

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 1:68-79

Note the order, the progressive line of thought, in the four pericopes for the Advent season in the Eisenach Gospel series. The first pericope speaks of the *Savior* who comes, in whom all have remission of sins. The second speaks of the *kingdom* of the Savior. The third emphasizes the Savior's Gospel, the divine *message* of salvation, "Repent ye!" And the fourth speaks of the *blessedness* of those who are in the Savior's kingdom.

The Benedictus, Luke 1:68-79, is one of a series of revelations given in connection with Jesus' birth and recorded in the first two chapters of Luke. These revelations are the very warp and woof of Luke's message concerning Jesus. The revelations point to the deity of the person presented to us in the Gospel.

"The Messiah is on the threshold; think of the glorious significance of His coming" — that is one of the chief notes of this hymn. It has been called the last prophecy of the Old Dispensation and the first of the New and furnishes a kind of key to the evangelical interpretation of all prophecies. The first part (vv. 68-75) is a noble expression of thanks for the salvation God is now bringing about through the Son of David; the second part (vv. 76-79) speaks of the role John is to play and gives the content of his message. The language is taken largely from the Psalms and the Prophets.

Propers

Our text fits well the emphasis of this Sunday: The King, our Savior, is coming. Let none that wait for Him be ashamed (Introit). Stir up Thy power and come (Collect). The Epistle instructs as to the manner in which we are to prepare for the Savior's visit, be that past, present, or future. The

Gospel emphasizes the lowly, yet triumphant advent of our Savior, bringing salvation.

Introduction

A new church year! What will it bring and mean to us? The Benedictus opens rich possibilities as it emphasizes for us that

Our Savior Visits Us in the New Church Year

I. *He Has Saved Us from Our Enemies*

A. John's birth was for Zacharias the earnest of Messiah's coming. What was long ago prophesied, v. 70 (the Great Prophet of Moses, the Immanuel and Prince of Peace of Isaiah, the Branch of Jeremiah, the Shepherd of Ezekiel and Zechariah, the Holy One of Daniel), what God had promised the fathers with an oath, vv. 72, 73, was now certain of accomplishment. The forerunner had arrived (v. 17; Mal. 4:5, 6). So Zacharias speaks as though everything which Messiah was to do had already been accomplished. (Past tenses, vv. 68, 69)

B. God has visited, i. e., looked upon His people with active concern and eagerness to help (Luke 7:16; Ex. 4:31), and redeemed them.

C. God showed His concern also by raising up a "horn of salvation," i. e., a horn which is, works, effects salvation. Christ, true God, a strong Helper, bruised the serpent's head, His salvation is not a "broken reed of a staff" (Is. 36:6), but certain.

D. Through this redemption and salvation we are saved, v. 71. Not physical enemies but spiritual: sin, death, power of devil. Satan can no longer accuse us; sin has lost its power; death no longer is a terror. (Gal. 3:13; Heb. 2:14, 15)

E. God redeemed us not because of any merit or worthiness in us, but vv. 72, 73; Gal. 4:4, 5. Our redemption and salvation an act of mercy, Eph. 1:7; 2:8, 9, already

promised to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15), and by a special covenant to Abraham. (Gen. 22:16-18)

Benedictus!

II. *He Grants Us Ability to Serve*

A. God's purpose in remembering His covenant and oath (vv. 74, 75). It is not the natural thing for man to serve God (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 6:17-19; Eph. 2:2, 3). This ability possible only through the Savior, by whom we are "delivered from the hand of our enemies."

B. A life of service, defined as "serving Him in holiness and righteousness." Holiness is separation from sin and devotion to God; righteousness is the devotion to what God's righteousness and verdict approves. The two go together. First and Second Table of Law, Matt. 22:37-39. How do we stand toward God, His Word? How about Commandments 4—10? During coming year?

"Without fear." Courage, boldness. Christian life usually unpopular, not appreciated, not understood. Daniel; Peter and John. (Acts 5:29)

"All the days of our life." Not just Sunday or before parents or other Christians. Enoch. (Gen. 5:22)

Benedictus!

III. *He Guides Us and Others into The Way of Peace*

A. Zacharias addresses his son (v. 76). Prophet of the Highest. He will be given this title by contemporaries and many later generations. Herald, announcing the Lord's coming, preparing His way. By Word.

B. Purpose of preparation of way (v. 77). Welfare of subjects. The Messiah brings the salvation through the forgiveness of sins. The forerunner gives the knowledge of it to the people, as consisting not in political deliverance, but in a spiritual deliverance from the dominion of sin.

C. V. 78. Not human worthiness, but

God's loving-kindness and mercy induce Him to forgive sins. A deliverer has come, the Dayspring, Dawn, Rising of the Sun; Messianic era is sunrise time (Is. 9:2; 60:1; Mal. 4:2). He visits us after the dark night of misery, bringing hope and help.

D. V. 79. The Benedictus swells finally into a grand missionary hymn. Luke cannot but have thought with gratitude of the effects produced by the preaching of Christ in his own Gentile world. He had known the deep spiritual "darkness" of that world, its longing for religious certainty, for the assurance of immortality, and for the peace of forgiveness, all of which had come to it through Christ. (Matt. 5:14-16)

Benedictus!

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 17:20-30

Propers

Introit: "Thy salvation cometh" through the King. Collect: "Stir up our hearts that we may serve Thee" in Thy kingdom. In the Gospel our King promises to save and deliver. The Epistle encourages us to wait steadfastly and hopefully. On concept of "Kingdom" see C. T. M. XXI (1950), p. 8 ff.

V. 21. "in the midst of you" — RSV variant reading and KJV have "within you." Former seems preferable. Would Jesus say to the hostile Pharisees that God's kingdom is in their hearts? The emphasis is on the invisibility of the Kingdom. Cp. C. T. M., XV (1944), 730 ff.

Note the imperfect tenses in v. 27a and v. 28. They are descriptive of customary actions; the cold, hard facts follow. Cp. also Matt. 24 and 25; Mark 13; Luke 21.

Introduction

Coming of God's kingdom a matter of great importance, and yet it is greatly misunderstood. Various ideas — Jehovah's witnesses, Adventists, millennialists. On the

other hand, many lack any concern. Let us hear again what the King has to say about the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God Is Coming

I. *Actually, It Has Come*

A. There probably was no more burning question, especially to the Pharisees, than the one asked v. 20. A very common topic of conversation. Marvelous things had been foretold about this Kingdom (2 Sam. 7: 12, 13; Ps. 45; 72; 110; Is. 9:7; Jer. 31:33, 34; Dan. 7:13, 14; cp. Rev. 21:22; Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:15; Luke 16:16). The scribes taught the coming of a kingdom on basis of Micah 4:7, etc. The Pharisees, then, were not rejecting the thought of a future advent of the Kingdom. But they had wrong conceptions about its nature; had not listened properly to the instruction of the King Himself. They ask Christ a very pertinent question: When is the Kingdom finally coming?

B. Jesus gives a pertinent answer: It is here; it has come. Of course, Pharisees must change their ideas of the Kingdom (vv. 20, 21). The Kingdom and its coming is nothing like what they think. Not a kingdom coming "with signs to be observed."

C. Best proof for this is their very question; they ask, When is it coming? and Christ replies, Lo, it is here. Not of this world; spiritual, invisible. "In the midst of you," now already among you; it has come (John 18:36, 37). Through its King God broke in upon the world with His redeeming power and defeated the rule of Satan, death, Law, sin.

D. It was Christ's work to establish the Kingdom, and when He died, He said: "It is finished." He points to this in v. 25. Before "His day" the supreme tragedy, yet the source of joy and happiness, took place. One is emphasized, "rejection by this generation." Startling! Repudiated, disowned by own people. "Must," it has to be so; so it was

foretold that the suffering Messiah would establish the Kingdom; and like a golden thread this runs through the whole history of Christ's life.

The kingdom of God came despite all obstacles; the devil tempted Christ, the Jews rejected and persecuted Christ, the Gentiles crucified Christ — and that very cross was the agent of His Kingdom! It has come!

II. *Yet It Is Coming*

A. Disciples, too, were indulging in daydreams concerning the Kingdom. Jesus' warning (vv. 22, 23). A kingdom of Pharisæic dreams will never come. Days of tribulation will come for members of Kingdom. Then they will long to have just one day of the manifestation of Jesus' glory granted them in advance, to bring relief and strengthening for their faith. So we frequently in times of deep grief and disappointment — just one preview of heaven, please! But disciples' wish would not be fulfilled. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed; we walk by faith, not by sight.

B. It is not a visible principality built and defended by earthly means; no external marks (emotions, visions); no chiliasm. All predictions of exact dates and all statements as to local appearances are folly.

The Kingdom is where Christ the King is; and it comes in His Word (Luther's explanation of Second Petition; v. 21). It is found in the communion of saints on earth; the marks of membership are not a few good resolutions, but faith in the Savior, engendered by the Gospel. Where the Gospel is preached, there the King is present.

Praise God! In Word and sacrament the Kingdom comes to us now and all our life! Are you a citizen?

III. *And It Will Come*

A. Not always will God's kingdom remain hidden. Time is coming when the Kingdom will be revealed in glory. Now a Kingdom of the cross, surrounded by sin

and wickedness, beset by false prophets. (V. 22)

B. But v. 24. Not only suddenly or unexpectedly or dazzlingly bright, but universally and instantaneously visible; all will see Him, all will know Him. Two examples from Old Testament history vv. 26-30; Gen. 6 and 7; 18:20—19:25. Men took care of interests of body and of social joys and needs; not sinful in themselves, but became all-absorbing for them; utter dedication to what is earthly. God and His Word, His promises and warnings, neglected and ridiculed. Then, destruction! (Note Sodom's description in Deut. 29:23; Is. 13:19, 20; Jer. 49:18; Amos 4:11; Jude 7.) "So will it be!" (V. 30)

Does it not seem as though we were living in "the days of the Son of Man" (v. 26)? that the time of grace is drawing to an end? that even now fire and brimstone are ready to do their last work? (Gen. 19:24)

"The kingdom of God is coming" (Luke 21:34-36). Therefore Matt. 6:33; 16:24-27).

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

MATTHEW 3:1-11

Propers

The Introit speaks of joy with moderation, quiet contemplation, release from captivity. The Collect requests light for darkness, repentance through the Lord's Advent, while the Gradual implores God to shine forth. The Epistle speaks of the stewards of God's mysteries, the preachers of repentance, and the Gospel continues the story of John, the repentance preacher of our text.

Notes

For good reading on "repentance," see Augsburg Confession, Art. XII; Apology, Art. XII, especially 28—38; Smalcald Art., Part III, Art. III; and Formula of Concord, *Solid Declaration*, Art. V, especially 7—9. "Re-

pentance" is used in the N. T. in a twofold sense: a turning away from, or this, plus a turning to. In this text the latter is meant. The tense of John's demand is present, a state or condition, a life lived in repentance. Note that the expression "Repent" is not equivalent to "Do penance." The original means "Change your minds, your mode of thinking and of viewing things," not in order that the Kingdom may come, but for, because, it is at hand, has been drawing near and thus is now at hand. This change of mind can come only as the Word is proclaimed.

V. 7. "Vipers." What quality the figure of the viper means to express is evident; deadly hypocrisy, base treachery, and the fatal deceptions which they practiced (Matt. 12:2, 24; 15:2; 16:1; 22:15). When it comes to dealing with these deadly sins, no words are minced by the Baptist or by Jesus or by the apostles. The conscience is struck with a directness that almost takes the breath away." (Lanski)

Introduction

John the Baptist was no missionary to heathen, but a preacher in and for the church. We must keep this in mind, otherwise we miss the point of his appearance.

Repent Ye!

I. *The Meaning of This Message*

A. John the Baptist (cp. Benedictus, Luke 1:76 ff.; outline for 1 Advent), preaching in the wilderness, tells people, "Repent!" Not dressed in fashionable clothes (v. 4; cp. Matt. 11:8), but like ancient Elijah (2 Kings 1:8); like him, satisfied with humble food (v. 4; 1 Kings 17:6, 9-15); like him, a preacher of repentance. Great crowds kept going out into the wilderness (v. 53). So let us forget rush of days, rid minds of cares and worries of daily life, and hear God's message: Repent!

B. What does "repent" signify? Means

to change one's mind, one's attitude, one's way of thinking in a radical way. The Pharisees were self-righteous, self-satisfied; insisted on letter of Law, ignoring spirit; added traditions to Scripture; religion for many an external thing (Luke 15:1, 2; 18:9-14; Matt. 15:2-6; 23:1-33). They are told to repent.

The Sadducees, cultured unbelievers, rationalists, liberalists, highpriestly aristocracy (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8), though members of the Jewish Church, are told to repent. All people coming to John hear the same inexorable demand: "Repent!"

C. Change your way of thinking concerning yourselves (vv. 7-10). "Vipers" — not complimentary; stern Law, but Matt. 9:10-13. "Abraham as father?" But Gal. 3:7; Rom. 2:28, 29. If descendants despise blessings promised to father Abraham, God could raise up descendants from stones to receive the blessings! Worthless trees. (V. 10)

D. Change your way of thinking concerning the promised Messiah (v. 11). John's work only preparatory. Baptism was for full forgiveness; Holy Spirit received. But after Christ's glorification (John 7:39), the Spirit in a larger measure would be given, to testify, etc. (John 15:26; 16:13; Acts 1:8); also special gifts (Acts 2:4, etc.). "With fire" — judgment. The Mightier One!

E. Confess your sins (v. 6; Matt. 5:23, 24; Ps. 19:12; Luke 18:13; Ps. 51; Prov. 28:13) and look for salvation to Him who taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

F. Like those people coming to John, we also are sinners. And there is a good deal of the Pharisee in each one of us. Daily we sin. To us also is addressed the call of John: Repent! Luther's 95 Theses.

Let us not be satisfied with external mem-

bership in the church of Christ, proudly pointing to our orthodoxy. Baptized and confirmed members and no more. No carnal pride of nationality or race. Then to us also would apply vv. 9 and 10.

Confessing our own sinfulness (Matt. 5:23 f.; Ps. 19:12; 51:3-9; Luke 15:21; 18:13; Prov. 28:13) and casting aside the filthy garments of our own righteousness (Is. 64:6), we let Christ alone be unto us Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption (1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:7-14). If repentance is sincere, good works will follow spontaneously. (V. 8; Luke 3:10-14)

II. *The Results of This Message, If Obeyed*

A. Repent! In Biblical language: "Be totally turned around by God." The coming King is at the same time the road contractor! Indeed, it is the Lord Jehovah who comes to us in the manger (Is. 9:6, 7; Jer. 23:6).

B. The kingdom of heaven is at hand! The same kingdom we discussed last Sunday.

C. To see and accept all this glory calls for eyes of faith (Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Cor. 1:23; 2:14). Yet God Himself works in us that very repentance and faith which He demands. Repentance is not a preparation for Christ, but it is the work of Christ and His Gospel in the hearts of men. The means: the proclaimed Word and the sacrament (John's baptism, v. 6). We still hear the Word of Him who said John 6:63b (cp. Rom. 1:17; 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25). We have His Baptism, granting forgiveness and having regenerative power. (John 3:5; Gal. 3:26, 27; Titus 3:4-7)

D. There is finally a gathering into the heavenly garner (Matt. 13:43; 25:34-40; Rev. 7:9-17). Therefore "Repent! Prepare the way of the Lord!"

Seward, Nebr.

WILLIS LAETSCH

EXEGETICAL STUDY OF JOHN 1:15-18

I. The Background

This pericope makes up the concluding verses of the introduction or Prolog to the Gospel of John. All the basic concepts (e. g., Word, life, light, witness, world, believe, truth, glory) and the basic purpose for the writing of the Gospel According to John (cf. 20:31) are either clearly stated or implied in the Prolog.

After introducing the Word ("*Logos*") in 1:1-3, the Prolog discusses especially life and light in 1:4-13. The "and" in v. 14 returns once more to the "*Logos*" concept. The "*Logos*" became a human being and tabernacled among men. Jesus' disciples saw His glory, "such glory as befits the Father's only Son." (NEB)

II. Detailed Explanation of the Text

V. 15 is parenthetical, introducing at this point the witness of John the Baptist to the preexistence of Christ, which was implied in v. 14.

"*John bore witness* (historical present tense) *to Him.*" The Fourth Gospel is not interested in John the Baptist as a forerunner of Jesus, nor in his baptism. It continues to emphasize John the Baptist as a witness to Jesus.

"*And cried*" (perfect tense used with the force of the present). Both this verb and the previous one speak of the testimony of John the Baptist as having present significance. *κηρύξεν* is used again at 7:28, 37; 12:44 to introduce important pronouncement by Jesus.

"*He who comes after me ranks before me, for He was before me*" (cf. 1:27, 30; Matt. 3:11). Jesus, who comes after John the Baptist in time (Luke 1:36; Mark 1:4-9), ranks before him in glory, power, and dignity. Between Jesus Christ and John the Baptist there is a difference as between the Infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal (contrast 1:1 with 1:6).

V. 16 is explanatory of v. 14.

"*From His fullness.*" "Fullness" occurs only here in John. The term is used in the same way of the "fullness" of Christ in Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:19; 2:9. It looks back to v. 14, where it is said that Christ was "full of grace and truth." Christ's "fullness" is an abundant source of blessing that includes the full measure of all the divine powers and graces concentrated absolutely in Christ, the incarnate Word.

"*Have we all received.*" If John the Baptist is speaking, the "we" must be the prophets. But it seems best to understand the "we" as including all Christian disciples. The subject of *ἐλάβομεν* is wider than that of *ἑθεασάμεθα* in v. 14, where the thought is of contemporary witnesses of the public ministry of Jesus. They were not the only ones who received of His fullness. What they once received now belongs to all who believe through their preaching. The "we all" implies all true Christians.

"*And* (exegetical *καί*: "that is to say...") *grace upon grace* (*χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος*)." (1) Chrysostom understands the sentence to mean that Christians have received the higher grace of Christ *in exchange for* the grace of the Law, "for even the things of the law were of grace." But the point of v. 17 is that grace did not come through the Mosaic Law, the word "grace" being explicitly confined to the grace of Christ. Furthermore, the grace of God is not available in two different grades. (2) *ἀντὶ* here implies *correspondence* rather than *substitution*. The idea would then be that the grace which the Christian receives corresponds to the source of the grace in Christ. (3) *ἀντὶ* means "in place of," "grace in place of grace." C. F. D. Moule translates: "We have received one favour in place of another —

a succession of favours."¹ It seems best to take this phrase in this third sense. The Christian life is based entirely on grace. As it proceeds, one grace is received in place of another. Each blessing received becomes the foundation for a greater blessing. One manifestation of the unmerited favor of God in Christ is hardly gone when another one arrives, like the waves that follow one another on the seashore, one constantly taking the place of another.

V. 17 further elucidates v. 16.

"The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." In this verse the main emphasis lies on the contrast between Moses and Christ, between Law and Gospel. The Law did bear witness to Christ (5:39), but Moses is primarily an accuser (5:45) and a negative witness to Jesus. The Law "was given through Moses," i. e., he was only the mediator through whom God gave the Law, but grace and truth "came through Jesus Christ," who is Himself the Source of grace and truth. The Law, though good in itself, was unable to save. It made demands, but did not possess the pardoning grace needed by sinners who are confronted with these demands. "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ," who by His redeeming life and death merited the grace and showed Himself to be the Truth. The sinner who experiences grace and truth in Jesus Christ no longer asks chiefly what God has commanded or forbidden, but rather what, apart from any known command or prohibition, will please the Father. The sinner does this not to gain reward or to avoid punishment, but because of his desire to please the Father. This new relationship to God is possible for the sinner only through the grace and truth in Jesus Christ.

"Grace and truth" (ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ

¹ C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 71.

ἀλήθεια)." This pair of words recalls the Hebrew pair *hèsèd w'èmet* (e. g., Ex. 34:6; cf. 33:22, *δόξα*, in the same context). The two Hebrew words are closely related in meaning (signifying God's loyalty and faithfulness to His covenant and to His covenant people), but in the Septuagint *hèsèd* is most often rendered *ἔλεος* and has the meaning "grace," "undeserved favor." In this sense it underlies the New Testament use of *χάρις*. *ἀλήθεια* retains more of the meaning of *'èmet*, a term used absolutely in the Old Testament to denote a reality that is to be regarded as "firm" and therefore "solid," "valid," or "binding." It thus signifies what is "true." When used in the Old Testament of persons, it sometimes expresses that which predominantly characterizes their speech, action, or thought.

"Grace" (*χάρις*)." This characteristically Christian word does not appear in the Gospel of John anywhere except four times in the Prolog (1:14, 16 [bis], 17). It is used elsewhere in Johannine literature only in salutations (2 John 3; Rev. 1:4; 22:21). The word is never spoken by Jesus in any of the Four Gospels (except in the sense of "thanks," Luke 6:32, 34; 17:9), and it does not appear at all in Matthew or Mark. In Luke it is applied occasionally to the special favor of God to individuals (1:30; 2: 40, 52). The Christian understanding of this term as *grace* is derived from Paul, who regularly uses it to designate the condescending love of God in redemption, as contrasted with the legalism of the Mosaic Law (e. g., Rom. 5:21; 6:14). Though the term "grace" is not used in the narrative of John's Gospel, its meaning emerges in this Gospel as love (e. g., John 3:16). Grace emerging as love is illustrated in the careful narration of the story of the woman of Samaria (ch. 4), the healing of the cripple at Bethzatha (ch. 5), the healing of the man born blind (ch. 9), and the raising of Lazarus (ch. 11).

"Truth" (*ἀλήθεια*)." This is one of the key

words of the Fourth Gospel. It occurs 25 times in this Gospel and 20 times in the Johannine Epistles, while it is found only 7 times in the Synoptists and not at all in the Apocalypse. In the Fourth Gospel the term sometimes means simply that which corresponds to fact, or is not false (5:33; 8:40, 44 ff.; 16:7). But more often it means the Christian revelation brought by and revealed in Jesus (1:17; 8:32; 16:13; 17:17, 19; 18:37; perhaps also 1:14; 4:23 f.). This revelation arises out of the faithfulness of God to His own character, and to His promises, of which it is the fulfillment. It is saving truth (8:32). It is perceived only through the work of the Spirit (16:13). This truth is Jesus Himself, who being God (1:1), is the Fulfillment and Revelation of God's purposes. (14:6)

V. 18. Not only had the Law been given through Moses (v. 17), but Moses enjoyed the great privilege of speaking with God "face to face" (Ex. 33:11). Yet even Moses did not "see" God, i. e., he did not get to know God in all His fullness. (Cf. Ex. 33:18-23; Deut. 4:12; John 5:37; 6:46; 1 Tim. 1:17)

In a much broader perspective, v. 18 sets forth the whole historical relationship of men to God. God is visible to no human eye. He sees, but is not seen. No theophany has granted the much-desired privilege of the vision of God (6:46; 14:8). Nevertheless God is not altogether isolated and removed. Men have heard His voice, for the Word is the means of His revelation to men, and that Word of God has become flesh in Jesus, the only Son of God. (1:14)

"No one has ever seen God." The Greek word order emphasizes God: "God no one has seen ever."

"The only Son." Correctly translated "only," not "only-begotten."² But "μονογενής

² For a detailed explanation for the reason why *μονογενής* was incorrectly translated "only-begotten" instead of "only" in certain New

θεός" ("only God") has better manuscript support than "*μονογενής υἱός*" ("only Son"). *μονογενής* occurs again in John only at 1:14; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9, and in the last three instances in connection with *υἱός*, so that the tendency of scribes would be to replace the more difficult *θεός* here by the more familiar *υἱός*. It is possible, though patristic evidence does not altogether favor the view, that *μονογενής* is not to be taken as an adjective qualifying *θεός*, but that *μονογενής, θεός, ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς* are three distinct designations of Him who is the Exegete (the verb is *ἐξηγήσατο*) or Interpreter of the Father. Whether one prefers the reading "only God" or the reading "only Son," the sense is the same. The Son is the Word, and the Word is God (1:1). Both terms refer to Christ's trinitarian Sonship.

"Who is in the bosom of the Father." NEB translates this phrase: "He who is nearest to the Father's heart." *ὢν* stands for eternal being, the relationship between the Son and the Father prior to the incarnation.

"He has made Him known." The invisible God has now in Christ been manifested in His glory, grace, and truth. The aorist (*ἐξηγήσατο*) indicates a particular period in time, i. e., that of the life of Christ on earth, during which He has made known God as Father.

The last words of the Prolog (v. 18) set forth briefly the theme of the Gospel that is to follow. The entire Gospel account is the *ἐξήγησις* or the manifestation to the world and to the disciples of God's glory in Christ.

III. Application of John 1:15-18 to the Fourth Sunday in Advent

The Fourth Sunday in Advent has been particularly designated as the *Praeparatio*, the

Testament passages, see Dale Moody, "God's Only Son: The Translation of John 3:16 in the Revised Standard Version," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXII (1953), 213—219.

Preparation, possibly more in anticipation of Christmas than of the Second Coming. The Introit speaks of the joy the church experiences in the salvation to be ushered in by the birth of the coming Christ Child. The Collect for the Day emphasizes the coming of the Lord Jesus and pleads for the help of His grace for our life. The Epistle (Phil. 4:4-7) speaks of rejoicing in the Lord because "the Lord is at hand." In everything

we are to go to God in thankful prayer, being assured that His peace will keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The Gospel (John 1:19-28) follows immediately after the words considered in this exegetical study. It gives the witness of John the Baptist to Jesus, which ties in directly with v. 15, as well as with the succeeding verses.

St. Louis, Mo. ARTHUR H. STREGE

A Suggested Outline for John 1:15-18

Properly emphasize God's blessings.

Theme: "The Christmas Blessing in the Words 'Grace and Truth Came by Jesus Christ'"

I. The Source of This Blessing

The eternal Word (Col. 1:15; Heb. 12:23)

The only Son of God, alone able to reveal God's nature

II. The Nature of This Blessing

Far superior to OT blessings (Rom. 4:15; 10:4; Gal. 4:45; 2 Cor. 3:7-11; Hebrews, *passim*)

Offers us grace and truth

In richest measure, *χάρις ἀντὶ χάριω*. The fullness of the Godhead communicated to men (Col. 2:9; Eph. 1:23)

Seward, Nebr. WILLIS LAETSCH

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

MATTHEW 1:18-23

The Text and the Season

The mighty act of God initiated at the Annunciation and celebrated by the faithful in the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord is the Incarnation. But the Incarnation was not just an exhibition of divine power, intended by God to impress His human creatures with His infinite capabilities and to provide them with some intriguing grist for their philosophical mills. The Incarnation was God's answer to man's desperate need. It was an incarnation for man's salvation *from* sin, death, and hell, *for* service in the Kingdom of Grace, forgiveness, and life. The contemplation of this mighty act of God can only arouse joy and gladness in the hearts of the faithful.

These three things: Incarnation, salvation, and the response of joy and service, are the heart of the Feast of the Nativity. Thus the

Introits (properly are provided for two celebrations) center our attention on the fact that He who was made flesh is the mighty God, the eternal Son of the Father, and call on His people to sing a new song. The Collect for Christmas Day is a prayer for salvation from the yoke of sin, a plea that can be made only because the only-begotten Son was born in the flesh. The Epistles again proclaim the mystery of God appearing in flesh, with the Titus pericope emphasizing especially the purpose of the Incarnation, namely, salvation *from* sin *for* service. The Graduals reflect the truth that the Child is the Son, but emphasize particularly (especially the second one) the response of God's people in rejoicing and service. The Gospel speaks of the when, the where, and the how of the Nativity. It reaches a climax in the angel's words, "Savior . . . Christ, the Lord!" and in the rejoicing of the heavenly host.

In the framework of these emphases our text fits in a most satisfying way.

Introduction

Where is the real joy of Christmas to be found? In gifts, visits of friends and relatives, greetings and well-wishes? Many think so, but they are wrong. The true joy of Christmas is something that lasts, and this certainly is not to be found in gifts that wear out, greetings that are forgotten, and visits that must come to an end.

The true joy of Christmas is something that can take possession of our heart and remain with us throughout life. If you do not know what it is, then consider well what this text has to say and the light it throws on:

The True Joy of Christmas

I. *It Is the Joy That Comes from Believing That Jesus Is Our Savior from Sin*

A. Joseph's experience

"I almost missed the true joy of Christmas. I was horrified when Mary told me she was expecting a child, and I decided to put her away privately. But all this was changed by the message from God's angel that this Child was JESUS, the promised Savior from sin. What joy filled my heart!"

B. Many today do not think much of this revelation

They think it more "relevant" to view Jesus as a Savior from social ills and emotional problems. But God's word is: "He is JESUS, the Savior from *sin!*"

C. Sin is our basic problem

God intended the world to be a place of holiness, love, and peace. But we have fixed that! Holiness? We know only lust, evil, and filth. Love? We know only hatred, prejudices, ill will, and self-love. Peace? We know only hurting, quarreling, estrangement, and a "peace" that must be maintained with an atomic stockpile.

D. Therefore God's message ought to fill us with joy

Jesus is our Savior from sin. He came to suffer for our crimes. He came to bear our

guilt. For His sake God forgives and adopts us into His family. Believing this brings the true joy of Christmas.

II. *It Is the Joy That Comes from Believing that Jesus Can Save Us from Our Sins*

A. Can Jesus *really* save us?

Consider Hoshea, the last king of Israel. His name, too, means "helper," "deliverer," but he failed miserably. Is "Jesus," perhaps, a meaningless name?

B. Consider *who* this Child is

He is the eternal Son of the Father, conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of a virgin. Incarnation! Hence His name is "Emmanuel," "God-with-us." Can *He* save us? With God all things are possible. In Jesus we have not only a Savior, but a Savior who is God!

C. Never forget this

Satan strives to raise doubts: "How could Jesus bear the sins of *all* men? How can He give forgiveness through *faith?*" But Jesus is "God-with-us," and in His almighty power and incomprehensible love we have the assurance that He can and does save us from sin.

Conclusion

Believe this and find joy, a joy that lasts long after the Christmas gifts are gone and forgotten, long after the Christmas tree has been thrown on the trash heap. We are celebrating the birth of "Savior," "God-with-us," of Him who came to save His people from their sins!

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

LUKE 2:25-32

The Text and the Season

If there is any word which strikes the keynote for the Sunday after Christmas, that word is "salvation." God has acted. He has sent His only-begotten Son, as a man, into the world of people to save them. He reigns

as the God of majesty and power, whose strength is more than enough to reach out and rescue men from the bondage of sin, death, and hell. Thus it is that the basic concept expressed in the Introits (there is a choice) and the Gradual is the quotation from Ps. 93:1: "The Lord reigneth, He is clothed with majesty, etc." The Epistle echoes the word "salvation" by declaring that "God sent forth His Son . . . to redeem those who were under the Law." The Gospel reflects this same idea by calling to our attention two people of old who were waiting for God's salvation (Simeon and Anna) and by pointing to the joy and thanksgiving upon seeing the Christ of God. The Collect is a prayer that can be offered to God only by those who have seen God's salvation in Christ, for only they who know and rejoice in this salvation would ask to "be made to abound in good works."

The text reechoes the keynote, "Salvation," But it points out a fruit that comes from the experience of God's salvation in our lives, and that fruit is *peace*.

Introduction

This text brings us face to face with an unusual man. His name was Simeon. He was just, devout, and earnestly looking forward to the day when God would send the promised Savior into the world. This in itself was not unusual, for there were others in Israel who also had this earnest expectation. But what was unusual about Simeon was that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had actually *seen* the Christ. The day came when Simeon did see, and what he said on that occasion is well worth our attention for it reveals to us:

The True Peace of Christmas

I. *It Is the Peace That Comes from Seeing God's Salvation in Christ*

A. Get rid of false notions

The peace spoken of here is not the abolition

of war and strife in this world. Many think this is what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of "peace on earth" and the "Prince of Peace." But see Matt. 10:34-36; 24:3-7. Neither is this peace a freedom from "fightings and fears within, without." See Rom. 7:18-25.

B. This peace comes from "seeing" God's salvation in Christ (v. 30)

It was not the physical act of seeing Jesus that brought peace to Simeon. Rather it was "seeing" with the eye of faith. The Spirit gave him grace to recognize that this little Child was in truth the long-promised Savior, bringing salvation to the sons of men.

So it is today. Many "see" Jesus, know all about Him, but they keep their eyes closed to the truth that He is God's Salvation, come to bring forgiveness and life. But the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of faith in many, as He did with Simeon, and then there is recognition and acceptance of the truth that there is salvation in none other.

This "seeing" by faith in God's Gospel promises brings the "peace which passes all understanding."

C. This peace is available to all (vv. 31 to 32)

God's salvation is not restricted to certain races and classes. It is for *all*, Gentiles and Jews; and if for *all*, then it is for *you* too!

II. *It Is the Peace That Abides in the Heart in Life and Death*

A. Simeon's case

It is generally assumed that Simeon was an aged man, near death (but note that the text does not actually say this). Hence, his reference "depart in peace" is frequently taken to mean: "Let me die in peace."

B. However, the words are capable of a general application

They can also be understood in this sense: "Lord, I see the salvation You have prepared. Let me now go in peace to face what-

ever lies before me." This is the sense in which Simeon's words are used in the Communion liturgy.

C. And so it is with the peace which Christ gives to His

As often as I "see" through Word and sacrament the salvation God has prepared in Christ for me, peace reigns within my heart.

I can face life with all its problems, evils, griefs, and miseries and rest secure in the salvation God has prepared for me. I can face death with all its terrors and rest secure in the salvation which God has established for all.

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