

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS.
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,

VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

Author of "Home Truths," etc.

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LUKE I. 34–38.

34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? 35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. 36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she	hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing shall be impossible. 38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.
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LET us mark, in these verses, *the reverent and discreet manner in which the angel Gabriel speaks of the great mystery of Christ's incarnation*. In reply to the question of the Virgin, "How shall this be?" He uses these remarkable words: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee."

We shall do well to follow the example of the angel in all our reflections on this deep subject. Let us ever regard it with holy reverence, and abstain from those unseemly and unprofitable speculations upon it, in which some have unhappily indulged. Enough for us to know that "the Word was made flesh," and that when the Son of God came into the world, a real "body was prepared for Him," so that He "took part of our flesh and blood," and was "made of a woman." (John i. 14; Heb. x. 5; Heb. ii. 14; Gal. iv. 4.) Here we must stop. The manner in which all this was effected is wisely hidden from us. If we attempt to pry beyond this point, we shall but darken counsel by words without knowledge, and rush in where angels fear to tread. In a religion which really comes down from heaven there must needs be mysteries. Of such mysteries in Christianity, the incarnation is one.

Let us mark, in the second place, *the prominent place assigned to the Holy Ghost in the great mystery of the incarnation*. We find it written, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee."

An intelligent reader of the Bible will probably not fail to remember, that the honour here given to the Spirit is in precise harmony with the teaching of Scripture in other places. In every step of the great work of man's redemption, we shall find special mention of the work of the Holy Ghost. Did Jesus die to make atonement for our sins? It is written that "through the eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot to God." (Heb. ix. 14.) Did He rise again for our justification? It is written that He "was quickened by the Spirit." (1 Peter iii. 18.) Does He supply His disciples with comfort between the time of His first and second advent? It is written that the Comforter, whom He promised to send is "the Spirit of truth." (John xiv. 17.)

Let us take heed that we give the Holy Ghost the same place in our personal religion, which we find Him occupying in God's word. Let us remember, that all that believers have, and are, and enjoy under the Gospel, they

owe to the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit. The work of each of the three Persons of the Trinity is equally and entirely needful to the salvation of every saved soul. The election of God the Father, the blood of God the Son, and the sanctification of God the Spirit, ought never to be separated in our Christianity.

Let us mark, in the third place, *the mighty principle which the angel Gabriel lays down to silence all objections about the incarnation*. “With God nothing shall be impossible.”

A hearty reception of this great principle is of immense importance to our own inward peace. Questions and doubts will often arise in men’s minds about many subjects in religion. They are the natural result of our fallen estate of soul. Our faith at the best is very feeble. Our knowledge at its highest is clouded with much infirmity. And among many antidotes to a doubting, anxious, questioning state of mind, few will be found more useful than that before us now,—a thorough conviction of the almighty power of God. With Him who called the world into being and formed it out of nothing, everything is possible. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

There is no sin too black and bad to be pardoned. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.—There is no heart too hard and wicked to be changed. The heart of stone can be made a heart of flesh.—There is no work too hard for a believer to do. We may do all things through Christ strengthening us.—There is no trial too hard to be borne. The grace of God is sufficient for us.—There is no promise too great to be fulfilled. Christ’s words never pass away, and what He has promised He is able to perform.—There is no difficulty too great for a believer to overcome. When God is for us, who shall be against us? The mountain shall become a plain.—Let principles like these be continually before our minds. The angel’s receipt is an invaluable remedy. Faith never rests so calmly and peacefully as when it lays its head on the pillow of God’s omnipotence.

Let us mark, in the last place, *the meek and ready acquiescence of the Virgin Mary in God’s revealed will concerning her*. She says to the angel, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.”

There is far more of admirable grace in this answer than at first sight appears. A moment’s reflection will show us, that it was no light matter to become the mother of our Lord in this unheard of and mysterious way. It brought with it, no doubt, at a distant period great honour; but it brought with it for the present no small danger to Mary’s reputation, and no small trial to Mary’s faith. All this danger and trial the holy Virgin was willing and ready to risk. She asks no further questions. She raises no further objections. She accepts the honour laid upon her with all its attendant perils and inconveniences. “Behold,” she says, “the handmaid of the Lord.”

Let us seek in our daily practical Christianity to exercise the same

blessed spirit of faith which we see here in the Virgin Mary. Let us be willing to go anywhere, and do anything, and be anything, whatever be the present and immediate inconvenience, so long as God's will is clear and the path of duty is plain. The words of good Bishop Hall on this passage are worth remembering. "All disputations with God after His will is known, arise from infidelity. There is not a more noble proof of faith than to captivate all the powers of our understanding and will to our Creator, and without all questionings to go blindfold whither He will lead us."

NOTES I. 34–38.

- 36.—[*Behold thy cousin Elisabeth.*] We should mark how graciously the angel helps the faith of the Virgin Mary, by telling her of a fact which may serve to assist her in receiving his message. This is the manner of God's dealings. He knows our weakness. It is like our Lord calling for meat, and eating of a broiled fish and honey-comb, to satisfy his disciples of the material reality of his risen body.