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Luther's Picture of Christ on the Basis of the Church Postil Sermons

By THOMAS COATES

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to know Luther without reading his sermons. It is impossible to understand Luther's theology without feeling the impact of his exposition of that theology in his preaching. And there is perhaps no better example of Luther's preaching than the *Church Postil* sermons. To read these sermons is to appreciate Luther as a man, as a preacher, as a theologian, as an exegete, and as a leader of men.

The compilation of the *Church Postil*, which Luther himself considered "the best of all his books," extended over several decades. Luther first undertook this work in 1520, in response to a request by Elector Frederick the Wise, who decided that Luther should desist from his polemical writings and sharp disputations with his adversaries and rather give himself over to positive, evangelical teaching, on the basis of the Gospels of the Church Year. In accepting this advice, Luther wrote to the Elector: "Your Electoral Grace has counseled well that I should turn from the quarrelsome, sharp, and entangling writings, in which I have been engaged nigh unto three years, and that I should occupy myself with the holy and kindly doctrine, and, beside the work of the interpretation of the Psalter, labor in the interpretation of the Epistles and Gospels (which is called Postil) for the benefit of the ministers and their subjects: you having been of the opinion that I, burdened with such an amount of work, would the sooner attain peace also against the attacks of my enemies."

He goes on to say: "I have written not for those that are experienced, but for the common people and those that have the Spirit, that are highly esteemed before God, as Isaiah says; I fear their opinion, no matter how coarse they speak, and especially that of Your Grace, which is disposed to the Holy Scriptures and clings to them with incomparable earnestness, and is also able to test the ability of the most learned theologian to the utmost. . . . I hope, however, that I shall do enough, if I uncover the purest and simplest sense of the Gospel as well as I can, and if I answer some of those unskillful glosses, in order that the Christian people may hear, instead of fables and dreams, the Word of their God, unadulterated by human filth. For I promise nothing except the pure, unalloyed sense of the Gospel suitable for the low, humble people. But whether I am able to accomplish this, I shall let others judge." (Lenker, 10, pp. 7, 9.)

During the period of 1520 to 1527 Luther himself wrote out his sermons and generally prepared them for the printer. From 1527 to 1535 his work was edited by Stephan Rodt and published under his supervision. From 1540 to 1544 the sermons were edited by Kaspar Kreuziger. The *Church Postil* underwent further revision after Luther's death. In this connection Grimm writes: "In reading these sermons of Luther, as we now have them, we must bear in mind that the vast majority were written out and filled in from notes taken by Luther's friends, Stephan Roth, Veit Dietrich, Andreas Poach, Kaspar Kreuziger, and others, and it is often difficult to come to a conclusion as to just what Luther really said, how he expressed himself, and in what form his sermons were originally preached.

"This is particularly true of the sermons which have been most widely read, the *Church* and *House Postilla*. Just a glance at these will show that many of them have been worked over and enlarged. The Epiphany sermon in the *Church Postilla* on the Gospels contains a hundred and thirty-six pages in Lenker's *Luther's Works*. The Gospel sermon for the Sunday after Easter, we know for certain, is composed of two sermons which the Reformer preached at Borna. On the other hand, there are several sermons in the *Church Postilla* on the Epistles, like those of the Second Sunday in Advent and of the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, which re-

semble sermon briefs and extracts rather than entire sermons." (*Luther as Preacher*, p. 94.)

Luther was glad to accept the assignment of the Elector with regard to the *Church Postil*, not only for his own diversion to a more pleasant and profitable task, but also to insure a greater measure of true evangelical preaching throughout Germany. His sermons were prepared for the use and guidance of the preachers of his own day, the majority of whom were unable to work out their own sermons and who often had recourse to the sermons of others, which in many cases were not truly Scriptural. Luther, therefore, realized the importance of writing an explanation of the pericopes of the Church Year for the benefit of the German clergy.

It was in this way, then, that the *Church Postil* sermons received their origin. The name "postil" means a homily or sermon, and is of medieval origin. In the public service the sermon followed immediately after the reading of the Scriptures, and the preacher customarily began his discourse by saying: "After these words of the text," etc. (*post illa verba textus*, etc.). In this way the homily came to be known as *postilla*; from this word are derived the verb *postillare* and the noun *postillatio*. The word occurs in Wycliffe's writings and in other old English literature, but is now obsolete in English.

Luther wrote very few of his sermons in full. This is not to imply, however, that he preached without preparation, for in every case he prepared a very careful and detailed outline. The majority of his sermons were taken down in dictation while Luther preached. Concerning Luther's sermonizing, Ker writes: "Of Luther's own preaching it is difficult to form a proper idea from what is left to us. We have a great mass of sermons, or lectures as we should call them; but he wrote none or very few of them; they were taken down by others and sent out without his being able even to look at them. There were what are called his *House-postils*—lectures on portions of Scripture to his family, friends, and neighbors, who filled a large room. These are like our week-evening lectures, evidently poured forth out of his fulness at the time. There were also his public discourses, in the church, at home, and wherever he went, which were delivered much in the same way, only after more careful preparation. It was his

habit, when he had chosen a text or a subject, to meditate upon it, to arrange his thoughts, jotting them down perhaps in outline with his leading illustrations, and then to throw his heart into the same. He did not see the sermon till it had been taken down and printed, and frequently he did not see it even then. Indeed, he was so occupied with the preaching of other sermons, with the duties of the church, the university, the Protestant community, and with the incessant consultation and correspondence which these involved, that when a sermon was once delivered, all thought of it was gone." (*History of Preaching*, pp. 158, 159.)

Luther is unquestionably one of the really great preachers in the history of the Church. His style is marked by a beautiful clarity of thought and simplicity of expression. He never uses a four- or five-syllable word when a one- or two-syllable word will convey the proper meaning. He has in mind always the children, the poor, the humble, and the unlearned in his audience. He himself writes: "When I preach, I regard neither doctors nor magistrates, of whom there are in this church about forty; but I have an eye to the multitude of young people, children, and servants, of whom there are more than two thousand. Will the rest hear me? The doors are open unto them: they may be gone. I see that the ambition of preachers grows and increases, and this will do the utmost mischief in the Church. . . . When they come to me, to Melancthon, to Dr. Pomer, & c., let them show how learned they be; they shall be well put to their trumps. But to sprinkle their sermons with Hebrew, Greek, and Latin savours merely of show, according with neither time nor place." (*Ker*, p. 162.) Again he writes: "When I was young, and especially before I was acquainted with theology, I dealt largely in allegories, and tropes, and a quantity of idle craft; but now I have let all that slip, and my best craft is to give the Scripture, with its plain meaning; for the plain meaning is learning and life." To preach clearly and simply is a great art—and of that art Luther proved himself a master.

His sermons are also marked by a remarkable thoroughness in the explanation of the sacred text. He delves into the very heart of the text and literally wrings it dry. He treats every verse exhaustively so that every portion of it will become crystal clear even to the dullest hearer.

Luther's preaching is also marked by a pungent and graphic manner of expression. He does not mince words. He cares nothing for high-flown rhetoric or for brilliant perorations. His style is forceful and popular, so that, as Ker tells us, "his preaching gained a power which roused all Germany and shook the souls of men. There had been nothing like it since the day of Pentecost. On his way to Worms, to meet the Diet, he could not escape from the crowds. At Erfurt, where he had commenced in the refectory, the great church was so crowded that they feared it would fall. At Zwickau, the market place was thronged by 25,000 eager listeners, and Luther had to preach to them from the window." (*History of Preaching*, p. 152.)

As one commentator puts it: "Luther was a master in the art of expressing his thoughts. He is able to use short, pithy, laconic sentences, and also, when the occasion presents itself, long, involved sentences. Even in the most learned sermons he likes to use the conversational method of delivery. He seems to take his hearers into his confidence and then discusses with them the thoughts suggested by the text. He asks them questions and invites them to consider problems with him, always holding the attention and the interest of all." (*Luther as Preacher*, p. 116.)

Luther preached with great vehemence, and his words fall like the blows of a sledge hammer. He never hesitates to call a spade a spade. Yet, when occasion demanded, Luther could vary his mood and speak in the gentlest and most winsome manner, so as to captivate the smallest child.

Luther's sermons, as might be expected, abound in polemics. It might almost seem that he counted that sermon lost in which he did not take a resounding blow at the Pope and the papists. No language is too vitriolic to be applied to them. While such preaching would be unseemly in our pulpits today, we should not criticize Luther too severely for his indulgence in harsh invective. It was in keeping with the custom of the times, and he regarded the Pope as the very Antichrist and the papal system as the most vicious and soul-destroying product of the Evil One. It was his devotion to Christ and the Gospel—of which the papal system represented the very antithesis—that impelled him to speak so drastically.

But the chief and surpassing characteristic of Luther's preaching is its exaltation of Christ. All of Luther's preaching—as indeed all of his theology—is centered in Christ. He never preached a sermon in which Christ and the Gospel of His salvation were not central. This factor is fundamental in the proper understanding of Luther. He himself writes: "What, then, is the great subject of preaching? It is the glory of God in Jesus Christ. We preach always Him, the true God and Man who died for our sins and rose again for our justification. This may seem a limited and monotonous subject, likely to be soon exhausted, but we are never at the end of it."

This centrality of Christ also dominates the entire body of the *Church Postil* sermons. They are, therefore, ideally suited for a portrayal of Luther's picture of Christ. It is to the presentation of this picture, as painted by Luther in these sermons, that we shall now address ourselves:

I. THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Of fundamental importance in the Christology of Luther is his teaching concerning the person of Christ. This consists of two natures—divine and human—uniquely and supernaturally conjoined in one Person.

A. HIS DIVINE NATURE

Luther is extremely clear and emphatic in his ever-recurring assertion of the deity of Christ. Indeed, there is not a sermon in which this doctrine does not come to the fore. Luther heaps proof upon proof to show that Christ is indeed true God.

He shows, first, that the Scripture ascribes to Christ the eternal attributes of deity. He writes: "Christ was before Abraham, . . . in other words, because He was the one true God. . . . The fact that the Seed of Abraham, who gave Himself for us, is also true God, secures blessing and victory for all sinners. Therefore Christ speaks not of His human nature that they saw and experienced; for they could easily see He was not yet fifty years of age, and did not live before Abraham. But with that nature by which He existed long before the time of Abraham, by which He existed also before all creatures and before the whole world . . . as is written in

Heb. 13:8: 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.'" (Sermon for V Sunday in Lent, XI:180 f.)* Thus also he states in his sermon for IV Sunday in Advent that Christ was "born before the world and all other things" (X:128). And ever and again he affirms that Christ was "begotten of the Father from eternity" (X:184, et al.), and that the Father knows Christ from eternity (XII:66).

Moreover, Luther ascribes to Christ the qualities of *life* and *light*, which are the attributes of deity. In his sermon for Third Christmas Day he writes: "Thus Christ has always been the Life and Light, even before His birth, from the beginning, and will ever remain so to the end. He shines at all times in all creatures, in the Holy Scriptures, through His saints, prophets, and ministers, in His word and works; and He has never ceased to shine." (X:198.) What is more, there is no light apart from Him, for he goes on to say: "There is only one Light that lighteth all men, and no man comes into the world who can possibly be illuminated by any other light" (X:205).

Luther also makes clear that Christ is worthy of the honor and glory which pertain alone to God. In the sermon for Third Christmas Day he states: "John says further: 'We beheld His Glory,' that is, His divinity through His miracles and teachings. The word 'glory' we have heard before in the Epistle, where it was said of Christ, that Christ is the 'brightness of the Father's glory,' which means His divinity. . . . This is also what the Evangelist means when he says, 'We have seen His glory,' to wit, His glorious being and deeds, which are no insignificant, common glory, but the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father." (X:221 f.)

He declares that Christ is greater and higher than the angels (XI:299), and that He has been appointed to exercise supreme and universal dominion: "In the Second Psalm, vv. 7-8, we read that God says to Christ: 'Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will give Thee nations for Thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possessions.' Here you see again that Christ is appointed of God a Lord over all the earth." (Sermon for Ascension Day, XII:192.) Moreover, He is Lord of

* This citation and those to follow refer to the volume and page in Lenker's Edition of *Luther's Works*.

the Church, as Luther explains in his sermon for the II Sunday after Easter: "Christ teaches us in this Gospel to look to Him alone as the true Shepherd, who only is the Founder, Lord, and Head of the Church. . . . He is the Lord of Moses and of all creatures, to whom all men should be subject." (XII:50.)

He further identifies Christ with God by citing divine names ascribed to Jesus. In the sermon for I Sunday after Easter (XI:411) he quotes the confession of the Apostle Thomas, in which he calls Christ "My Lord and my God!" and points out that Christ did not repudiate this confession, but confirmed it. It follows very logically, then, that Christ either is true God or else an impostor; the fact that He accepts Thomas' worship of Him as God admits of no other alternative. Elsewhere he calls Christ the "Creator" (X:209); he declares (XII:354) that the Son is "as great as God Himself"; he states that Mary, in bearing Jesus, actually became the mother of God (X:138); he says that "we worship the Crucified as God and Lord" (X:310) and that Christ "is a gracious God" (XI:126); he argues that Christ must be God because "God bestows on Christ His own government" and "it is not possible for God to bestow His glory, government, property or people on one who is not true God, as He Himself declares: 'My glory will I not give to another,' Is. 42:8" (Sermon for Epiphany, X:134). Indeed, Christ and the Father are One, says Luther: "Why does He not say: 'I honor My Father, and ye dishonor Him' but says 'Ye dishonor Me'? Impliedly He proves by this that the Father's and His honor are alike and the same, as He and the Father are one God." (Sermon for V Sunday in Lent, XI:176.)

Luther further examines the deity of Christ in the light of the fundamental Christian doctrine of the Trinity of God. In his sermon for the IV Sunday after Easter he writes: "This is truly an incisive text for the article of the three persons in the one divine Being, that the Son of God is the Word of the Father in eternity, whom no one hears speak except the Holy Spirit" (XII:165); again, in the sermon for the Sunday after Ascension Day he states: "Christ says further: 'Whom (the Holy Spirit) I will send unto you from the Father.' For He, the Father, is the person who takes the initiative; I am the Son; and from us the Holy Spirit proceeds. And the three

persons are one, and one essence, with equal power and authority." (XII:248.) He further states: "We can have no surer foundation for our belief in the deity of Christ than that we enwrap and enclose our hearts in the statements of the Scriptures. The Scriptures gradually and beautifully lead us to Christ; first revealing Him to us as a man, then as the lord of all creatures, and finally as God. Thus we are led to the true knowledge of God. . . . Our faith in these two persons, the Father and the Son, is therefore sufficiently established and confirmed by passages from the Scriptures. . . . And in Matt. 28: 19, deity is also ascribed to the Holy Spirit." (Sermon for Trinity Sunday, XII: 409, ff.)

Christ's deity is further attested by the impressive series of miracles which He performed, and which can be accounted for only by acknowledging His divine power. Luther devotes a goodly portion of his *Church Postil* sermons to the exposition of these miracles, e. g., the changing of water into wine (XI: 54 ff.); the cleansing of the leper and the healing of the centurion's servant (XI: 70 ff.); the stilling of the tempest (XI: 97 ff.); the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter (XI: 148 ff.); the feeding of the five thousand (XI: 166 ff.); the healing of the ten lepers (XIV: 60 ff.); the raising of the young man of Nain (XIV: 127 ff.); the healing of the palsied man (XIV: 158 ff.); the healing of the nobleman's son (XIV: 252 ff.); the raising of Jairus' daughter (XIV: 326 ff.), and others.

Of greatest moment in establishing the deity of Christ is the interpretation of the classic passage from the first chapter of John's Gospel concerning the Word made flesh. Luther devotes his great sermon for Third Christmas Day to this theme. He shows first that Christ is the Word; that this Word is the Second Person in the Holy Trinity, and thus that He is the true and eternal God; that He was *with* God and, at the same time, *was* God, and that, as such, He made all things. He summarizes his very detailed and lucid exegesis of this difficult passage as follows: "Thus the Evangelist contends that both assertions are true: God is the Word, and the Word is with God; one nature of divine essence, and yet not one person only. Each person is God complete and entire, in the beginning and eternally." (X: 183.) Again: "Behold, in the man Christ are all things. He has made all things; in Him is

life, and He is the Word by whom all things were made." (X:190.)

In the same sermon Luther drives home the importance of believing that Christ is indeed God; "He who does not believe Christ to be true God, as I have so far described Him, that He was the Word in the beginning with God and that all things were made by Him; but wishes to make Him only a creature of time, coming after His mother, as Cerinthus teaches, is eternally lost and cannot attain to eternal life; for there is no life without this Word and Son of God; in Him alone is life. The man Christ, separate from, and without God, would be useless." (X:187.)

B. HIS HUMAN NATURE

Christ, however, is not *only true God*. At a point in time He assumed the human nature and became man. Upon the fact of Christ's true humanity Luther is also very insistent. In his sermon for the Sunday after Christmas he writes, X:306: "The human nature of Christ . . . was an instrument and temple of the Godhead. . . . Although the Spirit was in Him from the first moment of the conception, yet as His body grew and His reason naturally developed as in other men, so also was He filled and moved by the Spirit more and more. It is no delusion when Luke says that He waxed strong and advanced in wisdom, but the words tell us plainly in age and in stature, and as He grew in stature, His reason developed, and with development of His reason He became stronger in the Spirit and filled with wisdom before God, in Himself and before men."

Luther makes frequent references to the fact of Christ's humanity. He states: "Jesus was a natural man in every respect just as we, the only difference being in His relation to sin and grace, He being without a sinful nature" (X:140). Thus also he refers to the special appellations "Son of David" and "Son of Man," whereby the human nature of Christ is clearly indicated. So truly was He a man that even His mother found it hard to believe that He was the promised Messiah (X:89 ff.). Referring to the fact that the Scriptures refer to Christ as being made in the "likeness of men," Luther writes: "These words must be understood as referring to His external being and mode of living, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, resting, working . . . and all human conduct

and deportment, by which no one could recognize Him as God, had He not been so proclaimed by John in the Gospel" (Sermon for Third Christmas Day, X:221). Luther concludes: "God will not and cannot be found, save through and in His humanity, which He has set up as an ensign for the nations" (X:195).

C. THE UNION OF THE TWO NATURES

The question arises, of course, as to how Christ could be both God and man in one person. Luther agrees that this is a mystery beyond the understanding of limited human reason, but stoutly maintains that the union of the two natures is a fact that cannot be denied. According to Scripture, each of the two natures of Christ partakes of the properties of the other. Thus Luther can write, in his sermon for Trinity Sunday, X:448 f.: "But what do these words import: 'The Son of Man, who is in heaven'? How is it that He has come down from heaven and is still in heaven? . . . True, He descended into our flesh and blood and humbled Himself below all men, unto death on the Cross, as a man forsaken and accursed by God. However, He was not in the meantime separated from God, but He remained with God all the time and hence was always in heaven; He exists from eternity, ever beholding His Father and present with Him, ruling and working together with Him, coequal in power and might. These features of His omnipotence were not in any wise apparent in His humbled state, when He divested Himself of the form of God, as Paul says in Phil. 2:7, and went about in the form of a servant, enduring suffering and death, until such time as He was delivered from this state and was exalted again and sat down at the right hand of God. . . . His divinity and communion with the Father He has had from eternity and has continued in possession of them all the time, even from the moment He took upon Himself limitations of His human nature." In other words, when Christ became man, He did not cease being God; and now that He has returned to the right hand of God, He does not cease being man. The two natures are united in His person and will remain so through eternity.

Luther states this fact very clearly on numerous occasions. He asserts: "Although Christ died as man, yet He

ever remained alive; for life could not and cannot die" (X:194). Further: "Christ (as) true man is God's Son from eternity, and yet He died and rose again . . . (and) in His human nature He has become Lord of heaven and earth" (XI:294).

Moreover, in his sermon for the XVIII Sunday after Trinity (XIV:193 f.) he makes a further case for the union of the human and divine natures in Christ by citing the fact that Christ, according to His human nature, was David's Son, and yet David, in Psalm 110, calls Him "Lord." He concludes: "The meaning is . . . that Christ was both David's true natural Son of his blood and flesh and also David's Lord, whom David Himself must worship and hold as God."

II. THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S MISSION

Having established the fundamental doctrine of the person of Christ, Luther devotes a great deal of attention to the purpose of Christ's coming to earth. He makes it clear, for one thing, that Christ came to fulfill and to consummate the Old Testament, of which He was the great theme and which abounds in types and shadows of His person and in prophecies concerning His mission. And then, of course, the essential and compelling reason for His coming into the flesh was to bring redemption to lost mankind.

A. CHRIST CAME TO FULFILL THE OLD TESTAMENT

Luther shows that Christ is the very heart of the Old Testament. He writes: "Now we have seen . . . how the deity of Christ is confirmed by the Apostle from passages in the Old Testament. For the New Testament is nothing more than a revelation of the Old. Just as one receives a sealed letter which is not to be opened until after the writer's death, so the Old Testament is the will and testament of Christ, which He has had opened after His death and read and everywhere proclaimed through the Gospel." (Sermon for Third Christmas Day, X:174.) Again he writes: "The dear saints of the Old Testament knew Christ well" (X:302); "Abraham . . . recognized Christ when he was told in Gen. 22:18: 'In thy Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed'" (XI:180); "Moses certainly writes concerning Christ, and Christ is found in the books of Moses" (XI:293).

The Old Testament era, therefore, terminated with the coming of Christ. Luther writes: "Moses (signifying the Old Testament) declares that the people will no longer hearken to him and that his teaching will end when this Prophet Christ appears, to whom they should hearken thenceforth" (X:262). And the manner in which Christ has put an end to the Old Testament dispensation he graphically states in his sermon for the II Sunday after Easter (XII:46): "If you would come to God and be saved, you must, after all, surrender Moses, the Law, the Temple, and the priesthood. All these will in no wise help you. You must come hither to Me (says Christ), whether you be Jew, Gentile, priest, layman, or what you will, even if you should be Moses himself."

B. CHRIST CAME TO BRING REDEMPTION TO MANKIND

Luther answers the question as to why Christ came into the world in this manner: "Why did God the Father send Christ? For no other purpose than to do the Father's will, namely, to redeem the world. . . . My Father hath sent Me (says Christ) to fulfill the Law, take the sin of the world upon Myself, slay death and overcome hell and the devil; not for My own sake, for I am not in need of it; but all for your sakes and in your behalf, in order that I may serve you." (Sermon for I Sunday after Easter, XI:374.)

He affirms that Christ came to seek and to save lost mankind (XIII:63 ff.; XIII:161 ff.). Indeed, the very name "Jesus" means "Savior" (X:318). Luther explains the manner in which Christ has wrought our salvation as follows: "Now, no one, not even an angel of heaven, could make restitution for the infinite, irreparable injury and appease the eternal wrath of God which we had merited by our sins; except that eternal Person, the Son of God Himself, and He could do it only by taking our place, assuming our sins, and answering for them as though He Himself were guilty of them. This our dear Lord and only Savior and Mediator before God, Jesus Christ, did for us by His blood and death, in which He became a sacrifice for us; and with His purity, innocence, and righteousness He outweighed all sin and wrath He was compelled to bear on our account; yea, this He entirely engulfed and swallowed up, and His merit is so great that God is now satisfied and says: 'If He wills thereby to save, then there

shall be a salvation.' As Christ also says of His Father's will, John 6:40: "This is the will of My Father, that everyone that beholdeth the Son and believeth on Him should have eternal life.'" (Sermon for Easter Tuesday, XI: 344.)

Christ came, not as a stern and accusing Judge, but as a Helper in need (X:110) and as the Author of salvation (XII:345). He came to reconcile an aggrieved heavenly Father to His erring children by atoning for their sins and bearing the full force of divine wrath (XII:198 f.; XI:412; XII:268 ff.). To do this, He fulfilled the Law *for us*, in our stead (X:49), so that He has now covered the filthy garb of our sinfulness with the spotless robe of His righteousness.

Christ is the Good Shepherd, says Luther, who not only watches over and cares for His sheep with infinite love and tenderness, but even lays down His life for them, to save them from the ravening wolves (XII: 21 ff.; XIII:86 ff.; *et al.*).

Now, Luther submits that Christ and His salvation cannot be apprehended by reason, but alone by faith (X:361; *et al.*), and that this faith alone can save man. He leaves no room for doubt on this score; "I will show you how to get rid of your sins and obtain salvation. Not that you can strip off your sins and make yourselves pious through your works; another man is needed for this; nor can I do it; I can point him out, however. It is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. He, He, and no one else either in heaven or on earth takes our sins upon Himself. You yourself could not pay for the very smallest of sins. He alone must take upon Himself not alone your sins, but the sins of the world, and not some sins, but all the sins of the world, be they great or small, many or few." (Sermon for IV Sunday in Advent, X:132.)

This, then, serves to indicate the proper relationship of the Christian toward Christ, which Luther describes in this fashion: "To let go all that is mine, and value only this, that Christ is given to me as a present; His sufferings, His righteousness, and all His virtues are at once mine. When I become conscious of this, I must in return love Him; my affection must go out to such a being. . . . (His) friendly look and lovely sight then sustain me. Thus must God become known, only in Christ." (XII:253.) Luther elsewhere stresses the fact that once the believer has laid hold on Christ in faith,

He must follow His example and reflect His love in a life of service and good works (XII:40; *et al.*).

And the end and aim of Christ's work of redemption Luther sums up as follows: "It is not for the purpose of giving me many golden crowns and kingdoms, for then I would still remain in sin and death; but that I might be free from hell and eternal death, and not be lost eternally. . . . In short, God has done all this that I might have an eternal, imperishable life in exchange for eternal destruction and death." (Sermon for Pentecost Monday, XII: 358 f.)

III. CHRIST'S THREEFOLD OFFICE

In the performance of His redemptive work in the interest of mankind, Christ undertook what theology calls a threefold office, namely, that of Prophet, Priest, and King.

A. CHRIST AS PROPHET

The word *prophet* in this connection is, of course, to be understood in the original sense of inspired *preacher* or *teacher*. In His capacity as Prophet, Christ revealed the will of God and proclaimed Himself to be the long-promised Messiah and Savior of the world. It was this prophetic office of Christ to which Isaiah referred, chap. 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." In explaining this verse, Luther writes: "When Isaiah says: 'He hath anointed Me,' he thereby means that Jesus is the Christ and that Christ should do all these works, and he who is doing them must be the Christ. For the Greek word *Christ* is *Messiah* in Hebrew, *Unctus* in Latin, and *Gesalbter* in German. . . . This anointed King and Priest, Isaiah says, shall be anointed by God Himself, not with real oil, but with the Holy Spirit." (Sermon for III Sunday in Advent, X: 92 f.) Christ, accordingly, proved His Messiahship: a) by His works; b) by His words.

The ministry of Christ, which began with His Baptism (X:199), was the real beginning of the New Testament era, for, says Luther, "had He not begun to preach, His birth would

have been of no use; but when He *did* begin to act and to teach, then were fulfilled all prophecies, all Scriptures, then came a new light and a new world" (Sermon for IV Sunday in Advent, X:128). For the purpose of His ministry was the preaching and manifestation of the Gospel (XIII:160), that Gospel of which He Himself was the subject and the essence; for the Gospel is the glad tidings of salvation through His merit (X:100) and of His triumph over death, sin, and Satan (XI:177).

Even though Christ has left the earth, His prophetic office continues, for He decreed that all Christians should proclaim His Word (XI:359), and He established the office of the Gospel ministry, so that through the agency of His undershepherds He might gather, govern, and preserve the sheep of His fold (XII:51).

B. CHRIST AS PRIEST

The function of the priest in the Old Testament was twofold: a) to offer up sacrifices for sin; b) to intercede for the people. This Christ has done for mankind in the ultimate sense, Luther teaches. He repeatedly calls Christ a "priest" or the "high priest," and makes frequent reference to the mediatorial office of Christ (X:57: "Their faithful Priest and Mediator"; XI:32: "Our blessed Savior and High Priest, Jesus Christ"; *et al.*).

Christ performs the function of a priest in that He intercedes for His people before the throne of God, and this on the basis of His all-atoning sacrifice for sin. It is only through Christ that sinners find acceptance with God. Thus Luther writes in his sermon for Pentecost Monday, XII:342 f.: "The Holy Spirit teaches everywhere that we do not possess the Father except through a mediator, and He will not allow us to approach the Father without one"; and again: "Let us thank the Father for . . . placing between us one who is God and equal with God, and also man, on a level with man; for we are human, and He is God. Where God and man oppose each other, man meets with destruction, for he cannot stand against God. God has now intervened by placing as mediator one who is alike true God and true man. Through Him we are to come to the Father." Further: "Notice carefully that man must have a mediator, and that mediator is Christ. Ascend upon Him to the Father, and say: 'Although I cannot

exist before Thy majesty nor that of any angel—all must shake and tremble—yet I have here one, Christ, whom Thou canst not fail to regard. I am under His protection and rely upon Thy Word that Thou wilt receive me through Him.” Indeed, only through Christ will prayer be effectual, says Luther: “He is our Mediator, through whom all things are given to us, without whom we merit nothing but wrath and disgrace. . . . It is praying aright in Christ’s name, when we thus trust in Him that we shall be received and heard for His sake, and not for our own sake.” (Sermon for V Sunday after Easter, XII:171.) Only the works of Christ are acceptable to God. By faith in Christ, His perfect righteousness is imputed to the sinner, counted to his credit, so that the sinner thus becomes righteous before God.

Expanding this theme, especially on the basis of Hebrews, Luther shows that Christ, as our great High Priest, offered up the ultimate and perfect sacrifice for sin, the sin of all the world. And, paradoxically, this sacrifice was Himself, for “He offered up His own body upon the tree.” Thus Christ was at once the priest and the sacrificial offering. Luther writes in his sermon for Pentecost Monday, XII:352: “Now, the wrath of God against sin is so intense that no creature could have devised means to appease Him or effect a reconciliation; the condemnation was so enormous that no angel was mighty enough to remove it. . . . Therefore, that one Person, even God’s Son, had to take upon Himself sin, God’s wrath, and death, under which humanity helplessly lay, and make the sacrifice for them.”

C. CHRIST AS KING

Luther also devotes much attention to the kingship of Christ and to the kingdom over which He holds sway. Luther views this kingdom in a twofold aspect. In the first place, He is Lord of all creation; the whole universe is His kingdom, as the Psalmist declares in Psalm 2 (XI:294; *et al.*).

Secondly, He rules over the Kingdom of Grace, the Holy Christian Church. This is a spiritual, eternal kingdom, not an earthly, temporal kingdom, “whereby He would everywhere rule invisibly within the hearts of men through the Word and ministry and would cause them to pass from sin, God’s wrath, and eternal death into grace and eternal life

in heaven" (Sermon for Easter Tuesday, XI:332); again: "It is not to be a government constituted and organized in worldly fashion by human wisdom, power, and might, but a government of the Holy Spirit, or a spiritual kingdom, in which Christ rules invisibly, and not with external, bodily power, through the Word alone, which the Holy Spirit will preach and thereby work in the hearts of men" (Sermon for IV Sunday after Easter, XII:135); and again he says that Christ established "a kingdom on earth to be called an eternal Kingdom of Grace and always to be governed by the forgiveness of sins" (Sermon for Easter Tuesday, XI:347).

This Kingdom of Grace should not be ushered in nor characterized by pomp and fanfare and a great display of power and splendor, but by that humbleness and meekness which was the great mark of the Ruler of this Kingdom; and the subjects of this Kingdom are the poor and lowly in spirit. This of course is in direct conflict with the popular ideas current among the Jews as to the nature of the Messiah's kingdom, for they expected the Messiah to establish an earthly kingdom in which they would reign as lords and princes over the hated Gentiles and be forever free from the irksome yoke of Roman domination. These mistaken ideas of theirs led them to be gravely offended by the claims of Jesus, the humble carpenter's son of Nazareth, to be the promised Messiah and King of Israel, and therefore they rejected and condemned Him.

Luther, however, cites the entry of Christ into Jerusalem as evidence of the true nature of His kingly office. He writes, in his sermon for the I Sunday in Advent (X:42 f.): "The Prophet shows clearly what kind of king Christ was and what they should seek in Him, in that he calls Him just and having salvation and yet adds this sign of His coming by which they are to know Him: 'He cometh to thee meek and riding upon a colt, the foal of an ass.' As if to say: 'A poor, miserable, almost beggarly horseman upon a borrowed ass who is kept by the side of its mother not for ostentation, but for service.' With this he desires to lead them away from gazing and waiting for the glorious entrance of a worldly king. And he offers such signs that they might not doubt the Christ nor take offense at His beggarly appearance. All pomp and splendor are to be left out of sight, and the heart and the eyes directed

to the poor rider, who became poor and miserable and made Himself of no kingly reputation so they might not seek the things of the world in Him, but the eternal, as indicated by the words, 'just and having salvation.'" In the same vein he writes in his sermon for III Sunday in Advent (X:102 f.), that Christ corrects those who look for Him to appear in glory and majesty, and "turns their look downward and holds before them the blind, lame, deaf, dumb, poor, and everything that conflicts with such splendor, and contrariwise He presents Himself in the state of a common servant rather than a great king."

Moreover, Christ was King not of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles as well. His kingdom knows no bounds of race or color or nationality, but as King over all. "He is rich unto all that call upon Him." Luther establishes and repeatedly affirms the universality of Christ's kingdom, i. e., of the Church. He states in the sermon for the II Sunday after Easter, for example: "The Gospel is to be preached to the Gentiles also, so that they also might believe in Christ, that there might be one Christian communion, composed of Jews and Gentiles. . . . Accordingly there is now but one Church or communion, one faith, one hope, one love, one Baptism, etc. And this continues to be so at the present day and will so continue until the Day of Judgment. . . . The kingdom of Christ is in the process of growing and is not something that is completed." (XII:31.) Of this growing, thriving, conquering, eternal kingdom, then, Jesus Christ is the Ruler and Head.

IV. THE STATES OF CHRIST

In the course of His life and activity, we see Christ in two states: humiliation and exaltation, as Luther plainly shows in his *Church Postil*. He brings out the fact that only through a proper understanding of these two states do we obtain a clear and complete picture of Christ.

A. HIS STATE OF HUMILIATION

Christ's state of humiliation consisted in this, that He, the eternal Son of God, voluntarily and for the sake of mankind, dispensed with the full and continuous exercise of His divine power and majesty during the period of His sojourn on earth. He became man and was subject to the infirmities and hardships

which are common to man, even to the extent of suffering and dying. His deity, therefore, was not externally evident during His life on earth, except on those occasions when He chose to manifest it (e. g., at the Transfiguration). Luther points out that the humiliation of Christ is a stone of stumbling to human reason, which cannot discern how this humble, obscure Man, persecuted by His foes and condemned to a criminal's death, could possibly be the Messiah, yea, the only-begotten Son of God. Luther recommends, therefore, that we "look at His works and compare them with the Scriptures," which will prove the best way to avoid or overcome such offense.

The first stage in the humiliation of Christ was His conception by the Holy Ghost in the womb of Mary — the first step in the assumption of the human nature. Concerning this miraculous occurrence, Luther writes: "Since no man can be born from man and woman without a sinful nature, God hath ordained to take a woman alone for the conception and birth of Christ, the promised Seed; without a man, she becomes the Child's mother, by the Holy Ghost, who causes this conception and birth in her, in order that He may be a natural man, having our flesh and blood, but without sin and power of Satan, whose head He was to bruise." (Sermon for Easter Monday, XI:297; see also X:259; *et al.*)

In the fullness of time, then, Christ was born of the Virgin Mary. Luther regards the Incarnation as one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity; he returns to it again and again, and elaborates upon it in great detail, especially in his Christmas sermons.

Luther rejects all rationalized interpretations of the birth of Christ, and says plainly: "We must abide by the Gospel, that He was born of the Virgin Mary. There is no deception here, for the Word clearly states that it was an actual birth." (Sermon for Christmas Day, X:140.) In contrast to the unclean, sinful birth of man, he shows that Christ had a pure, innocent, and holy birth. (X:143; X:312; XI:34; X:159; *et al.*)

With regard to the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child, he writes (Sermon for Epiphany, X:363): "For although they enter a lowly hut and find a poor young wife with a poor little Child, and find less of royal appearance than the homes of their own servants presented, they are not led astray. But in a great, strong, living faith they remove from their eyes

and their minds whatever might attract or influence human nature with its pretense, follow the word of the Prophet and the sign of the star in all simplicity, treat the Child as a King, fall down before Him, worship Him, and offer gifts."

The circumcision of Jesus, which forms the theme of his sermon for New Year's Day, is cited by Luther as an evidence of how Christ began His sufferings immediately upon His advent and shed His first blood within eight days after His birth. Moreover, He thereby subjected Himself to the Law from the very outset, serving as our Substitute and fulfilling it for us. (X: 308 ff.)

Luther describes the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt shortly after the birth of Christ, and remarks: "How differently from other children is this royal Child reared and treated; how did He, especially in this case, taste the sorrows and troubles of life!" (X: 304.)

Since Scripture is silent as to the childhood of Jesus, with the exception of a few events, Luther says very little on this subject, except to reject vigorously the numerous fables and fantastic legends that were current about His childhood and which had their origin, not in Scripture, but in the Pseudepigrapha. Luther justifies the silence of Scripture on Jesus' childhood in these words: "Let us therefore be satisfied with the narrative of the Gospel, which tells us enough about His childhood. Luke writes that 'the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom,' etc. Later on he writes that He was subject to His parents. What else should he have related? The time was not yet come when He performed miracles. He was brought up like other children, with the exception, that as some children excel others in ability, Christ also was an extraordinarily clever child. Thus no more could be written concerning Him than is recorded by Luke. If he had related how He ate, drank, and what He did every day, how He walked, stood, slept, and watched, what kind of narrative would that have been?" (Sermon for Sunday after Christmas, X: 305.)

Luther does, however, devote an entire sermon (for I Sunday after Epiphany) to the account of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple, in which we perceive a foregleam of His mission and obtain a glimpse into His true nature. At the same time, Luther emphasizes the fact also that this story

indicates how the young Jesus was subject to His earthly parents and performed all that was required of Him, both in the way of domestic and spiritual duties.

The very depth of the humiliation of Christ was reached, of course, in the events encompassed in the expression of the Apostles' Creed: "(He) suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried." This was the climax of His life and ministry, this was the objective of His earthly mission, this was the great denouement of the eternal plan of salvation. And for this everything that went before in His life had simply been the prelude. This, then, the very heart of the Christian religion—the setting forth of Christ Crucified—was also the heart of all of Luther's preaching. The keynote of his message from beginning to end was indeed that watchword of St. Paul: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him Crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2)—*crucified for us, suffering and dying in our stead, with His lifeblood paying the price for our sins, taking upon Himself the full load of our guilt, and bearing the punishment of that guilt as our Substitute, so that in and through Him we might have forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. This is the great, throbbing, central theme of Luther's preaching, and this marks him, pre-eminently, as a preacher of grace.*

In his sermons Luther traces the various steps in which Christ's humiliation became increasingly evident and ever more acute. He describes His forty days of fasting in the wilderness and His temptation by Satan, which served as a prelude to His active ministry, and in which He, the eternal Son of God, allowed Himself to suffer the indignity of being tempted by the Archenemy, Satan—again, for our sake, "that He might be able to succor them that are tempted"; he shows the rejection of Christ by the Jews when He set forth to proclaim Himself as their Savior and King and to reveal Himself as God's Son, for "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11); he pictures the slowness of heart, the fearfulness and the faithlessness of Jesus' own disciples, who consistently misunderstood His mission and purpose and who, in His hour of utmost need and distress, all forsook Him and fled; and he portrays Christ exposed to the venomous opposition and to the cruel and devious machinations of His foes, who in the end conspired to effect His arrest,

imprisonment, arraignment before the high priests, trial before the Roman governor, and finally, condemnation to a shameful criminal's death upon the accursed Cross.

Thus Luther writes concerning the suffering and death of Christ: "This is the true foundation, thoroughly to know Christ's Passion, when we not merely understand and lay hold of Christ's sufferings, but also of His heart and will in those sufferings, for whoever views His sufferings in a way that they see not His will and heart in them, must be more terrified before them than they are made to rejoice on account of them. But if one sees Christ's will and heart in His Passion, they cause true comfort, assurance, and pleasure in Christ. . . . Such a great and wonderful thing it is, that the Son of Man died on the Cross willingly and cheerfully to fulfill the Scriptures, that is, for our welfare; it is a mystery and it remains a mystery." (Sermon for Quinquagesima, XI:126 f.)

Again, Luther writes: "This is truly also a deep, hidden knowledge, that God the Father knew His only-begotten and beloved Son, when like the child of the poorest beggar He had to lie in the manger, not only unknown to His entire people, but cast out and rejected; or when He hung in the air most disgracefully and ignominiously, naked and bare, between two murderers, as the most wicked blasphemer of God, and a rebel, cursed by God and all the world, so that He was compelled to cry out to Him in great agony: 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' Matt. 27:46. Nevertheless, He says here: "My Father knoweth Me, precisely in this suffering, disgrace, and offensive form, as His only Son, sent by Him to be the sacrifice and to offer up My soul for the salvation and redemption of His sheep." (Sermon for II Sunday after Easter, XII:68.) Luther elaborates upon this theme in especially great detail in his sermon for Good Friday, "A Sermon on How to Contemplate Christ's Holy Sufferings" (XI:183 ff.), which he summarizes thus: "Then cast your sins from yourself upon Christ, believe with a festive spirit that your sins are His wounds and sufferings, that He carries them and makes satisfaction for them . . . as St. Paul writes, 2 Cor. 5:21: 'He hath made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.'"

Luther's approach to the central doctrine of the atoning sacrifice of Christ may best be indicated by a quotation from

his sermon for Easter Tuesday (XI:308): "That is what Paul means when he says to the Corinthians in his First Epistle, 2:2: 'I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him Crucified.' What kind of glory is this, that impels him to write that he knows nothing save Christ Crucified? It is something which neither reason nor human wisdom can understand, nor yet they who have studied and learned the Gospel; for this wisdom is mighty, hidden, and mysterious, and seems of no value, because He was crucified and emptied Himself of all power and divine strength, and hung upon the Cross like a wretched, forsaken man, and it seemed as if God would not help Him. Of Him alone I speak and preach, says St. Paul. For the Christ who sits on high, does wonders, comes and breaks through with power, that all may see who He is and may quickly come to know Him. But to know the weak Christ, who is hanging upon the Cross and lying in death, one needs great wisdom; for they who know Him not, must needs stumble and be offended."

B. HIS STATE OF EXALTATION

The suffering, death, and burial of Christ, however, were not the end. This grim and terrifying chapter was followed by a glorious sequel. The culmination of the State of Humiliation was followed by Christ's entry upon His State of Exaltation. And of this Luther in his sermons paints a picture of the most vivid and joyful colors.

Christ did not remain in the tomb of Joseph, in which His lifeless body had been placed on Good Friday's dark afternoon. On the third day, early in the morning, He rose from the tomb, to show Himself as the Prince of Life and the Victor over death and the grave. Luther teaches that the Resurrection of Christ proved Christ to be the Son of God and His doctrine to be the truth; that God the Father has accepted the sacrifice of His Son for the reconciliation of the world; and that His Resurrection is the bond and surety for the resurrection of all believers unto eternal life.

Luther writes, in the first sermon for Easter Sunday (XI:216): "It is not enough to learn only how and when Christ our Lord rose from the dead; we must also preach and understand the benefit and use both of the sufferings and the resurrection of Christ, namely, what He thereby acquired

for us." This he further explains by saying: "You must believe that He rose for your sake, for your benefit; and was not glorified for His own sake, but that He might help you and all who believe in Him; and that through His resurrection sin, death, and hell are vanquished and the victory given you" (Sermon for I Sunday after Easter, XI: 354).

The resurrection of Christ is indeed a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith, without which the entire structure would collapse, as Luther very logically argues in his sermon for Ascension Day (XII: 199): "If Christ be not risen from the dead, then sin and death have devoured and slain Him, and we cannot get rid of our sins ourselves. Jesus Christ took them upon Himself, so that He might tread sin, death, and hell underfoot, and become their master. But if He be not risen, then He has not overcome sin, but was overcome by sin. Also, if He has been overcome by sin, then He is not risen; if He be not risen, then He has not redeemed you; then you are yet in your sins."

After His resurrection on Easter morning, Christ remained on earth for a period of forty days, albeit in a glorified body, appearing to His disciples from time to time to confirm their faith with the visible demonstration of His bodily resurrection and to give them further instruction and counsel. At the end of that period He assembled His followers upon the Mount of Olives, gave them a farewell message, and, while they beheld, slowly ascended up into heaven, a cloud receiving Him out of their sight. It is to this theme that Luther devotes himself in his sermon for Ascension Day (XII: 180 ff.). He writes: "Now we must consider the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . All the Prophets took great pains in describing Christ's ascension and His kingdom. For, as His sufferings and death are deeply founded in the Scriptures, so are also His kingdom, His resurrection and ascension. In this manner we must view the ascension of Christ. . . . And for this purpose did He ascend up thither that He might fill all things and be everywhere present; which thing He could not do had He remained on earth, for here in the body He could not have been present with all. He ascended to heaven, where all hearts can see Him, where He can deal with all men, that He might fill all creation. Nothing is so great, be it in heaven or on earth, but He has power over it, and it must be in perfect obedience to Him."

This, then, leads to the next stage of Christ's exaltation, namely, His session on the right hand of the Father. This, of course, is not to be understood in a physical, corporeal sense. Since God is a spirit, He has no right hand in the material sense of that term. The expression "sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty" means that Christ has re-entered into the full exercise of His divine power and majesty and, by virtue of His deity, rules and governs all things.

Luther writes, in his sermon for III Sunday after Easter (XII:98 f.): "Christ, God's Son, became man, suffered death on the Cross, but rose again and sits now at the right hand of the Father, Lord over all, even according to His human nature, and governs and preserves His Church against Satan's wrath and all the power of the world." Again: "For this reason He is risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, that He might begin a spiritual kingdom, in which He reigns in us through righteousness and truth. Therefore He sits above; He does not rest and sleep, does not play with Himself, but, as Paul says, Eph. 1:22, "has His work here upon the earth, governing the consciences and the souls of men with the Gospel." (See also X:19 f.)

From His heavenly throne, says Luther, Christ also sends the Holy Spirit into the hearts of men, and portrays Christ as saying: "When the Holy Spirit comes, you will be glad that I went to the Father. . . . My suffering and death will be comforting to you when you see that I live again and that I come to help you and to make you partakers of all the treasures I have." Therefore, concludes Luther: "We Christians are to become lords over all God's creation and to boastfully say of Christ: My Lord Christ, who takes my part, is lord over all things; what shall harm me? For the Father in His infinite power has made Him lord over all creatures, and all things must lie at His feet." (Sermon for Pentecost Sunday, XII:286 f.)

Enthroned in His eternal majesty and power, Christ is portrayed by Luther also as judging Satan and all his enemies, all those who reject Him. He does this through the medium of His convicting Word, until, on Judgment Day, all His foes will be effectually and forever trodden underfoot and be forced to acknowledge His victory. (Cf. XII:155 f.)

His coming to Judgment will be the final stage of His

State of Exaltation. Luther explains (X:74 f.) that Christ will come on the Last Day, accompanied by the great host of angels, in great majesty and splendor, and visible to all creation (in profound contrast to the humble, obscure manner of His first coming, in His birth at Bethlehem). While the coming of this day will be foreshadowed by various signs, both in nature and in mankind, the exact time must ever remain a mystery hidden from men and known alone to God.

At His coming, says Luther, "He will transplant all who have believed in Him and have exercised love toward His followers, into His Father's kingdom of eternal glory, all who believe in Him and love His saints; and, He will also cast into hell forever all who live not as Christians and who separate themselves from Him and all His saints" (Sermon for XXVI Sunday after Trinity, XIV:381). Luther concludes that while this must be a terrifying doctrine for the unbelievers, for the Christians it holds forth the most glorious and comforting promise.

This, then, is Luther's picture of Christ as he paints it in the *Church Postil* sermons. It is, to be sure, a picture of beauty and grandeur, exact in detail and both vivid and reverent in its manner of portrayal—a picture which could be painted only by an artist upon whose soul this picture had already left its indelible impress.

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