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Ein Prediger muss nicht allein *weiden*, also dass er die Schafe unterweise, wie sie rechte Christen sollen sein, sondern auch daneben den Woelfen *wehren*, dass sie die Schafe nicht angreifen und mit falscher Lehre verfuerehen und Irrtum einfuehren.

Luther

Es ist kein Ding, das die Leute mehr bei der Kirche behaelt denn die gute Predigt.—*Apologie*, Art. 24

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?—1 Cor. 14:8

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## Outlines on the Wuerttemberg Gospel Selections

### First Sunday in Advent

Luke 17:20-25

A new church-year begins. May it be one of peace, joy, and blessing for every one in this assembly! At its portal the Advent season greets us. Advent, meaning "coming," "arrival," points to the coming of Christ, which is a threefold one, His coming in the flesh, His constant coming in the means of grace, His future coming in glory to judge the world. If the new year is to bring us real happiness and progress, these three comings must be considered and pondered by us and made vital forces in our lives.

Speaking of Jesus' advent, we may, guided by our text, think of it that not only He but the kingdom of God is coming. In the Lord's Prayer we send up the petition "Thy kingdom come." Jesus is the King. If He comes, the kingdom arrives, too. It is in keeping with Advent to speak of the great facts pertaining to the kingdom of God. John the Baptist, the Advent preacher of the ages, proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

Let us, then, on the basis of our text, see:

#### Jesus' Answer to the Question, When shall the Kingdom of God Come?

1. *The kingdom of God is a present reality*
2. *Its citizens must endure tribulations till the final consummation*

#### 1

The Pharisees, who according to the text asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming, had an altogether wrong notion as to its nature. They thought of it as something resembling the kingdom of David or Solomon, its strength expressed in arms and citadels, its splendor in scepter, crown, and palaces. Besides, they thought that the kingdom of God was still in the future; that the Messiah would usher it in they believed, but that Jesus was the Messiah they refused to accept. Hence they thought the kingdom had not yet come.

Jesus corrects them on both points. The kingdom is not an outward establishment, which one can confine within a certain country or class or race. It is spiritual, invisible. Nor is it merely a future matter. It is here in our midst now, Jesus says, v. 21. Of course, so He implies, one cannot see it. The kingdom of God has come. It is the sum total of believers, the communion of saints, the holy Christian Church, established here by Christ through His Holy Spirit, in which the members are bound together by the common faith in the Savior.

A wonderful kingdom! It rests on the suffering and death of Jesus, pointed to v. 25. Whoever accepts the suffering Lord as his Redeemer is a citizen. Let us in the new church-year ever be drawn closer to Him, listening to His Word, using the holy Sacrament, and our connection with the Kingdom will be strengthened.

## 2

Jesus tells His disciples another thing about the kingdom of God: there will be tribulation for its citizens. In v. 22 He speaks of days of trouble for His disciples, which will bring sufferings so severe that they would wish to see one of the days of the Son of Man. They will say, If we could see Jesus but one day in His heavenly glory, this burden would be easier to bear. But their wish at that time would not be granted. Jesus urges them not to be carried away by false hopes, v. 23.

True Christians have to suffer; cf. Acts 14:22. The world does not care for the message of Jesus but regards it with scorn and contempt. It desires not forgiveness but pleasures, not peace with God but power. Those who adhere to the Kingdom it hates and opposes. Think of Stephen, Paul, and the other apostles.

Jesus shatters in the minds of His disciples any picture of glowing outward success and world dominion they may have entertained. Let us not think that because Christianity is true, it will become popular here on earth and win universal recognition. The chiliastic notion of a temporal kingdom of Jesus here on earth where there will be no clouds, no heartaches, no enmity, is refuted by the clear statements of the Scriptures.

What a kingdom! If the new church-year, as we hope, will strengthen the bonds uniting us with the kingdom of God, let us not think that this will mean better jobs, bigger salaries, more social and political prominence. It may be accompanied by the very opposite for us.

But do not despair. The day will come when Christ will return, v. 24. Then all suffering will vanish, the Kingdom will be victorious, and everlastingly we shall see the days of the Son of Man, that is, we shall behold Jesus in His glory and share in it. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" Rev. 22:20.

W. ARNDT

## Second Sunday in Advent

### Luke 12:35-48

Who does not know that failure to prepare has often led to other disastrous failures? *E. g.*, the present leader of France has declared that his country's defeat was due to unpreparedness. Any number of speakers and writers are continually telling especially the young to prepare for future duties and tasks by education.

Every one is told that by economy and thrift he is to prepare for the rainy day. While all this warning is not to be despised, yet we are to keep in mind that there is one preparation more important than all these, the *preparation of which our text speaks*. Here in this text He who loves us better and more wisely than we love ourselves gives us a very explicit instruction concerning our preparation to meet our Lord when He comes to judge the quick and the dead. He emphasizes all that He has to say by these impressive words:

**“Blessed Are Those Servants whom the Lord, when He Cometh, shall Find Watching”**

In considering these words, let us have the text answer for us these two questions:

1. *Who are meant by the servants whom Jesus will find watching?*
2. *Wherein does their blessing consist?*

### 1

a) Those servants are watching who never forget that their Lord is *sure to come* and that they will have to render an account to the Lord. In our text it is assumed that Jesus is coming to ask us to give account. You and I, whether we die or whether we live when the Lord comes, will be asked to give an account of our life and what we have done with the gifts that God has given us, with the hours and time we have had at our disposal, with the money we have had, with the words we have spoken, what we have done and what we have not done — we must give an account. You may not have kept an account, but God has kept an account of all your words and actions, of all your emotions, of everything in your life. They who firmly believe in this coming of their Lord to Judgment, they are the servants who are watching.

This same truth is taught in many other parts of Scripture: Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Thess. 4:16; Acts 17:31; 2 Pet. 3:3-12; Matt. 12:36, etc.

b) Such a watchful servant *will not be drunken, arbitrary, and unmerciful to his fellow-men*, v. 45, not like Dives, who fared sumptuously every day, Luke 16:19; not like the fool who thought that his soul could find ease because he had much goods laid up for many years, Luke 12:19; but he will have his loins girded about; *i. e.*, he will be active in the service of his Lord, devoted and diligent in doing the Lord's will, and he will have his light burning; *i. e.*, he will be an attentive hearer of God's Word, which keeps the light of faith and of hope and of love burning within our hearts and shining in our lives, v. 35.

c) Such watchful servants also know that the *exact date or hour of Christ's coming is known to none of us*; therefore they are continually ready, vv. 38-40. Cf. also 2 Pet. 3:10; Mark 13:32; Luke 21:34, 35; 1 Thess. 5:1-3; Matt. 24:42-44; 25:1-12.

d) Such watchful servants remember also that this return is *imminent*, near at hand, vv. 35 and 36; 1 John 2:19; 1 Pet. 4:7; 1 Cor. 10:21; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Thess. 2:1-12.

*Application.* — Do we belong to this company of watchful servants? Those who have been watchful will praise God through all eternity; and those who did not watch will bewail this ever after, for this coming will decide our lot throughout all eternity.

## 2

Wherein does their blessing consist?

a) They will escape the lot of the ungodly, who will receive their punishment, vv. 46-48. Cf. also Prov. 1:24-33; Matt. 24:50, 51; 25:41-46; Luke 16:24-26.

b) The watchful servant will be richly rewarded, vv. 37; 41-44. Cf. also Matt. 25:31-40; 25:1-12. Hymn 553, 4. MARTIN S. SOMMER

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### Third Sunday in Advent

#### Luke 3:2-18

In the Advent season we love to speak of "receiving Christ." Unless we have really not believed in Christ before, we are, of course, not actually doing this. We mean to say that we wish to remind ourselves of His message; to clear away obstacles in our hearts and lives and give Him room anew; to find new courage and confidence in our atonement with God through His precious work. While the rest of the world prepares outwardly for Christmas (advertisements, household activities), we are to be busied also inwardly. That is harder. That means being made over. The forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist (Is. 40:3; Mal. 3:1; Luke 1:76-79), was sent by the Lord before His first coming in the Incarnation to prepare people in that way, turning unbelievers to faith and making believers more fully aware of the King's presence and purpose. Using his exhortation,

#### Let Us Prepare to Receive Christ

1. *Gaining, or growing in, the faith which we must have to this end*
2. *Producing the works which are the fruits of this faith*

## 1

A. "Repent." That means there must be a new heart and mind. — a. The old man, who knows only the righteousness of the Law, must be cast out and overcome, v. 5: this implies a sweeping change, which requires the almighty power of God, tremendous spiritual engineering. Though not directly implied in the text, we may well think of the valleys of despair, the mountains and hills of pride, the crooked and the rough ways of doubt and confusion, which must be leveled through the work of the Holy Spirit, Ps. 51. Also those who imagine that all is well may need such renovation. It does not do just to excuse ourselves with outward church affiliation and to imagine that all is well, v. 8. Not what we do, but what He does for us, is essential to make us His children, ready to receive Christ Jesus. — b. There must be repentance, a new mind, the mind that accepts the forgiveness of sins procured by the atoning sacrifice of Christ. This must be the gift of the Holy Spirit, John 3: 5, 6. The Spirit operates through the means of Word and Sacrament, 1 Pet. 1: 23; John 3: 5; John's baptism "for the forgiveness of sins," v. 3. Through the means of grace our Advent preparations are to be made. "One mightier than I cometh," v. 16. We must have a clear understanding of Christ Jesus. He is the Lord, the Son of God, sent into the world to bring about the forgiveness of sins and the place in His kingdom, through His work of redemption and the sending of the Spirit, v. 16. Our receiving of Christ is not empty sentiment; it is the accepting of Jesus as our Savior.

B. Do not reject this Savior! He is the mighty Judge, and resistance to Him through a stubborn refusal to accept Him results in everlasting doom, v. 17. Ex. 23: 21; 34: 7; Mark 16: 16. This is not a holiday matter; it is life or death. Houses may go undecorated, gifts unpurchased; but the heart must receive Jesus.

## 2

A. "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance," v. 8. The Lord seriously expects these works. — a. He is ever inspecting His Christians to see whether they are producing these testimonials of His presence in their hearts, these fruits of faith, v. 9. Advent is a double reminder of this fact: it tells of His first coming to make the fruits possible; it warns of His return to test their presence in heart and life, Matt. 25: 35 ff. — b. Let us be frank in detecting our shortcomings; let us be stirred by the Spirit to a fuller usefulness in the Kingdom, particularly in these days of spiritual and bodily need. Such appraisal will indicate that we need new spiritual resources, conveyed to us by the means of grace; that we need the presence of Christ in our hearts to live a life by faith in Him, Gal. 2: 20.

B. "What shall we do, then?" V. 10. What are such works? —  
 a. They are works truly worthy of repentance, v. 8, issuing forth from the power of the Spirit in our hearts; not artificial, superstitious, momentary efforts at being religious or kind, v. 7, the shamefulness of such unspiritual religion. But the Lord looks for works that truly flow from faith and the presence of the Spirit in the heart and hence indicate whether He is at home in us. Our good works are to indicate to Christ that He is at home in us; the lack of them is to indicate to us that we need Him more. — b. These works are not extraordinary, do not involve the abandonment of our callings; they pervade life as it is lived and transform it from lust, rapine, selfishness, to love, service, sacrifice. The illustrations of the text, vv. 10-14, and the strong delineation of what must be taken out of life, what must be added to it, to become an indication of the Spirit's presence. Illustrations and parallels from life today. We are not to receive Christ by hanging gaudy ornaments over the filth of our hearts; but the hearts themselves, new and clean, are to be a constant dwelling-place for the Lord.

The quickening of pulses at Christmas-time — shining eyes, eager anticipation, strenuous preparation. How much more joyous, purposeful, thorough, the preparation of our hearts for the Christ! May the Spirit Himself be our Helper through Word and Sacrament! Amen.

R. R. CAEMMERER

### Fourth Sunday in Advent

John 3:27-36

How are you approaching the joyous Christmas Festival? Occupied with the observance of ceremonies? How empty and meaningless is Christmas for the formalist! He misses the heart and center of the Christmas-message. — John and Jesus were baptizing near Salim. John's disciples were envious of Christ. These men were living in the glorious days of Christ's advent and yet failed to see it and rejoice in it. Seemingly they challenge the validity of Christ's baptism, vv. 25, 26. Their mind is occupied only with externals. The implication of their remarks to John really is: Is not your baptism, by virtue of your priority, more valid than the baptism of Jesus? In his wonderful testimony John goes to the heart of the matter: the all-important question concerns the individual's personal relation to the Messiah.

#### John's Answer to the Advent Question, How shall I Receive the Messiah?

1. *Receive Him as your heavenly Bridegroom.*

a. John is conscious of his God-appointed office, v. 28, but not his disciples. Because of his unusual birth, his unique personality,

his forceful preaching, and the great popular acclaim they believed him to be the Messiah. The Old Testament, Zacharias, and John himself had repeatedly pointed out that his office was that of the Messiah's herald, Is. 40:3; Mal. 3:1; Luke 1:76; John 1:23; Matt. 11:9 ff. Now his task is finished, v. 29. He had served as the Bridegroom's "friend," whose duty it was to ask the hand of the bride, to serve as instrument of communication between the Bridegroom and the bride, and finally to preside at the nuptial festivities. John fully understood his relation to Christ, because the Holy Spirit had enlightened his heart to know and to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Bridegroom.

b. Therefore John could rejoice. He has fulfilled his task, for the Bridegroom is ready to claim His bride. He knows that the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled, Hos. 2:19, 20; Ps. 45; Is. 61:10; Song of Sol. 4:8 ff. At the Bridegroom's voice John contemplates, listens, rejoices; for the heavenly Bridegroom is ready to enter into the blessed communion with His bride, the Christian Church. What a glorious faith! As a lamp he is willing to go out in order that Christ, the Light of the world, may shine in undiminished splendor, v. 30. John sees the storm-clouds gathering about his head. What of it? — God grant that we, too, shall see beyond the swaddling-bands next Tuesday evening and behold in the Babe at Bethlehem our heavenly Bridegroom, who has come to claim us as His bride. That alone will give us true Christmas joy.

## 2. Receive Him as the Eternal Word.

a. Christ is the personal Word, the Second Person in the Trinity. V. 27 must be understood in the light of John 1:14, 15. The glory of Christ's person is brought out by contrasting His with ours, v. 31. Man's origin is of the earth, and he must remain human. There is no possibility of man's rising to become divine, as Modernism has taught. How shall we receive Christ? Only one answer: As the eternal Son of God, the Word made flesh. Come to the manger with holy awe and wonderment, 1 Tim. 3:16.

b. Is this important? Absolutely. "No man hath seen God." Christ, the Eternal Word, reveals the will of the Father, the blessed counsels concerning our salvation, vv. 32a, 34a. Prophets and preachers also speak God's will, but mediately. Christ, however, proclaims what He has seen. He is in the bosom of the Father and can therefore proclaim the infinite love which is the ruling attribute of God. Human rationalization concerning God has resulted in ridiculous or blasphemous concepts of God, v. 31. (Examples: Sovereignty of God with theory of a double election; fatherhood of God with the idea that God will easily forget man's shortcomings.) If you would see God in His true essence, go to Bethlehem,



hearken to the words of the Eternal Word. But more, accept the Gospel of the Eternal Word in true faith. Jesus has the divine testimony that He is sent by God. St. John's gospel asserts more than twenty times: The Father hath sent Jesus. Our faith or unbelief does not affect Christ's Word, Rom. 3:4. But if your Christmas is to be blessed, then accept the Word of Him who is God's only authorized Spokesman, vv. 33, 34; 1 John 5:10.

3. *Receive Him as your only Savior.*

a. The Advent message: Is. 40:1, 2, 9—11. Hatred in war-torn countries causes untold suffering. Greater, infinitely greater, the effects of man's warfare against God. Man hates God and God's wrath kindled against man. The Messiah's proclamation: "Peace on earth!" He has removed God's wrath, Is. 44:21-23; 2 Cor. 5:19. Our Messiah-King rules victoriously over sin, death, hell; for He is the mighty God, v. 35; Heb. 2:7, 8; Eph. 1:22; Is. 9:6.

b. But you must receive Him as your Messiah-Savior. Cf. *Trigl.*, 684, 27—30. By rejecting Christ, man rejects His only Savior, v. 36b. Come to your Messiah as a loyal, believing subject, and you shall find full and everlasting salvation, v. 36a. F. E. MAYER

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**Christmas**

**John 1:14-18**

The birth of the Babe in Bethlehem's manger ought to make first-page news. It does so as little today as it did then, John 1:10, 11. But "as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name," v. 12. The Son of God became the Son of Man that we might become the sons of God. Jesus, born at Bethlehem, is the world's Great Emancipator from the slavery and bondage and tyranny of sin and Satan and hell. That is the message of Christmas. John, in our text, presents it to us in these words:

**"The Word was Made Flesh and Dwelt among Us . . .  
Full of Grace and Truth"**

Let us consider what this means:

1. *"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us"*
2. *The Word comes to us "full of grace and truth"*

**1**

a) *"The Word,"* v. 14. This term, Word, *Logos*, John applies to the Son of God, vv. 1-3, 10, 17, 18; Ps. 33:6; Heb. 11:3. "The reason why He is called the *Word*, and the real description what the Word is, v. 18 tells us. The Word is the only-begotten Son, in the bosom

of the Father, and the Father's most careful *Interpreter*." (*Bengel, Gnomon.*) He hath "declared" the Father unto us; He is the Father's *Speaker*. He is a Person distinct from the Father, vv. 1, 18.

b) "The Word was *made flesh*," v. 14. The Son of God assumed our nature, body and soul, but without sin. "God sent His own Son *in the likeness* of sinful flesh," Rom. 8:3. Man's frail, mortal condition is denoted by the word "flesh." As the Word made flesh, as the God-man, He dwelt among us, v. 14. He entered the tabernacle of our flesh for a permanent stay. He is still true man. Not His coming into the flesh, but the *mode* of so doing, belongs to His humiliation.

c) Being the Word made flesh, "we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," v. 14; not only by the eye of *sense*, in His miracles, but by spiritual discernment, by faith, we *behold*—not only see—His divine majesty, wisdom, love, grace, His glory "as of the Only-begotten of the Father." Therefore John had to acknowledge His pre-existence, v. 15; Micah 5:2. He who was made flesh was God from eternity—and is now since His conception in the Virgin's womb the God-man in all eternity.

This coming of the Son of God into the flesh was necessary for our salvation.

## 2

a) "Full of grace and truth." That is what the God-man, the Savior, brought and gave to a sinful world: *grace*, the merciful, undeserved love of God for sinners; *truth*, God's own good news (Gospel of the sinner's salvation).

Moses had nothing to give but the *Law*, which, since we are all transgressors, pronounces the everlasting curse upon us. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," v. 17; an abundance of it, a full measure, v. 14, yea, grace upon grace, grace in an increasing measure, v. 16. Through His active and passive obedience Jesus procured for us this grace, forgiveness with God, Heb. 9:24-28.

b) "Of His fulness have all we received," v. 16. How? V. 18 gives the answer. In and through Jesus, God has revealed His gracious mind toward sinners. Jesus is the Word, God's own Messenger, Spokesman, Interpreter, for He is "in the bosom of the Father," v. 18; and Jesus not only Himself preached this Gospel, Luke 18:31-33; Mark 1:14, 15, but He commanded that it should be preached in all the world, Matt. 28:18-20, "for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come," Matt. 24:14.

Our whole country is today observing Christmas as a holiday, but very few are observing the day as a *holy* day, a day made holy and commemorative by the coming of the Savior into the world.

Many are receiving gifts on this day, but the greatest of all gifts, the Gift of God for their salvation, they will not receive. Many open the doors of their homes today to receive friends, but they will not open their hearts and homes to their greatest and best Friend, who would bring them that peace of mind and heart which surpasses all understanding and which the world cannot give.

What does Christmas mean to you? Hear again the words of our Christmas text, vv. 14-18, and then let each say with a penitent and believing heart, Thank God that I have a Savior, Jesus, my only Savior. Amen.

JOHN H. C. FRITZ

## Second Christmas Day

Matt. 1:18-25

Superficially considered, v. 21 ("shalt call His name Jesus") does not seem to be a fulfilment of the prophecy, v. 23 (Emmanuel). Apparently two altogether different names are to be given the Child. Yet the evangelist made no mistake. That Child is called Jesus because He is Emmanuel, and He can be called Emmanuel only because He is called Jesus.

### Jesus Is Truly Emmanuel

1. *Because He is God with us in the flesh*
2. *Because He is God with us in the fulness of His grace*

#### 1

Foretelling the birth of Mary's Child, Isaiah says that His name shall be called Wonderful. A wonderful Child indeed! The lives of great men have been written by illustrious authors, in some cases by a large number of writers through many centuries. Compare Paul, Luther, Washington, Lincoln. None has been so highly honored as this Child. His birth is not only announced by the angels, Luke 1:31; Matt. 1:20, 21, like that of Isaac, Gen. 18:10, and Samson, Judg. 13:3. It was foretold centuries before it occurred, vv. 22, 23, four thousand years before, Gen. 3:15. Compare the many detailed prophecies in the Old Testament. His life and His deeds were recorded in the four gospels by infallible authors, who wrote by inspiration of God, and are far better known the world over than the life and the deeds of any other human being. This already stamps Him a wonderful Child indeed.

How wonderful the manner of His birth! All other human beings are the natural offspring of father and mother, human children of human parents. Not so Jesus. The angel tells Joseph: v. 20; compare Luke 1:34, 35; and God corroborates this miracle, Matt. 1:18. Virgin Birth! Stupendous miracle! The Babe of Beth-

lehem is, in fulfilment of Is. 11:1, the "fruit of the mystic rose," Mary, of the house of Jesse, and at the same time "of that rose the stem." Jesus, the Son of Mary, is Mary's Creator, to whom she owed her life and being. That is a mystery so great that Mary herself marveled, Luke 1:34. And she received the answer, v. 37, and she believed, v. 38.

Blind unbelief raises a thousand questions and proves to its own satisfaction the impossibility of this miracle. Yet it is a fact. There in the manger lies Jesus, Emmanuel, the virgin-born Son of God. Angels proclaimed Him the Son of the Highest, the Lord Jehovah, Luke 1:32, 35; 2:11. The forces of nature own Him their Creator and Ruler, Mark 4:39; John 6:19, 21; dumb creatures recognize in Him their God, Luke 5:4, 6; John 21:6; diseases of all description vanish at His word, Matt. 8:16; death submits to the voice of its Master, Mark 5:41; Luke 7:14; John 11:43; the spirits of hell do not dare to deny His deity, as modern unbelief does, Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:24, 34; God Himself proclaims this Child His Son, Emmanuel, Matt. 3:17; John 15:36, 37; Rom. 1:4.

Jesus is Emmanuel, "God manifest in the flesh," 1 Tim. 3:16. Do not doubt, do not listen to proud reason. Like Mary, believe with a humble spirit and rejoice that the Holy One has come down to dwell with those of a humble and contrite spirit, Is. 57:15. In Bethlehem the High and Holy One is with us in the flesh, and there He comes to us and is with us in the fulness of His grace.

## 2

This Emmanuel, born of the Virgin Mary, is Jesus Christ. He is Jesus. So Joseph is to call this Child, v. 21, whose name shall be called Emmanuel, v. 23. Why shall Emmanuel's name be called Jesus? The angel tells Joseph, v. 21b; He is Jesus because He is Christ, the long-promised Anointed One, who came to fulfil all that was spoken concerning Him in the prophecies of the Old Testament. Choose some of the many promises in which the saving work of Jesus, His power to save from the guilt, the punishment, and the dominion of sin is brought out, and some of the hymns of praise of the New Testament extolling Emmanuel Jesus, from Zacharias's hymn of praise, Luke 1:67-80, to Paul's magnificent, triumphant song, Rom. 8:28-39, and John's glimpses of the glory above, Rev. 4:5; 7:9, 17; 21:22. And all this is made possible only through the birth of that Child whose name shall be called Jesus, Emmanuel. If you want God to be with you in days of joy or sorrow, in life and death, in time and eternity, here is the only way: humble, childlike faith in Jesus Emmanuel, the Virgin-born, 2 John 9; 1 John 2:23. Hymn 161, 1, 20.

TH. LAETSCH

## Sunday after Christmas

Luke 1:40-55

Christmas with its festivities lies behind us. Has our Christmas joy come to end, too, with the ringing of the Christmas-bells? Some celebrations leave no aftermath but a severe headache. Have we found the true Christmas joy, the joy which does not end with the Christmas holidays but reaches forward into the new year, aye, through the coming year and all the years of our life? Let us make sure of this before we turn our faces toward the new year; let us learn of one who had found the true, abiding Christmas joy.

### Mary's Joy Our Joy

She rejoices

1. *In God's mercy*    2. *In God's power*    3. *In God's faithfulness*

#### 1

Vv. 48, 49. Mary speaks of herself and the wonderful things God has done to her; but that is merely the introduction. She knows that the miracle of her Son's birth concerns all men; it is an evidence of God's mercy toward mankind. For who are we that God should be mindful of us? Fallen to the lowest estate possible, a depth with which Mary's lowly social standing is not to be compared, sinners, rebels against God; nothing in us to make us worthy of His love. Yet He has loved us and resolved to save us from the results of our own guilt; to do this at the cost of His dearest and best. That is mercy. — To paint the mercy of God in its true colors, Mary contrasts it with her own lowliness. To value the mercy of God aright, we must have a true conception of our own condition, had the grace of God not appeared at Christmas-time. That does not spoil true Christmas joy; on the contrary, there can be no true, abiding Christmas joy without this double conviction: we desperately need a Savior; in the Child of Bethlehem we have this Savior. — What an echo Mary's praise of God's mercy should call forth in our hearts!

#### 2

The great act of mercy, conceived and planned in eternity, was carried out in the fulness of time. That was a divine act, impossible to all but divine power. Mary praises this power of God in phrases of rising strength, vv. 51-53, which reach the climax in vv. 54, 55, again a reference to Christmas. The very planning of a way of saving sinners without violating justice required divine wisdom; no created mind ever imagined this "mystery of godliness: God manifest in the flesh." God again manifested His power which in the beginning had created man and made him a living soul, now

to redeem him from his sins by the miracle of the Incarnation. Everywhere in history we see the evidences of the strength of His arm, but nowhere more plainly than in the work of man's salvation. Make no mistake: Here is God intervening and changing the laws of nature; God manifest in the flesh; the Eternal, Infinite, Almighty, substituting for man — else have we no Savior! For true and abiding Christmas joy you must find your way to the manger in Bethlehem and confess with Mary: "God, my Savior!"

## 3

It is a stupendous miracle, the birth in Bethlehem; yet, after all, only the fulfilment of divine promises extending over four millenniums. Hence Mary praises the faithfulness of God. So firm is her trust in the faithfulness of God that she speaks of the work of redemption as finished though it still lies in the future; she alone knew that she had conceived this Child, and she only by divine promise; but God had made a beginning, and so she knows it will all come to pass. But note chiefly the application she makes: He who has fulfilled His promise to Abraham and the fathers, whose mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation, He will not overlook her; He is "God *my* Savior." — If your Christmas joy is not to evaporate with the festival days, you must be able to put the emphasis on that word — "*my* Savior." That means: I need a Savior; God's Word is truth in all it says of sin, its guilt, and its consequences. That means: I have a Savior; God is faithful in all His promises. — On Wednesday of this week we begin a new calendar. Let these days be days of self-examination, of repentance, of firm trust in the faithfulness of our God. Then our Christmas joy will be abiding joy; every day of the new year we shall sing: "My soul doth magnify the Lord," etc. THEO. HOYER

