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Outlines on the Wuerttemberg Gospel Selections

J. H. Fritz

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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that Jesus is indeed the Lord, Phil. 2:9-11. So will the virgin-born Infant be led back into the world whose sin He purged away, where but a few acknowledged Him as their God and Savior, John 1:9-13.

This text is admirably suited for the Christmas season. It throws a brilliant light into the darkness of the lowly stable at Bethlehem. It brings out the hidden glory of that humble Child in the manger. That is a lesson of special importance in our day of so general denial of the deity of our Redeemer. The preacher will urge his audience to profess boldly the deity of the Christ-child. That alone gives us the assurance that His Word is truth, that our sins are purged, that He will safely lead us to glory, protecting both soul and body which He has created. The preacher may point out: *Our Precious Christmas-gift as to His Person and His Work*. Or he may show that *Mary's Son is God's own Son*, as proved by His names, His works, His honor and glory. — *Behold in the Manger Your Heavenly King!* The King of the universe (things visible, vv. 2 b, 3 a; things invisible, vv. 4-6); the King of Grace, vv. 1, 2 a, 3 b; the King of Glory, v. 6. — *Unto Us a Child is Given!* The Mighty God; the Everlasting Father (Creator and Preserver); the Prince of Peace. (Purges our sin, rules His Church, leads it to glory.) — *The Miracle of Christmas*. The Son of God becomes the Purger of our sin; the Creator and Preserver becomes our Brother; the Heir of all things makes us heirs of heaven.

THEO. LAETSCH

Outlines on the Wuerttemberg Epistle Selections

First Sunday in Advent

Rom. 14:17-19

(NOTE. — In order to understand this text, the preacher must read the entire chapter. Paul is speaking of such as refrain from eating and drinking certain things, v. 2, and as observe certain days, v. 5, of whom he says that they are "weak in the faith." He does not indicate that he has the same kind of people in mind of whom he speaks in 1 Cor. 8. Among the Christians at Rome there were such as thought they could serve the Lord best by setting aside now and then a special day to Him and by abstaining from certain food and drink. They did not do this in a self-righteous spirit. Yet they were in danger of looking upon others who did not do likewise as not being as sincere and zealous in their Christianity as they were. Their *hesitancy* to "esteem every day alike," v. 5, and to "eat all things," v. 2, was a weakness on their part. Over against these the apostle says: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost," v. 17. — For a detailed exposition see Stoeckhardt, *Roemerbrief*.)

The very fact that we are permitted on this First Sunday in Advent, being the first Sunday of a new church-year, to assemble in the house of the Lord in order to hear the Word of God, the Gospel of our salvation, and to worship the Lord by hearing and believing His Word, by saying our prayers, and by singing our hymns of supplication, praise, and thanksgiving, is evidence that the Lord will continue unto us His kingdom and its blessings. While Christ has procured these blessings for all men, only those enjoy them who are members of the kingdom of God. Of this kingdom of God our text speaks. It answers the question,

What Must We Know Concerning the Kingdom of God that We may Enjoy Its Blessings and Impart Them to Others?

We must know

1. *What the true nature of the kingdom of God is*
2. *What the true service is that is required in the kingdom of God*

1

a) "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink." In these words the apostle tells what the kingdom of God is not. Its essential characteristics is not found in mere *external* things. That Christians in the congregation at Rome set aside certain days dedicated to the Lord, and that they refrained from certain food and drink in order to exercise a rigorous discipline of self, practice self-denial, and avoid the dangers of excesses in eating and drinking, all this could not *in itself* assure their membership in the kingdom of God. After all, these things were within the sphere of *adiaphora*, things in themselves neither right nor wrong. To think that the mere observance of such things are indicative of real piety is a mistaken idea. If people, for instance, fast before partaking of the Lord's Supper or bow their head every time the name of Jesus is mentioned or restrict their diet during the season of Lent or refrain from eating meat on Good Friday: all this may be done if done in the right spirit; but *in itself* it does not constitute real piety or make such as observe such practices better Christians for this reason than others who do not observe them. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink." What is it?

b) "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." These are not virtues but graces, divine gifts. "Righteousness," that which Christ has acquired for us, 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:18; Phil. 3:9. The result of such righteousness is "peace," Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:2; Luke 2:14; Num. 6:26. And the result of both such righteousness and peace is "joy in the Holy Ghost," that joy which the Holy Ghost gives to the believer, Rom. 15:13; 1 John 1:3, 4; John 15:11. The sinner who has come to

a knowledge of his sins, repents of them, by faith accepts Christ's righteousness, the forgiveness of sin; he it is that also has peace with God and the joy of being an heir of salvation; he it is that is thus a member of the kingdom of God. Being clothed with the righteousness of Christ, comforted by the peace of God, and rejoicing in the joy of the Spirit of God, a believer is assured his membership in God's kingdom and his eternal salvation. The kingdom of God is of an *internal* and *spiritual* character. "The kingdom of God is within you," Luke 17:21.

Application.— We should beware of making our Christianity consist merely of external things, external observances, etc. We should make sure that by faith we have laid hold of Christ's righteousness. Then we have and enjoy the blessings of the kingdom of God. But then will follow also a true service in this kingdom.

2

a) That is true service in the Kingdom of God which serves Christ, v.18. Such service is the *result* of having righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, these spiritual and internal blessings which are characteristic of the kingdom of God. He who through Christ is justified before God, who through Christ has peace with God, and who rejoices in the Holy Ghost because of his salvation in Christ, will serve Christ cheerfully with body and soul. Such service consists in a truly godly life, in doing good works, in having and manifesting Christian virtues. Such a one is "acceptable to God" and "approved of men," v.18. Even men must respect such a godly life; by well-doing, Christians "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," 1 Pet. 2:15, and prevent them from blaspheming, 2 Sam. 12:14.

b) That is true service in the kingdom of God which builds up, and does not destroy, the kingdom of God, v.19. Since we have peace with God through Christ, we should also live in peace among ourselves. We should therefore not let trivial, non-essential matters, such as food, drink, keeping of days (according to context), or anything along similar lines, cause a disturbance in the Church. The strong should bear with the weak; "for meat destroy not the work of God," v.20; "destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died," v.15. The strong in the faith should bear with the weak; but the weak should not judge the strong, v.3.

Application.— We should serve Christ by a truly Christian life; we should not unnecessarily, on account of trivial matters, things in themselves neither right nor wrong, disturb the peace of the Church but rather "follow after the things *wherewith one may edify another*," v.19, for the upbuilding of God's kingdom and to the glory of His name.

J. H. C. FRITZ

Second Sunday in Advent**Rom. 14:7-12**

The Christian church-year is not a haphazard arrangement of festival seasons; it is designed 1) to teach Bible history in its appropriate chronology; 2) to give instruction to Christians for every period and phase of their lives. — An indication in the very first two texts of the old Gospel series: I. Advent, the central fact of Christian faith: The Coming of the King into the World—Our Redemption; but at once, II. Advent, the Church bids us look to the end, the consummation: The Second Coming of the King, for Judgment.

This text is appropriate for this Sunday; it speaks to us of our confidence and our resolve in view of the Lord's coming, whether in death or at the Last Judgment. Says the prophet (Mal. 3:2):

"Who may Abide the Day of His Coming?"

1. *Our confidence*
2. *Our resolve in view of the Lord's coming*

1

This life has many troubles and worries, not the least of which is the uncertain future—and the one certain thing in this uncertain future: death and the Judgment. It is not surprising that many lose courage—rather, surprising that any have the courage to live on—except the Christian.

"We are the Lord's," v. 8. Not by nature, Eph. 2:3. Nor could we transport ourselves from the Kingdom of Darkness to that of the Son of God.—But v. 9. Christ died for our sins and broke the power of Satan; He rose in proof of His victory; He lives eternally, the Lord Omnipotent, and rules the universe. He has sought and found us who were lost and made us His own by regeneration.

We are the Lord's whether we live or die. While we live, we are in His hand; He leads and guides us, controls all that happens to us; there are no accidents; we go the way He has mapped out for us; why worry?—He has set the goal; our life will end exactly at the right time; He calls us when our work is done, when our mansion in the Father's house is ready for us and we are ready for it. And the judgment for us is already past because we are the Lord's.

2

But Matt. 24:42—51. Make sure that we are the Lord's until He comes.

Hence let us live unto the Lord. Not to ourselves, seeking honor, glory, earthly treasures and pleasures; but to the Lord, who

has bought us; serve Him, not by leaving the world, but by so living in the world that the world by our service may also become His own; ever conscious that for this very purpose He has left us in the world.

Let us prepare that we may die to the Lord. See that we grow in the knowledge of Him who is our only Righteousness; use this new year of grace for this purpose; hear and read His Word; become more diligent and fervent in prayer; be ready at any moment, wherever we may be, to welcome Him when He comes. So shall we be ready to give account of ourselves to God.

THEO. HOYER

Third Sunday in Advent

Acts 3:19-26

For several reasons this is a splendid Advent text. For one thing, it draws our attention to the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, showing how the children of God in the days of the Old Covenant were informed of the coming of the divine Helper and could look forward to His arrival. Moses, Samuel, and Abraham are the great men of God mentioned here by name; but St. Peter, the speaker, tells his audience that *all* the prophets "have likewise foretold of these days." It was a season of waiting, on which we like to dwell during the days before Christmas, when we ourselves are waiting for this blessed festival to arrive.

The text is a real Advent message likewise because it directs our thoughts to the second coming of Christ, His coming on the Day of Judgment. How much the ancient Church during the Advent season occupied its thoughts with this subject can be seen from the regular lessons of the church-year selected for this period.

Let us today, on the basis of this text, speak of the

and note **Second Coming of Our Lord Jesus**

1. *That this coming is proclaimed both in the Old and in the New Testament*
2. *That it will be a blessed coming for believers, inaugurating times of refreshing*
3. *That we must prepare for it by true repentance and conversion*

1

That Jesus will come again and at that time inaugurate an eternity of bliss for His disciples is vehemently denied by unbelievers and scoffers. Their manner of attacking this doctrine is vividly described 2 Pet. 3:3, 4.

Against all unbelief we put the plain message of the Scriptures. Peter asserts that the prophets of God since the world began have spoken of this very thing. Among the passages of the Old Testament Scriptures which treat of this matter and which at once come to mind is Joel 2:31 ("the great and terrible Day of the Lord"); cf. also Is. 26:19-21. Of the many pertinent New Testament passages we merely mention the great description of the Last Judgment, Matt. 25:31 ff. Let the unbelievers mock. Some day it will become apparent how woefully they have deceived themselves.

It is true, of course, that Jesus at present is invisible. Peter speaks of this fact, v. 21, telling us that Christ at present is dwelling in the invisible world. Christ indeed is not shut up in heaven; He is everywhere; but our eyes at present do not see Him. On that Great Day all eyes will behold Him.

2

Peter is telling his hearers in the Temple of Jerusalem about the return of Christ in terms of rejoicing. The times when He will appear he calls "the times of refreshing," v. 19.

Here on earth God's children often mourn and are distressed. Cf. Matt. 5:4; Acts 14:22. "They sow in tears," Ps. 126:5. The situation will change for them when Christ reappears. "They shall reap in joy." They shall be refreshed. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," etc., Rev. 21:4.

Furthermore, Peter in v. 21 speaks of "the restitution of all things." He evidently does not mean that all the wicked and condemned people will be released from their place of punishment and placed into a condition of bliss and joy. Such a view would contradict clear statements of the Holy Scriptures. Cf. Matt. 25:46. What he means to say is that the old heaven and the old earth will vanish and there will come to be "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness," 2 Pet. 3:13. There will be once more a situation in which God's children will be perfectly holy, serving Him in celestial happiness from eternity to eternity. What a day to look forward to, this day of refreshing! How we should thank God for this message!

3

The great question is how we may properly prepare for this second coming of Christ. Peter says, "Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out," v. 19.

There have been enthusiasts who, thinking that the return of the Lord was imminent, prepared outwardly, dressed in white garments, and assembled at specially designated localities, on mountain tops or other elevated places. Views of this sort always became manifest as sad delusions.

The right preparation for this coming of the Last Day consists in something inward, in repentance and conversion. In the first place, he that wishes to be in the right attitude when Christ appears must realize his sinfulness and feel sorry for the wrongs that he has done. True contrition is one of the things needed if we are to meet Christ in the proper way. Such contrition is here referred to in the call: Repent. In the second place, what is needed is the acceptance of Christ as the only Savior. Having realized our own unworthiness and inability to provide help for ourselves, we must gratefully seize the aid, the forgiveness, which Jesus offers us. This is referred to in our text in the term "be converted."

Outwardly God's children may appear to be not better prepared for the reception of the great King than the children of the world. But their inward condition is that which Peter here describes: putting their trust in the redemptive work of Christ, their hands are, as it were, always stretched out, eager to welcome Him as He arrives to take them home. — The great question for every one of us today is, Are we in this frame of mind and heart? Is Christ to us the Rock of salvation? Or are the flesh-pots of Egypt enticing us to such an extent that we neglect Jesus and His promises?

W. ARNDT

Fourth Sunday in Advent

1 John 1:1-4

This Sunday is the last of a series preparing for the Christmas Festival. Have we prepared? For the Christian Church, Christmas is the time to tell of the coming into the world of Christ, our Savior. Does that take preparation? Can we not simply tell the story? God's Word bids us prepare more carefully. It describes for us the determination and the conviction which are essential for a blessed telling of the Christmas Gospel and bids us strive for this conviction. It sets before us blessed purposes which we are to realize in telling the story to our world. Let the Apostle John, then, answer our closing Advent question for us today

Why Shall We Tell of Christ, Our Savior?

His answer in our text, and that of Scripture as a whole, is twofold:

1. *Because we know Him so surely*
2. *Because we thereby achieve such great results*

1

St. John may not have written this epistle just before Christmas; but he says that he has a Christmas purpose in it: to declare Christ. He is moved to this by a mighty knowledge, a conviction of which he is powerfully sure. That assurance is every Christian's.

A) What is it that we are sure of in Christ Jesus? 1) He was "with the Father," "His Son." To tell of human beings stirs us mightily at times; how much more to tell of God! The note of wonder, of exultation, in the message of Jesus, Is. 9:6; John 3:13; 1:14. 2) He is "the Word of Life." The same name of Christ in John 1. A word is the means by which a thought or fact is revealed and conveyed to another. Christ is the Word of Life; He is the means by which God's own way of salvation for man, God's own will of love and grace, is conveyed to man. Beholding Christ, we know God, John 1:18; 5:36; 6:46. 3) He is "eternal Life." This text unique in calling Christ directly "Life." Man by nature is cut off from God and therefore without life, Eph. 2:12. But Christ means life to us; He has reconciled us again to the Father, John 1:12, has brought God's grace to man, John 1:17; 1 John 3:14; Col. 3:3. This Christ accomplished by accepting human nature, taking man's burden of sin on Himself, suffering and dying as man's Substitute. What a story! How different from every other!

B) But are we truly sure of these facts about Christ? 1) St. John and his fellow-disciples were sure. The Life was "manifested," visible to human eyes; "we have seen with our eyes, have looked upon, and our hands have handled." Cf. John 1:14; Luke 24:39. St. John and the disciples spoke with the certainty of eye-witnesses concerning His life, death, resurrection, 1 Cor. 15. 2) We Christians today are likewise sure. We may not be eye-witnesses, but our faith is just as sure and even more blessed, John 20:29. Through the Word of Grace the Christian today stands in just as rock-ribbed a certainty of Christ as did the eye-witnesses, 2 Pet. 1:15-21. Shall we, then, not speak?

2

The Christian bears witness to Christ; he tells the Christmas-story because he knows His Savior and is sure of Him in faith. But there is not merely a pressure from within, behind the telling; there is also a goal and a purpose for the telling.

A) We produce a divine fellowship. 1) Our telling of the story of the Savior is to produce a "fellowship which is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." Our story is the means of bringing men who had been cast off from God into a saving oneness with Him again, Matt. 28:19; John 17:20, 21. 2) Our telling of the story is to produce a fellowship between men — "that ye also may have fellowship with us." The closeness of this fellowship is made apparent through the entire remainder of the epistle; it is apparent in the lives of Christians through their keeping of the "new commandment," 2:8; 4:21. Yes, is this not the one story that can produce true love between men in this hate-ridden and in any age?

B) We produce joy. 1) Men hope to get joy out of Christmas. This year they are well in advance sure of the shortcomings of much Christmas joy — loneliness, insecurity, perplexity, temper the holiday mood. But Christians plan to produce genuine joy, genuine by every test. 2) We bring joy in Christ Jesus, we speak "that your joy may be full." No reservations, exceptions, are to mar this joy; the Savior's own program, John 15:11, of making men happy is ours in telling men of the Christmas Gospel.

May the Church go to work with a will, with zest, with purpose, in carrying out its Christmas task of telling the Savior's story!

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

Christmas Day

Eph. 1:3-8

We Christians may rejoice today when Christ was born to comfort and to save us. In that Child lying in the manger the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily, Col. 2:9. By this Child came grace and truth, John 1:17. And of His fulness, inexhaustible because it is the fulness of the Godhead, have all we received, and grace for grace. That is the wonderful Christmas-gift of God, an everlasting gift, providing for all who accept it joy and comfort in time and unending bliss in eternity. This gift was not given on the spur of the moment. As loving parents plan and prepare their gifts for days and weeks before Christmas, so the heavenly Father planned and prepared His gift in the ages before the world began. It is this latter thought that is stressed in our lesson and that adds to the value of the gift and ought to increase our Christmas joy.

Thanks Be to God for His Everlasting Grace in Christ Jesus!

- 1. Here is predestination unto the adoption of children**
- 2. Here is wisdom and prudence for preordained holiness**

1

We thank God, who has predestinated us unto the adoption of children. On the basis of Rom. 8:14-17; 1 John 3:1,2, etc., describe the marvelous privilege of being adopted as God's children. How is such adoption possible in view of Eph. 2:3? Answer: By Jesus Christ, the Babe of Bethlehem. There in the manger lies the Child of God, the Beloved, v.6; cp. Is. 42:1; Matt. 3:17; 17:5. In Him we have been accepted as God's children. We again ask, How is that possible? The apostle answers: Because in this Child we have forgiveness of sins, remission of our transgressions, a sending away of all our wrong-doings; cp. Micah 7:18, 19; Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:12.

Once more we ask, How could God send away sin? Does His justice not require punishment? Surely. But there in the manger lies the Child in whom we have redemption by His blood, a deliverance not only from the penalty but just as surely from the guilt of sin. It is a ransom by the blood of Him of whom in a peculiar sense God is the Father, who is our Lord, v. 3; 1 John 1:7, a ransom by which the last penny of our guilt has been paid, a redemption whereby we have been freed forever from the wrath of God, a ransom which opens to us the door to heavenly places, v. 3, closed to us by our sins.

What moved God to give us so marvelous a gift? Was there perhaps something of merit that God saw in us? Listen to what the apostle says vv. 5, 6; and lest we forget, once more the riches of His grace are mentioned in v. 7. This grace goes back into eternity. According to the good pleasure of His will He has predestinated us unto the adoption of children before the foundation of the world, v. 4. Already in eternity God thought of you and of me and decided to make you and me His children. For this purpose He sent His Christmas-gift, Christ Jesus, vv. 3, 5, whose birthday we are celebrating today. That Child is Jesus, the Savior, Matt. 1:21; Luke 2:21, Christ the Lord, Luke 2:11. What a marvelous Christmas-gift both as to its nature and because of its Donor, who so graciously thought of you and me ages before we ever saw the light of day, ages before the world began. Do we appreciate this gift properly?

2

V. 4. As children of God we are to walk in holiness of life, 1 Pet. 1:14, 15. For this purpose He has chosen us from eternity. Knowing that mankind would fall and utterly corrupt itself, He had determined to have a people denying ungodliness, and zealous of good works, Titus 2:12, 14; Phil. 2:15. Our sanctification is the unalterable will of God, expressed not only in His constantly repeated demand of holiness, but already by the fact that He from eternity chose you and me that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, love towards our heavenly Father, love towards all mankind. For this purpose He redeemed us, not only from the guilt and penalty of sin but also from its power, v. 7. For this purpose He made us His children, v. 5. Children love their parents, and so He has given us the spirit of adoption lovingly and joyfully to do His will. Cp. Rom. 6:3-23.

In order to accomplish this purpose and enable us to be blameless in keeping with this eternal will and good pleasure, He has caused His grace to abound towards us in all wisdom and prudence, v. 8. By the Child in the manger we have not only the strength to

walk in newness of life, but also the necessary wisdom and intelligence without which we would not be able to know and do the will of God. Cp. Eph. 5:15; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-11; Luke 1:17.

All this we owe to the grace of God in the Christ-child, to its abundance. To clean a filthy rag, an abundance of water and soap is needed. Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, Is. 64:6. Cp. Jer. 2:22. If it takes an abundance of grace to make our pitifully few righteousnesses acceptable to God, what a superabundance of divine grace and loving patience and long-suffering is required to rid our heart of the abomination of unrighteousnesses which constantly arise out of it! Mark 7:20-23; Rom. 7:18. We need this grace every minute! And God offers it to us; from eternity He had determined to give it to us in divine superabundance in His gift of grace, the Manger Infant. And wherever we fail in our efforts, in Christ we have forgiveness of sins, by the riches of God's grace. What a precious Christmas-gift! Take it! Rejoice in it! Use it!

THEO. LAETSCH

Second Christmas Day

Heb. 12:1-4

Again we have heard the glorious, joyous tidings of a Savior from sin and its curse. Again the multitude of the heavenly host has proclaimed to us, "Unto you is born a Savior," etc.

Is this message proclaimed simply to provide a holiday and a celebration for us and our children? Certainly not. The Gospel which was appointed by the early Church for the Second Christmas Day shows us the purpose of the Christmas-message. There we read that the shepherds, having worshiped the Lord Jesus, *returned to their daily work and cheerfully took up their daily humble duties*. That course is exactly the one which the present text also impresses upon us. Therefore,

"Let Us Run with Patience the Race that is Set before Us"

1

The cloud of witnesses who testify to the truth of our faith should encourage us to this patient running of the race.

a) Our Christian life here upon this earth is compared to a race, 1 Cor. 9:24-26. That is to impress upon us the fact that it is not enough to begin to be a Christian, but that the Christian is to continue even unto death, Rev. 2:10b. "One receiveth the prize." The Christian who begins to follow Jesus soon finds all manner of obstacles, difficulties, temptations, pitfalls. The life of a Christian is not a series of celebrations. Our text mentions

"weights," i. e., discouraging experiences, which would weary us. Many, very many, have allowed such discouraging experiences (e. g., hypocrites in the church, ingratitude, misunderstanding, etc.) to chill their ardor and cause them to fail in the race or to drop out of the ranks. Let us be sure to put away from ourselves that can make us unwilling to continue to run steadfastly the race that is set before us, to walk, step by step, the narrow way.

Away, vain, idle thoughts, depart;
Roam not, my soul, abroad.

We should look to the many (chap. 11) who have gone before and who in speech and life bear witness to the truth of God's Word.

b) Then there is the "sin which doth so easily beset us." That also must be laid aside. While one becomes weary or discouraged in running, another is allured by some forbidden fruit which Satan or the world offers. Our flesh and blood is so easily interested in this satanic bait of temporal gain or pleasure. Sin "doth so easily beset us." Oh, the temptations are so many! At every turn there is some pitfall of sin. But tell me, we who are standing at the manger of the pure Child Jesus and rejoice in His love and kindness, shall we now turn from Him to wallow again in the mire and filth of sin and carnal indulgence? No, when sin besets us, let us look at the cloud of witnesses that surround us. *Abraham* forsook home, fatherland, and relatives to avoid idolatry. *Abraham* lived in peace with selfish *Lot* and did not allow *Lot's* worldly selfishness to weary him or to drive him to the same sins. How much ridicule did *Noah* endure! How was *Joseph* tempted! In what bright colors the pleasures of *Egypt* were offered to *Moses*! These all remained steadfast; they fought manfully against sin. Upon this day the ancient Church also commemorated the martyr *Stephen*. His life and death are also to encourage us to run, etc.* Let us do likewise!

Again and again turning from the beggarly elements of this world, from its bait of pleasure, let us remain faithful unto death. Let us remain in the ranks of those many witnesses of whom we read chap. 11:33 ff. For this purpose let us often read the lives of the great and faithful children of God as recorded in Holy Scripture. Their lives have been recorded to encourage us. God has surrounded us with this cloud of witnesses so as to help us that we may not become weary, that we may not be seduced by the deceitful promises of Satan and the world.

* If *St. Stephen* is to receive special attention, the narrative which deals with his testimony and martyrdom may be more fully exploited at this place.

2

"But if too hot you find the fray," *look to Jesus, v. 2*, the Author and Finisher of our faith. How much He met which could have wearied Him! In youth there was poverty, and misunderstanding even by His mother and His foster-father. And later on there was the bitter enmity of His own people. The leaders of the people persecuted Him, His own disciples misunderstood Him, denied Him, and betrayed Him, v. 3. How much shame, suffering, misery, ingratitude, misunderstanding! Luke 19:41. But all this is now past, and Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God. Even now He is praised, glorified by His Christians, and the day will come when every knee must bow before Him, etc., Phil. 2:10, 11. Just so it is His intention that those who suffer with Him here shall reign with Him, 2 Tim. 2:12a. Those who are humiliated with Him here shall be glorified, 1 Pet. 4:13. Let us look to this Jesus lest we become weary or lest sin drive the Holy Spirit from our hearts. Remember and behold again and again the humble birth of Jesus — in a stable! And yet He is to have a name above every name. We are not to be above our Master. If we would be His disciples, we must take up our cross and follow Him. But remember Rom. 8:18. Hymn 334, 1.

3

Our text adds one final warning: *Do not exaggerate your sacrifices, difficulties, or cross-bearing.* a) "You have not resisted unto blood striving against sin." God has not permitted temptation to become too severe, but He has with the temptation made a way to escape, so that you have been able to bear it, 1 Cor. 10:13. We Christians are inclined to exaggerate our self-denials and difficulties, to bemoan our afflictions or temptations. That is what the ungrateful Israelites did, Ex. 14:11; 17:1-3; Num. 20:2-5; 21:5.

b) When these thoughts of self-pity attack us, we should think upon that cloud of witnesses who suffered so much for Jesus, and we should look to Jesus. (Second Art.) Think what the glorious Christmas-message has taught us. Dwell in thought upon God's promises. What joy is awaiting us! Vv. 2, 3.

MARTIN S. SOMMER

Sunday after Christmas

1 Tim. 3:16

With the question Matt. 22:42 Jesus put the issue of His incarnation squarely before His adversaries. It was a basic matter upon which they were to reach a decision. The answer determined whether they were with Him or against Him. The Incarnation is

a central doctrine of the Christian Church. It is necessary that we know what we must believe concerning it if we wish to be Christians. Let us therefore dwell on the topic

The Christian's Confession Concerning the Incarnation of Christ

1. *He humbly confesses that it is a great mystery*
2. *He sees in it the source of all true godliness*

1

The sole authoritative source of all our knowledge of the Incarnation is the Bible. Our text: "God . . . in the flesh." To the apostle's witness must be added that of others. God the Father declares of the Man Jesus in the Jordan: Matt. 3:17. Jesus says of Himself: John 10:30; 14:9; 17:1,5, etc. The Holy Spirit testifies: Rom. 1:4. The prophets of old predicted the Messiah's divine nature in Is. 9:6; Micah 5:2, and are in harmony with the declarations of the apostles, who saw Jesus in the flesh, John 1:1-3,14; 1:49; 20:28; 6:69; Matt. 16:16. Angels join in, Luke 1:32; 2:11,14. Others testify: John 9:35,38; Matt. 27:54. Even the devils declare Luke 4:41. Jesus is true God.

But Jesus is also true man. Again we have the testimony of God in Gen. 3:15; of the Lord Jesus Himself, Matt. 16:13; Luke 19:10 etc. (Son of Man used of Jesus 82 times in Scripture); of the Holy Spirit, Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18,20. The prophets and apostles are in harmony in their statements, Is. 7:14; 11:1; Micah 5:1, compared with Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 2:5. Angels are heard from to the same effect, Luke 1:31; 32,33; 2:11. His life and acts as related in the gospels clearly stamp Him true man.

These statements of the Scriptures are plain. Their meaning is unmistakable. Yet we are confronted by a great mystery that the mind of man cannot grasp. It is in faith that the Church and the individual Christians in it accept the truth that Jesus is both God and man. We follow Paul in confessing: "Without controversy . . . flesh."

But not all men bow before this mystery as did Paul. Many prefer to place reason above faith. Such were the scribes and the Pharisees and many others of their age and race. Their successors in our day are the Modernists, who may be willing to grant all other honors to Jesus except that He is man and God.

The Church and we stand with Paul and "without controversy" confess that Christ is God incarnate. To deny this mystery would mean to deny our holy faith, something which God may forbid.

But the Incarnation is not only a great mystery, it has also a very practical aspect.

2

The apostle speaks of the Incarnation as a "mystery of godliness," meaning that its result and object are our own godliness. By godliness is meant reverencing God and leading a life in conformity with His holy Law.

Even in man as he is by nature we still find a faint recollection that God requires holiness. The heathen, too, seek to attain a certain kind of godliness, Rom. 2:14, 15. Some have even reached a comparatively high plane of virtue, as, *e. g.*, Socrates, Cicero, and others. And yet, viewed in the light of God's perfect holiness, what a caricature of true godliness even their highest attainments represent! They fall short of their goal, Rom. 3:23. To natural man, even at his best, applies Gen. 8:21, and all without exception must confess before God: Is. 64:6. Man cannot keep the whole Law, and the verdict Jas. 2:10 applies.

Where man has failed, God has provided. He sent His Son into the world in the form of man that He might show us the way to true godliness and also provide the means to attain it. Christ came to redeem man from the power of sin. The apostle in our text in bold outline presents His redemptive work, concluded with His being "received up into glory." What we could not do Jesus did for us. He fulfilled the Law, and He made atonement for our sins. If it had not been for His incarnation, He could not have done this for us. But now He is our Substitute. If we believe in Him and accept Him as such, our sin is covered, and in spite of our weak flesh we may attain a godliness such as is pleasing in the sight of God. Christ's active and passive obedience give us the power to become "saints." We may be sure that we are God's dear children and that His pleasure rests upon us.

Thus Christ's incarnation occupies the very center of our faith. May we never tire to marvel at this mystery, and may we through it be ever led to a life of greater godliness!

G. V. SCHICK

New Year's Eve

Heb. 13:14

As the last day of the year has ever been employed by business men and others in taking an inventory of stock and planning for the future, so it has been customary for Christians to use the last hours of the old year in a similar inventory, in taking stock of their spiritual standing and their progress in the knowledge of their salvation and sanctification. Our text suggests some valuable thoughts as we are assembled for the last time in the old year.

Admonition and Comfort for the Christian at the Close of the Year:

1. *"We have here no continuing city"*
2. *"But we seek one to come."*

1

The holy writer's remark brief and to the point, a reminder and an admonition to all who hear this word, and in particular also to us Christians.

a) There are many people who obviously are committed to the idea that this world and the things of this earth are the end and aim of their existence. They look upon this earth as their continuing city, as the place where they expect to abide forever or at least as long as life lasts, and this, they hope, will be very long, in order that they may enjoy what, they believe, this world has to offer. Their thoughts are summarized by the holy writer Is. 22:13. They foolishly believe that their indulgence in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life will give them true happiness. They are concerned about acquiring riches and honor and, like the people in the days of Noah, to be married and to be given in marriage, Matt. 24:38, to try all the plans of which Solomon speaks in Eccl. 1 and throughout that entire book as being emptiness, vanity, vexation, of spirit. Yet the world passeth away, 1 John 2:17.

b) Christians accept the word of our text as God's truth, supported also by the experience of all history: no continuing city here. They are strangers and pilgrims on this earth, Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11. They know that the earthly house of this tabernacle will soon be dissolved and that their true, eternal home is in heaven, 2 Cor. 5:1. They have learned to set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth. Col. 3:2. They do indeed accept with grateful hearts such blessings as God may dispense to them while they are passing their sojourning here in fear, 1 Pet. 1:17. Their constant song is: "I'm but a stranger here: Heaven is my home." And therefore their comfort is in the second statement of our text.

2

The second part of our text gives us the consideration of a thought that is the very opposite of that contained in the first declaration.

a) Christians know that there is a city which is to come, that there is a place and a condition of bliss beyond death and the grave to which they may look forward with joyful anticipation. From eternity God has planned a deliverance from all evil for those who trust in the redeeming blood of His Son. The believers know

that they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time, 1 Pet. 1:5, that, in receiving the end of their faith and hope, they will experience in truth what St. John so vividly describes in the Book of Revelation, when he saw the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, Rev. 21:3-7. For we are told that there remaineth a rest to the people of God, Heb. 4:9, where they shall see their Savior face to face and be with Him in everlasting glory and majesty, Phil. 3:20, 21.

b) This being the case, and the Christians learning to put their trust ever more firmly in this truth as taught in the Word of God, they *seek* the city, the final redemption, which is to come, which will certainly be revealed. They follow the admonition of the apostle to know their Savior better from day to day and thus to attain to the resurrection of the dead, Phil. 3:9-11. They work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, always depending on the promise that the source of their strength is in God, Phil. 2:12, 13, who alone is able to assist them in making their calling and election sure, 2 Pet. 1:10. Thus the Christian will, at the end of the year and every day of his life, be in readiness, so that, when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, we shall also appear with Him in glory.

P. E. KRETZMANN

