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Homiletics: Studies on the Swedish Gospels

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HOMILETICS

Studies on Old Testament Texts

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

PSALM 24

The Text and Its Central Thought.—David may have written Psalm 24 for the occasion of bringing the Ark from the house of Obed-Edom to Mount Zion (2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 15). — Vv. 1, 2: These verses extol the immeasurable glory of the Lord as the Creator of the earth and all its inhabitants. He has given every inanimate creation its shape and destiny, every animate creature its form and purpose. As Creator He laid down principles for the life cycles of everything He had made. Without hesitation David recognizes the Lord as the Possessor and Sovereign of all things. — Vv. 3-6: But on this festive day David's interest lies primarily in the "hill of the Lord" and "His holy place," i. e., Mount Zion and the Tabernacle, which were to be set aside and hallowed as the Lord's earthly abode. Therefore David concentrates on the kind of man who can ascend and take his stand in the presence of the Lord. His answer to the question in his mind at first glance seems superficial and inadequate, but vv. 5 and 6 show us the depth of his thought and clearly indicate that hands, hearts, minds, and mouths can follow through on David's description only when they have been touched and motivated by the Spirit of the Lord. David certainly brushes the mere outward act aside. Any hypocrite could qualify on that score. The man David holds forth has received "the blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation," i. e., forgiveness of sin and the assurance that the Lord Himself has provided and cemented a new relationship between Himself and man through the Messiah. The man who accepts and believes in this new relationship with the Lord has hands that will fold in earnest prayer, earn an honest living, pay all debts, give to the poor and missions; a heart that is filled with faith, unimpeachable motives, and laudable aims; a mind that will not lose itself in useless activity nor put any person or anything above the Lord; a mouth that will find its greatest satisfaction in speaking the truth. — Vv. 7-10: These verses with their questions and answers concentrate on the King of Glory, the Lord of Creation, the matchless Messiah, the incomparable Redeemer. David's joy rings through every one of these verses. He calls upon doors, gates, and hearts to open wide so that He

who is worthy to enter may enter freely. There can be no doubt about who this King of Glory is. He is none other than the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is significant to note how often David uses "Jehovah" in the Psalm. He is talking of the covenant God who visits his people in mercy and showers love and forgiveness upon them in abundance. The terms "strong and mighty" and "mighty in battle" carry pointed meaning, too. They do not let us stop with the many evidences of the Lord's power when He stepped into the breach for His people in the long years of wandering in the wilderness and later on gave them repeated victories on many battlefields. The terms just mentioned unquestionably refer to the battle which only the Lord Jesus Himself could enter and carry through to victory, the battle against sin, death, devil, and hell.

The Day and Its Theme.—According to a long-standing custom of the church the first Sunday in Advent involved a call to the Christian people to let the Lord God enter their hearts. No other call can take precedence over this one. The church continues as such only so long as Christ dwells in her. It is of the utmost importance for the church to heed this call and so insure spiritual health and growth for another year.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The sermon ought to lead the hearer to come to a better understanding of the relationship between the Lord and himself. It should deepen his desire to live in the Lord and give himself wholeheartedly to God's service.

Sin Diagnosed and Remedied.—Hand, heart, mind, and mouth mentioned in v. 4 open up the gamut of sin and make it quite difficult for us to know where to stop. These members of ours are so fruitful in finding new ways of sinning. On this day it is well for us to think about the times we neglected prayer, Bible study, the family altar, attendance at divine service, the Lord's Table, and increasing our contributions to the Lord's treasury. Even though we might have been fairly consistent, we must admit that we did not always do our best. A welcome change will come when the King of Glory enters our heart to give us a new point of view and a fresh start.

Opportunity for Explicit Gospel.—Several terms are loaded with Gospel content. "Lord," "blessing from the Lord," "righteousness from the God of his salvation," "seek Him," "King of Glory," talk to us about the God who planned and perfected our salvation. Cf. Eph. 1:3-14.

Illustrations.—Since the population of our country and the world is increasing rapidly and rampant sin is piling up distress, it is well

to use this sociological fact to point up the need and urgency for every Christian to heed the Advent invitation.

Outline

The Advent Invitation: Open Your Heart to the Lord

- I. To receive the King of Glory
 - A. He is the Creator and Sovereign of the earth.
 - B. He is the Redeemer of the world.
 - C. He is the Protector of the church.
- II. To benefit through His blessing
 - A. He gives you forgiveness of sin.
 - B. He stands by you in your mental and physical troubles.
 - C. He gives you the assurance of life everlasting.
- III. To serve Him with your gifts
 - A. With His assistance you build a Christian home.
 - B. With His guidance you use yourself and your means to expand His kingdom.

St. Louis, Mo.

ALEX. WM. C. GUEBERT

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

ZEPH. 3:14-20

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Zephaniah brought a message of Law and Gospel to Jerusalem and Judah at the time of King Josiah. Chapter 1 describes the evidences of God's judgment over sin, idolatry, and rebellion, carried out through internal violence and external war and pillage. Chapter 2 reinforces the warning against Judah by showing how also its enemies shall be laid waste; cf. also 3:5-7. All of this violence and destruction in history has one purpose: that the people of God may hear His Word and worship Him (3:8-12). And now comes a promise upon that portion that heeds the warning Word and proves its repentance (v. 13) and a psalm of praise, first from the lips of one who is in the praising group (vv. 14-17), and then from the lips of God Himself, giving a promise of rescue and of help to carry out the purpose of God's people on earth (vv. 18-20).

V. 14: The praise is to be sung by "daughter of Zion," "Israel," "daughter of Jerusalem." But the context indicates that it is specifically the "remnant of Israel" (v. 13) — whether originally Jewish or whether God's dispersed throughout the nations (vv. 9, 10, 19, 20) — that is

meant, the spiritual Israel throughout the New Testament world (Rom. 9:6 ff.; Gal. 4:26; Rev. 3:9).—V. 15: judgments are here the demonstrations of God's wrath over rebellion, His sentence over sin. The enemy of God's people and of God is cast out, and in his place is God Himself as King and Protector.—V. 16: Hence a great message pervades the spiritual people of God: fear not, don't hesitate to lift up your hands in joy and adoration, instead of leaving them slack in fear and apathy; cf. Is. 40:9.—V. 17: The burden of the message is that God, restored to His people, is mighty. He will save and keep on saving. He will find His joy in His saved people. He will be peacefully satisfied in His love, no longer contriving judgment and destruction but forgiving and blessing.—V. 18: The Lord God speaks; the text is difficult. RSV conjectures that the first words go with 17: "As on a day of festival"; and continues: "I will remove disaster from you so that you will not bear reproach for it." Luther: "Die, so durch Satzungen geängstet waren, will ich wegschaffen, welche Satzungen ihre Last waren, davon sie Schmach hatten." The KJV is literal and suggests God's decree to call His people together, from all over the world and in every age, away from their gatherings of mourning into His own company of rejoicing.—Vv. 19 and 20 speak the mighty hope of God's people, in that He will rescue them, bring them back from dispersion and captivity, and give them honor among all men—honor that is His doing and that involves the appreciation of the nations for the blessing brought them by God's people. The pervading idea: Rejoice that God delivers His people in love.

The Day and Its Theme.—This Sunday, in its Propers, stresses not so much the incarnation of Christ as it does the hope of God's people in every age, climaxing in the deliverance of the last Judgment. God's Day, the working out of His purpose, is revealed in the cataclysms that interpret His judgment upon men, but it is supreme in the plan by which he takes fear from the heart of His people and guarantees its salvation. This text speaks not only of the final Judgment but also of God's succor that makes His people a blessing already before the end of time. The accent in *Parish Activities* on thought for others reflects itself particularly in what it is that makes God's people "a name and a praise among all the people of the earth," namely, their response to God's rescue and their telling of His good news.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The preacher has the choice of goals: that his people should hope that God's redemption in Christ turns their lives to joy and witness or that they should rejoice in their

own rescue from death. These are roughly the accents of Epistle and Gospel for the day. We suggest the latter.

The Diagnosis of Sin.—The chief Law preaching of the Book comes before this text. The cues for it in the text are v. 15, "thine enemy." Flesh and devil still at work among Christians. V. 16: "let not thine hands be slack," the apathy toward thankfulness and worship that pervades Christians under the stresses or the materialism of life.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—V. 15: "The Lord is in the midst of thee" is a good Messianic note similar to Is. 7:14; v. 17 stresses God's carrying out a redemptive plan at the expense of His sacrificial love and finishing it thoroughly; "save" (v. 19) and "gather" (v. 20) are strong Messianic words interpretable in God's act in Christ.

Illustrations and New Testament Parallels.—The whole process of history is God's gathering His people from multifarious exiles. America a haven for the oppressed, or Israeli for persecuted Jews; how much more the people of God a rallying point for men plucked from death. Note Eph. 1:10 ff. as a counterpart of vv. 17-20.

Outline

Rejoice That God Delivers His People in Love

- I. God's people are lost
 - A. In exile among the people of the world.
 - B. Tormented by enemies and the enemy.
 - C. Reminded of their plight by the disasters of history.
- II. God delivers His people in love
 - A. His great plan of love is carried out to its fulfilment.
 - B. It involves His coming to dwell among His people.
 - C. Therewith He delivers His people from their exile and gathers them.
- III. Hence rejoice!
 - A. Lift up hands in adoration.
 - B. Tell the message: "Fear thou not," within the church and beyond it.

St. Louis, Mo.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

MALACHI 3:1-6

The Context, Text, and Central Thought.—In Mal. 2:17—4:6 the Prophet addresses himself to the people of Israel, who were displaying a spirit of discontent because the expected judgmental visitation of the glory of God did not occur. This discontent is voiced in 2:17 and 3:13-15. "Evildoers prosper; therefore God is not just; so there is no profit in serving Him."

The Prophet meets this challenge with the answer "The Lord will visit Israel" (3:1,2). By His visitation He will refine the nation of Israel, which is murmuring because He doesn't come (3:3,4), and destroy those who do not fear Him (3:5). This visitation is sure, because God is unchangeably holy and must purify His people—by the destruction of the wicked and the refinement of the righteous (3:6).

The Prophet instructs the people that their own unrighteousness has withheld the visitation of God (3:7-12). He warns them that only the righteous will stand in the day of His visitation (3:16-18). Because God's visiting will have a twofold purpose: the destruction of the wicked (4:1), the healing of the righteous (4:2). Hence, the adequate preparation for God's visit is, "Remember the Law of Moses," and make your hearts like the hearts of your fathers (4:4-6).

In this context our text gives the assurance that God, after His way is prepared, will visit Israel (v.1) and states that the purpose of His visit is to cleanse His people of sin—by refining the righteous (vv. 3,4), by destroying the wicked (v.5). The guarantee of this visit is found in the fact that God's people must be made like their unchangingly holy God (v.6).

The Day and Its Theme.—The Collect states the theme: "Lighten the darkness of our hearts by Thy gracious visitation." The Introit antiphon derives from another pre-Reformation Epistle pericope. It anticipates next Sunday's Epistle. The Introit Psalm (Psalm 85) speaks so beautifully of God's visitation of forgiveness (v.2), salvation (v.7), righteousness and peace (v.10), that we advise the ancient custom of reading the entire Psalm. The Epistle demands faithfulness of the ministers of Christ in their God-given task of preparing men for God's visitation. The Gospel introduces John the Baptist as the first of the preparatory messengers of Christ. The text gives all messengers of Christ their message: "God comes to lighten the darkness of our hearts by His gracious visitation."

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To make God's gracious visitation more real by explaining what is its nature; to make God's gracious visitation more pleasant by removing the sins that retard and impede it.

Sin to be Diagnosed and Remedied.—The sins depicted by Israel, which also cling to us: doubting God's visitation of judgment, exemplified by envying the wicked and turning to their sins without fearing God, remedied by the assurance of God's visitation of judgment so that men will fear God; revolting against God's visitation of mercy, exemplified by a reluctance to be refined so that we may offer pleasing sacrifices to God, remedied by the assurance of God's visitation of mercy that we may love God, best expressed in Rom. 8:1-4: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. . . . For God has done what the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, *in order that the just requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us*, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—"The Lord . . . will come" (v. 1) is the final Old Testament repetition of the first Gospel promise made to man (Gen. 3:15), more clearly expressed to Abraham: "In thy seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). In the atoning work of Jesus Christ we have the answer to the question of v. 2: "Who can endure the Day of His coming?" Christ's suffering for us is our motivation for entering and continuing the process of refinement (vv. 2, 3; cf. 1 Peter 2:19-25; 4:12-19; 1:3-9). Faith in Him is the basic requirement for offering right offerings to the Lord (v. 4; cf. Heb. 11:6).

Old and New Testament Parallels.—The text must be studied against the background of Is. 40:3-11; 57:14-21; 62:10-12, of which it is a summary. The New Testament fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Luke 1:15-17; 32-35. Confirmation of John the Baptist's ministry of preparation is given in Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:2-8; Luke 3:2-18, and by our Lord in Matt. 11:7-15 (Gospel); Luke 7:24-30; Matt. 17:9-13; Mark 9:11-13. The judgmental character of Christ's visitation is told in John 3:19-21; 9:35-41.

Outline

Introduction: Discuss evidences of doubt concerning God's visitation as shown by Israel at the time of Malachi and by men of our day.

God's Visitation to Lighten the Darkness of Our Hearts**I. The assurance of God's visitation****A. Affirmed by the preparatory messenger (v. 1 a).****B. Affirmed by the promise of God, "The Lord of Hosts has said" (v. 1 b).****C. Affirmed by the unchanging holiness of God (v. 6).****II. The purpose of God's visitation.****A. To destroy the wicked (v. 5).****B. To refine His people (vv. 2-4).**

Conclusion: The Christ to whom the Law and Prophets bear witness has come to fulfill them. He laid down His life for us to bear our sin and redeem us from the dominion of sin, so that we, freed from the condemnation of the Law, might fulfill the just requirements of that Law as a pleasant offering to God. Through removing our sins and purifying our sinful nature God's visitation lightens the darkness of our hearts.

St. Louis, Mo.

HOLLAND JONES

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT**ISAIAH 40:1-10**

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Dark days were in store for Jerusalem and Judea. The prophet Isaiah, in chapter 39:5-8, announced to Hezekiah the coming Babylonian Captivity, God's judgment on the nation which Jehovah had chosen out of the nations of the earth but which had consistently proved unfaithful to the Lord. But even in punishing God still remained Israel's God, and for Him the nation with which He had made His covenant remained "My people." He cannot deny His character as the merciful and faithful One. And so the Prophet hears the divine summons directed to himself and other prophets to dispense comfort to God's people by proclaiming to Jerusalem that "her warfare," i. e., the hardship and trouble caused by her sin, had come to an end, since double pardon was available from the hand of God. In the Spirit the Prophet was spanning eight centuries and hearing the voice of one John the Baptist (Matt. 1:3), who was destined by God to preach repentance in preparation for the coming of the Lord in the flesh. Drawing on what was evidently a familiar scene in his day, Isaiah in vivid imagery describes the changes which the human heart must undergo for a worthy welcome of the Lord, the Christ. The humble should take courage, the proud become lowly,

and those who have hitherto closed their hearts should become receptive for the Lord's message of grace. And so the Lord's purpose in coming to His people will be achieved. Through those who welcome Him as their Lord His glory will become manifest before the eyes of all the people of the world, and the truth of God's promises of salvation will be established.

In this connection the Prophet receives instructions to preach and emphasize the fallacy of putting one's trust in man, who is ephemeral like the grass. God's word with its promises alone has enduring worth. And so the true Zion, which has God's Word and puts her trust in it, is encouraged to proclaim to the cities of Judah the glad news that the Lord is in their midst to dispense salvation. In conclusion the text takes note of the fact that the Lord who comes is the Lord God, endowed with divine power to rule as Lord over all. He will deal with men in accordance with their attitude toward Him. Herein lies hope and joy for those who gladly receive Him, but a note of warning for those who reject Him.

The Day and Its Theme.—The Epistle motivates its exhortation to rejoice in the Lord always with the assertion that the Lord is near. The Gospel relates how John the Baptist directs the inquiring Jews to Jesus, who had made His appearance among them. Both thoughts, the nearness of the Lord and the duty to lead others to Him, find an echo in our text.

Sins to Be Remedied.—During the Advent season preoccupation with making preparations for the external observance of the Christmas season is likely to dull the awareness of the spiritual meaning of the coming of the Savior in the flesh. Nothing of an extraneous nature should be allowed to intrude upon the Christian's worshipful appreciation of the divine mystery "God was made manifest in the flesh."

Outline

The Advent Summons: Prepare the Way for the Coming of the Lord

- I. A message of comfort for us who believe in Him
 - A. It recognizes that we are sinners (v. 2).
 - B. But assures us of double pardon for our sins (v. 2).
 - C. Confirms in us the conviction of the absolute dependability of God's Word in a world of uncertainty (v. 8).
 - D. Directs our look forward to the Lord's gracious reward (v. 10).

II. An exhortation which stirs us to greater zeal in behalf of Christ's kingdom

- A. The Lord wants to come to all kinds of people (v.4).
- B. He desires His glory revealed among all flesh (v.5).
- C. Hence the church is charged with bringing the good tidings to the world at large clearly and without fear (v.9).
- D. The Lord Himself will support His cause (v.10).

St. Louis, Mo.

G. V. SCHICK

CHRISTMAS DAY—THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

ISAIAH 9:6,7

The Text and Its Central Thought.—The first twelve chapters of Isaiah contain prophecies of judgment and doom for the Kingdom of Judah. Three odd-numbered chapters, however (7, 9, 11), also contain some of the best-known Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Ch. 7 announces the birth of Immanuel; ch. 9 gives Him the unique set of names: Wonderful, etc.; ch. 11 pictures Him as the Twig and the Branch issuing from David's family tree. These insertions are a good example of the way in which the Prophet alternates in his preaching of Law and Gospel.

1. The conjunction *for* at the beginning of v. 6 is very significant. It refers back to vv. 2-5 and thus gives *four reasons* why the wonderful Child was born:

A. Judah and the world at large were in *darkness* (v.2). Natural man gropes about in spiritual darkness. The shadow of death surrounds him constantly. Therefore the Child brought light and life, not a light like the flash of an atom bomb which deals out death but a light that radiates and glows with life.

B. Multiple *sorrow* was the aftermath of the fall (v.3). God had said, "I will greatly *multiply* thy *sorrow*." But the Child was born so that *joy* might be *multiplied* (read with RSV, "Thou hast increased its joy"), a joy like that of the harvest festival or of victorious soldiers.

C. Spiritual *bondage* was the lot of all men (v.4). Man's slavery under sin was like bearing a heavy yoke or burden, like being struck on the back with staves and rods. Therefore the Child came to break this burdensome yoke and to shatter those rods and staves in a victory as miraculous as Gideon's over the Midianites (Judg. 7:19-23).

D. *War* was being aggressively waged by man's enemies (v.5). They had effective equipment for bringing men to their knees:

marching boots that enabled them to trample roughshod over their opponents, uniforms that were scarlet-colored from the blood which they absorbed (cf. RSV). But the Child turned the tide in this war, stripping the foe of boots and uniforms and burning all of his equipment.

II. Those were the reasons for the gift of the Son. But how could the Son effect such a deliverance from darkness, sorrow, bondage, and war? The four names that were given Him give us a clue to His power and ability (v. 6).

A. Wonderful Counsellor! What a miracle Child: born of a virgin, both God and man in one person, entirely without sin! How eminently suited to be our Adviser and Guide: our temptations and problems were His, His divine counsel and wisdom were ours.

B. Mighty God! Another tribute to the Child's deity: a frail, helpless, human infant, and yet the mighty God Himself. He has full responsibility for the world's government, all things are placed under His feet. He is indeed able to be the Author of our redemption.

C. Everlasting Father! He that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father. The Son and the Father are one. They were always one, also before the Incarnation ("before Abraham was, I am"). The Son is also "one who continually acts as a father to his people" (Skinner).

D. Prince of Peace! A royal Prince indeed, of the very dynasty of heaven. A heavenly Prince to restore the heavenly peace, which man had terminated. Under Him swords will be beaten into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, war will be past (Is. 2:4).

III. Such glorious names qualify the Son as the Establisher of an equally glorious kingdom (v. 7). It is a kingdom that

A. Constantly expands and increases. The Great Commission. Evangelism. Program of home and world missions.

B. Is assured of peace. Its peace cannot be disturbed, strife and warfare cannot recur, because the Prince reigns supreme.

C. Is based on justice and righteousness. As its Head brought justice and righteousness to His subjects, so they in turn practice justice and righteousness toward one another.

D. Endures from henceforth even forever. Its members pass from suffering to glory, from cross to crown, from knowing in part to seeing face to face.

The Day and Its Theme.—On the Feast of the Nativity Christians rejoice because "the Son of the Father is born." It is significant that the words of the text (Is. 9:6, 7) are used both in the Epistle and in the Introit for Christmas Day. The Collect for Christmas Night, point-

ing to Christ as the true Light, has its roots in Is. 9:2. The Epistle and the Collect for Christmas Day speak of the newborn Christ's redeeming us from the old bondage of sin (Is. 9:4).

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—The hearers need to be made aware of the darkness, sorrow, bondage, and strife which characterize their human lot, so that they may lay hold on the light, joy, freedom, and peace which Christ brings them and may, in turn, become effective instruments in helping to preserve and expand His kingdom of justice and righteousness.

Sins to Be Diagnosed and Remedied.—Darkness is the symbol of ignorance. The worst ignorance is failure to recognize sin for what it is. Bondage points to those habitual sins, those deeply entrenched vices, which quickly become our masters when they are not curbed. Boots and uniforms suggest the bold attitude of those who challenge God's world leadership and defy Him to bring on His judgment.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—The Son is a *gift*, undeserved by man. God so *loved* that He gave. The phrase *unto us* is meaningful. The Son was certainly given, not just for the Jews, not just for the believers, but *for all men*. All are entitled to His grace and salvation. Only those, however, who kiss the Son in the allegiance of faith (Ps. 2:11, 12) can testify and say, "He is given *unto us*" (Stoeckhardt).

Outline

Unto Us a Son Is Given!

- I. The gifts which He brings
 - A. Light (v. 2).
 - B. Joy (v. 3).
 - C. Freedom (v. 4).
 - D. Peace (v. 5).
- II. The names which characterize Him (v. 6)
 - A. Wonderful Counsellor.
 - B. Mighty God.
 - C. Everlasting Father.
 - D. Prince of Peace.
- III. The Kingdom which He establishes (v. 7)
 - A. An Expanding Kingdom.
 - B. A Kingdom of Peace.
 - C. A Kingdom of Justice and Righteousness.
 - D. An Eternal Kingdom.

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