church took place.

The very names “Caesarea” and “Philippi” bespoke the dominance of Rome and Greece. They were symbols excluding all dreams of a Jewish national kingdom. And there, in that depressing place as regards Jewish hopes of political supremacy, Jesus put a direct question to the twelve about Himself. “What,” He asked them, “do people think of Me?”

They all began to speak at once. “Some say You are John the Baptist, come back to life again; others say no, but that You are Elias (that is, Elijah), or Jeremiah (Jeremias), or one of the other prophets.”

“And you yourselves, what do you think?”

Peter spoke up instantly: “You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”

It was a clear declaration of His Divinity, among all the shifting sands of vague opinions.

“If you know that,” Jesus said to him, “it is not because you have thought of it for yourself, but because My Father in heaven has revealed it to you. And now, in turn, I say to you: You are Peter, the rock, as I called you when I changed your name from that of Simon; and upon this rock, I will build My Church. The forces of evil will never prevail against it. And I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

It was not enough, however, that the twelve should know the fact that He was the Messiah. They had still much to learn about the nature of His mission. So Jesus went on to explain to them that He must go up to Jerusalem, to be there rejected, tortured, and put to death by His own people; that only thus could He redeem them; but that on the third day He would rise again.

The shock of this declaration was so great that the last words were completely overlooked; and Peter, unable to reconcile himself to such treatment of his adored Master, exclaimed impulsively: "God forbid. Nothing like that must happen to You."

But Jesus told him that to try to prevent it would be to play the part of Satan. "You would have Me," He said, "turn aside from the very thing I came into this world to do! You are thinking as men think, and not seeing things as God sees them. Not self-interest, but self-sacrifice is demanded of Me. And if any man will come after Me, he too must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me."

15. Training of the Twelve.

Again and again, from then on, Jesus tried to impress upon the minds of the Twelve that He had to endure an ignominious passion of suffering and death.

But He did not neglect measures to confirm them in their faith, and to reassure them of His ultimate triumph.

Only six days after Peter's profession of faith He took Peter and James and John with Him up to a high mountain-top, and was there transfigured before them, His face shining radiantly, His clothes glorious with an unearthly whiteness. Two men were conversing with Him, whom the Apostles recognized as Moses and Elias (Elijah), representatives of the Old Testament Law and the Prophets. They were talking about the very thing Jesus had been stressing all the week, the necessity of His passion and death. And in the midst of it all, a voice came from Heaven: "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. All you, Hear Him."

The whole experience raised the thoughts of the Apostles to the divine level; but it was for themselves alone. "Tell the vision to no man," Jesus said to them afterwards, "till the Son of Man be risen from the dead."

From now on, concentrating more intensely still on the formation of the Twelve, He gave them many lessons bearing upon their own spiritual lives, above all on the necessity of prayer, of humility, and of the forgiving of injuries.

One day, setting a little child in the midst of them, He said: "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven."

Then, thinking of the welfare of little children themselves, He added severely that it would be better to have a millstone tied round one's neck and to be thrown into the sea, than to teach evil to any one of them.

"Despise not one of these little ones," He said, "for I tell you, their angels in Heaven always see the face of My Father who is in Heaven." He knew what the angels do in Heaven, for He was, as He had described Himself: "The Son of Man, descended from Heaven, but who yet is in Heaven."

As to the forgiveness of injuries, to Peter, who thought it generous that pardon should be granted seven times, Jesus replied: "Not seven times, but seventy-times seven times," or indefinitely.

16. Visit to Jerusalem.

So the instructions continued, in between the various duties of the ministry, until in the October of that year the Feast of Tabernacles, a kind of Harvest Festival, was at hand. Many were accustomed to going up to Jerusalem for the festivities, and Jesus decided to go also. Afterwards He intended to work in Judea rather than in Galilee.

After His journeying through Phoenicia and Decapolis, He had returned for a brief stay at Capharnaum. Setting out from there along the road towards Nazareth, He came to the heights above Magdala and paused at that vantage point to have a last look back at the Sea of Galilee and the towns along its Northern shores.

Sad at heart, He reproached the cities for their resistance to divine grace, saying: "Woe to you, Corozain; woe to you, Bethsaida; woe to you, Capharnaum. If the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented. If they had been done even in Sodom, that place would have been spared. In the day of judgment it will go easier with those wicked cities than with yourselves." Then He turned, and set His face resolutely towards Jerusalem.

His journey took Him through Samaria, and at one village, to which James and John had gone ahead to prepare accommodation, they were refused hospitality on the ground that the party was travelling to the Jerusalem so hated by the Samaritans. The two Apostles returned to Jesus full of indignation and wanted to call down fire upon the town as Elias (Elijah) had done upon the insolent villagers.

But Jesus quietly reproved them, telling them that they certainly had not the right spirit yet. It was one thing for Himself to declare what would be the just judgment of God on the Galilean cities which had refused divine grace; but it was not for them to invoke disasters upon villagers who had merely refused hospitality to strangers. Patiently, therefore, He went on with them to another village.

Arrived within the vicinity of Jerusalem, Jesus stayed in the little town of Bethany, only about two miles from the Holy City. St. John says simply, in his gospel: "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister Mary, and Lazarus." These were friends in whose house He was always welcome; and that home He often visited during His ministry in Judea.

17. Clash with the Pharisees.

During these days of the Feast of Tabernacles, He Himself was the main topic of conversation. Many Galileans were already there before He arrived, and people were asking whether He, too, was coming. Opinions about Him were very divided. Some said that He was a good man; others that He was a fraud and a deceiver.

Suddenly, one day, He appeared in the Temple court, and there began to teach the people openly. He spoke about Himself more clearly than ever before and the people were amazed at His utterances as He answered all that was being said against Him by His enemies.

No. He had not studied in the Rabbinical schools in Jerusalem. But then, His doctrine was not of men; it was directly from God. Yes. He had healed the sick on the Sabbath day. But circumcision was performed on the Sabbath day, and far from breaking the Law of Moses, was performed precisely to keep that Law; and He certainly was not breaking the Law by giving the blessing of health. They knew His family and could point to his relatives, maybe; but they had not made allowance for His heavenly mission of which His miracles were the guarantee.

The Scribes and Pharisees present, unable to bear this, discussed the possibility of arresting Him, but scarcely knew how to go about it. Too many of the people were sympathetically disposed towards Him. The Sanhedrin sent some officers to try, but the officers returned empty-handed, excusing themselves by saying: "Never did man speak like this man."

Evidently, the thing to do was to undermine His standing with the people. Next day, therefore, when He was again speaking in the Temple courtyard, the Scribes and Pharisees thought to force the issue by bringing to Him a woman taken in adultery.

Moses, they said, commanded such a one to be stoned to death. What did He say? They thought, diabolically, that if He agreed to her death He would forfeit the sympathy of the people; if He released her, they themselves could challenge Him with having publicly flouted the Law of Moses.

But all His divine wisdom was at the disposal of His mercy. Without denying the Law of Moses, He said, with words full of meaning and authority: "Very well. But let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone."

Speechless, they edged away, beginning with the eldest. They had the feeling that He was reading them like a book. As for the poor woman, forgiveness did not mean condonation. "Go," He said, "and now, sin no more."

Jesus continued His discourses. He declared Himself to be the "Light of the World." Whilst others were but "of earth," He was "of Heaven." If people wanted freedom, let them follow Him; for His disciples would know that true freedom which is freedom from sin.

This was too much for the Pharisees, who cried out that they had such freedom and were already acceptable in God's sight as children of Abraham. But Jesus countered by saying that Abraham himself was overjoyed by the sight of His advent.

"What," they replied, "you are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham?"

"I can assure you," He answered, "before Abraham so much as existed, I am." This was a claim to share in the very name by which God had described Himself to Moses, and they took up stones from the Temple courtyard to stone Him to death for the blasphemy. But Jesus evaded them, and mingling with the crowd, went away.

Outside the Temple precincts, He came upon a man blind from birth whom He healed. The news of such a miracle in crowded Jerusalem rapidly spread, filling the people with astonishment and admiration. The Pharisees, however, were filled with consternation. They sent for the man, and unable to shake his testimony, abused him. The man sought out Jesus to tell Him of this, and Jesus said to him, in the presence of some Pharisees: "I am come into this world, that they who see not, may see; and they who see, may become blind."

The Pharisees who heard Him asked: "Are we blind?" Jesus declared that they were deliberately so, and therefore guilty in the sight of God.

18. Judean Ministry.

Leaving Jerusalem, He went home to His friends at Bethany. During a brief stay there, He preached to the country people round about, and such visitors from Jerusalem as happened to be present.

He told the people that He was the door to the-true sheepfold. Only through Him could they enter upon the way that led to salvation. Yet more. He was the Good Shepherd who was prepared to give

His life for His sheep. In fact, He would do so, and voluntarily; although afterwards He would rise from the dead.

His words were carried back to Jerusalem, where they caused much discussion; and opinions concerning Him were more divided than ever.

He now went farther afield, and during the next two months taught in various country villages throughout Judea and Perea. He also chose and sent seventy-two disciples to help in the work.

The doctrines taught were concerning the Kingdom of God in general, but more specifically the fatherhood of God, the necessity of prayer, the generous fulfillment of duties, the obligation of fraternal charity, and the final judgment in which the reward of eternal happiness or the punishment of eternal misery will be the lot of each man according to his deserts.

When the disciples came back to Him full of enthusiasm and with reports of the great success which had attended their labors, He said: "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, and the ears which hear the things you have heard."

To this period belongs the expression of His own great love for men, when He spoke those memorable words: "Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is sweet, and My burden light."

All through, too, He manifested His constant spirit of communion with the heavenly Father He so loved, giving Himself to such prolonged and fervent prayer that His Apostles, observing Him, felt that they had never known what it really is to pray. So they asked Him to teach them also to pray.

It was in response to this request that He taught them the prayer, as sublime as it is simple: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

19. The Supreme Declaration.

In the following December Jesus went back to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Dedication, which commemorated the deliverance of the Temple in 165 B.C. from the desecration to which it had been subjected by Antiochus Epiphanes some five years earlier. Antiochus was a tyrant who had tried to stamp out Judaism and impose upon the people his own Greek paganism.

Arriving shortly before the Feast, Jesus stayed once more with His friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary, at Bethany, two miles outside the city. Then, on the festival day itself, He went to pay His visit to the Temple.

As soon as he appeared there, the people at once gathered around Him. But the Pharisees were there also; and they were determined to force Him to say openly whether or not He claimed to be the promised Messiah. So they threw the challenge at Him: "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, say so straight out."

Jesus answered that whatever He might say they would not believe Him, but that the miracles He had wrought in the name of His Father were evidence enough of His divine mission. Then He added the momentous words: "I and the Father are one."

The implications of this were only too clear, and at once, the Pharisees took up stones from the courtyard to stone Him.

But Jesus challenged them in turn, saying that He had done many good works that only God could do. "For which of My good works," He asked, "do you stone Me?"

"Not for any good works," they shouted, "but for blasphemy, because, being a man, you make yourself God."

Dropping the stones, they made a concerted rush towards Him, intent on arresting Him; but once more He escaped them by losing Himself in the surging throng, left the Temple courtyard, and Jerusalem itself, setting out at once, not back to Bethany, but to the far side of the Jordan some twenty miles away, near to the place where John the Baptist had first commenced his mission.

But He went in tears, saying: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets, and stone them that are sent to you. How often would I have gathered your children as the hen her chickens under her wing, and you would not!"

20. Raising of Lazarus.

The next two months Jesus spent in Perea teaching, doing good always, and making many converts.

The Pharisees, however, constantly dogged His footsteps; and one day a group of them told Him to get out of Perea because Herod Antipas, who was Governor of Perea as well as of Galilee, was planning to kill Him.

No thought of His welfare made the Pharisees warn Him. Full of envy and hatred, they thought that the threat might at least put an end to His present work, impelling Him to go elsewhere.

But He merely replied to them: "Go and tell that fox I shall continue My work until it is time for Me to go to Jerusalem."

"If a prophet is to perish, it can only be in that city."

At last came a call of charity which He could not refuse. Messengers came from Martha and Mary at Bethany to say that their brother Lazarus was dangerously ill. The message sent by the sisters was merely: "Lord, he whom You love is sick." They knew that they need not say more.

But Jesus was well aware that whilst the couriers were making their twenty-mile journey Lazarus had died; and He deliberately allowed two further days to elapse before saying to His Apostles: "Let us go into Judea again." They reminded Him of the plots to kill Him there, but it was in vain, and seeing His determination to go, Thomas said to the others: "Let us also go, and die with Him."

Lazarus had already been four days in the grave as they approached Bethany, and Martha, hearing of His coming, went to meet Him with the tearful words: "Lord, had You been here, my brother would not have died." Her sister Mary came also, when told Jesus was asking for her, and said practically the same words. The two sisters had probably said repeatedly to each other that had Jesus been there, He would never had let their brother die.

At His request, they took Him to the cave where Lazarus was entombed, and He told the men present to remove the stone covering the entrance to it. Then, after a prayer to His Father, He commanded Lazarus to return to life and come out from the grave.

Lazarus at once did so, to the immense excitement of all who witnessed it, and the conversion of most of them. Not, however, of all. Some hurried to Jerusalem and informed the Pharisees, who immediately demanded a meeting of the Sanhedrin or Supreme Council of the Jews.

The meeting of the Sanhedrin was held in the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest for that year. All agreed that something had to be done. If Jesus was allowed to continue with such impressive confirmations of His teaching, all would eventually believe in Him. If there were any disturbance, the Romans might even step in and reduce them to absolute slavery, taking away all their present privileges.

The discussion went on until Caiaphas put an end to it by saying: "There is only one thing to do. It is better for Him to die than for the whole nation to perish."

Jesus was doomed. But they could not lay hands upon Him for the moment. He had left Bethany and gone into the desert country some miles North, near Ephraim. The Sanhedrin could but make their plans for His death, issuing orders that anyone knowing where He was to be found should immediately inform them.

21. Last Missionary Days.

Jesus did not stay at Ephraim. He spent some three weeks journeying through Samaria, Galilee and Perea. His movements were reported to the members of the Sanhedrin, in Jerusalem; but He was always moving, and they could bide their time.

Wherever He went, Pharisees were in attendance and He had many skirmishes with them. On one occasion, they brought up the important question of marriage and divorce. In response to their declaration that the Law of Moses permitted a man to put away his wife and marry another, He told them uncompromisingly that Moses had never really meant to approve of such laxity, but had merely tolerated the practice because of their lack of good dispositions. Such laxity, He said, was quite against God's original intentions. Nor could it be tolerated henceforth. "From now on," He proclaimed, "if a man puts away his wife and marries another, he commits adultery. And if the woman who is put away marries another, she commits adultery."

That sounded severe even to the Apostles, but they knew that if He spoke in such a way, it was a sheer matter of principle. They had too many evidences of His gentleness and mercy to think otherwise.

Thus, about this same time, He healed the ten lepers who cried out to Him so movingly: "Jesus, Master, have pity on us."

So, too, He blessed the little children some women brought to Him, despite the efforts of the Apostles to prevent them from bothering Him. "Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not," He said, "for of such is the Kingdom of God."

One day, as they were approaching Jericho and getting ever nearer to Jerusalem, He told the Apostles what would happen to Him there. He would be arrested, condemned, mocked, spat upon, and put to death; but on the third day, He would rise again. He had warned them so often of these things, but still they could make nothing of it all. It seemed so unreal.

Two of them, however, (James and John) felt at least that the climax was approaching and that the Kingdom for which Jesus had been so long preparing them was at hand. So they begged Him to

grant them the privilege of sitting, one on His right hand and the other on His left, when the glorious Kingdom would at last be His.

In reply, Jesus asked them if they were willing to share in His sufferings, and on receiving their answer in the affirmative said: "That at least I can promise you, but not more. What you have asked rests not with Me but with My Father in Heaven." Then to all twelve He spoke seriously on the necessity of humility.

When they entered Jericho, He asked the publican Zacchaeus, a local customs officer, for hospitality. Zacchaeus, who was not very tall, had climbed into a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus over the heads of the crowd who had gathered for the occasion; and Jesus singled him out as a sincere and honest man despite the fact that the Pharisees regarded him as a sinner.

Next day, as He was leaving the town, He was accosted by Bartimeus, a blind man. Bartimeus had been told that the noise of the crowd was because Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Again and again, therefore, the blind man cried out:

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

In vain, others told him to be quiet. Impressed by the man's faith and perseverance, Jesus stopped, ordered the man to be brought to Him, asked what he wanted, and bestowed upon him the gift of sight that he so desired.

22. Banquet at Bethany.

It was only about twenty miles to Bethany from Jericho, and when Jesus came into the little town on the Friday afternoon, just six days before the Passover, He was welcomed by all. Only a month ago He had raised Lazarus, so well-known and popular with everybody, from the dead.

A wealthy citizen named Simon even put on a banquet for Him and for His Apostles, inviting Lazarus, Martha and Mary to be present also.

During the course of the evening, in the presence of the whole company, Mary gave expression to her reverence, love and gratitude by lavishing upon the head and feet of Jesus a most costly and refreshing perfume. This greatly distressed Judas, who protested against such waste, saying that the precious ointment could have been sold for between ten and twenty pounds and the money given to the poor. Now he said this, not because he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and having the purse, carried the things that were put therein.

But Jesus defended her. "The poor you have always with you," He said, "but not Myself. She has done well, preparing My body beforehand for burial. And I tell you that wherever the gospel is preached in the world, what she has done will be recalled in memory of her."

Judas, however, was anything but appeased. He had been repelled by what he had seen. The loss of the money rankled. Thoughts of selling the precious ointment began to yield place in his mind to thoughts of selling something infinitely more precious, Jesus Himself.

During these days, Jerusalem was seething with excitement. Caravans of pilgrims were pouring in every day from everywhere for the Passover. On the hillsides round about tents were pitched, and daily the crowds from them went into the Holy City. Many Galileans were amongst them.

All the talk was of Jesus, and above all, of the miracle He had wrought a month ago, the raising of Lazarus from the dead. People, coming and going, thronged the two miles of road between Jerusalem and Bethany. So many of them wanted to see Lazarus with their own eyes.

23. Palm Sunday.

It was into the midst of all this excitement that Jesus had come on the Friday of His arrival at Bethany, and He determined to go on to Jerusalem after the Sabbath, on the first day of the week. But, unlike previous visits, this one was to take the form of a public entry into the City. He therefore sent two of His disciples to a nearby village to bring back a donkey's foal which He said they would find tethered there, and which the owner would gladly let them have.

The news that He was coming in such a way quickly spread, even to Jerusalem itself; and as He rode up the hillside towards the city, the people came to meet the miracle worker from Nazareth, waving palms and crying out:

"Welcome."

"Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest!"

It was in vain that angry priests and Pharisees bade the people stop, asking what they meant by it. "This is Jesus the Prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee," they said, and went on with their demonstrations of joy. The Pharisees then turned to Jesus. "It is for you to stop all this," they said. "Bid them cease." "If I did," He replied, "the very stones would cry out."

As a sudden turn in the road brought the city into sight, Jesus was moved to tears. Here He was, publicly accepting the role of the Messiah, yet knowing that within a few days He would be as emphatically rejected. "If you but knew," He said, half-aloud, "the things that are to your peace. But now they are hidden from you. There will not be left in you a stone, upon a stone, because you have not known the time of your visitation."

Entering into the teeming city, He visited the Temple to give Himself to prayer. But the priests and Pharisees said to one another angrily: "We have accomplished nothing. The whole world seems to have gone after Him." They therefore held another meeting to consider what next move they should make.

No further developments took place that day in Jerusalem; and, having looked round on what He saw there, Jesus returned in the evening to Bethany. It was little more than half-an-hour's walk.

24. Second Cleansing of the Temple.

Next day, Monday, He went back to the city with the twelve. On the way, coming upon a fig tree in full leaf, but bearing no fruit, He wrought His only-miracle of judgment, condemning it to death. On the following day, to their astonishment, the Apostles noticed that it had completely withered away. The incident was a kind of acted parable, a "visual-aid" in the religious education of the Apostles, teaching them the fate that awaited Jerusalem itself, so splendid in promise yet so disappointing in results.

In the city He found the Temple precincts once more turned into a market-place, with beasts and birds for sale and booths set up for changing the various moneys of pilgrims from different localities. Again, therefore, He drove them all out, declaring the Temple to be a House of Worship,

not to be desecrated by such trafficking. Had the offenders refused to go, Jesus and His handful of disciples could not have expelled them by physical force, short of a miracle.

But the moral authority and blazing indignation of Jesus were more than they could resist. Naturally, the Chief Priests were furious; but Jesus had received such a wonderful welcome from the people the day before that they could not arrest Him publicly.

He spent the rest of the day teaching in the Temple without interruption, save for one incident only.

Some small children came in whilst He was speaking, and recognizing Him as the central figure of the procession of the day before, began to chant the words they had then heard: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" The Temple authorities, unable to bear it, said to Him: "Don't you hear what they are singing?" "Yes," He replied. "But have you never read that God has inspired the perfection of praise from the lips of babes and sucklings?"

That night He again spent at Bethany, returning to the city on Tuesday morning.

25. Day of Questions.

The Chief Priests and others had had time to think things over, and when He began teaching again in the Temple they interrupted Him, demanding to know by what authority He took such duties upon Himself.

He retorted with another question. "From whom did John the Baptist receive his authority?" They were reduced to silence. For if they said that John the Baptist had no authority, they would have angered the people, who regarded him as a prophet of God. If, on the other hand, they said from God, the reply would have been: "Then why did you not obey him?"

Taking advantage of their discomfiture, Jesus then preached the parables of the "Two Sons" (Matt. 21:38-32) of the "Wicked Husbandmen" (Luke 20:9-18); and of the "Wedding Feast" (Matt. 22:1-14). All three parables predicted God's rejection of the Jews as His chosen people, and the bestowal of their inheritance upon the Gentiles.

Enraged by these, the Pharisees sought to get Him into trouble with the Roman authorities by asking whether or not it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar? They gained nothing by that, for He replied simply: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

The Sadducees then put a captious question about marriage in Heaven which Jesus summarily dismissed by saying that in Heaven there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, conditions there being quite different from those on earth.

The Pharisees then tried again by asking which is the greatest commandment? Jesus replied that the first is to love God, and that the second is to love one's neighbor — a love they certainly were not then manifesting!

After that, there were no more questions, but Jesus went on to warn the people against the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees. These took His words as a declaration of open war; and Jesus knew that He had virtually pronounced His own death-sentence.

As He was leaving the Temple, never to enter it again, He saw a poor widow put two mites into a collection-box for the upkeep of the Temple. How small an offering that was can be realized from

the fact that sixteen mites would be equal to an English penny! Yet Jesus praised her sacrificial giving, saying that she merited more than all the others because she had given all she had.

A little later, however, He predicted to His Apostles the total ruin of the Temple despite its vast stones and solid structure.

Going home to Bethany, He broke the journey by going to Mt. Olivet, taking apart with Him His Apostles Peter, James and John, to whom He spoke at great length about the Last Judgment.

26. Judas the Betrayer.

Next day, Wednesday, Jesus spent in retirement with His Apostles, possibly in Bethany, probably out in the nearby hills.

These were the last hours of spiritual preparation, and during them, He told them clearly once more: "It is but two days to the Passover. Then I shall be given up to be crucified."

One Apostle, however, was missing for some hours on that day. He had gone alone to Jerusalem, where the Sanhedrin was holding a meeting in the morning, trying to decide what to do about Jesus. The members were worried by the number of His friends who had come in from the country areas. But, to their delight, Judas came to them, asking what they would give him if he would inform them where they could find Jesus away from the usual crowds.

They agreed to give him thirty pieces of silver, possibly equal to four or five pounds in English money. [This is about 100 British Pounds in 2011 terms.] It must have seemed a rather poor bargain, but still Judas accepted it. He had been disgusted by the way in which Jesus had failed again and again to assert Himself as the Messiah-King of Jewish nationalist aspirations when opportunities had presented themselves.

27. The Last Supper.

On Thursday, Jesus sent Peter and John into the city to arrange for the use of an upper room in the house of a friend where He could celebrate the Passover meal with His Apostles that evening; and in due time all came to the house, including Judas.

Before the meal began, having in mind the many times the Apostles had disputed about "who would be the greater," He gave them a supreme lesson in humility by girding Himself with a towel and then, taking a bowl of water, kneeling like a household slave to wash their feet.

After that, He proceeded with the supper, during which He warned them that one of them was about to betray Him.

Judas went away, to tell the Temple guards to be ready for the moment when he would notify them. It would be soon.

Jesus was at supper with His Apostles in the house of a friend, he told them. They would be able to arrest Him without any public disturbance after He had left the premises.

When Judas had gone — as seems more probably the case — Jesus proceeded to fulfill the promise He had made a year earlier of giving His flesh to eat and His blood to drink. Taking bread, He said: "Take and eat. This is My body which is given for you. Do this in commemoration of Me." Then, taking wine: "This is My blood of the New Covenant, which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins."

Thus, He gave the sign of His own Priesthood according to the order of Melchisedech, who had offered sacrifice in bread and wine; and also made the Apostles priests according to that same order. So, too, He left to His Church the Sacrifice of the Mass, of which St. Paul was later to write: "As often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord until He come." 1 Corinthians 11:26.

After this, Jesus spoke for some hours to His Apostles, until towards midnight, comforting them, promising them the Holy Spirit for their future work, telling them that they would be united with Him as living branches are united with a vine, and concluding with a priestly prayer for the unity of His Church, impressing on them the wonderful relationships of Himself with His Father, and of themselves with Him.

A hymn of thanksgiving followed, then He left the house with His Apostles, and set out with them from Jerusalem along the Bethany road to His favorite Mount Olivet. There He went into a garden called Gethsemane, where He went apart from the Apostles with the exception of Peter, James and John whom He took with Him. These three were allowed to witness, as He knelt in prayer, something of the sorrow with which He was afflicted by the weight of the sins of the world, the burden of which forced from Him a very sweat of blood.

28. Arrest and Trial.

It was in the garden of Gethsemane that Judas, coming with the Temple guards, found Him.

The Apostles fled.

Jesus, arrested, was taken first to Annas, a former High Priest, who had no authority, but who wanted to examine Him in order to think out the best charge to bring against Him. Annas then sent Him to his son-in-law, Caiaphas, the actually ruling High Priest, who had already decided that it was better that Jesus should die than that the whole nation should perish.

It was now daylight, on Friday morning. The Sanhedrin had gathered quickly. Many professional informers were called to give evidence before the Jewish tribunal, but their accusations were so conflicting and so palpably false that Caiaphas set them all aside, and took things in hand himself.

He put a direct question to Jesus, bidding Him in the name of the Living God to say whether or not He claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus replied that He did, and that one day they would see Him coming again in the clouds of heaven.

It was clear that He was declaring Himself to be equal with God, and Caiaphas turned to his fellow-members of the Sanhedrin. "You have all heard that blasphemy," he said. "There's no need of other evidence. What do you say?" All agreed that the death-sentence should be pronounced.

During these proceedings two of the Apostles, Peter and John, had plucked up courage enough to come to the courtyard of the High Priest's house; but there, when recognized, Peter was terrified and three times denied, even with an oath, that he so much as knew Jesus. The crowing of a cock brought home to him the prediction of Jesus that he would do this; and going out he wept bitterly. For the moment he did not remember, although he did so later, that even when predicting his fall, Jesus had also said: "I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith fail not; and after your conversion, it will be for you to strengthen your brethren."

The Sanhedrin, forbidden by the Roman authorities to inflict the death-penalty themselves, took Jesus to Pilate, the Governor of Judea, accusing Him of advising people not to pay taxes to Caesar, of proclaiming Himself King, and of inciting the people to rebellion.

Pilate did not believe them; tried to escape condemning Jesus by sending Him to Herod Antipas, Governor of Galilee, who happened then to be in Jerusalem; and, when that expedient failed, together with all persuasive measures to placate the Jews, handed Him over to them to be crucified.

Before doing so, however, he washed his hands in their presence, declaring himself “innocent of the blood of this just man.” In a frenzy of triumph the mob, incited by the Jewish priests, cried out: “His blood be upon us and upon our children.”

Then they made Jesus carry His own cross to Calvary.

29. Death on Calvary.

Nailed to the cross, Jesus endured for three hours the ‘ignominious and agonizing tortures of crucifixion, with a placard above His head, to the mortification of the Jews but insisted upon by Pilate, proclaiming, Him as “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

Seven of His utterances from the cross have been preserved for us. He prayed for the forgiveness of His persecutors; promised paradise to the repentant thief who, together with another criminal, was crucified beside Him; entrusted His Mother to the care of St. John; expressed His own mental and bodily distress in the cry: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me,” and in the words: “I thirst;” and then, after declaring that all had been “accomplished,” His final, strong and confident declaration: “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit.”

So, at 3 p.m., on that Friday afternoon, Jesus died.

Nature itself paid the tribute His own people had refused. The sun was darkened, whilst the earth quaked, rending the Veil of the Temple and splitting open the tombs. The Jews were terrified and fled, beating their breasts. Even the Roman centurion exclaimed: “Indeed this man was the Son of God.”

The High Priests were not less terrified by these things than the others, but they were obsessed by yet another and greater fear. Jesus had said that He would rise again on the third day. They did not believe it possible; but they were determined to take precautions against any removal of His body by His disciples, with a subsequent claim that the prophecy had been fulfilled.

At sunset, the Sabbath would begin. They must get everything done by then. At their request, the Roman soldiers hastened the death of the two thieves by breaking their legs; but when they came to Jesus, they found Him already dead.

Still, to make sure, a soldier thrust a spear into His side.

The bodies were taken down, and Pilate granted permission to Joseph of Arimathea to give honorable burial to that of Jesus. One concession he made to the Jewish priests. They could seal the stone at the entrance to the vault, and get Roman guards to remain on watch until after the third day, preventing any interference with it.

30. Risen and Living Still.

Any ordinary biography would here come to an end. Impressed by the goodness, magnificent courage and unselfish devotedness of such a life as has been described, people might think the end to have been one of sheer tragedy; yet none the less it would be the end of but one more great man who had played his part on the stage of human history.

In the case of Jesus, however, things are very different.

Shortly before dawn on the third day, Sunday, an earthquake dislodged the stone from the entrance to the tomb in which He had been buried; and the Roman soldiers on guard were terrified not only by that, but by the apparition of an angel, luminously brilliant. They fell to the ground unconscious and when they came round, fled.

The displacing of the stone was not in order to allow Jesus to emerge from the tomb. He had already risen when that happened. But Mary Magdalen and the other women who came just before sunrise were thus enabled to see that the tomb was empty. The angel, still there, invited them to do so. "See the place where the Lord was laid," he said to them.

"He is not here, for He is risen, as He said. Go quickly and tell His disciples."

It was true. The disciples, however, were slow to believe. But during the next forty days, at various times and in different places, Jesus appeared to them singly and in groups.

He continued instructing them, explaining to two of them, on the road to Emmaus, how all that Moses and the prophets had predicted of the Messiah had been fulfilled in Him.

Appearing in the midst of them, when they were gathered together in Jerusalem, He bestowed upon them the power to forgive sins, breathing upon them and saying: "Receive the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you forgive, are forgiven them."

On another occasion, in Galilee, He confirmed Peter in his office as supreme head of the Church on earth, after exacting from him a threefold profession of love as reparation for the threefold denial. To him Jesus confided the care of lambs and sheep alike, the whole flock; and promised him the crown of martyrdom in the end.

Fittingly in Galilee also, where He had first called them as Apostles, He gave them His great commission, saying: "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth. Going, therefore, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days even till the end of the world."

His last appearance to them came shortly afterwards in Jerusalem. In that final interview, having given them further instructions about His Church as the Kingdom of God in this world, He told them to remain in the city until the Holy Ghost descended upon them as He had promised. After that, they were to begin their apostolate of preaching the gospel throughout the world, even to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Now the time had come for Him to return to the Heaven from which He came. Accompanied by them all, He set out on the road towards Bethany and the Mount of Olives. When they had ascended the mountain, He blessed them, and as He did so began to ascend above and beyond this world. For a few moments only, they saw Him going. Then a cloud suddenly formed beneath Him, cutting Him off from their gaze.

As they continued looking upwards, two men in white robes appeared to them and told them that Jesus had finally gone from them, but that He would come again one day even as they had seen Him go. Strangely, they felt no trace of sadness at His departure, but went back to Jerusalem with great joy, there to persevere in prayer and to wait until endued with power from on high.

Nine days later, on Pentecost Sunday, the promised Holy Spirit descended upon them. Peter, chief of the Apostles, preached the first sermon that very day in Jerusalem, and some three thousand souls were received into the Church.

And that Church — the Catholic Church — which has been in the world all days since then, and is still with us, the living witness reaching back through the ages, makes us one with those who heard Jesus speak and who saw the things He did; and no more than they, can we doubt the reality of the experiences that were theirs.

To us, as to St. Peter, Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Of Him with St. John, we have no choice but to say: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”
