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Homiletics: Outlines on the Nitzsch Gospel Selections

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Homiletics

Outlines on the Nitzsch Gospel Selections

CHRISTMAS DAY

MATT. 1:18-23

Among the doctrines of Scripture which are assailed is also the virgin birth of Jesus. At first thought someone may say: What, after all, does it matter whether or not anyone believes this doctrine as long as he believes that Jesus is the Savior? But it does matter very much if a person denies this doctrine, for, in the first place, the doctrine of the virgin birth is a doctrine clearly revealed in the Old and New Testaments; if one is permitted to deny this doctrine, what would keep him from denying other doctrines of Scripture? In the second place, he who denies the doctrine of the virgin birth actually denies that Jesus is the Savior. Only the Jesus born of the virgin could be the sinless man who could as the God-Man become the Savior of the world. It is very fitting, therefore, that on this Christmas Day we should, for the strengthening of our faith, meditate on

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF JESUS

I. The fact of the virgin birth of Jesus

II. The purpose of the virgin birth of Jesus

I

A. Mary "was found with child of the Holy Ghost" (v. 18). Mary was to become the mother of Jesus. In her the Son of God was to assume human flesh and blood. Mary knew this, for God had sent His angel Gabriel to announce this to her, as we read Luke 1:26-35. In true childlike faith Mary believed what far surpassed her human comprehension; she said: Luke 1:38. Hence we confess in our Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, conceived by the Holy Ghost," but we at once add, "born of the Virgin Mary."

B. Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus. Since, according to the common course of nature, ordained by God Himself, children are born into this world of man and woman,

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Mary was surprised when the angel Gabriel announced to her the birth of Jesus; for she said: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34.) Our text refers to this when it says: "Before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost" (v. 18). This was in accordance with the prophecy of the Old Testament which said: "A virgin shall be with child, etc." (v. 23; cf. Luke 1:26-27). And Mary remained a virgin until Jesus was born, for we read in the words following our text that Joseph "knew her not until she had brought forth her first-born son and called His name Jesus" (v. 25).

C. Mary, however, though a virgin, was both at the conception and birth of Jesus a wife, the betrothed wife of Joseph. When Joseph became aware of the fact that Mary was with child, he was surprised and puzzled. He believed Mary to be a chaste virgin. But that at that time she was with child he could not understand. Joseph, therefore, not willing to make a public example of her, "was minded to put her away privily," secretly (v. 19). All this Joseph did in ignorance. God, therefore, sent an angel to Joseph, saying: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy *wife*, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (v. 20). We read in our text that Mary was espoused to Joseph, or, as we say, betrothed, engaged. But Joseph and Mary had not yet established their home and did not live together as husband and wife. Nevertheless, the angel sent by God calls Mary Joseph's wife. By virtue of their betrothal they had been made husband and wife in the eyes of God. Therefore Jesus was not born out of wedlock. God desired also in the birth of Jesus to preserve the sacredness of the marriage estate, which He Himself had established.

Why must we hold fast to this doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus? The answer is given us when we, secondly, consider the *purpose* of the virgin birth.

II

The virgin birth of Jesus had been designed by God in His eternal plan for man's salvation (vv. 22-23). Jesus came to be the Savior of sinners (v.21).

A. Our text relates the prophecy which said that when Mary would bring forth her son, "they shall call His name

Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is *God with us*" (v. 23). The name **Emmanuel** refers both to the divine and the human nature of Christ. Christ had to be *man* in order to put Himself, in the stead of sinful man, under the Law of God (Gal. 4:4-5) and to suffer in the stead of sinful man, the sinner's punishment; that was God's way of reconciling a sinful world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19, 21; Gal. 3:13). And our Savior had to be *God* in order that His work of redemption might be given universal and eternal value.

B. But in order to fulfill the Law and to suffer the punishment of sin in the sinner's stead, *our Redeemer had to be without sin*. If Jesus had been born according to the common course of nature, of man and woman, He would have been a sinner, for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh" (John 3:5); and a sinner could not have saved himself, much less all sinful mankind (Ps. 49:7-9). As a result of His virgin birth, Jesus was without sin. It is for this reason that the angel, in announcing the birth of Jesus, said to Mary: "That *holy thing which shall be born of thee* shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Thus Jesus could truly become, and did become, the world's Sin-Bearer.

We should not let anyone rob us of this precious doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus, for it assures us that Jesus is indeed He who has saved us and all mankind from sin. When Jesus first came into the world, we are told, "the world knew Him not" (John 1:10), but by impenitence and unbelief rejected Him. Even so it is today. The Gospel of salvation is being preached to many, but many will not repent and believe. God grant that we be not among such unbelievers, but that with contrite heart we anew acknowledge our sins, in true faith accept Jesus, our Savior, and by a godly life give evidence of our Christian faith. (Hymn 86:1.)

J. H. C. FRITZ

SECOND CHRISTMAS DAY

JOHN 1:1-8

From the protevangel (Gen. 3:15) to the message of the last Apostle (1 John 1:2, 7) the Christmas Gospel teaches that the Christ Child came from heaven to save sinners. "God is man, man to deliver." (L. H., 77:2; 85:3.)

THE CHRIST CHILD, HEAVEN'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

I. *He is the gift of Heaven*

II. *He is the Savior of mankind*

I

This gift does not appeal to the ungodly (v. 5 b). No room in the inn. Persecution by Herod (John 6:66; Is. 53:2; 1 Cor. 1:23). Even in these days of universal Christmas observance comparatively few behold His glory.

He is God's Word, the personal Word. He is the personal Wisdom of God (Prov. 8), God's manifestation to mankind, as the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament and as the incarnate Son of God in the New Testament (Heb. 1:1; Rev. 19:13; 1 John 1:1; *L. H.*, 76:2).

What a majestic gift! He *was* in the beginning, from eternity (John 17:5; Prov. 8:23). The Prophets of old foretold His might (Psalm 2:9), and the angels sang their "Glory to God in the highest." He Himself proved His might. By His omnipotence He directed world affairs to suit the time and place of His birth. In His work of creation we again see His glory. By Him were all things created (v. 3; *L. H.*, 104:2).

The work of our redemption was so great that no created being could accomplish it. The Christ Child is true God (Is. 9:6). The Son of God was with the Father from eternity as a separate entity, as one person is distinct from another; yet He is true God, consubstantial with the Father (cf. the Nicene Creed). The deity of the Word is the climax in the description of the Savior. "Upon this rock of Gibraltar rests the foundation of our faith" (*L. H.*, 85:3; 93:2).

The Christmas Gospel brings us directly into contact with the majesty of the Most High. While Christmas is truly a children's festival, the message is so sublime that the world's greatest thinkers or philosophers cannot fathom, or understand, the nature of the incarnate Word.

II

The glory of the Lord shines most brightly in His relation to lost mankind. He who from eternity was Life itself became the Savior of mankind. The Son of God not merely gives life (1 Tim. 6:13), nor is He merely life as the creatures have received life from the Creator, but He is Life in the absolute

(Col. 3:4; Rev. 1:18). **Creatures exist (Acts 17:28), but the Savior is (Ex. 3:14).**

As this Life, the Christ Child established contact with mankind, not merely at the Creation and in man's state of innocence, but especially after man's fall into sin. He sent His Prophets. He Himself spoke. He redeemed the world. He is the Lightbearer (2 Pet. 1:19). As God at the Creation first made light, on which life is dependent, so the Word, as the Light of the world, dispelled the darkness of sin (1 John 1:5; L. H., 80:4). This Light even enlightens the Gentiles (Luke 2:32). In His light we see the invisible Father (Ps. 36:9).

As the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds in the darkness at Bethlehem, the Christ Child still shines in the darkness of this world. This action of the Savior continues (Is. 60). Refer to the Savior as the Light in our own day; in the history of missions, and especially in our own heart.

The message of the Savior's glory and of His work as Life and Light is to be made known among all mankind. God sent John the Baptist to testify of the Savior (vv. 6-8). John was God's own messenger, even as God sent his angel to Bethlehem and as our pastors still preach the Gospel. Neither John nor any other Gospel preacher has the power to communicate life to a world dead in trespasses and sin, but we do have power to witness of that Life, which is also the Fountain of life. Through this message God works faith and gives salvation.

May we not let this Christmas pass without devoutly beholding the glory of the Christ Child and more fervently accepting Him as our only Savior. You have life, live; you have light, shine; you have the truth, witness!

VICTOR MENNICKE

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

LUKE 2: 25-32

The Christmas joy of the children of this world was the fleeting joy of a decadent materialism. It is not so with the Christmas joy of the children of light.

Theirs is an

ENDURING CHRISTMAS JOY

I. Wherein does this joy consist?

II. For whom does it endure?

I

The angel of the Lord came upon the shepherds and brought them the good tidings of great joy concerning the birth of the Savior. The heavenly host sang the praises of this joyful event. The shepherds became partakers of this joy by finding Mary and Joseph and the Babe lying in the manger. They could not keep this joy to themselves. They made it known far and wide. Forty days later Mary and Joseph appeared in the Temple to bring an offering for the purification of the mother (Lev. 12:1-8) and to present the Child Jesus as the first-born of Mary to the Lord (Ex. 13:2; Num. 8:16-19). Now an aged man who has become a symbol of enduring Christmas joy suddenly appears on the scene (v. 25). This just and devout man was waiting for the Messiah, who would comfort all that mourn (Gen. 5:29; Is. 61:2). By the Spirit he had received the definite promise that he would not depart this life until he had seen the Christ of God (v. 26). This Spirit-inspired anticipation of seeing the long-awaited Comforter of Israel was a part of Simeon's Christmas joy. Hope maketh not ashamed (Rom. 5:5). And now he was to see the fruition of this hope. Directed there by the Spirit, he sees Mary and Joseph and the Child Jesus in the Temple. He takes the Child into his arms and thus experiences life's supreme Christmas joy. He says, as it were: "Here I hold a little child, barely six weeks old, unknown to the world, yet it is the true Savior, my long-awaited Redeemer and Comforter." Then he blessed God, first in behalf of himself and then in behalf of the whole world (vv. 29-32). Out of the abundance of a joyful heart the mouth speaketh. With the Babe in his arms he sang a joyful hymn of praise and thanksgiving, the Nunc Dimittis, that has found a place in the liturgy of the Church. He sings of a departure in peace, a release from joyful service to God and man (Is. 57:2; Matt. 25:21). He rejoices because his eyes had now seen the Lord's salvation. By revelation of the Spirit he saw more than a simple child. He saw the salvation that He would bring by

His perfect life and His innocent suffering and death. Furthermore he confesses that the joy of this salvation is prepared for all peoples, for Jews and Gentiles alike. Simeon declares that this Christmas joy shall be proclaimed in all the world.

Another blessed Christmas season is drawing to a close. Have we by faith received its joyous message? Or have attending material joys meant more to us? God forbid. May we experience and retain the true Christmas joy of Mary and Joseph, of the shepherds and Simeon. Then ours will also be enduring Christmas joy. (L. H., 85:13-15.)

II

Christmas joys are to be experienced not only at Christmas time, but at all times. Who are they that will have enduring Christmas joys? Once more let us take notice of this venerable man Simeon.

St. Luke refers to him as a man whose name was Simeon. Nothing more is said about his station in this world. Like Mary and Joseph and the shepherds he belonged to the obscure of this world, poor in this world's goods but rich in God. In his outward life he was, like Zacharias, "just." Cp. Luke 1:6. In his inward life he was "devout." He was conscientious and God-fearing. Like Jacob of old, he waited for the Consolation of Israel. His whole life was dedicated to waiting joyfully for the arrival of the promised Messiah, the Comforter of Israel (Is. 40:1; 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 3:20). In the midst of a faithless world the Lord had preserved him in the saving faith.

Do you desire that Christmas joys endure for you? Then follow the example of Simeon in his firm faith and pious life. May our life be dedicated to "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Guided and inspired by the Holy Ghost, Simeon came to the Temple at the right time, took the Child Jesus in his arms and sang his beautiful swan song. Christmas will surely endure for us if we also are directed by the Spirit of God through the Word and the Sacraments to search the Scriptures daily, to attend divine worship regularly, and thus to find the Savior in His Word and Sacraments and to take Him into our arms of faith.

Our Christmas joys will furthermore endure if, like

Simeon, we confess that the salvation of the Christ Child is prepared and meant for all peoples, Jews and Gentiles alike. In disseminating the Gospel, in spreading true Christmas joy, as did the Shepherds, we help to increase these joys and to retain them for ourselves and others.

Thus ever remaining in the service of Christ, our Lord, we shall joyfully await our release from service here on earth, as did Simeon, and come to the everlasting joy of heaven, where we shall see our Savior as He is, face to face (Ps. 16:11; 17:15; 1 John 3:2; L. H., 137 and 138).

H. C. HARTING

NEW YEAR'S EVE

MICAH 7:18-20

Come to the close of another year. The year that is about to end belonged to the future at one time; now it has practically departed. How much transpired that we regret! But no prayer will bring back lost opportunities; no tears will cause a single day to return. How are we to begin the new year? Filled with fear and trepidation? No, on the ridge on which we are standing at this moment, we look back upon 1946 and forward upon 1947, receiving strength and grace and encouragement from the Lord of heaven, whose grace and faithfulness are unequalled. In joyous faith let us, at the turn of the year, ask the question,

WHO IS A GOD LIKE UNTO THEE?

- I. *Thou forgivest our sins of the past*
- II. *Thou wilt be faithful also in the future*

I

A. V. 18a is a question of sincere admiration and adoration, asked in true faith. The world wants to know nothing of God or only as much as suits its fancy. Claims credit for accomplishments (Deut. 8:17). The children of the world publicly deride and mock Him if someone reminds them of their sins and calls them to repentance. Compare Ex. 5:2. But here in text the question is one of believing admiration. Often He proved His might: Compare the Exodus, pillar of cloud, manna, Red Sea. When Jethro heard of all these things, he rejoiced and exclaimed: Ex. 18:11. For this reason God can say: "I am the Lord, and there is none beside Me."

B. There is none like unto the God of Israel, the Triune God, because of His grace, His great goodness, mercy, and love. Hence v. 18. To show sinners grace and mercy is His especial delight. Overlooks, as it were, our sins, passes over our disloyalty and unfaithfulness, our shameful treachery, the broken promises of the remnant of His heritage. This faithlessness of Israel often incited His wrath, but "He retaineth not His anger forever" (v. 18 b; Ps. 103:9). — You ask: How can He delight in mercy? For the sake of Him who eight days after His birth received the God-appointed name of Jesus, Savior; Compare Gal. 4:4-5. Did He not bear our griefs and carry our sorrows? Is there anything that the Lord requires of us that He has not fulfilled in our stead? For His sake God delighteth in mercy, has no pleasure in death of wicked, but that the wicked turn from his evil way and live.

C. The incomparable God of the covenant, Jehovah, is different from all other gods. False gods require of their adherents that they atone for their own sins, but of this God Scripture says: Ex. 34:6-7. He will not fail us either; He will reveal Himself unto us again as a merciful and forgiving God (v. 19). He will again have compassion, says Micah, after He has punished the people. For Israel had sinned in many ways, as the Prophet confesses at the beginning of this chapter. Idolatry, dishonesty, graft, lack of love to the neighbor: these are the sins upon which the punishment of dispersion and captivity must follow. For this reason the Prophet must announce this judgment of God.

Is it different in our case? Were not many things done by us in the past year of which we repent with bitter tears? Or have we made marked improvement in life? Does Lord not find among us worldliness, indifference to Word, willful ignoring of Word at times, anger, hatred, envy, unchastity? Who of us could rise today and say: "I have done nothing amiss in 1946"? "Alas, my God, my sins are great! My conscience doth upbraid me." Who is a God like unto Thee? As jealous as Thou, visiting iniquity of fathers upon the children? But, praise be to Thee, as compassionate as Thou? As He had compassion with Israel in past, the Prophet is certain He will even now show mercy. That is our hope, our confidence, today. We hope that He will subdue our iniquity as one subjugates a cruel tyrant. Many of us seemingly cannot forget a wrong.

That is not true forgiveness. God does not forgive in this manner. Casts all our sins into depth of the sea that not even their memory may continue to live. He casts our sins behind Him, and He never looks back. A glorious picture of the forgiving love of a merciful God. What a comfort at the turn of the year! Our sins many and great; God's mercy greater. He delights in mercy. (Hymn 19:3.)

II

Yes, who is a God who like unto Thee will be faithful also in the future? For our text says: V. 20. This is a confession on the part of Micah that God will also in the future remain our faithful and gracious God. He is Jehovah, who is ever the same, keeps His Word, performs His truth, keeps faith with men. He had sworn unto the fathers to show them mercy. With a solemn oath He promises Abraham that he should become a great nation and that Canaan should become the possession of his descendants. Repeated to Jacob. Did God perform His truth? History gives answer. Leads Israel out of Egypt into Land of Promise. Messiah had not as yet appeared at time of Micah, but promise is repeated. It will be fulfilled, for all forgiveness and grace is possible only through Christ. And did not everything come to pass exactly as foretold—Virgin Birth, birth in Bethlehem, Christ's life, death, resurrection? In Christ He can now be merciful unto transgressors. Where in history of world is there a God like unto Him who shows such mercy? Cannot deny Himself, keeps His Word, especially the Word promising pardon.

B. And that is our hope for the future. Also in our case He will perform His truth, show mercy and grace in Christ. That is our comfort at the turn of the year: He will keep us in faith (1 Thess. 5:24; 1 Cor. 10:13; John 10:28-29).

Also in earthly matters He will be with us, will feed and clothe us, provide and care for us, grant us health, strength, peace, and as much of worldly goods as is good for us. Will answer prayer; help us bear the cross, comfort us in sorrow. Thus, even though future is uncertain, it is as bright as the promises of God. Sure of His almighty protection, certain of His glorious grace, we may confidently enter the new year, exclaiming with genuine admiration of humble faith: Who is a God like unto Thee? (Hymn 19:4.)

PAUL KOENIG

NEW YEAR'S DAY

LUKE 4:16-21

Relate the story in its setting with special reference to the meaning of the acceptable year. Cp. Lev. 25:9.

The acceptable year had come to Nazareth. Today we are wishing ourselves and others a happy new year, but will those wishes come true in 1947?

MAKE YOUR WISH COME TRUE: A HAPPY NEW YEAR

Though the air is filled with "Happy New Year," strangely enough so few know what this really means. To the sick and invalid who is watching the shadows of the days lengthen with dread for the night, it may mean strong limbs, a healthy heart, a disease-free body, or a sound mind; to the hungry sitting midst the rubble, a year of a little to eat, a roof over his head, any kind; to the penniless or the debtor, a job to bring to him some of the wherewithal of life; to the weary and the oppressed, a lightened heart; to the lonely, companionship; to the disappointed, renewed hope. Any and all of these may be included in the wish for a happy new year, but unless these receive their direction from Him who brought the acceptable year to Nazareth, these wishes are but passing winds in a world of storms.

I

What is a happy new year?

A. When the Gospel is preached to the poor. What is that? Ask the man who fell among the thieves, stripped of money and clothing, bruised and beaten. Ask him as he feels careful hands wash him and lift him upon the beast of burden, as he hears the cheering words of a friend. So ask those who, having recognized their spiritual poverty, are now enjoying the riches of heaven given them in the Gospel. Once poor, now cloaked with the garment of the righteousness of Christ, adorned with the ring of adoption, shod with the sandals of peace, bearing the staff of life.

B. When the heart ground and broken by the bruising weight of the Law is healed. What is that? Ask him who for 38 hopeless years anxiously sought healing for his crippled and gnarled legs and now, lying on the porch of the pool called Bethesda, bereft of every shred of hope, moans,

"I have no one to help me." Ask him when he hears the words, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk," and feels the healing of his limbs, as he gains muscles and sinews and straightness of bone. So ask those who, once trapped by the demands of the Law and bruised by their attempts to meet these demands, have experienced the finding of the Savior, who is the fulfillment of the Law.

C. When deliverance is preached to the captives. Do you wonder what that may mean? Ask Peter, imprisoned by the wicked hands of one who wished to win the applause of treacherous churchmen in high places, as he feels the touch of an angel loosen his shackles and leaves the prison cell a free man. So it is truly a happy new year when Christ preaches deliverance to those whose sins have fettered them to hell itself.

D. When the recovering of sight is proclaimed. Does this mean little to you who daily bathe in the sun's rays and the beauties of God's creation? Then ask blind Bartimaeus, at the side of Jericho road, who, pitifully begging for alms, suddenly hears the voice of his Messiah say, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" Ask him what it meant to have his plea, "Lord, that I might receive my sight," answered. So, too, there is a happy new year when the spiritual blindness, which is ours by birth, is removed by the power of the Spirit and the daybreak of the Son of Heaven flashes before our seeing eyes.

E. When they who are bruised are set at liberty. Is life too easy for you to appreciate the burdens of the enslaved? Ask Onesimus of Colossae, who, in slavery, found the yoke too heavy and fled to the only friend he knew, Paul. But ask him when he returns to his master, Philemon, knowing that he is a free man in Christ, returning to one who is more than a master, a brother in Christ. So, too, this new year will be happy when the load of guilt no longer presses; when we know that we are no longer slaves, but free men whose burdens and yoke have been taken up by Him who gives us rest.

This is the acceptable year—having this we have the jubilee year.

II

But how do we make this our own?

A. Not by pious wishes, not by the works and plans of men, by new resolutions and pledges.

B. It is ours through Him who alone can make it a happy new year.

C. Christ offers this happy new year to all who hear His Word, and all He asks us to do is to accept. Recognize yourself as one who is poor, bruised, imprisoned, sightless, enslaved, and accept in faith His riches, healing, liberty, sight, and freedom. In short, trust and embrace Him as your Savior — grow in the knowledge of that faith — and your wish will come true. Yours will be a happy new year.

In that faith and love you will live a life in conformity to His will and thus spread, through service, the happiness of the new year.

ARTHUR C. REPP

THE SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR

MATT. 3:13-17

Christ's redeeming work is the central fact of our faith. During the past weeks we reviewed God's sending His Son into the world to take care of this task (the Christmas story; Gal. 4:4 ff.). The story is so familiar that we are apt to take it for granted, to think of it simply as a lovely account in a book, and to forget, in and behind it, the great God at work with His purpose and grace. Hence the Scriptures draw our attention to the fact that the Father was with the Son all the way, in the carrying out of the tremendous task. Today's Gospel reminds us how God's providence ordered the very events of history to preserve the Christ for His task of redemption; kings and politics had to bend to that plan. Our text goes even farther. It tells of

GOD'S GIFT OF HIS SPIRIT TO HIS SON FOR HIS TASK

I. The Father bestowed His Spirit in a special manner at the start of the Savior's ministry

II. For that purpose He employed John's Sacrament of Baptism

As we ponder these facts, we shall be helped to realize God's mighty purpose to save us from our sins.

I

A. The episode of our text was connected with the work of John the Baptist. He had been sent as the forerunner of Jesus, the herald who would describe Christ's coming and summon men to accept Him as Savior. This event also belonged to the preparation for Christ's ministry. When John at Bethabara finally announced that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God, he told of this story as the confirmation, by God Himself, of Jesus' task of the redemption (John 1:29-34).

B. Jesus of Nazareth was the very Son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:35). The favor of God was with Him as He grew to maturity (Luke 2:47-52). Hence this story does not imply that Jesus was without the Holy Ghost before the Baptism.

But in this event God the Father gave to His son as the Redeemer of the world the Spirit of God in a very special sense. He equipped Him with His Spirit for the purposes of His ministry. Jesus was He to whom the Spirit had been promised for the work of redemption (Is. 61:1-3; Ps. 45:7). The Spirit would lead and strengthen Christ through the paths of His redemptive career (cf. Matt. 4:1 ff.). That God here gave the Spirit to His Son is our proof of the concern of God for the completion of the task of the Atonement.

II

Why should the Father utilize just this device and means for the purpose?

A. The Baptism made possible a testimony. John the Baptist could use it as a proof of Christ's person and work (John 1:29-34). The heavenly Father Himself could thereby give immediate and tangible proof of His mandate upon His Son and of His presence with Him for the task (text vv. 16-17). The Spirit used a hovering presence to make Himself visible in His relation to Christ. We in our own time thus can rejoice in the fact that Jesus Christ carried out God's own program of salvation for us. We can so be confident that our Lord spoke truly of His power to impart the Spirit also to His followers (John 15:26; 16:14).

B. The Savior Himself hallowed this means of grace for its function. John baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 19:4). John knew that Jesus Christ had no need of forgive-

ness of sins and hence was reluctant to baptize Him (v. 14). But Jesus was nevertheless anxious to be baptized because He had come to submit to every divine institution, to fulfill every divine command (v. 15). As the Representative of sinners (Is. 53:12) He received the Baptism instituted for sinners. Baptism for forgiveness conveyed also the power of the Spirit. The power of that Spirit Jesus wanted to gain by every means that God had instituted, for the great tasks before Him.

We, the followers of Jesus, are grateful not only for His redeeming us, but also for this token of His devotion to the means of grace, a powerful reminder to us to draw upon the Spirit of God for our faith and duty, through the means set before us in Gospel and Sacrament.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

EPIPHANY

MARK 1:14-22

When Jesus appeared among the people of His time, they often looked upon Him merely as the healer of bodily ills. Similarly, people of today often look upon Him as a mere social reformer to cure the ills of our society. This text is an Epiphany text, since it records an appearance of Christ and its lessons.

THE LESSONS OF CHRIST'S GALILEAN EPIPHANY FOR OUR DAY

- I. *The true nature of the Kingdom of God*
- II. *The proper perspective of our own lives*
- III. *The correct judgment in matters of religion*

I

A. Historical background of the text: Jesus begins His great Galilean ministry; begins to reveal Himself to His contemporaries; preached the "Kingdom." People had false conceptions of His kingdom (secular, political).

B. Similarly, false conceptions of the Kingdom of God today: Some think this Kingdom consists of peace among nations, peace among races, just civil government, a successful world government, suppression of crime and vice, freedom from fear, want, freedom of speech and religion. To this some would

add cultural and scientific advancement as the unfailing assurance of the coming of the "Kingdom." All these may be blessings, but they are not part of the Kingdom of God.

C. Christ's kingdom is something far different. Text v. 15: "The time is fulfilled," i. e., the prophecies of the Old Testament about a Savior are now seen as events. "Repent ye," this change of heart is an essential of membership in this Kingdom. "Believe in the Gospel," for where there is no such trust in the message of salvation by Christ, there is no Kingdom of God.

The importance of this correct view of the "Kingdom": Without this knowledge we are uncertain about ourselves and about our duties as Christians. The Kingdom of God is within us. Without Christ and without faith in His Gospel we are not in this Kingdom. All mission work essentially aims at bringing men into this spiritual Kingdom.

II

A. Text, vv. 16-20. Most of these four men, possibly all, had met Christ before (John 1:35-42). Thereupon they returned to their occupation as fishermen in Galilee. They had considered this occupation important; now they were to learn that there was for them a greater purpose in life: "I will make you to become fishers of men."

James and John bound also by considerations of family (the aging father). Yet, "they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants and went after Him."

B. In this Epiphany the Lord gives us the proper perspective of our lives. Our occupation, labor, job, income, may be important, but not the most important. These matters often stressed today almost to the utter disregard of all else. Following Christ and being "fishers of men" is the higher and more important aim. Every profession which so completely commands our time and energies that we can no longer follow Him and be fishers of men has usurped a place that belongs to something else.

Demands of family may be important, but not sufficiently important to justify dropping fellowship with Christ or being inactive church members. Let us keep the balance and proper perspective regarding our lives.

III

A. Text: Jesus enters the synagog to teach. His hearers had often heard religious discourses by the scribes. This scribal doctrine was that of countless laws and distortions of the Old Testament. When Jesus taught, the hearers noticed a great difference. Before His Word scribal teaching paled into insignificance. "He taught as one that had authority." His words were convincing.

B. Today many false prophets, and false doctrines are preached in the name of religion (radio, press). The attitude of the modern world concerning differences in doctrine is often: What is truth? Or people believe that all religions can contribute something to heavenly truth.

We shall keep our balance by being Christ-taught. His Word even today the unfailing guide; His Word the test for all that is preached and taught. Comparing His Word with the words of sects and isms, we find that He still teaches as "one that has authority."

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