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ARCHIVES

HOMILETICS

INTRODUCTION

Some people, as the initial outline tells it, are hard pressed to see their daily lives as epiphanies. And some people reveal themselves—and Him of whom they are continuous epiphanies—in almost all that they do. When in addition such people are able to lead us to Bethlehem and beyond to see in a new light those things that have been revealed to us, they are worth grateful following. Give these sermon suggestions some concentration, and then your own expansion, and you may have just the leaven you need to get a rise out of your people.

Elmer Witt said of his contributions, “. . . worked on variety . . . ‘ways’ of signaling the Gospel—rather than only via the ‘forgiveness’ motif. Hope it’s clear and hopeful.” That might be a good resolution for special effort during the days of Epiphanytide: to signal the Gospel in every sermon in a fresh mode. If wise men aren’t making it to church these days, it isn’t because they lack transportation. Horsepower surpasses camel power. The motivation must be there. The Gospel, hung like His star to draw men to our Lord, can supply it. Men walk miles for that and are made wise.

While you are at it, give some attention to the variety in outlining that appears in these sermon starters. Good outline phrasing sets up signals for followers too. Preachers who are afraid of being too obvious if they openly state their division headings often becloud the issue. Even earnest followers are left wandering around the courts of the Lord asking, “Where is he?” Hang them up where everyone can see and hear. Keep their eyes on where you are leading them until they too come and stand over where the Holy Child is, until they too go back into life to live another way.

With the beginning of another Lent many congregations will be concentrating on their outreach with the Gospel. What a power if the sermons you preach could go on echoing your phrasing of the Gospel . . . the Gospel . . . the Gospel . . . Comes a little booklet to help you achieve just that. It is from the typewriter of Richard R. Caemmerer, the Dean of the Chapel of Concordia Seminary, and the dean of homiletics for thousands of you parish preachers. The Said Dean—there was a Red Dean of Canterbury, you remember, and that is precedent for such a capitalized title for one who is a dean of the spoken Word—the Said Dean of Concordia has produced a four-chapter guide for group discussion called “When the People Preach.” You might wish to use it for pre-Lenten discussion groups to help persuade your people to echo your sermons. “People listen to people. The Word of God was set up by God Himself to be the Word as a person, a man, the man Christ Jesus. What one person cannot do, because he isn’t in some individual’s neighborhood or doesn’t speak his language or appear to be trustworthy to him, another can.” (Try ordering it through Concordia Seminary Book Store. It’s \$1.50, and five or more copies to the same address are \$1.35 a copy.)

GEORGE W. HOYER

JANUARY 6, THE EPIPHANY

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Ordo A</i>
ISAIAH 49:1-7	ISAIAH 60:1-6
EPHESIANS 3:1-12	EPHESIANS 3:2-3a, 5-6
MATTHEW 2:1-12	MATTHEW 2:1-12

The standard lessons and Ordo A are the

same for the Epiphany, focused on the Gospel account of the Visitors from the East.

By definition, the Epiphany deals with mystery . . . the mystery of Christ, the secret plan now revealed that through the Gospel Gentiles are joint heirs with Jews. We dare not trivialize the mystery behind the mystery:

God Himself who is Love.

The Epiphany deals with nature: distant land, star, gold, frankincense, myrrh. The created universe waited with eager expectation (Romans 8) for Him through whom God decided to bring the whole universe back to Himself. (Colossians 1)

The Epiphany deals with people: astrologers, Herod, all Jerusalem, chief priests, teachers of the Law, the mother of our Lord. Each responds negatively or positively to the story of the star. Christmas and Easter spotlight the acts of God. Pentecost and Epiphany are feasts of response.

SERMON OUTLINE — MATTHEW 2:1-12

People of God are often hard pressed to see their own daily lives as epiphanies. Life is mostly a drag with constant demands and not enough time for relationships and things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable. It's easy to feel stuck in life, at age 14 or 84. People need and want to see, hear, and feel again the awakening and enabling power of God.

Our Leader Takes Us to Himself

I. *God brought astrologers to Life*

Laymen doing their daily tasks.
Nature meant to be servant of God and man.
The Herod-system got in the way.
But God brought "outsiders" to the Child.
They sought a king but found Life.

II. *God brought us to Life*

His love in Christ *revealed* to us at Baptism.
Out of darkness into *marvelous* light.
Redeemed us: *restored* us to His original value and purpose.
Changed us from enemies into *friends* through the life, death, and resurrection of the Child.
And made *friendship* possible with others.

III. *God keeps bringing us opportunities for Life*

Astrologers between trips? Bethlehem was a high.

Sometimes God takes us on trips. Sometimes we seem to stand still. His life enables us to survive lows and celebrate highs . . . to see our life as a festival of opportunities revealing His friendship:

- in relatives, neighbors, friends
- at work, home, school
- in nature struggling to remain servant
- in modern Herod-systems frustrating the will of God
- among sick, poor, oppressed, hungry, lonely
- in worshiping community of believers
- in the promise of His presence

Conclusion: Is. 46:3-4 — Pagans carried their gods; Yahweh carried Israel. In highs and lows our Leader takes us to Himself in a festival of opportunities.

JANUARY 9, EPIPHANY I

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Ordo A</i>
ECCLESIASTES 12:1-7	ISAIAH 42:1-4, 6-7
ROMANS 12:1-5	ACTS 10:34-48
LUKE 2:41-52	MATTHEW 3:13-17

The standard Gospel lessons continue with the epiphanies in the temple, at Cana, and on the holy mount of Transfiguration. Ordo A omits post-Epiphany and pre-Lent and begins numbering the Sundays of the Year. It includes the epiphany at our Lord's baptism in a sequence describing the beginning of His public ministry.

The standard lessons have a youthful tone. Ecclesiastes contrasts old age and youth. Romans — the living commitment of our transformed nature. Luke — the lad Jesus takes His Father seriously in the temple.

Ordo A zeroes in on the particularity —

and ordination, if you will — of Jesus as the One sent by God. He is the Chosen One bringing true justice to the nations. He is appointed universal Judge. The voice from the cloud identifies Him as "My own dear Son."

SERMON OUTLINE — MATTHEW 3:13-17

Whom can you trust today? You don't find that listed in the Yellow Pages! Salesmen doubt customers; customers suspect salesmen. Students question the integrity of teachers; teachers are very uneasy about students. Politicians mistrust voters; voters distrust politicians. Parents lack confidence in children; children are uncertain about parents. Nothing seems to work. Nothing seems to last. "Even friends have changed!" Reliability is extinct.

Your Assignment, Mr. Jesus: Be the Holy One of God

The Commissioning Service

After a general baptism in the Jordan River, John baptizes Jesus in order to do all that God requires.

The Baptizer recognizes the baptism as Jesus' I. D. card as the Son of God, the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (John 1). Later, Jesus relates baptism to His suffering and death (Luke 12 and Mark 10). He is ordained, anointed, commissioned to Calvary and an open tomb. The dove and the voice bring the hand of God into the open. Jesus preaches, heals, teaches and prays. But the end is in sight. He is the One born to die.

Mission Accomplished

The Father's delight is not misplaced in His beloved Son. He is the holy, Chosen One of God. The Word became a human being and lived among human beings. Creation and creatures are torn from the Creator. He puts them together again, ordained to be Reconciler at His baptism. At our baptism we are buried with Him and share His

death. And His rising from death gives us new life. Mission accomplished. He is trustworthy. What He is sent to do gets done. What He promises happens. Reliability returns.

All the Reports Are Not In

No printed statistics are available, but the work of the Holy One goes on . . . in us. We trust Him and His mission accomplished,

sin for us, one-for-all;
death for us, once-for-all;
life for us, all-in-all.

And because He trusts us — with the care of His world, with the message of reconciliation, with the well-being of fellow human beings, with His own love — we can begin over and over again to trust ourselves to take God seriously, in early youth and golden age. And miracle of miracles, we can learn the risk, adventure, and fun of trusting others. God is not partial. The Holy One of God treats all alike. So can we.

Conclusion: As in the life of Jesus, trust begets trust. It is demonstrated, not commanded. We trust because we have been trusted. Others will trust us as we show our trust in them.

JANUARY 16, EPIPHANY II

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Ordo A</i>
DEUTERONOMY 18:15-19	ISAIAH 49:3, 5-6
ROMANS 12:6-16	1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-3
JOHN 2:1-11	JOHN 1:29-34

The standard lessons in Deuteronomy and John signal the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He is the One like Moses to whom we ought to listen. Cana-wine is the first sign by which He reveals His glory. The Epistles for Epiphany I, II, and III, a serial reading from Romans 12 on Christian behavior, are amaz-

ingly rich but difficult to correlate with the other lessons.

The lessons for Ordo A jell more readily, focused also on Jesus beginning His public ministry. This week He belongs to the nations, the Light of God's forgiveness of the whole world. The Baptizer is front and center, introducing the Lamb of God.

SERMON OUTLINE — JOHN 1:29-34

Many people believe in mini-God. They acknowledge Someone above and beyond and maybe even His Christ. But He's restricted to selected areas of life, possibly only the life to come. God is spiritual, they reason, and therefore limited to ancient angels, ancient heroes, ancient faith, ancient preaching, prayer, sacraments, worship, and the like.

While man lives out his maxi-life searching for work that is satisfying, struggling to stay healthy, protecting his property, choosing war or peace, seeking dignity as a member of a minority, fumbling for honesty and pleasure as a sexual being.

Thou shalt not cramp the Lord, thy God!

God Unlimited

Three nouns held together by verbs . . .
Lamb

John had a ministry to defend, a following to protect. But that was all small-time now. The preferred One had come, "greater than I!" This is the Lamb of God.

Lamb means more than gentleness, meekness, and humility. It is Judaic talk for sacrifice. John blends the Passover lamb (Exodus 12) with the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). The old sacrifices were not enough. Bulls and goats and lambs could not do the trick. "God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place." (Hebrews 10)

The verb: *look*. Look at the Lamb, for the Lamb has looked for you. — Later John asks, "Are you the One who is to come, or should we *look* for someone else?" — The Lamb is

to be seen, to be dealt with, to be accepted or rejected. He cannot be ignored.

Sin

God knows man, and man knows sin. The human condition includes the facility to mess things up. We distort His truth, fail to meet our potential, rebel against His care and wisdom, destroy our relationships with others. We are obsessed with authority and play the "domine" theory of being "lords" when we are meant to be servants. We refuse to see the good in others or seek the good of others. Left alone, justice and righteousness is not our thing.

The verb: *take away*. God laid on Him, the Lamb, the iniquity of us all, and He carried it away. "You were set free by the costly sacrifice of Christ, who was like a lamb without defect or spot" (1 Peter 1). Sin, guilt, punishment, and shame are out. Love, forgiveness, freedom, and dignity are in. It's GOD UNLIMITED. It's amazing, abundant grace. "Where sin increased, God's grace increased much more!" No small God. No small grace.

World

The object of the unlimited God's unlimited love is the world. With no strings attached. Nations: Medes, Parthians, Swedes, Congolese, Guatemalans, Chinese, Russians, Canadians. People of all traditions and colors: Jews, Polish, Black, Czech, American Indian. All situations: married/single; women at work/women at home; employer/employee; artist/mechanic; laborer/executive; laity/clergy. All conditions: haves/have-nots/haves-and-want-mores; educated/noneducated; overcrowded/overlonely; first, second, and third worlds; youth/adult; female/male. The goal: to know that in the Lamb "actually everything belongs to you," and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to GOD UNLIMITED. (1 Corinthians 3)

The verb: *love*. His love and our love. What else? Conclusion: In the Lamb we find

our potential for fulness of life in the fulness of God.

JANUARY 23,

THE TRANSFIGURATION

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Ordo A</i>
ISAIAH 61:10-11	ISAIAH 9:1-4
2 PETER 1:16-21	1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-13, 17
MATTHEW 17:1-9	MATTHEW 4:12-23

The standard lessons hang together better for the feast of the holy mount. Isaiah — Yahweh comes through with integrity and praise. Peter — the witness to the divinity of Jesus is personal but Spirit-moved. Matthew — once again the cloud and the voice: “. . . My beloved Son . . . listen to Him.” The thrust: another revelation of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Ordo A launches the person-by-person, crowd-by-crowd preaching and healing ministry of Jesus. Matthew 4 picks up Isaiah 9 as John is in prison and Jesus heads to Galilee. Four disciples are called to spread the news that the kingdom of heaven is here. And Paul warns against factious groups and factitious language, which keep the King's message from having its full weight among men. The thrust: at long last the Kingdom is here!

SERMON OUTLINE — MATTHEW 4:12-23

For some people Christianity is strictly a backward look. Get the history straight, the Bible stories in good order, and we're on our way. Others maintain it's exclusively forward . . . tomorrow, the future, where we're going, and finally heaven. And in between are those struggling with the moments and eons of today. Can the past “inspire” the future in ways that make today exciting, worthwhile, and with direction? On the mount it was Moses and Elijah from the past, with Jesus transfigured for the future. But

Jesus, Peter, James, and John had to return to the present. Can we take

That Old-Time Religion?

That Old-Time Religion is RADICAL

- calls for repentance that is drastic . . . much more than sorrow for misdeeds . . . reorientation of whole life and personality
- a turning *away* from sin and a turning *toward* God, repentance is active acceptance of God's gift of faith
- repentance is change you can see as well as say and feel
- repentance is gutsy, root-ish, total experience that moves from sorrow to joy, from death to life

That Old-Time Religion has AUTHORITY

- not in the Law, or in rules, or in requirements
- the Authority is the Author, and Finisher, of faith, the Beginning and the End . . . Jesus Christ Himself
- His authority is not only that He is God but that He is fully man . . . authentic human being
- Jesus has all kinds of official power . . . in heaven and on earth . . . but His kingdom authority is supreme and personal love
- to receive His love is to receive His cross and to receive His authority

That Old-Time Religion is UNPREDICTABLE

- it's made up of surprises
- it comes through the unanticipated Spirit
- it depends on the foolishness and flimsiness of preaching
- it includes healing of all kinds of infirmities — physical, mental, emotional — with and without medical science
- it leads to unexpected places: Bethlehem, Galilee, Golgotha, the uttermost parts of

our world, our nation, our community, and our hearts

- it comes up with unlikely followers . . . laity . . . fishermen . . . politicians . . . the outcasts . . . black, red, yellow . . . capitalists, communists, socialists . . . ordinary people doing extraordinary things.
- it works in unsuspecting ways: person to person, group to group, system to system, through channels, around channels, without channels
- it transforms improbable things: sinners into saints, hate into love, a cup of water into worship, suffering into joy, weapons into tools, the past into the present, the present into the future, the cross into a crown

Conclusion: the Kingdom has come. The Kingdom is still coming. The Kingdom is here.—Let's hear it . . . and see it . . . for the Kingdom!

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Matteson, Ill.

SEPTUAGESIMA

The Standard Lessons point to this theme: Grace calls us to work.

The Old Testament Lesson (Jer. 1:4-10) records God's call to Jeremiah. By grace he was chosen before he was born. This grace put him to work as a prophet.

The Epistle (1 Cor. 9:24—10:5) shows St. Paul working hard to obtain the prize which is already his by grace.

The point of the parable in the Gospel (Matt. 20:1-16) is grace: "I choose to give to this last as I give to you." Yet this grace calls to work in the vineyard.

The lessons for Ordo A emphasize our response to God's gracious call: humble submission to His Spirit. The theme: Grace opens us to the Spirit of God.

The Old Testament Lesson (Zeph. 2:3, 3:12-13) calls us to be poor in spirit.

The Epistle (1 Cor. 1:26-31) asks us to

consider God's gracious call: "God chose what is foolish." This recognition of God's grace opens us to His Spirit.

The Gospel (Matt. 5:1-12a) is spoken to those who have been opened up by the grace of God and shows how they live.

Outline for the Gospel in Ordo A:

"Do You Want to Be Blessed?"

- I. Sure we do
 - A. The blessings we want: excitement of riches, contentment, power, self-satisfaction, superiority, getting what we want, using people, popularity (opposite of the Beatitudes).
 - B. But are they really blessings? Such "blessings" destroy us and our society.
- II. Let God bless you
 - A. His blessing is single: Jesus, who gives us God by grace alone. See the Gospel.
 - B. This blessing really blesses
 1. It fills our needs

Makes us poor in spirit—and enriches us with God's rule that makes life really full. See the Old Testament Lesson.

Makes us mourn, yearning for God to set things right—and gives us the comfort of seeing God in action making us and our world whole.

Makes us meek (not weak), courageously trusting in God and His will for us—and gives us the earth, the fullness of life.

Makes us hunger and thirst for righteousness—and gives us the satisfaction of forgiveness and the power to love.
 2. It promises glory

Makes us merciful as is our Lord—and promises mercy in the day

of judgment. We fear nothing. We have no need to feel superior. We don't even fear death.

Makes us pure in heart, single-minded in our devotion to God — and promises that we shall see God in the resurrection, which is what we really want. See the Epistle.

Makes us peacemakers, learning from the Prince of Peace — and promises that we will be sons of God. Like the Son of God, we need not use people. We serve them.

Makes us persecuted — and promises the peace of God's approval.

If you want to be blessed, desire the blessings God wants to give you in Jesus Christ.

SEXAGESIMA

The Standard Lessons point to this theme: The grace of God works.

The theme is set by the Gospel (Luke 8: 4-15). The parable of the sower shows the power of God's grace in the seed of the Word to produce a hundredfold in hearts that will receive it. Grace works!

The Old Testament Lesson (Is. 55:10-13) is a close parallel. The rain of God's grace makes us "bring forth and sprout."

The Epistle (2 Cor. 11:19—12:9) shows the power of God's grace working in the life of St. Paul.

The Lessons for Ordo A would seem to emphasize what that hundredfold yield is. The theme: Grace makes us shine.

The Old Testament Lesson (Isaiah 58: 7-10) should start with verse 6. Note that this is also the Standard Old Testament Lesson for Trinity IV which calls us to the fast that God chooses: caring for the needy. "Then shall your light rise in the darkness."

The Epistle (1 Cor. 2:1-5) speaks of the source of the light with which we shine:

"not in plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and power."

The Gospel (Matt. 5:13-16) calls us to reflect God's grace, to be what He has made us, to bear fruit a hundredfold: "You are the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world. . . . Let your light shine."

Outline for the Gospel in Ordo A:

"What Are You Worth?"

What are you worth? "About 50 thou'." Is that all? All your labor, all the agony of living, and it's all worth only dollars?

"I'm only a housewife. I don't count for much. A maid. A housekeeper. Little more."

"I'm only a kid. Maybe someday I'll be worth something. Right now I'm mainly a pain in the neck."

"Nothing. I'm too old. I'm just a burden to everyone. It's time to die."

What are you worth?

- I. By the grace of God, you are worthwhile.
 - A. We won't find much worth in the eyes of men, especially in our own eyes.
 - B. But God makes us worthwhile.
 1. Jesus' sacrifice makes us worthwhile — and shows us that we are. The power of God's Spirit in the seed of the Gospel makes us produce a hundredfold. See the Gospel and the Old Testament Lesson.
 2. He makes us salt: We make life "taste good" for those who know us. We are preservatives that keep the world from going utterly rotten.
 3. He makes us light: We dispel the darkness of ugly evil in which men stumble, hurting and getting hurt. We give security and peace as we light "the Way."

See how worthwhile God has made you! Look what He did to Paul. See the Epistle.

II. Be worthwhile!

- A. Don't frustrate the Spirit of God by refusing to be salty or by hiding your light. If we do that, we destroy ourselves.
- B. God has made you salt. Be salty! Make life "taste good" for those whom you touch by giving the love God has given you. Preserve the world from going rotten by being the world's conscience.
- C. God has made you light. Shine! By word and example dispel the ugliness and evil around you. Light up the Way, which is Christ, so others can walk with you.

Find your worth in being what God has made you, in whatever place or role you find yourself.

QUINQUAGESIMA

Still focusing on the grace of God, the Standard Lessons support this theme: Grace produces love.

The Epistle (1 Cor. 13:1-13) is St. Paul's sublime call to love.

The Gospel (Luke 19:31-43) points to God's great love as Christ begins His sacrificial journey to Calvary and compassionately heals the blind man.

The Old Testament Lesson (Is. 35:3-7) is tied to the miracle of healing in the Gospel: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened." But that "then" refers to the day of the Messiah who brings God's love: "Waters shall break forth in the wilderness."

The Lessons for Ordo A might revolve around this theme: Grace calls to obedience.

A Lutheran will look twice at the Old Testament Lesson (Sirach or Ecclesiasticus 15:15-20): "If you wish, you can keep the commandments." But in relation to the Gospel he can hear this as a call from the Christ who enables obedience.

The Epistle (1 Cor. 2:6-10) speaks of the

"secret and hidden wisdom of God," the Gospel, which gives us the motive and the power for obedience.

The Gospel (Matt. 5:17-37, or 20-22a, 27-28, 33-34a, 37. Why not add two paragraphs and finish the section?) is a call to full obedience from the Savior who brings us grace and fulfills the Law and the Prophets for us.

*Outline for the Gospel in Ordo A:**"Fulfilling the Law"*

I. The Law's accusations

Why don't you obey God? Two possible answers:

- A. I do. This is not true. He who says this deceives himself. He means only that he's trying, or doing the best he can, or doing as well as others and better than some. But he's not obeying God.
- B. I can't. This leads either to despair and fear, or to surrendering to sin and giving it full sway in one's life.

II. The Law's fulfillment

- A. Jesus fulfills it. He did not come to condemn us to hell (John 3:17). Nor did He come to abolish the Law, allowing us to do as we please, excusing our sin. He atones for our sin under the Law (Rom. 8:3-4). Compare the appointed Gospel. By the power of His love for us He changes us inside and enables us to obey God from the heart. See the Epistle.
- B. He calls us to filled-full obedience. He is not demanding a more stringent moralism. He is effectually calling us to fulfill the new life He has created in us. He gives examples:
 1. Don't merely avoid killing. Live reconciled.
 2. Don't merely avoid adultery. Live as "one flesh" in the heart.

3. Don't merely avoid swearing falsely. Let all speech and all life be lived in responsibility to God. Don't despair that you can't obey, nor pretend that you do. Open yourself to God's love in Christ and let Him change you. There is the power to obey. Compare the Old Testament Lesson.

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