BEACON LIGHTS

FOR PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUTH

Christmas ISSUE

When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy
Matt. 2:10

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.
Luke 2:14

★ ★ December - 1948 ★ ★

BEACON LIGHTS

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Beacon Lights Staff

Editor-in-chief ..... Homer G. Kuiper
Assistant Editor ..... Alice Reitsma
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Associate Business Manager ..... Thelma Jonker
Photography Editor ..... Ted Leoienga

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Beacon Lights

For Protestant Reformed Youth

VOLUME IX DECEMBER — 1948 NUMBER 3

Behold the Glory of His Nativity

Rev. G. Vanden Berg — Grand Haven, Michigan

Simply nauseating, isn't it?

Already seven weeks before the holy day of Christmas, we may hear the children of Zion singing:

"You better watch out, you better not cry,
You better not pout, I'm telling you why,
Santa Claus is coming to town.
He is making a list and checking it twice,
He's going to find out who is naughty and nice,
Santa Claus is coming to town."

And sad it is that the familiar chords of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" are scarcely heard until the last few days preceding the event of Christmas. Santa Claus is heralded into the cities and homes with great honor and festivity. He is lauded with songs and praise and frequently superstitiously even worshipped and Jesus is given less place than the abject stable of Bethlehem.

Simply nauseating, isn't it?

For weeks and weeks the excited mobs of men, women and children crowd the world's metropolises, driving to insanity many a neurotic clerk, and appeasing the carnal greed of the insidious merchantmen. Thousands of dollars are wasted on trivial matters and the various causes of the Messiah's glorious Kingdom often suffer want. Surely the blessed example of the Wise Men, who brought their gold, myrrh and frankincense to the crib of the Christchild, is greatly disregarded in our modern celebrations.

Simply nauseating, isn't it?

On the eve of the Christmas Day, which is an excellent occasion for the families of Jerusalem to unite at the family altar with father leading the children to the remembrance of the Holy Narrative and unitedly to join in the beautiful anthem, "O Come Let Us Adore Him", but Hiram, the eldest must see Helen to surprise and please her with that precious 'ring'. And Eleanor must be engaged at the neighbors, 'taking care of the "kids", while the elders go out to 'celebrate'. After all, it is Christmas Eve. Then, too, little Nancy

and Bernard, who don't know any better, are not satisfied until they have received and opened all their presents, and it is naturally almost an impossibility to begin anything with them after that.

Simply nauseating, isn't it?

On Christmas Day, the services in God's House are not considered to be of equal importance as those held on the Lord's Day and so mother and an older daughter are permitted to remain home to prepare that 'very special dinner'. And seeing that someone is home anyway, the smaller children might as well be home too, because they do have many new toys in which they are predominantly interested. Thus, the House of God is meagerly attended on the special day.

We ask, "Isn't this all very nauseating?" And yet, it constitutes such a great part of the annual Christmas celebrations, not only and exclusively among the world that has no other Christmas but also among the children of the church. How much richer, more enduring and spiritually gratifying our Christmas becomes when we spend all our energy, which otherwise we exert to wedge our way through the mad mob of shoppers, and all our wealth, which otherwise goes predominantly toward natural luxuries, TO BEHOLD THE GLORY OF HIS NATIVITY.

And that is the accomplishment of a mighty faith.

For to behold His glory in such a way that it is obscured by nothing of the flesh and this world demands that all the celebrations of this joyous season are governed by that dominant principle that overcomes the world.

Victorious Christmas!

Moreover, the faith that incites us to behold the glory of Jesus is the very evidence of unseen things. When you and I go presently to Bethlehem to look upon Him and to handle Him who is the Word of Life, you must, upon failure to see His glory, not become disappointed in Him but remember that faith declares of Him:

"*He hath no form nor comeliness and when we see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him.*"

And yet, strange as it may seem and even paradoxical as it may be, HE IS ALSO THE ALL-GLORIOUS ONE, GOD AND MAN, LORD AND KING, OF WHOM AND THROUGH WHOM AND UNTO WHOM ALL THINGS SUBSIST. Shall we not sing of Him, "Lord, our Lord, Thy glorious Name. . . ."?

For His glory is the revelation of all His good and perfect virtues. That glory He will not give to another, nor can you see or find it in any other because His name is The

Lord. All the festivities and merry wishes of Christmas are not gloricus and there is in them no goodness or virtue except that they begin and end in the glorious Jesus.

Would we therefore, be really happy in this season of mirth, we must not only be told the Christmas story and perhaps add a bit of religious piety to our hilarity of the day but we ought to dispose of all our external foolishness and live by faith and trust in God alone. We ought to go to Bethlehem and realize that,

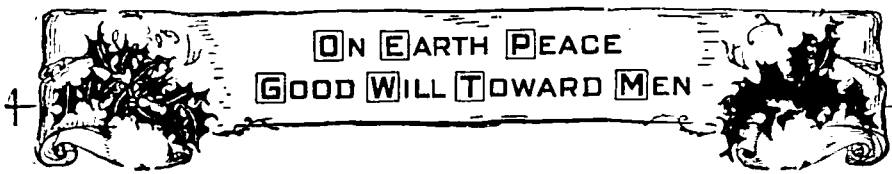
"In this the day the Lord hath made
To Him be joyful honors paid.
Let us Thy full salvation see
O Lord. send now prosperity."

Then, though we are cast out of the world for His name's sake and have no more than a place in the stable with a few bands to cover our naked body, we are rich and prosperous, having more abundance than the ungodly, who, without Jesus Christ, live in untold wealth. For He was made poor for us that we might be rich. He, who did not consider it robbery to be God's equal — for He is God — emptied Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant so that being deeply humiliated, He might obtain through obedience to the Divine Will, the crown of glory for Himself and all that the Father hath given Him. There in the manger is the commencement of that Glory. Behold it—Believe it—Trust and Obey it.—He is more precious than rubies or gold.

And the longer you and I stand at the side of His manger and look upon Him in faith, the greater glory we behold. It surely would not hurt us to rise on Christmas morn with the breaking of dawn and spend the WHOLE day contemplating His glory. We may be sure that we would never exhaust the subject of our meditation, nor would we see more than our faith would desire. On the contrary we would cultivate a love to know "More about Jesus". Think of the revelation of glory in His birth. Born without the will of man—of a virgin through conception by the HOLY SPIRIT of God. Consider the PEACE which He came to establish which not only surpasseth human understanding but is the very power of God that keeps us—heart and mind—unto the salvation which is to be revealed in the last time through Jesus. Be mindful of the disturbance His coming created in the heavenly world causing angels in great chorus to sing of His glory and majesty.

O, blessed Christmas with Jesus.

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness,
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' Name;
On Christ, the Solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand."



God's Gift

This is the Christmas season, a time of preparation for the celebration of the holiday we know as Christmas. During this season many thoughts and plans crowd our minds. These thoughts may range from the question of how much money we have to do our Christmas shopping to the pleasant speculation about the things we expect to receive from our friends and dear ones. Not only are these weeks a period of great activity in the sphere of material things, but it sometimes seems as though the air itself is charged with the Christmas spirit. As we visit the shopping centers in our cities and towns, we can sometimes go about for hours with the sound of Christmas songs in our ears. Everywhere the usual Christmas decorations abound and no effort is spared on the part of business men to remind us that now is the time to buy our gifts.

No doubt you recognize that the commercialism of Christmas is a blight on the true celebration of Christmas. Christmas originally was a day set aside for the specific purpose of celebrating God's gift to His people, the gift of a Savior who was no one less than His only Son. The Church of today, that is, the true and faithful church, still celebrates the day in that sense. For that reason we go to church on Christmas morning and we listen to the word of God telling us of God's gift to us and usually we are reminded of how unworthy we are to receive such a gift, how unwilling even to accept such a gift and how necessary that we have such a gift. God's gift is given us in His eternal good pleasure and it is really a gift. It cannot be purchased. This was tried by Simon of Samaria in the days of the apostles and his name today is known to us in the term *simony*, an evil practicing of the ministry of the Word of God.

This gift is a gift of God in the fullest sense of the word. It is given unto us freely and completely, without conditions or inducements, without regard to our lack of merit or worthiness. In fact those who have been given this Christmas gift by God are the first to admit how unworthy they are to have it and that they are often

more undeserving than their fellow men.

God's gift is the giving of His Son to us as a Saviour and Redeemer so that all our dreadful guilt and sinful condition is removed from us. It is this that makes the gift of God so amazing. For God is just and righteous, He cannot accept any sinner in His favor unless justice is done. He gave His Son to the demand of that infinitely perfect justice. To do this, His Son was given to us in Bethlehem's stable and He spent His life on earth under the wrath of God and delivered us completely.

For that reason it is entirely proper that God be praised at Christmas. We ought to sing from the heart songs of adoration and give Him the praise and the glory not only at Christmas but all through the year. H. K.

Christian's Play

Our Grand Rapids Christian High School has again in the past week placed itself in the same category with the public high schools of our city. It has presented its Senior Class *play!* The play was repeated on three successive evenings, including Thanksgiving Day, because *everyone* wanted to see *Christian's* play! The auditorium was filled each evening at 80¢ a seat.

Imagine for a moment, if you can, that at our next convention, the Inspirational Mass Meeting would have to repeat its evening's entertainment three times because the auditorium could not hold all those who wished to attend. Or if that is too remote, can you imagine *filling* the auditorium *one* evening, even with so dynamic a speaker on the program as Rev. Hoeksema, and *free?* Now what accounts for this difference? You say, a speech, or lecture, or any sacred program for that matter, lacks appeal. No, it doesn't lack appeal! But it appeals to our *spiritual nature.* And this spiritual nature too often lies deeply buried under all our carnal desires and appetites. We keep them buried by starving them and stifling them while we feed and nourish our carnal interests. Christian High, too, with its theatrical performances is nourishing and feeding these carnal appetites. You wonder if this is true? Try to say to yourself as you leave such an evening's performance that your spiritual life has been enriched, that the Christian school sponsoring the program has shown itself to be distinctively Christian, that God's Name has been made great, that you could feel that He was near and that He

was pleased with the performance. And if you can not say that as you leave the auditorium of a Christian school, that school has failed to present a *Christian* program. The essence and content of every public program by a Christian school must, of course, be *Christian*. That is not only its calling but that should be its joy and its delight. Through its program it should manifest its Christian purpose. Oh yes, these programs are usually opened with prayer. If they were not it would be a frank admission on the part of the sponsors that God had no place in their midst that evening. But for what can they pray? Usually while the prayer is being offered asking God for His blessing upon those taking part in the program the performers are busy with last minute fixings of wigs and make-up and lines and cues. All must be in readiness for upon the "Amen" the curtain will rise and the show will be on! No *need* for *prayers* backstage! Pray for what then?—that God may be glorified and His people edified, and then promptly proceed to remove God from all their thoughts and glorify self in the presentation of an evening of Godless entertainment. Isn't it mockery? The prayer must necessarily be earthy, carnal and material as the program which is to follow. Not only does such entertainment have no appeal to our Spiritual nature, but on the contrary, it should be repulsive to a serious minded and sensitive Christian. This is one reason why we see the need for a Christian school system that will *not conform* but that will rather pride itself on being *distinctive*, by the grace of God.

Some of *our* Young People appeared on the stage those nights of *Christian's* play! Many of our people appeared in the audience. Shame on us for refusing to be a peculiar people! Consider this matter carefully, not from the point of view of carnal pleasure, but of Christian principle. And then boldly take a stand! A. R.

BEACON LIGHTS STAFF

and the

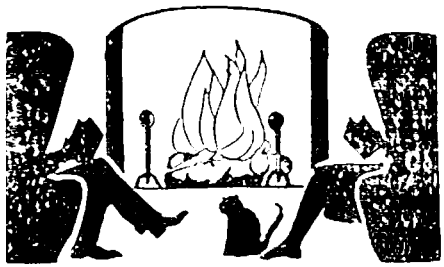
FEDERATION BOARD

Wish All Of You A

BLESSED CHRISTMAS

Christian Living. . .

REV. R. VELDMAN
Grand Rapids, Mich.



Don't They Know?

The Christmas season, the most festive and joyous of all the year, is with us once again.

The Church of Jesus Christ in the world is preparing to celebrate the greatest event of all history, the supreme gift of the love of God: the coming of the eternal Son of God in our flesh. Presently the strains of Handel's mighty oratorio "The Messiah" will again fill the air and Christmas carols will ring out all over the world.

Well may we celebrate, Christian friends,—we, who are the sheep of His pasture, the people "saved by the Lord". Think of what we commemorate on this sacred occasion! Contemplate what God has wrought in the mystery of the Incarnation!

Jesus is born, the Saviour, Who shall save His people from their sins!

Christ, the anointed of the Lord par excellence, our Chief Prophet, our Only High Priest, our Eternal King!

The promised Messiah, in Whom heaven and earth, God and man, eternity and time, Creator and creature are forever united in the one Person of the Son of God!

Shiloh, unto Whom shall be the gathering of the people!

Immanuel, God with us!

Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace!

Our Light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon us!

The Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world!

You can add to this list no end.

Indeed, let the church of Jesus Christ make mirth. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee." Let "The Messiah" fill the air; and let the Christmas carols ring out!

"O come let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord."

"Christ the Saviour is born,
Jesus the Saviour is born."

* * * *

However, as my subject indicates, I am not thinking particularly of

the church, but of the world, those who have no living part in the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet dare to celebrate His coming. For also the world appears to celebrate Christmas, does it not? Go where you will in this large land of ours, everywhere you will hear Christmas carols and wherever there are men you will breathe in the Christmas atmosphere.

It is with a view to this condition, this mimicry of Christianity in a world that by and large has no need of the miracle of Bethlehem, no use for the Christ of God,—a world that always and again nails the hated Nazarene to the cross—that we ask in amazement: Don't they know?

Don't they know, that the same seed of the woman, Who gives to the church her everlasting victory, came for the very purpose of crushing the head of the serpent and destroying his seed forever?

Don't they know, the workers of iniquity namely, that there is an aspect of the Messiah, that means for them nothing but everlasting death and desolation?

Don't they know that there is in Christ Himself a mighty antithesis; that He is as strong to curse as to bless, to destroy as to save; that He is most terrible for the ungodly world; that He is coming to trample them in His fury and that the salvation of Zion is coming in the way of their destruction?

Don't they know, who do not love the Lord Jesus as the Saviour from sin, that He is also a relentless Destroyer; that even while they celebrate His coming, His garments are dripping with their blood; that they are singing their Christmas carols out of the very winepress of the wrath of God?

Don't they know, who love the darkness rather than the light and refuse to embrace Him as penitent sinners, that even while they sing in their hypocrisy: "O come let us adore Him", that same "Him",—the Babe of Bethlehem, the Sufferer of Calvary, now the returning Lord of Glory,—says with a view to these same wicked in that fearful passage from Isaiah 63: "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in my anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment"? This is He "that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah", Christ as the Lord of Glory, the Magnificent Conqueror, Who is returning every day to judge the world with equity. The winepress is the winepress of the wrath of God, in which the children of Edom, the reprobate world, will be trampled in the fury of the Christ of God. Like grapes they are cut off from the vine and cast into this winepress, all the ungodly, and the

glorified Savior Himself will trample them in His fierce indignation, until His garments are drenched with their blood and they are utterly consumed in everlasting hellfire. Let Edom give heed, for the Word of the Lord stands.

Don't they know, the children of disobedience, who do not hesitate to make merchandise of the holiest things, that this same Jesus has said: "For the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come"? Christ is not only a Good Shepherd, He is also a Mighty Destroyer. He is coming to avenge His heavenly Father. He loves His Father with all His heart. Edom hates that Father and curses Him to His face. Jesus will avenge that Father in the day appointed and that day is ever in His heart. He will take vengeance for what they did to Him. They insulted Him, the nations of the world; they mocked Him, blasphemed Him, spit in His face, pressed a crown of thorns into His brow, ridiculed His royal claims, nailed Him to the cross and railed at Him no end. They still do! He will seek and find them and tread them in the winepress of His righteous wrath. He will take vengeance for what they did to His people, His beloved church. Always Edom had drenched the earth with the blood of the saints. The Lord of Glory will avenge that people and He is eager for the day.

Don't they know, the children of this world, that it is written concerning the Lord's Christ: "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel"?

Don't they know? Of course, they do! They must know! It is written, clearly and unmistakably, on the pages of Holy Writ. But, blinded by their carnal lusts and enmity against God and His anointed, they don't care. They hate the Christ now as they did when He was on earth. That is the answer to the question of Psalm 2: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" Such are you and I by nature! Such is man, until he is converted by almighty grace, or destroyed forever by almighty wrath.

* * * *

Christmas! "Hail! the Christ is born!"

The church? Let her sing, of course! Let her hymns of praise fill the air! Zion, "Behold your God!" Concerning you it is written: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

Our 1949 Convention . . . Montana or ???

In response to the information given in the last issue of Beacon Lights by our Federation president concerning our next Young People's Cnnvention, we received the following suggestions and opinions:

Dear Federation Board:

The members of our society read in the Beacon Lights, your article on the 1949 Convention, and as a society we have discussed this matter thoroughly and decided that it would be better to have our 1949 Convention more centrally located. We all look forward to this, and if it is held in Manhattan very few would be able to attend, because of expenses and because of the date on which it will be held. Society of Grand Haven

Ralph De Young, Sec'y.

* * * *

Dear Federation President:

As secretary of the Oskaloosa Society, I wish to inform the board as to our opinions concerning the Convention of 1949 in Montana.

At our last held society meeting it was voted by a two-thirds vote to have the Convention in Montana and in the month of July. It was also discussed concerning the cost, which the members agreed willing that it would be well worth the while and effort to make the Convention of 1949 in Montana a real success.

Yours for a Good Convention:

Society of Oskaloosa, Iowa

Emily Langstraat, Sec'y.

Dear friends:

Our society approves of the 1949 Convention in Manhattan if details can be worked out.

We would like to go by car if that would be possible. We think that would be a better and less expensive way.

We all feel that it would be a very nice idea to go to Manhattan.

Kalamazoo Young People's Society,

Nellie Trienzenberg, Sec'y.

* * * *

Dear Federation Board:

In reply to your request concerning the coming convention, in the November issue of the Beacon Lights, the South Holland Society has discussed the matter and has unanimously decided to advise the Federation Board not to have the Convention in Manhattan, Montana.

We presuppose the following:

A. That the expenses would be too great due to the distance.

B. The time, in the month of July, is not convenient for our society members and the stay is too long.

C. It would be better to keep our conventions local so as to make it possible for the majority of our young people to attend.

We greatly appreciate the invitation extended by Manhattan, but due to the circumstances mentioned above, the South Holland Society advises to keep the convention local.

South Holland Young People's Society.

Agnes Van Baren, Sec'y.

We thank these societies for their prompt action in regard to this matter. We also, received a letter from Rev. J. Heys, pastor of the Hope Prot. Ref. Church, and president of his young people's society. Although he did not write this letter for publication, we are passing it on to you because we feel that it is packed with many worthwhile suggestions.

Dear Board Members,

By this time you have received a letter from our Young People's Society informing you that there are five members of our society that plan on going to the convention in Montana, if it is held there next year. I am no less enthusiastic about it than they. Having been there more than once, I know what they will enjoy, and I certainly would like to go again, though I have been there several times. I have another reason for interest in this convention. It was during my student days that I supplied the pulpit of newly organized Montana's congregation while several ministers were considering the call. And I had the privilege and honor of presiding over the meeting at which Montana's society was organized. And now they are contemplating holding a convention for several other larger societies!

My young people are planning to go, and I feel responsible for them. Before they go, I would like to be sure that the plan proposed in Beacon Lights is the proper way. It is the most economical, perhaps, but is it the wisest? I am thinking, for example, of church services those two Sundays after a three days and two nights jolting ride on a bus. Would we not be too sleepy that next day (Sunday) on the way over and on the way back to listen carefully to God's Word? Then too, are church services available, real church services? Can Montana's building hold an extra 80 to 100 people? I am sure it cannot. There is a way out, I suppose if they rent a larger place for that day and hold their regular services there.

I would like to know, and our young people too, how much more it would cost to go by train. If we could rent two cars to hitch behind the Milwaukee Road's Olympian, it would take but 26 hours to get there, one night sleeping on the train. Or to go by the Milwaukee Road's Columbian or the Northern Pacific's North Coast limited would mean only one day and two nights on the train. There would be a saving of meals on the road at least. I know that by train we would stay together better; no rest stops or meal stops to leave a few stragglers behind (remember the Milwaukee Clipper?). The more stops we make, the more possibility of such things.

By bus I have other objections—although I say again, that if you go that way, I still would be tempted to go provided I can see that it will not hurt our divine services on the Sundays involved. We saw on the way to Detroit last summer, how one flat tire can cause a tremendous delay. How long will it take each morning for the men to shave in a place where only one or two can do so at a time? How much time would be spent waiting in shifts in some little one-horse

town out west to be served meals? Even a large place could not unexpectedly serve 80 meals more than their usual number in a short time. Out west places to feed 80 at a time are few and far between. If we go by bus, we surely ought to leave on Wednesday rather than Thursday. It will be July—hot, sticky days. An air-conditioned train would bring us there much more rested and ready for work and inspiration.

If we go, by bus or train, I surely would like to have our young people given a Scriptural Mountain Appreciation program either by speech—much easier in a train—or by mimeographed copy to be read at a certain time. Scripture says much about mountains, and we surely ought to go and see these things by faith. We ought to be reminded of the flood when we see the great canyon in Yellowstone Park. It does not teach that the world is billions of years old. The mountains dwarf us, and they make us feel small. The greatness of God ought to be seen in these works of His. Games could even be played in this connection. Something in the form of a mimeographed Bible Quiz.

Well, I guess this is lengthy enough. It is not meant to discourage your efforts but if possible to make the next convention a really worthwhile one.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. J. A. Heys.

We thank Rev. Heys for taking time to write us this letter. It has served as a source of encouragement rather than discouragement, since it touches on many vital points. Above all we wish to make our 1949 Convention a Convention toward Spiritual growth and therefore, we consider such things as Sunday Services, devotions on the train or bus, and appreciation of the things we see in the light of God's Revelation as highly important.

The Board had also been working on train rates and the information which we have just received is very favorable. The C&O informs us that the trip from Grand Rapids to Manhattan, Montana can be made in thirty hours and that the cost will be $42.64 including tax. This is no more expensive than the bus fare and certainly eliminates many problems.

In the near future the board will have to make a decision in this matter—do we go to Montana in '49—yes or no!! Several societies have not yet expressed an opinion on this question. Perhaps the above information will help you decide.

FOURTH

BEACON LIGHTS

SINGSPIRATION

will be held

Sunday evening — December 19

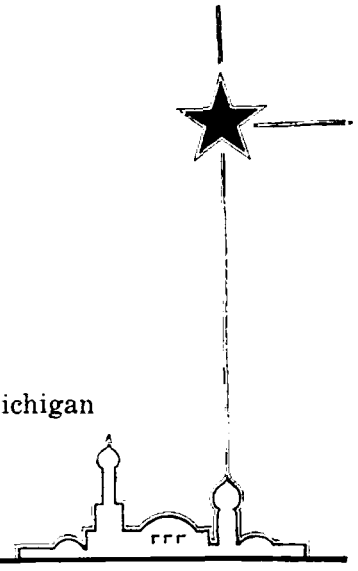
9 o'clock

HOPE PROT. REF. CHURCH

Everybody Welcome!

The Star Of Wonder

Mr. C. De Boer
Kalamazoo, Michigan



"Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."
Matt. 2:2.

For centuries men have wondered about the star of Bethlehem, and as we approach this Yuletide Season we, too, are intrigued by this heavenly phenomenon, which took place at the time of Christ's birth.

Are you aware of the fact that the account of this amazing wonder star is found in only one chapter of Scripture, namely: Matthew 2? Before you continue reading this article, it would be advisable to carefully peruse the account of this story in the first eleven verses. Thus, you will discover that the wise men visited Jesus in a house, not in a manger as is frequently pictured. The number of wise men is not stated, although, traditionally it is three magi who come from the Orient. Often we see shepherds portrayed with the luminous star, but we have no record that they were aware of such an unusual heavenly body; rather, they had direct information from the heavenly throng of angels.

Through the ages men have suggested various explanations for this Star of Bethlehem. Was this star, perhaps, a brilliant meteor or fireball? If we watch the heavens at night, especially during the month of August, we may see several small meteors or shooting stars. These are fragments of a star, which produce a streak of light as they travel earthward. Occasionally one will be observed of exceptional brilliance which will surpass the moon in size. However

this star or His Star could not have been a streak of light, for it "went before them", thus suggesting that it had a definite path and was of some duration. Let us read the verses carefully. Many of us believe that the Star led the wisemen the entire journey from the East to Jerusalem, and it might be well at this time to point out the fact that Scripture doesn't state this. Rather, it mentions seeing the Star in the *east*, and then, in verse 9 we read, after they had reached Jerusalem, "and lo, the star which they saw in the *east* went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Thus, they recognized this same star in Jerusalem as the one they had seen in the East.

Could it have been a comet? Those of the older generation possibly recall the magnificent display of Halley's Comet in 1910. This appears every 77 years. It is a heavenly body which travels around the sun in an eclipse. When it appears between the earth and the sun it is visible for a week or more and rises and sets as the sun, gradually changing position. According to history, and astronomical calculations Halley's Comet appeared in 11 B.C., which was too early. Another comet appeared in 4 B.C., but according to calculations this was too late. Furthermore, a comet would be visible to all and would be of considerable account; whereas Holy Writ reveals that Herod and his wisemen had not seen the star.

Was it possibly a "nova" or "new star"? A star may suddenly explode its outer layer and increase in brilliance several thousand times only to fade away again in a few weeks. Such was the case in 1604 and suggested an explanation of the Star of Bethlehem to the famed astronomer—Kepler. The nova he observed lasted 17 months. Certainly Herod and his wisemen would have seen or heard about it if it had been a nova.

According to the Bible the Star of stars was no brilliant light in the heavens as a nova, a comet, or a meteor, for certainly then King Herod and his court would have been aware of any sensational events taking place in the heavens. Matt. 2:3 informs us that "when King Herod heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Also he "inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. His ignorance and that of his people was obvious and also their concern when men—not ordinary men—but magi or astrologers from the East (Persia or Babylonia) confronted them with this startling question, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Since only the wisemen came with the question concerning the signifi-

cance of the star, we must not look for the spectacular which was visible to all, but rather for some phenomena observed by these students of the sky—the astrologers.

Who were these wise men? They were learned men of the east who were priests of Zoroaster and students in astrology. Astrology is the study of the heavenly bodies with the purpose of determining future events in human affairs. In Babylonia, astrology was considered to be an essential part of their religion. The astrologers divided the sky into various regions each of which represented a certain nation, race or part of the human body. They foretold the future chiefly on the basis of the arrangement of seven ancient planets—Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Sun and Moon. (Only the first five are considered planets today). Any peculiar arrangement of these planets was interpreted to portend an unusual advent in the nation or race represented by that particular segment of the sky.

According to Kepler, a brilliant and devout astronomer, an unusual event occurred in 1604. While studying the stars, he observed Jupiter passing Saturn, and shortly after Mars passed both of them. By careful calculation he discovered that this remarkable conjunction (passing) of the three planets occurs once every 800 years. While he was observing this conjunction of a millennium a brilliant nova appeared which suggested to him an explanation for the Star of Bethlehem. By figuring back he discovered that this significant event of a conjunction took place about 6 B.C. Then it took place in the region of the sky called Pisces (the Fishes) which the ancient astrologers had assigned to the area of Palestine and called it "the House of the Hebrews." Thus, the wise men would have the clue as to the location of a wonderful happening. In addition the astrologers believed that the planet Saturn ruled over the destinies of the Jews. Evidently the wisemen had some knowledge of Jewish prophecy from exiled Jews and their great expectation of the Messianic King. Considering all these facts, then—the rare event once in 805 years of the planetary conjunction—in the sector of Pisces (the House of the Hebrews)—Jupiter, Mars and Saturn (the latter the planet that determined Jewish destiny) wouldn't it seem natural for the magi to hasten to Jerusalem—the capital of Jewry?

Actually the passing of these planets was not the usual passing of Jupiter and Saturn which occurs every twenty years but it was a triple conjunction (passing) in which Jupiter passed Saturn three times. This took place in "the House of the Hebrews" and it hap-

pens only once in 125 years. The second significant sign which the magi saw was the conjunction of three planets—Jupiter, Saturn and Mars, which is the phenomena of a millennium since it occurs only once in 805 years. It took place in the early part of 6 B.C. This, it is conjectured, drove home the importance of the event which was taking place in the "House of the Hebrews"; namely, the birth of the King.

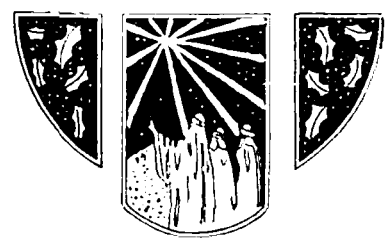
Now note, "When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star which they saw in the *east* went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was."

A third conjunction of the planets—Jupiter, Saturn and a new one Venus took place. The above theory would explain that this is what they again saw as they left Herod and followed "the star" to Bethlehem. The wisemen knew "the star".

We, who believe in God's counsel, maintain that Christ came in God's own time. Dark, indeed! Mary was the last of the House of David. It was providence rather than coincidence that the Roman Emperor called all people to their respective birthplaces—hence, the manger in Bethlehem. The Hebrews had no place for Him but the heavens spoke from afar and called the Gentile Magi to come to worship Him. If we do maintain this theory of Kepler do we in any way deprive God of miraculous power? Isn't it just as astounding to believe that the very planets in their orbits were attuned to this great event of history?

However, whether it was a *special* star for this *special* event as we are want to believe, or a series of conjunctions of planets, it showed that the very heavens were in harmony with the advent of the Messiah.

Schaffer's "Bible Dictionary" has this thought: "That the heavens should be laid under contribution and one of the heavenly bodies be the appointed, the silent leader of the magi whose coming prophesied the ingathering. . . . of the Gentiles, was in itself a probable event. The earth felt the tread of His blessed feet; why should not the sky lend one of its jewels to light the path of His seekers."

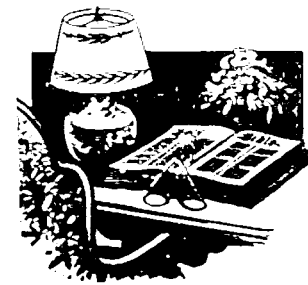


"Star of wonder—star of Light,
Star of glorious beauty bright;
Westward leading--still proceeding
Guide us to Thy heavenly Height."

BIBLE OUTLINES

REV. JOHN BLANKESPOOR

Doon, Iowa



LESSON X.

(John 3:9-16)

How can these things be, vss. 9:13.

In vs. 4 Nicodemus asked a similar question, how an old man can be born again. Here he admits the possibility but questions the manner of this spiritual renewal. That the Spirit gives rebirth is not enough for him, he must also know how this is done.

Jesus' reply is a mild rebuke. Does not a well-known and acknowledged teacher in Israel (the nations that received God's special revelations throughout the Old Testament) and one who has a place in the famous Sanhedrin, know anything about this? What then is to be expected of the people? What he should see is that the works of the Spirit and its results are essential, not how the Spirit works. But this subject matter is of such an entirely new nature to him that he fails to comprehend its essence.

In the past the Jews have received marvelous testimonies. The pronoun we very likely refers to Jesus and the Baptist. They had given them testimonies of the things they have known and seen. In many words and miracles, understandable to earthy people, they had attested of the spiritual, heavenly things. But their witness was not received. "How shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" By earthy things are not merely meant things that inherently are earthy, but those that take place in the sphere of the earthy. To this earthy belong regeneration, faith, conversion, sanctification, etc.; to the heavenly the Divine decrees, etc., but also the purpose and goal of all the works of the Lord. The earthy and heavenly therefore are not opposites, but are most intimately related. The earthy side has an eternal, exalted, heavenly background. In fact, the heavenly is realized through the earthy; the things that take place here on earth in connection with the entire program of salvation are a means to realize the heavenly. No, Nicodemus and the Jews must not now busy themselves with the "hour" of the heavenly, but believe it as it is revealed to them here on earth.

This can be done only by Jesus, to whom he is at this very moment speaking, vs. 13. If any ordinary man were to become a direct witness of heavenly things, this would necessitate that he first ascend to heaven and then come down again and thus testify what he had

seen and heard while he was in heaven. But, says Jesus, no man has ascended into heaven. This eliminates the possibility of any man revealing heavenly things. However, the Son of Man came down from heaven, but at the same time is in heaven. According to His Divine nature Christ was always in heaven, He never left it while He was here on earth. In Him, therefore, we have one who knows all the heavenly realities, but at the same time is on earth and able to tell us in earthly terms about them. Marvelous Son of Man! Notice how John in this emphasizes his theme, the Word become flesh.

Questions: Had Nicodemus never before heard of regeneration by the Spirit? Was Nicodemus an unbeliever since Jesus says: "ye receive not our witness". Or must we explain this unbelief with the pronoun "ye"? How must we explain the expression "and ye receive not our witness" in the light of the fact that John was very popular and Jesus as well during the beginning of His ministry?

Salvation through the Son of Man, vss. 14-16.

From the great person who came from heaven and can testify to the heavenly things Jesus advances to the great salvation coming through Him. Jesus will portray before Nicodemus only one thing, Christ Jesus, and Him crucified. All our salvation is in Him. He is the antitype of the brazen serpent in the wilderness. Read Num. 21. The Israelites, due to grievous sins, had been bitten by poisonous snakes, the snakes being symbols of the devil himself. Remember Paradise. They could be healed by looking up at the brazen serpent nailed to a pole. So Christ would be and is the Saviour for all those overcome by the venom of the devil. He, too, must be lifted up. Now there are all kinds of differences of opinion about this lifting up. Some commentators refer it to the cross, but also to the ascension, others only to the former. In ch. 12:32 Jesus himself confines it to "the manner of death He should die". We believe, too, that it refers to this, but that the lifting up denotes not merely His exaltation on the cross, but also that He was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Rome being the world power, by means of this act lifted Him up before the whole world. The whole world must see the Brazen Serpent. By faith in Him men will receive eternal life.

In vs. 16 John gives the reason why Christ must be lifted up. It's the amazing love of God for the world. The emphasis must be placed on the word so. The measure of God's love is manifested in His marvelous gift, His only begotten Son. This is the heart of the Gospel. Again, notice how John comes to his theme, the Son of God come to us, and on the cross.

This text is a favorite of the Arminians. Who does not know how they explain it? But all their arguments are without basis. First of all the word world is never used in Scripture to denote all men and all things. Sometimes it denotes the world in its final perfection, or also as it is in God's counsel. Then it may refer to the totality of sinful men in their life on this earth, John 17:9. In

II Cor. 5:19 it undoubtedly refers to the total number of God's elect people. It was that love of God for the world of His people as one organic whole, that moved God to give His Son. And whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish. Whosoever. That we must preach. Naturally, this does not mean all men. Those that believe, they shall have life. And who are they, ultimately? Those who are of that world which God loves.

Questions: How can we from the viewpoint of the love of God refute the Arminian interpretation of this tejxt? How do you explain the "must" of vs. 14? Is it reformed to preach to all: Whosoever believes shall be saved?

LESSON XI.
(John 3:17-21)

God's Purpose with this World, vs. 17.

We say this world, because the word world also here refers to that one organic whole of the new creation with all of the saved elect. This world Christ does not condemn (judge, R. V. which is more literal but save). It may seem to be so to men, that Christ comes to judge and condemn all men, all sinners. But essentially He comes to save this object of God's great love. Worthy of condemnation as it is, God saves her through the marvelous way of His Son. To judge and condemn this world God would not have needed to send His Son. Sin is always the basis for condemnation.

Who is Condemned, vss. 18-20.

But not all men in our present world are of this world. A "crisis" must therefore take place, and a separation must come by means of the condemnation. The determining factor for this separation between all men is faith; every man is a believer or an unbeliever. The believer is acquitted by the Divine judge, and therefore condemnation free. But the unbeliever is condemned, no, not merely in the final day, but with each deed of unbelief. God judges all the time, every day and every minute, and makes us conscious of the verdict. But will not a grand final judgment take place at the last day? Not in the strict sense of the word. The judgment of the Lord in time will be revealed in that final day.

And this judgment depends upon our attitude towards the only begotten Son of God. What do we do with the Christ? Can there be a greater than He? Is He not in the bosom of the Father, the perfect image of the almighty, infinite God, and also as the only-begotten the object of all His love? Man's attitude towards Him is the basis of God's judgment.

But this does not mean that because men do not believe in Jesus, therefore they are lost, and this is the cause of their perdition. The fatal sin is not the sin of unbelief in the Son of God. So the Arminians would have it. According to them Christ paid for all, and now faith or unbelief determines where we will spend eternity. No, sin is always the determining factor, sin against the Most High God. Sin makes man guilty, and guilt always invokes the just wrath of God. Only where there is no sin can man be declared righteous and be condemnation free, Rom. 8:1. However, our depraved nature reveals itself in unbelief. This is the undeniable proof that we are

haters of God. Our attitude towards the only-begotten Son of God removes every veil with which we might hide the fact that we are not really enemies of God.

Therefore we read in vs. 19 and 20 about the reasons for the unbelief of the world. Christ, of course, is the Light spoken of here. He is the Truth and always reveals the Truth. But men (as they are by nature) loved the darkness rather than the Light, and consequently hate the Light. Why? Because the Light always reveals what is in man, and exposes us (reproved in vs. 20). Christ always shows up man's wicked deeds, as evil, worthless, fit only for the "darkness". And this is what hypocritical, "pious" man hates. He will always cover up. This is exactly what Christ did with the Pharisees from time to time. This the truth of God's Word does with us every Sunday in God's house. And how wicked men hate such preaching.

Questions: If faith is the determining factor in re God's judgments why lay so much emphasis on the truth of God's Word? Why does Scripture emphasize the necessity of faith even for the saints in so many places? Can we see in daily life that all the works of wicked men show that they hate the Light? What does the "Third Point" teach regarding this matter? Why cannot our feelings, or likes or dislikes be the criterion of a good sermon or of a "good" minister?

Coming to the Light, vs. 12.

This the believer always does. No, he is not afraid of being exposed by the Light. Of course, the Light will also convict him of much sin, showing up his weaknesses and faults. But this man wants to be rid of these and gladly submits to the power and judgment of the Light. Positively, he wants to have his deeds manifest that they are wrought in God. He wants it stated or said that his works (those done in faith) are wrought in God. It is his desire that God will approve of him, bless him, and so encourage and strengthen him day by day as he fights the darkness that still assails him. Such Divine sanction is a marvelous grace! This is Jesus' word to Nicodemus.

Questions: How can we see in the light of this truth that even the most holy have only a small beginning of new obedience? Can we explain the reject of the Old Testament prophets and of Christ Himself in the light of this fundamental truth? Is the same true yet today? Why do you think "ministers" are always tempted to bring the word of man instead of the Word of God?

LESSON XII
(John 3:22-36)

Historical Remarks, vss. 22-24).

These remarks serve only to present the situation in which the dispute arose that furnished the occasion for the Baptist's final testimony regarding Jesus. This testimony is John's real subject; all else is incidental.

The discussion with Nicodemus took place in Jerusalem; now He goes into the Judean country. The text does not specify the place where He tarried and baptized, but it must have been some place near the Jordan to facilitate the matter of baptism. Jesus always baptized thru

His disciples, ch. 4:2. John is now on the other side, the western side of the Jordan, near Salim. Its location is uncertain. Vs. 24 is inserted so that those who were acquainted with the Synoptics would not think the apostle John is confusing things. No, John the Baptist has not yet been cast into prison. So we find Jesus and John alongside of each other. First John, then Jesus and John, the former supplanting the latter, and soon John disappears from the scene, his work being finished.

The Dispute, vss. 25, 26.

It is quite evident that this dispute between the Jews (who evidently followed Jesus) and the disciples of John arose out of the situation mentioned in the previous verses, namely, the baptism of Jesus as well as of John. The purifying mentioned therefore refers to the ritual of baptism which symbolically signifies purifying. It seems as if these Jews maintained the superiority of Jesus' baptism over that of John, which the latter's disciples naturally refused to admit. And so they went to John.

They seem to be under the impression that Jesus is under great obligation to the Baptist, and, secondly, that Jesus is showing Himself ungrateful to John. Remember how John testified of Jesus, gave Him a good "boost" in the opinion of the public, but now look at the competition He offers. Is that right?

Questions: Did John's disciples have any conception of Jesus as the Messiah? How much did John really understand of Him? Matt. 11. How must we explain these things?

John's Reply, vss. 27-36.

"The reply of the Baptist which now follows in extenso and is our evangelist's chief concern is so thoroughly true, so illuminating and at the same time so demonstrative of his perfect humility that it stands as a monument to him forever", (Lenski). He begins with a general truth: A man can receive nothing except it have been given to him from heaven. All good things come to us from the Father. Whatever we obtain in a wicked way we do not really have. What we therefore do really have is from God. Jesus has a large following, ergo, it must be from God. And had not John himself testified of Him on the other side of the Jordan? His entire conduct had borne this out, ch. 1.

But John has more to say, vs.29ff. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom. Of course, she does not belong to a friend of the bride. The Church, this following of Jesus, is the bride. And Christ is the groom, therefore He must have her, not John. He is merely a friend of the bridegroom. (Some commentators refer this to "The Friend of the 'Bridegroom" as it is used in the Song of Solomon). John is merely a friend, no special task is really given him. He "stands and hears Him". And remember, John in the eyes of the people was a great prophet, perhaps the greatest of all time. What humility! Without Christ he means nothing, so he confesses, but neither do you and I. Still more. There is no jealousy here. John's joy is found in the fact that Christ is not merely in the center of the picture, but the whole picture. Even so, that

Jesus must increase, and he himself must gradually decrease. In the eyes of the people this may be interpreted as a failure for John; but this doesn't matter. Christ's cause only matters.

The Baptist thus far has spoken of the relation between Jesus and himself, as His forerunner. Now, in vs. 31ff, he speaks of Jesus' relation to all men, including the Baptist as a mere man. Jesus' superiority consists in this, that He came from heaven, is of heavenly origin, and therefore is supreme over all men who are wholly of earthly origin. No man born of the earthy can possibly be like Jesus. This his disciples must know. And what He has seen and done, He reveals to earthy men. Not by mere revelation does Jesus speak as did the prophets of old, but from the actual presence in heaven he bears witness firsthand. But no one receives His testimony, this wondrous, marvelous testimony. With the expression "no man" John does not mean this in the absolute sense, as the next verse shows, but a very, very small number. The number is so small that it isn't worth mentioning compared with the multitude of unbelievers.

How blessed, however, for those who by God's grace do receive this testimony of Christ. By means of it they confirm, or ratify that God is true. Faith in Christ gives us the assurance that the Lord alone is God, the all-sufficient true God. Idols are works of men's hands. This assurance the testimony of Christ can give because He speaketh the words of God with a full measure of the Spirit. Conclusion: again: all is in the Son, vss. 35, 36. By faith in Him we receive the things which the Lord has placed in His hands, namely salvation and eternal blessedness. But upon the unbeliever the wrath of God shall remain.

Questions: How must we explain the multitudes that follow Jesus in the light of "and no man receiveth His testimony"? Do the same things still happen today? When does the believer actually receive everlasting life? How does vs. 36 prove that there can be no common grace?

LESSON XIII
(John 4:1-16)

Jesus in Samaria, vss. 1-6.

The cause of Jesus' departure into Galilee is that the Pharisees have heard about Jesus' increase of followers. Perhaps they considered the matter of Jesus and John to be one of competition, and therefore could justly cast their reproach upon the entire movement. By going to Galilee Jesus must pass through Samaria. This was by far the shortest route. The Phariseeistic Jews often went by way of Perea, east of the Jordan, to abstain from pollution of the Samaritans and their land. (Look up on your map). But Jesus goes directly through Samaria, probably also because he intends to seek contact with the inhabitants of the land.

It very likely was a hot summer day. Weary and thirsty and hungry Jesus sat down on Jacob's well (which Jacob dug and was perhaps over 100 feet deep) while the disciples went to the town for some victuals. Since John very likely has Roman time, it was about six p. m.

Then ensues this marvelous discussion with the Samaritan woman. From it we

can learn many things. First of all it shows that Jesus was always engaged in the work of the kingdom. Paul speaks of laboring night and day, sacrificing all for the kingdom. This Jesus certainly did, His whole life was wrapped up in it. Physical hunger and thirst are not worthy of attention when there is work to do. In the second place His work here is prophetic of things to come. Here already the middle wall of partition (Eph. 2) is being broken down between the Jews and the Gentiles. Later Jesus does the same thing with the Nobleman's son and with the Syro-Phoenician woman. And the climax is reached when our Lord tells them here that men must worship God in spirit and in truth, and that all local boundaries vanish with such worship.

Questions: Who were the Samaritans? II Kings 17:24ff. Why do you think Jesus baptized only through His disciples, not performing the deed Himself? Can we conclude from the fact that Jesus became weary, etc. in His human nature that this in itself spelled suffering for Him in so far that it often hindered Him in His zeal for kingdom work?

The Samaritan Woman and the Living Water, vss. 7-15.

Notice how Jesus, the very Son of God, works on a very small scale, and then often with people who are of no account in the world. First it is with a ruler of the Jews, but at night. Now with a poor, ignorant Samaritan woman. His approach reveals marvelous psychology. He does not directly approach her with the subject of the Messiah, but with water, the very thing she was in need of. This physical water is His point of contact. And then He proceeds from one step to another.

First of all Christ astonishes this woman (who perhaps was a social outcast because it was customary to come to the well with a company of women) by even talking to her and asking her for water? The Fountain asks for water. This request is altogether unexpected, because the Jews are against the Samaritans. But Jesus' very question removes the barrier.

Secondly, in vs. 10 Jesus makes Himself known as the giver of living water. If the woman would have realized who it was that asked for water, she would have immediately come back with a question for living water. The woman realizes that Jesus is speaking of some other water, but as yet fails to grasp the import of Jesus' words . But she does not leave, she is inquisitive and stays with Jesus. So also with Nicodemus. This I think is their beauty.

In vss. 13, 14 Jesus speaks of the blessedness of this living water. Those drinkink it (Jesus Himself as the Saviour) will never thirst again. But the water (the new life of Christ) will become in them like a fountain of water, which will mean for them eternal life. The woman, of course, still fails to comprehend Jesus' words, and asks for physical water which will quench all thirst.

Questions: Do you think the interest of this woman manifests true life? How could she call Jacob their father? Why is it that Nicodemus and this woman as well are so slow in understanding Jesus?

Current Comments

REV. L. DOEZEMA

Bellflower, California

Theologians Disagreeing.

Although this is a common thing that theologians disagree, it is important to notice when leading theologians are at odds about important issues.

The case I have in mind is the difference between Barth and Niebuhr about Barth's speech at the Amsterdam World Council of Churches. This difference I wish to call to your attention for several reasons. First it gives us a statement of one of the leading speakers at this conference, namely, Karl Barth. This has not been called to our attention in our church papers yet, but it has been emphasized for the second time with almost the same quotations from Barth's speech in "Time" magazine. And I am sure you will agree that Barth's idea is striking, which impresses us as very close to the truth and as altogether contrary to prevailing religious opinion. The second reason for my calling your attention to this is that here we have two theologians, one from Europe and one from our United States, Barth a leading theologian, and Niebuhr who has been recognized as a leading exponent of the Barthian theology in America, who now differ as to the practical application of their theology. My third reason for quoting these statements of opinion is to acquaint us with current comments as to the task of the Church and to be an incentive for our youth to think about the issues and form Biblical views of our calling in the future.

In *Time*, of November 8, we read the following, "Last week, in the pages of the *Christian Century*, U.S. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr attacked 'continental' theology for having its head in the clouds. His target was the continental theolo-ians' chief spokesman, Karl Barth.

"Big, bearlike Karl Barth of Basel, Switzerland, had jolted the Amsterdam delegates with a speech on the text. 'Take counels together and it shall come to naught. . . . for God is with us.' (Isaiah 8:10). 'Perhaps' he said, 'the much-regreted absence of either Roman Catholic or Russian Orthodox delegates we should now praise and thank was God's doing. 'I propose that

we should now praise and thank God, that it pleases Him to stand so clearly in the way of our plans.' Barth warned the churchmen that their job was to bear witness to the Gospel—not to presume to the world-saving functions reserved for God Himself. Said he, 'We ought to give up. . . every thought that the care of the Church, the care of the world, is *our* care. . . For just this is the final root and ground of all human disorder; the dreadful, godless, ridiculous opinion that man is the Atlas who is destined to bear the dome of heaven upon his shoulders.'

"Says Theologian Niebuhr: 'Barth is preaching a dangerous doctrine. The care of the Church is most certainly our care,' and to prove it he cites Saint Paul (I Cor. 12). Barth's emphasis on 'what we cannot do,' is really a temptation to Christians 'to share the victory and the glory of the risen Lord' without undergoing the trials, perplexities, and decisions—the 'crucifixion of the self which is the scriptural presupposition of a new life'. . ."

It would be interesting to have the entire speech of Barth. From this excerpt we can say that he is certainly speaking the truth. It can be seen that Niebuhr misses the point. The editor of Time magazine makes this startling remark in giving the gist of the differences. "U. S. Protestants are inclined to be simple-minded do-gooders with a busy-bee, 'social-worker' concept of religion that comes perilously close to the Pelagian heresy.' 'European Protestants spend too much time thinking about God and Scripture, not enough in helping their neighbour." It is questionable whether the editor of Time really is fair to European theologians. At least we could add that the correct position is to speak the Word of God also and not only contemplate it and that that also includes works of faith. There is evidence here of a failure to recognize the power of the Word of God and the Spirit of God, that the battle and the victory is the Lord's.

DO YOU KNOW . . . .

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Our Servicemen receive Beacon Lights free of charge.

Reformation Day Mass Meetings

The Federation Board called for Reformation Day Mass Meetings during the week of October 25, wherever two or more Young People's Societies could get together. Following are reports received concerning these Mass Meetings.

Oaklawn and South Holland, Ill.

The Oaklawn Y.P.S. and the South Holland Y.P.S. jointly celebrated Reformation Day on the evening of Nov. 5. We realize that this was a week late, yet circumstances would not permit us to celebrate on the 29th of October.

After opening prayer by Rev. Schipper there was a paper by a member of South Holland Society on "Luther". Following this a trio from Oak Lawn sang and one of South Holland's members gave an accordian solo. The topic of a debate between the two societies was: "Resolved that controversy is of benefit to the church". South Holland won this debate. John Buiter of the Oak Lawn Society gave a paper on "John Calvin". We thought this piece of work to be very good and so we are sending a copy of it to you in the hope that it may be used in some issue of Beacon Lights.

After recess and refreshments, we had a general discussion on the subject: "The Relationship between the Reformation and the Protestant Reformed Church."

This evening which was spent in Christian fellowship was, I sincerely believe, of a very beneficial nature to the two societies. We hope that other societies may have had as blessed and edifying an evening as we had. May it be God's will that in the days and years which lie before us we may always hold fast to that truth which we have and which we have received from our forefathers in the days of the Reformation.

Louis Regnerus,
Oak Lawn Young People's Society.

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Manhattan Society

Every Sunday evening at 7:30 about thirty young people gather in our church auditorium here at Manhattan, for an hour of Christian fellowship. Our meetings are opened with song service and prayer, led by the president, or in his absence by the vice-president. After Rev. Hanko left our meetings were led by the ministers who filled classical appointments. At present we are studying John I under the leadership of our new president and pastor Rev. Vis.

After recess our business matters, if any, are taken care of first. Then follows a program of three or four numbers. These include readings, essays, questions, recitations, three-minute prepared speeches, impromptu speeches, spell-downs, Bible-quizzes, debates and music, either vocal or instrumental. We will devote one program period a month to the discussion given in the Beacon Lights for the after recess program.

Our meeting of October 24 was devoted entirely to Reformation Day. The program opened with the usual song service

and prayer led by Rev. Doezema. Then followed a variety of numbers (music, essays, readings, etc.) We also had a round table discussion in which the whole society took part. Rev. Doezema led the discussion which proved to be very interesting and informative. One interesting subject discussed was the fact that Luther really wrote 99 theses instead of the 95 we usually speak of.

The progam was closed by singing a psalter number and after Rev. Doezema closed with prayer, the Doxology, "Blest Be Our Father's God" was sung by the society.

Our group is small and we are far from the other societies of our denomination, but we gain new courage when we read the words of the Saviour, "Where two or three are gathered in My Name, I will be in their midst."

Manhattan Young People Society,
Claire Edna Leep, Sec'y.

* * * *

Western League

During the past few weeks preparations were made by the various ministers and societies to hold a joint meeting of the Western League of Young People Societies, to commemorate the Reformation. This meeting was held October 29 at our church at Doon, Iowa. It was opened by song service and reading of Scripture and prayer by Rev. Van Weelden. After this we were favored with a short speech by Rev. Peter De Boer. His topic was, "What we owe to John Calvin", under God's will. He spoke mainly about Calvin's life and work and the principals he taught and followed. The main principles were: First: absolute authority of the Word of God. Secondly, the sovereignty of God, and finally, the Covenant. John Calvin's great influence was especially felt in Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands. After Rev. De Boer's speech questions were asked about this topic. The program for the evening consisted of numbers from the various societies. The male quartet from Hull gave a number, an essay about Martin Luther and the Reformation from the Doon society and a duet from the Edgerton society. Recess was then held and delicious refreshments were served by the ladies of the Doon church. After recess Rev. Blankespoor and Rev. Van Weelden took part in a debate on the subject, "Are we true to the Reformation?" The meeting was closed with prayer by Rev. Blankespoor. It was truly an enjoyable evening of Christian fellowship.

Ena Dykstra, Hull, Iowa.

* * * *

Michigan Churches

Rev. Kok was chairman of our meeting held at Hudsonville. Mr. H. Hoeksema very capably led our Bible discussion. Enthusiasm characterized our discussion which was terminated as Rev. Kok arose to announce chow time.

After recess Rev. Vos delivered a timely speech on "The Significance of the Reformation". In his speech he pointed out that the Reformation gave us three things. First: The Bible. Through the work of the reformers and with the help of the printing press the Bible was trans-

lated to German and other languages so that the common people could read it. Secondly: the True Church. Through the Reformation God made known and manifest His people. Thirdly: The Christian received a free conscience. When the guilty sorrowful sinner asked "What must I do to be saved?" he was answered "Confess your sins, repent, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Self persecutions, journeys to Jerusalem, etc., were done away with. The Cross of Christ shone forth as the only atonement of our sins and in this the confessing repentent sinner found peace and a free conscience.

Also for our after recess program we were favored with an accordian solo by Marion Van Spiker and singing by our boys quartet composed of Ed Ophoff, Herm Hanko, Jim Kok, and Ch. Westra.

Frances Dykstra,
Fuller Avenue.

AFTER RECESS PROGRAMS

THE GLORY OF GOD - *And The Church*

Rev. Bernard Kok — Holland, Michigan

I.—The Church is Never the Work of Man.

It is sad but true that the error of Arminianism is rampant in the Church of today. This heresy is a denial of the sovereignty and glory of God in respect to the origin, the realization and preservation of the Church. It teaches that the origin, the realization and preservation of the Church does not lie in the will of God, but in the will of man. Not God determines who shall be saved, but the puny will of man. According to this God dishonouring heresy, not the will of God is sovereign, but the will of man. God wills that all men shall be saved, but that there are but few saved is not because there are but few that are chosen, but because there are but few that are so good that they will let God save them. This pernicious doctrine would have us believe that there was a possibility that all men could have been, and still could be, saved if they only would. Just a few weeks ago I heard an Arminian propose a plan whereby all men living today could be saved within a few weeks, if only every Christian would gain one convert an hour for Christ, and if every convert in turn would do the same. Logically it also follows that there was a possibility that no one would be saved, and that all the work of God in Christ would have been in vain. God really depends upon man's zeal and man's efforts in the realization of His Church. And do not be deceived! These Arminians also speak of election, but according to them God elected those who believe. God's choice was dependent on man's choice. Hence Arminianism is man centered. Man's freedom must be maintained even at the expense of God's sovereignty. The salvation of man, rather than the glory of God is for

them the matter of supreme importance. QUESTIONS: In which way does Arminianism deny the total depravity of man? Is it also a denial of Christ's atonement upon the cross? Is the first point of 1924, which teaches a general well-meaning offer of salvation, Arminianism? Which truth affords the greatest comfort to a Christian, the truth of God's sovereign grace, or the doctrine of freewill?

II.—The Church is the Work of God.

The idea of the Church is eternally in the mind and will of God. In His eternal counsel He conceived the Church of which Christ is the head, and the believers the members of His body. (Eph. 1:3, 4, 11 and 12.) Hence the Church is not a mere society, to which you can add or detract without marring the whole, but she is a living organism, a body that grows and develops from an inner principle. And the life-giving principle whereby the Church exists and grows is the life of the risen and glorified Redeemer. He it is who from the beginning of the world unto the end gathers, protects and preserves unto Himself a Church chosen unto everlasting life. (Heid. Cat., Lord's Day 21). Therefore the Church is not a mere multitude of individuals, but a finished whole, in which every member has his God-given place. Thus the Church as the body of Christ is complete, and in it's completion it is a unity, of which not one member can be missed without marring the whole, and to which not one member can be added. I Cor. 12:12-27. Scripture also presents the Church as a temple or a building of which the members are living stones. I Peter 2:5; I Cor 3:16, or as a city which is builded compact together. Psalm 122:3. Then the Church is regarded from the viewpoint of its being a well-designed structure, of which God himself is the divine architect. As such only the elect belong to the Church. It is God who determines how many should be members of the Church, and also the place that each member shall have in the Church. No architect leaves it up to the brick or building material to determine the size and shape of the building, much less the supreme Architect. God did not leave it up to man to determine the number of members in your body or mine, or the place and function of each individual member, thus also He did not leave it up to the puny freewill of man to determine the number or place of the members of the body of our blessed Redeemer, which is the Church. It is of the Church that the Lord says in the prophecy of Isaiah, "This people have I formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise". Isaiah 43:21. This scriptural view of the Church which ascribes all glory to God, implies not only election but also reprobation, but always in such a way that reprobation is subservient to election. Indeed reprobation must serve to reveal God's justice and wrath in the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, Rom. 9:22, but no less to serve the elect. Even as chaff must serve in the development and growth of the wheat, so also the power of darkness and the wicked are subservient to the realization of the Church. Reprobation is as it were the scaffolding which God uses in the building of His Church, which is the temple of God.

Truth vs. Error

Rev. J. Howerzyl — Oskaloosa, Iowa

As you probably remember from last month John and Jack were rather good friends even though John did belong to the Protestant Reformed Church. Jack had made some rather sharp and pointed comments on the mission activity of the Protestant Reformed Churches which John had, at the moment, been unable to answer. But after checking over the matter with his father he felt rather well prepared to defend himself and his church and began. . . .

"I'd like to begin by saying a word about Geheim, where our missionaries are now working and where your uncle lives who sent you that letter about us. It isn't as though we just sent our men out blindly, or so my dad says, but he tells me that they had a definite request from some people there who were not satisfied with the preaching there, had heard of us and wanted us to do some work there." "That doesn't really make any difference though," retorted Jack immediately, "because you will always find a few grumblers who are dissatisfied if you look long enough, and if that were all we wouldn't mind it so much. We're probably just as well off without them and you can have those 'trouble-makers' and welcome. I believe you've had some experience with some of them in your own churches: 'trouble-makers' who kept right on making trouble. But you lead a lot of good people astray also, people who are church members, who are satisfied, who have been loyal to the Christian Reformed Denomination for years and years. Besides this you make hard feelings in the families when one goes and the other stays, and as long as they are good Christians and church-members I can't see why you don't go to those who are heathen."

"I know it really doesn't make any difference whether we were asked to come or not," answered John, "and I only said that to point out that it was a call that we couldn't ignore. When people say, "Why don't you come over and help us," even as a denomination you must hear and heed and if possible go over and help. But I admit it wouldn't have been a bit different and we have just as much right to go anywhere as to go to Geheim. And so if we want to get the straight of this we have to go first of all to Christ's commission to His Church in which He lays down His command regarding mission work. This we find first of all in Matt-28:19, 20, where we read, 'Go ye therefore, and 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, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world'." "That's exactly it," broke in Jack, "don't you see that Christ here points out that the field is all nations? Why don't you go to the heathen?"

"It's true," replied John, "that Christ here specified all nations as the field but

its obvious that it is physically impossible for one church to preach to all nations, you can't do that either." "That's true," answered Jack, "But at least we try to do our best." "Yes, but the point I want to make," retorted John, "is that you must find more definite instructions as to the order of procedure of mission work and that you find in the 'geographic order' of mission work in Acts 1:8 'And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth,' so we must begin at Jerusalem and work out from there." "And that's exactly what we do and you don't," Jack shouted triumphantly, "We have our mission work among the unchurched, that is 'Jerusalem', then we also go out further to 'Samaria' and I would compare that to mission work we do among our own Indians but we also go to 'the uttermost parts of the earth', for we have our Chinese, our African, our Ceylonese fields and we hope soon to have a field in India. And I don't believe that you have a single mission that tries to reach your unchurched neighbor, nor a foreign missionary, only those who try to tear down our churches."

"Just a minute, Jack, do you think that Jerusalem refers to your unchurched neighbor, Judaea to those a little farther away, and Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth to those people who are farthest away of all?" "Surely, that's what I mean because that's what the text says. The apostles had to preach to their neighbors and friends and slowly on widen out until they reached the whole world.

"But why does our Lord say Jerusalem then?" asked John. "It's simply a fact that all the disciples with the exception of Judas Iscariot were not of Jerusalem but of Galilee. So if it meant your next door neighbor or the one near you, Jesus would have said Galilee or named every man's home town. But He doesn't! He simply says Jerusalem first. And this becomes plain when you remember that Jerusalem was the head and the center and the heart of the Old Testament worship of God. There was the temple and the altar and the sacrifices. There and there alone Israel could worship God. There God dwelt with His people. But what happened? That Jerusalem became Sodom and Gomorrah when it crucified the Lord! It becomes the false church as the Apostle expresses it, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." To that false church, which claimed to be the only church, Christ sends His apostles to witness first of all. And history certainly bears this out too. They do begin to preach in Jerusalem. And next is Samaria that still has a remnant of the fear of God and then and only then the heathen."

"Do you mean to say then," asked Jack angrily, "that the Christian Reformed Church is the false church, is Sodom and Gomorrah, is guilty of crucifying the Lord?"

"I wouldn't yet call it Sodom and Gomorrah because I believe it has more than three righteous people in it," laughed John, "but in 1924 it certainly became corrupt in adopting the three points and especially in casting out and deposing her true children who were preaching and

believing the Word of God. It certainly turned in the direction of the false church and that doesn't mean now that there are no children of God present in her any longer but it does mean that she has turned from the truth, at least officially, and we who were her true sons are in the same position as the apostles in Jerusalem. And therefore we, in obedience to the command of Christ, strive with all our might to rescue those of your church who still believe and we say continually to them, 'come out from among them, and that's why we begin our mission work in the Christian Reformed Church. It simply is God's commandment."

"That surely reveals a hateful attitude just the same," Jack said with a trace of disgust in his voice.

John smiled and replied, "You know, I was just going to add, that this whole thing can also be shown to be correct if you look at it from the viewpoint of true Christian love. . . ."

But just then the whistle blew and back to work for the rest of the day, but John determined that he would finish this matter the next noon-hour.

NOTE: Would you like to answer Jack from the viewpoint of Christian love. Send your answer to:

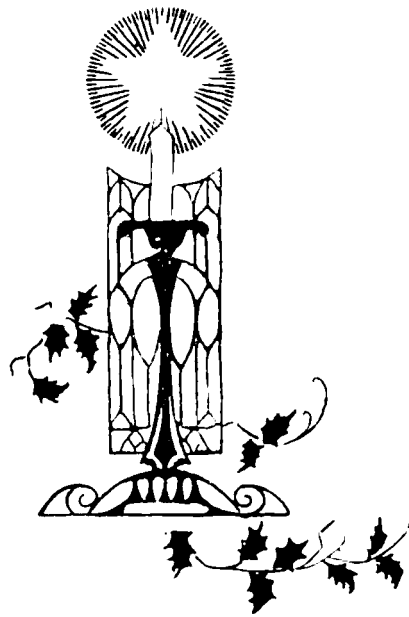
Rev. James Howerzyl
515 Third Avenue, E.
Oskaloosa, Iowa.

From The Editor's Desk. . .

The date of publication of Beacon Lights has been changed from the 5th of the month to the 25th of the previous month. That is, the January issue will be published on December 25, etc. The reason for this change is to enable subscribers to receive their copies by the first of each month. Consequently, the deadline for all material has been set on the 10th. Contributors, kindly observe this deadline—by or before the 10th!

If you haven't guessed it yet, (or if someone hasn't told you), the answer to our "Old Time Riddle" is the fish, or whale, that swallowed Jonah. Did we say we would publish the names of those who sent in the right answer to the riddle? Impossible! Never dreamed that we would receive such a voluminous response. Letters and post-cards were received from all parts of the U.S.A., wherever Beacon Lights is read, from children and grown-ups, school teachers and farmers and housewives; some answers right and some answers wrong. Betty Dykstra of Fuller Ave. was the first to send in the corect answer. Although it is impossible to acknowledge all your names, we thank each one of you for your interest and response.

The after recess program in this issue—"The Glory of God and the Church" is written by Rev. Kok. Next month's issue will carry an outline on the topic "The Glory of God and the School", by Miss Della Vander Vennen. We hope your society is using this material as an aid to better after-recess programs.



MERRY
CHRISTMAS

Mr. John Zandstra, Jr.
182nd St.
South Holland, Ill.