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Outlines on the New Pulpit Program Series

EDITOR'S NOTE: These are the first sermon outlines in the "Combined Bible-Reading and Pulpit Program" announced in the June issue. The Rev. George W. Bornemann, pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church, Elmhurst, Ill., has prepared a schedule of daily Bible readings which may be followed by families of the parish prior to the Sundays on which the relevant sermon would be preached. The sermons serve to focus the readings and to relate them to the church year. A detailed schedule of daily Bible readings for the entire year to match the sermon areas may be ordered from Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Mo., for general distribution to all members. Order No. 13-1183. The staff will include in each month's homiletic section a detailed study of one of the texts outlined in the issue. It is hoped that this will enrich the value of this section and provide even greater depth in the pulpit.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

ADAM

GEN. 1:26—2:2

Introduction

This is the beginning of a church year, a year to absorb instruction about God's *will* for man. (The Jews' name for the five Books of Moses, the "Torah," means "instruction.") Beginning at God's created earthly paradise (Genesis in the readings), we continue to the heavenly Jerusalem that God has prepared. The former is a symbol of God's power for our protection (on which we depend, as we pray today's collect), and the other is the climax of our redemption and of the Advent message. In the first garden we see man become the sinner, and in the Jerusalem come down from heaven we shall realize the true blessing of a forgiving God.

This is a year to behold the *revelation of God's acts for man*. Three cycles in the year reveal His work:

Christmas—the Father gives us His Son;

Easter—the Son in love gives His victorious life;

Pentecost—the Father and the Son send, as at creation, the Holy Spirit.

Beginning with the book of beginnings (Genesis) we go back and with the first patriarch, Adam, *learn what man is really like and what God is really like*. Both are revealed especially in the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

I. *What Man Is Really Like*

A. *We see this in the first Adam.*

1. Climax of creation. Genesis 1 outlines creation, and Genesis 2 details the creation of man.

Man is God's image, different from other creatures classified by botany, zoology, astronomy. Man has fellowship with God and breathes God's life.

2. Crowned with blessings. Man is made to rule, to share in God's dignity, and to have dominion. Man is not subject to, but ruler of, creation. He shares in the creativity of God.

Man is God-reliant. God is his protection.

3. Corrupted by sin. Rulers must also obey. Man fails in obedience to God. Man desires only self-reliance. But he can not be "on his own." He tries to contend he is "reliant on God": "the woman Thou gavest me" with the stress on "Thou." On his own, man reaps not blessings, but sweat, tears, thorns, death.

B. *We see true man in the Last Adam.* (1 Cor. 15:45)

1. Christ does not fail in obedience, for He is "obedient even unto death" (Phil. 2:8). *Obedience* is the key word of His kind of people. (Mark 3:35; Matt. 10:39)

2. Christ was not proud and selfish, but offered Himself for man. With wild beasts in the temptation *wilderness* (Mark 1:13), with *sweat and tears* in Gethsemane's garden (Heb. 5:7), with *thorns* as a mock ruler (Matt. 27:29), with a *tree* Jesus of Nazareth redeems fallen mankind.

3. Jesus shares blessings of God and assures man of His *presence*. We have a new fellowship in Christ. (1 Cor. 1:9)

II. *What God Is Really Like*

A. *The image of God was seen in Adam.*

1. Climax of creation is Adam. Something of what God is like could be seen in man.

Love to an unseen God is to be given to man who is seen (1 John 4:20). Giving to the least of His brethren, we give to Christ (Matt. 26:40). God is to be seen in man, for he who was made in God's image has been redeemed.

We, too, now fail to see God in our fellowmen, fail to give ourselves for them.

2. Crowned with blessings. God said of all creation, "It is good." The heavens tell God's glory (Ps. 19), but man is God's own crown of glory (Ps. 8:5; 1 Cor. 11:7). God is a Giver. God is Love itself to spend Himself so on a creature.

3. Corrupted images of God. The devil corrupted man's picture of God with "Is God really like that?" "When you eat of it you shall be like God, knowing good and evil."

We, too, now see a corrupted image of God. We reveal it by our judgment: "Is God fair?" "Is God able to help?" "Is God concerned?"

B. *Christ Jesus, the Last Adam, shows God to us.* Philip asks, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Jesus answers, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:8, 9). We can look forward to Christmas. He becomes truly God in the flesh.

Today's Gospel records how the crowd welcomed Him with "Hosanna! Blessed is He!" (Matt. 21). But a Friday later man

showed what man is really like, and God showed what He is really like. Man said, "Let us see if God wants Him." God made man; God made man all over — redeemed, restored, forgiven.

Conclusion

Nothing shows more clearly what God is. He is Love. Nothing shows more clearly what man is. He is loved. By His Advent we are redeemed and protected from our first and last enemies: the devil, disobedience, and death. The door of Advent opens and the ray of hope shines. "Let there be light!" A new beginning in Christ.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

NOAH

GEN. 6:11-15

Introduction

We approach Christmas, God's door of hope. Like Adam, the children of Adam sinned. God's doom comes. Doom is that God deems a man worthy only of death. The wages of sin is death, and the soul that sins dies. A ray of hope was given Adam and Eve in that a "Seed" of the human race would save it. Bible readings of the past week (Gen. 6—15) show *God's judgment* on sin in the Flood. Yet there is a *salvation*, an ark and a rainbow. Over the cemetery of a world the rainbow promises life, for the seasons will continue.

In midst of death there is life. When Mary heard of God's coming salvation, she asserted that God shows strength (Luke 1:51) and that He also shows mercy (Luke 1:53). Today's Gospel of the end of the world (Luke 21) and Christmas belong together. Angels sing "Gloria in excelsis," and angels are ready to put trumpets to lips to sound judgment. *God is Judge and Savior.*

I. *God Is Judge Over Against Evil*

A. *The family was the hope of God.* Gen. 3 and 6 show the home as the place of

influence for good or bad. God's reason for establishing a home ("not good to be alone") was to put the solitary in families, where good influences for living could exert their force. But sin changed all that. It broke up the relationship between the first husband and wife, and the first child murdered his brother. Our homes are influential too; sailor, salesman, and student away from home carry traits learned at home.

B. *Evil rises from the heart.* Gen. 6:5 declares: "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Man had been corrupted at his very center. Home environment gives opportunity for evil that comes from the heart to rise in thoughts, words, and deeds. Hatred of one another is one of its manifestations. Gen. 6 and its violence come through today.

C. *Evil refuses to hear correction.* For 120 years Noah preached and pleaded (Gen. 6:3). They would not hear. "Lord, who has believed our report?" (Rom. 10:16) is the complaint of Noah, Isaiah, and Paul. It is increasingly true today.

D. *Evil reaps God's judgment.* God is Creator, Protector, and Judge. "This is a people without discernment; therefore He who made them will not have compassion on them, He that formed them will show them no favor" (Is. 27:11). God uses sinful creation to destroy sinful creation as He uses His good creation to protect His good creation. "The house is divided." And our nation, and we in it, stand under judgment.

II. *God Is Savior in the Midst of Evil*

A. *The home is to be rescued.* The home becomes God's arena of saving activity. Noah with his sons and their helpmeets enter the ark. Not a new creation, but a new beginning.

New Testament believers see Christ come into the world via the home of Mary and Joseph. In the beginning home was God's creation, the place blessed by His gift of pro-

creation, the place kept by His protection. Now again the home is the gate into the world for Him who was in the beginning. He enters the home to make for men a new beginning. All who believe on Him become sons of God. No one plucks them out of His hand.

B. *The heart is renewed.* Man's deceitful heart brought forth evil. Now God would give a new heart to man. Although David would kill, lie, steal, commit adultery, cheat, he asks for "a clean heart and a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51). It is a gift God wants to give.

God consented to the shedding of the blood of His Son that men might not die. Christ's blood gives life. Christ's blood takes away the sins of the world. With such a love God creates in us a new heart and calls on us to love as we have been loved. (1 John 4:7-11)

C. *The covenant is established.* Rainbow and promise assure men that God cares. Generation after generation will hear of His grace and love. The people will see it in seedtime and harvest, summer and winter. Noah's descendants, through Shem, will know the Messiah. By Shem the world will hear repeated, "God is a Savior in the midst of evil."

D. *The World will remember God's grace from heaven.* When the world ends, all nations and people will know that Christ is the Savior. We need not wait. Heaven's rainbow is still God's symbol of concern and hope for man. The ark is also a symbol of His care. In the witness of the church the water of Baptism (1 Peter 3:21) is a sign and means of God's heavenly grace, for "Baptism doth also now save us." And God's promise is sure. The world continues to sin; judgment comes; but His heavenly grace saves.

Conclusion

Until time's end the call to repentance is sounded. Scoffers rise as in Noah's day, but

God's judgment and salvation continue to be declared. "Now is the day of salvation" is the rally cry. The time to set in order our own houses is *now*. Now is the time to examine our hearts, to hearken to God's words, and to find refuge in His ark and joy in His water of salvation.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

ABRAHAM

GEN. 17:1-14

Introduction

We are climbing the third step that leads to Christmas. Today's Gospel pleads, "Believe in Christ who is sent" (Matt. 2:2-10). The people of Jesus' time should have accepted and recognized Him as the promised Christ, as did their father Abraham (John 8:56). They boasted they were Abraham's children, but they were not. Abraham was the father of the faithful, and they believed not. True children of Abraham are believers in God. Cf. Gal. 3:6-8, esp., "It is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham."

God is "able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham," said John the Baptist (Matt. 4:9; cf. Luke 19:40). That God can make of us men of more faith, men of God. Faith in God and in His Christ is exemplified in Abraham, as we view his sojournings. The source of his faith and of ours is revealed in his seed. And God shows His mercy available also to us as He deals with Abraham in his sin.

I. *The Sojournings of Abraham*

As we see Abraham, a separated man and a suppliant, we see the demands the faith puts upon us as well.

A. *Abraham by his sojournings is separated for God.* He is separated from his people and world. His city, Ur, was old in Abraham's day, as Rome is in ours. He lived in a land of idols. Every city, well, river, and acre had a god and spirit. Abraham believed

in God. Jewish legend says that Abraham was persecuted for not believing, trusting, and worshipping idols.

Abraham is separated from his family. At Haran his father, Terah, died. He moved 400 miles south to Canaan. At Shechem he is first promised the land. At Bethel he gives Lot the choice of the "goodly" land. Abraham leaves Lot and settles at Hebron.

In separation Abraham and children of faith exhibit faith in God over all gods and serve God with all of self.

B. *In wanderings Abraham is a suppliant before God.* At Shechem he built an altar, also at Bethel. Abraham's two symbols are a tent and an altar. He sojourned, but he sacrificed self and possessions to God. Faith summons children of God to obey and calls them to worship.

At Sodom and Gomorrah he interceded on behalf of the righteous. Trust in God summons to a concern for the brethren, that none be lost. How does our faith measure up? Can men see us as separated for God? Can God hear us as suppliants for ourselves and for men?

II. *The Seed of Abraham*

What God did for Abraham He was doing also for us. Our forgiveness for failure and our faith for the future struggle is given through Abraham's Seed.

A. *The covenant of God's grace comes via Abraham.* God's call and promise in the text are given in six points: "a great nation," "bless you," "make your name great," "you will be a blessing," "bless those who bless you, and curse him who curses you," "by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This is repeated at Shechem, Sodom, and Hebron.

The promise is a carryover through Abraham. It began when Adam and Eve received the first promise of God's favor. The promise to Noah that man will not again be destroyed by water is carried on via Abraham.

By his family comes the blessing. Eighth in generation from Noah, Abraham carries on the promise of hope. Now the covenant makes more specific the worldwide blessing that would come through the Seed of Abraham. God blesses again the world which He blessed in the beginning. God is faithful.

B. *The child is the fulfillment of God's promise.* The promise comes not by human works, and its fulfillment comes not by human flesh. It is God's promise and God's fulfillment. The child born to Hagar by Abraham's human act and Sarah's consent (Gen. 16) is not God's promised blessing. God's gift is grace and not a work of man. Flesh is still flesh. Salvation in any of its phases is not of man but of God.

God's promise brings joy. When man ceases to doubt God and accepts God's ability to do what He says, there is joy. We must lean not on ourselves but on God. "Testing" is designed to make us see that we cannot live on our own or stand by ourselves. On Mount Moriah, Abraham refuses to "be on his own." He tells Isaac that the "Lord will provide." This child came not by man's work but by God's promise. Isaac belongs to God. God will see to His promise. All salvation history — Abraham's, Isaac's, yours, and mine — is of God.

C. *Circumcision seals the covenant seed.* All life comes from God. The organ of life's procreation, accepted frankly as such and regarded as surety for a witness, is marked by God.

When on his eighth day Jesus is circumcised, He is marked as Abraham's Child. Jesus is the blessing to all nations. Jesus is the culmination of the covenant sealed in circumcision.

D. *The Seed is ended, completed, and fulfilled in Christ.* "Not many but One" Seed, says Paul (Gal. 3:16). As Luke tells the story of salvation, he stresses at first that Christ is "man" (Luke 3:38), but as Matthew tells the story, the "Seed" begins with

Abraham (Matt. 1:2) and ends with Christ (Matt. 1:16). Christ is the Mediator of the "new covenant" because the "old covenant" is fulfilled.

Abraham was *marked for service*. So, too, Christ. So also we are marked in Christ. Circumcised in heart, forgiven in Christ (Rom. 2:28, 29). In Christ we are baptized and have His circumcision (Col. 2:11 f.), no more to be concerned as being seed of Abraham but seed of Christ.

III. *The Sin of Abraham and God's Mercy*

Can all of this help us? More often than not our hearts seem more stonelike than childlike. Can God, will God, own us as His children and keep us in His family?

A. *Men of faith, like Abraham, face times when "faith falls short"* (Mark 9:24 NEB). Abraham shows he is "flesh of flesh" in Egypt and at Gerar (Gen. 12:10; 20:1) — he lies. Isaac, his son, is like his father, also at Gerar (Gen. 26). Sin continues in the human race.

In the midst of sin God is merciful to Abraham, repeating the covenant promise. "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." God does not ignore sin. He punishes but promises redemption. God suffers, God Himself bears our disgrace, God suffers in Jesus Christ, whose day Abraham rejoiced to see.

B. *Though our faith fails, God is faithful.* The Virgin Mary responded to the angel's announcement of the Savior. She knew that God remembered "His mercy, as He spoke to Abraham and to his posterity forever" (Luke 1:54, 55). Zachariah sang blessings to God, who performs "the mercy promised to our fathers and who remembers His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham" (Luke 1:72, 73). And we, too, can be as confident. True children of Abraham are children of faith. They trust God and not their own flesh. They are born of God, not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. The secret of their life is

hid with Christ in God. Though a thousand, thousand times we fail to keep God's Law, God has marked us for His own. The grace that He shows us brings us humbly, penitently back to the Lord, trusting and believing His promise of grace in Christ. In Him we are blessed!

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

ISAAC

GEN. 26:1-6

Introduction

We stand on the doorsill of Christmas. Today's Gospel tells of John, who as a doorkeeper and usher invites us to come and see Christ. He also tells us (John 3:30), "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Christ's coming in the flesh is God's gift to men's sight but requires faith to believe more than we see. "Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh." (1 Tim. 3:16)

Isaac is an ordinary son of a great father (Abraham) and an ordinary father of a great son (Jacob), but he is son and father of faith. In all his human blindness and mistakes of judgment, he is yet summoned to faith, and he responds with "blessings on Jacob and Esau" (Heb. 11:20) and in a life that brings blessing still to us. We who are children of faith—fathers of faith and sons of faith—and who are as ordinary and as human as men come, we can receive the same blessing from God to *walk by faith and not by sight*.

I. In Childhood

A. Isaac was a child of promise given to faith.

1. Abraham is 75 years old when the promise of Isaac is given (Gen. 12). He fails in Ishmael to fulfill his hope, but God does not fail in His promise as Isaac is born 20 years later. He is named "laughter" or "Isaac," as a reminder of God's faithfulness

and as a rebuke of his parents' doubts. Isaac is to recall that he walks by faith, not by sight. Today's Epistle (Phil. 4) summons us to "rejoice in the Lord alway." We can know that joy when we believe God's promises are "yea" and "Amen."

2. Jesus, born at Bethlehem, is the *Child of promise, ours by faith*. God's promises, developed through the centuries, culminate in the angel's message to Mary. He is God's suffering Servant, the Messiah. He is the "Seed of the woman," promised to our first patriarch, Adam; the "God of Shem," spoken of by Noah, our second patriarch; and the "seed of Abraham," our third patriarch. Accepting Him, we walk by faith.

B. Isaac was a child of obedience by faith.

1. Abraham, Isaac's father, obeyed the will of the Lord. Isaac was to be a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. This was a summons to selfless love as much on Isaac's part, surely as on Abraham's. With devotion he submitted. With confidence and obedience he inquires "Where is the lamb for the offering?" With faith he hears and accepts Abraham's answer, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen." *Faith now, sight later!*

God had prepared a substitute for Isaac in the ram. "Lay not thy hand upon Isaac."

2. God the Father announced His substitute for you and me in the Child of promise, His Son, our Savior. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son" (John 3:16). Jesus is "obedient . . . unto death, even the death on the cross" (Phil. 2:8). On the mount of the Lord it is seen. Jesus Himself is the substitute Sacrifice, the "Lamb of God." (John 1:29)

II. In Parenthood

A. In the midst of sin Isaac finds faith's value.

1. Isaac repeats Abraham's sin, exposing his wife to danger and protecting himself at Gerar. But God is faithful. His covenant

is grounded in His love, not conditioned on our obedience. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 3:13 RSV). God even repeats His promise. (Gen. 26)

2. Sin tangled the lives of Isaac's sons, but God's promise moved on. Isaac loved Esau and "ate of his game" (Gen. 25:8). Once Esau despised the birthright (Gen. 25:33); now he attempts to regain his place as Isaac is hungry for meat. The blessing is seized by Jacob by a fraud (Gen. 27:19). Rebekah deceives her husband (Gen. 25:7 ff.) and shows partiality by arranging Jacob's sin. Only misery can result. In the midst of sin Isaac cannot recall his "mistake." He cannot correct. Sight fails and condemns. Sight cannot give or receive undeserved blessings. They come from God. In the midst of our sin God still blesses. So Christ comes to earth at Christmas, to earthy people for our earthy sins. He comes with blessings and grace that we do not deserve. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found."

B. *In quietness Isaac learns the fear of God.*

1. Isaac's appearance is that of a quiet, kindly man. Underneath the moss of his humility is the rock of faith. Like John the Baptizer in today's Gospel, underneath he was a man of courage.

By the "Fear of Isaac," as Jacob said, Jacob found strength (Gen. 31:53; 31:42). Isaac had a "fear," a worshipful awe of God, which he received from the teaching of his father Abraham and which, in turn, he taught his son Jacob.

2. Now we stand near the manger. It is a night that is silent with awe, and a night that is holy with God's love. We hear the words "Fear not," but "go and worship," for these are "tidings of great joy." We, too, have our sins of weakness and fear, trusting our dim sight. But God announces that the

swaddling-clothed Baby is the Savior of the world. Perhaps we are struck dumb with silence as was Zechariah, saying, "How shall I know this?" God *summons us to faith, not sight*, to accept His gift.

Conclusion

God's promise finds fulfillment in the gift of His Son, Bethlehem's Babe. God's salvation is perfected in the obedience of His suffering Servant. Our salvation is perfected in the obedience of faith. With despair so easily possible, we rejoice in the bright ray of hope that stresses forgiveness in Christ. As little children we come to the manger, beholding the *Infinite* in the *Infant*. We walk now by faith, later by sight.

CHRISTMAS DAY

THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

GEN. 35:19

Introduction

Bethlehem is a "little town" with memories of great men. There Jacob buried his great love, Rachel. Her two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, were Jacob's second love. Rachel died at Bethlehem, giving birth to Benjamin.

When Jacob was in Egypt, blessing his sons on his deathbed, his memory returned to Bethlehem. "Rachel to my sorrow died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."

For us Bethlehem's message is more than memories. It tells us that by the Son of God, born in Bethlehem, death, to which we are subject, was overcome, and we have life. Life is no longer a driven wandering, for He has been born who gives the weary rest. No matter what the number of our failures — Bethlehem's message is of another chance. From Bethlehem comes news of our mighty deliverance!

It Happened at Bethlehem

I. Life and Death Happen at Bethlehem

A. Many of Israel's children had known life and joy in Bethlehem. After the wilderness it was a place of milk and honey. Jacob's descendants were carried into Babylonian slavery. Ramah was a scene of grief (Jer. 40:1). Northern exile is lamented symbolically by Rachel (Jer. 31:15). That impending death is remembered in the actuality of the massacre of the innocents at Bethlehem. (Matt. 2:18)

B. At Bethlehem men, women, and children lived ordinary lives and tasted ordinary death. But here began our world's only really extraordinary life. Christ was *born to die* in order to give us life. "Ephrata" is a "fruitful valley" and "Bethlehem" a "house of bread," for here our life is supplied in Christ.

C. Sir Edward Burne Jones' picture "Star of Bethlehem" shows the Child and mother in Bethlehem. Outside shepherds and wise men travel in the midst of snow, leafless trees, and darkness, but inside at the manger side is the warmth of spring, life, and light. The picture is representative of the gifts God gives us out of Bethlehem. *Out of the midst of death is life*, for Christ is the Life, who comes to give all dying men life.

II. Rest Is to Be Found at Bethlehem

A. Rachel and Jacob were traveling from Bethel to Mamre when Rachel died. Joseph and Mary also were traveling. "No room in the inn." They, too, were strangers who came only for a census.

B. Another woman, Ruth, came to Bethlehem as a foreigner and stranger. She, too, found hospitality and rest with Boaz.

C. God's people desired a deliverer from Rome's power. Was the Child born at Bethlehem to be such a *king*? He found no place to rest as a child and when grown to manhood no place to rest as King. Herod feared

the Child was a king, and when Christ had grown to manhood, Pilate feared the King was the Child, the Son of God! But He brought God's true freedom to all who would by faith become the sons of God.

D. Christ opens the doors and makes room for the sick and needy, the widow and orphan. So are we in His name to make room for His brethren in need in our hearts.

E. We were strangers and aliens to God by sin. At Bethlehem the Father's house is opened to us. By and in Christ eternal rest is ours. In Bethlehem we see the door dramatically open.

III. Second Chance Comes at Bethlehem

A. The place where Ruth settled was later the birthplace of David, Ruth's great-grandson. David was all each of us is, more or less: thief, murderer, adulterer, liar, covetous man. God brought him back. What chance for us?

B. David's greater Son, the real Shepherd of Israel, the King, was Jesus Christ. As the Good Shepherd He searches for and brings back lost sheep, lost Davids. He came for this. He comes for us.

C. Bethlehem assures a second, a third, a fourth chance. "*Seventy times seven*." God's eternal grace in Christ came to us at Bethlehem!

IV. Mighty Deliverance Is Given at Bethlehem

A. Through Jezreel's valley came Rachel and Jacob, Mary and Joseph. There Isaiah sang of deliverance from hostile power. Foreign power forced Mary and Joseph toward Bethlehem. The "rod of Midian," the hostile power, was broken by Gideon as God did His work (Judg. 7:15-25; Is. 9:2-7). "To us a Child is born, to us a Son is given." Gideon and Isaiah knew that with God there always will be deliverance from hostile forces.

B. Hell with its yawning jaws, death, Satan, fear of sin's power or punishment—

all are met by Him who was born at Bethlehem. The manger Child is "Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6). Bethlehem that was "little among the thousands of Judah" (Micah 5:2) has become "not the least among the princes of Judah" (Matt. 3:6). And why? Because out of Bethlehem has come "the Governor that shall rule My people Israel." God is faithful. His covenant remains unbroken. Still He is our God, and we are His people!

Conclusion

"Little town of Bethlehem," little, indeed, but there a great thing happened, one great thing that divided history into *Before and After Bethlehem*. There God interrupted history. Because of our Lord's birth at Bethlehem we have life instead of death, rest even in unrest, another chance, a mighty deliverance!

SAINT JOHN THE APOSTLE AND THE EVANGELIST'S DAY

GEN. 33:9-12

Introduction

"Glory to God in the highest!" The echo of the Christmas glory is still with us. Israel had the "glory of God" in the cloud and pillar of fire, God's signs of His presence. Israel's people would be glorified in the suffering Servant (Is. 49:3). In Him God would be present. This was the presence in the incarnation at Christmas, the presence that brings peace. He was the "Glory of Israel" spoken of by Simeon in his Nunc Dimittis as it was fulfilled in Christ. (Luke 2:32)

Jacob saw God face to face. He saw His glory and His presence. As we view this patriarch's life, we can also see, through Jacob *Israel's Glory*.

I. The Birthright Shows God's Glory

A. Jacob and Esau were born as God's

answer to prayer (Gen. 25:21). The first-born Esau had special rights because of his priority, a privilege extended throughout the history of God's people and even included in the Exodus.

By his mother Rebekah's plan, by brother Esau's despising, and by father Isaac's confirmation Jacob secured the birthright. Esau's revenge and Jacob's flight coincide.

B. God was present through the entire history, blessing and judging. "Your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:33). Sin separates brothers, families. Sin separates man and God. Sin finds resting places in the hearts of Jacobs and of Esaus (the "good" and the "bad"). Sin robs us of rights and blessings, even if we say, "only this once."

Strange foundations are such sin and weakness for the "people of God." But it is God's presence that is the "glory of Israel." How odd of God to choose the Jews, or how odd of God to choose Jacob or you or me!

II. Bethel Shows God's Glory

A. On stone terraces of the Bethel area Jacob, lonely and with frightened heart, cried to God for help. He wanted to be with God.

In a *vision of angels* on a ladder Jacob found God. He vowed to return, to remember, to tithe. This place, indeed, was for him "the house of God."

B. God meets us to show us His glory. Christmas angels announced to frightened shepherds God's presence at Bethlehem. The manger Child grown to manhood told Nathanael that what Jacob saw in vision is a reality in Jesus Himself. (Cf. John 1:51.)

Where God meets us in our needs and we learn of His love and grace in Christ, there is the "house of God" and the "gate of Heaven."

Meeting God, assured of His presence, we soon again will make our New Year's vows, perhaps to make new ones or renew (again?) the old ones.

III. *The Blessing Shows God's Glory*

A. By a ruse the birthright became Jacob's. By a ruse Laban made Jacob work an extra seven years for Rachel, even if they seemed but one year for the love he had for her. Later Laban's daughter tricked Laban too (Gen. 31:14). Yet out of trickery a blessing comes!

Jacob must meet his "enemy" Esau with a gift for appeasement. Jacob has a guilty conscience.

Jacob faces reality. His *real* antagonist is not Esau but God. Using "human" methods to obtain an earthly blessing, he sinned against God. Yet God gives a blessing despite sin. Jacob's name is changed to "Israel" (God perseveres). (Hos. 12:3 has "he strove with God.")

God gives Himself and renews His promise. Jacob meets Esau, and his brother receives Jacob. God blesses Jacob with all He promised. Twelve sons and several famines later in Egypt he prays that "the angel who has redeemed me from all evil" will bless them.

B. God's glory overrides our sinfulness. God can use a faulty man for a great purpose. He who waits for God's salvation (Gen. 49) learns that God *alone* is Redeemer. How true this is as God Himself redeems mankind in Christ. He indeed is the Blessing of Israel for the world, the Blessing through Israel for the world.

At the beginning and at the end of life, and this holds good for every chapter of life, we know that God perseveres with His blessing. We turn to God and find that in Christ He forgives and grants mercy.

Conclusion

It is this presence of God that makes us rejoice that we are now called the sons of God. In and through Christ God dwells with us and in us, and we dwell with Him and in Him. This is His blessing.

SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR

JUDAH

GEN. 44:13-44

Introduction

In today's Gospel (Matt. 2:13-23) Joseph and Mary with the Child flee for security to Egypt. Herod plans to destroy Him. God says, "Flee to Egypt."

Man's sinfulness is the destruction of life. But the God who means only good for His creatures is in control even of wickedness in the world. When famine caused another flight to Egypt, a flight by Jacob's sons, God had already turned evil to good. His instrument was their own brother Joseph, whom they sold into Egypt. They thought evil against him, but God ordered all things for their salvation and for ours. These things were being done not only for Jacob's family but for all the world that should be blessed through the covenant people.

Judah—in Egypt He Stayed

I. The Need to Go to Egypt

A. The older brothers are all involved in the sinning that caused their lives to be threatened by death. Reuben was the first-born. His sin with Bilhah (Gen. 35:22; 49:1-4) caused Jacob to replace Reuben. Simeon and Levi, next in line, were "scattered in Israel" with no priority, for they conducted themselves barbarously in murdering Shechem's males (Gen. 34:25 ff; 49:5). Judah, fourth in line, sinned in his marriage to the Canaanite and his relation with Tamar. (Gen. 38)

The brothers sell Joseph. They are jealous. "Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice." (James 3:16 RSV)

B. The famine becomes a "fiery ordeal" (cf. today's Epistle, 1 Peter 4:12-19), forcing the brothers of Joseph to realize their dependence on God. The famine sets into motion God's plan to rescue Judah's family, for man's hope was in this family. The res-

cuer, Joseph, has done his work well—the source of life is waiting. The flight to Egypt is not easy for Jacob and his kinfolk. Only “when he saw the wagons he believed.” Later Joseph sums it all up saying, “God sent me before you to preserve life.” (Gen. 45:5)

C. Into Egypt Israel must go. God finds it necessary to send us or have us sent “into Egypt.” It is only “out of Egypt” that God calls Israel in the flesh via Moses. “Out of Egypt” God calls Jesus Christ (Hos. 11:1). Thus He makes us realize anew the need and the value of our redemption.

II. *The Need to Stay in Egypt*

A. Judah and his brothers are tested by Joseph. “You are spies” (Gen. 42:14); “in prison for three days” (42:17); “bound Simeon” (42:24); “every man’s money in his sack” (42:25); “the silver cup in Benjamin’s sack” (44:12). The testing brought results. The brothers said, “We are guilty” (Gen. 42:21). It was in Egypt that they saw themselves for what they really were.

B. “Testing” is “being put on your own.” Test a child if he can walk unaided. Such “temptation” forces us to admit we are weak, poor, sinful, and in need of God’s help. A Savior is needed desperately. Our confession must be, “We are guilty.”

III. *The Need to See God’s Salvation*

A. We need Egypt. We need to see our shortcomings. We need to see God’s salvation. We need to see God’s hand at work. “God sent me,” says Joseph (Gen. 45:5, 7, 8, 10) to Judah. Suffering under slavery, famine, separation—under God’s hand all this works into His plan to meet man’s need.

B. Judah becomes the “lion’s whelp,” the forerunner and progenitor of Shiloh, as spoken by his father (Gen. 49). He is spokesman for the group. He pleads with brothers not to kill Joseph (Gen. 37:25). He pleads with Jacob that he will be a surety for Benjamin (Gen. 43:8). He pleads with Joseph a threefold question: “What shall

we say? What can we speak? How can we justify?” Judah will stay and die in Egypt. He will be a sacrifice so that Benjamin might live.

C. Christ, through Perez by Tamar (Matt. 1:3), was Judah’s descendant. Christ, too, suffered “in Egypt” because of sin, but not his own sin. As God’s suffering Slave, facing famine and hunger, He was tempted. But He did much more. Judah finally was moved by loyalty and love to his father to offer his own freedom for Benjamin’s. How much more Christ did for us. As true man His loyalty and love to the Father never wavered. Not involved in human sin at all, yet He offered Himself as our Substitute. He became Surety for us. Christ released us from sin’s prison and punishment.

D. Joseph’s heart was moved by Judah’s self-sacrifice. Thus Israel moved into position to be saved by God’s mighty arm in the Exodus. In a greater way, but as part of the same mighty acts of God, the sacrifice of Christ has put us into the position of salvation. His sacrifice was accepted. God’s love gives us new life. By His cross we are freed from slavery and fear, we are given freedom and joy. We see our salvation again as He gives Himself to us in His body and blood.

Conclusion

The “Lion” of the tribe of Judah, the “Shiloh” of the tribe of Judah, has come in Christ. Judah’s story of sin and evil is also our story. God’s forgiveness and grace, finding its perfection in Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior of all mankind, who by promise was of the tribe of Judah, is also our Forgiveness.

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

JOSEPH

GEN. 45:4

Introduction

Wrapped Christmas packages conceal the presents inside. Our joy is the greater when we see what was hidden. What joy is ours

today! Epiphany means for us that God is manifest in the flesh.

From desert pit, slave market, and prison Joseph was exalted to a high office at the right hand of Pharaoh. His position concealed his true self from his brothers. After testing his brothers Joseph revealed himself.

I Am Your Brother

Joseph's life was lived out to show us not only a type of our Lord Jesus' manifestation, but also a life prominent in the history of God's salvation. His revelation of himself to his brothers can suggest to us parallels as we behold the revelation, the redemption, and the reconciliation which is ours in Christ. On Epiphany we celebrate how Christ Jesus made it clear to us that *He is our Brother!*

I. This Was a Revelation

A. *With Joseph.* Joseph's brothers had no idea that Zephenathpaneah the Great, husband of Asenath, the daughter of the priest of the great national temple at Heliopolis, was their own brother Joseph. Everything seemed to make even the vaguest suspicion irrational — his dress, his language, even his apparent age. They did not recognize him. But the lad whom once they sold into slavery was now, under God's hand, their deliverer. The one whom they turned over to Gentiles was the deliverer of Jew and Gentile.

B. *With Jesus.* Jesus manifested Himself when on earth. The devils admitted, "We know who thou art." The winds obeyed Him, the sea stood firm under Him. The earth trembled at His death. The sun's light was hid. Death gave up its dead. But men did not always recognize. "What manner of man is this?" The doctors in the temple wondered. Men said, "We never saw it in this fashion before." "They knew not whence came the wine."

It required a revelation, for He had made Himself of no reputation. He was their own flesh. He lived among men. He had become

our brother, "the likeness of sinful flesh," (Rom. 8:3) "the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7). He tested men. He drew them to Himself, He did not overwhelm them with deity. But His life, death, and resurrection made it clear that "God was manifest in the flesh." (1 Tim. 3:16)

II. This Was a Redemption

A. *With Joseph.* When he announced, "I am your brother," he assured his brothers that this was all a result of the direction and plan of God. He came to Egypt as a slave to "redeem them," to reclaim them as God's own family, to "save" them from destruction.

The redemption was through God's planning and *only* by God's planning. The brothers had other ideas — destruction, self-salvation. But God had made a covenant with Jacob and with the world, and He would be faithful to that covenant.

B. *With Jesus.* Jesus' manifestation was much more a part of redemption. It was God's plan, not man's. He came to earth by the love of God for sinful man. Man's sin caused redemption's need. God's plan and mercy brought redemption with the sending of Christ.

Joseph could set up a salvation for Israel and Egypt, but Jesus secured redemption *for all*. Jesus was faithful and righteous, without sin. Sinful man sold Him to be rid of Him, but Jesus is alive, and thus there is salvation for all!

III. This Was a Reconciliation

A. *For the father and brothers of Joseph.* "Go, tell." Jacob must be told that the "little brother" lives. Jacob must know of hope in famine. Jacob did not believe till "he saw the wagons." Then he believed. Jacob was not to hold the sin against the brothers, for God had planned it for their good. (They did not know what they were doing!)

"Do not fight along the way." Joseph asks his brothers not to blame one another.

That they reproached themselves was good, but they should "be at peace with one another." The triumph of clemency is a mark of the family of God.

B. *For the Father and the brothers of Jesus.* "Father, forgive them. . . ." This is the "elder brother" pleading for us. "It is finished," salvation is accomplished. The family of God is redeemed. We are reconciled with our Father. Now we are the sons of God and brothers of our Savior.

"Love one another." God forgives in Christ, loves us in Christ. In turn we now love one another.

Conclusion

No one recognized the redemption of starving Israel when dromedaries carried Joseph to Egypt's slave market. And few recognized Israel's redemption when dromedaries brought Wise Men from the East to worship the Christ. One would think that all Israel would have run to Bethlehem. They wait, scoff, scorn, scourge, slay Him. "Lo, the dreamer" they cry, "God's darling! Let us see if God wants Him." Later they meet the judgment and discover He was the Savior and God. Was it too late when they had to bow down and acknowledge Him? "He came to His own, and they received Him not, but as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God." Receive Him now as He offers His body and His Blood anew to you at the altar. He is your Brother!

Elmhurst, Illinois

GEORGE W. BORNEMANN

SERMON STUDY

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

ABRAHAM — HIS CHILDREN

GEN. 17:1-14

The Lord told Abram that his children would be as numerous as the stars of the

heaven (Gen. 15:5). Such a promise must have seemed bold and extravagant to a man who at that time was childless. Therefore it is the more remarkable that Abram responded to this promise by believing what the Lord had said, and such faith was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). That is the theological reason why Abram is the foremost among the patriarchs and why he is known in Christian circles as the father of all believers.

Historically the life of Abram is associated with a number of significant events that took place around the year 1700 B.C. It was then that a great migration of the Amorites took place throughout the length of ancient Mesopotamia. When Abram left Ur of the Chaldeans, it is likely that his journey from Ur to Haran led him along one of the routes which the migrating Amorites were following. Abram left Babylon at the time when the great lawgiver Hammurabi was teaching his people the basic principles of case law. As Abram followed the middle Euphrates, he could well have come into contact with the city of Mari, from which an important collection of ancient cuneiform tablets has been recovered. Here such Biblical names as Jacob and Benjamin were found recorded on clay tablets; here Amorite place names have been uncovered that correspond to the names of Abram's kinsmen Terah and Nahor. When Abram followed the Lord's summons and left Haran on the journey that eventually led him all the way down to Egypt, his itinerary probably corresponded with that of the ancient Hyksos, the Semitic rulers who overran Palestine and took control of Egypt during the patriarchal period.

The followers of Judaism must be recognized as being the physical sons of Abraham, and no one can gainsay their right to be called Abraham's children. Yet in the perspective of God's whole plan of salvation it became clear that the children of Abraham

after the flesh were the bearers of God's promise only up to a point. Already in the Old Testament God had made it abundantly clear to His people that it was not merely their physical descent from Abraham which made them His people. Rather it was the *spiritual* heritage of Abraham, the *promise* of covenant blessings given to him and the response of *faith* to these promises, that made the people of Israel the true children of Abraham.

There is no better way to see that the true children of Abraham are his spiritual offspring than to look at the record of God's covenant with Abraham as this is recorded in the early chapters of Genesis. Gen. 17: 1-14 is a covenant text which teaches that those who have a faith like Abraham's, those who hold to God's ancient promises as these are fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, are the real heirs to the title Abraham's children.

This pericope may be divided into two parts which speak of the promissory and obligatory features of God's covenant. In vv. 1-8 God reveals His gracious will toward Abram in a series of declarations: I will make, I will establish, I will give. In vv. 9-14, on the other hand, God gives directions concerning Abram's part in the covenant: You shall keep, you shall be, you and your children after you. As the first part promises abundant children and possession of the land to Abram, so the second part obliges him to perform the rite of circumcision on all of the males who are connected with his house.

V. 1. Abram was practically a centenarian when God introduced Himself to him with the name that is characteristic of the period of the patriarchs. God said, "I am El Shaddai." This name not only is used in the Genesis accounts but also occurs quite often in the Book of Job. It is usually interpreted to mean the God of unlimited power. It designates "the God who compels nature to

do what is contrary to itself and subdues it to bow and minister to grace." (Delitzsch)

Historically it can be shown that the name El Shaddai has to do with a preliminary phase of God's revealing himself to the fathers. When God introduced Himself to Moses in Egypt (Ex. 6:2), He used the same formula with which our pericope begins. There He said, "I am Yahweh"; here He says, "I am El Shaddai." There He added, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but by My name Yahweh I did not make Myself known to them" (Ex. 6:3). After the divine name Yahweh was thus introduced, the patriarchal name El Shaddai receded more and more into the background.

It is not clear why the Septuagint replaces El Shaddai with "your God" and why the Old Latin has simply "God." Luther refers to El Shaddai as a new name and says that God used this new name because He wanted to point to a mystery: Circumcision is not a rite that binds the entire world; rather it is applicable only to the offspring of Abraham. From the fact that God referred to Himself by this unique name the patriarchs were to learn that circumcision pertained only to their children, and for them only till Christ's time.

There are two imperatives in God's address to Abram "Walk before Me and be perfect." The first of these imperatives has to do with worship, the second involves ethics. Earlier in the Book of Genesis it is said that Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:24) and that Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9). In explaining the phrase "walking with God," Luther drew on Heb. 11:5-6. He held that if this text says of Enoch that he pleased God before his translation, and if it is impossible to please God without faith, then Enoch's walking with God (and Abram's by implication) must have meant that he believed in God. On the basis of the original text

walking *with* God means walking in God's way and not in the way of sin. Walking *before* God means this too, but as the Hebrew suggests, it specifically means walking before the face of God, walking in the presence of God. That Abraham did walk in the presence of God in the sense of worshiping Him is indicated by the fact that he built an altar wherever he went in the Holy Land and there worshiped the Lord.

Such worshipful walking *before* the Lord makes it possible for a man to walk obediently *after* Him. When 1 Kings 14:8 says that David walked after God with all his heart, this means that he followed the Leader in a model way; he walked in the footsteps of his Lord, who went before him. The phrase "be perfect, be blameless" also carries a strong ethical accent. The Hebrew *tamim* means complete, whole, devout; it implies wholehearted surrender to God. Abram is to give himself completely to his Lord in a life of worship and of sound personal deportment.

V.2. As introduced here, the covenant was primarily an agreement between Yahweh and Abram as an individual. The covenant was an ancient human institution that was intended to clear up *legal* problems between several parties that hitherto could not be resolved (Von Rad). In a *religious* context the covenant was a treaty whereby God brought an individual or a group into relationship with Himself with mutual obligations. The description of the covenant in Gen. 15:7-21 includes a detailed ritual including the slaughter of animals and a smoking firepot. In ch. 17 there is no reference to the ritual, and the idiom used is "to give or to establish a covenant" rather than "to cut a covenant." It is not necessary to establish a sequence between Gen. 15 and Gen. 17 and to state that in Gen. 15 the covenant was established while in Gen. 17 the covenant was put into force or was made operative (Leupold). The two chapters are

merely parallel accounts of the same occurrence.

As His part of the covenant God agreed to multiply Abram very, very much. Throughout the Old Testament abundance of children was regarded as a special blessing of the Lord. Rachel asked Jacob to give her children, or she would die (Gen. 30:1). The psalmist spoke of children as a heritage of the Lord and regarded the fruit of the womb as a reward (Ps. 127:3). Is it any wonder that for both men and women the primary blessing of old was that they receive offspring, that they be given a generous quota of children? By contrast Luther was convinced that in his day one could find many greedy fellows for whom the blessing of many children would be a veritable punishment. How is it today?

V.3. Abram was so overwhelmed by the Lord's promise that he simply fell on his face. Whereas God had said, "Walk before My face," Abram fell down on his face. The only possible reaction of this lowly creature over against his Creator was to lie facedown on the earth, as many a Moslem does to this day when he goes through his five daily prayers. What an eloquent summons to us to express our creatureliness and unworthiness with a similar gesture of submission!

Vv. 4-6. While v.2 had promised many children, vv. 4-6 elaborate this promise in two ways: Abram will father many nations, and kings will go forth from him. The idea of the fathering of many nations is associated with the changing of Abram's name to Abraham. The original name Abram, meaning "exalted father" or "father is exalted," is simply lengthened into Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude." The ending *ham* of the elongated form appears to be connected with the Hebrew word *hamon*, meaning multitude, thus producing the combination "multitude of nations." It has been suggested that one form of the name was used in Mesopotamia, the other in Canaan, and

that the change of Abram's name was a tangible sign whereby the binding features of the covenant were written into the public record. (Vawter)

V. 6 repeats the phrase "very, very," which had been used at the end of v. 3. There it had been a promise to multiply Abram very, very much, here it is a promise to make Abraham very, very fruitful. When v. 6 concludes by saying that kings shall come forth from Abraham, this echoes the strong Messianic note that had been struck earlier in Gen. 12:3. Thus the promise of God is made to include nations and kings, and the extension of God's salutary work beyond Israel is proclaimed.

V. 7. Thus far the covenant had applied to Abraham as an individual. Beginning at v. 7 the covenant is described as including Abraham's descendants also. This clearly suggests that the covenant is valid not only for Abraham's time but for all time. In an eternal covenant God promises to be a God to Abraham and to his descendants after him. The words "I will be God to you" are the very heart of God's side of the covenant relationship. With his characteristic depth of insight Luther associated the promise "I will be your God" with Abraham's worship life. "I will be your God" means that you will always have the Word of God in your family and in your home, you and your descendants will worship Me. By way of explanation of such worship Luther added: "To adore God is to go to Him for help when you turn your face toward Him and call upon Him in trouble, when you give thanks for deliverance, when you recall and proclaim His acts of kindness by declaring that He is the Creator, the Benefactor, the Promiser, and the Savior."

V. 8. To the blessing of an abundance of children, this verse adds the promise of the possession of the land of Canaan. Children and land are the two most ancient parts of the patriarchal promise. Luther found an

obvious contradiction in this verse. On the one hand, Abraham is told that he is a sojourner in the land of Canaan; on the other hand, he is told that he will possess this land eternally. But Luther found an ingenious way of making both of these statements come out to be true. During this life Abraham is a sojourner in Canaan, but after his death he will take permanent possession of the land.

V. 9. The first eight verses stressed the divine side of the covenant; v. 9-14 have to do with the human side of this relationship. Even as God made, established, gave the covenant in the opening verses, so Abraham and his descendants are obliged in the closing verses to keep, uphold, and preserve God's covenant throughout their generations. Observing the covenant in turn means fulfilling the obligations which God is about to explain in the following verses.

V. 10. It is correct to say that the word "covenant" in this verse is used by metonymy and refers to the sign or the condition of the covenant (Leupold). As his part of the covenant Abraham is to give evidence of his attitude toward God in an act—the circumcision of all the male members of his household. It is not unusual for such external signs to be used in connection with human covenants to make sure that the parties involved will observe the terms. For example, Jacob set up a stone as a pillar. (Gen. 31:44)

Circumcision is a very ancient rite. The Egyptians knew it as early as the end of the fifth millennium B.C. (Vawter). Usually it was used for hygienic purposes; only in Israel did it receive religious significance. It was not practiced in Mesopotamia; on the basis of the text its use among the Hebrews goes back to Abraham's arrival in Canaan.

From a religious point of view the rite of circumcision may appear to be a strange oddity. Yet there is a certain appropriateness in associating it with the removal of evil.

Man's life must be purified even at its point of origin. Ultimately man's life can be purified only through Him who was born of a woman, who was born under the Law for us. This in turn explains why circumcision no longer needs to be practiced today, namely, because the covenant promise of which it was a symbol was fulfilled in Christ. Our relationship of sonship with Abraham and with God is determined not by a surgical act but rather by a faith like Abraham's in God's promise.

What then is circumcision? It is (1) an act of appropriation of God's promise; (2) an act of witness to God's revelation; (3) a sign of acceptance of God's salvation (Von Rad). Luther defines circumcision as "a public mark by which all, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, are urged to follow in the footsteps of Abraham, or to emulate the faith of Abraham." The Reformer found an added benefit in the divine command concerning circumcision — God wanted to proclaim thereby that the promised Savior would come from this circumcised people.

Vv. 11-14. In these verses the introductory statement of v. 10 on circumcision is elaborated with a number of directives. V. 11 describes the type of operation that is to be performed: the removal of the flesh of the foreskin. V. 12a designates the age at which the rite of circumcision is to be performed — on the eighth day. According to ancient Hebrew law an animal was held to embark upon its independent existence on the eighth day (cf. Ex. 22:30). Even so the male Hebrew child was to be separated from its parents on the eighth day and given to the Lord by the rite of circumcision (Leupold). V. 12b indicates the group which is covered by the rite of circumcision, both the males who are native to the house and also those male foreigners who were bought as slaves. V. 13 stipulates that circumcision is an absolute requirement, that *all* males in the household of Abraham and his descendants

are to be circumcised in their flesh as a sign of the abiding covenant. In answer to the question why women were not required to be circumcised, Luther stated that the women have a circumcision of their own, for their pain in childbearing is multiplied, and they bring forth their children with much travail. V. 14 lists the sanctions which are to assure conformity with the requirements of this rite. Any male who keeps his foreskin will be cut off from his people, that is, he will be excluded from the terms of the covenant, he will be "excommunicated" from the fellowship of God's people. There is no indication that the death penalty was imposed for failure to be circumcised.

It must be noted that Luther's treatment of Gen. 17 is based to a large extent on the viewpoint of Paul's letter to the Galatians. Luther found two arguments in Paul's theology against circumcision: (1) Christ is the End of the Law; (2) Abraham was made righteous by faith before and without his circumcision. Luther insisted on a sharp distinction between the circumcision of Abraham and that of his descendants. When Abraham was circumcised, God was already his God, so he did not become a child of God through circumcision. But when Abraham's descendants were circumcised, their circumcision symbolized that they were the children of promise. Luther maintained that the difference between Abraham's circumcision and that of his descendants was quite parallel to the difference between Christ's Baptism and the Baptism of Christians.

The Reformer was surprised that no sect arose in his day which insisted that the rite of circumcision was necessary for salvation. On the other hand, he thought that Abraham must have been greatly disturbed and troubled over the fact that circumcision was limited to his offspring; that the Gentiles were not included in it. Yet Abraham did not let this bother him. Similarly for a Christian it is wise to obey God in his vocation

without being concerned about what others may be doing. The disciple should not say with Peter, "But what about the other man?" (John 21:18). Only a few are content with their portion: laymen want to be clergymen, pupils long to teach, and citizens would rather be rulers. Whoever thinks longingly that his fortune is in the place where he is not should learn with satisfied Abraham to be content in whatever state he is.

With his deep concern for Law and Gospel Luther saw even in circumcision a foreshadowing of sin and grace in the grand

dimension of Biblical theology. Circumcision preaches sin, because the rite is performed on such a shameful member. It proclaims grace, because only a portion of that member, not all of it, is cut off. Whether the reader agrees with this interpretation or not, Luther thus summarized quite effectively the twin themes of the covenant account in Gen. 17:1-14. May God's grace thus be added to God's law in our preaching today so that the spiritual seed of Abraham may thereby be edified and multiplied!

ALFRED VON ROHR SAUER