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ARCHIVES

(Except for the extended study of the Gospel for the Second Sunday after Epiphany, which is by the Rev. Robert H. Smith, Chappaqua, N. Y., the outlines which follow were condensed and translated from C. F. W. Walther's *Evangelien-Postille* by Prof. Alex W. Guebert, St. Louis, Mo. The notes on the "Hymn of the Week" are by Mr. Arno Klausmeier, St. Louis, Mo.)

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

LUKE 2:33-40

The Christmas invitation to rejoice in the Savior God sent into the world does not penetrate our sin-hardened heart or brighten up our sin-darkened mind until God Himself takes our natural displeasure against His Son away and through His grace gives us genuine pleasure in His loving concern for us.

Think with me as I talk to you on the topic:

Man's Displeasure Against Christ

- I. *By nature all men are displeased with Christ*
- II. *By His grace God can free them from this displeasure*

I

A. Not only outside but also inside Israel itself many were displeased with the Christ Child. As then, so now. The proclamation of the Christ Child comes to many as a shock. The intelligent and the mighty rise against it in rebellion. In disgust they reject it. Even the holiest, most righteous, and most pious spurn it as dangerous and destructive.

B. Deep down in our heart we Christians also, if we listen closely enough, can hear strong rumblings of disturbance concerning the Christ Child. Doubts plague us. Can this Child really be the almighty God? Did God actually humiliate Himself so deeply? Isn't this Christmas message just a dream?

C. Disregarding what men think of saving power in philosophy, money, good physical health, worldly honor and glory and satisfaction of the flesh, God sent the Christ Child, who alone has power to save.

D. Do not be surprised if your reason contradicts the Christ Child. This contradiction makes it clear that the Christmas message could originate only in the heart of God.

II

A. God alone can drive the natural displeasure against the Christ Child out of our heart. He leads us to see our displeasure against Christ and fills us with displeasure against ourselves.

B. Many of us suppose we have pleasure in Christ when we diligently read and hear God's Word. But our heart is not like that of Simeon and Anna. We still cling to what is earthly and temporal. Christ, with His grace and righteousness, is not yet our chief Treasure. We need to recognize our displeasure in Christ to gain pleasure in Him.

C. In recognizing our displeasure in Christ we become displeased with ourselves. We need to see our sin, to have concern for our salvation, to hunger and thirst after grace and righteousness that God alone can bestow, to wait for the consolation of Israel like Simeon and Anna, to fear the judgment of God. If we fail to see our need, God's grace and kindness will make no impression on us.

D. Do not suppose that you can open your own heart for the Christ Child to come in. God alone can do that through His Word. Turn to God in fervent prayer. Ask Him to arouse hunger and thirst in you for His grace. Then you will possess and serve the Christ Child with pleasure like Simeon and Anna.

The Hymn of the Week — "To Shepherds as They Watched by Night" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 103)

Expressing fittingly the confidence inspired by the Incarnation, this hymn of Martin Luther reflects the appearance of the angels to the shepherds and the results of the Gospel's constant admonition "Fear not!" The text first appeared in the *Klug'sche Gesangbuch* of 1543, but was probably written earlier. Some authorities feel that it is a shorter version of Luther's great Christmas hymn "Vom Himmel hoch," but this is unlikely. It is an echo of many of the medieval Christmas hymns, especially *Dies est laetitiae*. The translation is by Richard Massie and first appeared in 1854. *The Lutheran Hymnal* translation is slightly altered. The tune was originally fashioned in the 15th century for the medieval carol *Geborn ist Gottes Söhnelein*, but in its present form it first appeared in Part VI of Michael Praetorius' *Musae Sioniae* of 1609.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

LUKE 2:21

How shall we begin the new year? With resolutions that no one keeps? By ignoring the mistakes and sins of the past? It is significant to see the civil new year come so fast after Christmas. For the wide-awake person this means just one thing: Christ must be the Source and the Center for all activity in the new year.

I invite you to follow me as I show you that

We Begin the New Year in the Right Way
When We Begin It with Faith in Christ

- I. *Then we shall not take the sins of the old year into the new*
- II. *Then we shall be properly prepared to face the uncertain future*

I

A. The worldly man begins the new year with thoughts about himself and his family. He wants the new year to be better, more glorious than any previous one. He has no

consciousness of the consequences of sin. What a pity!

B. The Christian begins his new year with joy. Because of forgiveness of sin through Christ he does not drag the sins of the previous year into the new. He knows that for Christ's sake all his sins of the past are buried in the depths of God's love. He believes this because the God-man Jesus shed His blood to blot out sin. The circumcision of the Child and the name Jesus make this clear. Let the world scoff. We rejoice in the humiliation of Christ. Willingly He submitted to the Law of God. Now it cannot condemn us.

C. Let no one of us suppose he need not dedicate himself to Christ this year, but do it sometime in the future. What if there is no future for you to turn to Christ? Surely, you do not want to face a stern unyielding Judge? Come to Christ today! He is drawing you to Himself through His gracious love.

D. Does anyone say, "I'd like to come and believe, but I can't"? Hear the father of a sick child in Mark cry out, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." If this is your prayer, Christ will give you a stronger, a more joyful faith in the new year.

II

A. The new year lies before us shrouded in darkness. Each day, each hour, opens new doors before us to bring us new temptations to sin, new sorrows, and also new joys. It is of great importance to meet what lies behind each door as it opens. Every traveler makes careful preparations for his trip. The captain of a ship inspects anchor, compass, and lifeboats before he sets out to sea.

B. What kind of preparation for the new year have you made, you who do not believe in Christ? How will you meet temptation to sin, sorrow, sickness, the death of loved ones? What will you do if poverty and shame should overwhelm you? Where will you go if death should reach out and claim you?

C. What a blessing for you who enter the

new year with faith in Christ! Jesus assures you of victory over every sin. With Paul you exult, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me!"

D. My new year's wish for you is this: May God give you faith in Christ — faith to lead you through life, faith to comfort you in suffering, faith to support you in death.

The Hymn of the Week. — "O Blessed Day When First Was Poured" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 115)

The liturgical calendar stresses the thought of Christ's infant fulfillment of the Mosaic Law in our stead and His incipient suffering "for us men and for our salvation" rather than the mere beginning of another calendar year. The hymn of the Festival of Circumcision was written in the form and style of the ancient office hymn by a little known priest of Sens, France, and was first published in the *Paris Breviary* of 1736. The author, Abbé Sébastien Besnault, was priest of Saint Maurice's Church, but the date of his birth is not certain. Our translation, an altered version of the translation of John Chandler, was first published in *Hymns of the Primitive Church*, 1736. The tune is an adaptation of a slightly sentimental tune from the 1657 *Heilige Seelenlust* of Breslau.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

LUKE 2:41-52

The church can exist in every country and under every form of government. Experience shows that in times of stress the church grew stronger inwardly and produced the staunchest Christians. However, those who here sought peace and quiet for their families put their children in great spiritual danger. Under the guise of freedom of religion and of conscience the most shocking sins are rampant all over the country. How will our children fare in this atmosphere?

There is no reason for us to despair. God

has His Kingdom here too. He is reaching His gracious hands to us also. For your encouragement, as you think about your children, I want to point to

The Example of the Holy Family

I. It is an example for parents

II. It is an example for children

I

A. Mary and Joseph brought the 12-year-old Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem. See the care with which they brought up the Christ Child. Dare we have less care for our children, who are sinful? We cannot convert our children, but we can bring them up in such a way that they know and love their heavenly Father.

B. Our first obligation is to bring our children to Jesus through holy Baptism as soon as possible. Later the Christian day school can assist us in teaching our children the Word of God. Nevertheless the duty of watching over our children never stops.

C. After confirmation no parents have the right to feel that their children may shift for themselves. Think of the blame such parents will have if their children become apostates! What can they say when God asks them, "Where are the children I gave you"?

D. You parents who diligently watch over your children and yet see no fruit, do not despair. God sees your tears. He hears your prayers. Wait upon Him. God heard and answered the prayers of Monica for her son Augustine. He will answer you also in His way and at His time.

II

A. The Son of God could have come into this world as a grown man. But He chose to come as a child to free also children from their sins and to show them how to lead pious and God-fearing lives.

B. Remember, little children, the holy

Christ Child is also the Son of God. In Him lay all the wisdom and knowledge of the Godhead. In Jerusalem He passed by the king's palace and the homes of the rich and hurried to the temple to hear God's Word. Are you like this holy Child? Does the Word of God make you happy too? Blessed are you if you can justly say, "Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

C. Remember also, little children, how the Christ Child went down to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph and was subject to them. I wish I could write these words in your heart with indelible ink. See His humility, and try to follow Him! Obey your fathers and mothers. Pray God to forgive you for the many times you disobeyed your father and your mother. Never forget these words: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee and thou mayest live long on the earth." Grant that this prophecy may be fulfilled for all of us.

The Hymn of the Week. — "Of the Father's Love Begotten" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 98)

The Spanish poet Marcus Aurelius Prudentius, who has been called "the Horace of the Christian Church," was born about 348 in northern Spain, where he was a lawyer and judge up to his 57th year, when he took holy orders. Our hymn, radiating the mystery of the Incarnation and our response to it, is actually a part of a longer Latin hymn, *Da puer plectrum, choreis ut canam fidelibus*, which does not have either the refrain or the concluding doxology. The source of this hymn is Book Nine of a collection of "Hymns Throughout the Day" (*Cathemerionon*), and the translation is the joint effort of John Mason Neale and Henry W. Baker. Stanzas one, four to six, and eight (with slight alterations) are Neale's, and the remaining stanzas are Baker's. The melody, originally a plainsong tune, has been traced

back to a 12th-century manuscript. A corrupted form of the tune was printed in Didrick Pedersen's *Piae Cantiones* of 1582, first to be rediscovered in the 18th century and corrected.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JOHN 2:1-11

The Church has selected John 2:1-11 as the Gospel for the second Sunday after Epiphany. "Epiphany" is a simple Greek word which means "appearing" or "making visible." God the Creator appeared or made Himself visible in Jesus Christ. God acted to show or make plain His love for men.

The late Ronald Knox, a writer of sermon books in distinctly offbeat style, once offered a definition of Epiphany. He said that Epiphany is "what our ancestors called a manifestation but we call a showdown." That's good. A showdown. When God acts to show His hand, you and I are face to face with a showdown, a critical, decisive moment. The way we respond to God's self-revelation determines whether we live or die. Every Epiphany of God confronts us with the need for deciding for God or against God. Our life hangs in the balance. In Jesus Christ God shows down His power and His love, and we must make the life or death choice of faith or unbelief.

I

The story of the wedding at Cana is an Epiphany story. At first everything seems crystal clear and simple. It's merely a straightforward miracle story — if we can call the narrative of any miracle a "mere straightforward story." Furthermore it is a charming, captivating account with all the elements of a good short story: problem, conflict, suspense, surprise, happy ending.

Unfortunately this story has a wax nose, and everyone pulls it into whatever shape he pleases. 1) On the basis of this story the Roman Catholic Church has established Cana

Conferences, groups which meet with a priest for a kind of group marriage counseling. 2) Who has not heard or read Lutheran sermons on this text which emphasize the fact that Jesus was quite different from John the Baptist and the Jewish sect of the Essenes. That is, He was not a hermit, not an ascetic. He was able to enjoy a good party, approved of marriage, knew how to laugh, and even provided wine for merrymaking. Halfway between this and the first view is Bengel's comment: *Christus non tollit societatem humanam sed sanctificat*. 3) An amorphous group transcending denominational boundaries is simply astounded at the fact that He had power to turn water into wine, especially on such a grand scale.

The Roman Catholics emphasize marriage, the Protestants note the joy, everyone is amazed at the power, but the text itself speaks of Jesus' manifesting His glory before His hour had fully come.

II

Vv. 1, 2 — The text recounts a private miracle done for the benefit of the disciples (2:11) and belongs to the story of their call, which ends with this pericope. Jesus had hardly finished telling Nathanael that he would see greater things (1:50 f.), when the wedding at Cana "of Galilee," some nine miles north of Nazareth (see the commentaries of Hoskyns and Barrett, *ad loc.*), presented a sterling opportunity for a further and more decisive manifestation of His glory.

Jesus was surely less an ascetic than the Baptist (Luke 1:15; Matt. 11:18 f.; Mark 2:18) and with His disciples had accepted an invitation to a wedding. The stage is therefore set for significant action; for the OT had long spoken of God's covenant with His people as a wedding (Hosea 2:19 f.; Is. 54:4 ff.; 62:4 f.; Ezek. 16:7 ff.). In later Judaism the rabbis exalted the establishment of the covenant at Sinai as the wedding day of Israel, where Moses gave away the bride

to Yahweh, the Bridegroom of His people. The rabbis looked to the days of the Messiah for the ultimate renewal of that covenant. Jesus Himself more than once spoke of the Messianic era in terms of a wedding (Mark 2:19; Matt. 25:1 ff.; Matt. 22:1 ff.). So did John the Baptist (John 3:29). And the picture recurs among the apostles (2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7 ff.; 21:2; for a full treatment see the article γαμέω by E. Stauffer, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, hereafter abbreviated TWzNT).

V. 3 — Jesus' mother, who remains unnamed in the Fourth Gospel (2:12; 6:42; 19:25 ff.), was also present. In the first scene Jesus appears to deal somewhat brusquely with her when she brings to His attention the shortage of wine. To address a woman as He did, saying to her simply "woman" (γύναι), is not in itself impolite or rude, nor does it imply any want of respect. It is a normal form of address — *but not for a son*. And this is the point. By thus speaking to His mother (both here and in 19:26), Jesus is setting aside the mother-son relationship in favor of a higher one, as He did also in the temple at the age of 12 (Luke 2:49; see article, γυνή, by A. Oepke, TWzNT, I, 776 ff.). Bengel writes, *Dominus Patrem super omnia spectabat; ne matrem quidem noverat secundum carnem*.

V. 4 — The phrase "What have you to do with me?" (RSV), however translated (see NEB), hardly adds up to anything but a flat refusal. Jesus will not do tricks on demand. He will not act under any human pressure or compulsion.

The rhythm of His life keeps time with another clock. His "hour" has not yet come. Throughout the Fourth Gospel Jesus' "hour" (ὥρα), or His "time" (καιρός; 7:6, 8), is the moment of His death. Jesus' hour is the predetermined moment when He will "depart out of this world to the Father" (13:1). At that hour the disciples will be scattered

(16:23). It is the hour of His death when He will be lifted up on the cross. (12:23, 27; 17:1)

That moment is fixed by the decree of God and comes without benefit of human interference. It is the right time, pregnant with the divine decision. It is D Day.

Before His hour comes, no man can lay violent hands on Him (7:30; 8:20). The coming of that hour will inaugurate a new worship (4:21, 23), a new life (5:25, 28), and new and full access to the Father. (16:25)

Until that hour comes, Jesus' acts are signs of what He will accomplish and have proleptic and promissory significance. His deeds point forward to and interpret His sacrificial death.

Vv. 6, 7 — "Six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons." These are not common, ordinary kitchen utensils. They were set apart for religious purification and lustration. And note their generous proportions: 20 or 30 gallons each. That adds up to 120—180 gallons in all. Or it means between 480 and 720 quarts. And Jesus had the servants fill them "to the brim."

Jesus is anything but stingy. Is the prodigality of Jesus a case of the sorcerer's apprentice whose power got out of hand? Or is it possible that they really needed that much wine at a village wedding? Hardly.

Jesus is absolutely lavish in providing wine, one of the basic drinks of the Oriental, just as bread is the elemental food. Together bread and wine are the staff of life. In the structure of the Fourth Gospel the miracle at Cana is parallel to the feeding of 5,000 by the multiplication of five loaves (John 6: 1-14). In the days of the patriarchs Isaac had blessed Jacob, his younger son, with the words, "May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine" (Gen. 27:28). In the end of days came Jesus, freely and

fully dispensing bread and wine and pointing to Himself as the food and drink from heaven necessary for eternal life. (John 6: 52-59)

V. 8 — "The steward of the feast" (ἀρχι-τρικλίνος) is the head waiter at the banquet, the slave in charge of all arrangements for the feast. It was evidently part of his job to sample food and wine before they were set at the tables. Because of his boldness in summoning the bridegroom, some think that ἀρχιτρικλίνος here designates the toastmaster (Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, entertains the possibility).

V. 9 — He "did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew)." Time and again John contrasts the ignorance of one person or group with the knowledge and faith of another. To that extent at least, the steward typifies the ignorant and unbelieving Jews, and the servants who did as Jesus directed are figures of the obedient and knowledgeable disciples of Jesus.

V. 10 — The steward sums up the entire matter by declaring the new wine superior to the old. This is astonishing and contrary to natural expectation. According to St. Luke Jesus Himself had once declared, "No one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, 'The old is good'" (Luke 5:39). That saying comes at the conclusion of a pericope common to all three synoptists, which displays some significant parallels to our text. (Luke 5:33-39; Mark 2:18-22; Matthew 9:14-17)

V. 11 — Turning the water into wine was "the first of His signs." What we ordinarily call a miracle, John calls a sign. It is worth examining the four vocables employed by the NT.

τέρας — A prodigy, a *miraculum*, that which arouses wonder. It never stands alone in the NT.

δύναμις — Literally it means power, but it

is used also of an expression of power, a powerful deed.

ἔργον — Deed, or work. The Father works in and through Jesus. Jesus obediently works out the Father's will and purpose, and the works of Jesus tell who He really is. (John 5:36)

σημεῖον — Sign, or portent. Jesus' deeds by which He taught or signified to men who He was and what was meant by His coming. σημεῖον in the LXX is the translation of מֹלָא, which in the OT designates also such non-miraculous but significant acts as Isaiah's walking three years naked and barefoot. (Is. 20:3; see also Is. 8:18; Ezek. 4:3)

According to Peter (Acts 2:22), Jesus was "a man attested to (Israel) by God with mighty works and wonders and signs" (δυνάμει καὶ τέρασ καὶ σημείοις). Every part of the NT affirms that Jesus performed what we call miracles but which might better be named signs. They are given not simply to dazzle and amaze but to serve as tokens of the inbreaking kingship of God. As fine a statement of the significant character of the mighty works of Jesus as can be found is this:

The physical miracles are external signs of the supreme Messianic Miracle, the rescue of men from the grip of the powers of evil — from sin. The supreme Messianic Miracle to which the miracles point is the salvation of men by the power of the Living God exercised through the agency of the Messiah. (Hoskyns and Davey, *The Riddle of the NT*, p. 169.)

By the sign Jesus manifested His glory (δόξα). In the Bible δόξα has lost its primary Greek sense of "opinion," retaining some instances of the secondary sense of (human) "honor" or "fame" but attracted to itself the full numinous content of the OT כְּבוֹד. The characteristic and dominant sense in LXX and NT is that of "the divine and heavenly brilliance pregnant with the sublimity and majesty, even the very essence of

God and His world" (G. von Rad and G. Kittel, *TWzNT*, II, 240). And the NT takes the further step of assigning the word to the exalted Jesus, resurrected and ready to return. It is not used in the synoptics of the earthly Jesus (except by Luke in the birth narratives and in the story of the transfiguration).

With John matters are different. His Gospel has been dubbed "a perpetual theophany" (A. Loisy). That is to say, the Fourth Gospel is written with a special tendency to view the life of Jesus from the point of view of the resurrection. And yet even here the earthly life is completely human, and Jesus is emphatically the Servant. And it is not only that His glory or divinity is veiled in Servant's garb. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus' glorification coincides with His death on the cross. His death is His glorification. He entered once again into that glory which He had with the Father before the incarnation exactly when He was lifted up or exalted (both rendered by ὑψώω, 3:14; 8:28; 12:32). To see God's glory in Jesus means to believe that in the humility and death of this unlikely historical person God Himself is speaking and acting for us men and for our salvation.

By the prodigious transformation of water into wine at Cana Jesus signifies that OT purification has come to an end; for the Master Purifier is now at hand, the One who has authority to forgive sins. The old covenant is superseded by a new; for a greater than Moses is here. The steward at the feast declared it indirectly when he said, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." Here is one of the great themes of the Fourth Gospel: "The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The grace and truth of the Messiah came later, but they are better than the former dispensation.

The glory of God in Jesus of Nazareth is evident only to the eye of faith (2:11; 11:4, 50). Faith is indispensable. His glory is accessible only to faith, and all His signs challenge and call men to believe and so to live.

In other words, this is not simply a story of Jesus' power over water. It is the story of the manifestation and declaration of His real identity: God in the flesh, the Savior, the Purifier, the Author and Giver of Life with God, who fulfills His mission through His death. By offering up His whole life in service to God, by waiting on God's hour, by giving His life as God's sacrificial Lamb, Jesus is the Dispenser of real and authentic life, eternal life. (John 20:30, 31)

III

Jewish purificatory rites were outmoded and outdated, set aside and made obsolete by God's new act in His Son. But many chose to cling to the old, disregarding and denigrating the new.

Today also men have their substitutes, their old and comfortable surrogate gods. "What is it to have a god? What is God?" asked Luther in the Large Catechism. "A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need." We might paraphrase: That to which men look for cleansing and for life, that is their god.

And people—especially moralistic, optimistic, and activist American people—still hold fast the belief that purification and paradisiacal life will come to the man who works hard, keeps his nose clean, and manages to be no worse than his neighbor.

The falsity of this do-goodism and self-satisfaction is empirically demonstrable. It does not require genius to see that ours is the land and this is the age of the blunted conscience, moral slippage, and anxiety. An appalling number of people, both within and outside the church, fit perfectly T. S. Eliot's description of "empty-chested, hollow men."

No amount of minimizing the holiness of God or maximizing our own moral attainments is an effective catharsis for our uncleanness or an elixir of life for our deadness.

Jesus Christ, the Crucified One, to whom John bore witness, is still the Revealer of God, the Remover of sin, and the Giver of life indestructible with the Father.

Christ Is the Cleanser and Vivifier

I. The wedding at Cana is an Epiphany (showdown) story with many surprising twists.

II. Through the provision of the supply of wine Jesus manifests His glory, declaring by a sign that He is the Master Purifier, the Giver of Life, who will bless the world through His death on the cross.

III. Natural man, especially of the active American variety, would rather have more comfortable and manageable gods, than this disturbing Jesus, who acts the humble servant and goes to ignominious death.

IV. By the performance of this sign Jesus challenges us to see in Him and in His out-poured life our purification and our vivification. This is a showdown: believe and live!

The Hymn of the Week.—"Songs of Thankfulness and Praise" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 134)

This hymn, written by Bishop Christopher Wordsworth in 1862, was subtitled: "Recapitulation of the Subjects presented in the Services of former weeks throughout the season of Epiphany; and the anticipation of the future and great Epiphany, at which Christ will appear again, to judge the World." Thus it summarizes the teachings of the Gospels of the whole season. The author, who lived from 1807 to 1855, was the brother of the more famous poet William Wordsworth and was a classicist in his own right, as well as the editor of both the Old and the New Testament in Greek. The melody was first published in Thorne's *Selection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes* in 1858.

This selection in itself is from a collection of hymns which closely paralleled the Hymn of the Week plan, the *Holy Year*, first published in 1862.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

MATT. 8:1-13

Lutherans have been severely criticized because some men think they condemn everything that is not Lutheran. This is a mistake. The Lutheran Church indeed does teach that the Christian religion is the only religion that saves and that neither God nor salvation can be found outside of this one true religion. And it confesses that wherever the Gospel is preached in heterodox churches, God converts some of the hearers and makes them His disciples. The Gospel for today points to this truth.

I wish to discuss with you the fact that

Some Disciples of Christ Are Found
in Heterodox Churches

*I. There is no reason why we should doubt
this fact*

II. This fact must be properly evaluated

I

A. The New Testament gives us a number of examples of believers who were not Israelites. There are the centurion, the woman of Canaan, the Samaritan leper, the Wise Men from the East, and the Roman Cornelius.

B. The Word of God and the holy sacraments always have the power to convert those who accept it and believe it. Though error is preached in heterodox churches, the portion of the Gospel still heard retains its divine, converting, and comforting power. Luther maintained that in spite of error the very best Christians are found in the Roman Catholic Church.

C. The Bible clearly teaches that Christ's church is universal. Therefore the church

exists wherever the Word is preached. Among spiritually proud enthusiasts Christ has humble disciples. Among self-righteous monks Christ has souls hungry for grace. Among His enemies Christ has friends. In the midst of a wicked Sodom Christ has a believing Lot.

II

A. Is it immaterial, then, to belong to any church and to adhere to any religious confession? This is far from the truth. No one can ignore the truth, willfully remain in error and a false religion, or abandon the true religion, and expect God to save him. This leads to ruin. Though God can make the poison of false doctrine in heterodox churches innocuous, so it does not destroy the souls of His disciples, we have every reason to pray Him to keep us steadfast in the truth unto our death.

B. Christ points to the correct understanding of the truth He is urging in the text when He says, "Many shall come . . ." (vv. 11, 12). Because the Jews felt themselves well entrenched in the heavenly kingdom and yet refused to accept and believe in Him, Christ decisively rejected them.

C. Let us consider Christ's words well. We have the whole truth of God in its purity and enjoy an advantage over others who have been subjected to error from the day of their youth. Let us not be satisfied with mere membership in the orthodox church. Remember, we have received much. Much is expected of us. Appreciate the doctrine your church teaches. Cling to it. Guard against false teaching. Express your thanks for God's spiritual gifts. Show it in deeds of love. So shall we be received into glory.

The Hymn of the Week.—"O Christ, Our True and Only Light" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 512)

This hymn was written by Johann Heermann (1585—1647), who represents a transitional figure between objective and

more subjective German hymnody. First published in *Devoti Musica Cordis* of 1630, this hymn was one in a section entitled "Songs of Tears in the Time of Persecution and Distress of Pious Christians." This heading reflects both the general sufferings of the Thirty Years' War and also Heermann's own *Anfechtungen*. His town was plundered four times in five years as the tides of war swept the German countryside; a disastrous fire and an outbreak of pestilence also scourged the town. Heermann himself twice barely escaped with his life. The translation is from the facile pen of Catherine Winkworth, to whom we owe so many fine English versions of German hymns. It appeared in the *Lyra Germanica*, Second Series, published in 1858. The melody, by an anonymous composer of the 17th century, appeared in Nürnberg in 1676.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

MATT. 8:23-27

Under the blessing of God the apostolic church grew fast. Early Roman emperors, however, persecuted the church. They brought dark days, heavy suffering, and death upon the Christians. In the Middle Ages and later danger threatened the church from a different angle. The Papacy had diluted and corrupted the Gospel. Enemies of the church are still eminently active. Many of them are within the church. They laugh at the Gospel. They call it a fable or lead people into heterodoxy. Is this reason for us to become fearful and lose our balance? The Word of God says no.

Let us strengthen our faith by meditating on the Gospel for today and see

Christ's Ship on the Sea of Galilee, a Picture
of the Church in Our Day

I. It is a picture of dangers that threaten the church

II. It is a picture of the members of the church

III. It is a picture of the protection the church enjoys

I

A. After a busy day of teaching and healing, Jesus toward evening stepped into a ship with the disciples. With Christ in the ship the trip across the lake should have been without incident. But a storm arose and threatened to destroy the ship. And Jesus was asleep!

B. The ship, buffeted by the waves, is a picture of the church. Soon after the apostles began their mission of preaching, trouble arose. Bloody persecutions raged. Winds of false doctrine ripped through the church. Though we are enjoying religious freedom in America, the enemies of Christ are strong. Some ridicule everything that is holy. Others deceive many through their weasel-words about enlightenment, progress, and freedom. Truly, the church, like the ship, is in great danger, and Jesus seems to be asleep!

II

A. Fearful for their lives, the apostles wake up Jesus. This act emphasizes two points. The disciples had faith, but it was very weak. If their faith had been strong, they would have thought of the miracles they had seen. Hymns of thanksgiving and praise would have been on their lips after their request for help. The thought of perishing could not have entered their mind. Yet Christ had to censure them for lack of faith.

B. The church still has giants of faith. But like the disciples in the ship many Christians in our day are weak in faith. Storms of smaller dimensions, afflictions and temptations of lesser degree than those the disciples faced, overwhelm modern Christians. If bloody persecutions should sweep into the church today, many Christians, unless their

faith grew stronger, would fall away from Christ.

C. Though we must expect that the church will face greater dangers, more afflictions and increased persecutions, there is no need to fear destruction of the church. Christ does not reject those who are weak in faith. He does not tear the broken reed apart or put out the smoking flax.

III

A. Though asleep in the ship, Christ is still watchman over Israel. Awakened, He immediately stopped the storm and quieted the sea. In amazement the disciples cried out, "What a Man! Wind and wave obey Him!"

B. Like the ship in the text, the church in our day may seem to face certain doom. Many mighty and many learned men are whipping up a smashing hurricane against the church. Though Jesus seems to be asleep, though many Christians might lose faith and leave the church, there is no reason for anyone to sink into despair. Jesus, the all-knowing and almighty God, is in the church. He

is wide awake. He will take the church into the haven of rest.

C. Do not despair. We, too, will say with the disciples, "What a Man! Wind and wave obey Him!"

The Hymn of the Week. — "Seek Where Ye May to Find a Way" (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 383)

The author of this hymn, Georg Weissel (1590—1635), was, like Prudentius, a jurist turned clergyman. Pastor of the Altrossgart Church in Königsberg, East Prussia, Weissel wrote this hymn for the dedication of a new church building in 1623, the same year he assumed his pastorate there. It was published in *Preussische Fest Lieder*, Part I, in 1642. Weissel is probably best known for his stirring Advent hymn "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates." The melody was written by a particular friend of Weissel's, Johann Stobäus, who composed the tune for a wedding hymn of a friend. However, Weissel intended this tune to be used with his hymn *Such wer da will*. The translation, by Arthur Voss, was done expressly for our hymnal.