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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT-CHRISTMAS

With this issue the homiletics section begins a series of sermon studies based on the revision of the historic pericopes prepared as an interim project by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship. A glance at the study for the First Sunday in Advent gives some indication of the kind of variation that will be appearing each week with the use of the new proposals. The Epistle covers the same material from Romans 13, and the entry of our Lord into Jerusalem is still the accent of the Gospel, but it is taken from St. Luke instead of St. Matthew. This is only a beginning of larger changes the future holds. The 3-year-cycled lectionary which the ILCW is promising for use in Advent of 1973 will propose even more varied lessons. It will be based substantially on the Roman Ordo. A listing of the lessons proposed in the Roman lectionary for the first Sunday in Advent over the 3-year series will give some indication of the variations.

	<i>Ordo A</i>	<i>Ordo B</i>	<i>Ordo C</i>
First Reading	Is. 2:1-5	Is. 63:16b-17; 64:1, 4-8b	Jer. 33:14-16
Second Reading	Rom. 13:11-14	1 Cor. 1:3-9	1 Thess. 3:12—4:2
Third Reading	Matt. 24:37-44	Mark 13:33-37	Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

One conclusion instantly arrived at will be the need for new books. Fred Lindemann's *The Sermon and the Propers* and Pius Parsch's *The Church's Year of Grace* (which it, not always subtly, introduced into many Lutheran studies) will no longer serve.

This introduction will now become something of a book review and a bit of a Christmas list suggestion. Consider:

Guide for the Christian Assembly—A Background Book of the Mass. By Thierry Maertens and Jean Frisque. Notre Dame, Ind., Fides Publishers, Inc., 1971. Advent/Christmas (trans. from the French by the Monks of Valyermo) and Eastertime (trans. Molaise Meehan, O. S. B.). Each \$5.00. Paper.

Some will recognize the title from the original series written at St. Andrew's Abbey and copyrighted by Biblica, Bruges, in 1965. Fides Publishers prepared the first American printing in 1967. This is a complete revision undertaken since the introduction of the new Roman lectionary. These are the first two volumes to appear—there were five volumes in the original edition. They are in paperback, but the cost must be calculated with an awareness that the first of these volumes numbers 317 and the second 382 pages. For some they may supply *too much* information, since they work through not only the three lessons three times for the new Sunday series, but also the first reading and the Gospel for each weekday; but this too might well encourage a new seriousness in the holding of daily services in many chapels, and daily Scripture study in many offices.

The commentary is divided into two parts: exegesis and doctrine. This edition concentrates on the readings and does not provide treatment of other material such as prayers or hymns, sometimes included in the previous edition. The authors' explanation is interesting: "Greater liberty of choice, and some improvisation, is to be expected in that area."

Exegesis is first—"a minimal requirement if the thought of the inspired author is to be respected." But "it does not cover everything. It keeps us from following false trails or seeking verification in the text for *a priori* views. But it does not exhaust the possibilities of the

text in deepening our understanding of the liturgical celebration" (p. vi). And therefore the exegetical section adds "the various themes, the really central message, out of which a homily can be built." Finally "some doctrinal, moral or liturgical comments will be found . . . which relate the biblical text to the whole context of life in the Church and in the world today."

The doctrinal discussion usually includes two discussions "considering the principal themes of the exegetical commentary." The authors' explanation of how they develop the doctrinal exposition reveals the basic thread of the volumes.

We do not really study an isolated theme in purely analytic fashion. Theological reflection should be centered on the Eucharistic celebration because this is the essential act of the Church's life, involving the whole mystery of both Christ and the Church. . . . The living relation which unites a man with Jesus Christ crucified and arisen, the one mediator of salvation for everyone, is shaped more than anywhere else in the Eucharistic celebration. It begins at that extraordinarily complex historical moment of baptism, which brings a man from unbelief into faith. It is developed as the liturgy of the Word initiates him into salvation history, the thread of growth, at once continuous and discontinuous, which links Adam with Jesus by way of Abraham. The thread always lies in the background of every formulary, reminding us where we stand and whither we must go. It is important for each one to know throughout life where he stands on the road that leads to Christ, what is still pagan in him, what still remains at the stage of Jewish man.

Whoever is admitted to the Eucharist is a member of the Church. In the mystical body he has his essential role, the implications of which he should constantly weigh. It requires him to cooperate in the building of the Kingdom, in the always actual shaping of salvation history. It ought to dominate his life, because it is in the warp and woof of actual living that the Church has the mission to bear witness for men to the salvation acquired once for all in Jesus. (P. vii)

That would seem to be worth the lengthy quote to tell you what you're getting for Christmas. If some of the accents on the Holy Communion are stronger than the stress you are giving it, it would be helpful to read again the introduction which Fred Lindemann provided for his volumes. If some of the terminology does not quite sound like that you use, if malady and means are not mentioned, if Law-Gospel does not appear as a hyphenated word, it serves helpfully to force more careful reading and more prayerful thought toward one's own conclusions. There are here provided some of the very specific connections which pastor and people require if the service is to come alive and come together Sunday after Sunday. It is cause for giving thanks to God how helpfully post Vatican II materials support the construction of Lutheran sermons.

Why wait for Christmas? You pay the bills anyway. Order now in time for your Advent sermonizing. Get accustomed to working with the book this year so that you can really handle it when next Christmas you get a tri-cycle.

GEORGE W. HOYER

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

The Season: The first service of the liturgical year has such a wealth of objectives that they may seem to cancel each other out. God's people are being invited into a year of worship, of Word and Sacrament. "Coming" in the administration of the church's schools seems pretty well aimed at preparation for Christmas. The expectation of God's people for the return of Christ to judgment is apt

to seem little more than liturgical politeness. Trying to achieve serious reflection upon sin may appear to be "preparation" for the good word of Christmas, a sort of deal of contrition for favors to be received. With such a wealth of concepts about to circulate in the minds of worshipers, it behooves the preacher to be as simple, direct, evangelical as he can, in putting his parish on the track of salutary worship for the season and day.

The Day:

Old Standard	ILCW Lectionary
O. T. Jer. 33:14-18	Is. 62:1-12
Ep. Rom. 13:11-14	Rom. 13:10-14a
Gos. Matt. 21:1-9	Luke 19:29-38

The new OT lection expands on the promise of Jeremiah to the church under the Messiah; it will come up out of trial and defeat to display God's glory before the Gentiles, and triumphs of the Gospel and the fulfillment of God's purposes will mark the elapse of time right down to the end. It would be helpful to have this lesson read either by a suitably experienced individual, or by a trained speech choir which had carefully learned to exploit the tremendous feeling of this chapter and to communicate the good cheer and hopefulness of the vision. This Isaiah chapter underscores the mood of the Introit and the Gradual with a counterpoise of hope that can already lay hold on God's redemption and Redeemer.

The epistle stresses not so much hope as persistence in faith, and links the meaning of Jesus Christ with the behavior of God's people. The last half-verse is a curious excision.

Christ's entry into Jerusalem, also the lesson for Palm Sunday, is retained from the standard lectionary, but in the Lukan version. At the beginning of Holy Week it sets the stage for the Passion history. At the beginning of the church year it invites to a "following" or "hailing" of Jesus. The propers for the day have signaled minds that are duly intent upon that process. The entire service with its hymnody and Sacrament, and the educational activities of the parish preceding the service, will be needed to help the preacher bring this objective to fruition.

The contrasts from the Matthean pericope are few: a colt, rather than an ass and its colt; conversation with the owner; the disciples spread garments on the road, and the multitude sounding its praise is identified

as that of the disciples, praising "God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen"; no reference to palm branches; and a unique song of praise with a clause found in none of the other gospels, "Blessed be the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" The differences are no hardship for the interpreter. Are they of any benefit to the preacher? Luke sets out the redemptive act of God in the Christ with particular reference to the Gentile church as it receives the Gospel (1:1-4). Proclamation is the watchword, and the song of the angels at Bethlehem resounds in this text with the unique variation, "In heaven peace, and glory in the highest." A theme for the day and for the sermon on the Gospel begins to take shape:

The Sermon: BLESS THE KING AS HE KEEPS ON COMING!

The heart of the Christian's faith, Jesus Christ, God's Son, comes to His people. Bless Him! Meet Him! Be where He is coming!

I. He came once.

- A. Men were in desperate need without Him, renegades from God.
- B. God promised His coming, to bring men back again to God.
- C. He came; how the angels sang! God's peace had returned to men. The Christ lived among men, servant and healer. He died for the sins of the world. The text tells of His entrance on the final act of the redemption. His disciples sang: In heaven peace; glory in the highest!

II. He will come again.

- A. We have been won for His kingdom. Can we remain obedient and faithful, in order to enter with Him upon His final kingdom?
- B. His Second Coming will mark the

end of much of what we are apt to treasure falsely; but it will enhance all that is lastingly good now.

- C. Can we hold out in faith until He takes us home? "All they that wait on Thee shall not be ashamed."

III. He is coming!

- A. For another service of worship, for another year of services, we gather about our Lord and give Him our honor, we remember who He is and seek to honor Him the way His first disciples did at His first entrance.
- B. The heart of our joy and faith is God's peace, which Christ has established and reestablishes anew each time we ponder His redeeming work and receive His body and blood.
- C. Can we outwit and outlast the ways of the world and of our flesh that would weaken our vision, slacken the tension of our waiting and praise?
- D. Here He is to stir up our hearts, to bring rescue not just at the Last Day but right now as we remember that He is our King and puts His rule into our hearts anew, as He assures us of the peace and love of God through the power of His own death and rising again to life and rule.

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

The Day:

Old Standard	ILCW Lectionary
O. T. Micah 4:1-7	Mal. 4:1-6
Ep. Rom. 15:4-13	Heb. 12:25-29
Gos. Luke 21:25-36	Mark 13:19-27

The menace of the testing-time of the last days, so pronounced in the OS Gospel and its ILCW parallel for this Sunday, is not sustained in such intensity in the ancient Prop-ers, which are positive and optimistic. The

OS Epistle is one of the great lessons of the Scriptures concerning the Bible itself, and in the course of centuries that choice led to the denominating of this Sunday as "Bible Sunday." Only the Gradual has a note of warning.

The Malachi pericope, the closing paragraph of the Old Testament, links the positive mood of the Micah vision with a reminder of "the terrible day of the Lord." The Epistle is quite in contrast to Romans. It is an almost unrelieved word of warning, quite compatible with the traditional Gospel for the day. Its special value lies in its holding out the help in the redeeming act of Christ not merely for the survival of the final holocaust, but for a place in the kingdom of God in which we already now serve God "with reverence and godly fear." This pericope is especially rich in Gospel resource as it leads the reader and preacher back into the preceding context.

Before addressing the Gospel, it is useful to note that the Collect for the Day in contrast to Advent I addresses the Father, but with the same plea, "Stir up!" The coming for which it prays is not merely the final one, but the one through which already we are enabled to serve God with pure minds.

The motif of the Second Coming is strong in the Gospel selections. The OS Luke 21:25-36 lection includes a few parallels with the ILCW version from Mark, and more lie in the contexts: signs in heaven, v. 25; the Son of Man coming in the cloud with power and great glory, v. 27; the parable of the fig tree, v. 28, is in the context of the Markan section. Unique elements in the Markan pericope are: the acute distress of the last days, which will be shortened for the sake of the elect, v. 20; false Christs, vv. 21-23; the gathering of the elect on the Last Day, v. 27. The heart of the Markan message is Christ, but Christ as He acts in the world. In this section the central objective or goal of Jesus' teaching and warning is in

the context, v. 33: "Take heed" . . . "watch and pray" (vv. 35-37 and 23). The concern for the elect is primary, the days are shortened for their sake, the tests are almost strong enough to deceive them, they will be gathered from the four corners of the earth. The Lukan term "the kingdom is nigh at hand" or "redemption draws near" here is termed, "They will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory; and then He will send out the angels and gather His elect." (Vv. 26-27)

If the ILCW lectionary is employed not merely for preaching, but for the lessons in the service, then the chief accent for the day and the sermon becomes:

The Sermon: TRUE WATCHFULNESS FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST

Watch! We watch out for danger; we watch with eagerness and anticipation for prized moments. The middle ground—no danger, no worth—is actually where the real and lasting dangers lie. Our Lord counsels us to be watchful, for He is coming again. What is true watchfulness?

- I. In vision.
 - A. Not misled by apathy, stupor, weariness, the numbness of pain.
 - B. But mindful of the future for which He has redeemed us in Jesus Christ.
- II. In wisdom.
 - A. Not beguiled by false promises, utopian or catastrophic teaching, threats or magic, materialism of this time or terror of the future.
 - B. But strengthened by God, mindful of what He has done through His Christ.
- III. In courage.
 - A. Not quailing under the most arduous of trials and difficulties.
 - B. But remembering why God employs them even for His elect, remember-

ing that He chose us to be His own in Christ and redeemed us all the way.

IV. In prayer.

- A. Not silent toward God in thoughtlessness, disgust, faithlessness.
- B. But clinging to Him as Father because He has redeemed us to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

"Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Thine only-begotten Son."

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THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Is. 40:1-8; Rom. 15:4-13; Matt. 3:1-12

In this service and the sermon on the Epistle Lesson (Rom. 15:4-13), we focus on the theme: *Our Abounding Advent Hope*.

St. Paul uses the word "hope" four times in the sermon text. The Propers and sermon text speak repeatedly of God's comings, which form the basis for our hope. We have a future, because God has acted in past comings to judge and redeem His people.

In Is. 40:1-8 the prophet announces God's coming to restore His people from exile in Babylon. What a hope that coming afforded! The people prayed the Gradual hopefully, "Stir up Thy strength and come . . . come and save us!" And God "did bring back the captivity of Jacob." (Introit) Hallelujah!

"The Root of Jesse shall come," Isaiah had prophesied, and St. Paul quotes him in our text (Rom. 15:12). The Coming One is now about to establish God's rulership. He rises to rule the Gentiles. (Matt. 3:2; Rom. 15:12; Gen. 49:10)

The Gospel shows the forerunner, John the Baptist, as he begins his public ministry. (The Standard Gospel, Matt. 11:2-10, pictures John the Baptist in prison near the end

of his ministry.) He announces that all God's comings will climax in the advent of "the Greater One" (Matt. 3:11). "Christ became a servant . . . to show God's truthfulness . . . in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs." (Rom. 15:8)

He comes *now* to instruct us "by steadfastness and encouragement of the Scriptures" (Rom. 15:4). He comes in answer to our prayer "to enlighten the darkness of our hearts by Thy gracious visitation." (Collect)

Indeed, His comings in the past mean we have being now and a future. And that sure future radically affects our lives right now. He has "baptized us with His Holy Spirit" (Matt. 3:11), so that we bear fruits that befit a changed person. We "let our moderation be known to all men" (Introit). The sermon text records St. Paul speaking especially to Gentile Christians in the Roman congregation and exhorting them to show a loving forbearance toward weak Christians, probably Christians from the Jewish community who had scruples about diet and holy days. Christians who have a patient hope will also show patience toward others weak in the faith.

Abounding in Advent Hope

The goal of the sermon: that the hearers will, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Scriptures read and proclaimed, abound more and more in hope and the related virtues of steadfastness, encouragement, and harmony.

I. Advent hope abounds, because its Source is the Triune God Himself, the "God of Hope" (Rom. 15:13).

A. Our fleshly nature wants a secular hope based on things we can see, acquire, manage, and control, but eventually such hope is vain. God denounces and overthrows any hope that finds security in anything but Himself.

B. We hope in "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:6).

This merciful God fulfilled His promises in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in Him and His resurrection gives us the basis for a better, living hope (Rom. 15:12; Col. 1:27; 1 Peter 1:13). In Christ Jesus the Christian has the assurance of the things he hopes for; he has a demonstration of those things he does not see. (Heb. 11:1)

C. Faith and hope seize this mercy and so have a future. The hope of the Bible is a confident waiting upon a future given by God. Keep on hoping!

II. Advent hope abounds, because it confidently and patiently expects only good from God.

A. Hope based on our feelings and/or favorable conditions around us will also fade and die. Such hope leads to impatience, unsteadiness, and anxiety. It leaves people having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph. 2:12; 1 Thess 4:13)

B. The steadfast mercy of God in the past and present helps us face the future with confidence that this same God will send only that which works for our good. Tribulation only strengthens our confidence. (Rom. 2-5; Phil. 4:4-6)

C. Through the Scriptures God gives us more and more of His own steadfastness and encouragement, joy and peace (Rom. 15:4). Thus our future expectation affects our present attitudes and conduct. What we shall be influences what we are!

III. Advent hope abounds, because it is shared in God's community.

- A. God establishes this community, His church. He acted in faithfulness to Jews and in mercy to Gentiles that both might have the same hope in Him (Rom. 15:8-9). He welcomes all in Christ Jesus; we should accept and warmly welcome all to share the hope He has promised to all (Rom. 15:7; 14:3). An all-inclusive unity gives glory to God. (Rom. 15:6)
- B. Self-centered forces want to limit the community and its common hope. We may welcome some, our kind of people, not all. We often tend to think the weak in the faith are "hopeless." We grow impatient with the weak and judge them rather than shoulder the burden of their doubts and fears (Rom. 14:1; 15:1-2). As we please ourselves and go on our own sweet way, we fail to build others for their good; we do not follow the example and character of Jesus Christ. (Rom. 15:3)
- C. The Holy Spirit sends power to and through His people as they gather in worship around His Word, His channel for encouragement and steadfastness (Rom. 15:13b; Rom. 14:17). We unite our praises; we rehearse the comings of God, and thus He comes again and our hope is strengthened (Rom. 15:9-11). We pray for each other the same prayer St. Paul prayed for the Roman Christians. (Rom. 15:13)

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Jer. 23:5-6; Phil. 4:4-7; Luke 1:26-38 or Luke 1:46-55

The Introit (Is. 45:8) sings notes of joyful exultation, because God extends His salvation to His people. Read Is. 44:21—45:25. Then you understand better the rea-

son for the joyful song. These people rejoice *in God* (Is. 45:25). He has forgiven His people and returned them to Himself and will return them to their homeland (Is. 44:22). So all creation sings and shouts for joy to God. (Is. 44:23)

"Let the skies pour down righteousness" (Introit). This truth, expressed in poetical imagery, became a historical fact! The O. T. Lesson (Jer. 23:5-6) tells us God's promise to send a King, a "righteous Branch," from the family tree of David. Jesus Christ came from heaven as the "Branch" and "executed justice and righteousness in the land." What good news then and now to a people scattered, captive, fearful, dismayed! (Jer. 23:1-4)

When this Lord comes to us, "our mouths shall speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh shall bless His holy name" (Gradual). Like John the Baptist, we become voices "crying in the wilderness" and pointing people to Jesus, the Christ (John 1:19-28). What better time than Christmas to announce that the Messiah has come? Share your joy in Christ with others, and it increases!

The revised pericopes above show the Annunciation or the Magnificat as Gospel texts. As the angel announces the conception and birth of the Son of the Most High, our hearts leap for joy, even as did the infant John in his mother's womb (Luke 1:44). With Mary, we declare the greatness of the Lord, and our spirits, too, rejoice in God our Savior. (Luke 1:46-47)

Phil. 4:4-7

Are You Rejoicing in the Lord Always?

- I. Are you rejoicing in the Lord at all times or rejoicing only at certain times, when all goes well?
- A. Of course, rejoice in good times, because God's salvation and peace includes many good times and good things.

- B. But Christian joy is active also in bad times. In the Letter to the Philippians, St. Paul exhorts them to joy and rejoicing 16 times. And he writes from prison!
- C. Constant joy is based on the Lord, who is at hand. God is the Source of pure joy, and perfect joy lies in the future with Him. However, He has shown us His love in the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. We celebrate the past and anticipate the future. Joy leaps between the two poles of His First Coming and His Final Coming. Conditions around us cannot cut off that joy.
- II. Are you rejoicing in the Lord or are you seeking instant, man-made happiness?
- A. Millions of people today seek happiness in bottles or boxes of happiness pills. They seek joy in alcohol, drugs, entertainment, or sensuality. "Their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame" (Phil. 3:19). How often, however, chemical happiness and glandular pleasure end in "destruction." (Phil. 3:19)
- B. Lasting joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus Christ from the Father (Gal. 5:22; Rom. 14:17; 15:13). Remember, at your baptism you received the Holy Spirit. Keep asking Him for His gift of Himself and His joy (Luke 11:13). Let this Spirit through the Good News of His Gospel fill you more and more with joy!
- C. How good to feel joyful! But do not joy in joy or the emotion of joy, because feelings can and do vary. Rather, base your joy on God, who is constant and unchanging. Do not tie your joy to the emotion of joy, but hook it by faith to God.
- III. When worries hinder your rejoicing in the Lord always, what do you do? Do you take your worries to people only or to God Himself? Do you complain about everything or give thanks for everything?
- A. In times of radical and swift change, we find many causes for anxiety.
- B. Share your anxieties with fellow Christians. St. Paul shared his problems with others by letters, and he was thankful for companions who visited him in prison.
- C. But above all, "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Phil. 4:6)
1. Tell God your anxieties. Make specific requests.
 2. But pray *with thanksgiving*, lest your prayers reinforce your fears and discourage you. Beware of the sour godliness that complains about everything to God and men. Let "thank You" prayers counterbalance your "give me" prayers.
- D. The peace of God stands guard over our hearts and minds.
1. "Peace of God" is peace from God, the peace which God gives in and through Jesus, the Prince of Peace. It is not based only on human understanding but by faith exists in relation to Jesus.
 2. The vandals of anxiety cannot get in to wreck minds and hearts when this peace, like a soldier, stands guard at the door of our inner life!
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