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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

INTRODUCTION

With this issue we begin homiletic suggestions for the Sundays of the coming year based on the new lectionary proposed by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship. There is a bonus provided—Rev. George W. Bornemann, pastor of Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church, Elmhurst, Ill., remembered by CTM readers for earlier programs of Bible readings coordinated with the Sunday sermons, here supplies suggestions for readings in the home which help to emphasize the premise of the new lectionary—we will be blessed as we study the Sacred Scriptures. He supplies as well the sermon studies for the Sundays in Advent. Space may not make possible the completion of this yearly schedule of Bible readings, but we would appreciate comments from those of the readers who find this a help in their parish programs.

George W. Hoyer

CALENDAR AND LECTIONARY

This calendar and lectionary combines Sunday's lessons prepared by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship and Daily Bible Readings to be used in conjunction with the regular lessons. The congregation is asked to read the daily lessons and thus be better prepared to enjoy the Good News preached from the pulpit. The sermon becomes a climax and capsule of the week's previous readings.

Cycle A uses for the day's gospel the Gospel According to Matthew. The readings are from the Pentateuch and early prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings), together with Matthew, John, and other New Testament writings. Saturday's lesson includes Sunday's gospel.

Cycle B uses for the day's gospel the Gospel According to Mark. The readings are from the later prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Little Twelve), together with Mark, John, and other New Testament writings. Sunday's lesson includes Sunday's epistle.

Cycle C uses for the day's gospel the Gospel According to Luke. The readings are from the "Writings" (Job, Proverbs, Chronicles, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Daniel), together with Luke, John, and other New Testament writings.

The schedule in general Christian use calls for Cycle A, 1974-75; Cycle B, 1975-76; and Cycle C, 1973-74, and again, 1976-77.

The suggested sermon topic is based on the day's gospel, supplemented by the theological emphases of the Daily

Bible Readings and, if possible, the day's epistle, Old Testament lesson, and psalm.

Week of Nov. 26—Dec. 2, 1973

- Mon. Job 1:1-22
- Tues. Job 2:1-13
- Wed. Ps. 1:1-6 (Antiphon 1:6)
- Thurs. Luke 1:1-4
- Fri. Luke 19:28-40
- Sat. Luke 21:25-36
- Sun. 1 Thess. 3:9-13

First Sunday in Advent

- Psalm—1*
- OT Lesson—Jer. 33:14-16*
- Epistle—1 Thess. 3:9-13*
- Gospel—Luke 21:25-36 or 19:28-40*
- Sermon—"Standing in the Presence of God"*

Week of Dec. 3-9, 1973

- Mon. Job 3:1-26
- Tues. Job 4:1-21
- Wed. Job 5:1-27
- Thurs. Ps. 92:1-15 (Antiphon 92:1)
- Fri. Luke 1:5-25
- Sat. Luke 3:1-16
- Sun. Phil. 1:3-11

Second Sunday in Advent

- Psalm 92*
- OT Lesson—Mal. 3:1-4*
- Epistle—Phil. 1:3-11*
- Gospel—Luke 3:1-6*
- Sermon—"The Forgiveness of Sins"*

Week of Dec. 10-16, 1973

- Mon. Job 6:1-30
- Tues. Job 7:1-21
- Wed. Job 8:1-22
- Thurs. Ps. 58:1-11 (Antiphon 58:11)

Fri. Luke 1:26-38
 Sat. Luke 3:7-18
 Sun. Phil. 4:4-7

Third Sunday in Advent

Psalm—58
OT Lesson—Zeph. 3:14-18a
Epistle—Phil. 4:4-7
Gospel—Luke 3:7-18
Sermon—“The Coming Retribution and Judgment”

Week of Dec. 17—23, 1973

Mon. Job 9:1-35
 Tues. Job 10:1-22
 Wed. Job 11:1-25
 Thurs. Ps. 139:1-24
 (Antiphon 139:1, 14)
 Fri. Ps. 21:1-13 (Antiphon 21:13)
 Sat. Luke 1:39-80
 Sun. Heb. 10:5-10

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Psalm—139
OT Lesson—Micah 5:2-4
Epistle—Heb. 10:5-10
Gospel—Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)
Sermon—“A Body for God”

Week of Dec. 24—30, 1973

Mon. Titus 2:11-14
 Tues. Luke 2:1-20
 Wed. Job 12:1-25
 Thurs. Job 13:1-28
 Fri. Job 14:1-22
 Sat. Luke 2:25-38
 Sun. Heb. 2:10-18

The Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Day (Tuesday)

Psalm—67 (Antiphon 67:3)
OT Lesson—Is. 9:2-7; 52:7-10; 62:10-12
Epistle—Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 1:1-9
 Titus 3:4-7
Gospel—Luke 2:1-20; John 1:1-18;
 Luke 2:1-20
Sermon (Luke 2:1-20): “Joy for All People”

First Sunday after Christmas

Psalm—39 (Antiphon 39:4)
OT Lesson—Jer. 31:10-13
Epistle—Heb. 2:10-18
Gospel—Luke 2:25-38
Sermon—“Born to Suffer”

Week of Dec. 31—Jan. 6, 1974

Mon. Rom. 1:1-7
 Tues. Luke 2:21-39
 Wed. Luke 2:39-52
 Thurs. Job 15:1-33
 Fri. Ps. 72:1-19

Sat. Matt. 2:1-12
 Sun. Eph. 3:2-12

The Name of Jesus (Tuesday)

Psalm—130 (Antiphon 130:1)
OT Lesson—Num. 6:22-27
Epistle—Rom. 1:1-7
Gospel—Luke 2:21
Sermon—“God’s Gospel Makes All Years New”

Week of Second Sunday after Christmas (omitted during 1973—74)

Mon. Job 16:1-32
 Tues. Job 17:1-16
 Wed. Job 18:1-21
 Thurs. Job 19:1-29
 Fri. Job 20:1-29
 Sat. John 1:1-18
 Sun. Eph. 1:3-6, 15-18

Second Sunday after Christmas

Psalm—119:17-24 (Antiphon 119:24)
OT Lesson—Is. 61:10—62:3
Epistle—Eph. 1:3-6, 15-18
Gospel—John 1:1-18
Sermon—“Seeing God in the Flesh”

The Epiphany of Our Lord (Jan. 6)

Psalm—72:1-19 (Antiphon 72:18, 19)
OT Lesson—Is. 60:1-6
Epistle—Eph. 3:2-12
Gospel—Matt. 2:1-12
Sermon—“No Limits to God’s Love”

Week of Jan. 7—13, 1974

Mon. Job 21:1-34
 Tues. Job 22:1-30
 Wed. Job 23:1-17
 Thurs. Job 24:1-25
 Fri. Ps. 40 (Antiphon 40:11)
 Sat. Luke 3:1-22
 Sun. Acts 10:34-38

The Baptism of Our Lord (First Sunday after Epiphany)

Psalm—40
OT Lesson—Is. 42:1-7
Epistle—Acts 10:34-38
Gospel—Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
Sermon—“God’s Favorites”

Week of Jan. 14—20, 1974

Mon. Job 25:1—26:14
 Tues. Job 27:1-23
 Wed. Job 28:1-28
 Thurs. Ps. 96:1-13 (Antiphon 96:10)
 Fri. Luke 4:1-13
 Sat. John 2:1-11
 Sun. 1 Cor. 11:2—12:11

(Note: Epistles from 1 Corinthians occur

as follows during Epiphany:

Cycle A, from Epiphany II to VIII;
Cycle B, from Epiphany II to VI; and
Cycle C, from Epiphany II to VIII.)

Second Sunday after Epiphany

Psalm—96

OT Lesson—Is. 62:1-5

Epistle—1 Cor. 12:3-11

Gospel—John 2:1-11

Sermon—"To See God's Glory"

Week of Jan. 21—27, 1974

Mon. Job 29:1-25

Tues. Job 30:1-31

Wed. Job 31:1-40

Thurs. Ps. 45:1-17 (Antiphon 45:1, 7)

Fri. Ps. 2:1-12 (Antiphon 2:11)

Sat. Luke 4:14-21

Sun. 1 Cor. 12:12-27

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Psalm—45

OT Lesson—Is. 61:1-6

Epistle—1 Cor. 12:12-21

Gospel—Luke 4:14-21

Sermon—"The Holy Spirit Uses
Christ and His Body"

Week of Jan. 28—Feb. 3, 1974

Mon. Job 32:1-22

Tues. Job 33:1-33

Wed. Job 34:1-37

Thurs. Ps. 119:105-118
(Antiphon 119:105)

Fri. Ps. 119:161-176
(Antiphon 119:175)

Sat. Luke 4:21-30

Sun. 1 Cor. 12:27—13:13

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Psalm—119:105-118

OT Lesson—Jer. 1:4-10

Epistle—1 Cor. 12:31—13:13

Gospel—Luke 4:21-30

Sermon—"Words of Grace from His
Lips"

Week of Feb. 4—10, 1974

Mon. Job 35:1-16

Tues. Job 36:1-25

Wed. Job 37:1-24

Thurs. Ps. 8:1-9 (Antiphon 8:1)

Fri. Ps. 119:25-40 (Antiphon 119:27)

Sat. Luke 5:1-39

Sun. 1 Cor. 14:1-40

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Psalm—8

OT Lesson—Is. 6:1-8

Epistle—1 Cor. 14:12-20

Gospel—Luke 5:1-11

Sermon—"Overwhelmed by God's
Wonders"

Week of Feb. 11—17, 1974

Mon. Job 38:1-41

Tues. Job 39:1-30

Wed. Job 40:1-24

Thurs. Job 41:1-34

Fri. Job 42:1-17

Sat. Luke 6:1-26

Sun. 1 Cor. 15:1-28

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Psalm—42 (Antiphon 42:11) and
43 (Antiphon 43:4)

OT Lesson—Jer. 17:5-8

Epistle—1 Cor. 15:12, 16-20

Gospel—Luke 6:17-26

Sermon—"Blessing of the Faith"

**Week of Seventh Sunday after Epiphany
(omitted during 1973—74)**

Mon. Prov. 1:1-33

Tues. Prov. 2:1-23

Wed. Prov. 3:1-35

Thurs. Ps. 119:65-80
(Antiphon 119:77)

Fri. John 1:1-33

(Note: John is read in its entirety in each of the cycles during Lent and Easter; Matthew, Mark, and Luke are not used as Sunday Gospels in most of this season.)

Sat. Luke 6:27-38

Sun. 1 Cor. 15:29-50

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

Psalm—119:65-80 (Antiphon 119:77)

OT Lesson—Gen. 45:1-7

Epistle—1 Cor. 15:35-38a, 42-50

Gospel—Luke 6:27-38

Sermon—"God's Wisdom Gives Life"

**Week of Eighth Sunday after Epiphany
(omitted during 1973—74)**

Mon. Prov. 4:1-27

Tues. Prov. 5:1-23

Wed. Prov. 6:1-35

Thurs. Prov. 7:1-27

Fri. John 2:1-23

Sat. Luke 6:39-49

Sun. 1 Cor. 15:51-58

Eighth Sunday after Epiphany

Psalm—37:1-40 (Antiphon 37:23)

OT Lesson—Is. 55:10-13

Epistle—1 Cor. 15:51-58

Gospel—Luke 6:39-45

Sermon—"The Labors in Faith
Produce Results"

Week of Feb. 18—24, 1974

Mon. Prov. 8:1-36

Tues. Prov. 9:1-18

Wed. John 3:1-36

Thurs. John 4:1-54

Fri. Ps. 97:1-12 (Antiphon 97:1, 6)

Sat. Luke 9:28-36

Sun. 2 Cor. 4:3-6

The Transfiguration of Our Lord (the Last Sunday after Epiphany)

Psalm—97

OT Lesson—Deut. 34:1-12

Epistle—2 Cor. 4:3-6

Gospel—Luke 9:28-36

Sermon—"Enlightenment in Glory"

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Gospel: Luke 21:35-36 (alternate Luke 19:28-40)

Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

OT Lesson: Jeremiah 33:4-16

Today's lessons make us aware of standing in God's presence. Afraid of the dangers facing the people of God, Paul in the epistle rejoices that they believe. He prays that they remain firm in God when summoned to danger, so they will be able to stand in God's presence. The Old Testament lesson notes that in the latter days Jerusalem will be no more a word of shame but of glory, a possession of God. The gospel encourages us to watch and to pray, for we will stand in His presence when He comes.

Aids: Disturbance in the heavens causes the sea to surge (Ps. 65:8; Job 38:11), and this causes all nations (*ethne*) to react in fear. A new creation, a new heaven and earth are coming, for the Creator is at work in judgment. The Son of Man (Dan. 7:13) comes in the cloud of glory (*shekinah*, Ex. 34:5). As always, where God is at work, deliverance (*apolytroxis*) comes, including forgiveness. Bowed down, we are summoned to look up. Blossoming and fruiting trees announce summer's nearness. The disturbances above us are signs of the nearing promised kingdom.

Wanting signs (Luke 11:29-32) and asking for signs (Luke 21:1 ff.), the present generation will see Jerusalem fall (verses 5-24), a Jerusalem which rejected its Lord. This is a foretaste of the full world that is to fall.

Aroused to be on guard we cannot set the day. He comes in judgment not merely for Jerusalem but for all people, but His

day means redemption for His people.

Standing in His Presence

Introduction

1. The coming kingdom of God (Advent) is *for Christ*. He arrives in His world. Men reject Him when He is present as when He was absent. He destroys all that destroyed His world: sin, death, satan.

2. The coming kingdom of God is *for us*. He comes through His words which never pass away (Luke 21:33), so we are cleansed to stand in His presence.

3. The coming kingdom of God is *for all people*. He comes and all will stand in His presence.

I. The signs which precede His coming

A. *Ignorance:* nations will not understand what is going on or which way to turn from upheaval in the heavens (Ps. 65:8; Job 38:11). The Lord gave; the Lord is taking away (Job 1:21).

B. *Fear:* men would turn and curse God (Job 1:9, 10). All is disorder in their eyes.

II. The Son of Man presents Himself

A. The event as spoken in Daniel 7:13-14, brings liberation.

B. Joy results with freedom from all forces, from sin, death, satan, nature.

III. All our selves to prepare

A. This generation shall see fulfillment of word. Jerusalem is a paradigm of what's coming on the whole world. But His Word endures.

B. Knowing His Word is to be fulfilled, we watch and pray.

Watch—for signs in universe?

No. For budding trees? No. For the Son of Man on cloud? No. Watch your self; watch our lives. He comes any time (Luke 17:24); the day comes as a trap (Is. 24:17-18). The emphasis is suddenness, not immediacy.

Pray—be in His presence now.

When two or three are gathered in His name, He is there. We're children of the heavenly Father and converse with Him.

Whenever He comes—at the first or second Advent, daily in Word and Sacrament, or at regeneration or final redemption—He comes that we may be in His presence.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

Epistle: Philippians 1:3-11

OT Lesson: Malachi 3:1-4

Today's lessons make us aware of the gospel's goal: the forgiveness of sins. God fulfills His covenant and delivers His own. What He began He completes, and so His glory is revealed. The Baptizer is a man in a moment of history. After centuries of silence the voice of the prophet is heard in the land proclaiming the Good News of God's forgiveness of sins in the act of baptism. All mankind will see. Prepare the road! The holy people, the holy places, the holy things will be purified and refined. The forgiveness of sins is the ultimate goal.

Aids: The cleansing at the Jordan was *not*, and yet at the same time really *was*, "once upon a time." It was a moment in history and was no small matter (Acts 26:26). It is here that the Gospel begins (Mark 1:1; Acts 10:32). The exactness of the time structure requires a listing of Roman rulers and Jewish leaders. At that mark in history the Word of God, divinely inspired, came on (*epi*) John, just as God approached the prophets Samuel to Malachi. It was John, the son of Zechariah, who proclaimed as well as practiced the baptism washing as a release (*aphesis*) from God. John's proclamation was a washing to bring about a change of face. John also is the hinge on the boards which hold together the Old and New Testaments. He holds to one and points to the other. He is the voice in Israel announcing to her God's deliverance to all peoples. The Isaiah 40:3-5 quotation is practically word for word from the Alexandrian version of the Old Testament, and proclaims a leading to the forgiveness of sins, a deliverance.

Toward the Forgiveness of Sins

Introduction

God's new beginning comes in the forgiveness of sins to be manifested in the Christ. From the beginning mankind was marred as sin entered the world. Now, a change. History will be divided into two sections. It is the role of John the Baptizer to bring the message for the ages in that moment of history.

I. Moment in History

A. Exactness of dating. Tiberius in

Rome (a tyrant); Herod in Judea (once an admirer of John); Philip of Iturea (best of Herod's three sons); unknown Lysanias of Lebanon. This is an important moment (Acts 26:26). Consider church and state: the church is disorganized (Annas and Caiaphas), and the kingdom is divided. There is political power and chaos, moral degradation and religious uncertainty.

B. Out of a wilderness a voice speaks. Sin reaps sin (Job 4:8). History continues its flow. The assembly line does not stop. But then God has a revelation in that moment.

II. Man of the Hour

A. The Gospel begins here with the Baptizer (Mark 1:1-5; Matt. 3; John 1:6-9). See Acts 1:22; 10:37; 13:24.

B. Separated at birth (a Nazarite, as others before him). Job might curse the day of his birth (Job 3), but John had a task. He is a prophet upon whom came the Word of the Lord. A theophany occurs (John 1:33; compare Jer. 1:1; Ezek. 1:3; Jonah 1:1) as with all prophets.

III. Message for the Ages

A. A new rite and ceremony. Many washings before, but this is to lead to the forgiveness of sin.

B. A means of removing and relaxing sins held against us. It is not "repent and be baptized" (TEV), as though by fulfilling these two requirements man receives forgiveness of sins from God. John is proclaiming a baptism of repentance for forgiveness. It's a means of grace, as God comes to man.

C. The voice cries out. As once Yahweh entered the holy land at the head of His people, so again God comes and John identifies Him with Christ. He comes with salvation for Jews, God's people, and for all. The Isaiah passage, for Luke, is more pronouncement than prophecy. It is deliverance for the whole human race.

And to think it happened! In that moment of history the man of the hour announced the message of the ages for me.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Gospel: Luke 3:7-18

Epistle: Philippians 4:4-7

OT Lesson: Zephaniah 3:14-18a

The lessons for this day point more to God's mercy than to His judgment. A final farewell from Paul has the adjective *epieikes* (as also in 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 3:2; James 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:18), which calls for consideration beyond correctness, justice above law's demands, moral rights above legal rights. What if God insisted on being right? His justice and righteousness will save the people, pronouncing them righteous. His mercy is beyond justice. He does not demand His rights from us nor against us. God's actions are such as to make us pleasant and righteous in His sight.

Aids: John addresses not only Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 3:7) but the public (*ochlos*) and is amazed that these "vipers" received and obeyed the confidential hint (*hypedeixen*) to flee from God's indignation and fury (*orge*). Was he as surprised as was Jonah at Nineveh? A "favored nation clause" is in God's covenant, but no security is established in Abrahamic descent. Abraham may have been the rock from which God hewed Israel (Is. 5:1, 2), but it is God who raises children (*bannaya*) from stones (*abnaya*). As unproductive trees are cut down so is Israel ready for destruction. When asked three times: *ti poisomen* ("What shall we do?" Luke 3:10, 12, 14), John's answer is in action—simple and not complex—as is also suggested in Jesus' encounters with Dives (Luke 16), Zacchaeus (Luke 19), and the centurion (Luke 7). When John demanded separation from evil, people wondered if he were the Christ. His answer was that the One mightier in cleansing is coming. Already He has the fork in hand ready to throw wheat into the wind. The wind itself will separate the grain-to-be-stored from the chaff-to-be-burned. John would proclaim a cleansing with water, but the Messiah would wash and clean *in* the Spirit and fire. The Holy Spirit and fire are God's instruments, one to separate and cleanse and the other to judge and consume (see Is. 4:4). To have evil destroyed, to obtain security in God's granary, John calls men to "turn about" and face the wind. God is ready. This is good news as John preaches it. (*Evangelizer*, v. 18)

Repentance

Introduction

1. "Salvation is for all" (Luke 3:6)—a theme of Christ's coming and of John's proclamation. God's desire is for men to repent, to change.

2. John's work has but one purpose, to preach the Good News (Luke 3:18).

I. We seek a change of heart

A. Vipers are warned of wrath to come. Venom of vipers causes evil. Evil within us affects us (Rom. 7:17-25).

B. Vipers flee from wrath to come. Conscience speaks: "We are victims of our own iniquity" (Job 8:4). Call of conscience (Job 6:4; 7:16-18) and of God strikes response.

C. We cannot hide. No man can plead any special favor (Rom. 9:6-9).

II. We seek a change of our lives

A. "What shall we do?" is a normal, natural response. For each individual there is that question and for each an individual answer. "Each man has his own ladder down to hell."

B. The change in behavior is simple, not complex, affecting us where we are and in what we are doing. For Dives—a child of Abraham!—the answer is to share, following God's Word (Luke 16). For the publican Zacchaeus—a child of Abraham!—a change in behavior follows the coming of salvation (Luke 19). For the centurion—not a child of Abraham, but whose faith is greater than any of Abraham's children!—it is to be content that God's will and word is enough (Luke 19). The obedience of faith demands contentment. See how great faith is to follow God's Word, to trust Him, and having heard His Word, to obey it in faith.

III. How can we find such a change in heart and life and be fully cleansed?

A. We have struggled and sought. We have endeavored to do what we should do. There must be more, for so far is not enough.

B. Without water nothing can flourish, said Job (8:11). John has a water of life, of repentance, of change.

John's baptism is one of repentance toward the forgiveness of sins. John stands in the sunlight and his shadow is upon us. But there is one mightier than John.

- C. A stronger cleansing is required by Him who is the stronger One. We turn and are exposed to the Holy Spirit, the wind of God, as the Messiah casts us into the Spirit. The evil is blown away to be burned and removed from us. And we are cleansed by the Spirit. Our own evil has not injured God but us (Job 7:20, 21). God removes evil and guilt.

God's desire announced by John and His deliverance fulfilled in Christ takes away all man's guilt. Our desire for freedom from the wrath to come and our disappointment in our attempts to do what is right are all set aside by His love and mercy, grace and kindness in Christ.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45

Epistle: Hebrews 10:5-10

OT Lesson: Micah 5:2-4

The three lessons for the day climax God's work of fulfillment, joy for all people. It is the hand of God and not of man which brings deliverance. Gloomy may be the moments of pain waiting for God's fulfillment, whether by natural birth pang or in a figurative sense. Both Mary and Elizabeth express the deliverance and the anticipated joy. The baby delivered at Bethlehem is the Deliverer Himself!

Aids: Mary cannot wait to visit Cousin Elizabeth. Why the urgency (*meta spoudes*)? Is it aged Elizabeth's pregnancy or Mary's bearing the Christ which urges the visit? After the 80-mile trip Mary extends to Elizabeth her personal and powerful greeting (*aspasmon*), which could be "Peace be with you" or "The Lord be with you." The impact of either one is great. Elizabeth's response is prompted by John's reaction, as he is excited at the nearness of "the one Who is to come." Unable to comprehend why the Lord's mother visits her, Elizabeth pronounces her to be "blessed." This is a positive word with comparative or superlative sense. Mary is blessed because of the Child she bears. She is also blessed because of the fulfilled promise. A possibility exists of a twofold

blessing—either blessed because of her action of faith or she will be blessed when she beholds God's action in fulfillment. In Luke 11:27-28 the blessing pronounced on Mary is linked by Jesus more to faith than to motherhood. God's word to be fulfilled means more than Mary's experience of carrying the Child. Gabriel's message cannot help but be fulfilled because it is on the side of the Lord. (*para kyriou*)

Expectant Children or Facing the Coming of Christ

Introduction

Within two days it will be the festival of Christmas. Anticipation runs high. The visit of Mary to Elizabeth has elements of joy and eagerness within it, but also of faith. We see the faithful God keep faith, and we see ourselves summoned to faith.

I. With eagerness we face the coming of Christ

- A. Was Mary's eagerness to see if the angel's words (Luke 1:36) were true? Can miracles happen, even at Christmas? That possibility was questioned by Zacharias (Luke 1:18). Mary accepted the fact before her visit. Her faith increased her eagerness. "I believe; help me when my faith falls short."
- B. Was Mary's eagerness to serve Elizabeth? Mary was eager to serve; consider Cana. She wanted to be the Lord's servant (Luke 1:38). Was she the first Christian nurse? Faith in action wants to serve God and neighbor. "Faith without works is dead."
- C. Was Mary's eagerness to speak about the coming Christ? Her soul would magnify the Lord, her spirit would rejoice in the Savior. She accepted Elizabeth's greetings (Luke 1:48). Faith wants to share the Good News. "I believed; therefore have I spoken."

II. With joy we face the coming of Christ

- A. Was Elizabeth's joy caused by the stirring of the child? Is this coming holiday merely a children's festival? God gives life (Job 10:8-12). Faith sees the gift of a child.
- B. Was the joy caused by the sound of Mary's greeting? If by the Spirit's inspiration she knew that Mary was the "mother of my Lord," did the

words "The Lord be with you" or "Peace be with you" have a greater effect? The very incarnation and presence of the Lord causes faith to respond with joy.

- C. Was the joy caused by the Spirit present in Elizabeth? The fruit of the Spirit is joy. The Spirit being what He is brings good news. The Spirit moves us to receive and accept and also to respond in faith.

III. With faith we face the coming of the Christ

- A. Did Mary have faith and never doubt, as did Zechariah (Luke 1:18)? "How will I know?" "How can this be?" (Luke 1:34). God does things beyond our under-

standing (Job 9:10). Pity poor Zechariah who lived with Mary and Elizabeth for three months, after Elizabeth said to Mary (and probably in his presence), "Blessed are those who believe." Thomas would believe, if . . . Doubt brings sorrow, regret, despair.

- B. Faith gets an answer, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11). God's promises are fulfilled (Luke 1:45). God's words are not idle dreams nor fantasies, but truth.

We approach Christmas to stand at the manger with eagerness, with joy, and with faith, ready to serve. Now we believe; then we shall see face to face.