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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

Homiletical Helps for 1969—70

The Worship Supplement

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY proposes to base the coming church year's homiletics section on the materials and suggestions provided in the new *Worship Supplement* authorized by the Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, printed by Concordia Publishing House, 1969. The planning promises sermon starters for each Sunday and the chief festivals of the church year.

Whenever the materials on homiletics have been of a more general nature, as they have been during the past months, letters are received by the journal arguing the cause of the busy parson who must produce one or more sermons each Sunday and calling on the homiletics section to carry its share of that load. This year we highly resolve. . . .

Whenever the materials on homiletics have provided specific sermon outlines for each Sunday of the year, letters are received from busy preachers indicating that they can never really use the outlines as they are printed and, sometimes, arguing for homiletic articles of a more general nature. And this year we are resigned, in a lowly and humble spirit, to the fact that we will not be all things to all parsons.

The attempt will be made, however, to develop sermon starters rather than sermons or sermon outlines. Grady Davis, in his helpful text on homiletics called *Design For Preaching* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), uses the word "idea" to capsule the intangible elements that go into the sermon batch like a kind of yeast to make it rise, to make it attractive, interesting, fresh, appealing—all the elements so important if

people are to be helped to take to the sermon and to eat the bread of life. Next year's materials will seek to provide sermon "ideas." Moses' staff was nothing out of the ordinary until he cast it down as God directed—then it wriggled. A sermon subject that is cast in the form of the "idea" *wiggles*, it is moving, alive. The analogy could obviously be pushed too far. The reactions, moreover, are sure to be varied. One man's idea is another man's cliché. There may be some comfort in the fact that when Moses first saw his rod as a serpent, he fled from it, but when Aaron's rod was cast down in front of Pharaoh and became a serpent, all the magicians of Egypt gathered, and "every man cast down his rod, and they became serpents." No one was impressed. Still, "Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods." Whether every preacher will be impressed by the ideas presented in this series of sermon starters is of little importance. The journal will not ask which swallowed which. But if the suggestions can provoke the birth of moving ideas in the minds of thousands of preachers who know the needs of their people and help them present their sermons so that men's hearts will not be hardened and they will listen to them, that will be accomplishment sufficient.

A good idea requires form, and before that, if it is to be a Christian sermon idea, it requires angles. The angles will be built into the new series of sermon starters. An attempt will be made to phrase a succinct *Point*, which will be the goal of the suggested sermon idea. It will be called *Point*, because, as Grady Davis suggests, a good sermon idea must be sharp enough to get under the preacher's skin if it is to stand the test of

getting under the skin of the hearers. That requires that it deal as well with the realities of the human condition—another angle, which will be identified as *Problem*. But if the sermon is really to be the word of God for its specific situation it must seek also to do in words and sentences and paragraphs what God accomplished in the Word made touchable, handleable, tasteable. The Word made sermon seeks to do what the Word made flesh did do—solve with *Power* from on high the *Problem* of men. God released His *Power* through the life, death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus Christ and by the outpouring of His Spirit. The sermon attempts to take that action of God and focus it on the *Problem* so that people are released from its tentacles even while they hear and are enabled to move toward the *Point*.

These sermon starters will recognize the need for form in attempts to formulate the *Point-Problem-Power* in such a way that their relationship cannot be missed. In this way they will attempt to assist the preacher in the *Presentation*. But form in the sense of outline will not be the particular concern of the sermon starters. Obviously the three areas of angle mentioned above could serve as the outline and sometimes do it very helpfully. But if it is the preacher's "moral obligation to be interesting," as Halford Luccock suggested, then new patterns of presentation are continually necessary. In order to make the material the journal will present more relevant to the thousands of different situations faced by the church pulpits, it will not be shaped in any final form. The man on the scene can better fit the material to the parish—no "off the rack" sermons here, at least next year.

It will be apparent that the terminology employed in this description merely recasts the "goal-malady-means" emphasis that is basic to the method suggested by Richard R. Caemmerer and developed in his book, *Preaching for the Church*. There is no new

thing under the sun, but new ways of saying a thing sometimes help.

The Worship Supplement

The generation of sermon "ideas" is a bit more mysterious than the formation of distinctive patterns in a kaleidoscope. But they can be programed in a somewhat similar way. Take a sufficient number of different-colored thoughts and suspend them between the two flat plates of *Problem* and *Power*, add plane mirrors to supply the necessary reflection, and the idea will be generated. The hard work of honing it into the shape of a *Point* will still remain, but the generative power of a good "idea" will excite the homiletician to bring all into focus.

The series of sermon starters will deliberately reach into the *Worship Supplement* to supply the first ingredient of color for the sermon thoughts. One of the new items suggested for worship in the *Supplement* will be selected for discussion and use on a given Sunday. The propers of that Sunday will be another source of supply for thought and color. In some cases the material from the *Supplement* will supply a specific Biblical text. In other instances a pertinent text will be suggested by the material, or the interaction of the material and the specific needs of the parish may propose a text. In other cases the sermon idea may be proposed with a sequence of Biblical thoughts and no one text. Mixed with all these thoughts will be the varied elements that go into corporate Christian worship, and the wide spread of blessings and benefits that can accrue to those Christians who unitedly offer spiritual worship to God. When all this material has been brought together, the writer will turn it slowly until suddenly the combination that reaches him will fall into place and he will have the "idea experience." When this experience is transmitted in print through the journal to the individual preacher, he must break it all up into thought pieces again,

place it into his own pulpit kaleidoscope, and set the plates of *Problem* and *Power* in their right relationship, and after sufficient reflection by his own mirrors of self and of pastoral theology, he will, hopefully and Spiritually, arrive at his own "idea experience."

Much more is included in the potential of this plan than a series of varied, interesting sermons. The worship life of the people of God will be the major element, and when the Word of God deals with that action, all kinds of things can result. The act of worship will itself speak the Word of God to those who do it—and when new forms are proposed that have definite theological ideas and purposes behind them, the congregation that thinks about them and does them will have a double application of the Word's power. When the preacher, therefore, takes one of these new forms, helps the parish think about its significance, applies the *Power* to the *Problem* that is implicit in the situation that called for the new form, a renewal of parish life can be anticipated, or at least renewal in a whole sequence of *Points* can be hoped for.

This could be nothing but phrased optimism, of course, if the *Supplement's* new materials fail to deliver on their part of the assignment. The test requires purchase, just as the sermon series value would require buying the experiment. If a parish wishes to seek for the blessings that can come from its understanding of itself as the people of God, this is the time to order sufficient copies of the *Worship Supplement*—a publishing miracle at one dollar—that each member of the assembled people can have a copy. If the parish would gain the new understanding of the celebration of thanksgiving basic to the Holy Communion that is implicit in new forms of the *Supplement*, if it would experience what can happen to its corporate worship with some of the new hymns, if it would feel a new level of offering among its members—all these are goals

that can be sought through the use of the proposed series and the *Supplement*. If the ideas developed are as relevant as hoped for, the sermon series will spell out new areas of renewal as the year proceeds.

Back of all this is a great ecumenical goal as well, one that is expressed by the cover of the book. It is better than paperback, as befits a book for use in the worship of God—a worthy cover; but it is obviously a book designed for temporary use. It is the offering of the Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to the larger efforts of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, which is actively engaged in preparing materials for an all-Lutheran hymnal for the United States and Canada, and perhaps for other English-speaking areas of the world. The *Supplement*, it is hoped, will be a body of materials with which parishes of all the Lutheran synods engaged in this production of a joint hymnal will be interested to experiment, to supply common experiences for further common discussion and future decisions for the common hymnal.

The *Worship Supplement* contains various materials that reflect its various stages of development. The work it reflects began as committee work designed toward a conservative revision of *The Lutheran Hymnal*. All members of the text and tune committees working with hymns, and the members of the liturgical text committees and those working with the settings for those texts began with the thought of providing that much of an advance in worship and hymnody that would bring the divergent tastes of a large church body along with them. This was to be a book in hard covers, and if it was to last and to be purchased, it would have to be about where the people were and within their means to adjust. But every change that would suggest itself at once brought up the conviction that more than one synod ought to be involved in such revision. As this conviction grew, it brought about the

result that the synodical convention in Detroit resolved not to proceed with the production of a new hymnal but to seek the cooperation of all Lutheran synods in the planning of an all-Lutheran book. But the convention agreed that the result of the many years of committee work ought to be published as the commission's offering to the new proposals and as interim materials with which the congregations might helpfully experiment as they sought for renewal in their worship and parish life. This made possible the inclusion of materials of a more novel nature that the committees had developed or gathered, and made possible the somewhat greater shift into contemporary language. The fact that the Roman Catholic Church was engaged in the transition into English liturgical materials and with the new post-Vatican II spirit were themselves eager to involve other Christian denominations in a joint effort to secure common forms also contributed to new items—such as the translations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer and series of new intercessions and materials in a Eucharist celebration—and resulted in additional materials that could be submitted for trial use.

What we have, of course, will without doubt be recognized as conservative material. There is nothing really radical, and much is not original; but much will be new and far enough out for many of our parishes. And all the material will have the added dimension, for those who are reluctant to change so much and as well for those who are discouraged because the proposals call for so little change, that great numbers of their fellows in the church are experimenting with the same materials at the same time. The common use and the interchange of reaction can do much to achieve a new sense of unity and of common life throughout the synods.

It is the hope of the *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY* that the homiletics series will be something of a catalyst in the

discussion. The material that follows is the first in the series of sermon starters. It is designed for the last Sunday in the church year as a kind of springboard into the new series and the new church year. It was felt that if a congregation were to be helped to make a strong beginning with the first Sunday of the new year, an opportunity would be necessary to present something of the planning and something of the potential for blessing that is hoped for to the congregation before Advent I. The comments of this article might serve as background for material that could be sent out to parish members in the church paper, or these comments might serve for the development of a presentation that could be made to the congregation before the service on the last Sunday in the church year. The sermon itself might be worked out in such a way that the necessary preliminary material could be included. In whatever way all of this is brought together, it should show as another result an increased attention to hearing, which is the congregation's task in the homiletic process. Someone ought to write a column for them too.

GEORGE W. HOYER

THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY November 23

Worship Supplement: Suggestions
for the Worshiper, pp. 15—16

Text: Matt. 25:1-13, The Parable
of the Wise and Foolish Virgins

If they had it to do over again, of course, the virgins would all be wise. They would be even wiser than the virgins whom the Lord, who made up the story, considered wise. They would be practical—which is of course, we all know today, the great wisdom. They would put out all the lamps except one, set up a schedule, and take turns watching for the coming of the Lord. When the cry at midnight would wake all the rest from the sleep of the just, or at least the

sleep of the practical, they could share the remaining oil and share the light, and everyone would be ready to welcome the Lord, and everyone would get into the marriage feast before the door was shut. If they had the chance to do it over again, that is . . .

Isn't that the *Problem*? There are too many proxy worshipers in the church. There are the obvious proxies—wives or husbands or children who are present to "represent the family"; there are fathers or older brothers who sit with the funnies in the family car while the younger children sit in Sunday school. But there are many others—the man daydreaming in the pew, content to let others worship for him by proxy; the pastor who goes through the liturgy to help worshipers worship but is not himself adoring the Most High. But isn't this the real problem?—not that the worship is drowsy, but it isn't rousing! Evidently the great things God has done for us in Christ Jesus, the new life that is ours by His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ Himself, who is present always with the two and three who gather in His name—none of these things stir us, move us, rouse us. And that means the problem is *us*—for those things *are* rousing. The text warns that we should watch, "for you know neither the day nor the hour" (25:13) when Christ will come again and of the end of the age (24:3). But even if we watched out of fear or out of practicality or out of habit, we would still be part of the problem. God is not interested simply in having some lamps burning when He comes nor so gullible as to think that the difference between half asleep and asleep is so significant. He wants watchers, worshipers, who love the Bridegroom, who joy in the coming of their Lord in every aspect of His advent—not only at the end of all things but at the beginning of every proclamation of Word and sharing of sacrament and offering of worship in His presence.

The *Supplement* urges each one of us:

"Think of yourself as a priest of God, functioning as such in the great priesthood of all believers, rejoicing in the privileges of your baptism, and bringing an offering of praise and thanksgiving through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit." This could be the *Point* of the sermon and a worthy purpose for the coming year. Aware of the fact that the Lord comes in every Word situation, each one of us should watch, function as a priest, hold high his own light and welcome the King, and enter with Him to His feast.

How splendid—what a joy to us and to Him—if all of us here were waiting and rejoicing together as He comes! If He were to come now, while we remember Him in love, recalling His birth and death and His resurrection and coming again, what a joy to Him and for us! During the next weeks we will recall again His birth. The young people of a congregation, all on their own, without telling anyone, surprised their fellow worshipers last Christmas by gathering hundreds of paper bags, filling them with a base of snow into which they set a candle, lighted just before the time of the Christmas service and lining all the sidewalks up to the church with a welcoming glow. This year we could all gather—no proxy worshipers—along the path to the stable to welcome the child Jesus as He comes to take on our human nature, each one of us holding his lamp. And when He walks the way of sorrow to the cross, we could be lining the path with our lamps, because we know that He offers up His life for us, even while it appears others are taking it from Him. Since the soldiers will be "as dead men," there would be none to stop us from lighting the scene at the sepulcher with our shining lamps when we celebrate again that He was raised for our justification. And we could gather faithfully—no Thomases, no proxy worshipers—in this upper room each time we celebrate His Supper, knowing that our welcoming lamps will reflect His promised

presence as we hear Him say, "Peace be with you." As we speak of all these things He has done for us, *Power* fills our hearts and we become the more aware that we are worshipers and we worship.

The structure of the sermon, the *Presentation*, might develop in this sequence, but it could take the *Power* sequence, for instance, and lead the congregation through a survey of the *Supplement* materials that will be used through the coming Sundays. Each item selected could suggest a major element of the *Point* and speak the mighty acts of God as *Power*—to move us to worship Him now in the service, and to motivate us to a resolution to be involved in all the new possibilities of worship throughout the year. No proxy worshipers! GEORGE W. HOYER

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

November 30

Worship Supplement: The Offertory
for Adventide, p. 30

The seasonal Offertory for Adventide is one of the new possibilities provided by the *Supplement* for deepening the understanding of worship and helping the congregation into increasingly meaningful involvement. While the offertory taken from Psalm 51 that was commonly used in the service actually did express a new action and begin a new section in the forward progression of the service, many worshipers have long misunderstood its proper function. Since it was sung immediately following the sermon and since the process of "taking the collection" separated it from the presenting of the offerings at the altar, many in the congregation have looked upon it as a kind of liturgical response to the sermon and part of the Service of the Word.

The new pattern of the Holy Eucharist has placed the Creed after the sermon, thus making a clear break between the sermon

and the Offertory. Not only does this set it into the proper place as the beginning of the Service of the Sacrament, but the common Offertory (p.25) and the seasonal Offertories (pp.30—33) clearly stress that we now begin to "offer." The rubrics on page 51 indicate that the offerings could be deposited at the door when the worshipers enter the church so that all would be in readiness for the presentation of the offerings as the Offertory is sung. The offerings may be received during the Hymn of the Week or immediately after. Whatever method is used, the involvement of the congregation in the action of offering is to be made clear by bringing the offerings and the bread and wine to the altar during the singing of the Offertory. The more clearly we realize the significance of these gifts as tokens of our self offering, the more we will attain to the "spiritual worship" Paul urges. (Rom. 12)

The Offertory for Adventide (Ps. 50:3, 4, 5, 14), especially the words of v. 14, suggest a sermon *Point*. The words are a call to honest-to-God thanksgiving—thanksgiving that comes from our realization that actually we only accept from God and can never really give Him anything; a thanksgiving that is really offered completely like a sacrifice; a thanksgiving that includes our vows and our paying of them; a thanksgiving that gives God our greatest praise by calling upon Him even more in our days of trouble.

Our *Problem* may be seen in the folly of thinking we can give God anything (vv. 7 to 13) or in thinking that God is "one like ourself" (vv. 16-21). But our *Problem* is equally devastating if we have failed actually to make a covenant with Him by sacrifice (v. 5). The Advent message is that "our God comes, he does not keep silence . . . that he may judge his people." The psalm is full of some of the sharpest threats of God's judgment.

The *Power* is apparent in the psalm's reference to the covenant by which God has

gathered His faithful ones. God has been honest-to-man out of His steadfast love. It is so dramatically evident in the entry of God's own Son into Jerusalem. He has indeed made a covenant with us by sacrifice, by *being* sacrifice. He "does not keep silence" — He broke the silence with His Word made flesh, entering into space and time. He did stir up His power and came to save us, and by His continuing protection and deliverance He comes and keeps on saving us.

Ought we not be honest-to-God in our offering? "No bull from your house nor he-goat from your folds" (v.9) but real sacrifice of thanksgiving and paid vows and pleas and glorifyings. No palms fading into "crucify Him!" — but these tokens of all we have and grow and enjoy, these garments from off our backs for Him to enter upon, symbols of our vows as we enter upon this new year.

(Material supplied by
PHILIP H. ILTEN
Wausau, Wis.)

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 7

Worship Supplement: The Holy Eucharist
(I, pp. 19 ff.)

The propers for the Second Sunday in Advent move attention from the past coming of Christ to His final coming in glory. It is significant that the Lord gave us the blessed sacrament to bridge these two points in time as He comes to us in the Holy Communion. Christians often approach the Lord's Table with the confessional prayer still lingering in their ears more loudly than the clear words of absolution. As a result they think of the Service of Holy Communion most often as a time for receiving forgiveness and less often as Eucharist, a thanksgiving, a time for remembering Christ's coming to our aid by the very action we are engaged in, a cele-

bration in which we continually anticipate His coming again to eat and drink with us.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving II on page 46 of the *Worship Supplement* expresses the note of remembrance, of praise and thanksgiving, and of anticipation. "Remembering therefore his whole work of redemption, his conception and birth, his suffering and death, his resurrection and ascension, and looking for his glorious coming again, we here present before you the remembrance which your Son has commanded us to make, beseeching you graciously to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving." In the whole act of such total participation we show the death of the Lord until He comes again. As Luther correctly stressed, the sacrament is a gift of God to us. In the gift of the body and blood of Jesus Christ we do receive "forgiveness, life, and salvation." In that new saved and forgiven life we do in this service remember all that Christ has done, celebrate His victory over all evil, and anticipate His coming again.

The *Point* of the sermon could be shaped around the remembering, celebrating, and anticipating action of the church in the Eucharist.

It would be helpful to the congregation if attention were called to the new aspects of the service and if some rehearsal of the new music were made possible. As with anything new, familiarity can breed appreciation. There may be need for warning against expecting "instant Eucharist" through a new form. Individual items such as the beginning with the Entrance Song or the new forms of the Kyrie might be mentioned. The inclusion of the Old Testament Lesson will be new to some congregations. The division of the Gradual as it has been printed in *The Lutheran Hymnal* into the Gradual and the Alleluia verse should be noted. (After the Lesson the first two lines of the Gradual would be said or chanted as printed on page 54 in the *Hymnal*; but "Alleluia! Alleluia!

The powers of heaven . . ." through the end would be sung after the Epistle in anticipation of the Gospel.)

The sermon immediately follows the Lessons, emphasizing its purpose of contemporizing the Word that has been read. The new forms of the Creed and the Our Father, the choice in Intercessions, and the Greeting of Peace might be noted. Many of these will be given individual attention in later sermon suggestions. It may be advisable to introduce only a limited amount of the new material at first. For example, it may be best simply to speak the service at its first use.

The *Problem* might be illustrated by our common practice of remembering. We do special things every day to remember persons and occasions. We might propose a toast, send a greeting card, throw a party, plant a kiss, or extend a knowing look in the direction of another. In this sense the sacrament may not be unlike an anniversary party in honor of the Lord, for it is in a very real sense a joyous gathering that here remembers His love. We are ashamed when we forget. There is a sizable business in the greeting card industry for cardboard apologies for forgetting. How much more serious when Christians do not remember when they have the opportunity to "do this in remembrance." It is not a case of forgetting, for the service itself is a time for remembering what God did for us through Jesus Christ. (The *Power* will be released through words as the events in Christ's atoning work are told again.)

The *Problem* is obvious again in our lives if we do not celebrate. Do we doubt His victory? Do we value more highly the victories available by personal successes and undervalue what is ours through Jesus Christ? (The *Power* lies in a retelling of the significance of the resurrection—how sin and death are indeed bound and how the Christ-life has been released for all to live who will in faith accept it.)

The *Problem* is apparent again when

Christians fail to anticipate the coming again of the Lord. The life that we are living—if it is truly the Christ-life—is even now the eternal life. It does not find its fulfillment in things, and it does not end with time and breath. Our life is that new life which is made by forgiveness and extends into "salvation." Once God has given that to us, what must be His attitude toward us if we ignore it, fail to look forward to its joyful completion? (The *Power* can again be told—in the detail of how our Lord will come again in power and great glory!)

(Material supplied by
PHILIP H. ILTEN
Wausau, Wis.)

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT December 15

Worship Supplement: The Form of the Intercession for Adventide (pp. 33—34)

We do all too evidently "look for another" (Matt. 11:3). This is Gaudete—and we should "rejoice in the Lord always" (Introit)—not only in another time or beyond this time, but in our present Lord, in the present presence of our Lord. "Again I say, Rejoice." The Intercession: "We rejoice, not only in Christ's presence among us but in the knowledge that this saving presence will be one day fully manifest in glory." But for today, this *Point*—that we rejoice in the glory of the present presence.

Our *Problem* may sometimes be that we are so engrossed in that future presence, a gross in-heavenness, that we ignore the present presence. More probably, our *Problem* is that we are seeking among the husks to find the home. In *The Answer*, by Jeremy Larnier (The Macmillan Co., New York, 1968) —

"The drug exists and people try it."

"Why do they?"

"Because it's supposed to give you an Answer. To yourself and everything!"

Cathy shook her dark head in indignation.

"You mean people take it as a kind of . . . search? They think they're going to learn some special secret?"

"Why not? . . . They have a right."

"Oh, anybody has a right to do anything! . . . But it's stupid!" (P. 42)

Benjy tried the Answer Drug.

"The truth is, old friend, I'm under the influence of a drug. I know that. I know it completely. And it knows me. So if I seem a bit bland, or even comical, I'm not bland or comical on the inside, I assure you. That's the funny thing."

"How *are* you?" I asked . . .

"You won't believe me. It is funny, I know. But I'm trapped in here, screaming for help. Some of the time at least. It keeps coming back to that. Only I can't get it out—everything comes out funny, excruciatingly funny! It's all such a good joke. But it's been two—three days, old friend. I'm scared I'll never get out of here!" (P. 37)

He gets out, later—"Benjy swung away . . . my old friend Benjy, three days dead, dangling by his own rep necktie." (P. 123)

But if he was trapped in there, what about his father? "I knew what I wanted. You had to in those days, or the Depression would deal you right out of the deck" (p. 13). He got it too, only to find that it wasn't it. In how many strange closets and attics and furrows men ransack life and their days searching for the answer.

The real *Problem* (only faith knows it—but all of us trapped in here with Old Adam understand) is that "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world knew Him not. He came to His own home, and His own people received Him not" (John 1:10-11). We know Him, and yet we look for another. We have grown so accustomed to the mysteries, we the stewards and servants of Christ, that we reject the Answer.

How different John. He was trapped. "When John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, 'Are you He who is to come . . . ?'"

The *Power* is available, now as we proclaim it again. He did give sight to the blind, He made the lame walk and the deaf hear, He raised the dead. We poor searchers can hear the Good News preached to us, in this sermon. His presence in the world gave power to all who receive Him, who believe on His name, to be born by the will of God and to be sons of God. The mystery of God's plan to make all creation and all creatures His is revealed even now by His stewards, and shared in that water and this bread and wine. And the Lord comes—He who is even now present. "Let us pray for ourselves and for all of God's people, that this our hope incite us to greater faith and love."

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT December 22

Worship Supplement: "The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns" Hymn 707

The Epistle repeats Gaudete. The Christian is a rejoicing man. Initiated by Advent III's Introit into awareness of the presence as a present fact, the rejoicing quality is made ever "more so" by contemplating that "the Lord is at hand!" Everything great in this hymn is made even "more so" by that future fact. We rejoice in the brighter glory of the Lord's quick coming.

"Not as of old"—our *Problem* is often that we are past participants and not future perfects. We remember His deeds of old—and we do know a thankfulness and a joy of sorts. But we do not vibrate to the greater joy that should transform all living: "The King shall come"—perhaps *when this next*

morning dawns. We think of Him as "of old" — great; we ought to know Him as "shall come" — greater! What restrains us? We are not — most of us, most of the time — still asking, "Who are You?" But yet, the One who stands among us we know not. Or as we recognize Him we keep checking on the thong of His sandal, wondering whether we are worthy enough by now to untie it. We are not free — not rejoicing, not forbearing, not care-less, not supplicating and thanking, not at peace — and our *Problem* is none of these nor all of these but that we do not accept His worthiness that brings us all these blessings, though *how* passes understanding.

For those who knew not, what did John do? He pointed Jesus out and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He!" And Jesus used the same approach to those who followed John's pointing finger and asked "Rabbi, where are you staying?" He said, "Come and see." This sermon should point. This sermon should show. It could do it in the contrasts of the stanzas.

A little Child — to bear and fight and die: great! He did that! But crowned with glory like the sun — greater! He will do that too!

The victorious rising again from the lonesome place of death and the rage of foes — great! But brighter still when light triumphant breaks and the King shall come. He will do that!

How sad the Emmaus disciples as their eyes could not recognize Him — how great their joy when He took the bread and blessed it and broke it, even though He vanished from their sight! When morning dawned, how dim the light on the shore as the Man called, "Children, have you any fish?" But another great catch convinced them — "It is the Lord!" And they ate with Him as morning dawned and light triumphant broke.

O brighter than that glorious morn
Shall this fair morning be,
When Christ, our King, in beauty comes
And we his face shall see!

Hail, Christ the Lord! Thy people pray:
Come quickly, King of kings.

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CHRISTMAS EVE

December 24

Worship Supplement: The Quempas
Celebration, No. 718

"The Quempas Celebration" forms the basis for an excellent Christmas Eve service. The celebration would require four small children's choirs or solo voices, one in each corner of the church, to announce to the congregation that "Heaven's all-glorious King is born." The hymn indicates the line each group would sing; then follows a stanza of "The Nunc Angelorum," which is to be sung by a mixed choir; then the congregation joins both choirs to sing the refrain, "God's own Son is born a child, etc." In this order all four stanzas of the Quempas are sung.

No one really knows how old the Quempas is, but a few copies of the Latin text are housed in some museums of Europe, dating as far back as the 15th century. Various settings have appeared, but the most famous is the one by Michael Praetorius (Concordia Publishing House, No. 98-1518).

Should one use the Quempas Celebration as the basis for a Christmas Eve service, it might well be put together under the general topic, "The Mystery of God's Gift in Jesus Christ." Using the four hymn stanzas, sung as listed above, one could develop the service with a short devotion after each stanza of the hymn.

A short devotion would introduce the service, "The Mystery as Faced by Joseph — Unbelievable!" A suggestion might be a

short free-verse playlet such as the one called, "His Name Shall Be Immanuel," found in the Walther League *Worker's Quarterly*, October 1964, page 27. This short conversation between Joseph and Gabriel would introduce the service in a setting of mystery and joy. The first children's choir group would then sing stanza 1, which talks about how shepherds come to see the amazing event of Christ's birth. The choir would follow with the angelic report of this amazing event in terms of joy. The second devotion could follow the congregational response, "God's own Son is born a child. . . ." The devotion could be entitled, "The Mystery as Faced by the Shepherds — Wonder!"

The second stanza would then be introduced by the children's group as they speak of the Wise Men who came from afar, strangely following a star. The choir's response to this announcement is that this strange birth is set to make us free. Upon the congregation's response that Christ is born, a third devotion could follow under the title, "The Mystery as Faced by the Wise Men — Strangeness!"

The third stanza would then be introduced by the children's group telling the story of the angels being present to sing about God's coming through a humble human maid named Mary. The choir would then respond that Christ took our human weakness to be one with us at our point of need. Following the response again by the congregation, that Christ is truly born, the devotion could perhaps be "The Mystery as Faced by Mary — in Weakness!"

The final stanza then brings to our attention that we are here to worship and adore this great Gift of God. And the choir seems to respond by telling us that the world still gets this gift today — when the congregation reminds us that the Gift is here in Christ. The devotion that follows could possibly be entitled, "The Mystery as Faced by Us — Receiving the Gift!"

A fitting close for the service might be the congregation's singing "In Dulci Jubilo" or even a candlelight rendition of "Silent Night" in which the congregation leaves the church in darkness to go out into the brightness of the night to celebrate "The Mystery of God's Gift in Jesus Christ" in each of our lives.

CHRISTMAS DAY

December 25

Worship Supplement: The Offertory
for Christmastide

"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,

Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;

Bring an offering, and come into his courts!

Worship the Lord in holy array; tremble before him, all the earth!"

The words of 2 Cor. 9:15 and Psalm 96: 7-9 express the amazing wonder of God's Gift in terms of our Lord's power and strength, His glory and holiness. As we receive the good Gift, these attributes ought to make us tremble before Him. Here we receive proper instruction and understanding of what it means to have God visit the earth. It certainly is inexpressible! Beyond all expectation of reason is it that this Gift would come from the majesty of God to a people so far separated from Him. But the fact that God's Gift did come and came in the humble and strange way of Christ's birth at Bethlehem indicates that the power and strength and glory of God are not synonymous with the pyrotechnics of God's power in His creation or in the framework of the best Fifth Avenue commercials. Here is one aspect of the *Point* and the *Problem*. They do not try

to snow us into accepting this Gift, nor do they try to force us to receive Him by command. They seek to bring us to our knees in trembling awareness of our need but in even greater adoration of the Gift that meets our need.

To reinforce the Offertory thrust, the Old Testament Lesson sets the stage for Christ's coming in terms of the contrast between light and darkness. When the prophet talks about the birth of our Lord against the background of military power — as ruler, as successor to the throne of David — a thought almost alien is inserted. In the midst of all this power and battle talk comes the concept of "Prince of Peace."

Back to the Offertory again: The paradox of peace in the midst of turmoil, of peace in the midst of man's understanding of majestic power as tumult and blood-letting, makes us ask of God's Gift in His Son: "Is the Gift real in our lives? Does it have meaning in our time?" Our *Problem* is apparent if we do not tremble, but just as apparent if we do not worship, both in what we say and what we do.

The Epistle for the day: 1 John 4:7-16 sets the tone of Christ's coming. The expression of God's love is given to man by the sending of His Son to be the expiation for our sins. John says this "God love" should give us direction for our love to one another. It points up the necessity of giving, of sacrifice and suffering, to express the heart of our relation to God and to one another. The

point is that real love in our life comes only when God's love in Christ abides in us, and real love comes to others in our world only when that love is expressed through us and thus becomes, through us, God's "inexpressible gift" to man.

The Gospel: Luke 2:1-14 is the traditional story of the "inexpressible gift" finally delivered in a special place at a specific time, in very humble circumstances — born in a stable in a little town like Bethlehem. A seeming victim of circumstances, Jesus Christ through all His life was the expression of God's love in the midst of our warring lives. The strong and glorious God was willing to be weak and despised in order to share His love with us and get us to be loving toward Him and our fellows.

One way we could contrast God's majesty transformed into His humble coming would be to use an old Ukrainian custom for Christmas celebration. Traditionally in the Ukraine, the homes on this day of the Savior's birth were strewn with new hay and straw to remind God's people where it was the Christ was born, and how it was He was born, and when it was He was born. And certainly in many of our beautiful and ornate houses of worship, to have the aisles strewn with straw would make an interesting contrast that would reinforce the introductory words of this Offertory, "Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!"

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