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Homiletics: Outlines on the Standard Gospel Series

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Outlines on the Standard Gospel Series *

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

MATT. 21:1-9

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not; they are new every morning" (Lam. 3:22,23). This comforting word is particularly meaningful to us today because it assures us that Jesus is ready to bring the mercy of God again throughout this new church year. Let me speak to you this morning about

The Comforting Truth That Jesus Will
Come in This New Church Year

I direct your attention

I. To Him who will come

II. To those to whom He will come

I

A. During the past it seems that the coming of Jesus has been in vain. Very few people received Him. Even we at times turned against Him. Still Jesus does not grow weary of coming.

B. Though our conscience accuses us of many sins, the text pictures Jesus as One

* EDITORIAL NOTE: As previously announced, the texts of the Standard Gospel Series will be presented during the coming church year. One of the texts for each month will be developed in an exegetical-homiletical form. For the remaining Sundays and festival days, outlines based on C. F. W. Walther's *Evangelien-Postille* will be furnished. The abstracting and translation is done by Prof. Alex W. C. Guebert, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. The sermon studies are prepared by Pastor Robert H. Smith of the Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Chappaqua, N. Y. The notes on the hymn of the week are by Prof. Robert R. Bergt. For the purpose and use of these hymns see the article in this issue by Prof. Ralph D. Gehrke.

whom we need not fear. He, the *omniscient* God, who knew the thoughts of the people of Bethphage, knows us, our thoughts, our sins, our disappointments, our troubles, sighs, and tears. What a comfort to realize that Jesus knows and is coming to help and sustain, refresh and heal! This Jesus is also the *almighty* God, whose power to help, to forgive sins, and to save cannot be restrained.

C. Therefore every Christian has every reason to shout for joy, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

II

A. This coming of Jesus is such a great comfort because it reaches out to the daughter of Zion. The term "daughter of Zion" became the name for the church of the Old and the New Testament. Therefore it is the believers in the true God to whom Jesus is coming.

B. Some of us may not yet be a part of the daughter of Zion. Some of us may not be serious about the Word of grace and the sacraments and so are actually far away from Jesus. But this Jesus who is coming is meek. He wants you. He wants you who forget Him, you who love money and goods more than Him, you who let your flesh deceive you. Let Him comfort you.

C. The portals of the new church year are open before you. Jesus, your King, has come to you through His Word! Arise! Receive Him!

The Hymn of the Week: "Savior of the Nations, Come," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 95

Martin Luther's translation, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* (printed first in *Eyn Enchiridion*, Erfurt, 1524), of the ancient office hymn *Veni, Redemptor gentium* (one of 12 hymns attributed to St. Ambrose, ca. 340-397), is

aptly appointed for the first Sunday of the church year. The full and faithful translation of Luther captures the poetic freshness and vigor of the original. The English translation by William M. Reynolds, 1860, obviously based on the German text, provides a vivacious support of the theme of the day expressed most clearly in the Gospel (Matt. 21:1-9). The version of the translation contained in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is slightly altered.

Martin Luther adapted the melody from an ancient plainsong melody in Mode i, which creates a fitting and strong support for the Christological text. Choral settings by M. Vulpus and J. S. Bach attest to its greatness; cf. Paul Thomas, ed., *The Hymn of the Week* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961).

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

LUKE 21:25-36

The Bible clearly teaches that heaven and earth shall pass away. The Day of Judgment is coming. Though unbelievers ridicule this teaching loudly, reason is conscious not only of change but also of destruction and death of all things. Even heathen authors have written about the end of time. It is wise, therefore, to believe the teaching of the Bible, foolish to reject it.

On the basis of the Gospel for today let me talk to you about

The Folly of Supposing That We Need Not Look Forward to a Judgment Day

This is foolish

- I. *Because of the signs that have already come*
- II. *Because of the condition the world today finds itself in*
- III. *Because of the suddenness with which the Day of Judgment will come.*

I

A. God has not revealed the date of Judgment Day. Yet He mentions the certainty of its coming in 1 John 2:14; 1 Peter 4:7;

1 Cor. 10:11; James 5:9; Rev. 1:3; Heb. 10:37; 10:25; Phil. 4:5.

B. Signs of its coming have been seen in sun, moon, and stars; in pestilence, famine, and earthquakes; in false prophets, widespread apostasy, and growth of the papacy; in the rise of scoffers within the church.

C. The world pays no attention to these signs. God will call it to account soon. It would be folly for us to ignore these signs. God is using them to call us to repentance and make it possible for us to be saved.

II

A. The present condition of the world also points up the folly of ignoring Judgment Day. The mad rush for pleasure, the senseless worship at the altar of drunkenness, gluttony, and money are messengers of the coming of Judgment Day (Cf. Luke 17:26-30; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-5; 2 Peter 3:3-5). Remember the days of Noah and of Sodom and Gomorrah!

B. Because the world is sliding downhill at precipitous speed we dare not stand by and feel that we are secure. Heaven and earth are crying out, "The Judge is standing at the door!" And Satan is exerting all his power to turn men against their Creator. Prepare to receive Jesus with joy when He comes to judge the quick and the dead.

III

A. It is foolish, furthermore, to ignore Judgment Day, because it will come unannounced. It will come more suddenly than death. No one, not even the Christian, has an inkling of the time when that day will break upon the world. The scoffer will continue to sneer at the Christian: "Stop prattling to me about Judgment Day, hell, and Judgment. That is nothing more than an idle tale preachers have concocted to scare women and children!"

B. While they are yet scoffing, the angels God will sound the trumpets to summon the

living and the dead before God's tribunal. Then woe to the scoffers and all unbelievers! Their lot will be suffering in hell. But for the believer in Christ there will be peace and happiness. Flee in faith into the wounds of Jesus! Continue there! "Watch and pray always that you may stand before the Son of man!"

The Hymn of the Week: "The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us," *Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 67

The author of this hymn, Johann Walther, 1496—1570, friend and co-worker of Martin Luther, assisted with the adaptation of ancient melodies for the first Lutheran services of 1523 and 1526 and with the first Lutheran hymnal, *Geystliche gesangk Buchlein*, 1524. More distinguished as a musician than as hymnwriter, Walther wrote two hymns which have passed into English translation: *Herzlich lieb hab' ich dich* and *Herzlich tut mich erfreuen, mein Gott*, the latter containing 33 stanzas. Because of the impractical length of the latter, stanzas 31, 8, 9, 16, 18, 17, and 13 were selected in that order and appeared in Melchior Frank's *Rosetulum musicum*, 1628. Stanza 31 begins *Der Bräut'gam wird bald rufen*. The English translation by Matthias Loy, 1880, treats these seven verses. This hymn sets forth the joy of expectation as the Christian awaits the return of the church's victorious Bridegroom.

Originally sung to a melody on "The Joys of Summer" *The Lutheran Hymnal* presently weds this hymn to the tune *Ach Gott vom Himmelreiche*, composed by Michael Praetorius, appearing first in his *Musae Sioniae*, VII, 1609.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

MATT. 11:2-11

The whole world is a magnificent miracle of God. Through sun and stars, wind and clouds, earth and seed, grass, flowers, and trees God is performing new miracles each day. Yet in the strictest sense a miracle is something different from the results we see that grow out of processes at work in nature. A miracle is something God alone can do without using pre-existing material and established natural laws.

Our Gospel for today shows us that Jesus Christ demanded that people believe in Him because of the miracles He performed.

I ask you to let your mind dwell on this point:

The Miracles of Jesus Christ Prove Indisputably that He is the Son of God and the Savior of the World

Let us

- I. Investigate the power of the proof
- II. Realize that no one has any excuse to offer if he fails to believe in Christ.

I

A. If we see any man perform a real miracle, we have reason to believe that he received such power from God. What he does and what he says is something we are bound to accept, because he came direct from God. God cannot and does not practice deceit.

B. When God sent prophets into the world with His message, He endowed them with power to perform miracles. So it was with Moses and other prophets. God expected people to believe what these prophets proclaimed.

C. Christ, very God of very God, performed miracles in His own power. His miracles were not only numerous, they were glorious; His greatest miracle was His resurrection from the dead. (John 2:19; 10:18)

D. Christ's power to perform miracles was unlimited. He drove out evil spirits. He uncovered secret thoughts. He healed people afflicted with all manner of ailments, sicknesses, and diseases. The blind, the deaf, the dumb, the lame, the leper profited from His miraculous touch. Fish, wind, and sea obeyed His command.

E. Though Christ could have used His power to eliminate His enemies, He did not do so. He came as Redeemer to save, to heal, restore and refresh. His miracles con-

vinced many a person, even a man like Nicodemus, that He was the Savior of the world.

II

A. Because of the miracles Christ performed no man will be able to find any excuse for not coming to faith in Him. No man can doubt the miracles. They have been reported and attested by the most reliable witnesses who did not hesitate to reveal their own weaknesses and sins. Men who are conscience bound to express truth regarding themselves will also express truth regarding others.

B. Christ's miracles were not performed only in the close circle of His friends. Thousands of enemies saw them too. Neither hostile Jews nor unfriendly heathen shouted the apostles down as liars when in their preaching they pointed to the miracles of Christ.

C. Christ not only performed miracles, but also added word to deed. Hence there is no excuse for any one (John 15:24). He declared: "He who sees Me sees the Father; I am the Door; I am the Good Shepherd; I am the Bread of life; I am the Light of the world; He who believes in Me, though He were dead, yet shall He live." He is the Son of God, the Judge of the living and the dead, the only Savior, the One Mediator between God and man, the only name under heaven given among men whereby they must be saved. Say with Peter, "We believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

The Hymn of the Week: "Ye Sons of Men, Oh, Harken," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 75

When this hymn, *Mit Ernst, o Menschenkinder*, first appeared in 1642 in *Preussische Fest-Lieder*, it was appointed for use on the fourth Sunday in Advent. Later Lutheran practice shifted it to the third Sunday in Advent. Valentin Thilo, 1579—1662, the author of the first three stanzas of this hymn based on Luke 3:4, 5, was professor of rhetoric at Königsberg for 28 years. The fourth stanza, obviously not in the style of this professor, was an addendum

from the *Hannoversches Gesangbuch*, 1657. The English translation by Arthur T. Russell, 1851, has been freely altered as it now appears in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. The theme of the hymn underscores the thought of the day, especially related to the Gospel. (Matt. 11:2-10)

The melody to which the hymn is sung, *Aus meines Herzens Grunde*, is of 16th-century secular origin. The author is unknown. It was included in the *New Catechismus-Gesangbuchlein* (Hamburg, 1598).

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

JOHN 1:19-28

(A study by Robert H. Smith)

All four of our canonical gospels preface the story of Jesus with an account of John the Baptist. And before we celebrate the joy of Christmas, the church requires that we bend a serious ear to the hard message of John, who called himself a voice crying in the wilderness.

I

Of all the figures in the N. T. John the Baptist is the oddest and the most eccentric, the sternest and most austere. Sunday school literature ordinarily pictures him as a kind of wild-eyed Tarzan with unkempt hair. He has been described as a man with "no humor, no patience, and a one-track mind," "a great, tall, bony man as wild as a hawk" (Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King* [London: Victor Gollancz, 1943], pp. 68, 73).

It is a mistake to suppose that he fit into the first century any more comfortably than he fits the 20th. We miss the point entirely if we imagine that in his day lots of people dressed and talked the way he did. That simply is not true. He was out of place as much as a knight in shining armor would be, clanking down the center aisle of a suburban church today, shouting aloud at the top of his lungs.

And the suburban reaction to such an interruption would be comparable to the re-

action of influential Jews to John. At first there might be a chuckle or two at the man in armor, and folks might wonder whether he were insane or playing a practical joke or paying the consequences of some quiz program. But if he persisted, they might become annoyed and lose their tempers with the rude, intruding nuisance.

The official religious leaders among the Jews discovered in John no more than an interesting figure, to say the best. It was naturally quite a delightful novelty to have among them a man who behaved and dressed in the manner and fashion of the great Elijah (cp. Mark 1:6; 2 Kings 1:8; also Zech. 13:4). At first it seemed great sport to listen to his leather-lunged exhortations that conjured up visions of ancient Amos or Isaiah. The religious "big shots" of Jerusalem were for a time amused at the sight of that scrawny, tanned figure dressed in animal skins who subsisted on wild honey and some kind of grasshopper (Mark 1:6). They were disposed to laugh at the crowds of ignorant peasants who chased after John along the lonely banks of Jordan. Many educated, sophisticated Jews paid John no serious attention, but dismissed him with a yawn and half a smile, thinking to themselves, "He's just a harmless preacher, and something of a crank."

But then disturbing reports began filtering back to the officialdom of Jerusalem. John the Baptist was not the flash-in-the-pan they had anticipated. It was impossible to ignore this voice crying in the wilderness as though he were a soapbox orator filled with hot air. The people were genuinely stirred (Mark 1:5). They recognized in John great depths of moral and religious authority (Matt. 14:5). His directness, bluntness, and simplicity moved them and made them see the contrast with the character of their official teachers, the scribes and Pharisees.

John's fearless proclamation of God's will and scathing denunciation of all evil earned

him the admiration of the lower classes and the cordial hatred of the learned and the propertied strata of society (Mark 6:19). He acquired the reputation of a dangerous agitator who had better be dealt with before he caused irreparable damage.

When Herod Antipas had John the Baptist imprisoned in the fortress of Machaerus on the Dead Sea and then executed (Mark 6:17-29), men of wealth and position and religion breathed an audible sigh of relief. They said, "Good riddance," and chalked it up to the public good.

This briefly is the story of John the Baptist. When we read the account from this distance, our first impression may be that he cut a ludicrous figure; but we are quickly impressed by the fire, the flint, and the unflinching passion for righteousness in his personality. And then, although he is far from lovable, we are saddened by the tragedy of his early, unjust end.

II

The account of the Fourth Gospel presupposes what the synoptic gospels tell us of John the Baptist. That information has been sketched and stretched above. Naturally the question arose, "Who is this man?" This particular story (John 1: 19-28) may have been included by the evangelist partly as a polemic against those who knew only John and his Baptism and valued them too highly, as the disciples of John in Ephesus (Acts 18:25; 19:3,4). But the story of John stands independent of any polemic; for John the Baptist was designated precursor by Jesus Himself, when He submitted to John's Baptism. That act of Jesus makes John and his testimony significant for us.

John 1:19-28

V. 19. An official delegation came to interrogate John publicly. As everywhere (70 times) in the Fourth Gospel the antagonists of God's eschatological inbreaking are "the

Jews." "The Jews" (as "the Pharisees") are for John not so much empiric groups as stylized types. They represent that Judaism which rejected Jesus on the basis of the Law. "The Jews" kept the Law and so stand over against "the crowd" (ὁ ὄχλος), the people of the land (the Ἰουδαῖοι ἔθνος, 7:49, etc.). Ultimately the Jews and the world are identical in the Fourth Gospel. The Jews steer men away from Jesus. They make accusations against Him and intimidate those who seem to be gravitating toward Jesus' sphere of influence (5:10 ff.; 7:13; 9:18 ff.; 19:38). Finally they mount an all-out attack on Him leading to the decision to put Him to death as a blasphemer (5:16, 18; 7:1; 10:31-39; see Leonhard Goppelt, *Christentum und Judentum im ersten und zweiten Jahrhundert* [Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1954], pp. 251 ff.)

V. 20. John gave his testimony (μαρτυρία), for which he had been sent (1:7, 8). The sum and substance of the brief exchange with the deputation from the Jews is that John "disowns every kind of movement towards himself" (E. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 2d ed. [London: Faber and Faber, 1950], p. 169). John's witness or confession (ὁμολογία) is a negative one. He tells who he is not.

1. Not the Messianic King. Elsewhere he declares, "I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him." He calls himself the friend of the bridegroom, and says he must decrease as the other increases (3:28 ff.). In his responses John studiously avoids making any claim for himself which could be interpreted Messianically, and he adumbrates the testimony of Paul, who declared that John said, οὐκ εἰμι ἐγώ, "I am not He." (Acts 13:25)

2. Not Elijah. The story of the transfiguration of Jesus shows that Moses and Elijah were popularly associated with the coming of the Messiah. The *locus classicus* for the coming of Elijah is Mal. 4:5, 6: "Be-

hold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (cf. 3:1). And the prophecy continues in words picked up by the angelic announcement of the Baptist's birth, "And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (cf. Luke 1:17). Jesus recognized the fulfillment of this prophecy in the person and work of John: "He is Elijah who is to come" (Matt. 11:14; cf. 17:13). But John does not presume to seize for himself what Jesus and the angel give him.

3. Not the prophet. Moses had promised the Israelites that "the Lord, your God, will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed" (Deut. 18:15). Hope in a great eschatological prophet was alive in Judaism (see 2 Esdras 2:18; 1 Maccabees 4:46; 14:41; 2 Macc. 15:15). Jesus, too, was thought by some to be that prophet. (John 6:14; 7:40 and perhaps 7:52; Mark 6:15; 8:28)

V. 22. By his string of denials John exasperates his interviewers. Who are you, then?

V. 23. He describes his person and work with a quotation from Isaiah. In essence John says, "In and of myself I am nothing at all, but I have a divine mission to accomplish." He is a voice crying in the wilderness—his task is preparation by proclamation. He makes propaganda not for himself but for another.

He lifts his voice to speak a word of judgment and a word of hope. To the self-righteous and nomistic Pharisees and Jews John was a scourge. But to the little people, confused and made desperate by a welter of demands unreasonably compounded by their religious leaders, he was a preacher of hope.

In the message and action of John is concentrated all the weight of the prophets' words of repentance and salvation. John is the last great exemplar of O.T. prophecy. "He stands there, an erratic boulder in his

times, over against all Israel, in the solitariness of the literary prophets." (Goppelt, p. 37)

V. 24. These Pharisees are most likely members of the Sanhedrin and part of the official delegation sent to question John concerning his all too popular movement.

V. 25. If he refuses to make plain, unvarnished statements regarding himself, perhaps he will explain why he is baptizing people. In the LXX O. T. βαπτίζειν (often for לָבַטַף) was used of ceremonial washings which cleansed from ritual impurity (Lev. 11:32). Naaman shed his leprosy when he "baptized" himself seven times in the water of Jordan at the direction of Elisha (ἑβαπτίσαντο ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ἑπτὰκι, 2 Kings 5:13 f.).

In pre-Christian Judaism the Jews practiced "proselyte Baptism." Heathen converts to Judaism were cleansed from Levitical impurity by a bath. Baptism was thus a rite of purification and initiation into the congregation of Israel.

Two readily observable facts about John's activity brought his Baptism into question.

1. He called on *Jews* to be baptized. What set men's teeth to grinding, what caused their faces to flush with anger and indignation, what crushed hearts with guilt and repentance was the fact that John addressed not the Romans, not the Greeks, but God's own people, insisting that they needed the cleansing of Baptism. John boldly insisted that the Jews themselves needed the purification which they demanded of Gentile sinners. The late T. W. Manson put it this way, "He had to destroy the confidence that the Messianic hope was a gilt-edged security from which every reasonably good Jew might expect to draw a dividend." (*The Servant-Messiah* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952], p. 47)

2. Those who heeded John's call to repent did not baptize themselves, as in proselyte Baptism, but were passive while John admin-

istered the rite. Hence he earned for himself the title "the Baptist," or "the Baptizer" (ὁ βαπτιστής, ὁ βαπτίζων).

Furthermore John's Baptism was distinguished by the fact that it was completely nonpolitical and nonritual in character. It was strongly ethical in orientation and implication, and it had an indissoluble connection with eschatology. (On proselyte Baptism and John's Baptism see A. Oepke, in Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, I, 532—535)

V. 26. As it was different from Jewish baptisms, immersions, and lustrations, so John's Baptism was also distinguished by John himself from the Baptism to be administered in the Messianic era. "I baptize with water" (ἐν ὕδατι, 1:26, 31). The Christ will baptize with the Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι, 1:33, cf. 3:5), which is His alone to give. In other words John's is a Baptism of promise and hope; Christian Baptism is baptism of fulfillment. John's Baptism is a "sealing" in the direction of the coming Messianic time.

V. 26. And the One for whom John is making straight the way is already present. He is there unknown and unrecognized by the Jews. It is John's peculiar task to bear witness to Him. (1:6, 7, 15; 3:26)

V. 27. John had set himself in magisterial independence above both church and state, defying tetrarch and Pharisee, but he bends his head to the ground before the Messiah. The Baptist would not be displeased with the words of Charles K. Barrett, "John is the spoken word, whereas Jesus is the incarnate Word" (*The Gospel according to St. John* [New York: Macmillan Co., 1956], p. 145). John prepares; Jesus fulfills. John is shadow, Jesus Substance. John is the question, Jesus the Answer.

V. 28. The exact location of this Bethany (the other is a suburb of Jerusalem, 11: 1, 18) is unknown, but tradition places it some five miles north of the Dead Sea in

the territory of Peraea, which together with Galilee was the Tetrarchy of Herod Antipas, who had John executed.

Everything about John is expectation. He is O.T. prophecy in concentrated dosage. What was unique about him? "John was not the first to preach repentance and moral reformation; he was not the first to make washing a ritual act charged with religious significance; he was not the first to indulge in propaganda concerning the Messiah. But he was the first to bring all three together in an organic unity." (Manson, p. 39)

III

John's work was making straight the way of the Lord. St. Irenaeus wrote, "As precursor there went before Him John the Baptist, preparing in advance and disposing the people to receive the Word of life, declaring that He was the Christ" (*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, par. 41). If John were alive today, he would not be a great missionary in heathen parts. He would be a great reformer in so-called Christian places. He would be appalled at the truce which Christians of the 20th century have struck with the world. All too many have managed to reach a dangerous compromise by accepting as par for the course a peaceful coexistence with the evil in the world and the sin in their lives. Humanist and naturalist Joseph Wood Krutch has somewhere crustily observed that it is not at all certain whether in our time more and more people are joining the church or the church is joining more and more people.

And let's not point the finger at others. Let's examine our own entrails. John is a great question mark, writ large over all our lives, calling into question our piety and religiosity. Is our religion more than a sugar coating on the bitter pill life dishes up to us? Is it more than a veneer laid like thin hardwood over a very soft and common core? Are we any better than Pharisee and Sadducee, upon whom John heaped burning

scorn? They believed in their theological system, their rules and regulations. They were smug and confident in their preparedness. They thought their laws, knowledge, ancestry and good deeds were a sufficient asbestos to protect them from the fire of God's wrath and displeasure. If ever we begin to believe in our own respectability, our own deeds of charity, our church attendance, then we are in the same boat with scribe and Pharisee, priest and Levite.

John points us away from a religion of our own invention to the vibrant, beating heart of true religion. A famous painting by the 15th-century artist Matthias Grünewald captures this aspect of John. His altarpiece at Isenheim, Germany, portrays a gaunt-looking John pointing a long arm and bony finger at the figure of Jesus Christ on the cross. "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

John Paves the Way for the Coming of Christ

- I. John's person seems both ludicrous and tragic. But to laugh him off or merely to shed a sympathizing tear and consider him a hero of old is to miss the point.
- II. John's testimony shatters complacency and smugness then and now.
- III. John's goal is to usher us into the presence of the Messiah.

A. John points to Him, the Lamb of God, sacrificed and offered not for the proud and righteous but for sinners.

B. Christ dwells with sinners. And true religion means not humility alone but decreasing for this purpose, that Christ may increase in us and for us.

The Hymn of the Week: "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 62

An unknown author of the 12th century took five of the original seven "Great Antiphons" and wove them into a hymn, the first line being *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*. Totally disregarding the

historical sequence and deleting two antiphons entirely, this unknown author added the refrain not found in the original prose:

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

John Mason Neale translated this popular hymn version into English in 1851.

The "Great Antiphons" date from the 9th century and were sung before and after the Magnificat, beginning on Dec. 17. The sequence of the antiphons for use at vespers is as follows:

1. *O Sapientia, quae ex ore altissimi . . .*
2. *O Adonay et Dux domus Israel . . .*
3. *O Radix Jesse, qui stas in signum . . .*
4. *O Clavis David et Sceptrum domus . . .*
5. *O Oriens, Splendor lucis aeternae . . .*
6. *O Rex gentium et Desideratus . . .*
7. *O Emmanuel, Rex et Legifer . . .*

The Sarum, York, and Hereford Breviaries add an eighth antiphon:

8. *O Virgo virginum quomodo . . .*

The Sarum Breviary alone adds a ninth antiphon:

9. *O Thoma Didyme, per Christum quem . . .*

The melody *Veni, Emmanuel* is from the 13th century and would be better sung in the pure rhythmically free style of plainsong chant.

Cf. the historical introduction by Arthur C. Piepkorn to Healey Willan, *The Great O Antiphons of Advent*, with Musical Settings (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958).

CHRISTMAS DAY

LUKE 2:1-14

Millions of people all over the world are streaming into their houses of worship today. Joy is indeed everywhere. Do you know the reason for this joy? A little Babe born at Bethlehem. Although the world does not understand our joy, may God enlighten our eyes and deepen our faith to grasp:

The Unspeakable Importance of the Lowly, Poverty-stricken Birth of the Christ Child

This importance is apparent in

- I. *The noteworthy events that happened in heaven and on earth and are still happening*
- II. *The wonderful union of God and man this birth accomplished*
- III. *The result this birth achieved*

I

A. As I speak to you about the importance of the birth of this Christ Child, I realize that I cannot find adequate words to express this mystery. Since my mind cannot reach to its dizzy height or penetrate its unfathomable depth, I can only make some stammering remarks about it.

B. This birth, the birth of the Son of God and the Savior of the world, is radically different from any other birth. The Triune God conceived it in eternity before the world was made.

C. When Adam and Eve fell into sin soon after creation, the birth of the Christ Child was announced in the promise concerning the woman's Seed. From that time on every messenger of God, every patriarch and prophet, as well as the worship in tabernacle and temple and events in the nations of the world, were used by God to pave the way for the coming of the Christ Child.

D. As the time for the birth of this Child drew near, God caused Caesar Augustus to issue a decree to bring Mary to Bethlehem in time for the birth. When the Child was born, God opened the heavens and let a chorus of angels sing the news into the world.

E. This birth has changed the course of the world. Millions have accepted the Child. They have realized that His birth is incomparably, unspeakably great.

II

A. So far we have stood before the open door of heaven and have made some inquiry

in the world about the birth of this Child. Let us now enter the stable for an understanding of the Child. Through His birth God and man are united. God became man, and man became God!

B. "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." Not even the angels understood this mystery as they sang, "Glory to God in the highest!" How do the other wonders of God compare with this wonder, "The Word was made flesh"? Where is the language that can express the importance of this birth adequately?

III

A. A wise man who spends huge sums of money on extensive plans has a great goal in mind. No one is wiser than God. In sending His Son into the world as a little Child at such a tremendous cost, God achieved incalculably great results: glory for Himself, peace on earth, and good will among men.

B. Through the birth of the Christ Child God uncovered His heart of love. Thereby He gives us mansions in heaven, grants us eternal peace before His throne, clothes us in brilliant garments of righteousness, makes us His own special children, raises us into the royal nobility of heaven.

C. Since the Christ Child has come in the flesh, every human being can say: "God's Son is my Brother. God is also my Friend. He is gracious to me. He must want me to believe that He is my Father and that I am

His child." With His eyes directed to Bethlehem, God is still calling down from heaven, "Come, you who are thirsty! Come and take the water of life freely."

The Hymn of the Week: "All Praise to Thee, Eternal God," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 80

Martin Luther gave birth to one of his simplest and yet most profound poetic expressions in the hymn *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ*, 1524. He based the first stanza upon the sequence

Grates nunc omnes reddamus Domino Deo, qui sua natiuitate nos liberavit de diabolica potestate.

Huic oportet ut canamus cum angelis semper:

Gloria in excelsis.

The author of this sequence may have been either Richard the Monk or Robert of Winchester. Both claim authorship in manuscripts from the 12th century. It has also been erroneously ascribed to Notker Balbulus and St. Gregory the Great. To this stanza already popularized in German, ca. 1370, Luther added six original stanzas, all of which conclude with *Kyrieleis*. Only five stanzas are found translated into English in the *American Sabbath Hymn Book*, 1858. The translator is unknown. This same translation of *The Lutheran Hymnal* catches but a few of the paradoxes which appear in every stanza of Luther's original. Someone has described this hymn as "the blessings of the birth of Christ in paradoxes." It rehearses the Epistle, Titus 2:11-14, and announces the Gospel for Christmas Day, Luke 2:1-14.

The melody *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* is from the plainsong, ca. 1400. The composer is anonymous. It was adapted in Wittenberg, ca. 1524. Its flavor is both like that of a carol and a chorale, which befits the similar character of the text.