

12-1-1944

Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference

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Recommended Citation

Arndt, W. (1944) "Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 15, Article 72.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol15/iss1/72>

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Outlines on Gospels Adopted by Synodical Conference

Third Sunday in Advent

Matt. 3:1-12

John was an unusual person: prophesied about in the Old Testament, clad in the garb of Elijah, eating the simplest food, carrying on his work in the wilderness and along the Jordan. He was a great Advent preacher. We need His message today. He speaks of

The Reception We Are to Give to Christ

1. *There must be no carnal pride of nationality or race*
2. *We must see that mere outward religiousness will not suffice*
3. *There must be heart repentance*
4. *There must be recognition of Jesus' coming in the Word and the Sacraments*

1

Mere descent from Abraham did not avail, v. 9. Some people boast of being Americans, as if their citizenship in our country made them children of God. We should love our United States, but woe to those who fasten their hopes of heaven to such external matters. Our Lutheranism is a precious heritage. How sad if it is to us merely something inherited!

2

Witness John's castigation of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees displayed great religious zeal. The Sadducees, the priestly party, were likewise strict in their adherence to the rules concerning the sacrifices. We see from Matthew 23 that with the Pharisees, generally speaking, the religious fervor concerned itself with the shell, and not with the kernel. The same thing we see with respect to the Sadducees (the high priests) at the trial of Jesus. — How often we are satisfied with the external acts of religion and with outward church connection!

3

Repent, says John, v. 2. He speaks of sin and God's wrath, v. 10, but likewise of grace, v. 2. Repentance signifies recognition of our sinfulness, our need of help, furthermore, true sorrow with respect to our wrongdoing, and, finally, the acceptance of forgiveness earned by the Savior and offered by God's grace. If this repentance is sincere, good works will follow spontaneously.

4

John preached, and the people thronged about him to receive his message. He likewise baptized, and many accepted his baptism.

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Thus Jesus comes today. It seems a humble, insignificant advent. But in these simple means of grace dwells the Holy Spirit, v. 11. —

Let us meet Jesus as He approaches us again and again in the Word and the Sacraments and thus escape the fire of the judgment, v. 12. W. ARNDT

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Mark 6:17-29

Vanity, all is vanity! Who would dare to write this as a caption under all the Christmas preparations reaching their climax today? But while we are standing at the very threshold of Christmas, our text, as an Advent text, stands guard at the entrance to the great festival urging: Beware, lest it all be vanity! This text presents a story of people to whom the message, "Behold, He comes!" was in vain.

Why Some People Receive No Blessing from the Message of Christ's Coming

1. *This is not because God does not offer His blessing to them, but*
2. *Because they mean to continue in their sin, and*
3. *Because they are too proud to heed the voice of their conscience*

1

The characters of this text, although utterly unworthy, had heard about Christ, chiefly through the Forerunner. Herod "heard of Him" (Mark 6:14), knew of His "mighty works." Even after this royal adulterer had yielded to the nagging of the equally adulterous Herodias and had cast John into prison, this king still had the hand of God reaching out after his soul: Herod "heard him gladly." Herodias, cruel and revengeful, had heard that correcting accusation, "It is not lawful," as a warning. That notorious family of Herod, placed right in the midst of the time and place where Christ accomplished the world's salvation! Truly, God would have all men to be saved!

God seeks to save that which was lost. This is impressed upon us in this Christmas season: "Good tidings which shall be to all people." Familiar truth to us, but a truth impressively demonstrated to us at each Christmas time. The message goes out in so many forms. The children study the story of the Christ Child; God is using the air waves to bring the message in so many radio programs; the carol singing, the best music of the season, the Christmas services — all help to bring God's message also to the Herods and the Herodias and the Salomes: "Come unto Me!" God planned this Christmas blessing for all.

2

This family of Herod, however, hears this message of a Savior come into the world without any blessing.

Herodias had a life story. Having flitted about a corrupt and licentious imperial court at Rome, she imbibed its spirit. Married to one Herod, she consorts with another Herod, already married; adulterous and incestuous. She hears that a preacher has dared criticize her actions, a preacher who had also spoken about a Lamb of God taking away sin. Result: Herodias "has a quarrel" against John (literally: "has it in for him"); she would have killed him. To gain her point, she does not hesitate to make her own dancing daughter an accomplice in the murder. She will have her adulterous life, preacher or no preacher. She loves her pet sin, hence, no blessing for her in Christ's coming.

On the threshold of Christmas, many reject its blessings for the same reason. Indeed, anyone can get that shallow thrill of Christmas which comes from expensive gifts, enjoyable social affairs, well-filled cash registers, and rising graphs of business activity. But only penitent sinners can get the real Christmas blessing. The cheat who plans to cheat some more, the thief who plans to continue his thievery, the slanderer who plans to continue his slandering, the despiser of Word and Sacrament who plans to continue his way, will find that for him Christmas will bring nothing more than the anticlimactic feeling of being glad when it is all over with.

3

Herod is an example of a man torn by conflicting emotions. He is torn this way and that; his conscience tells him to do one thing, his pride drags him away in the opposite direction.

Herod's conscience was not yet completely dead: He thinks that Jesus is John the Baptist risen from the dead (v. 16); he believes John is "a just man and an holy," and he "feared" John (v. 20); he even protected him from the wiles of Herodias ("observed him" = "guarded" him); he heard John gladly, and upon the horrid request of the girl he was "exceedingly sorry."

Why, then, did he not listen to the voice of his conscience and accept the word of John? Pride was the motive for overriding his conscience. "For his oath's sake." A king breaking an oath made to an appealing and clever girl! "For their sakes which sat with him." A king exposing himself to the contemptuous sneers of his inferiors! Impossible! Herod must choose between what is right and what is saving his face. He does the latter and silences that voice which would have brought him further blessings.

So do people greet the message of Christmas and lose its blessing. They know that they have led sinful lives, have con-

stantly stifled the voice of their conscience. Christmas comes to them with a Savior from sin; but their pride denies sin; to them sin is only a few mistakes which everybody makes. Such people feel that they are still far better than others whom they could name. Such are satisfied with the outward thrills and frills of the festival, too sure of themselves to acknowledge that Christ came because of sin. Hence, "Unto you is born a Savior" leaves them cold.

May this Christmas not be vanity of vanities to us! Let it be a Christmas in which Christ the Savior is all! H. O. A. KEINATH

Christmas Day

Matt. 1:18-25

"Oh, sing unto the Lord a new song, for He hath done marvelous things!" Ps. 98, 1. How fittingly these words of the Christmas Introit strike the keynote of this festive day! To all the seven seas, to every battlefield, wherever are assembled the sons and daughters of our nation, there goes, by way of radio, through sermon and story and song, the nineteen-century-old message of Christmas. In almost every language, to the very ends of all the earth, there sounds out the joyous story of Christ's birth. Thus is fulfilled the prophecy of the Christmas angel (Luke 2:10), "Behold, I bring you good tidings . . . which shall be to all people." How wonderful! But even more wonderful is the birth of Christ itself. Hence —

The Marvelous Birth of Jesus

1. It is a "marvelous thing" because it is the birth of God.

A. "He was conceived by the Holy Ghost," vv. 18, 23. His mother — a virgin, as prophesied Is. 7:14; stated in our text, vv. 18, 25; attested by an angel, v. 20; and acknowledged by the one most intimately related and most deeply concerned, vv. 24, 25.

B. He is called God, v. 23 (Μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεός, lit., "With us God"); Ἰμᾱν in v. 23 (cp. Is. 7:14: Immanuel); and in v. 21 (Ἰησοῦς, from the Hebrew יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, lit., perhaps, "Jah is Salvation"). These names, God and Jehovah, are Old Testament designations for the one true God. See also Luke 1:16 and v. 76, where "Lord" is equivalent to Jehovah. (Is. 40:3; Luke 2:11; Matt. 2:4-11.)

The birth of Jesus is the birth of God, hence worshiping and serving Him ought to be the most important phase of our Christmas celebration and of our entire life. But is it? Verily, the pleasures, the cares, and the worries of this evil world continually crowd Him out — even out of our homes and out of our lives! Indeed, "we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment." And yet there is hope — in the birth of Jesus, for —

2. It is a "marvelous thing" because it is the birth of our Savior.

A. "He shall save" not merely from sinning, but, v. 21, "from their sins," all of them! Truly, a comforting truth, making our salvation dependent not on us, but on Christ. (See also Luke 1:47, 68, 71-74; 2:11.) He saved us by removing the curse of the Law, Gal. 3:13; fulfilling it in our stead, Gal. 4:4, 5; not imputing our trespasses to us, 2 Cor. 5:19; Rom. 4:5, 7, 8, 22-25.

B. He saved *all* mankind, Luke 2:10, 32; John 1:29; from all sin, 1 John 1:7; but only those who accept Him as their Savior become "His people," v. 21; Gal. 3:7-11, 26; 4:4, 5.

C. He is the *only* Savior, v. 21 (emphatic, lit., "He and none other"); Is. 43:11; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:12; 2 John 9.

How very gracious of God thus to be conceived of a sinful woman; born as a babe; laid in a manger; nourished like an infant — in order that through His sacrifice we might be saved. Should not we in the face of such humiliation and such an offering on our behalf be truly humble and eternally grateful? To this end let us like the shepherds of old return to our daily tasks, "glorifying and praising God for all the things which we have seen and heard," that others, too, may through our efforts hear of this Christ, believe in Him and be saved.

Surely, the Lord "hath done marvelous things." May we, therefore, on this happy day of Christmas "sing unto Him a new song," not merely with our lips, but with our hearts and lives.

THEO. F. NICKEL

Sunday after Christmas

Luke 2:22-32

Christmas and its joyous services are a thing of the past. Within a few hours we shall close another year. War still rages and many hearts are full of fear for the future.

This is not the Christian attitude to assume. From our text we may learn much on this last Sunday of the year as we consider

Facing the Future Unafraid with Christ

1. How Simeon did this
2. How we may do this

1

A. Our text is a post-Christmas text. V. 21 refers to the circumcision of Christ. V. 22 refers to the presentation of Jesus, Lev. 12:1. The text is well suited to serve as a post-Christmas text. It is definitely suited as a pre-New Year text because it illustrates the firm and wonderful faith of Simeon.

B. Vv. 22-24 explain to us how the Baby Jesus came to the Temple, where Simeon could see Him. According to the Law of Moses (Ex. 13:12) the first-born child really belonged to God and

had to be presented to Him as His own property. Since in later years the Levites were substituted for the first-born of every family in Israel to do the service of the Tabernacle, the first-born children were redeemed. (Ex. 13:15; Num. 18:6.)

C. Simeon was a faithful Christian. Fine description, v. 25. Because he had faith in the coming of the Messiah, God looked upon him as just and declared him to be righteous. He was devout and demonstrated his Christianity in his regular life. The Holy Spirit was definitely with him, v. 25 c. The Holy Spirit had not only by special revelation assured him that he would not die before he had seen Christ (v.26), but this same Spirit led him to the Temple at the very time when Mary and Joseph presented Jesus to the Lord, v. 27.

D. His faith in God, a faith made strong by actually seeing the long-awaited Redeemer, brought real joy to the heart of Simeon and caused him to be able to face the future without fear. We see this demonstrated in his song of praise (vv. 29-32), in which he praised God for His goodness to him personally and to the whole world. He now had seen his Lord, and he knew by personal experience that the Savior had come and that he was at peace with God and reconciled unto His Maker through the Savior, v. 29. Having attained his highest ambition in life — to see his Salvation with his own eyes, the Lord Jesus, v. 30 — he faced the future unafraid. Nothing could harm him. Even death was nothing to fear, because in Christ he was at peace with God.

E. Simeon also knew that the future, the future of all nations, the salvation of the world, was in the hands of the Redeemer-King, vv. 31, 32. Simeon's words re-echo Is. 9:2; 60:1-3. Simeon could well trust his own future and the future of the world to such a wonderful Savior and face the future unafraid. We may do the same thing.

2

A. We may face the future unafraid on this last Sunday of 1944 if we follow in the footsteps of Simeon, of Mary and Joseph. In order to rid ourselves of worry and care, trouble and stress, let us go to church. Show how churchgoing, the use of the Word and Sacrament, will drive away fear and care and give hope and cheer.

B. We can face the future unafraid if like Simeon we permit the Spirit to teach us, to lead us, to guide us, vv. 26a, 27a. The Spirit will lead us unto the truth and will show us that in God and in Christ we have everything we actually need. John 14:26, 27.

C. We may face the future unafraid if with Simeon we rejoice in Christ. We cannot take the physical Christ into our arms, as Simeon did, but we know that Christ is truly with us, Matt. 28:20 b. Our soldiers and sailors have learned to face the foe, and also the

future, unafraid in the knowledge that the ever-present Christ is with them.

D. Christians may face the future unafraid also because of the knowledge of His salvation for all people. God's purposes will be accomplished also in the days of war. Even these days of war serve the purpose of spreading the Gospel all over the world. (Mention missionary experiences of soldiers and sailors.) For such a wonderful Savior, whose plans for the world of the future and the future salvation are being carried out give praise. On Him cast all your cares as the new year dawns. E. L. ROSCHKE

New Year's Eve

Is. 30:18-21

Another year of our life here upon this earth has passed away. What a year it has been! We are living in a world that has been and still is in great distress. War, bloodshed, destruction: God's judgment upon a sinful world. We are living in a world that lieth in great wickedness. And how about ourselves? What about our life during the last twelve months? What has been our relation to God?

Of What Should We be Reminded as This Year Draws to a Close?

1. *Of our people's sins and of our own*
2. *Of God's great mercy and grace*

1

a. The sins of our people. When attacked by their enemies, the Israelites turned to man for help and not unto God, vv. 1, 2; 31:3; the Lord's Word they despised, 30:9-11. They were a rebellious people, v. 9; brought adversity and affliction upon themselves, v. 20; and indeed had cause to weep, v. 19.

This war is God's judgment upon a sinful world, also upon our nation, calling men to repentance. But our nation has not been brought to its knees. Our people rather trust in their own power and that of their allies, instead of seeking help from God. The Word of the Lord is despised. The Lord's prophets are told to speak smooth things, vv. 10, 11. In the meantime sinful living goes on. Considering all the misery that is in the world, this night surely ought not to be a night for carousing and merry-making, but rather a night in which our people get down on their knees and humble themselves before God. But do they?

b. Our own sins. God's judgment is also upon us, 1 Pet. 4:17, 18. How have *we* reacted? Are we aware of our sins, our many transgressions of God's holy Word? Has the line of demarcation between us and the people of the world been closely drawn, or have we at times sinned together with the world? Have we always

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been conscious of our obligation to a sinful world, to wit, to let our light shine, Matt. 5:14, and to hold forth the Word of Life, Phil. 2:15, 16? Have we been thankful for the treasure of God's Word? Have we gladly heard it? Did we read it in our homes?

Will the Lord still show mercy to us and our people? Thank God, yes.

2

a. The Lord delays not only His final judgment but also His most severe and widespread judgments now; He is merciful and gracious, not willing that any should perish, vv. 18, 19; Ezek. 18:31, 32.

The Lord has not been very severe in His punishment upon our people. Compared with other war-stricken countries, we have been spared very much by the Lord. True, many of our sons and some of our daughters have had to go to war. Some will never return, others as cripples. But at home we hardly know that there is a war. We are still enjoying the comforts of life, have enough food to eat, have much money, and can lie down to sleep at night without fear that our cities and homes will be destroyed. We still have the Word of God, can read it in our homes and hear it in our churches. But our nation as a nation even despises God's long-suffering mercy. Not only have our people at large continued in the life of sin as before, but sin and crimes have increased, youth delinquency, immorality, etc. There has been no run on the churches in the past year. How many of the people of our country will be found in the churches in this night or on New Year's Day? Yes, how many of our own people will be missing either tonight or tomorrow morning?

b. Yet God is waiting, v. 18; He is long-suffering, merciful, and gracious, vv. 18, 19; His Word is still with us, vv. 20, 21. And we have the promise that if we cry to Him, confessing our sins, He will be very gracious and hear us.

God's mercy and grace is our comfort and encouragement. Let us not despise it. Let us turn to God anew. We need not take any of the sins of the old year with us into the new. If we but acknowledge our sins and repent and accept God's forgiveness in Christ, our Savior, we are God's dear children, 1 John 1:7. God's blessings will remain with us. If truly penitent, we must, of course, forsake our sins and in our life bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, Gal. 5:22-24. Finally, we should not forget our obligation to the world to bring unto many everywhere the Word of Life.

Let us prayerfully and in true humility close this old year. Relying upon God's grace, let us confidently and cheerfully enter upon the new year. As God's children, let us cast our many cares upon Him, knowing that He cares for us, 1 Pet. 5:7. Then, truly, we shall enjoy a blessed and happy new year.

J. H. C. FRITZ

New Year's Day**Luke 13:1-9**

There seems to be little connection between the Standard Gospel and our text. Yet in the center of both is Jesus, the Mediator between God and man. In Luke 2:21 Jesus is shown presenting to God the first drops of His holy, innocent blood as the initial payment on the ransom price which forms the basis of His intercession. He is also shown teaching us the immensity of our guilt, which only the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, could cancel. These two phases of Christ's mediatorship, so necessary for man's salvation, are clearly brought out in the text which we have chosen for today. For our instruction, admonition, and comfort let us on this first day of the new year turn our attention to

Jesus Revealing Himself as Our Mediator

1. *Speaking to us for God, He proclaims to us God's call to repentance*
2. *Speaking to God for us, He pleads our cause before God's judgment throne*

1

A. The stories vv. 1 and 4a both tell of swift, sudden death: in the one case due to the brutality of man, in the other to accident. In the history of death's universal rule over mankind the year 1944 will go down as one in which death has reaped one of the most horrible harvests throughout the world. At home and abroad how many thousands of lives have been snuffed out by accidents, unavoidable or due to carelessness! And how many thousands and tens of thousands has the grim reaper cut down in battle by bombing, torpedoing, conflagration, starvation, owing to the brutality and hatred of men!

B. Jesus' answer, vv. 2-5, teaches us the folly and sinfulness of those who have been spared a like fate and on that account in self-righteous self-satisfaction regard themselves as better than those stricken down. Jesus assures His countrymen that all Galileans and all inhabitants of Jerusalem had deserved a similar fate as those so suddenly cut off. The lesson for us: All Americans, all inhabitants of every country and city, also we, have deserved God's judgment; and, unless we repent, we, like them, shall perish. Let us look back at the year 1944 and at our record before God's judgment throne. The pastor will point out sins prevailing in his congregation, sins of commission and of omission, and on the basis of Scripture drive home man's depravity, Ps. 51:5; Is. 64:6; Rom. 7:18; etc., and God's appalling, all-consuming wrath against sin and the sinner, Deut. 32:20-22; Ps. 5:4-6; Rom. 1:18; 2:8, 9. These truths

must be preached to our generation and to our people lest we forget the hopelessness of our cause if we had only our own works to rely upon, Rom. 3:19, 20, 23. Thank God, that is not the only side to Christ's Mediatorship.

2

A. In close connection with the incidents narrated in vv. 1-5 Jesus spoke the parable of the unfruitful fig tree, picturing Himself as our Mediator pleading for us that we might be granted another year of grace.

B. A Lutheran congregation, above others, is like a fig tree planted in the rich soil of a vineyard. By the grace of God we enjoy in full the riches of God's pure Gospel; we have the Sacraments, the open Bible, day school and Sunday school, vast Lutheran literature, our church periodicals, pastor and schoolteacher, etc. All these blessings are bestowed upon us by our gracious God for a purpose, and this purpose He Himself states very clearly: "I come seeking fruit on this fig tree," v. 7, fruit of the spirit as Paul describes it. We have seen what our record was. What excuse can we offer if in spite of the superabundant grace of God we have brought so little fruit, and fruit so very far below the standard that God has laid down in His holy Law? God has a right to look for fruit in special abundance from people so especially favored. Could we charge God with injustice if He should decide to cut us down as unfruitful trees which only cumber the ground or as trees which do not bear the amount of fruit that He has a right to expect? What would become of us if on this first day He should announce this decision to us?

C. Behold Jesus pleading for us! Like the gardener pleading for another year of grace for the unfruitful fig tree, vv. 8, 9, so Christ, who on the eighth day after His birth shed the first drops of His blood for our redemption, pleads to this day with God for His negligent and careless Christian, asking God, "Grant him another year of grace; grant Me one more opportunity to bring My message of redemption and salvation to him in order to turn him from his evil way." Yes, the Lord is gracious and will for the sake of His Son give us another opportunity to show our gratitude for His abundant blessings by bringing forth fruit. He will continue among us with His Word and Sacrament, the means of grace, of regeneration, of justification, sanctification, and preservation. Let us use them diligently: let us from the Law recognize ever better the wickedness of our sin, Lam. 3:40; Ps. 90:5-8, and with sorrowing, repentant hearts let us, like Israel of old, turn to the Lord for forgiveness, Jer. 3:22; Joel 2:12, 13; let us make this new year a year of loyalty to our Savior, a year of bringing forth fruit a hundredfold.

THEO. LAETSCH