

these people who marveled at the events surrounding John's birth heard of the events that took place in Bethlehem not many months hence, and if they did, what conclusions they drew. Surely Israel had not heard of anything such as this for a good long time.

Zechariah, in vv. 67-79, spoke about the destiny of his new son. In accordance with this destiny, John was a Nazarite, and reared in this way. Verse 80 tells us that he grew (in stature) and became strong in spirit, living in the wilderness area of Judea until he began to preach. We are not able to tell if John knew Jesus or not, though there is the possibility that he did so. Considering the exchange of words and knowledge between Mary and Elizabeth, we would be surprised if John's mother did not tell him about the events surrounding his birth as well as that of his kinsman.

## THIRTY YEARS PREPARATION

*Bethlehem—The Birth of Jesus—(Mt. 1:19-25)*

*Lk. 2:1-21*

Mary's faith was really put to the test when she returned to Nazareth. If she was not noticeably with child at this time, she soon was, and the knowledge would cause Joseph to consider what he must do in respect to the situation. The tie of betrothal was as sacred as the marriage vow itself, and Mary could be stoned as an adulteress according to the law. But her chosen was equal to the occasion even as she was, and for this we again marvel at those whom God chose as parents of His Son.

Matthew tells us that Joseph was thinking about his action in regard to Mary. He recognized that Mary had apparently been unfaithful, but he had about decided to give her a bill of divorcement privately. The text says that he was a just man, which we take to mean both fair

and considerate of others. While he was yet undecided, he was treated to a heavenly vision, and informed that he was to marry his betrothed. He was told that the child was from God and that He was to be called Jesus for He was to save His people from their sins. Thus was to be fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah about a son to be born to a virgin who would be called Emmanuel. It may be of interest that the Gospels do not record that this name was ever applied to Him by people.

This birth was apparently the second fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 though some think otherwise. There has been a considerable amount of discussion over the Hebrew term, which is translated in various ways (virgin, young woman, etc.) depending upon one's idea of what it may or must mean. Whether we are ever able to decide about the Hebrew word, there is no doubt as to what the Greek term means used by Matthew. It describes a woman even as was Mary, who stated that she had known no man. With this we are content.

The statement by Matthew in verse 25 certainly indicates that Joseph and Mary had normal relationships after the birth of Jesus. The doctrine of the Roman Catholic church that she remained a virgin is another of their doctrines which is false, and really adds nothing to her dignity or holiness. If God ordained the marriage relationship, it seems to us that it is a holy relationship. And so the New Testament teaches, Matt. 19, Mk. 10. What is wrong with a woman who does what her Maker intended for her to do? If the reader will consider the texts in Matthew 13:55-56, with its parallel in Mark 6:3, these very plainly state that she had other children. We would grant that the Greek word translated "brethren" (KJV) or "brothers" (RSV) can be translated either way, and sometimes means one and then the other. But we do not find that the word "sisters" is ever so used. It

definitely indicates what we mean by the term. There would have been no point in the people of Nazareth mentioning the fact that Jesus had cousins. They were identifying Who He was in respect to His immediate family whom they knew.

Though the home of Joseph and Mary was at Nazareth, the sure word of prophecy had declared that the Messiah (Christ to us) was to be born at Bethlehem, the native place of His royal father David. So we read that a decree was issued by Augustus for a census of all the world over which his power extended, which would be the Roman Empire in that day and time. Matthew tells us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem during the reign of Herod the Great. Herod the Great was appointed king in the year of Rome, A.U.C. 714, which equals our time 40 B.C. He died in the 37th year after being appointed to this position. This would place his death about 4 B.C. according to our calendar and A.U.C. 750 by Rome's. The calendar we use was figured out by Dionysius Exiguus, a monk who lived in the 6th century A.D. Somehow in his reckoning of dates, he made at least a four year mistake. This is how Herod could die before Jesus was born according to our calendar, and yet have been the king who attempted to kill Jesus after He was born according to the Gospel records. If Dionysius had reckoned correctly, then A.D. 1 would have been figured from a point of time preceeding the death of Herod, who died just before the passover in his 37th year as king. It is impossible to determine just *how long* he lived *after* Jesus was born. Nor do we know if it was some months or some years before Herod's death when Jesus was born. The text in Matthew indicates that Joseph took his family to Egypt before Herod died, but it does not say how long he kept them there. Thus we are unable to determine even the year in which Jesus was born, let alone the day.

### 30 YEARS PREPARATION

December 25 is as likely as any other day. The Gospel records do not tell us and we conclude that they did not intend to tell us the year or day. Jesus was born to die, and it is His life and death with which we are concerned.

In keeping with the orders from Rome, Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem for the census. The King James Version states that they went to be taxed, which was probably a result of the census which was the thing decreed. While they were there, God became a part of history in space and time. The birth took place in an unknown stable somewhere around or in Bethlehem. These three things are what it takes to make history: 1) an event 2) in space 3) and time. May we rejoice together that God came down to show us how to live as well as how to die.

Though they (Joseph and Mary) were both of the lineage of David, this did not procure for them any extra privilege in the town of Bethlehem it seems. But God does not neglect His own, though sometimes people do. So God graced a lowly stable by His presence. Not only this, but messengers from heaven, known to us as angels, appeared to shepherds keeping their flocks by night. How fitting that He Who is the "great shepherd of the sheep" should send angels on the night of His birth to those who were shepherds. They were directed to go to Bethlehem and there to witness what God had begun to do for His people. We cannot help but remind you that these men spread abroad in the country round about what they had seen and heard. It had not been long since the birth of John in the same region. Did *these events* cause people to begin to expect the Messiah?

#### *Jerusalem—Luke 2:22-40*

According to the law, Joseph and Mary went to the temple and presented Jesus as their first born, and offered

for Him a sacrifice that they might redeem Him. As He had been circumcised according to the law, so now He was bought back according to the law. While here at the temple, God kept a promise to one of His faithful servants called Simeon. Simeon's expression both to God and to the parents of Jesus contains both thanksgiving and a prophetic look at the future of Jesus. Anna also comes to offer her praise and thanks to God, and to go away speaking about Jesus to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. The reader should note that even now Jesus' world-wide mission is foretold as He was to be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles."

*Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth—Matthew 2:1-23*

The gospel of Matthew now takes up the story begun by Luke, and introduces us properly to the wise men. The character of Herod the Great coupled with the news of a new king for Israel threw the city of Jerusalem into a commotion. One of the Roman emperors had declared it would be better to be Herod's hog than Herod's son. The reason for this was that Herod was so insanely jealous that he would and did kill anyone that he thought to be a threat to his position. This would include even members of his own family, wife and sons for instance. So when the wise men came with the news of a new king for Israel, Herod immediately began to plot his death. He inquired from the wise men, as to the time of the star's appearance and of the Jewish scholars as to where the Messiah should be born. He then sent them on their way to Bethlehem, where they found Jesus and His parents in a house and presented to Him their gifts. They were directed through a dream to go back to their country another way.

When Herod discovered that they were not going to return to him, he sent his soldiers to Bethlehem to kill the

baby who was a threat to him. But God did not allow humans to thwart His plans. He sent a messenger again to Joseph and directed him to take his son and wife to Egypt. When the soldiers arrived, they killed all the boy babies in the area according to Herod's orders. Thus the mournful picture, long before drawn by Jeremiah under the image of Rachel, whose sepulchre was at their gates, was realized as the mothers wept for their dead sons, the first martyrs for Jesus.

The journey to Egypt also fulfilled a prophecy from Hosea 11:1 though we would never have known it to be true unless Matthew had told us. Here they remained until Joseph was again informed by an angel that Herod had died. When he got back to the land of Judea, he learned that the son of Herod named Archelaus was on the throne and was much like his father in disposition. So he took his wife and son and went to Nazareth. This was the home of Jesus throughout his boyhood days.

We should note here that the common pictures of the birth portray the shepherds and the wise men at the stable. The Bible does not even imply that the wise men were there. There are several reasons why we believe they were not there besides the silence of the Bible. *First*, they were from the East, perhaps Arabia or Persia or some other place. To have arrived at the stable on the night of His birth from some point that far east would have been difficult even in our time, let alone in that time. If the star which they saw did not appear until the time of His birth, there was no means of transportation available that could take them to Bethlehem the same night. *Second*, by some means unknown to us, they not only knew that a child had been born, but that he was born "King of the Jews." If they accepted the information as true, what was the hurry in going to visit him? They would have all of his lifetime to visit, so there would be

no necessary hurry in this regard. *Thirdly*, when Mary and Joseph went to the temple to offer the sacrifices to redeem their son, they offered the poor offering of two young birds. They should have offered a lamb according to Leviticus 12. Had the wise men appeared to them before this time, they would hardly have needed to offer the poor offering. *Fourthly*, when Herod learned of His birth, he sent his soldiers to kill all the children under two years of age. This age limit might have meant any child over one year old. Such an age limit would have been quite unnecessary if Jesus had just been born. The probable reason for such a limit was the fact that this would have enabled the soldiers to easily determine which baby should be killed. It is not difficult to tell a baby six months old from one that is walking and talking. With this age limit in mind, the soldiers would not have to ask the mother about the age of her son. If they were looking for a baby somewhere between the age of one to six months, and they killed all up to the age of about 18 months, they would be sure to get the baby in question. We should also remark that it is unlikely that more than 20 or 25 babies were killed since they had to be boys and only so old, and Bethlehem was not a large city. *Fifthly*, Mary went to the temple to present Jesus at the end of forty days according to the law. Matthew's account indicates that as soon as the wise men appeared and Herod knew about the birth, the family fled to Egypt according to direction of the angel. If the wise men had appeared before the forty-day period, they would not have been in the country let alone have gone to the temple in Jerusalem, the city where Herod was. We conclude that Jesus was over 40 days old and perhaps as much as six months old before the wise men came. The reader should also note that Matthew's gospel says in verse 11 that the wise men went into the *house* where they saw the baby Jesus.

Who the wise men were we do not know. They apparently were Gentiles who in some miraculous way had been informed by God that a baby was to be born in the country west of them called Judea. How they connected the star with His birth is also quite unknown to us. The text does not say that the star led them from where they were to Jerusalem. They apparently went to Jerusalem because this was the place where they could find out more information about the king who had been born. (We think the speculations about the star being the conjunction of certain planets is without any basis in fact.) Our sun is a star and not very big in comparison to other known stars. Do you think that such a star could direct one from Jerusalem the six miles down to Bethlehem and rest over the house where Jesus was? The star then was apparently as miraculous as the birth to which it bore witness. If it had been some large star like our sun, others would have noticed it besides the wise men. The text indicates that any miraculous event was quite unknown to the men in Jerusalem and the appearance of the wise men asking about such an event took them by complete surprise. We conclude that the star was seen only by the wise men, having been given for their benefit by God. The text does not say, but Matthew 2:12 implies that God also directed them to go back to their home and not return to Jerusalem to Herod with the news they had.

#### *Jerusalem—Luke 2:41-52*

The twelve years that passed before Luke takes up the account again, are years about which we can only wonder. Seemingly, Jesus along with his parents of course went to Jerusalem for each appointed feast, which is the probable meaning of Luke 2:42. However, the only thing that we are really told definitely is the statement in Luke 2:40



about Jesus growing and being filled with wisdom and having God's favor upon Him. We assume that Jesus was brought up according to the law by His parents, and taught as were all Jewish children to fear God and to keep His commandments.

At the age of twelve, Jesus was taken to the temple and there became a son of the law, obligated to obey its every precept. But this even is passed over in silence and we are treated instead to the discussion of Jesus with the Jewish teachers in the temple. It is interesting to note that they were not necessarily astounded at His questions but rather His understanding and answers. We know that even a small child can ask big questions. It is a different thing to indicate understanding and to show it in answers. Jesus certainly reveals His knowledge of His divine mission and His zeal for it. What an appropriate place to express such knowledge.

God's choices for the parents of Jesus were certainly wise and good. However, they were like all parents: they were human. Leaving Jerusalem at the end of the feast, each of them thought the other parent had their son along with them. They were apparently in company with other people and the men and the women did not travel in the same group. So they journeyed a day before they discovered that neither one of them had Jesus. The second day they returned to Jerusalem to seek Him. The third day their anxiety was well expressed by Mary, having found Jesus in the temple, when she said to Him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? Your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." We cannot help but wonder along with Mary at her son's reply. How much did He really understand about Himself and His mission? The reader should note that the expression in Greek is rather indefinite. It might almost be taken as a reprimand, for He says to them, "Did you not know

that it is necessary for me to be in the things of my Father?" He seemingly thinks that they should know about His mission, and so He contrasts the word "father" in His expression with the word in His mother's expression. But to show that He also knew what was required of any godly son, He returns obediently with His parents to the town of Nazareth. Here He grows to manhood, and increases in both wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man, for approximately eighteen years. We would suggest that such growth in the areas mentioned does not necessarily indicate that Jesus was imperfect at any given time, but rather progressed in such growth as God ordained.

The town of Nazareth was not very well thought of by many people, as is indicated by the question of Nathanael in John 1:46. Yet we suppose that Joseph and his family had friends and engaged in the local public life, as is perhaps implied by the invitation of Jesus and His disciples along with His mother to a wedding feast at the neighboring town of Cana. We assume that Joseph taught his son a trade as did every Jewish father. It is pertinent to remark that we do not know what trade Joseph pursued. The Greek word in Matthew 13 and Mark 6 which is translated as carpenter does not mean what we mean by carpenter necessarily. It means any craftsman, whether a worker in wood or in something else. There is an old proverb that says, "Familiarity breeds contempt." This is not necessarily true but it seemed to be for Jesus and His hometown. Two different times (Lk. 4; Matt. 13 and Mk. 6) in His ministry, Jesus attempted to work miracles or to teach in Nazareth, and each time He was rejected. Did the problems raised at His birth cause such rejection?

Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament, and occurs first in the Gospel accounts. It is hard to say

how big it was during the time of Jesus. It was apparently near the town of Cana and enjoyed a mild atmosphere and climate, being located in the province of Galilee.

It was in this town that Jesus began his mission of saving the world. That He well recognized all that was involved in that can be clearly seen in the fruit borne in His ministry. He had come to do the will of God, Heb. 10:9; Luke 22:42. In this place He prepared for that task. May we rejoice that the text in Matthew 2:23 "He shall be called a Nazarene" means for each of us that one person who was called that died for each of us, and His name was Jesus.

*The Jordan River—Matthew 3:1-17; Mark 1:1-11;  
Luke 3:1-22*

The preceding narrative has left both Jesus and His appointed forerunner awaiting "the time of their showing to Israel." Jesus was at Nazareth and John in the wilderness. Suddenly, as Elijah of old, John appears on the scene as a herald of the kingdom, a preacher of righteousness and repentance, a voice in the wilderness, crying, "Prepare the way for the Lord." The reader will note that Luke accurately (in keeping with his intention) marks the time that this event occurs. Observe that two high priests are mentioned, Annas and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, though the Old Testament specifically prescribed only one at a time. But such was the problem with the Romans in power. Annas was deposed in A.D. 14 by Valerius Gratus, but managed to get Caiaphas put in the position. This will explain why the soldiers who arrested Jesus first took him to the "real" high priest, Annas, and then to the "official" high priest, Caiaphas.

### 30 YEARS PREPARATION

John had developed into manhood in the Judean wilderness (Lk. 1:80) in a rather ascetic life. The people remarked that he worked no miracles (John 10:41) yet because of his remarkable appearance and more remarkable preaching, they mused in their hearts if he might be the Messiah (Christ), Luke 3:15. Certainly his preaching stirred the ones who heard, and many admitted their sins and dedicated anew their lives to God. Jesus said of him that none greater had been born of woman, Luke 7:28. The office that he filled so well lends credence to this statement. Yet he knew that he was but a voice, a nobody. His mission was to prepare the road ahead for the "somebody" who was to come after him.

Malachi 3:1-2; 4:5-6 and Lk. 1:14-17 describe the work that he was to do by pointing out that the hearts of mankind must be changed before they could receive the coming one. So John preached that the "kingdom of heaven was near" and that people should repent and be immersed for the remission of their sins. For those who heeded, such a change of heart and life readied them for the appearance of the promised Messiah. Let it be noted that John's baptism demanded repentance as a prerequisite. It also was for the purpose of the remission of sins. The Greek text is the same in this respect as it is in Matthew 26:28 and Acts 2:38. God expected each Israelite to obey his voice, though some rejected the injunction, Luke 7:29-30; Matt. 22:23-32.

Because it was the will of God, many people came to be immersed by John. He admonished the publicans who came to practice honesty and moderation; the soldiers to abstain from violence, false accusations, and wrongful taxations of a subject people; and for the selfish to share with the poor. Sadducees and Pharisees, who claimed rather exclusive privileges because of their self-imposed importance, were warned that God could and would raise

up true children from the very stones upon which they stood. They were summarily warned to bring forth evidence of repentance. John pictured the Messiah as one who would divide the good from the bad, wheat from chaff, fruitful from fruitless, with the barren trees and worthless chaff being burned up. Reasons enough for a change of heart!

Among those who came was Jesus. We really are not surprised at His appearance, for He was one Jew Who desired to "fulfill all the righteousness of God." Disobedience on His part would have been sin. Thus, we have a very practical reason why Jesus came for immersion at the hands of John. The expression of John need not surprise us greatly, if his mother had told him anything at all about his cousin. We also note that God had spoken to him about an unusual event to happen, John 1:33-34, even if he did not know upon whom this would take place. His expression may well be simply an accurate appraisal of the true relationship that existed between them. He presented this same idea in John 3:30 as he spoke to his own disciples about Jesus.

God appreciates obedience! Because Jesus obeyed, God used Him, in His obedience, as an opportunity to express both audibly and visibly that appreciation. We will probably never decide if John alone heard and saw these things, or if others did also. May we rejoice that, though Jesus was the Son of God, yea, God Himself in human form, yet He learned obedience and became the means of eternal salvation to everyone who lives a life of obedience to His will, Heb. 5:9.

*Wilderness of Judea—Matt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12-13;  
Lk. 4:1-13*

God did not intend that any human accuse Him of being unable to understand life here on earth by asserting

that "you have never been human." This is exactly the reason why Jesus was subject to what we call temptation. Is it not interesting to consider that God is a moral being, and has always had the power to choose evil rather than good? But we would not feel (I suppose) that "He has really seen it like it is" if Jesus had not been made a part of humanity. Therefore, the temptations in the wilderness present for our consideration the trial of the human nature of Jesus at close range. We ought not to think that this was either the first or the last time that Jesus knew temptation, even as a human.

The wilderness is made a very real place by Mark's statement that He was with the "wild beasts." Perhaps this occurred in the wilderness of Judea, around the vicinity of the Dead Sea. The text is just not specific enough to locate exactly where it took place, even to the "exceedingly high" mountain mentioned in the text.

Some suggest that the temptations were not only a subjective thing, but were experienced while Jesus was in a trance or ecstasy; and that the temptation and answer all took place within. Others make them subjective but while Jesus is conscious. The testimony of the accounts is that they were neither of these, but both objective and factual. Satan is presented as a real personality, and the possibility to sin was also real!

Some deny that the temptations were as presented because of the seeming difficulty about the devil taking Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple, or the apparent impossibility of presenting the kingdoms of the world from any mountain top. But to deny the reality because of our lack of understanding means that the whole gospel record is subject to our reason as regards its validity. Such a position is not one of faith. Others find problems with the apparent conflict concerning the order of the events as recorded by Matthew and Luke. Perhaps again it is

our understanding which is at fault. Luke may have a geographical frame of reference, whereas Matthew gives them in a time sequence, concluding the account with the statement of Jesus to Satan (which we might colloquially express as "Get lost!").

Who can really comprehend the depths of any temptation that comes in life, let alone fathom these that befell Jesus? Was it temptation to His physical self only? Such seems to be so for the first, but the third one does not fit so well here. It seems more to lean towards pride of position. How much of a temptation was it to Jesus to use His miraculous powers? Yet if He did so, what sort of example would this be for us, who are to follow in His steps? We would be quite unable to follow the Captain of our salvation in this respect.

Whatever view one takes of each of the trials, we would observe that each was presented with the idea that it was right. Is this not the way each one comes today? Consider the one who offers a drink of whiskey, or encourages a shot of dope, or lures with the promise of illicit sex: does not each temptation carry with it the implicit idea of "rightness" for the one tempted? But Jesus could see that more was there than met the eye. Again, Jesus knew the difference between trusting God and trying God. Would that we knew the same! True faith does not try God, rather it waits upon God. Thus, we do not advocate "Gideon's fleece" as a means to know God's will. If the reader will peruse Judges 6:36-40 carefully, we think that even Gideon knew that such was not the very best to do. Note verse 39 in this light. God may decide to answer anyway, even with such a way of ascertaining His will, but that does not mean it is the way that is best. Then, there is the implicit idea that one should decide what is best on the merits of the present circumstances, oblivious of anything apart from them. But Jesus taught

a vivid lesson that life is not godly apart from the adherence to absolutes, God's absolutes. God's Word is the criterion by which we may determine what is right and what is not. There are those in our time (as in every generation) that would have us practice situation ethics, or spelled out in a different way, the measure of all things is man himself. We can play our own god. Jesus did not so teach, nor should we so learn. Instead, the answer to each problem was the authority of the Word, God's never-changing absolute. Rejoice that He has given us a compass that never changes, and is adequate for each day's choices. Add to these facts the thought that it is Jesus Who ever leads us in triumph, vanquishing all the fiery darts of the evil one, and you have life victorious! "Day by day, and with each passing moment, strength I find to meet my trials here" can be our theme song for life. "Thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ!"

The strength of any temptation is measured by its promise to present the "solution" to the pressing need, and as well by how subtle it is. Such were all the trials of Jesus. Know that the real strength of any trial is known only by the one who completely resists it. Our Lord knew all of these. He rejected the devil's suggested course of action by avoiding what was possible to do in favor of doing what was right. We must see that the devil's part is to suggest, but we need not accept. Jesus did not stand around arguing about the reality of the devil, nor his strength. He treated him as real, and spurned his purpose.

Let us then learn these lessons: 1) Satan is real, 2) temptation is common, 3) God's Word is our absolute (for life is not a series of unrelated experiences, but must be seen in the light of eternity and God's will for us), 4) Jesus understands our every need for guidance and help.



Vanquished, the devil left Jesus for a little while. He had real objectives in mind, even if some of the temptations are not understood by us. Some of the temptations may have been partly subjective (as in the third, for instance) but each was fraught with peril. Even the holiest of places was a place for sin to happen! We need not doubt that just as the devil was aware of Jesus, so is he aware of us. But may we rest our life in the hand of Him Whose eye sees each sparrow that falls, and Who knows each of His own by name. God has turned on the light marked "exit" for each temptation. May we be willing to see it, rejoicing that He has shown us the "way out" of every temptation to sin!

*Bethany—John 1:29-51*

"Come and see!" Thus does Jesus capture the men who followed in His train, men who had heard the "crying one" point out "the Lamb of God Who takes away the world's sin." The first disciples of Jesus were Andrew and John, each of whom brought their brothers to Jesus. Such is ever the way of bringing men to Jesus: personal witness and contact! John had disavowed having any mission in life except that of a mouthpiece about Jesus, of a beacon light for the real "light." Could we but determine to do likewise! The "senate committee for investigation of internal problems" had received no answer from John except this ringing affirmation about his one all-encompassing goal respecting Jesus. Might it ever be our song, "No other name but that of Jesus."

Akin to a clear ringing bell was John's remembrance of his first day at the feet of the Master. It was near Bethany beyond the Jordan, perhaps the place where Jesus Himself had been immersed at the hands of John. It was about the hour of 10 A.M. We would suggest to

the reader that a very rewarding study could be done in John's gospel concerning the occurrence of the word "hour" as well as other expressions of time. As we meditate on John's vivid recall of his first experience with Jesus, we think of those who are ever searching for some experience in life that is worth having, and of those who advocate having an experience, religious or otherwise, to validate one's life. Could they but seek and find Jesus, they would have an experience, and one that is worthy of remembering!

Bethany is a place whose location is not known, other than the remark that it was east of the Jordan river, thus to distinguish it from the one near Jerusalem. Origen had looked for it in his time (he was born A.D. 185, died A.D. 254) and did not find it. Notwithstanding the fact that all the manuscripts of his day read Bethany, he changed the name of this place to Bethabara, since that place he could find. But such textural treatment is hardly the mark of good scholarship, and it is best to leave the text as it is. So we settle for Bethany, and identify it as the place where some of John's activities took place.

John's places for baptism are identified as this place and the spot located at AEnon near Salim. It thus seems likely that John moved about as the circumstances dictated and the need arose. Whether Jesus was immersed at one of these two places or some other is a question which the New Testament does not answer, and is not really important anyway.

"An Israelite . . . who is not deceitful!" This was the discerning observation of Jesus about the find of Philip: Nathanael. How wonderful the news to carry, as did Andrew and Philip, that they had found the One Who was the subject of Moses, and of the prophets. We hardly appreciate their joy from this distance. For them, John had pointed the way, and Jesus was there! How

like the man in Matt. 13 who found the treasure in a field, or the one who discovered the pearl of greatest price. These men left all to grasp this most worthwhile of all prizes!

Guilt by association! Such was the conclusion of Nathanael when told that Jesus was from Nazareth. What was wrong? Was it because Nazareth had a feud going with Bethsaida? Or was it just Nathanael who so felt? But Jesus was equal to the occasion, as was Philip. The word was again "Come and see!" In coming, Nathanael, as the others, found Him "in Whom are hidden every treasure both of knowledge and wisdom," Col. 2:3-4. Greater things were yet to come, but Nathanael was content to wait, and just enjoy his present possession.

### *Cana of Galilee—John 2:1-11*

This city is not mentioned in the Bible except by John. One had to go down to Capernaum from Cana, John 4:47, 49, 51, so it must have been in the hills of Galilee. The exact location has ever been a problem, since there are two villages north of Nazareth claiming the honor. Here Jesus displayed His first sign (John's word for miracle) which was to build some faith in His disciples.

Life as usual! A marriage! And John reports that it was the "third day" in a series of days, probably reckoned from John 1:43. He, along with other disciples, went with Jesus to this happy event. What a day, and what a wedding! One often reads that the Scripture does not mention the fact that Jesus ever smiled or laughed. It seems unlikely to us, though, that He attended a wedding and did not allow the corners of His mouth to ever turn up. What did He imply in the text in Matt. 9:15 about normal conduct at a feast such as this one?

However, not everyone was smiling as the feast progressed, for the cupboard grew bare too quickly, and thus the stage was set for the first of signs that John records to provide a basis for faith.

"The wine is gone!" would be a good statement sometimes, but not on this occasion, for the guests were still present, and the feast was not over. The wine having come up short, consternation was the order of the day in the kitchen of the host. What to do? We will never know just why, but the mother of Jesus informed her Son of the situation. He replied, "Why do you bother Me with it? What relationship exists between us that causes you to tell Me this?" Thus we reproduce what seems to be the gist of the Greek expression. The reader can see a like expression in Luke 4:34 and also in Matt. 8:29 in another place and time. How Mary took the expression is best seen in her response to it. She told the servants to do whatever Jesus said to do. That is good advice anytime, is it not?

"Keep taking it!" (the wine newly made). Thus did the servants for the duration of the feast. The servants may have been the only ones who ever knew how the supply of wine was renewed, other than the disciples of Jesus. It seems to us that the water placed in the waterpots was what was drawn out, which became wine, and was taken to the steward. It does not make much sense to have the servants fill up 6 large waterpots with water, and tell us about it, and then assume that the water drawn out was not from those jars. We do not think that the remark of the steward, upon tasting the wine, necessarily implies that the wine was fermented, as we will state in the following paragraph.

What was the wine? Was it a fermented beverage? Some so believe and teach. We do not so believe and teach. The case seems to be as follows to us. First, if Jesus were

God (which we accept as the fact), then He was the actual author of the Old and New Testaments. Consider then the texts like Proverbs 20:1; 23:20-21, 29:35; I Cor. 6:10. Would Jesus say such things and then provide the means to do what is said to be a bad thing to do? Is Jesus consistent with command and example? You may argue over the definition of "drunkard" but it is not wise to play Russian roulette with God. How do we know when God considers one to be drunk? The only sane course is complete abstention. Secondly, the word "wine" definitely is not always used to mean fermented beverage. It was not so used by other writers of that day. Nor do we think it is in the New Testament. Consider the text in Matthew 9:17. The expression "new wine" can not mean a fermented beverage, or else it would not be capable of expanding and thus bursting the skins. It rather describes a juice quite unfermented. The Greek word is used by contemporaries of the New Testament writers to describe a syrup made from boiling grape juice down, a beverage made from combining water and this syrup, the grape juice both out of the grapes and still in the grape, and even the grapes themselves. So we do not think that the word necessarily means a fermented beverage, here, or any place else, including I Timothy 5:23.

*Capernaum—John 2:12 (ref. Matt 9:1; Mk. 2:1)*

Conspicuous by its absence is the word about Capernaum. It certainly is of lasting interest that this city, so vitally connected with Jesus' ministry, is proof of the accuracy of Jesus' word. He condemned it, along with Chorazin and Bethsaida, to oblivion because of the unbelief of its people. His remarks, Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 10:13-15, about these cities clearly show that the vast majority of Jesus' ministry is not recorded. The com-

monly accepted length of Jesus' ministry is somewhat over 3 years (as we assume to be true), yet less than 100 of over 1,000 days are mentioned in the written accounts.

Seemingly named for someone called Nahum, the reason why Jesus moved His ministry to this city is not stated. Whether the ruins of Tel Hum or Khirbet Minyeh are those of Capernaum is not known, but Tell Hum is more likely. These ruins are along the north coast of the Sea of Galilee, about a mile long, and about 2 miles west of the Jordan.

The Gospel writers mention many historical events about the "city" regularly so-called. It was the home of Matthew, whose tax-collecting business was located in a city on a major trade route. Zebedee, and his sons James and John, lived there; and likely Peter and Andrew (compare Jn. 1:44 with Matt. 8:14). It is the only place where Jesus was said to be "at home" Mk. 2:1 (read here Luke 4:23).

The centurion who built the Jews a synagogue had his servant healed (Matt. 8; Lk. 7); a man's withered hand, Matt. 12; Mk. 3; Lk. 6, and a man possessed of a demon, Mk. 1; Lk. 4, were healed in its synagogue, where the Sermon on the Bread of Life, Jn. 6:25-65, was heard. A paralytic, Matt. 9; Mk. 2; Lk. 5, an official's son, Jn. 4:46-54, and Peter's mother-in-law were healed there. In the evening after Peter's wife's mother was healed, the city folk kept bringing their sick to Jesus, and he kept healing them, Matt. 8; Mk. 1; Lk. 4. Jesus sent Peter down to the city's beach with a hook and line to catch a fish with money for the temple tax, Matt. 17. These are events that make this city important in Jesus' ministry.