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## Homiletics: Outlines on the Nitzsch Gospel Selections

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## Outlines on the Nitzsch Gospel Selections

### FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 1:67-79

There are certain similarities between a new church year and a new civil year. But the differences are far more pronounced. The one is spiritual, the other temporal. The Christian's concern is with the spiritual. That is certain and a source of constant, unfailing joy.

#### THE CHRISTIAN'S JOY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW CHURCH YEAR

He rejoices because he knows

- I. *That God keeps His promises*
- II. *That God gives him strength to serve Him*
- III. *That God guides his feet in the way of peace*

#### I

A. The child promised to Zacharias and Elizabeth finally came. At the birth of that child, Zacharias' doubt was gone. Cp. v. 18. Moved by the Holy Spirit, he expressed his faith in a hymn of praise, because he realized that God had kept not only the promise concerning his own son, but was about to fulfill the many other promises concerning the salvation of Israel. In exalted words he briefly reviews the revelation the God of Israel had sent to His people through Abraham, David, and other holy Prophets. Lovingly he dwells on the oath God swore to Abraham, on the mercy and salvation which God had promised throughout the long centuries of the past. Why shouldn't Zacharias be full of joy at the beginning of a new era with the dawn of God's grace flooding his soul and mind?

B. God has brought us to the beginning of another church year. It is natural for us to feel timid, but let us look to Zacharias and God's many promises. Sweep away all doubts and fears, and let your heart swell with joy because God who never changes will fulfill all His promises to you. Believe it. As none of His promises fell to the ground in the Old Testament, so none will be ineffective now. God has promised to free you from sin, from an evil conscience, from the dominion

of the devil, from damnation, from eternal death. Calvary and the open grave of Jesus are God's guarantee that His promises to you are sure. Rejoice as you begin a new church year!

## II

A. Zacharias, the priest, was a "righteous man before God," etc., v. 6. "Blameless" indicates that he had served God without fear in holiness and righteousness. Occasions, no doubt, had been numerous in the past when temptations were strong to deviate from the commandments and ordinances of God, but Zacharias had stood firm in his public and private life. Now that he knew that God had made him the father of the prophet of the Highest, who was to prepare the way of the Redeemer, his joy increased, grew stronger, and with renewed faith and energy he faced the enemies of his soul and fearlessly served his God. On the threshold of a new era he moved forward in greater service.

B. You served God in the past in various ways according to your station in life. Often you succumbed to temptation. Many fears led you to forget God. Today you stand at the beginning of a new church year. The old enemies will again strive to make you forget God and depend on others and on yourself for help in life's struggle. But look! Your God says, "Serve Me without fear in holiness and righteousness all the days of your life!" Can you do it? Certainly. Since God's promises are true, you know that you can begin to fear, love, and trust in God above all things and to love your neighbor as yourself. Since God's promises are true, you know you can do all these things without fear, for God supplies all the necessary strength and forgives all shortcomings. Oh, rejoice a thousandfold!

## III

A. For many years Zacharias, the priest, had offered sacrifices in the Temple for worshipers who had come to find forgiveness and peace at God's altar. The devout found strength, comfort, and peace. The fulfillment of God's promise moved Zacharias to minister in his office with greater zeal because he saw through the Holy Spirit that the long-expected Messiah would appear in the flesh soon and minister personally to hungry souls, personally proclaim forgiveness of sins and salvation, personally lead people into the way of peace.

Joy? There was no end of joy for Zacharias as he in faith gazed upon the Dayspring who had visited him from on high.

B. We too like to let our minds dwell on peace, especially at this time when all the world is in seemingly hopeless confusion. But the peace for which you and I crave is a peace which the world cannot give; it is a peace that passes all understanding. It is a peace that rises above the world and reaches into eternity. That peace brings joy and is certain because the promises of God are true. Our joy over this peace at the beginning of this new church year rises to untold heights because our God wants this peace to "give light to those that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." We rejoice because, being ambassadors of God and fellow laborers with Him, we want to make this new church year a year in which many others can believe in the promises and embrace the peace that is so dear to us. May the whole year find you on the path of peace!

ALEX WM. C. GUEBERT

## SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 17:20-30

We can well understand why men should ask when the Kingdom of God will come. Jacob, dying, sighs, "Lord, I have waited for Thy salvation!" Believers of Old Testament times cried, "Watchman, what of the night?" And we, when the future looks dark and lowering — and the times are rare when the outlook is bright for the Church — we reiterate the cry, When? — Not only for our information, but for our consolation as well, the Lord in the text unfolds a grand panorama of history and says:

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD COMETH

#### I

The Pharisees no doubt meant to embarrass Jesus with their question; but they probably voiced a very common topic of conversation. The Prophets had foretold the coming of the Kingdom; John the Baptist cried: Matt. 3:2; Jesus Himself: Mark 1:15. Excitement doubtless became great among the people — like children counting the days till Christmas. But it means only gifts and candy to them; so the common

conception of the Kingdom was all wrong. They ask Christ: Despite all your promises, conditions in the land have not changed (Romans, Pilate, Luke 13:1); when is the Kingdom finally coming?

And Jesus says, It is here; it has come. Of course, you must change your ideas of the Kingdom, vv. 20, 21. The best proof for this their very question; they ask, When is it coming? and Christ replies, Lo, it is here, has been here for some time.

It was Christ's work to establish the Kingdom; and when He died, He said, "It is finished." He points to this in v. 25. So it was foretold that the suffering Messiah would establish the Kingdom; and like a golden thread this runs through the whole history of Christ's life. The Kingdom of God came despite all obstacles; the devil tempted Christ, the Jews rejected and persecuted Christ, the Gentiles crucified Christ — and that very Cross was the foundation of His kingdom!

## II

Pharisees are still scoffing, When is that Kingdom coming which you Christians are forever proclaiming? — A kingdom of the type of Jewish hopes will never come; Jesus' warning, v. 23 (the papal kingdom, a union of all churches, a millennium). It is not a visible principality built and defended by earthly means; marked by pomp, riches, honor, influence, or by mere virtue or respectability; no external marks (emotions, visions, trappings of various kinds).

The Kingdom is where Christ, the King, is; and it comes in His Word (Luther's explanation of the Second Petition). V. 21. It is the communion of saints on earth; the mark of membership not a few good resolutions, but faith in the Savior, engendered by the Gospel.

That Kingdom comes now, wherever and whenever the Gospel is preached. To recognize it, we too must at times unlearn certain presuppositions, v. 20. No pomp and circumstance at its founding (Bethlehem, Calvary, the first disciples, the early Christians); little thought of in the world today; yet a Kingdom that has conquered the world; no other kingdom in the world half as old; growing from age to age, while other kingdoms and empires fall.

## III

The time is coming when the Kingdom will be revealed in glory. Now it does not only seem insignificant to the world, but it is a kingdom of the cross; surrounded by sin and wickedness, beset by false prophets, endangered by defections, so that Christians look forward with longing to that revelation, v. 22.

But v. 24. Suddenly He will come; all will see Him, all will know Him; no need of saying, Lo, here, and, Lo, there. And they will know why He is coming — for judgment; though here He says no more about what will happen on that day; His disciples already knew that. Here His object is warning: Be prepared! Hence the two examples from Old Testament history, vv. 26-30.

V. 32: "Remember Lot's wife!" — Does it not seem as though we are living in "the days of the Son of Man"? that the hundred and twenty years of grace (Gen. 6:3) are drawing to an end? that even now fire and brimstone are ready to do their last work (Gen. 19:24)? "The Kingdom of God cometh!" Luke 21:36. THEO. HOYER

## THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 13:18-27

The preaching of John the Baptist and of Christ was Kingdom preaching, the former proclaiming that the Kingdom was coming, the latter that it had arrived (Luke 16:16; 17:20), although He indicated that the final consummation was lying in the future (Luke 21:31). The term was on the lips of friends and foes, cf. Mark 11:10; Luke 23:51; 17:20. What is this Kingdom? (Define the Kingdom.) In his explanation of the Second Petition Luther tells us how this Kingdom comes to us. It is the gracious reign or rule of God in human hearts established when the Holy Spirit enters through the means of grace. The true believers are in the Kingdom. The text tells us various truths about

## THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM

*I. The Kingdom will spread far and wide.*

In the Orient the mustard plant coming from a small and insignificant seed will become as large as a tree. This is

a good picture of the growth of the Kingdom of God, which at first is hardly perceptible, but gradually extends from one place and country to the other till it is like a tree of wide-spreading branches.

Think of the growth of the Christian Church. From Judea it spread in all directions. In modern times the Church's message has been taken to practically all parts of the globe.

It has come to us. God be praised, the Kingdom is represented in our midst.

### *II. This spreading takes place quietly.*

Like the ferment of leaven it progresses. In an unobserved way the work is done. The Holy Spirit does it, not with armies, machine guns, atomic bombs, but through the means of grace. It is a mysterious power that is exerted when the Kingdom is built. The Gospel, a very simple message, much despised among men, is the power of God.

Has the Holy Spirit done His quiet work in us? What the world needs is not sociology, but the means of grace.

### *III. Comparatively few people reach the final goal of the Kingdom — heaven.*

As if to counteract the view which might be entertained by some that ultimately the whole human race will be brought to the mansions above, St. Luke relates a dialog between Jesus and a questioner. The Kingdom of God is not mentioned, but the question whether the establishment of the Kingdom means the future possession of eternal life by every human being is answered.

Membership in the Kingdom is like passing through a strait, narrow gate. To be a Christian one has to repent and believe in Christ, the only Redeemer, take the reason captive, deny one's self, take up the cross daily, and follow Jesus. A place in the Kingdom is a free gift of God, but living in the Kingdom involves devotion to the heavenly Master.

Many people will realize what the blessings of the Kingdom are when it is too late (v. 25).

It will become evident that the mere outward connection with Christ and His Word (v. 26) is not the key that opens the gate of heaven.

**This is a word of serious warning not to trifle, not to rely on outward church membership, but to be in the Kingdom of God through believing acceptance of Christ the Savior and to follow Him in daily repentance.**

**W. ARNDT**

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

MATT. 3:1-12

Again the world is preparing for Christmas. No other birthday has been or will be celebrated so universally and with such elaborate preparations as the nativity of the Babe of Bethlehem. Yet mere outward preparation is displeasing to God and unworthy of that Babe. In our text God Himself exhorts us

**PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD!**

and tells us

*I. What this demands of us*

*II. Why we should gladly obey this exhortation*

### I

John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness, tells the people, Repent ye! He did not preach in the Temple, in populous Jerusalem, in the market places, but in the wilderness. He was dressed not in fashionable clothes (v. 4; cp. Matt. 11:8), garbed like ancient Elijah (2 Kings 1:8); like him, satisfied with humble food (v. 4; cp. 1 Kings 17:6, 9-15); like him, a preacher of repentance.

The people went out into the wilderness (v. 5). So let us forget the rush of business, rid our minds of the cares and worries of daily life and hear God's message: Repent ye!

What does repentance signify? The word means to change one's mind, one's attitude, one's way of thinking. The Pharisees coming to John were self-righteous, self-satisfied (Luke 15:1-2; 18:9-14; Matt. 23:1-33). They are told to repent. The Sadducees, cultured unbelievers (Acts 23:8), though members of the Jewish Church, are told to repent. All people coming to John hear the same inexorable demand: Repent ye. Change your way of thinking concerning yourselves (vv. 7-10); and concerning the promised Messiah (vv. 11-12). Confess your sins (v. 6), and look for salvation to Him who taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29).



Like those church people coming to John, we also are sinners. And there is a good deal of the Pharisee and Sadducee in every one of us. To us also is addressed the call of the preacher in the wilderness: Repent ye. Let us not be satisfied with external membership in the Church of Christ, proudly pointing to our orthodoxy. Then to us also would apply vv. 9-10. Confessing our own sinfulness (Ps. 51:3-9; Luke 15:21), casting aside the filthy garments of our own righteousness (Is. 64:6), let Christ alone be unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:7-14). That is true repentance, a complete change of mind, which alone brings forth fruits befitting a change of mind such as God demands (v. 8).

## II

A. Prepare ye the way of the Lord. It is indeed the Lord Jehovah who comes to us in the manger (Is. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:6). Look beyond the swaddling clothes and poverty and behold in this Child the Lord, your God, placed there as your Christmas Gift (Luke 2:11).

B. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand! Marvelous things had been spoken concerning this Kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12-13; Ps. 45; 72; 110; Is. 9:7; Jer. 31:33-34; Dan. 7:13-14; Rev. 21:22). A glorious Kingdom indeed!

C. To see all this glory calls for eyes of faith. Faith is not of man's creating (Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Cor. 1:23; 2:14). Yet God Himself works in us that very repentance and faith which He demands. He does that by His Word and Sacrament. His Word John preached, and his preaching was effective (vv. 1, 5, 6). We still hear the Word of Him who said John 6:63 b. (Cp. Rom. 1:17; 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23-25.) His Baptism (v. 6), granting forgiveness and having regenerative power (John 3:5; Gal. 3:26-27; Titus 3:4-7).

D. These are the means whereby He baptizes us with His Holy Spirit (v. 11; Is. 11:2; Acts 2:37-41; 10:44).

E. There is finally a gathering into the heavenly garner (Matt. 13:43; 25:34-40; Rev. 7:9-17).

Therefore repent! Prepare ye the way of the Lord! Shall He purge you from the floor of His Church as chaff to be burnt (v. 12)? No? Then let your life be one of daily repentance and preparing His way.

TH. LAETSCH