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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

INTRODUCTION

This issue begins the new series of homiletic studies announced for the church year 1971—72. The Gospel selected in the new Roman Catholic A series will be studied as a preaching text for the individual Sundays of the year. Meanwhile the authors of the studies will take their usual look at the propers that are employed in *The Lutheran Liturgy* and will note the new accents that would result from following the lectionary proposed in the new Roman Catholic *ordo*.

In order to introduce the new lectionary in some detail, two articles follow which analyze the new proposals and consider what additional planning has been taking place among Lutherans in the United States and within the Lutheran World Federation. The Rev. E. Theo. DeLaney, executive secretary of the Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, provides this latter report and, in addition, presents the introductory material on Advent and the sermon studies for the Sundays in Advent.

*Notes on the New Lectionary for Mass**

The rationale behind the development of a three-year cycle of lessons for the celebration of mass in the Roman Catholic Church is one with which all of Christendom will agree. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy directed that "the treasures of the Bible be opened up more lavishly so that richer fare might be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word and a more representative portion of sacred scripture be read to the people over a set cycle of years" (Article 51). After the Concilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy prepared the new three-year cycle of lessons, Pope Paul VI approved it in his apostolic constitution *Missale Romanum*, April 3, 1969. The lectionary in English for use in the dioceses of the United States was authorized by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to begin on Palm Sunday, March 22, 1970. Its use is mandatory beginning the First Sunday of Advent, Nov. 28, 1971.

It is an interesting and homiletically per-

*The comments which follow are based on the publication by the Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn., 1970.

inent item that the foreword to the *Lectionary for Mass* indicates that "since the biblical passages have been chosen with great care, their effectiveness in the eucharistic celebration will be increased if they are explained to the faithful and if they are further unfolded and applied in the homily" (p. xv). A brief title is supplied for each lesson to give a clue for such explanation and to point out unity among the lessons. The Order of Mass indicates, "A homily shall be given on all Sundays and holy days of obligation; it is recommended for other days" (p. xvii). The General Instructions further state, "Readings from scripture and the chants between the readings form the main part of the liturgy of the word. The homily, profession of faith, and general intercessions or prayer of the faithful develop and complete it. In the readings, God speaks to His people of the mystery of salvation and nourishes their spirit; Christ is present through His word. The homily then explains the readings, and the chants and profession of faith comprise the people's acceptance of God's word. Finally, moved by this word, they pray in the general intercession for the needs of the

Church and the world" (p. xviii). An accent on unity among the propers remains a basic concern even though the specific nature of individual Sundays is changed by the new selection of lessons.

In the midst of accents in other denominations that tend to remove ceremony and to resist the traditional in order to underscore some approach regarded as more relevant, the Roman Catholic instructions continue to insist that the reading of the Gospel be given special dignity by, among other items, being read by "the deacon or, in his absence, by a priest other than the celebrant; the other readings are read by the subdeacon or reader. In the absence of a deacon or another priest, the celebrant reads the gospel" (p. xviii). To those who follow the more usual Lutheran practice, the explanation will be of interest. "Reading the scriptures is traditionally considered a ministerial, not a presidential, function" (p. xviii). As a result the celebrant is the last to be listed as a possible reader.

The dropping of the traditional introit has suggested to many that there is less interest in psalmody in the new mass arrangements. But the instructions for the responsorial psalm or gradual which comes after the first reading alters those feelings. "The psalm is an integral part of the liturgy of the Word and is usually taken from the lectionary, since these texts are directly related to and depend upon the respective readings."

For the reading of the Gospel, the instructions envision the possible use of incense to accent the importance of this word. If the Gospel book is on the altar, a procession is envisioned with the ministers, possibly carrying the censer and candles, walking ahead of the reader to the lectern. In announcing the lesson, the priest opens the book and says, "The Lord be with you." Then he announces the location of the reading. As he does so, he is instructed to "make the sign of the cross with his thumb on the book and on his forehead, mouth, and breast. If in-

cence is used, he censes the book. After the acclamation of the people, he proclaims the Gospel. At the end he kisses the book, saying quietly: 'May the words of the gospel wipe away our sins.' After the reading the people make the customary acclamation" (p. xix). In a day of media awareness, in a denomination traditionally very much aware of the Word, the sensory and visual may well seem to be at least as acceptable as to those who use the revised mass form in the Roman church.

Since frequently there are choices in the readings to be selected, and since not always nor everywhere are all three readings required, the instructions are at pains to say, "The pastoral effectiveness of a celebration depends in great measure on . . . an intelligent use of the options. . . . In planning the celebration, the priest should consider the spiritual good of the assembly rather than his own desires. The choice of texts is to be made in consultation with the ministers and others who have a function in the celebration, including the faithful" (p. xx). The latter is another of those directives that ought to be met with immediate response by Lutherans who have insisted on the important role all the believers play in the church. It is strongly recommended, however, that all three readings be used. Where pastoral reasons or a decree of the conference of bishops makes two readings preferable and permitted, then "the choice between the first two readings should be based on the norms in the lectionary and the desire to lead the people to a deeper knowledge of scripture and never simply on the brevity or simplicity of the reading." (P. xxi)

Weekday readings are also provided for each day of the year. The clergy are alerted to the fact that when saints' days or other feasts interrupt the course of readings, the lessons ought to be surveyed before the week begins and intelligent choice made as to which lessons to drop or to combine.

In general the selection of texts has assigned the more important ones to Sundays and feasts "when the Christian people are bound to celebrate the eucharist together" (p. xxvi). The weekday readings then, to some degree, complement those texts. "Neither part of the lectionary is dependent on the other; the readings for Sundays and feasts proceed independently of the weekday readings and vice versa." (P. xxvii)

The readings for the Sundays and feasts have been arranged according to two principles which are called semi-continuous or "thematic." The different seasons of the year and the themes of each liturgical season determine which principle applies in specific cases.

The Old and New Testament readings best harmonize when their relationship is self-evident, that is, when the events and teachings of the New Testament are more or less explicitly related to those of the Old. The Old Testament readings in this lectionary have been chosen primarily because of their relationship to the New Testament selections, especially the gospel reading.

Common themes provide another kind of harmonization among the readings for each Mass. Seasons which best illustrate this principle are Advent, Lent, and Easter, each of which has its own spirit and message.

The Sundays of the year [selections for Epiphany to Lent and after Pentecost], on the other hand, have no particular theme. The epistle and gospel readings for these days are arranged semi-continuously, while the Old Testament readings have been chosen because of their relationship to the gospel passages. (P. xxvii)

There are still liturgical criteria governing the selection of readings in certain parts of the church year. "The importance of scriptural reading at Mass, as well as liturgical tradition, demands that in this new lectionary certain scriptural books should be reserved for specific liturgical seasons. The

tradition of reading the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter season is preserved, as common to the East and West. . . . These readings beautifully illustrate how the total life of the Church springs from the paschal mystery. The Eastern and Western tradition of reading John's Gospel during the last weeks of Lent and throughout the Easter season is likewise preserved, since it is the 'spiritual' gospel which brings out the mystery of Christ more deeply" (p. xxix). It is of interest that the long readings from St. John are set up in this lectionary with different parts to be read by different individuals—the words of Christ, the narrator, and speakers other than the Christ.

A brief indication of the content of the Sunday lessons chosen for the different seasons gives insight into the patterns followed. Each Gospel of Advent has a specific theme: the Lord's coming in glory now appears on the first Sunday; John the Baptist is the chief character in both the second and the third, while the fourth Sunday gives the events immediately prior to the Lord's birth. The Old Testament lessons are prophecies about the Messiah, chiefly from Isaiah. The writings of the apostles present exhortations and instructions relating to the season.

The lessons in the Christmas season have been traditional in the Roman liturgy. The Sunday within the octave of Christmas is the Feast of the Holy Family, and readings deal with family life. The octave of Christmas becomes a day dealing with Mary, the mother of God. The naming of Jesus is included, but is no longer a specific feast in the Roman calendar. The second Sunday after Christmas deals with the mystery of the incarnation, and Epiphany lessons speak of the call of all people to salvation. The rubric for Epiphany indicates that Epiphany may be observed on the Sunday occurring from January 2 to 8 inclusive, rather than on January 6, a choice the United States calendar has made. The

Sunday after Epiphany is the feast of the Lord's baptism.

Pre-Lent disappears. The Gospels for the first two Sundays of Lent (not "in" Lent) deal with the temptation of the Lord and then His transfiguration. The lessons then focus on themes dealing with initiation into the Christian faith. All three years may use these lessons, but alternatives are supplied in cycle B, dealing with John's text about Christ's future glorification through His cross and resurrection, and in year C with Luke's texts on conversion. The Old Testament lessons deal with the history of salvation, and the Epistle lessons have been selected to conform in accent.

Easter supplies accounts of the risen Christ's appearances. The lessons on the Good Shepherd have been delayed to the third Sunday after Easter in order not to interrupt the narrative. The prayer of Jesus again picks up the themes of the last Sundays. The Acts are used for lessons dealing with the life and growth of the early church in each year. The writings of the apostles then are selected by authors—year A, the First Letter of Peter; year B, the First Letter of John; year C, the Book of Revelation.

During the rest of the time each Sunday is designated as the *nth* "Sunday of the Year." There are 33 or 34 weeks to be filled in, the first ones after Epiphany and the final ones after Pentecost. In order to maintain the final lessons on eschatology, certain lessons are omitted after the "Epiphany" selections, and the "after Pentecost" lessons pick up with the day that allows just enough Sundays to complete the year. The solemnities of Trinity and Corpus Christi are included in the American calendar for the first and second Sundays after Pentecost. With the third Sunday of the Year a semi-continuous reading of the three synoptic Gospels begins (Matthew in year A, Mark in B, and Luke in C), providing not only the development of the Lord's life and preaching but also a

presentation of each Gospel's distinctive perspective and doctrine. This also makes possible a connection with the Epiphany themes, since the first selections will be read during the post-Epiphany Sunday and deal with the opening of Christ's life and mission. A harmony with the eschatological notes at the end of the year is thus also achieved as the Gospels deal with those subjects in the lessons before the passion narratives. A semi-continuous reading of the letters of Paul and James is included, while 1 Corinthians is arranged in a three-year cycle at the beginning of the Season of the Year. The Letter to the Hebrews has one part in year B and another in year C. The theme of the last Sunday of the year is Christ the King.

It is to be noted that all these directives for lessons envision "extended reading and explanation of sacred scripture to Christians during the celebration of the eucharist" (p. xxxii). The frequent substitution of mere "preaching services" is quite foreign to the accent of the Roman lectionary. Pope Paul VI expressed as the goal of the lectionary, however, that there would develop among the faithful "an ever-increasing hunger for God's word, the word which leads the people of the new covenant to the perfect unity of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." He added a sentence that suggests the kind of unity of Scripture and Sacrament within each service which is also the desired objective in other denominations. "We are fully confident that priests and faithful alike will prepare their hearts together more earnestly for the Lord's Supper, meditating more thoughtfully on sacred scripture, nourishing themselves daily with the words of the Lord." (P. xxxii)

A final note of interest explains the decision about which cycle is used in which year. "Each year is designated A, B, or C. Year C is a year whose number is equally divisible by three, as if the cycle began with the first year of the Christian era. Thus 1968

is year C, 1969 is year A, 1970 is year B, 1971 is year C, etc." (p. xxvii). 1972, therefore, is year A, "beginning with Advent of the preceding calendar year."

Everyone comes at a consideration of these new proposals with personal biases. My own, which are triumphantly out of step with most of the Christian world, include a deep appreciation for the pre-Lent Sundays as they have been celebrated, a fondness for the significance of Laetare, and the alteration of the Lenten mood which it brings about, and a sincere lack of enthusiasm for the endless march of numbers "after Trinity" in our present sequence. The Roman lectionary drowns pre-Lent without a regret, has little concern that it totally alters the accents of Sunday after Sunday, and is absolutely more discouraging than helpful with its "Sundays in the Year" which march on to the 34th. But then, I am not in favor of fixing the date

of Easter, either, any more than I am for shifting the days of famous men so that their less famous descendants can have repeated three- and four-day weekends. The church year, like certain other creatures in our common life, is more interesting when not perfectly predictable.

In the last sentence of comments that reveal what a tremendous work the lectionary and specifically the printing of this volume is, any reference to mistakes must be taken as an attempt to help — "just in case no one else has noticed." — The Gospel for the Nineteenth Sunday of the Year should be Matt. 14:22-33, obviously, not 22-23. On top of p. 171 the heading should consistently still be "The Twentieth Sunday." There may be others, but I did not notice, my head being bowed in admiration.

GEORGE W. HOYER

A New Lectionary for Lutherans of America?

For many years Lutherans on the American scene have heard the cry for different pericopic readings. Pastors have complained that the traditional series of pericopes does not offer Christians sufficient entry to the treasures of Holy Writ. Preachers have complained that they need additional texts for homiletical use. But not much has come of such cries over the years.

It is true that some new pericopic systems have been devised by Lutherans in America, chiefly as preaching texts, but these have not found very wide acceptance or use by Lutherans generally.

In 1968, at the invitation of the Commission on Worship and Spiritual Life of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), representatives from Germany, Scandinavia, and America met at Geneva to discuss the possibilities of pericopic reform for the Lutheran churches of the world. The merits of the one-year cycle of the historic church were

contrasted with the merits seen in the new — at that time still projected — three-year cycle of the *Ordo Lectionum Missae*. At the close of the consultation, the following document was prepared for presentation to the Commission on Worship and Spiritual Life.

The committee of experts has concerned itself extensively with the work done in the last decades, aiming towards a new order of pericopes for the so-called main worship service (Sweden, USA, Germany, the Anglican, and the Roman Catholic Church). The committee deemed it desirable that during the time when the Roman Catholic Church is trying out its pericopic series (decided upon following Vatican II and in connection with it), the evangelical denominations should, for their part, attempt to arrive at a common lectionary based upon the vital principles and orders used in their churches.

Despite variations of opinion on all suggested drafts, the committee agreed

upon the following guidelines for the drafting of a common lectionary:

1. It should contain, if possible, a basic cycle of three readings for each Sunday and holy day. These are to be taken from the Old Testament, the non-Gospel sections of the New Testament (letters, Acts of the Apostles, Revelation of John), and the Gospels respectively. The inclusion of an Old Testament series seemed to the committee to be unavoidable in view of decisions made in the Lutheran churches in the USA and in the Roman Catholic Church.

2. The fundamental cycle should be based on the Epistle and Gospel series of the so-called Pericopes of the Ancient Church. These present an order developed over a long period of time. The majority of Lutheran churches are presently bound by them, and they contain important elements both in their Lutheran characteristics and in the shaping of the Church Year. But the committee unanimously agreed that these so-called Ancient Church Pericopes need further examination with regard to selection of texts both as to suitability and comprehensibility.

3. It was deemed desirable that further cycles of three readings each (Old Testament, "Epistle," Gospel) be added to the fundamental cycle in order to include the richness of the Holy Scriptures in the readings for services. An inclination toward the Roman Catholic lectionary may be feasible and may be desirable. It remains, as yet, undecided whether the total number of cycles should be two, three, or four. The committee found itself confronted with two differing opinions regarding the use of cycles. The one was in favor (with the Roman Catholic Church) of a reading series which would encompass several years so that the same text would be repeated every two, three, or four years. The other opinion held for an annual repetition of the fundamental cycle with the texts of the other cycles being used (as in the Evangelical Church in Germany—EKiD) as preaching texts with the result that such texts would recur only

after longer periods of time (about six years). Each church should be free to make its own decision here.

4. The goal of all the work on the proposed lectionary lies in this, that dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican communion, and other churches tend toward the possibility of a common order (at least in major portions) for the entire realm of Christendom.

The LWF commission adopted the recommendation and the LWF secretariat recommended to the various Lutheran churches of the world—Federation members and non-members alike—the undertaking of lectionary reform. On the American scene this responsibility was assigned by the participating churches to the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW), an intersynodical agency already at work on other aspects of worship materials revision. The ILCW, in turn, assigned primary responsibility for preparing the groundwork to a special lectionary committee. Questions of calendar reform were likewise assigned to this committee since the two propositions are interrelated.

One of the primary tasks which faced the Lectionary Committee was an evaluation of the new Roman *ordo*. When one contemplates the possible changes in the church year lectionary which have been made by the Roman Catholics and adopted—with some adaptation—by Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and others, it is quite apparent that some shifts in accent are to be expected in various Sundays.

The German and the Scandinavian Lutherans have not felt themselves ready to undertake so great a revision of the ancient readings which theoretically date back to the time of St. Jerome. Accordingly, they have been content to make only minor revisions in the traditional one-year cycle of pericopes.

Lutherans in America apparently think that a sense of unity among the various Christian traditions on the American scene

is more important than knowing that the same lessons that they use are being read by Lutherans somewhere in Europe. Hence considerable attention is being given to the revisions offered by the Roman *ordo*.

For at least 200 years Lutherans have felt the need to bring their congregations a wider exposure to the Word of God than is possible by reading merely the Hieronymic pericopes. As a result of this pastoral concern, various pericopic systems arose in different parts of Europe and America. Paul W. Nesper, in his *Biblical Texts*, gives a total of 14 different systems—all taken from various Lutheran traditions.

In answer to the ILCW Lectionary Revision Committee's request, the present writer prepared a tabular comparison of pericopic selections—Old Testament, Gospel, Epistle—for a total of 59 different series from Lutheran, Roman, Anglican, and Reformed traditions. Not all series were complete with three readings since many had been conceived merely as preaching texts to be used in addition to the Hieronymic series. This is especially true of the series contained in Germany's *Perikopenbuch* today.

In order to orient itself to its task, the ILCW's committee first gave its attention to a suggested revision of the present one-year cycle of readings. By this means the committee hoped to make it possible for pastors gradually to introduce the idea of pericopic or lectionary change. It would afford some revision of the year's thrust by obviating those lessons which have been considered inadequate for the needs of the day. Decisions about the committee's work are to be made by the ILCW at its November 1971 meeting.

The resources afforded by the Roman *ordo's* three-year cycle more than double the Scriptural treasure available for reading to the congregations as pericopic lessons and for homiletic resources. It is for this reason that the ILCW has insisted that the Lectionary

Revision Committee study the *ordo* thoroughly with regard to both its adaptability for use in the Lutheran Church and its doctrinal content. The *ordo* includes selections from the Apocrypha, and certain readings focus on celebrations of non-Scriptural saints. The Presbyterians have already found it possible to make substitutions for those readings, whereas the Episcopalians have not been bothered by these two problems in accepting the *ordo* for use in their churches.

Instead of numbering the Sundays after Epiphany as "first" to "sixth" (followed by the three "-gesima" Sundays), and instead of numbering the Sundays after Trinity as Pentecost II through XXVII, the *ordo* merely calls these "Sundays of the Year" (*per annum*).

During these nonseasonal Sundays, the chief thrust of the Gospel seems to be in the nature of a kind of *lectio continua*. By this scheme the congregation is afforded a clearer connection of the Gospel for a given Sunday with those of the Sundays surrounding it. The last two Sundays of the liturgical year are devoted to readings dealing with the eschaton. In order that these not be omitted because of the "extra" Sunday in some years, readings are to be adjusted at the beginning of the post-Pentecost resumption of the *lectio per annum*.

Old Testament lessons in the *ordo* have been selected where possible because of their relationship to the particular Gospel in order to demonstrate a unity between the testaments. By this means most of the principal sections of the Old Covenant will become known to the average member of the congregation.

The Epistle selections bring the congregation another kind of *lectio continua* from the apostolic writings. Acts and Revelation are used more extensively in the *ordo* than in the Hieronymic system.

During the three-year cycle at least one lesson is to be read on a Sunday from each

book of the Bible except 1 Chronicles, Esther, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Obadiah, Nahum, Haggai, 2 and 3 John, and Jude. Small wonder, then, that the new *Ordo Lec-*

tionum Missae has so much to recommend it for consideration as Lutherans look toward lectionary reforms.

E. THEO. DELANEY

The Advent Lessons

Advent has always been a time when pastors have given their attention to series of sermons dealing with various types of preparation. Sometimes these have been based on free texts because the preacher has felt a lack of unifying factors in the historically appointed pericopes for the season. As we look at cycle A of the new Roman *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, the texts for Advent seem to have an underlying theme, though not explicitly expressed, which ties them together as parts of a single message: "The Day of Salvation Is at Hand—Be Prepared for Its Arrival."

Viewed in this light, Advent I focuses on the totality of the Old Testament's message of preparation. Advent II shows the same message to be the burden of the New Testament. Advent III shows both coming together in the activities of John the Baptizer and Christ. Advent IV shows the beginning of God's direct intervention, making possible this glorious salvation.

At first glance there would seem to be little in common among the historic gospels and cycle A of the new Roman *ordo*. Yet there are very definite affinities which can be recognized. These give validity to the idea of using *ordo A* texts for sermonic treatment while retaining the old unity of the day's propers. In order to focus attention on the total scope of pericopic reform in Lutheran circles, we shall include three groups of texts in these studies. *Ordo A*, of course, will refer to the first year of readings in the new Roman Catholic three-year cycle of readings. HP will refer to the Hieronymic, or so-called historic or standard pericopes. S/G will refer to the new one-year revision

approved by the Lutherans in Scandinavia and Germany.

ADVENT I—Matt. 24:37-44

HP and S/G—Rom. 13:11-14; Matt. 21:1-9

The Epistle—the same in all three series—calls attention to the fact that time has arrived for the day of salvation. The HP Gospel depicts the arrival of the Savior-King, tying together the two great stages of the act of salvation: the arrival of the Savior as the God-man and as the Royal Sacrifice. *Ordo A's* Gospel depicts echoes of the story of Noah's times—a reminder that the Advent theme, "Prepare! for the day of salvation is at hand," was not a late development in God's message to mankind. Then, as now, salvation and rescue were promised and effected for those who were ready, a warning to prepare was proclaimed, and no definite timetable was spelled out. There seems to be a closer relationship between the Epistle and *Ordo A's* Gospel for Advent I than between the Epistle and the historic Gospel pericope. It is interesting to note that Christ takes His illustration from outside the traditions of Judaism. He selects an example that has worldwide connotations, stressing the universality of God's message and of His salvation.

PREPARE—FOR NEW BEGINNINGS

I. He is coming.

A. Suddenly, like the flood at Noah's time or a flash flood today—and there is no possibility of predicting the exact time of His arrival.

B. But not unexpectedly—God warns

us that He has an exact schedule. His message urgently calls attention to His coming (Noah's preaching, preaching of various Old Testament prophets).

- C. Conditions are ripe today—"the earth is filled with violence" (Gen. 6:11); "scoffers will come in the last day with scoffing, following their own passions" (2 Peter 3:3-7); and we ourselves have need to have something written to us about the end time. (1 Thess. 5:1)

II. Be ready.

- A. Prepared—not with physical safeguards, guards, burglar alarms; nor with delusions that if we do our best in the field or at the mill that we will make out all right.
- B. Prepared—with the preparation only God can provide: total trust in His message; total faith in His Son and way of salvation; total reliance on His grace—all that the Spirit Himself gives us.
- C. Prepared—to live the new life His coming brings.
1. Noah built his ark and "by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith" (Heb. 11:7). The rain was a relief—after all the ridicule, the testing of his faith, to know for sure that the forbearing God was washing out the old to begin a new earth (1 Pet. 3:20). And when "Noah went forth" he "built an altar to the Lord" (Gen. 8:18-20) and lived the new life on the new world.
 2. Many were ready to accept His entry into Jerusalem as the beginning of blessing for all—"Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord." (Matt. 21:9)

3. For "those who love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8) the faith that Jesus "makes all things new" (Rev. 21:5) makes each day new.

ADVENT II—Matt. 3:1-12

HP—Rom. 15:4-13; Luke 21:25-36.
S/G—1 Cor. 4:1-5; Matt. 3:1-12

It is interesting to note that S/G has inverted the Epistles in HP's Advent II and III, but has taken its Gospel from Ordo A. The HP Epistle points to Christ as the only hope for all mankind. This is retained in Ordo A's Epistle, although the reading is shortened to end at verse 9. The HP Gospel urges observation of the signs of the times to see that time for preparation has almost elapsed. Ordo A expands the scope of this message of warning by contrasting two bases for salvation: God's and man's. Again the Gospel transcends provincial ideas and shows the universality of God's grace in Christ.

PREPARE—THE END IS HERE

I. This is God's message.

- A. There will ultimately be an end of all things. "The wrath to come" . . . "the axe laid to the root of the trees" . . . "the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."
- B. It is *His* message; regardless of man's opinions He sent John with the message according to His promise. He sends preachers today with the same message (the Gospel: Luke 21:25-36).

II. But it is God's message of *salvation*.

- A. It is not to be heard in the externalism of man-made religion—dependence on Abrahamitic descent, or modern counterparts' reliance on legalistic observance of the letter of

the Law (the Pharisees and Sadducees and their modern echoes).

- B. But it is to be found in God's gift in Christ Jesus, who followed John. The kingdom of heaven has arrived and therefore men should repent. Jesus Christ is God's gift of grace. He makes it possible for us to receive the Spirit's gifts. Only the Spirit can enable us to produce good fruit and thus not to fear the judgment.

ADVENT III—Matt. 11:2-11

HP—1 Cor. 4:1-5; Matt. 11:2-10. S/G—Rom. 15:4-13; Matt. 11:2-10

Ordo A's Epistle (James 5:7-10) urges patience and hope as we wait for the coming of Christ. HP's Epistle addresses itself to faithfulness in Christ's service while awaiting His return. All three systems have the same Gospel. Ordo A adds Christ's commendation of John's faithfulness.

JOHN THE BAPTIZER—PATTERN FOR THE PREPARED

I. The inquiry

- A. John inquired of Christ in order to confirm the truth of his own message and life.
- B. We, too, may test the Christ, to seek a sign whereby He will validate His credentials and so justify our pattern of life.

II. Christ's response

- A. Christ offers a gentle rebuke for John's failure to recognize the signs around him, but yet He commends John's greatness in humility.
- B. Christ also rebukes the crowd for their misapprehension of the prophet and his role.
- C. Christ responds to us by alerting us to the fact that greatness and pur-

pose in life come from a relationship with Him in His kingdom.

III. Our reaction

- A. Ours cannot be a reaction of sentimentalists . . . "reed shaken in the wind" . . . "man clothed in soft raiment."
- B. We must face up to what God is doing in Christ Jesus as did the true prophets, as did John ("no one greater!").
- C. We must tell others of the significance of Christ's coming, both the warning and the blessing (the Epistle: 1 Cor. 4:1-5).

ADVENT IV—Matt. 1:18-24

HP—Phil. 4:4-7; John 1:19-28. S/G—Phil. 4:4-7; Luke 1:46-55

Here we find the three pericopic systems going their own ways except for the Epistle, which is common to HP and S/G. Phil. 4 gives us the encouragement to rejoice because we have an all-transcending peace in Christ Jesus. Ordo A's Epistle (Rom. 1:1-7) brings us the ground for this peace, that is, the Christ who was born of the Davidic line, who died and rose for us. The S/G Gospel also rehearses these grounds for peace by means of the virgin mother's Magnificat. The HP's Gospel continues the matter of John's ministry, which seems out of place today in view of the Epistle. Ordo A's Gospel shows how God made this peace available as it tells of God's preparation of Joseph for the Savior's imminent advent.

GOD PREPARES HIS ADVENT

I. The beginning of His preparation

- A. For Joseph it seemed to begin with His intervention into Joseph's plans.
- B. But this was only the last stage of preparations begun long ago (Is. 7:14 noted by God's writer here).

HOMILETICS

- C. God's involvement in our lives from before the foundation of the world. (Rev. 13:8; 1 Peter 1:20; Eph. 1:4; Matt. 25:34)
 - D. Climaxes in the appearance of Jesus, who saved us from our sins, who stands among us today (the Gospel: John 1:19-28).
- II. The completion of His preparation**
- A. It is achieved in our faith-filled acceptance of all that He has done.
 - B. It can be thwarted if we feel like Joseph that we are wiser than He in deciding what ought to be done.
 - C. As Joseph followed through on the revelation of God, so we will find joy and the peace that passes understanding (the Epistle: Phil. 4:4-7) as we believe and do.

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