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Homiletics: Studies on the Swedish Gospels

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HOMILETICS

Studies on the Swedish Gospels

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 4:16-22

The Text and Its Central Thought.—This pericope marks the commencement of Jesus' public ministry and indicates its course. Jesus, as it were, announces the program for the drama of salvation, which is now to be enacted in His person.—The scene was the synagogue at Nazareth with its familiar boyhood associations. At the point in the synagogue service devoted to a free lection from the Prophets, Jesus rose and read the first two verses of Isaiah 61. (Luke's version seems to be a loose rendering of the LXX. The second clause in the A. V. is not original.) Jesus later alluded to this same passage in giving a testimony of evidences to the disciples of John the Baptist (Matt. 11:4ff.). This prophetic passage, therefore, gives us an insight into Jesus' own understanding of His mission. He had been anointed by the Lord with the Holy Spirit to be the Messiah, the Christ. (Cf. the prominence of the Spirit in the first chapters of Luke—1:35; 3:22; 4:1,14.) The threefold office of the Anointed One can be deduced from this passage without unduly straining the words: As Evangelist He is the Prophet; as Healer, the Priest; as Emancipator, the King. In Him the "acceptable year of the Lord" had begun, the "year of the Lord's favor," the time appointed by God for His visitation of grace. The promises of this passage appear, in part, to be stereotypes of the jubilee year (Leviticus 25). In Jesus, then, the time of jubilee had dawned, spelling release for captives, good news for the poor, etc. Some of these promises found a literal fulfillment in the healing ministry of Jesus. But to restrict the application to these instances is to abbreviate the ministry of Jesus into meaninglessness. The poor are the beggars who deserve nothing at God's hands, but who receive all through the good news of God's gift of grace in Christ; the blind who receive their sight are those who in Christ have become aware of the nearness of God's love, etc. Above all, the word *aphesis*, twice used, and translated "deliverance" and "liberty," must receive its deeper meaning of "forgiveness." The cross, the instrument of forgiveness, casts its shadow over this pericope in the rejection of Jesus by His townsmen. They could not deny the power of His words and the greatness of His Gospel, but they were not prepared to yield to His claim. By accounting for Him as Joseph's son, they thought they could dis-

count Him. They thought they knew all about Him and knew nothing at all.— A central thought for this text is: "Jesus, the Anointed One, brings the grace of God to men in His work as Evangelist-Prophet, Healer-Priest, and Emancipator-King."

The Day and Its Theme.— The Propers for the day are especially well unified. They all sound the Advent note of glad expectancy. The theme proposed by the Swedish lectionary is "The Coming of the Lord to His Church." This might well be substituted for the suggested theme in the appended outline.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.— To awaken Advent longing and Advent joy by proclaiming the Christ who has come as the Christ and still comes to His church in full redemptive power.

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.— If the coming of the Advent Lord is to mean more to our congregations than it did to the Nazareth congregation, then our people must be led to identify themselves with the "poor," the "captives," and the "blind" of the text, and that, first of all, in their poverty, captivity, and blindness. Imagination and examples of local wickedness should enable the preacher to load these terms with specific content.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.— In this text we have the good news as Jesus preached it and as He lived it. If it is at all textual, a sermon on this text will proclaim the glad tidings from beginning to end. To avoid sweet generalities, however, the preacher must translate the poetry of the prophetic promises into the bitter terms of the life that Jesus lived and the death that He died. The good news is not just something that Jesus said; it is something that He did. In the suggested outline, division IIB would emphasize the meaning of Christ's death in the act of redemption, IIC the meaning of the resurrection.

Illustrations.— Isaiah 61—63 offers rich and varied amplification of the key prophecy. The people of Nazareth are an example of blindness; the widow and Naaman in the following pericope are illustrations of God's grace to the believing church.

Outline

Needed: Another Advent!

- I. The church today is a church in need.
 - A. A bankrupt and beggar congregation is in need of comfort.
 - B. A blind and bruised congregation is in need of healing.
 - C. An embattled and captive congregation is in need of deliverance..

II. The Advent Lord is the answer to the church's need.

A. As the Prophet (Evangelist).

B. As the Priest (Healer).

C. As the King (Emancipator).

Seattle Wash.

WALTER BARTLING

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 12:35-40

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Our text is part of a longer discourse given by Jesus when a certain individual asked Him to render judgment in a question of inheritance. (Ch. 12:13 ff.) After refusing to render judgment, Jesus asks the people to consider that a man's life does not consist in worldly treasure, but in his being rich toward God. Ylvisaker in *The Gospels* tersely gives the train of thought in the words: "The believer shall not be disturbed for the things of this life, (1) because he shall be filled with trust in the heavenly Father, vv. 22-30; (2) because the believer, instead of losing himself in the affairs of this world, shall fix his mind upon the greater blessings and treasures which he knows shall be his when the Lord comes, to whom he has dedicated himself, vv. 31-40." If our valuables are stored in heaven and our hearts desire earnestly the things that are above, then we shall gladly heed the Lord's exhortation to be ever prepared for the coming of the Lord's return (vv. 35, 36).

By holding out a gracious promise (vv. 35-38), the first parable encourages us to be ready. The second parable warns against a failure to watch (v. 39).

Our text speaks of three items regarding readiness for the Lord's coming: (1) the actions of those who are ready; (2) the constant readiness; (3) the blessedness of those who are ready.

The greater part of this discourse is also found in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, the great Teacher, emphasizes and repeats those truths which He knows are important. Jesus treats the same subject also in Matthew 24 and 25.

The Day and Its Theme.—Rom. 15:4-13 speaks of being of one mind with one another, a quality to be found in Christians as they look forward in hope to the day of Jesus Christ. It is characteristic of a Christian that he is constantly ready for the Lord's coming. Luke 21:25-36 describes the signs of the Lord's return. Both the Introit and the Gradual speak of the Lord's coming, and the Collect refers

to readiness for the Lord's coming. All fit well the theme for the day "Waiting for the Day of the Lord." Our text agrees well with the monthly theme of *Parish Activities*, "The Coming of Christ and the Conquest of Social Evils." Constant readiness for the Lord's return will eliminate the social evils of today, particularly the crass materialism and the emphasis on the obtaining of earthly possessions as necessary for happiness. (Labor and management, Communism, and the wrong ideologies prevalent also among our people.)

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To focus the lives of the hearers on the eternal values that continue when Christ returns; to bring them to live their lives so that they are ready to receive the Lord at His coming; to further the hearers in the practice of the real stewardship of life.

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Pointed Out and Corrected.—The materialism of today, the setting of our hearts on gaining and keeping the earthly things of life; the failure to place first things first, particularly in the pre-Christmas season, when the world emphasizes the getting of material possessions; losing oneself in the affairs of this world so that one has no time for the things of the Lord; the wrong goals and purposes in life that result in many of the social evils of today.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—In describing the blessedness of those who are ready, we have opportunity to present the blessings of heaven. The Lord's verdict of "blessed" is based, not on what the servants have earned, but on what the Lord does for them. The entire admonition is directed to the disciples and presupposes faith in the Lord Jesus. V. 28 of the Gospel refers to this blessedness as redemption. The term "Son of Man" offers opportunity for stating for whom we wait—the Savior.

Illustrations.—The text provides a variety of pictures: the servant prepared for his master's return; the master becoming the servant and ministering to his servants; the references to the various watches of the night; the thief breaking into the house unexpectedly. Selected instances from life that show the materialism of today.

Outline

Be Ye Ready for the Coming of the Son of Man.

I. How?

- A. By turning aside from all materialism, from making worldly things our chief concern.
- B. By turning in faith to the Lord Jesus and rendering faithful service. (Speak of proper goals and attitudes.)

II. When?

- A. We know not the time of His coming.
- B. We must therefore be ready always.

III. Why?

- A. If we are not ready, He will come as a thief in the night to our sorrow.
- B. If we are ready, He comes to bless us with His redemption.

Springfield, Ill.

LEWIS C. NIEMOELLER

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

MATT. 11:11-19

The Text and Its Central Thought.—This text and its parallel of Luke 7:24-35 follow the account of Jesus' answer to John's question and His tribute to John's work. Whether we are willing to admit that John himself had doubts brought on by his sojourn in prison or prefer to believe that the doubts belonged to John's disciples, in either case Jesus' answer is very important to the understanding of our text. It points to His own works as prophesied by Isaiah, showing that His works prove His Messiahship. While John's messengers are still within earshot, Jesus gives His testimony concerning John as His forerunner.

Our text emphasizes that whereas John was great, yet the humblest member of the kingdom of heaven is greater. "From the days of John the Baptist until now" implies the success of John's work in throwing open that kingdom. He so prepared the way that men were eager to enter the Kingdom. The Lucan statement (Luke 16:16), with the same verb *biazetai* shows the reason for violence in entering the Kingdom. The Kingdom is not ill treated, but is stormed by determined men who do not care what force they use to attain their goal. Our Lord describes the enthusiasm which John has instilled into some souls, and He emphasizes the need of such enthusiasm on the part of His hearers. In v. 13 Jesus shows that John, in one sense, closed the epoch of the Prophets. By pointing to Christ Himself John was revealing the grace of God which the Prophets had foretold. Hence he is more than a Prophet. But Jesus doubts in v. 14 whether it will be clear to the people, even when stated plainly, that John is the "Elijah." They will have to accept all the implications, including His own Messiahship, to understand. Jesus (v. 15) urges them to use their ears to hear in order to gain spiritual understanding.

In vv. 16 ff. Jesus gives two illustrations to show how both He Himself and John were being rejected. As children in the market place refuse to join playmates in wedding and funeral games, so the people refused the Messiah and His forerunner. John came in strict austerity; the people said he was crazy (Phillips) and would not mourn and repent. Jesus came in the joy of the redeeming Messiah and in Gospel liberty; the people called Him a drunkard, a pig, and a friend of sinners, and would not accept Him as Redeemer.

The last line in our text gives some textual difficulty. The Sinaiticus, the Vaticanus in the original hand, and some of the versions have "works" (*ergōn*). Nestle is of the opinion that the common reading "children" (*teknōn*) was carried over from Luke. Both words make sense—the one emphasizing the works which Divine Wisdom performs, the other the persons whom Divine Wisdom influences. Our Lord is saying that God's wisdom is justified in the minds of men by its results. He probably means the moral results seen as changes in the lives of the publicans and sinners just mentioned. Cp. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15.

The context continues with our Lord pronouncing woes on cities which have rejected His and His forerunner's work.

The central thought of our text is: "True hearers of the Word recognize God's message, eagerly enter the rule of the Messiah, and bring forth fruits of repentance and faith."

The Day and Its Theme.—The Third Sunday in Advent has "The Forerunner of the Lord" for its theme. The Gospel, Matt. 11:2-10, immediately precedes our text. It tells the story of John's inquiry about Jesus and leads naturally into our text. The Epistle, 1 Cor. 4:1-5, emphasizes the need for faithful stewards of the Word. Present-day Christians and preachers are to be the forerunners of Christ, who is coming again to reveal what is in men's hearts. This fits in well with the monthly theme of "The Coming of Christ and the Conquest of Social Evils." The Introit emphasizes the freedom from worry, the gentleness, and the joy of such witness to the imminent coming of the Lord. The Collect prays for an enlightened heart. The Gradual establishes the source of light and strength in the reigning Shepherd of the flock.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To bring the hearer to a new awareness of his work of preparing the world for the coming of Christ by witnessing to the Savior by word and deed.

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The rejection of Christ by the world; the indifference of the professing Christian,

shown by his lack of enthusiasm in placing his life under the rule of God; the apathy of the professing Christian, shown by his failure to make his life a personal witness against social evil.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The Gospel for the Day shows the works of Jesus as proof of His Messiahship, including the preaching of the Gospel, *i.e.*, Himself as the suffering Servant. V. 19 of the text shows Jesus as Friend of sinners and testifies to the results of the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation. Further, v. 12 shows that the realization of Jesus the Redeemer makes men bold and eager to enter the Kingdom.

Illustrations.—Describe the setting and audience of the incident; the work of the Forerunner and of the Messiah; John in prison for testifying against the social evil of King Herod; Jesus' testimony against evils in the Temple and world. Use the example of playing children in the text. Make use of the dramatic possibilities in vv. 18, 19 of the text. Show the Christian as light of the world and salt of the earth. Direct application to hearer's opportunities to witness against social evils. Remember the exhortation of the Epistle for the Day. Compare first and second comings.

Outline

"Let us as true hearers of the Word joyfully open our hearts to God's message, eagerly enter the rule of the Messiah, and zealously bring forth fruits of repentance and faith as witnesses against social evil."

- I. True hearers receive God's message.
 - A. Vv. 18, 19 a: The world rejects the Word and Jesus.
 - B. Vv. 13-15: Let us open our hearts to the power of God.
- II. True hearers eagerly enter the rule of the Messiah.
 - A. Vv. 16, 17: Bad hearers are indifferent.
 - B. V. 12: Let us be eager to live for the Kingdom.
- III. True hearers bring forth fruits of repentance and faith.
 - A. Bad hearers do not bear fruit.
 - B. V. 19 b: Let us zealously show forth our fruits to a world in need.

Conclusion: May our witness be heard as we prepare the way of the Lord's Second coming!

Introduction: The difference between hearing and understanding.

Suggested Hymns: 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 134, 272, 482, 605.

Mascoutah, Ill.

WILLIAM E. GOERSS

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

JOHN 5:31-39

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Jesus is discussing His own person and work with the Jews who had begun to persecute Him (v. 16) because He had healed the man at Bethesda on the Sabbath and "made Himself equal with God" (v. 18). The Savior's rejoinder has little to say on the question of healing on the Sabbath, but much on the relation of Jesus as the Christ to the Father. This relation is one of giving the life of God to men and of judging the world at the resurrection (vv. 24-28). Jesus now adduces evidence that His bland claim of being God's Son and Life-Giver is credible. V. 31: without such witness from without, His assertions concerning Himself will not be accepted. The Lord adduces two witnesses: John the Baptist and God the Father. V. 32: "another beareth witness" seems to refer to John the Baptist (vv. 33 and 36), thus beginning with a lesser and moving to a greater. The Jews appealed to John for witness concerning Jesus, and he gave it—"to the truth"—identifying Jesus with the Messiah in the redeeming plan of God (v. 33). Others assume that v. 32 speaks of the witness from God Himself (vv. 36 and 37). That testimony (v. 34) which Jesus Himself receives and which causes Him to be conscious of Himself as from the Father (vv. 19-23) is from God Himself; it is that testimony which they should observe. They should be willing to do so, since for a while they were willing to observe the witness of John (v. 35). The Father witnesses to and about Christ in two ways: v. 36, the works which He enables Christ to do and charges Him to accomplish; cf. vv. 19, 20, 25, 27, 30. These works are not merely marvels, but they are demonstrations that Christ is the Messiah, the one whom God has sent (vv. 36, 37); the highest demonstration that Christ does the Father's work is that He goes to the cross (John 13:31, 32; 14, 2). This witness of the Father's to Jesus as the Christ is one that must be corroborated by the voice and Word of God. Jesus' enemies through their very unbelief indicate that they had not been hearing that voice (vv. 37, 38); otherwise they would believe in Jesus as the Christ. The Word of God must actually "abide" in a person, take root there, and that the enemies had not permitted. They had been searching the Scriptures, expecting to find life in them; but they had not realized that they speak of Christ, nor had they come to Him (vv. 39, 40).—The central thought: "The Father witnesses that Jesus is Life-Bringer, by the deeds which Jesus does and by the Scriptures, which speak of Him."

The Day and Its Theme.—The Epistle reminds of the Lord's judgment and His quality as Giver of peace. The Gospel describes the

witness of John the Baptist to Jesus. It stops short of John 1:29, which is the interpretation of his own witness and the remainder of the work which the Father sent the Son to do. Introit is general, likewise the gradual; the collect refers to the spiritual coming of Christ into the heart. The Swedish Lectionary suggests as theme for the day "The Lord Is at Hand." The accent on the second coming can be rendered more explicit in the modified theme: "The Father witnesses to Jesus as Christ by sending Him to redeem and to judge, as the Scriptures have testified." (The theme of *Parish Activities* can well be left unstressed in this service, instead concentrating on the hearer's final preparation for the Christmas message.)

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To have the completed work and promised judgment of Christ, and the testimony of the Scriptures to Him, work in the hearer the continuing faith that He is Redeemer and Lord.

Sin and Its Fruits to be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The unbelief of the Jews negated even their acceptance of Scripture. They concerned themselves with His philanthropic deeds, with envy or hatred, and neglected to see what they told of His being sent by the Father.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The works of Christ by which men see that the Father sent Him—climaxing in the act of the redemption—convey the explicit Gospel. To support this comes an array of Old Testament references to the Messiah, which the congregation has been reviewing during Advent. Make clear that to know and accept the Scriptures and not find Christ is death; but to find Him there, life.

Illustrations.—Exploit the visual values of the narrative: Jews, believing in the inspiration of the Scriptures, not finding Christ. Correlate with the drama of John the Baptist. Christ's analogies for Himself: Matt. 21:37; Paul: Phil. 2:5-8. The Scriptures: Luther: the cradle in which the Baby Jesus lies.

Outline

The Father witnesses to Jesus as Christ by sending Him to redeem and to judge, as the Scriptures have testified. (Title: God says: "Jesus is the Christ!")

I. Jesus says: "I am the Christ."

A. Modern scholars are uncertain whether Jesus claimed to be Christ.

B. But His enemies resented especially this, that He so claimed.

C. Our problem may be that we mouth the words, but feel little moved by their meaning: He is Redeemer, Lord, Judge.

II. John the Baptist said: "He is the Christ."

- A. On this Sunday we put ourselves in the position of those awaiting the Christ and see John point to Jesus.
- B. But we need not be content with mere human testimony.

III. God the Father says: "He is the Christ."

- A. He gave Him His own works to do. Not merely miracles of healing and power; but above all, the task of redeeming the world and the work of the last Judgment.
- B. In the Scriptures the Prophets of the Old Testament, and since then the New Testament writers, say: "He is the Christ."
- C. Can we accept this testimony? God works faith in us provided that we actually ponder Christ's working our redemption, actually see the Scriptures tell of Him.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

CHRISTMAS DAY

MATT. 1:18-24

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The lesson itself hands us its purpose on a silver platter. It tells us that the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise. Without any question it aims at giving us the manner of Jesus' birth. This wouldn't make too bad a theme. At least it seems to suit Matthew quite well for this section. A very strong cue is given us immediately when we are brought into contact with poor Joseph, no doubt the man who throughout this entire narrative acts as our representative. With all of the natural reactions that a good and pious man like him would have to his pregnant fiancée, we don't have to stretch a point to find our natural reactions to the virgin birth of Jesus. But God is gracious beyond providing the Savior: He sends His angel to set Joseph straight, even as He still sends His "good angel," His "evangel," to proclaim to us the real facts of the case. All the way through this sermon it would be well to remember that the Gospel, the *euangelion*, always gives us God's side of the story and therefore the real facts of any case. Too often it is the Gospel that to us appears unbelievable—because of our sin. All of our rationalizing without taking God into consideration, without making use of the provisions which come from Him, without trusting in His Jesus, who is born by the power of the Holy Ghost, what we

do and aspire to and concoct is what is really unbelievable in the light of the Gospel. Here is one of the real evils of our day: the greatest manifestations from God can be perverted by us to materialistic and selfish ends. Think only of what we do with Christmas and Easter. Thus all evil is essentially a perversion of some gift of God. The evils mentioned merely indicate that we can pervert even the highest, just as surely as Joseph was going to put Mary away and would have done so had he not believed the Word from God. Because that which is born of Mary is by the Holy Ghost, He can be called JESUS, for only as One born not by the will of man, but of God could save His people from their sins. Only as that which is conceived in Mary is conceived by the Holy Ghost, can we know Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us. A central thought for this text would be: "Jesus is truly the Son of God and thus the Savior, God with us. Whoever regards Him as anything else sees no more than Joseph did with his natural and sinful eyes."

The Day and Its Theme.—Titus 2:11-14 announces the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, while Luke 2:1-14 shows us the manner of His appearing, so utterly contrary to our human expectations. Introit, Collect, and Gradual emphasize the Godhead of the Savior so that we can petition God through Him to set us free from the yoke and bondage of our sin. The Swedish Gospel selection for Christmas takes us back just a step farther, and we see the working of God through the Holy Ghost to bring about this birth of our Lord through the Virgin Mary. Here then we are brought to the miracle of the Incarnation, God made flesh so that we may know Jesus as the Savior of sinners. *Parish Activities* relates the coming of Christ to the conquest of social evils. This, too, is possible in the full sense of the Word of God only if Jesus is Emmanuel, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, for only so can He be the Victor over all evil, personal and social, for the social is merely the extension of the personal.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To bring the hearer to believe that the Babe of Bethlehem is the Son of God, coming down to us at infinite personal cost, to save us from our sins. To believe this Gospel is everlasting life.

Sin and Its Fruits to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Essentially we are all like Joseph by nature, creatures of sense and sight. Thus, when we read the Gospels, we are very apt to see so much of the human in Jesus that we forget His divine origin. Similarly we can take so much of what the world makes of Christmas that we do not see what God

prepared on Christmas. This is more than possible as we go about this whole matter of our faith in a natural instead of a God-revealed way, or as we go about it in a formalistic, take-for-granted instead of an angel-proclaimed way. We need to recover our sense of awe at what God has done. We need to approach with hearts of faith, which alone are truly appreciative hearts.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—All this was done that God's Word of old might be fulfilled. God does more than turn the world upside down to keep His Word. We could never come to God; here is Emmanuel, God with us. We could not save ourselves; here is the One whom you must call Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.

Illustrations.—Picture well the frame of mind of Joseph as described in v. 19. He must have been almost frantic. Thus we find ourselves with deeply disturbed minds and hearts, weary and heavy laden, until we find from God that which is born of Mary is by the Holy Ghost, Jesus, the Savior of sinners. What Thomas was brought to by the resurrection, that we must do as we kneel at the manger: by faith declare of the Babe, "My Lord and my God." The remarkable obedience of Joseph should not go unnoticed. It is practically a characteristic of him. The angel says, and Joseph does. What is the obedience of our faith?

Outline

The Birth of Jesus, the Savior of Sinners.

- I. The miracle of it.
 - A. It was the fulfillment of prophecy, v. 22.
 - B. Explicitly stated that it was by the Holy Ghost, vv. 18, 20.
 - C. God uses an angel to convince Joseph, v. 20.
- II. The purpose of it.
 - A. That the Scriptures might be fulfilled, v. 22.
 - B. That God might be God with us, v. 23.
 - C. That we might be saved from our sins, v. 21.
- III. The Christian reaction to it.
 - A. Faith—calling His name Jesus, v. 25.
 - B. Obedience—doing as God bids us in this Gospel, v. 24.
 - C. Sacrifice—setting ourselves aside for this Jesus, vv. 19, 24, 25.

Minneapolis, Minn.

WILLIAM A. BUEGE

SERMON STUDY FOR THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS
MATT. 2:13-23

The term "Sunday *After* Christmas" signals a psychological anti-climax. "After" often leaves us with that letdown feeling. This is one of the "low Sundays" of the church year, like the Sunday after Easter. It ought not be. The overemphasizing of the material celebration of Christmas leaves us weak and weary. True spiritual considerations of the Savior's birth leave us eager and ready to go for the Lord.

The Bible account of the after-Christmas story shows no weak and weary believers. Those who worshiped at the manger were eager and ready to go. They waited for further direction from the Lord. Theirs is the story of

GOD'S POWER TO DIRECT LIVES

- I. God's power directing the people of the text.
 - A. The Wise Men departed (v. 13 a). They followed God's directions.
 - B. The Angel spoke to Joseph (vv. 13-15).
 1. Joseph had a direct command to flee to Egypt, different from our vague dreams.
 2. "Until I bring thee word"—God promises future direction. When He opens one door, you walk through. He tells you where to go on the other side.
 3. "Herod will seek . . . to destroy." God protects against enemies.
 4. "Out of Egypt I have called my Son." Here is fulfillment of prophecy by people who were not aware of their part in the fulfillment.
 - C. Even Herod's wickedness was turned to good (vv. 16-18).
 1. Herod was tricked by wise men.
 2. The massacre of innocents was fulfillment of prophecy Herod did not know.
 3. The fact that God predicted Herod's wickedness does not absolve him from blame.
 - D. The angel directs Joseph out of Egypt (vv. 19-22).
 1. It was safe to return. Herod was dead.
 2. At first Joseph was not given a specific locality—only "the land of Israel."
 3. When fears were expressed, God specified Galilee as the place to go.

E. The family settled in Nazareth.

1. Remained there until the beginning of Jesus' ministry.
2. Think of God's direction for remarkable prophecy fulfillment.
 - a. Was to be born in Bethlehem — Micah.
 - b. "Out of Egypt have I called my Son."
 - c. "He shall be called a Nazarene."
 - d. No one before Jesus' time could have imagined how God would direct His people to fulfillment of these seemingly conflicting prophecies.

Appl.: We are deeply impressed by the hand of God guiding the movements of the people in the text.

II. God directs men today.

- A. All of us have personal experience with God's direction in our lives.
 1. Relate story of one of congregation members.
 2. Relate personal story.
- B. We have promise that "all things work together for good to them that love God." We know from experience that God has not forgotten this promise.
- C. God directs not only individual lives but also groups.
 1. The family.
 2. The congregation.
 3. The nation and social order. God's hand in history. See *Parish Activities*.
- D. A good education must teach how God directs lives. Public education fails in this purpose. Only Christian schools can really educate.

Appl.: May the story of Christmas leave us eager and ready to go. When God opens doors, we walk through.

Baltimore, Md.

GEORGE H. SOMMERMEYER

SAINT STEPHEN THE MARTYR'S DAY, DECEMBER 26

ACTS 6:8-15 and 7:54-60

A saint's day in the Christmas season is neither a novelty nor a rarity. "The early church held Stephen in high honor as the first martyr and in the fourth century it appointed December 26 as his special day"

(Reed). The observance of December 27 as the Day of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist dates from the sixth century. And the Holy Innocents (December 28) have been commemorated since ancient times after the manner or order of the saints. In fact, apart from Christmas there are no saints: the communion of saints is the holy church of the holy Child. Gal. 3:26: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

All that the Bible tells us about Stephen is in Acts 6:5 to 8:2; 11:19; and 22:20. His name heads the list of the first deacons of the church, with a special note added, telling us that he was "a man full of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6:5). See also Acts 6:10 and 7:55. Paul might have been thinking also of Stephen when he wrote Rom. 8:14-18, with its repeated reference to the Spirit and to glory after suffering. In Acts 6:8 Stephen is again singled out for special mention: "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." The fact that he was an outstanding man is borne out also by the array of those whom he successfully resisted in dispute (Acts 6:9-10). And when his enemies resorted to false charges of blasphemy, he defended himself masterfully and at great length, with the assurance of faith and heaven written plainly in the features of his face (Acts 6:11-7:53). His persecutors, however, proceeded from false charges to violence (Acts 7:54-60). But they could not prevent him from catching a brief preview of the glory which was awaiting him in heaven. The path to eternal glory leads but *through* the grave. Stephen's death by stoning was witnessed by young Saul, who later, in turn, in his maturity, became Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles. The persecution that arose in connection with the martyrdom of Stephen caused the Christians to scatter abroad throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, and Christian congregations were established in these districts. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church" (Tertullian).

Surely it is appropriate for the church to take note of this fact in connection with the birth of Him who came to found the New Testament church and shed His own holy, precious blood for it. "One senses a certain propriety in commemorating the first martyr on the first day after the nativity of the King of martyrs. . . . St. Stephen, stoned by the Jews, ascended on high because our blessed Lord, praised by the angels, had descended here below. 'Glory to God in the highest,' the holy angels joyfully sang yesterday; today (we recall that) they triumphantly took Saint Stephen up in their midst. Alone our Lord

came down from heaven and humbled Himself in order that He might exalt His warriors on high." (Ressel.)

This suggests some of the rich material which can be effectively woven into a seasonal sermon. But remember that in this season the people are hearing more sermons than at most other times of the year. Therefore keep your theme and outline as vivid, brief, and simple as possible, e.g.,

Stephen—a Christmas Saint

He is an example for us in (1) *Faith* (Acts 6:5, and 8; cf. Rom. 8:14-18. Acts 6:9—7:59; cf. 1 Peter 5:8,9); (2) *Love*. His love is in evidence in his work. As a deacon he helped to administer the charity of the congregation at Jerusalem (cf. Matt. 25:34-40). He showed a spirit of forgiveness over against his enemies (Acts 7:60; cf. Luke 23:34 and Matt. 5:44).

Conclusion: 1 Peter 5:10-11.

A Collect for the Day

Grant, O Lord, through the power of Thy Holy Spirit, that, like Stephen Martyr, we may be filled with Christian love toward all men and with the confident assurance of that faith which, also amid the sufferings of this present time, steadfastly beholds the glory that shall be revealed in us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Additional references: *Lutheran Witness*, Dec. 22, 1953, pp. 10, 13; *Lutheran Chaplain*, December, 1951, pp. 38-40; Reed, *Lutheran Liturgy*, pp. 496, 497.

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