



THE SPRINGFIELDER

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HOMILETICAL STUDIES

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

MARK 13:33-37

Jesus told this parable of the porter or doorkeeper, recorded only by Mark, on the Tuesday of Holy Week (Mk 14:1). In the preceding verses (Mk 14:3-31) he foretells the destruction of Jerusalem and also His own coming in glory on the last day. When Jesus says that no one but the Father knows that day or that hour (v 32), He is speaking from the point of view of His humiliation. The fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily (Col 1:19). His work as God's servant set up a limitation, however, in the use of His divine attributes, including His omniscience. The connection between v 32 and the text: if even the Son knows not the hour for the end of the world, still less His disciples; therefore they are to watch. Men need to be alert and eagerly ready for the final coming of the Lord.

"Take heed" (RSV) in v 33, "see to it," is repeated for the fourth time in this chapter (vs 5, 9, 23). The next imperative stresses the need for alertness still more strongly: "watch, be sleepless, be wakeful." In v 34 the circumstances are specified under which the command to the porter is given. Each servant has his appropriate task; the porter's is to watch. The watching becomes the business of one, the porter. This watching is the main point of the parable. Note the present imperative at the beginning of v. 35: the watching is to be continuous. The four watches of the night are named—evening, midnight, cockcrow, and dawn—perhaps to illustrate that Christ will come at an hour when He is least expected. A doorkeeper would be inclined to sleep at night. The final present imperative (v 37) in climactic fashion ties the whole parable together. Christ is speaking not only to the four disciples (Mk 13:3) but to all of us: "Be on the watch. Stay awake until the Lord comes."

Christians today, perhaps even more than the disciples, are inclined to cease watching for Jesus' final coming. Almost two thousand years have elapsed since Christ spoke the words of our text. It is easy to think that Christ will delay His coming for a long time. His words come to us from so long ago and far away. But the Master has come once already, in the flesh, and He will come again, in glory. We must be constantly ready lest that day come upon us unexpectedly and we are caught asleep.

Since, for all practical purposes, our death is the coming of the Son of Man to us individually, we must recognize that any day may be our last on earth and that this very night our soul may be required. Life is short, the final day is not far off. Christ wants us to live as though He had gone from us only a short time and will come to us again soon. The exact time of His return is not told us so that we would not display any millennial fanaticism and so that we would not wait until the last minute to get ourselves ready. We are to live every day with a sense of the nearness of our Lord's return.

The Outline. Often it is difficult to stay awake when driving at night. More difficult is to stay awake spiritually. Sleepiness is evident in spasmodic use of means of grace, sluggish praying, lack of trust in God, lack of concern for others. Yet we are all porters, doorkeepers to whom Christ says, "Watch!" It is necessary that we **KEEP AWAKE**.

I. Because the Lord is coming again.

A. The Lord has removed His physical presence from us only for a while (v 34a).

1. Because Jesus is not with us physically, we can easily forget about Him altogether. We act as if life had no ultimate meaning or goal. Yet everything is pointing to the final redemption on the last day.
2. In a world where so much is happening and where the pressures of life increase, we do well to remember the temporality of the present existence.

B. The Lord will come at any time (v 35).

1. At a time when we least expect Him.
2. Distracted by many other masters—telephones, work schedules, social engagements. The flip cards in a television studio showing the number of seconds left can be distracting to the inexperienced speaker. In life, many flip cards force themselves upon our senses and distract us from watching for Christ's second coming. We must keep awake lest that day come upon us like a snare (Lk 21:34).

II. Because keeping awake is our job as Christ's servants.

A. If we do not stay awake, we will suffer the consequences (v 36).

1. If we fall asleep, lose our faith, then we shall find "the door shut," and the Lord will say, "I do not know you" (Mt. 25:10, 12).
2. We need such warning, too.

B. The Lord who commands us to keep awake enables us to do so.

1. By forgiving our drowsiness and sustaining our faith (1 Cor 1:8).
2. By the concern He shows in repeatedly calling us from carelessness and lassitude to alertness and readiness.
3. By assuring us of the blessed outcome of our watching for Him (Mt 25:21; Lk 12:37-38).

Gerhard Aho

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT
MARK 1:1-8

For Mark, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ coincides with Jesus' assumption of his Messianic office, which is inseparable from the work of John the Baptist. Since, according to Is 40:3 and Mal 3:1, the Baptist was the immediate forerunner of Christ whose mission it was to prepare the way for Christ, the gospel of Jesus Christ had its empirical beginning in the work of John the Baptist. Figuratively, a road had to be prepared on which God could come to deliver His people. But the preparation of such a road is beyond human ability or power. The only way for the Lord to enter the heart (v 4) is by repentance wrought by the Law and the Gospel. The baptism John proclaimed and administered was connected with repentance. He refused to baptize unrepentant persons, but

every repentant sinner baptized by John received the forgiveness of his sins. John's was a real baptism which mediated forgiveness. The same expression, "for the forgiveness of sins," is used in Ac 2:38 in connection with Christian baptism. The heart of John's preaching was the Messiah through whom alone forgiveness is possible (v7). John is Christ's humble servant. Christ is so great that He will baptize with the Holy Spirit (v 8) ---not that John's baptism was devoid of the Spirit. Christ's greatness in contrast to John is that He is Himself the sender of the Spirit who works in baptism and in the Word (Ac 1:5, 8; 11:16; Jn 16:7).

We all have need of daily repentance, as Luther reminds us. We are prone to let the love of things, the desire for a certain life style, and pride in our accomplishments supersede our need of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, when we get down on ourselves and doubt God's goodness and grace in our lives, John's message of forgiveness is comforting.

The Gospel is proclaimed in a "wilderness," amid obstacles that separate men from God. Perhaps God chose to have John work in a desert region in order to take men away from their daily interests and fix their attention on their spiritual condition. John's appearance was a sermon—a call to those who were making material things their chief concern to turn from such vanity and to look for what really counted. A man really needs very little.

"Repent," a sharp word, means primarily to have a change of mind regarding one's sin and one's relationship to God. Take a proper view of sin, your sin (2 Tm 2:25; Ac 20:21; He 6:1; 2 Cor 7:10).

John's message exerted a far reaching influence that died away in ever fainter echoes as people returned to their indifference and opposition to the truth.

Palestine in John's day was in a deplorable condition. The change proposed was not political but spiritual. Outward ills can be endured when men are inwardly emancipated through forgiveness. In order to have forgiveness we must have hearts that are prepared to receive forgiveness. That means repentance. But the possibility of repentance is already glad tidings.

The Outline. Preparations are necessary when the President of our country comes to a city. Barricades, escorts, dignitaries, all are a way of saying: Make way for the President. John the Baptist has something more than physical preparation in mind. As Christ's forerunner, he calls people to prepare inwardly: "Make way for Jesus."

We, too, need to MAKE WAY FOR JESUS.

I. By confessing our sins

A. That is a somber affair.

1. John's preaching (v4) and appearance (v6) point up the seriousness of sin. John baptized people only when they had confessed their sins (v 5b).
2. Sin has made our way crooked and has twisted our hearts. To confess one's sin requires honesty and a kind of self-disclosure that can be disturbing and threatening.

B. Yet confession is a freeing experience.

1. We no longer have to hide our sin and be miserable (Ps 32:5).
2. We no longer have to deceive ourselves and others.

3. We make way for Jesus, for Jesus receives sinners.

II. By accepting Christ's forgiveness

A. Forgiveness was the main purpose of John's work.

1. Baptism was the means of bringing forgiveness to each confessing sinner (v4).
2. John was not just a fire and brimstone preacher, but one who pointed to the forgiveness in Christ (Jn 1:29).

B. Forgiveness is brought to us through means.

1. Baptism, Gospel Word, Holy Communion.
2. Daily we receive forgiveness, for we daily sin much.
3. We make way for Jesus, for by faith we own Him as the one who remembers our sins no more.

III. By relying on His might

A. He is the great One of God.

1. John acknowledged Jesus' greatness (v7).
2. Jesus is Lord to whom belong glory, honor, and allegiance.

B. He is the bringer of the Holy Spirit (v8).

1. The Spirit fills us with power (Zch 4:6) not only to confess our sins and to accept forgiveness, but to do what is pleasing to Jesus.
2. We make way for Jesus as we rely on His might to effect in us continually that which is good.

GA

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

TEXT: JOHN 1:6-8, 19-28

John differed from other men in that he was sent from God. He was commissioned by God to witness "in order that all might believe through him." John the Baptist is the most important witness of all those cited by the evangelist John because he is the last and the greatest of a long line of prophets. John witnessed to Christ who is the light. Popular interest in John had grown until people were wondering whether he might not be the Christ (Lk 3:15). With so many reports coming in regarding John, it was obligatory for the Sanhedrin to conduct an official investigation. Messianic hopes were high and some were no doubt being inflamed to fanatical action. John gives the deputation a clear-cut, unequivocal reply. If rumors had sprung up regarding the Baptist being the Christ, John himself had given no occasion for them. His straight-forward denial evokes another question. Is he the forerunner of the Messiah described in Mal 4:5? The Jews expected Elijah to return in person. John answers with a categorical no. Another alternative presents itself: "Are you the prophet?" The reference is to Dt 18:15 where Moses speaks of a prophet like himself who was one day to arise (and finally did arise in the person of Jesus Christ). Again John says no. Various conceptions of the Baptist have now been eliminated and the questioners are baffled. So they ask John to give a positive account of himself that they might have something to report back. John responds by quoting Is 40:3. He identifies himself as the

immediate precursor of the Messiah. His own person is unimportant, for he is only a voice. Then how dare he baptize? The Jews did not interpret his claim to be a voice important enough to justify his baptizing. John's answer reveals that if they had been aware of Christ's presence, as John was aware of it, they would not have challenged his baptism because it was a divinely appointed way of preparation for the Messiah. The forgiveness that baptism was mediating was to be accomplished by Him who was already standing in their midst. John derogates himself and elevates Christ. His function is nothing more than to be a witness to the Messiah. The historical reality of the deputation's visit is emphasized by reference to the specific area where it occurred. The verse following the text describes the arrival of Jesus and John's glorious testimony to Him as the Lamb of God. This occurred the following day.

Christians need models for witnessing. John the Baptist is such a model—an honest witness. He provides inspiration and encouragement in our witnessing responsibility.

The Outline. We Christians are to be not only listeners but witnesses. What kind of witnesses? John provides a witnessing model for us. He is not only a courageous but an honest witness. He told it like it was.

ON BEING AN HONEST WITNESS

I. Speak up.

A. John could have chosen not to speak up.

1. The delegation that came to him was an important one. For fear of what they might do to him, he could have remained silent or given an evasive answer.
2. John was also well aware of the people's messianic expectations. Why disappoint them?

B. We are tempted to be silent or evasive.

1. We are timid about verbalizing our faith because we think the time is not right. Yet the "right" time never seems to come.
2. We are afraid to speak up because of what others might think about us—fanatical, too religious, too pious. Being an honest witness requires that we speak up when the occasion demands it.

II. Give Christ the glory.

A. John refused to take honor that was not rightly his.

1. Though he was sent from God, he was not the Christ, nor was he Elijah reincarnated (vs 6-7, 20, 21), nor was he the prophet like Moses.
2. Though He was Christ's immediate witness, he was still only Christ's slave (vs 8, 27).

B. We are tempted to make ourselves appear so important that Christ fades out of the picture.

1. The "I" often predominates in our speaking and doing. Christ is not given the credit.
2. Honesty demands that we acknowledge Christ's supremacy.

III. Do your work as well as you can.

A. John's work was to be a voice, no more.

1. He spoke a message of repentance and remission of sins and thereby was the instrument by which God did His work in people's lives.
2. Every preacher of the Word today is only a voice. The glory belongs not to him but to Him whose voice He is.

B. We are honest witnesses when we do what we need to do as well as we can.

1. We need to use the Word and the Sacrament faithfully.
2. But we also need to do our work—occupation, family responsibilities, community duties—as well as we can. Christ asks for faithfulness. Christ is the light (vs 7, 8) who lightens us so that through faith in Him we have both forgiveness and power.

GA

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

TEXT: LUKE 1:26-38

The historicity of the angel's appearance is stressed by the mention of Nazareth where Mary lived. Twice Luke refers to a virgin betrothed to Joseph. Jewish betrothal usually lasted a year and unfaithfulness on the part of the bride was punishable by death (Dt 22:22f). The Greek word translated "O favored one" (v 28) (perfect passive participle) makes God the agent of a special grace bestowed upon her. Mary is not able to bestow grace. She simply receives; she does not dispense. "Troubled" (v 29): Mary was reckoning up different reasons as to why this was occurring. She was upset and puzzled. The angel hastened to end the debate within her, assuaging her fear which is natural in the presence of the heavenly being. Here again the word favor means undeserved favor, divinely not humanly motivated. The last thing Mary dreamed of was becoming the mother of God's Son. The greatness of the child to be born of her is expressed in O.T. language (2 Sm 7:13, 17). The house of Jacob denotes not only the descendants of Jacob in the strict sense but his spiritual descendants through the ages (Ro 9:6-8). Mary's response to the angel's promise is not one of unbelief but of perplexity because she was still a virgin. The conception was a miracle worked by God. What the angel adds confirms Mary's faith. God can do anything. He has already permitted Elizabeth who is so old to conceive.

People are being influenced more than they often realize by the scientific outlook characterized by insistence upon empirical proof. But God's actions cannot always be explained scientifically. Faith is willing to take God at His Word. We need to live daily in the awareness that "with God nothing is impossible."

The angel announces the advent of Him who is "the beginning of God's creation" (Re 3:14). Genesis gives us the mysterious origin of the natural creation. Luke gives us the mysterious origin of the supernatural creation of which Jesus is the head. Jesus' kingdom will be everlasting. Mary is to be the mother of a new king.

Mary believes the incredible news. She submits to what the Lord is going to do with a kind of holy courage. She cannot but become the object

of suspicion to Joseph and many others. Her reputation will be at stake for a time. Faith alone could sustain her in such circumstances.

Mary, lowly, poor, living in a miserable little town, was the chosen instrument of God. Through Mary God glorified His name. He singled her out from all the women of mankind. Therefore we honor her, but we will not make her the queen of heaven. Christ is our mediator with God, not Christ's mother. God's grace made Mary what she was.

Mary will conceive by the power of the Spirit. Her child is both God and man and therefore the perfect mediator between God and sinful men. In Him the human race reaches the completion God intended.

The Outline. It is hard always to walk by faith and not by sight. We want crutches for our faith—signs that God is doing something for us in a tight financial situation or in sickness. We demand continuous good health, economic security, and material comforts, explanations of why God deals in certain ways with us or with others.

Evidently Mary needed no such crutches. Faith meant saying yes to God's promise, being willing to accept it. Faith is much more than merely holding certain ideas about God. Faith is an act of the will which has to do with the inner life. Let us learn from Mary what it means to have FAITH WITHOUT CRUTCHES:

I. Being assured that nothing is impossible with God.

A. Mary believed that by God's power she would bear a child.

1. He would be the very Son of God (v 32).
2. He would be the ruler of an eternal kingdom (v 33).

B. What God by His power would do in Mary was evidence of His grace toward her (vs 28, 30).

C. Evidence of His grace to the whole human race.

1. We are beneficiaries of that grace in all our unworthiness.
2. We are part of the house of Jacob, members of an everlasting kingdom.
3. Impossible? Not at all. Nothing is impossible for God. He says it is so. No other "proof" is needed. Who needs crutches?

II. Accepting God's promise without reservation.

A. Mary accepted God's promise despite possible inconvenience (v 38).

1. Joseph would question her, and others would begin to wonder about her pregnancy.
2. The great mystery and wonder of it all did not stop Mary from submitting to what God wished to do.

B. There will be inconvenience for us, too, when we accept God's promise of mercy in His Son without reservation.

1. The devil will tell us that mercy is not that free.
2. Yet we have been favored by God—made His children, under His protection (v 28b).
3. We may not always understand His way with us, but we know that in the holy child of Mary they are ways of grace and love.

We can accept this promise without reservation. Who needs crutches?

CHRISTMAS DAY

TEXT: LUKE 2:1-20

The familiar Christmas gospel is divided into three parts: the story of Christ's birth (1-7); the appearance of the angels to the shepherds (8-14); and the visit of the shepherds to the holy family (15-20). "All the world" refers to the Roman empire in which Palestine was included. Evidently each Jew had to be registered or enrolled in the city of his ancestors where, we can surmise, family records were preserved. Mary probably was not required by law to go with Joseph for the enrollment. Joseph wanted Mary with him. Perhaps because of her pregnant condition he did not wish to leave her alone in Nazareth. It is also possible that both Joseph and Mary had relatives in Bethlehem whom they wanted to take this opportunity to visit. Since only the manger or stall is mentioned (v 11), we cannot be sure whether this was located in a shed, a crude shelter, a cave, or simply under the open sky. But Mary was forced to lay her son in an animal feeding-trough. The angel's song of praise briefly outlines what Mary's Son would do.

Good news is always welcome in a world where so much bad news is heard. Christmas is a time for gladness because God has good news for us. It is not new news in the sense of our not having heard it before. The news about the Incarnation gives our Christmas celebration the dimension it needs if we are to be spiritually and emotionally enriched by it.

Things which seem not to have the remotest connection with God's plan of salvation are nevertheless under God's direction. God operates through seemingly ordinary channels to further His cause. God's people, too, must obey worldly rules. Mary's time had come, and now God's promises were to be fulfilled. God has His own time. The Son of God assumed our flesh in order to suffer and conquer for us. He became poor (2 Cor 8:9) in order to enrich the spiritually poor. His birth merited the angels' song. The shepherds went to look, for they believed what the angels said. Believing hearts are needed. Faith is a matter of the heart.

The Outline. The events of the first Christmas are uniquely of the earth and gloriously of heaven—A crowded town, a cattle stall, a baby born, shepherds in the fields—then, suddenly an angel and a host of angels. Angels had appeared before—Zechariah, Mary—but there had been nothing so spectacular as this appearance. For the first time since the fall into sin angels could really sing on earth. They had something to sing about—news to bring, and what news!

GOOD NEWS FROM HEAVEN

1. God has fulfilled His promise.
 - A. God used men to fulfill His promise.
 1. Because God was in control of world events, the prince of Israel would be born in "the city of David" (v 11; Mic 5:2).
 2. Augustus' decree, Joseph's and Mary's Davidic lineage, and their ancestral ties in Bethlehem were used by God to bring about the birth in Bethlehem (vs 1-5).
 - B. God always keeps His promises (Pr 30:5; Is 40:8).
 1. All God's promises find their yes in Christ (2 Cor 1:20).
 2. The news from heaven today is that God follows through, stands by what He says.

II. God has become man.

A. That is amazing.

1. A mystery how God's Son could become truly man (v 7).
2. Born of a woman to experience all aspects of our humanity, except without sin (v 12).

B. That is reassuring.

1. God is not far removed from us and the predicaments unique to our humanness.
2. God, being involved in our humanity, ennoble it.
3. The good news from heaven today is that the great God made himself a part of our world and our life.

III. God has sent a Savior (v 11).

A. We needed a Savior.

1. There was war between God and man because of men's depravity and rebelliousness.
2. Examples of that war: men wanting to go their own way, inhumanity to man.

B. The Savior will make peace (v 14).

1. Remove the enmity by His life, death, and resurrection.
2. This was the reason for His coming into the world.

C. Christmas is in hearts that ponder what it means to have a Savior (v 19).

1. Hearts that receive Him in faith (vs 15-16) and from which flow words and deeds that express faith (v 17).
2. The good news from heaven today is that God cared so deeply and loved so profoundly that He sent us a Savior.

GA

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

TEXT: LUKE 2:25-38

After the forty-day period of Mary's purification was over, Mary and Joseph brought the infant Christ to the temple to present Him to the Lord, to redeem the child from temple services at the price of five shekels and to offer the customary sacrifices (cf Lv 12). V 25: Simeon is one of the last of the O.T. saints and one of the first Christians. He was just in his dealings with men and devout in his reverence for God. V 26: His special revelation was that he should not die before seeing Christ, the consolation of Israel. V 29: Recognizing the Babe as the Christ, Simeon intones the *Nunc Dimittis*, which has been used in the church for fourteen centuries. Simeon represents himself as a slave or sentinel, watching for the Christ, and prays that he may depart from his post in peace. V 30: "thy salvation": the salvation provided by God in Christ. V 31: "all people": literally "all peoples" (Is 52:10). V 32: "the Gentiles," (Is 9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3). V 34: "the fall and rising again of many in Israel": Many would fall, hardening their hearts (2 Cor 2:15-16; 4:3-4; Mt 21:42-44; Ro 9:33). Many would rise from spiritual death to faith (Eph 2:5-6). "A sign which shall be

spoken against": Many Romans and Jews spoke against Christ in the first three centuries. V 35: This verse was fulfilled as Mary stood beneath the cross. V 36: Anna of the tribe of Asher was a widow in the eighty-fourth year of her life. V 38: Anna was a real missionary. Like Simeon, she saw in the infant Christ the great ransom who would pay the ransom price. She spoke again and again to people about Him. The goal of the sermon is to lead people to rejoice in Christ's birth and to radiate their joy by sharing Christ.

The Outline. The trouble with the Christmas celebration is that it is over too quickly. But like Mary, we want to ponder these things of Christmas in our hearts and live our lives in the glow of Christmas.

LIVING IN THE GLOW OF CHRISTMAS

I. Rejoicing in our salvation.

A. Aged Simeon was a devout Christian.

1. The Holy Ghost had brought him to faith.
2. He was just and devout.
3. He waited for the promised Messiah.
4. He enjoyed the special revelation that he would not die before seeing the Christ.
5. He recognizes the Christ-child as God's salvation.
6. In faith, he is now prepared to die in peace.

B. Christ's coming into the world should have the same effect in us.

1. Christ came to conquer death.
 - a. Death is sin's wage (Ro 5:12).
 - b. Being made sin for us and paying our debt, Christ has delivered us from eternal death (1 Cor 15:55-57).
2. Christ promises us eternal life for death (Jn 11:25-26; 3:16).
3. Now we can rejoice in our salvation.

II. Eager to tell others.

A. We should tell others.

1. God's salvation has been prepared for all in Christ (2 Cor 5:19; Jn 3:17).
2. God earnestly desires the salvation of all (2 Pe 3:9).

B. We can tell others.

1. Anna, though old, showed her faith by witnessing.
2. We are to be Christ's witnesses (Ac 1:8; Mt 28:18-20).

C. Things will happen when we do.

1. Some will fall in unbelief (Jn 1:5).
2. Some will rise from spiritual death to spiritual life (Ac 2:41; 1 Jn 5:12).

Let us try to live every day in the glow of Christmas, rejoicing in our salvation and sharing the good news with others.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

TEXT: JOHN 1:1-18

V 1: In the beginning, place it where you may, the Word already existed (Col 1:18). The expression "with God" indicates personal communion. Chrysostom: ". . . with God, as person with person, eternally." The Word was God (Col 2:9). V 3: The Word is the agent in creation (Col 1:16; 1 Cor 8:6). V 4: In St. John the word *life* generally refers to spiritual and eternal life. The light shines, continues to shine. "Comprehended it not": the radical meaning of the Greek word is "to seize, take possession of." V 7: The mission of the Baptist was to point to another. V 9: Jesus refers to Himself as the Light (Jn 8:12; 12:35). V 11: "did not receive Him": cf. the parable of the wicked husbandmen, Mt 21. V 12: The word *power* means also title or warrant. V 13: The word for *blood* is plural, following the LXX. In spiritual as well as physical birth, the origination is from without, not of ourselves. V 14: The Word became flesh (1 Tm 3:16; 1 Jn 4:2; He 2:14). Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. He dwelt among us—literally, he tabernacled among us, a phrase reflective of the tabernacle in the O.T. in which God dwelt among His people. The glory of the Word made flesh consisted in His grace and truth. V 16: "grace for grace": fresh grace appears over and above that already received. V 17: The Law makes great demands, but gives nothing. V 18: The word *bosom* denotes intimacy. The goal of the sermon is to lead the hearer to thank God for the great change that came in the world and in each Christian's life as a result of Christ's coming.

The Outline: Only a few, the genius class, have left their mark on the history of civilization: Moses, Galileo, Copernicus, Luther, Newton. None has affected the temporal and eternal life of man more than Christ.

THE BIRTH THAT CHANGED HISTORY

- I. The Word was made flesh.
 - A. No man had seen God at any time.
 1. Moses could not look upon His glory.
 2. Prophets revealed His words, but did not see Him.
 - B. Jesus revealed God to man.
 1. Jesus was true God from all eternity.
 - a. The Word was with God.
 - b. The Word was God (Jn 10:30).
 - c. In the beginning with God (Jn 8:58).
 - d. All things were made by Him (Col 1:16; 1 Cor 8:6).
 2. The Word became flesh (Col 2:9).
 - a. Jesus, true God: We behold His glory in His miracles.
 - b. Jesus, true man: He was born, wept, suffered and died.
 - c. We needed the God-man to be our Savior: true man to be our substitute; true God to be a sufficient sacrifice.
- II. Grace, truth, life, and light came by Jesus Christ.
 - A. The Law was given by Moses.
 1. It demands (Dt 6:5), threatens (Ga 3:10), and damns (Ga 3:11).

2. The Law does not empower man to keep its demands.

B. Grace came by Jesus Christ.

1. Grace is the unmerited favor of God.

2. Jesus revealed God's grace in His substitutionary death (2 Cor 8:9; Tt 2:11; Eph 2:8-9).

C. Truth came by Jesus Christ.

1. God promised Christ (Is 7:14; 9:6; Is 53).

2. Christ's coming demonstrated God's truthfulness and faithfulness.

D. Life came by Jesus Christ.

1. All men are by nature in death (Ro 5).

2. Christ came to win life for all (Jn 10:10; Jn 14:6).

E. Light came by Jesus Christ (Is 60).

1. The light of forgiveness for all (2 Cor 5:19).

2. The light of God's love in every need (Ro 8:33-39).

3. The light of heaven (1 Pe 1:3-5).

III. All who receive Christ become sons of God.

A. By nature all men are enemies of God (Eph 2:1-3; Ro 5:10; Php 3:18).

B. Many remain in darkness in spite of Christ's coming.

C. By faith we become sons of God.

1. Faith alone makes us sons (Ro 4:5; 1 Jn 3:1).

2. Faith is worked in us by the will of God (Tt 3:5-7; Eph (2:4-8).

What a change Christ's coming has brought. Therefore praise God evermore, here on earth and yonder.

HJE

THE FESTIVAL OF THE EPIPHANY

TEXT: MATTHEW 2:1-12

V 1: Herod, who ruled Palestine for thirty-five years, was now seventy years old. He was great only in wickedness. The wise men were not magi, but scientists, the first Gentiles to worship Christ. V 2: "His star" is the star which signalled Christ's birth; cf. the prophecy of Balaam (Nu 24:17), a miraculous star. "Where is He?" The question reflects no doubt. V 3: Herod was troubled because he regarded Christ as a pretender to his throne. V 4: The chief priests included both the incumbent and former high priests. The scribes, well-versed in the O.T. also assisted the civil magistrates. V 5: The scribes combine the words of Mic 5:2 and 2 Sam 5:2. V 7: Herod called them privately lest he arouse the suspicion of his courtiers and lest anyone forewarn the child's parents. V 8: "That I may come": Herod crowns hypocrisy with a base lie. V 9: The star travelled from north to south now. It was probably lower than other stars. V 11: No mention is made of Joseph. The Oriental way of worship was to drop to one's knees and touch one's forehead to the ground in complete surrender. Gold is the most precious metal. Frankincense and myrrh were costly

aromatic gums distilled from trees. The goal is to encourage Christians to walk by faith according to the example of the wise men.

The Outline: "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?" Jesus asked his disciples on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee. We fear when we try to play God, attempting to face life by ourselves. God urges us to live by faith. To encourage us, the Bible gives us many examples of people who did. The wise men are models: they believed God's Word, they acted on it, and their faith was gloriously rewarded.

THE WISE MEN: MEN OF FAITH

I. Their faith rested on God's Word.

A. They really had little to go on.

1. They saw the star.
2. They linked the appearance of the star to Balaam's prophecy.
3. They trusted God's Word implicitly.

B. By comparison, we have so much more to go on.

1. We have not only the O.T. prophecies the wise men had.
2. We have the N.T. also to which the O.T. points.
 - a. We know the Christ prophesied in the O.T.
 - b. We know His supreme sacrifice prefigured in O.T. worship.
 - c. God's Word is true; it does not lie to us or deceive us.

Application: How good for us that God speaks so clearly to us in His Word. Let us diligently study it (Jn 8:31-32; 2 Tm 3:14-17).

II. They acted on God's Word.

A. They made the long journey on the basis of the promise alone.

B. They withstood the temptations to their faith.

1. The rage of Herod.
2. The indifference of the scribes.

C. Faith acts on the Word of God.

1. Examples: Abraham (Gn 12), Peter (Lk 5), the centurion (Mt 8); cf. He 11.
2. Faith is unmoved by the world, neither by those who think that Christ will interfere with their lives, nor by those who are simply indifferent.

III. Their faith was rewarded.

A. Coming to Bethlehem they found the Christ.

1. What joy was theirs.
2. In sheer joy they, as the first Gentiles, worshipped the Christ and presented Him gifts.

B. Christian faith, too, is rewarded.

1. In Christ we find all we need: forgiveness, help in life's perils, and everlasting life.
2. In faith let us diligently worship to be strengthened by the promises of God.

3. In faith let us bring our treasures, too, so that Christ's kingdom may grow.

THREE REACTIONS TO CHRIST

- I. Herod, who felt Christ would interfere with his life.
- II. The chief priests and scribes, who were indifferent.
- III. The wise men, examples of humble believers.

HJE

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

TEXT: MARK 1:4-11

St. Mark plunges right into his subject, without genealogies of Christ or infancy narratives, intent on describing Jesus as the strong Son of God. V 4: John preached in the arid regions between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. A grim and solitary figure, John, the last of the prophets, stalked among soft-robed men like Elijah come to life again. He preached repentance. The truest way to create in men a longing for Christ is to evoke the penitent consciousness of sin. Those who repented received remission and this was sealed to them in baptism. John's baptism was typical, preparatory, intended for adults who confessed their sin. Christ's baptism is for all (Mt 28:18-20). V 6: Compare the O.T. description of Elijah (2 Kgs 1:8; Zch 13:4). V 7: Note John's humility. He directs people to the powerful Son of God. V 8: Christ will baptize with the Holy Ghost as a sign of His divinity. Only He can pour out the Spirit (Jl 2:28-29; Ac 2:17-18; Ac 1:5-8; 11:16). Christ gives the Spirit to convince of sin (Jn 16:8); to change the heart (Tt 3:5); to enlighten (Jn 14:26; 16:13), to teach (Jn 14:16; 16:7). V 9: The King goes forth to meet the herald. He wanted to fulfill all religious usages enjoined upon the people. V 10: At the baptism of Jesus, the Triune God set the stamp of approval upon the work of redemption. First we have the unlimited imparting of the Holy Spirit to the Son according to his human nature (Ps 45:8; He 1:9; Ac 10:38). Christ was anointed also for His work as the Messiah (Is 61:1ff; Ac 10:38). Here Christ really began to be the Christ, says Luther. V 11: The voice from heaven (cf Mt 17:5; Jn 12:28-30), "... my beloved Son": The announcement of the Father deals with the incarnate Son and with Him as now entering upon His Messianic work (Ps 2:7; Lk 9:35; 2 Pe 1:17).

The Outline. Who is Jesus Christ? People generally agree that He is a great moral example, a great teacher, and public servant. But if that is all, then we do not need Him very badly. But Christ is much more. He is the Son of God, attested by His words, His mighty miracles, and His sinless life. The comfort we draw from Christ's divinity is that He is our Savior sufficient to win forgiveness for all the world of sinners. But can we be sure that He is the Son of God? Our text demonstrates that He is, both by the witness of John and by the witness of the Spirit and the Father.

JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

- I. His divinity is attested by John the Baptist.
 - A. John was the last of the prophets.
 1. He dressed like one.
 2. He lived like one.

B. He preached like a prophet.

1. He preached repentance; turning from sin to God (Mk 6:12; Lk 13:3; 15:7; 24:47; Ac 2:38; 3:19).
2. He baptized repentant sinners for the remission of sins (Lk 3:21; Ac 18:8; Ro 6:3; Ga 3:27).
3. He pointed to Christ as Messiah and Savior.
 - a. Christ is mightier than John, for He is the Son of God and Lamb of God (Jn 10:30).
 - b. By sending the Spirit to convert and guide, Christ will proclaim His divinity (Tt 3:5; Jn 14:16,26; 16:7,13).

Now we can be sure that Christ is the Son of God. Let us daily repent of our sin and believe that for Jesus' sake God forgives.

II. Christ's deity is attested by the Spirit and the Father.

A. Jesus goes to John to be baptized.

1. Christ has no sin of His own (He 7:26).
2. Christ was baptized to fulfill all righteousness.

B. The Spirit descended upon Christ.

1. To fill Christ with the full measure of gifts also according to His human nature (Is 61:1ff; Ac 10:38).
2. To anoint Jesus as the Christ: our Prophet (Dt 18:15; Mt 17:5), our Priest (He 7:26-27; Ga 4:4-5), our King (Jn 18:36-37).

C. The Father spoke from heaven.

1. He called Christ His beloved Son (Jn 1).
2. The Father was well pleased with the saving work Christ had come into the world to perform (Ac 10:40-41; Php 2:9-11).

What a miraculous proof of the deity of Christ. Now we know and are sure that Christ is the Son of God, a sufficient Savior from sin and death.

HJE

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

TEXT: JOHN 1:43-51

V 43: "The day following": this is the fourth day after members of the Sanhedrin came to Jesus. "Follow me": The call makes Philip a disciple. V 45: Nathanael is identified with Bartholemew. Notice the clarity of Philip's confession. Jesus had probably reminded him of the O.T. prophecies as He did in the case of the Emmaus disciple. V 46: Nathanael is skeptical. People today who have not taken the time to study the Word are often skeptical. "Come and see": to see Christ in His person and work is one sure way to come to faith. V 47: Jesus gives Philip a practical demonstration of the truth of Philip's words. "An Israelite in whom there is no guile": a true Israelite. Nathanael, a true Israelite, hoped for the promised Messiah. In him was no deceit. He was sincere. V 48: This shows Jesus' omniscience. He has knowledge of us before we have any knowledge of Him (Is 45:4; Ga 4:9). V 49: Nathanael acknowledges Jesus as the Son of God and King of Israel, the true Israel. V 50: Nathanael shall witness

something more wonderful than Jacob's ladder (Gn 28). With Christ's coming heaven is opened. The curse of the Law is removed, the enmity between man and God abolished. There is now direct communication between God and man, Jesus Himself being the mediator (He 10:19-20). Angels delighted to serve Him who came down for the salvation of the world, as they did at his birth, temptation, Gethsemane, resurrection, and as they will at His return as Judge. "Son of Man": the term is used seventy times. Jesus is the second Adam, the eternal Son of God become our brother. The goal of the sermon is the rededication of our lives to Christ.

The Outline. Jesus came not only to save the lost but also to seek the lost. His goal is to bind them to Himself in faith and love. Our text gives us an example of His seeking love.

THE SEEKING LOVE OF JESUS

I. He calls to them "Follow Me."

A. The One who calls.

1. It would be presumptuous of anyone else to say "Follow me."
2. Jesus is the Son of God and Savior (Mt 11:28).

B. The life to which He calls.

1. A life of faith (Jn 12:36; Jn 10:27; Ro 5:1).
2. A life of Christian living (1 Pe 2:9; Mt 5:12; Jn 14:23).
3. A life of suffering for the sake of the Gospel (2 Tm 2:27; 1 Pe 2:21; Php 3:10).

Application: Jesus is calling. So many refuse to accept Him (Mt 23:27). Let us accept Him anew in faith and follow Him in life.

II. He removes skepticism.

A. Philip is convinced and witnesses in a simple, straight-forward manner.

B. Nathanael is skeptical.

1. Based on prejudice.
2. Based on insufficient knowledge.

C. His skepticism is removed.

1. By Philip who says simply "come and see" (Jn 7:17).
 - a. Jesus demonstrated His divinity by signs (Jn 20:30-31).
 - b. Jesus showed His love for the world by His death (Jn 15:13).
 - c. He arose again to declare His victory (Jn 2:19).
2. By Jesus' own testimony.
 - a. His omniscience: "An Israelite in whom is no deceit."
 - b. His omnipresence.
 - c. Greater things were yet to come.
 - (1) By His death and resurrection Christ opened heaven (Jn 11:25; Jn 3:16; Mk 16:15).
 - (2) Angels ministered to Christ.
 - (3) Nathanael, the skeptic, is won.

In our moments of doubt, let us recall Christ's life and sacrificial death, crowned by His victorious resurrection, and join in the confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

HJE

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
MARK 1:14-20

The opening verses of our text give the gist of Christ's preaching as "the Gospel of the Kingdom of God," that is, the good news that the Father had now sent the Son, as promised, that He might set up His gracious rule in the hearts of men, bringing them to faith in Himself as the Christ (the Messiah). How clearly He had spoken of Himself as the Messiah both in Sychar (Jn 4:25, 26, 42), and in Nazareth (Lk 4:21). This was the message He would preach to all who would listen to Him for the three years of His public ministry.

But there must be provision for the preaching of this message after His death, resurrection, and ascension. The Lord therefore gathered disciples who not only would be with Him for a time, as they were with Him in Judaea, but would follow Him throughout His public ministry. Mark tells of the call of the first of these future apostles of the Lord.

Mark says nothing of Christ's long discourse preached to the multitudes from Simon Peter's ship, nor of their launching out into the deep where they let down their nets for a draught, nor of Simon's reaction there in the ship: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk 5:1-9). Mark proceeds at once to what was undoubtedly uppermost in Peter's mind, the call to the apostolate: "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." Note their response. Straightway, at once, they left their nets and followed Him. They left their families, their homes, as well as their occupations.

The apostles were to devote themselves fully to the task of becoming fishers of men, to catch men in the net of the Savior, which would rescue them from eternal perdition. The Lord is still catching people today, saving them through the preaching of His Word. The Lord is still finding men in various occupations today and calls them to become fishers of men. They come from the farm, from business, from the sea. They come to the seminaries to be made fishers of men. The Lord does not call all into the full-time ministry of His Word. But He blesses all who have learned to know and love Him, giving all Christians an opportunity to serve Him. Whatsoever we do we can do to the glory of God.

Most sermon-hearers are not interested in becoming full-time ministers of the Word. They might be interested in knowing that God still calls people today as surely as He called the four fishermen and that it would be terrible for one so called not to preach the Gospel (1 Cor 9:16). Not all consider it a privilege to preach the Gospel or to hear it preached. Not all people read the Bible carefully enough. Not all are prepared to leave family and friends for Christ's sake, something which the Lord expects all of us to be willing to do if necessary, as former Jews, Mormons, and others must do when they turn to Christ (1 Cor 9:20). Not all go all out to share the Gospel. But for every two or three weak Christians there is one who is strong, faithful, loving, listening to the preaching of the Word, and following his Lord. Be sure to recognize that person, too.

The Outline:

HOW CAN WE HELP TO BUILD THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

- I. By asking the Lord to rule in our own hearts and lives.
 - A. With His forgiveness.
 - B. With His love.
 - C. With His power.
- II. By following His orders explicitly.
 - A. Knowing He means us when He calls.
 - B. Knowing He will be with us wherever He leads us.

HAS CHRIST APPEARED TO YOU?

- I. Do not expect Him to come in visible form.
 - A. As He came to Peter, Andrew, James, and John.
 - B. As He came to the multitudes who heard His Word and saw His miracles.
- II. He comes today through the preaching of His Word.
 - A. Giving us the assurance of His love (the gospel of the Kingdom).
 - B. Giving us the feeling of worth in His kingdom.
 1. Making us responsible for the preaching of His Word.
 2. Bringing people to faith through our witnessing.

MJS

THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

MARK 1:21-28

Our text gives us more of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God: the good news that Jesus is truly the Son of God, who saves—in this instance the Spirit teaches us that He saves from the power of the devil.

He taught the people as one having authority. He had the right and the might so to speak and act, no one being able to hinder Him. Note His discourse with Nicodemus, who said, You are a teacher come from God (Jn 3:2). Jesus countered—after speaking of the need of rebirth through the Spirit—"we speak that we do know and testify that we have seen" (Jn 3:11). He was in full communion with the Father, having come from Him (Jn 3:13). Gone were the days of His childhood where, as a mark of His humiliation, He increased in wisdom (Lk 2:52). As a Prophet He now spoke what the Father had given Him the right and authority to speak (Jn 12:49). He, the God-man, was sent by God. Being of the God-head He was sent to carry out God's will as prophet, priest, and king; in all things obedient to the Father; given divine authority also as a man to carry out the will of God. He spoke with authority as in the Sermon on the Mount, where He repeatedly compared His teaching with that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Mt 5:21f, 27f, 31f, 33f).

The Word He spoke with this authority was often a Word of law. The power was in the Word to convict, to condemn, or to guide and direct His hearers. He spoke the Gospel with equal authority to save people and to strengthen the saved. This comes out in this text and in every text that

follows in this Epiphany season. On this occasion He freed a man from Satan's grasp. The devil and his angels have a great, though limited, authority which they use consistently to seek to destroy God's kingdom. Jesus used His authority against Satan and his demons. The strong gave way to the stronger (Lk 11:21ff). With authority He commanded the spirit to come out and it did.

Pieper says on bodily possession (Vol. I, pp. 509, 510): "The devil, under God's sufferance, takes possession of a man by personally dwelling in him so that the demoniac, bereft of the use of his reason and will, becomes the involuntary instrument of Satan. The human personality no longer functions; the devil in every person becomes the acting subject." On this subject the Holy Spirit convinces us that we dare not question the authority of the Word of God which tells us of bodily possession (Mk 1:34; Mt. 8:29; Mk 9:20ff).

Some sermon-hearers have difficulty with Scripture's descriptions of bodily possession. Satan, the father of lies, helps some to believe that he does not even exist. Some believe that Christ was merely perpetuating, either knowingly or unknowingly, the beliefs of His day. Such marks of Satan's work must be recognized for what they are. Some hearers are slow to believe even the comforting Gospel of salvation.

The Outline:

THERE IS POWER IN THE WORD OF JESUS

- I. He speaks with authority.
 - A. He has the right to speak. (This may be developed as both Law and Gospel, then and now, or vice versa.)
 - B. He has the power to persuade men with His Word. (This too may be developed as Law and Gospel, then and now, or vice versa.)
- II. His mighty acts prove His authority.
 - A. The forces of evil not only recognized Him as Lord.
 - B. They had to bow under His commands.
- III. His powerful Word has been given to us today.
 - A. To put down the forces of evil.
 - B. To bring men to a knowledge of Christ and His love.

MJS

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

MARK 1:29-39

In this text the Holy Spirit gives us more of "the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God": the good news that Jesus is truly the Son of God who came to save; in this instance He also provided His love for those He saved by freeing them of bodily ills and infirmities.

Mark makes it very clear that the incidents of our text follow immediately upon the incident considered last Sunday. When they had come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew and there Jesus performed one of His many miracles.

When the prophets foretold the coming of Christ they stated that He would be recognized by His miracles. Jesus also pointed to them as proof:

"Go show John again the things that ye do hear and see." Then He told of the miracles that He was performing. They were the outward proofs of His deity which proclaimed Him the Messiah promised in the Scriptures (Mt 11:4). They authenticated His message as miracles authenticated the message of the prophets and apostles.

Today God no longer gives men miracle-working power for there is no need of authenticating the message of anyone today. We have the Scriptures which the Holy Spirit assures us are the Word of God.

Mark leaves no question about a miracle having been performed. Simon's wife's mother was sick with a very great fever (cf. Lk 4:38). Christ healed her. Immediately she rose and ministered to them. The fever departed immediately and the weakness too.

To imagine what happened that evening, go through the wards of a hospital. See the child suffering from leukaemia, the patient in the last weeks of terminal cancer, the arthritic. Go also into the psychiatric ward. Write a case history of each of these. Think of what sickness and disease does, not only for the person afflicted, but for the family.

Now go with Christ to one after another of people so burdened with sickness and disease. See Him immediately restoring them to health. Write a case history of these people with their families after the healing has taken place. But lest we get too caught up with His miracles of healing, Christ needs to remind us as He did the people of His day that His great purpose is to get the Word out to people "of every city and village." Early in His ministry He came especially to preach (Mk 1:38). This was His work as prophet. Later He would serve especially as priest, giving His life for the sins of the world. And that especially is what He preached about.

Many sermon-hearers today believe that miracle-working power is still given to people. Others question whether such power was ever given to people. They speak of the power of mind over matter and suggest that Christ used this power in his "miracles." But they cannot rule out miracles without rejecting the Word of God. Many are doing that, too.

Many look for Christ's love to show itself in healing. If it is not there, is there love at all? They forget that Christ's chief purpose was to save; that He often used sickness to draw men to Him that He might speak to them the Word of life. The faithful in the congregation know all of this but still need the comfort and assurance of God's love. Remember to include a prayer for those suffering in the hospitals or at home that God would relieve them of their illness, or give them strength to bear it to His glory.

The Outline:

WITH CHRIST, WORD AND DEED GO TOGETHER

- I. His healing Word brought instant relief.
 - A. Peter's mother-in-law was instantly healed.
 - B. He healed all who came to Him at Capernaum instantly.
 - C. He thus proved Himself the promised Christ.
- II. That healing Word is still to be preached today.
 - A. Christ still has compassion for all who are ill.

- B. He still promises healing in answer to prayer where this is for our good.
- III. His saving word still offers people His greatest gifts.
 - A. Christ proved this in the way He related His miracles to His preaching.
 - B. He showed it especially by limiting miracle-working power to the apostolic age.
 - C. He wants us to trust in Him especially as Savior and to expect His earthly blessings only where they are for our good.

MJS

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

MARK 1:40-45

This is the first Gospel record the Holy Spirit gives of Christ cleansing a leper. Jesus had spoken of the healing of lepers in Old Testament times (Lk 4:27). He had also mentioned the healing of lepers when proving to the disciples of John that He was the Messiah. But only one other record is given of the actual healing of lepers, namely, the ten lepers on the way to Jerusalem (Lk 17:12).

It was a dread disease; it showed up in the skin but went much deeper—often disfigured faces, hands, feet. I personally saw stumps left of feet of victims in the leprosarium in New Guinea, where sisters of mercy are doing all they can to prevent the disease from spreading. They give some relief, but cures are very few and far between.

No records occur in the Old Testament of actual cures of leprosy except the miraculous cures of Miriam (Nm 12:15) and Naaman (2 K 5:1f). Moses was given a sign of leprosy so dramatic that it at once gained the acceptance of Moses by the children of Israel (Ex 4:6).

This emphasizes the great faith of the leper who came to Jesus saying, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." He recognized Jesus as the Messiah. The law had made him an outcast. He was to cry from afar, "Unclean, unclean." But even lepers got news from their loved ones concerning the Christ who could heal the sick of their diseases and torments—yes, could even drive out devils (Mt 4:24). He came to Jesus in humble faith, not questioning Christ's power and love. But he left the decision to heal to Christ. Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His hand and touched him and said, "I will, be clean" (Mk 1:41).

The sisters of mercy in New Guinea touch lepers continuously, although using every precaution against the spread of the disease. But for one seeing leprosy for the first time even to come near the victims is difficult, especially when they reach out their hands for assurance that you are not afraid of them. I feel certain that is why Jesus touched this leper. Then with His Word He performed a miracle. The leper was immediately cleansed.

It was important that he show himself to the priest. Thus he received assurance that he was ceremonially clean. He could go home, attend the synagogue, and live in his community. As a leper, if he did attend the synagogue, he had to be separated from others by a screen. Now the barriers were taken away.

Many who preach about leprosy get away from the disease itself and speak of the leprosy of sin. That can be brought in only by inference. Sin also makes people unclean. It sets up barriers. But these truths are so clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture that the account of the healing of the leper ought not be used for this purpose.

People generally do not like to see the sick and the suffering, especially those afflicted with a serious illness. It is difficult for them to reach out to people in their misery. They close their eyes to suffering until it strikes their family, their own body. They consider it perfectly natural that Christ reached out to lepers. He could help them. They seem not to appreciate that their own compassion might mean much to the people who are ill. Some do not know at all what to say to the sick. Thank God that is not true of all. Guided by the Spirit, Christian doctors, nurses, and many others are often wonderful examples of Christian love, compassion and help, who need encouragement to carry on their important work.

The Outline:

TAKE THE ILLNESSES OF PEOPLE TO YOUR LORD

- I. Believe in His compassion for the afflicted.
- II. Trust in His power to heal (the seriousness of the disease of leprosy suggests that even the most serious of diseases today can be cured by the Lord).
- III. Hold firmly to His Word for an answer to your prayers. (People hesitate to pray for what they consider impossible. On the one hand, they must never be told that the Lord answers every prayer exactly the way we pray it, if we pray with sufficient faith. They should know, on the other hand, that the Lord hears every prayer and will answer it as His love dictates.)

CHRIST THE GREAT PHYSICIAN OF BODY AND SOUL

- I. He has power to help where man knows no help.
- II. According to His gracious will, He regulates our lives (we can ask Him for anything, knowing that if it is for our good He will give it to us).
- III. In His love and compassion He reaches out to us in our every need. (Here we would point out that, regardless of the answer that He gives, it will always be for our good. Every faithful Christian will testify to the truth of this statement.)
- IV. Through the help that He offers He invites all men to come to Him.

MJS

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

MARK 2:1-12

Here Mark is inspired to record an instance where Jesus was confronted by some of the religious leaders of His day, who at once accused Him of blasphemy. Mark's narrative moves quickly over details to the important truths he wants to present.

Jesus returned to Capernaum. The people of the community gathered at the house where Jesus was staying. They filled the house and the courtyard. There was not even standing room. Yet five more came, four carrying a mattress with a fifth lying on it helplessly afflicted. They were all men of strong faith, which they proved by taking their sick friend onto the rooftop, pushing aside the roof covering and letting the man down before Jesus' feet. They believed not just in Jesus' miracle-working power, but in Jesus, the Son of God.

Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." With these words He caused the Scribes to rise up against Him as have many commentators today. Some say Jesus was showing the close relationship between sin and sickness, that before He could heal the sickness of this man He had first of all to take away his sin. That suggests the man was still unconverted, which is ruled out by the text. It also suggests that no forgiven Christian would have sickness so great, which is disproved by Scripture, which repeatedly speaks of the sickness and suffering of God's saints on earth.

Some illnesses follow upon people's sins. Cirrhosis of the liver is at times due to excessive use of alcohol. Many, however, have been afflicted with cirrhosis who may never have imbibed at all. Some are maimed for life because of reckless driving, but it may have been the sinful reckless driving of another.

Jesus was asked about the man who had been born blind, whether it was he who had sinned or his parents. Jesus answered that neither the man nor his parents had sinned to cause the blindness (Jn 9:2, 3). Some Corinthians were sick because of a misuse of the Sacrament (1 Cor 11:30). Many in Israel were idolaters, fornicators, and murmured against God, for all of which God caused them sufferings (1 Cor 10:7f). The Lord also permitted sickness for His own glory that He might be manifested as the Son of God. It is important to keep these differences in mind as we study our text.

The Lord assured the man sick of the palsy of forgiveness as His greatest gift, and He proved that He had the right to forgive sins with the miracle of healing. He proved it also by reading the thoughts of the Scribes, thoughts that they believed they were concealing in their hearts.

This is the first record in the Synoptics of Christ's use of the name "Son of Man." Jesus always used this name to point to Himself as eventually judging the world (Da 7:13), emphasizing not His humanity but His deity. It was a Messianic title but not recognized by most men until Christ, arraigned before the high priest and asked if He was the Son of God, answered "Yes." "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God" (Lk 22:69). This clear reference to Daniel's prophecy was what caused them then to condemn Him to death. So in our passage Jesus is not speaking especially of His humanity but of the fact that He, the judge of the world, has the power on earth to forgive sins. He gives that forgiveness to all who are penitent *here on earth*. On the judgment throne He will judge them according to His Word: "He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mk 16:16).

Not all Christians appreciate forgiveness of sins. Satan directs their attention to other things. People are too concerned with the body. Many

doubt God's love for them. Sickness suggests that God is angry. On the other hand some are able to suffer pain cheerfully, committing themselves completely into the hands of the Lord. Yet they need comfort and encouragement to continue doing what the Spirit enables them to do.

The Outline:

CHRIST'S GLORIOUS WORKS, A MANIFESTATION OF HIS LOVE

- I. What love He shows as He forgives the sins of His own.
 - A. A love that required His death to earn it.
 - B. A love that reaches out to all (He even reaches out to His enemies seeking to convince them of His person and work).
- II. What love He shows in His concern for people's bodily needs.
 - A. Most of His miracles gave bodily healing to people of His day.
 - B. It is comforting for us to know Him as the same, yesterday, today, and forever.

FORGIVENESS IS CHRIST'S GREATEST GIFT TO THE WORLD

- I. It is the answer to our greatest need.
- II. It helps us to face every other need with confidence in God's love.

MJS

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

TEXT: MARK 9:2-9

Jesus had told the disciples of His impending suffering and death (Mk 8:31). Then He told them not to be ashamed of Him and they would see Him in His glory at His coming (Mk 8:34, 38). Six days after this, Mark tells us, the transfiguration took place (Mk 9:2). Here is truly an Epiphany message recorded by the Spirit for our learning and comfort. It shows Christ's deity, His glory, and His work.

Peter, James, and John were with Him at the time. They had been with Him also at the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:37) and later in Gethsemane (Mk 14:33). They had also witnessed most, if not all, that Mark had said of Jesus in his Gospel: His baptism with its manifestations of glory (Mk 1:10f); the call of the first disciples (Jn 1:43-51); the beginning of their training as fishers of men (Mk 1:14-20); the driving out of an unclean spirit (Mk 1:21-28); the healings in Capernaum (Mk 1:29-39); the healing of a leper (Mk 1:40-44); and that of the paralytic (Mk 2:1-12). In the transfiguration we have a culmination of all of this. Here Christ clearly shows His divine glory communicated to His human nature, the glory of the only begotten of the Father (Jn 1:14), the honor and glory which He received from the Father (2 Pet 1:17).

Much could also be said of the cloud, the symbol of God's glory, which appeared on the mountain as it appeared in the holy of holies in the temple; of the Father's declaration that Christ was the promised One; of the three witnesses who were to tell others of this great experience after Christ's resurrection (Mk 9:9). But space does not permit a retelling.

After this glorious event Christ would still continue on earth. He must still suffer and die as the Savior. Moses and Elijah spoke to Him of

this—Moses as representative of the law, Elijah as representative of the prophets. He showed His glory to them and to the disciples as a proof that He was truly the God-man, who, as God, gave worth to all that He did for the salvation of the world.

The purposes of this glorious event? Peter did not understand them at once; later they became clear: The Spirit was strengthening Christ for His passion and with this manifestation of glory He was strengthening Peter's faith as He still strengthens ours. On Him we build our hope that on the last day we too will be glorified (1 Cor 15).

Imagine the hearers as being no more prepared for such a glorious manifestation than were the disciples. People seldom think of the glorified body they will have in heaven and of Christ who is now in all His glory. They picture Christ as the Good Shepherd and on the Cross, which is important for their faith, but they should also see Him in His glory. The text gives occasion for this.

The Outline:

IN CHRIST'S TRANSFIGURATION WE HAVE A FORETASTE OF HEAVEN

- I. As Christ was glorified in His body, so will we be glorified.
- II. The salvation of which He spoke on the mountain will be ours forever and ever.

THE GREAT MESSAGE OF THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SON OF GOD IN GLORY

- I. Christ is truly the Son of God.
 - A. As all Epiphany lessons showed.
 - B. As this incident shows most clearly.
- II. Christ is truly Savior.
 - A. Moses and Elijah spoke of His death.
 - B. Christ often spoke of it as His purpose in coming (He did so just before His transfiguration).
 - C. The Holy Spirit has recorded this message for our comfort.

A GLIMPSE OF GLORY MUST BE ENOUGH FOR NOW

- I. It was enough to strengthen Christ for His impending passion.
- II. It is enough to strengthen us with faith and hope for the life to come.
- III. It is enough to fill us with love for Him while we wait for His coming.

MJS