

# Pericopes for the Divine Service

## Arranged According to the church year

*By Theodore J. Hartwig*

A comment in a theological journal several years ago that the Liturgy might also be treated from the pulpit furnished the impetus for working out this homiletical study of the Divine Service. That some form of instruction in our order of worship will be wholesome and edifying for the worshipping congregation is based on the following considerations:

1. Our people generally do not understand the structure and message of the Liturgy.
2. Whatever the structure may be liturgy is needful in public worship for the sake of good order.
3. A common liturgy in a single congregation as well as among a group of congregations or a synod promotes good order.
4. Liturgy is one of the most conspicuous binding forces among congregations. The sameness of liturgy is a reason for one's feeling "at home" in a sister congregation.
5. In keeping with the spirit of Luther, we do well to preserve the chief elements in the traditional Liturgy which has been received from the ancient church and which, by that same token, unites us in our worship with the church of all ages.
6. Paul's dictum comes to mind: "I had rather speak five words with understanding than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." If our Liturgy were a product of twentieth century Christian worship and Christian life, it might need no formal explanation. However, it is a historical thing and therefore, like Holy Scripture, it requires a degree of explanation if we would make it our own. This does not invalidate the timelessness of our Liturgy. In spite of its age, it is very much up-to-date. It fulfills the needs of the worshipping congregation. In summary, either use it with understanding or substitute, lest what is used deteriorate into empty ritual and vain tradition.

Although this study is pointed to the Divine Service, an attempt was made to synchronize, in their proper sequence, the parts of the service with the message and the continuity of the Church Year. With such an arrangement the danger of topical monotony is more easily avoided, the whole Sunday service remains unified, and the textual treatment can more naturally draw on and be embedded in the primary requisite of all proper preaching: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In keeping with this plan and for greater convenience, the regular Propers of the Church Year have been printed at the head of each topic and sermon study. With the Propers are included the Sunday Sentences and the traditional **Hymns of the Week** which are coming into use in our churches and which help to unify the service. The sermon study itself is not worked out in usual homiletical fashion with suggestions for theme and parts but is merely designed to explain the choice of the text and to furnish key thoughts for use of the text in its relation to the Divine Service and to the Church Year.

That this pericope study was arranged to follow the **Order of Holy Communion** is not an effort to propagandize "the historical place of the Sacrament in the Lutheran church service." It is as pointless to debate whether the church service is or is not complete with or without the Sacrament as it is to argue the relative merits of various wholesome foods. In spiritual matters as in the temporal, we are grateful for all gifts that the Lord furnishes for our need and welfare, and thus we use them when they are offered to us and thank God for the blessing. A careful study of the pericope will also show that the **Order of Holy Communion** proved most practical and expedient for synchronizing the plan with the entire first half of the Church Year.

This study, then, is offered in the spirit of Christian liberty according to which such matters pertaining to liturgy must be judged. May it serve as an aid to the better understanding of our way of worship, as a stimulus to exegetical sermon preparation, and as an encouragement toward restudying the standard pericopes of the

ancient church and thus finding what richness there can be in preaching the Church Year even on the basis of non-standard texts.

To introduce this series of sermons on the Liturgy, a brief explanation of **Our Way of Worship** in the first Sunday bulletin will be appropriate. Such an explanation could be in the form of the following story:

When we Christians come together for church, we leave the world to walk with our God. We walk on a path where God comes to us and we come to Him; where God speaks to us and we speak to Him; where God gives to us and we give to Him. This walking together with God is our **Way of Worship**.

God comes to us first. He makes us ready to meet Him by forgiving our sins. He teaches us to fear and love Him when He speaks to us in the Word and gives Himself to us in the Sacrament. In Word and Sacrament God comes to us with the Lord Jesus and makes our worship a blessing.

Therefore we come to God. We open our lips, our hearts, and our hands. We give to Him, we speak to Him, we speak of Him. We worship Him with praise, prayer, and thanksgiving.

And finally, with God's holy name of blessing upon us, we are ready to leave church and return to our separate callings in this world with Christ in our hearts.

### **Advent**

BEHOLD, THY KING COMETH UNTO THEE!

Hymn 73: Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates!

### **Advent 1**

Theme: Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation (Zech. 9:9).

Propers: Psalm 25:1–5; Romans 13:11–14; Matthew 21:1–9

Hymn 58: O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee

Introductory Sermon: WORSHIP—Sermon Text: I Chronicles 16:23–33

The occasion for which David composed this Psalm (cf. vs. 1 and 7) prefigures the event in the Sunday Gospel.

Our Lord's coming to us today is much like the coming that inspired David to song. We do not see Jesus with our eyes, as did the people of Palm Sunday. He comes veiling Himself in Word and Sacrament. And we see Him by faith. Thus David, when the ark was brought to Jerusalem, rejoiced, because the Lord's word and promise was attached to that ark. In the coming of the ark David by faith saw his King coming to him. That is the most important part of worship. Worship means to receive the Lord who is coming to us because He wants to be our King of mercy and salvation.

Such an event sets into motion the complementary aspect of worship: our prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Here David is our model: vs. 23–33, vs. 34, and vs. 35. Stress the word 'give' (vs. 28, 29). Tell what it means and how it is done. Prayer (vs. 35 is the Palm Sunday **Hosanna!**) is a giving. In prayer we do not teach the Lord what we need, but we express our need for Him and as empty vessels we give ourselves to Him (Isaiah 65:24). Praise is a giving. Our hymns and offerings to the Lord—our speaking of Him to others—belong to praise. We also call upon nature (vs. 32, 33) to join in our praises. One is reminded of the flowers, candles, linens, fine woods, precious metals, organs, and music that we employ in our churches for enhancing the beauty of our worship: outward expressions of giving ourselves to the Lord.

For contrast, the Pharisees of Palm Sunday (Luke 19:39">39f.) may be compared with David's wife, Michael (I Chronicles 15:29). We must become as little children to worship our Lord (Matthew 21:15, Psalm 8).

## Advent 2

Theme: Look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. Luke 21:28

Propers: Psalm 80:1–7; Romans 15:4–13; Luke 21:25–36

Hymn 67: The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us

Sermon: CONFESSION—Psalm 24

Advent-time remains a reality. Like God’s people in the Old Testament, we too may say: The Lord is coming. We hear the Gospel of that coming on this second Advent Sunday.

The twenty-fourth Psalm strikes the same Advent chord (vs. 7–10). The question is not whether those gates and doors will be open when He comes again but whether they are open now. He is coming to us **now**. Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation (Ps. 118). He comes to us now in our Sunday worship. He meets us in Word and Sacrament. Our redemption is very near.

But first the great obstacle must be removed. Hence the question is asked (vs. 3), is answered (vs. 4), and we see the impossibility of our fulfilling such demands. We need the blessing and the righteousness of the Lord. He is the King of glory, and this is His glory, that He won the forgiveness of our sins.

Therefore Confession stands at the beginning of our service: the needful preparation for worship. The Lord makes us ready and that having been done—our gates and doors opened—we go to meet Him and to receive Him. And the King of glory shall come in!

This preparatory part of the service may be called a memorial of Baptism, for Confession is nothing else than a returning to and a renewing of our Baptism (cf. **Large Catechism**, Conc. Trig. 750, 74–79). The similarity between the liturgical versicles immediately preceding the Confession and the first verse of the text will also be noted. In such words and promises from God our faith is strengthened. We may go to Him with our sins. He who “made heaven and earth” has all power. He can and will help. “Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sins.”

## Advent 3

Theme: Prepare ye the way of the Lord. His reward is with him, and his work before him (Isaiah 40:3, 10).

Propers: Psalm 85:1–13; I Corinthians 4:1–5; Matthew 11:2–10

Hymn 61: Comfort, Comfort Ye My People

Sermon: INTROIT—Psalm 85

The text is the original Introit Psalm for the third Advent Sunday. Defined simply, the Introit is a foretaste of the festive meal that is served each Sunday from pulpit and altar.

Two questions are proposed in the Gospel, the one by John, the other by Jesus. Jesus answers both questions. John’s question brings from Jesus the Isaiah testimony regarding the Messiah and His blessings. The question, which Jesus then asks and answers about John’s work as forerunner, tells how those blessings of the Christ become ours.

The Introit furnishes a foretaste of this double message in the Gospel. The firm declaration of faith in verses 1 and 3 comes to a climax in verse 2 and then is developed and expanded in verses 8–13. *Forgiveness!* This is the foretaste, the one word which in the Isaiah passage Jesus breaks up like a beam of light into the seven colors of the rainbow so that we may see it from all angles: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, etc. The terrors of darkness, poverty, and death are whisked away when there is forgiveness.

A foretaste of the second question and its answer in the Gospel is furnished in verses 4–7 of the Psalm. Turn us, O God of our salvation. Change our hearts and minds. Direct us to Jesus who brought us life.

On this third Advent Sunday the Lord again sets His festive meal before us. It offers the gifts of the Advent King and points to the way for receiving those gifts with blessing.

Having worked through an entire Introit Psalm, we may agree with Luther that use of the original Psalm instead of the fragmented versions in the service books will prove more edifying for our people and will better fulfill the objectives of the Introit.

### **Advent 4**

Theme: My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior (Luke 1:46, 47).

Propers: Psalm 19:1–6; Philippians 4:4–7; John 1:19–28

Hymn 62: Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel

Sermon: KYRIE—Luke 1:46–55

The Kyrie rings throughout the church service. We hear it in the opening Confession, in the Gloria in Excelsis, in the Agnus Dei. We meet it in the Psalms and in our hymns. One hesitates to circumscribe the Kyrie with a definition that will reasonably account for its place in the Liturgy—after confession has been made and absolution pronounced. Worship need not proceed in a manner that will conform to rules of logic. Our Liturgy is not the product of an intellectual process. It developed gradually and historically, to become the natural expression of those innermost needs of a human heart, which has been touched by the Gospel. For brevity and simplicity, what prayer better sums up all those needs than “Lord, have mercy upon us.” Our whole life of faith must be a Kyrie. Only with a Kyrie in our hearts will we come to worship our Lord. In keeping with Advent-time and the approaching Christmas we may say: The Kyrie in our hearts is the key to real Christmas rejoicing.

While there are many Bible texts that contain the very words of the Kyrie, our choice harmonizes with the time of the year and especially with the joyful note of the fourth Advent Sunday. And more, Mary’s Christmas carol flows from a Kyrie. Mary was happy and could sing because she had learned to say Kyrie. Mary was humble. Not that she knew it. “True humility does not know it is humble. Else it would become proud from contemplating so fine a virtue” (Luther). Mary is praising God’s gracious regard for a handmaiden. In her humility—the Kyrie in her heart—Mary had the key to real Christmas rejoicing.

There is a special place for the Kyrie in our Liturgy. It has not been silenced after the Confession. We continue to sing and to pray it throughout the Divine Service. We need mercy, and in faith we boldly ask for mercy. We may not be able to sing such grand songs as Mary could. It may be difficult for us to express ourselves in prayer, not knowing what we should pray for, as we ought. But we can sing or say the simple Kyrie with this assurance, that such simple prayer from our stuttering lips will be enlarged and glorified by the Holy Spirit who prays for us at God’s throne in heaven. Romans 8.

### **Christmas**

UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN  
Hymn 92: Now Sing We, Now Rejoice

### **Christmas Day**

Theme: And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. John 1:14

Propers: Psalm 98; Titus 2:11–14; Luke 2:1–14

Hymn 80: All Praise to Thee, Eternal God

Sermon: GLORIA IN EXCELSIS—Luke 2:14

The Gloria in Excelsis is God’s answer to our Kyrie. The text demands that an exposition of this part of the service be a true Christmas sermon.

The Gloria itself, i.e., the song of the angels at the beginning of the hymn, is the chord that God strikes and must first strike, in any and every situation of Christian life, to set the sounding board of our hearts into vibration. That chord is the Christmas event: God’s eternal Son coming into our human flesh and blood. “We

must see God in the manger at Bethlehem. There God would have us know Him. There it pleased God to turn Himself from a hidden to a revealed God. The Christmas birth is God's gracious dealing with man." (Luther) The universal, salvation-bringing grace of God *has appeared*. (Epistle) On this event is founded and grounded the angel song: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

The chord has been struck to set the sounding board into vibration. Then follows the *Laudamus*. Look at the shepherds. Their reaction to the angelic message, their hurrying to Bethlehem, their worshiping, and their "making known abroad the saying" was also a *Laudamus* ... even so here in the liturgical *Laudamus*. In quick succession one word is heaped on another to praise, bless, worship, glorify, and give thanks to God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. But the Gloria with God's Gospel proclamation must be there too. Otherwise the *Laudamus* rings hollow. The *Laudamus* is the echo, repeating and retelling, amplifying and enlarging what has gone before: God's dealings with us, God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

### **Sunday after Christmas**

Theme: Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation. Luke 2:29, 30

Propers: Psalm 93; Galatians 4:1–7; Luke 2:33–40

Hymn 103: To Shepherds as They Watched by Night

Sermon: COLLECT—John 16:23–28

The name given to the prayer following the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the structure of this prayer, and the versicle which precedes it suggest a sermon on *the meaning of prayer in the communion of saints*.

The Collect is a prayer to be prayed together by the whole congregation. The message of the praying Church, and of the blessedness for believers so to pray with one another needs to be heard more often. Prayer is not only a private undertaking on the part of a Christian. There is also the prayer of the whole Church, and in this praying, as in every spiritual communion, there is a confession of oneness and togetherness in faith, - of believers drawn more closely to one another and knit together in cords of love. There is comfort and encouragement in such praying. The prayers of the Church in the opening chapters of Acts, especially in chapter four, should be read again.

The structure of the Collect with the versicle preceding it underscores another truth in respect to the meaning of prayer in the communion of saints. Ever since Jesus lived on earth, His Church has gained possession of a new kind of prayer: that in which Jesus Himself takes part. He calls it praying in His Name. For such prayer, pastor and congregation invite and prepare each other with their reciprocal greeting in which they are saying: "Lord Jesus, be with us; pray with us; pray for us," and with this same petition the Collect itself closes.

The text preaches the meaning of prayer in the communion of saints. It presents the Church—the little band of disciples—in its hour of utmost need, (and that, too, must be, before the Church can learn to pray). It lets us hear Jesus teaching the Church about praying in His Name. If there is room for overtones from the regular Sunday Gospel, let it not be forgotten that Simeon's prophecy about the stone of stumbling and the sign spoken against has been fulfilled many times among faithful Christians to whom the meaning of prayer in the communion of saints was precious.

### **New Year's Day The Circumcision and the Name of Jesus**

Theme: Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. Colossians 3:17

Propers: Psalm 8; Galatians 3:23–29; Luke 2:21

Hymn 122: Now Let Us Come Before Him

Sermon: CHURCH YEAR—Ephesians 1:3–10

Homiletical treatment of the Liturgy has come to a point midway between two sets of Variables: the preceding Introit and Collect and the following Epistle and Gospel. An explanation of the scheme of the Church Year according to which the Variables have been arranged is appropriate at this place in the service and on this occasion of a beginning new year (the Church Year topic may also be used on New Year's Eve or for the Epiphany Festival. (See the comments in connection with the Epiphany Season).

The traditional Church Year is used as the standard time table for our Sunday services. Too often it has remained that, a mere form, except on high festival days or during the Lenten Season. If the form of the Church Year is used, it ought to be employed with understanding. Such use reaches beyond pedantic references to the traditional name of the Sunday and its position in the Church Year or attempts to reconcile the Sunday Scripture lessons with one another. Often, the relation between Introit and Epistle or Gospel will be clear. Occasionally, no relationship is apparent. In any case, harmonization need not be standardized. The Church Year is too rich for such restrictions, and Christian worship does not conform to categorizations. New patterns of thought may be seen with each fresh study of the appointed lessons in any Sunday of the Church Year.

Proper explanation of the Church Year will stress the life of Christ. The Church Year offers the worshiping congregation a way for living with our Lord Jesus. Cf. John 8:31, 32; 15:5. The Church Year brings order and system to that "way." It opposes sectarian tendencies to individualize the service on the order of a program whose central feature is the sermon. In place of such individualization, it offers each Sunday as part of a well-designed and coordinated whole whereby the Christian congregation may re-live the life of Christ and celebrate the great events of that life from season to season instead of from one isolated festival day to another.

In contrast to the calendar year which is regulated by the sun and where time is measured by hours, minutes, and seconds, which in themselves are meaningless—they mark time; they show time to be a temporary, continually-changing thing; they do not solve the great *What* or the *Why* of time—the Church Year lives, moves, and has its being in a different kind of SON. In Him the story of this year was planned before time began. In Him the story of this year continues as long as time lasts. In Him the story of this year is completed when time ends. In the message of the Church Year, i.e., in the life of Christ and of His Body, the Church, we find the eternal meaning of time. In this message God shows us why He permits one calendar year to follow another.

This exposition of the Church Year flows from the text. Ephesians I sweeps through the whole span of human history and human destiny in this world, from the beginning and before (vs. 4) to the end and culmination of all things (vs. 10). It throbs with the quintessence of the Gospel: our eternal election in Christ. It puts Christ in the middle of the divine dispensation and points to that great single event and central truth of all history (vs. 7), whereby this dispensation has become reality. Verse 10 gathers together, synthesizes, and completes what has gone before: a mighty proclamation of the meaning of history, the meaning of time, and the message of the Church Year.

**Sunday after New Year**

Cf. sermon topic for Epiphany. Cf. comments under introduction to Epiphany Season.

**Epiphany**

**the Glory of the Lord is Risen Upon Thee!**

Hymn 343: How Lovely Shines the Morning Star

The topics designated for Epiphany Season should include at least the exposition of Epistle and Gospel. Use of other topics will depend on the length of the season. The preacher is free to choose what he pleases. However, whether it be two weeks or six weeks long, the season ought to be closed with the sermon topic and the Propers regularly appointed for Transfiguration, the last (sixth) Sunday after Epiphany.

## The Epiphany of Our Lord

Theme: The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. I John 2:8

Propers: Psalm 72:1–19; Isaiah 60:1–6; Matthew 2:1–12 and 3:13–17

Hymn 131: The Star Proclaims the King Is Here

Sermon: THE WORD—I John 1:1–4

The *Office of the Word* in Epistle, Gospel, and Sermon is a highpoint of the service. Here God is the Doer, and that is always the most important element of Christian worship, without which there can be no true worship.

In preparation for such great events, it is well for the congregation to hear again what is really happening when the Word is read and expounded in the church service.

As in his other two major writings, so in his first Epistle John begins with a reference to the Word, and thereby he gives evidence of his profound insight into the person and nature of Jesus. The first verse of the text confronts us with the great mystery: the personalized Word. The force of the Greek perfect tenses should be stressed: “we heard (and the sound is still ringing in our ears); we saw (and we retain the picture in our mind).” In the second verse John explains his choice of the name *Word*. All that God did in the person and the life of Jesus—He revealed Himself to be the God of life and salvation—may also be related to the Word. Either name may be used, *Word* or *Jesus*, both referring to one and the same person. John calls Jesus the Word because from the beginning of the world, through the mouth of the Old Testament prophets, in the crib at Bethlehem, on Calvary, it is always the selfsame Jesus in whom alone God made Himself known; and what that Word has done since the beginning, it continues to do when it is shown, spoken, and preached to us. That Word is Jesus speaking and declaring Himself to us.

Therefore the disciples who lived in the visible company of Jesus have no advantages over us (vs. 3). The Word remains with us, and in the Word we share their fellowship with Jesus. When the Scriptures are read, explained, and applied, we are hearing not only the voice of a man, and not only what holy men have written about God, but God is speaking to us through His Son. We do not see the Son. His glory is hidden, but it was also hidden in the manger at Bethlehem, in the formative years at Nazareth, and during most of His earthly life; and in this hidden nature of the divine glory John, more than the other evangelists, sees the glory of Jesus also. In spiritual matters we cannot rely on the senses. We live by faith, as did the shepherds, the wise men, and the disciples, being sure that when the Word is spoken to us, then Jesus is present with His entire blessing.

### Epiphany 1

Theme: We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Propers: Psalm 100; Romans 12:1–5; Luke 2:41–52

Hymn 341: Crown Him with Many Crowns

Sermon: EPISTLE—II Timothy 3:14–17

If the Scripture lessons in the Liturgy were to be arranged in more logical order, we might expect the Epistle to follow the Gospel, because the Epistle usually applies the great objective truths of the Christ-event, exhibited in the Gospel, to Christian faith and Christian life. Christian worship, however, is not governed by the formulations or formalities of logic. The order we observe in the Liturgy is one of gradation: the lessons build up to a climax in the Gospel, which is the heart and core of all Scripture.

The function of the Epistle is reflected in the regular Epistle for Epiphany 1. Romans 12 follows immediately after Paul’s majestic sermon in the first eleven chapters which cover the length and breadth of the Gospel and touch on the most sublime mysteries of the Gospel. The Gospel having been preached, Paul proceeds to practical application: “I beseech you.” The heat will not be separated from the fire. The fire burns to kindle in us the heat of life, activity, devotion, and love.

The choice of the text for a sermon on the Epistle as a liturgical topic was influenced by several factors. There is opportunity for comparison between Timothy (vs. 15) and the twelve-year-old Jesus, who is presented in the regular Gospel for Epiphany 1. There is a good list of practical applications (vs. 16) for which Holy Scripture is profitable or powerfully effective. There is a fine concluding statement, which summarizes the powerful and practical effect of Scripture on the man of God.

The text moves around the opening words of verse 16. Here Paul is not offering a proof passage for the inspiration of Holy Scripture, although it is that for us. He is speaking from the conviction of faith, which the Holy Spirit created in his heart by the Gospel-preaching of Christ crucified. Through the power of the Gospel Paul, and we, are made certain of the divine nature of Scripture; and therefore, *because it is God-inspired*, all Scripture is profitable for the purposes which Paul enumerates.

## Epiphany 2

Theme: The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. John 1:17

Propers: Psalm 66:1–4; Romans 12:6–16; John 2:11

Hymn 30: Oh, that I Had a Thousand Voices

Sermon: GRADUAL Psalm 107:15–22

Colossians 3:16 is a good commentary on the nature and purpose of the Gradual in the Divine Service. The Gradual, spoken or sung, enriches our worship with the Word, and it furnishes another rung in the ladder leading upward to the climax of the Gospel.

Psalm 107 should be read in its entirety to appreciate the appropriateness of its verses as a Gradual for Epiphany 2 and for the entire Epiphany Season. The refrain which rings throughout this Psalm (in verses 15 and 21 of the text) reiterates the great Epiphany theme of the glory of the Lord. The wonderful works of the Lord which the Psalm enumerates are fulfilled in the miracles of Jesus which the Gospels throughout Epiphany Season exhibit.

The Gradual is altogether festive in character. It would rouse the hearers of the Word from spiritual lethargy and sleep to sounds of rejoicing and salvation in the tabernacles of the righteous; and the text, with its clear preachment of Law and Gospel, should make manifest why these sounds will rise above empty, artificial cant to flow naturally and spontaneously from the Christian heart.

## Epiphany 3

Theme: They shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. Luke 13:29

Propers: Psalm 97; Romans 12:16–21; Matthew 8:1–13

Hymn 28: Now Let All Loudly Sing Praise

Sermon: HALLELUJAH—Psalm 146

Praise is an expression of joy and thanksgiving spoken directly to God. While our Liturgy offers the congregation sufficient opportunity for this kind of worship, nevertheless, the intrinsic power and purpose of praise is often lost or obscured. It is more fashionable to *speak about* praising God than to praise Him. It is easier to use the third person instead of the second in connection with God's Name, and this can also become a transgression of the Second Commandment.

*Hallelujah* is a song of praise in miniature. It is a summary of God-directed thoughts, in reflection or in anticipation of His wonderful works to the children of men (cf. again Psalm 107).

The text furnishes a review of those works on the basis of which its opening invitation to Hallelujah is extended. Specific examples of the generalizations in the text may be drawn from the regular Gospel for



Epiphany 3. The prayer of the leper and the testimony of the centurion, each in its own way, is also a Hallelujah.

One other aspect of the Hallelujah ought not be forgotten. Recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 15:8. Hallelujah is more than a word fitly spoken. Hallelujah is Christian life.

### **Epiphany 4**

Theme: The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. Romans 8:19

Propers: Psalm 97; Romans 13:8–10; Matthew 8:23–27

Hymn 383: Seek Where Ye May to Find a Way

Sermon: THE LUTHERAN CHORALE—I Timothy 3:16

The rubrics allow a considerable variety of musical expression in anticipation of the reading of the Gospel. The singing of a hymn is included among the suggestions. Since the hymn for congregational use belongs to the choicest treasures of our Lutheran heritage, and since this kind of hymn is a basic element of our public worship, a sermon on the subject ought to be refreshing and edifying.

The devotional and didactic value of the hymn may be stressed. Its theological import, which gives expression to divine truths solely formulated through the medium of song, should not be underestimated. Above all, the meaning of a good hymn for public worship should be explained. Such a hymn will satisfy the spiritual needs of the entire congregation. It will dwell on the basic themes of sin and grace. It will give clear and forceful expression to the fundamental truths of Scripture. It will be imbedded in the heart of the Gospel of Christ crucified. In correspondence with the words, its melody will be solid and strong rather than sentimental and sweet. The hymn which fits these qualifications best and which ought to be cultivated in our services most sedulously is our own Lutheran chorale.

For Scripture precedent, the Psalms and the New Testament hymns in Luke 1 and 2 may be restudied. Our text is another Bible hymn. Here Paul seems to be quoting a song which belonged to the early church and which is an excellent example of the appropriate hymn for public worship. It takes us from heaven to earth and again from earth to heaven with its recitation of the great acts and events in the life of our Lord: incarnation, justification, resurrection, and ascension—in consequence of which all things are become new (II Cor 5:17). On this foundation of objective fact and event our salvation is anchored.

A hymn patterned after this model may be sung in season and out of season. It is suitable for all sorts and conditions of men. Let us treasure our hymns that conform to this standard *by using those hymns* and singing them into our lives. The time may come when our chorales will alone remain the purest expression of evangelical theology inherited from the Reformation with which our people come into frequent contact.

### **Epiphany 6 (Transfiguration)**

Theme: God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. II Corinthians 4:6

Propers: Psalm 84; II Peter 1:16–21; Matthew 17:1–9

Hymn 134: Songs of Thankfulness and Praise

Sermon: GOSPEL—Luke 9:28–36

The appointment of the Gospel of Transfiguration for the last Sunday in the Epiphany Season is a contribution from the Lutheran Reformation. The choice was most relevant and excellent. In historical fashion, i.e., as a divine event in history rather than a dogmatical formulation, it sets forth the essential meaning and message of the Gospel. Here is Luther's explanation to the Second Article visibly presented. Here we see God's Son who entered into our human flesh and blood, who became obedient unto death, and to whom all the

prophets give witness that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. Acts 10:43.

The text shows Jesus in His humanity and in His divine glory. It lets us hear the Father's certification of credentials that belong to Jesus. It makes specific mention of the death at Jerusalem. It presents two great representatives of Old Testament Gospel prophecy, who, being dead, yet live on account of Him with whom they are speaking.

As thus powerfully portrayed in the Transfiguration, these truths and events relating to the person and the life of Jesus constitute the uniqueness of the Gospel, which sets it apart from all religion that has proceeded from the mind and emotions of men.

### **Prelententide**

### **Septuagesima**

Theme: We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. Daniel 9:18

Propers: Psalm 118:1–6, 26–29; I Corinthians 9:24–10:5; Matthew 20:1–16

Hymn 377: Salvation Unto Us Has Come

Sermon: CREED—Ephesians 2:4–10

A single sermon on the entire *Creed* will be in the nature of an overview. The preacher may decide for himself whether the sermon will treat of the one ecumenical creed, or of two, or of all three. Hymn 251 used in the service will expand, clarify, and confirm the message from the pulpit.

Luther's explanation in catechism and hymn must be restudied to get a picture of the *Creed* in its entirety. In his catechetical writings Luther likens the *Creed* to honey: as honey is gathered from a garden of delightful flowers, the *Creed* has been distilled out of all Scripture into a few, short sentences for children and for simple, unsophisticated (*einfältige*) adults. Furthermore, Luther points out that everything in the *Creed* has to do with works, which must be viewed, however, not only as historical happenings but as continuing to go into fulfillment: the Creator continues to create and to concern Himself for us; the Redeemer continues to shield and to shelter those whom he has delivered; the Spirit continues to gather and to sanctify. The *Creed* culminates in the words, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." In the Creed God is revealed as continually pouring Himself out: He is giving Himself to us wholly and completely.

Therefore the *Creed* is nothing else but the sermon in which Jesus preaches the Septuagesima Gospel of the Laborers in the Vineyard, wherein evangel reverberates throughout the text from Ephesians 2. Creed, parable, and text are classic declamations of God's activity to us-ward in Christ: the Gospel of grace. All creedal formulations that have proceeded from the heart of man—with their substitutions of their additions of rules, qualifications, and cooperation—are thrown into sharp relief. In its austere simple and objective majesty our Creed recites only the wonderful works of God. God's activity through Christ spells our salvation.

### **Sexagesima**

Theme: To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart. Psalm 95:7, 8

Propers: Psalm 44:1–8, 23–26; II Corinthians 11:19–12:9; Luke 8:4–15

Hymn 500: May God Bestow on Us His Grace

Sermon: SERMON (The Preacher)—Colossians 1:24–29

There are many methods for disseminating the Word of God. But our Lord's first concern is that the seed be sown—and received in an honest and good heart (*Sexagesima Gospel*); He comes to methods elsewhere (Matt. 10).

There are differences among the methods. There is a difference between reading the printed Word and hearing the spoken Word. There is a difference between hearing the Word when it is read and hearing the Word when it is preached without reading. There is a difference between seeing the preacher and hearing his natural voice or seeing his image and hearing a reproduction of the voice over the airwaves. There is no substitute for the sermon spoken by the preacher from the pulpit directly to the hearer in the pew. But an analysis of this kind cannot be fashioned into a club for browbeating parishioners into more regular church attendance. The right approach will flow from the Word of God like that written in Colossians 1 by the Preacher to the Gentiles.

The statement to watch in the text, and around which the sermon might be constructed, is at the end of verse 25: “to fulfill the word of God.” It is the second time in two verses that the *πληρῶ* occurs. Paul, writing from Roman imprisonment, had spoken of his afflictions (cp *Sexagesima Epistle*) as a *fulfillment*, in that instance a “filling up in turn.” (Note well this amazing attitude toward personal tribulation. It is of a higher quality than has ever entered into the mind of any wise, pagan philosopher.) In the second verse of the text Paul applies the same word to his commission as a preacher to the Gentiles. By the preaching of the Word he fulfills—*πληρῶσαι*—the Word, i.e., through preaching, the Word of God is given its full due. Paul is using an expression that is reminiscent of Old Testament prophecy and its fulfillment. The prophecies were God’s Word; they were perfect and complete, and by those prophecies the Old Testament believers were saved. Nevertheless, the prophecies were not *fulfilled* until Jesus had appeared in the flesh. Thus it is with the Word of God that is written in the Bible. It is perfect and complete of itself. Nothing need be added. No new teachings are necessary. Yet, behind each book, chapter, and verse of the Word there is a directive: *to be fulfilled*. The written Word continues to call for the service of preachers.

That is the significance of the sermon: a man and a message in the service of God’s Word. Read Ezekiel 3:3 and Revelation 10:9 in their contexts for more light on what preaching demands: a putting one’s whole self into the service of the Word. Then the Word is *fulfilled*. Then the Way, the Truth, and the Light of Holy Scripture does not remain an idea or a thought, but it appears in living form, bound together with a living human being.

Luther had a lively awareness of this. In his writings one often meets with expressions of this kind: “I have always taught that the spoken word must be there for the ears to hear.” The extended quotations that follow are selected at random from his exegetical and devotional works.

*Dieses Zeugnisz (I John 5, 4–12) ist also bestellt von Christo selbst, dasz es immerdar gehen und bleiben soll in der Kirche; denn dazu hat er den Heiligen Geist gesandt, und selbst berufen und gegeben den Aposteln und derselben Nachkommen, Pfarrer, Prediger, Lehrer ... die es treiben sollen, dasz es allenthalben und immerdar schallen soll in der Welt ... sonst duerfte man des Predigtstuhls und ganzen aeusserlichen Kirchenregiments nicht; denn es koennte es ein jeglicher ruer sich in der Schrift lesen (St. L. XII, 535, 20f).*

*Also haben wir zuvor oft gesagt, dasz dos Evangelium eigentlich sei nicht, das geschrieben ist in Buechern; sondern eine leibliche Predigt, die da gehoert soll werden in aller Welt, und soll frei ausgerufen werden vor allen Creaturen ... das ist, man soll es oeffentlich predigen (St. L. XI, 933, 3).*

*Unter “Reden des Herrn” versteht er aber nicht blosz die, welche in Buechern geschrieben sind, sondern ganz besonders die muendlich geredet werden ... Denn die Schrift schadet oder nuetzt nicht so viel als die Rede, da die Stimme die Seele des Worts ist (St. L. IV, 839, 48).*

*Aber siehe zu, wie rein, zart, fromme Kinder wir sind; auf dasz wir nicht duerften in der Schrift studieren und Christurn allda lernen, halten wir das ganze alte Testament ruer nichts, als dasz nun aus sei und nichts mehr gelte, so es doch allein den Namen hat, dasz es heilige Schrift heisz, und Evangeli eigentlich nicht Schrift, sondern muendlich Wort sein sollte, dasz die Schrift hervor trug, wie Christus und die Apostel getan haben; darum auch Christus selbst nichts geschrieben, sondern nur geredet hat, und seine Lehre nicht Schrift, sondern Evangeli, das ist eine gute Botschaft oder Verkuendigung genennet hat, dasz nicht mir der Feder, sondern mir dem Mund soll getrieben werden (Cf. WA 10, 1, 1, 17).*

The sermon is God’s message spoken through the mouth of a living human being. The sermon is filled with its preacher. This does not mean that he must have experienced everything that he tells others—else how could he or anyone else ever preach again?—but it means that the sermon is not to be separated from the

preacher. A sermon that was preached may lose its force when committed to print. A sermon also is not to be separated from its hearers. It belongs with the congregation to which it is preached. It is the Word of God being *fulfilled* for a certain congregation, in a certain place, at a certain time.

This Word Paul calls a “mystery” (vs. 26), for when it is preached, something is happening. God’s presence and power is in that Word, bringing Christ to its hearers and convincing them, kindling faith—“Christ in you,” Paul says (vs. 27); *Him* we preach (vs. 28)—He coming to you in the Word, warning *every* man ... teaching *every* man ... that we may present *every* man perfect in Christ (vs. 28). The emphasis is on *every*. Thus the sermon is to be preached and thus the Word administered so that it strikes into the life of *every* person, beginning with the preacher, so that each one may say: That was God’s Word. God came to me in this sermon. God spoke to me. God acted through the preacher.

### Quinquagesima

Theme: Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. Luke 18:31

Proper: Psalm 31:1–5; I Corinthians 13:1–13; Luke 18:31–43

Hymn 409: Let Us Ever Walk With Jesus

Sermon: SERMON (The Hearer)—Luke 2:19

There is a fine harmony between the *Quinquagesima Gospel* and the sermon topic. When Jesus announces His imminent passion to the disciples (Luke 18:31), He uses the “we.” He expects the disciples to accompany Him. He wants their devoted attention and ours to the story that is about to happen; and *devotion* expresses best what it means to be a hearer of God’s Word.

Devotion goes deeper than attentiveness and concentration on the sermon. There is earnestness in devotion, taking-to-heart of the message that is heard. This needs to be coupled with recognition that God and the Lord Christ are in the Word that is preached. To all who would participate in the divine service the warning is in place: Take heed! See who is meeting us in the Word. And if anyone would sidestep this truth, God knows and the devil knows what that person wants. Certainly, it is not the hearing and the heeding of devotion.

Learn of devotion from Mary. We find it in her response to the *Annunciation* (Luke 1:38). It shines from the text. There is watchfulness in devotion: Mary *kept* all these things that were contrary to human reason and understanding. She put them under guard, yet not by locking them away into a bank-vault recess of her mind, but by *pondering* them in her heart. The Greek for *ponder* recalls the German proverb of *geriebene Kraeuter*. Pondering means shaking together what has been heard, discussing it with others. Devotion is like digestion, the body in the service of the food that was eaten. Devotion is surrender. This the Lord desires when we gather to hear His Word. To this He invites us in the first verse of the *Quinquagesima Gospel*. For this He offers us an enriched opportunity in the approaching season of Lent.

### Lent

#### Behold, the Lamb of God Which Taketh Away the Sin of the World

*Hymn 142: A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth*

### Invocavit

Theme: For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. I John 3:8

Proper: Psalm 91:1–4, 9–16; II Corinthians 6:1–10; Matthew 4:1–11

Hymn 247: God the Father, Be Our Stay

Sermon: OFFERTORY—Psalm 51:1–19

There is a history behind the way in which the *Offertory* appeared in the service and came by its name, which history may be found in any one of the standard works on the Liturgy. The preacher may use such information if he will. More relevant for our needs is to find meaning in the parts of the service as we have them and use them at the present time.

The most natural point of departure from sermon topic to text is in verse 17 of the Psalm. This kind of offertory is God's greatest delight. When we come to Him with the sacrifice of a broken heart, then the Word with which He feeds us in Scripture readings and sermon has indeed become for us a savor of life unto life.

The Word, in Nathan's uncompromising "Thou art the man" had that effect on King David, and Psalm 51 memorializes the fact. Gone is the artificial sham-life that David had been acting for almost a year. Notice the superscription of the Psalm: a public offense publicly acknowledged, and this public confession assigned for use in the public worship.

The prayer in verses 10 to 12 is the heart of the Psalm. It wells up out of personal experience with and profound understanding of sin. David's sin with Bathsheba caused the whole mountain of his guilt to loom before him. "Yea, verily, the fountain of my life is polluted" (vs. 5). Only one sacrifice remained: the broken heart.

The prayer in verses 10 to 12 also radiates with confidence of a kind that flows from the Gospel. David is praying by faith in his greater Son and Lord, who would be manifested for this purpose that he might destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8). Here the *Invocavit Gospel* may be woven into the sermon.

The entire Psalm should be used. A text of such dimensions can be handled within the allotted time if the preacher recognizes that it is not necessary to exhaust each verse and sentence. Pick whatever flowers are needed for the bouquet and let the rest stand in the garden for use at another occasion.

### **Reminiscere**

Theme: The Lord hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. Isaiah 50:4

Propers: Psalm 25:1-9; I Thessalonians 4:1-7; Matthew 15:21-28

Hymn 522: When in the Hour of Utmost Need

Sermon: OFFERINGS—II Corinthians 8:1-9

The first three Sundays in Lent treat of Satan and of devil possession. Though his power may seem less palpable in our times, the warning in I Peter 5:8 remains in force, and among the soft spots of human nature that are most vulnerable to his attack is the propensity to greed. Greed renders that act of worship called the *Offerings* difficult of sincere, liberal, non-mechanical demonstration.

The god of the pocketbook must be unmasked with straightforward law preaching. To win the heart away from devil-greed, however, and to warm it with love demands other measures than the club of condemnation or the palliative of pious palaver. A different word needs to be preached, poles apart from greed. That word is grace.

Paul's sermon in the text dwells on the *grace* of giving. When he directs the Corinthians to the laudable example of theft fellow-believers in Macedonia, he immediately pulls out the rug from under the pet cover-up for selfishness: "I can't afford it." Paul's description is vivid. The Macedonians gave "in the depths of their poverty" (vs. 2), and out of that penury overflowed a wealth of liberality. Paul is speaking as a personal witness (vs. 3). Where there is spiritual wealth, no material wants can get into the way of the grace of giving.

It is often said, "Show our people the needs, supply them with the information, and they will respond." This is true up to a point, but do not even the publicans the same? Church giving needs that other and unique motivation to which Paul comes at the close of the text (vs. 9). From such fountain of grace Christian giving effervesces as an act of devotion in visible testimony of self-surrender to God (vs. 5) and as an expression of fellowship toward one another in the body of Christ (vs. 4).

## Oculi

Theme: The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Matthew 20:28

Propers: Psalm 25:1–5, 15–22; Ephesians 5:1–9; Luke 11:14–28

Hymn 258: Lord of Our Life and God of Our Salvation

Sermon: GENERAL PRAYER I—Ephesians 6:10–18

The pair of sermons this Sunday and the next is concerned with two salient aspects of the General Prayer: its petitions for spiritual gifts and graces and its intercessions for all sorts and conditions of men.

The petitions culminate in the closing words of the second paragraph (according to the version used in the service without Holy Communion), and that message dictated the choice of the text. Furthermore, there are overtones of this theme in the Sunday Gospel where we hear our Savior’s warning to watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.

This leads over to the need for prayer, a necessity that springs from faith. Faith needs prayer, not for what man would make of it—a slavish habit, a meritorious work, or as a form that may add dignity to the solemn occasion—but for the promises that God put into it. Faith needs prayer, for we wrestle not with flesh and blood. Paul’s panorama view of the enemy (vs. 12) elaborates on the Savior’s snapshot sketch in the *Oculi* Gospel: “a strong man armed,” whose weapons are his wiles (vs. 11). Satan recognizes better than we the need for prayer in the life of the Christian and perceiving it, he has another trick up his sleeve. If he can limit Christian life to prayer, he knows how quickly faith will dry up and with it the praying.

Faith needs to be nourished for prayer. The armor of God must be at hand—here confer the many statements in the *General Prayer*: “saving Word,” “sacred ordinances,” “purity of doctrine.” In the text Paul furnishes us with a piece-by-piece inventory of that armor: first, the several weapons when the battle begins, and finally, the great offensive weapon which is the evangel of the Stronger Man, who has laid low the enemy and taken his armor and divided the spoils; on account of which victory we, moving from strength to strength, may sing, “He’s judged, the deed is done, one little Word can fell him.”

Nourished by that Word, faith blooms into prayer. Do not overlook the seldom-used eighteenth verse of Ephesians 6. It completes the text. God our Refuge and Strength, who speaks to us in His Word, gives us the privilege of speaking also to Him. A life that is nourished for prayer and adorned with prayer will be a life of watchfulness and perseverance (vs. 18). This is the most effective antidote to natural human inertia and self-security in spiritual matters, of which the Savior graphically portrays the terrible end in verses 24 to 26 of the *Oculi Gospel*

## Laetare

Theme: Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. John 12:24

Propers: Psalm 122; Galatians 4:21–31; John 6:1–15

Hymn 347: Jesus, Priceless Treasure

Sermon: GENERAL PRAYER II—I Timothy 2:1–8

Intercession is prayer especially sweet smelling to God. To review the classic examples of intercession in Genesis 18, Exodus 32, Isaiah 63, and Daniel 9, and to ponder again on the intercessions of the Mediator between God and men (cf. *Laetare Gospel*, also a kind of intercession) will help put the preacher into the proper frame of mind for sermonic treatment of the subject. That the General Prayer is replete with intercession belongs to its excellence. Notwithstanding the length, this kind of prayer needs to be used by the *ecclesia orans* in public worship.

Through its pastor Timothy, the text is directed to the same congregation that had been urged to fight the good fight of faith (cf. sermon topic for last Sunday). One feels the stress of the πάντων in the first two verses. Insights for this emphasis may be gotten from study of the past history (cf. esp. Acts 19) and anticipation of the future history (cf. esp. &Rev; 2 and 3) of Ephesus and its environs.

The message in the first two verses is, “Do not circumscribe your prayer for others.” The four terms that Paul uses for intercessory prayer should be delineated. The plurals should be noted, indicating repetition. The *made* should not be overlooked (vs. 1). Intercession should be more than a mere thinking about others. *Made* means putting the half-conscious thoughts into orderly and concrete form. Pray for the government. Prayer, instead of flamboyant demonstration, is the mark of true patriotism, the first and highest service that a Christian can render to his country.

Verse 3 is elucidated by what follows. The point is that intercessory prayer pleases God not only because He wills but also has the means for saving all people. Now let verse 5 be used and enjoyed in its context. Emphasize the *one*: One is God and One is the Mediator. The two are One respecting their will to save all men. Their relationship to man is One, and through Christ, a man—the article is absent, for this man does not belong to a special nation but he mediated for all (cf. John 11:52)—the divine will becomes effective. The *gave* of verse 6 underlines the willingness of the Mediator, and the rest of the sentence portrays the substitutional character of the mediation: *instead, ransom, in behalf*.

A truth of such proportions must rouse Christians to action, to make intercessory prayer, and also to be busy at the work for which they are praying. Therefore verse 7 of the text, and here again is the *mysterion* of Colossians 1 (cf. text for *Sexagesima*). In verse 8 the masculine ἄνδρας is used instead of the generic ἀνθρώπους. The *holy* in verse 8 is another reminder regarding which persons’ effectual, fervent prayer alone avails before God (cf. Psalm 24:3, 4).

## Judica

Theme: I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. John 17:19

Propers: Psalm 43; Hebrews 9:11–15; John 8:46–59

Hymn 367: Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus

Sermon: SANCTUS—Isaiah 6:1–8

The text and the worship topic throb with festivity. What a contrast to the *Judica Gospel* seething with hate. But there is a fine consonance between sermon topic and *Judica Epistle* and *Introit Psalm*. Verse 56 of the *Judica Gospel* is also analogous to the statement in John 12:41, and this message may serve to introduce topic and text.

As spelled out in the four steps of the *Preface* (Hymnal, page 24f.), the worshiping congregation stands at the threshold of a most festive event. It is preparing to participate in great things, to see and to taste the glory of His grace. For such an occasion, with hearts lifted up, the congregation now sings with the seraphim before God’s throne in heaven.

A song of this kind may be hymned only by those who like Isaiah have had their lips touched by the live coal from off the altar. The experience with the live coal throws light on John’s comment that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus. In consequence of that “sight” he was inspired to the wealth of prophecy in the rest of his book.

Before his experience with the live coal, the vision of the Lord and the song of the seraphim had plunged Isaiah into ruin (vs. 5). *Without* that experience the holiness of God must burn and consume; *with* that experience the grace of God purges and heals.

The live coal was taken from off a place of sacrifices. The Lord’s ways and thoughts—high and lifted up (vs. 1; cp Isaiah 55)—are connected with a sacrifice that makes the crimson red as white snow. It is the sacrifice of the high priest who came not with the blood of goats, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place (cf. Epistle). Having tasted the gift of this sacrifice, Isaiah becomes a new man, ready to join the seraphim in publishing the Lord’s praises (vs. 8).

Let the *Sanctus* show us our need for the gift from off the altar. Let it sharpen our desire to partake of that gift. Let it remind us that our way of worship brings us into communion and fellowship with the hosts of heaven and the saints who have gone before us, who have rejoiced with Abraham to see the day of Lord Jesus, who have tasted with Isaiah the coal from the altar, whose lips have been, touched with the gift which declares: Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged. Depart in peace.

### Palmarum

Theme: He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many. Isaiah 53:12

Propers: Psalm 22:1–8, 13–19, 22–27; Philippians 2:5–11; Matthew 21:1–9

Hymn 142: A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth

Sermon: HOSANNA—Matthew 21:1–9

*Holy* we sing with the seraphim, worshiping the Lord who is “high and lifted up” in heaven. *Hosanna* we sing with the *Palm Sunday* populace at Jerusalem, for the Lord is also with us on earth and is very near. He still comes to us as He came to Jerusalem. He comes more intimately than on that occasion, not merely to be seen with the eyes but to be received in his body and blood, to be with us and in us. The Christ who abides in me through His Word also abides in me through His Sacrament. He still comes meek and lowly, veiling His divine majesty in the humble elements of the bread and the wine.

In the first part of the text the King of Majesty is issuing His royal commands: Go ... ye shall find ... loose ... bring ... the Lord hath need. At the end of the text He is received and accepted for the King that He is: Hosanna (cf. Ps. 118, esp. vs. 25) ... Son of David ... *en tois hupsistois* (cf. Luke 2:14). But in the middle of the text (vs. 5) is the great *Widerspruch*—meek ... sitting upon an ass. This is always integral to the Gospel and to all truth connected with the Gospel, the divine and the human conjoined in the person of Jesus, in the written Word of Holy Scripture, in the Sacrament of the Altar. This is the foolishness of God, which is apprehended only through faith.

*Hosanna* we sing with hearts bowed under the heavy load of sin. *Hosanna* we sing with hearts lifted up to greet this majestic King who is so gracious, who comes to us because He wants to be our King, to help and to save.

### Maundy Thursday

Propers: Psalm 67; I Corinthians 11:23–32; John 13:1–15

Hymn 311: Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior

Sermon: CONSECRATION—Matthew 26:26–28

Liturgical treatment of the text will vary from the ordinary in perhaps one respect only. It should be explained why the words of institution are repeated in connection with each celebration of the Sacrament. They do more than recount a great happening. They are a prayer in which the worshiping congregation repeats the promises of the Lord connected with the bread and the wine on the altar and claims these promises for itself, to wit: Lord Jesus, this you did in the night of your betrayal. Therefore we come to receive the gifts of your promise; we come, believing the words that we are praying.

The text from Matthew was selected on account of the chaste directness of the *est* in both members of the *verba*. One should augment textual study by reading in the *Thorough Declaration of the Formula of Concord*, Article VII, and beginning with Section 79 (Conc. Trig, p. 1001, par. 2f.).

### Good Friday



This day stands by itself. Topic and text relating to worship do not belong here. John 1:29 might be used for a sermon on *The New Testament*, but here in the light of Jeremiah 31:31–34, to avoid conflict or duplication with the sermon topic for *Easter Sunday*.

**Easter**  
**The Lord is Risen! he is Risen Indeed!**  
*Hymn 187: Christ Is Arisen*

**Easter Sunday**

Theme: Fear not. I am the first and the last and the living one. I died, and behold, I live forevermore, and I have the keys of hell and death. Revelation 1:17, 18

Propers: Psalm 139:1–12, 14, 17, 18, 23, 24; I Corinthians 5:6–8; Mark 16:1–8

Hymn 195: Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands

Sermon: THE NEW TESTAMENT CELEBRATION—I Corinthians 5:6–8

The topic invites a comparison between the feasts of the Old and the New Testaments. The first stanza of Luther's Easter hymn, No. 195, furnishes a point of departure for the analysis. On account of what happened this "first day of the week," every Sunday came to be celebrated by the New Testament church as its own *new* Passover.

Like the antitype in the Old Testament, Passover commemorates deliverance. In this manner God laid out, in both Testaments, a way for His children to freedom, liberty, and safety. Instead of commanding them to take up arms for battle, He bids them to rest and to be quiet (Isaiah 30); He spreads a table before them and invites them to feasting and celebration. Here the elements of the *Old Testament Passover* may be marshaled in order, special attention being given, anticipatory of the text, to the yeast that is *not* to be added so that the bread remains pure and sweet. By this feast, the Old Testament church escaped death.

Stanza three of the Easter hymn prepares the way for treating the fulfillment of the antitype. Since Easter, the "shadows of things to come" are melted away. "Here the *true* Paschal Lamb we see." His blood on our doors cancels out the charges of the Accuser. The Easter event proves it. Jesus lives—to be our Paschal feast.

The text unfolds, step by step, the right manner of New Testament celebration. Let the sour yeast of sin be eradicated, for Jesus has clothed us in the white garment of His righteousness. Purge out the yeast whose insidious nature is to spread through the whole body. Purge out the yeast, not with the strength of our arm nor with our good intentions or resolutions, but by feasting on Jesus. We eat our Passover when we hear the Word of Jesus and believe it. We eat our Passover when we receive Jesus bodily in the Sacrament. Here find the true purpose of our Sunday worship. This Sunday and every Sunday is an Easter day to celebrate the Lord's resurrection, to feast on our *New Testament Passover*. Cf. Hymn 195, stanza 5.

**Quasimodogeniti**

Theme: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. I Peter 1:3

Propers: Psalm 81:1, 2, 8–10; I John 5:4–12; John 20:19–31

Hymn 208: Ye Sons and Daughters of the King

Sermon: PAX—Luke 24:13–36

On account of its brevity this greeting tends to be lost in the shuffle. Let us recognize its beauty as Luther did. He found it buried in a mass of ceremony and prayer to the saints and lifted it out of hiding.

“Peace” is the risen Lord’s Easter gift to His own, and their reaction to His Word evinces the magnitude of the gift (Cf. Sunday Gospel, vs. 20). The text tells how the disciples of Jesus find His peace. Their need for this gift is reflected in the disposition of the Emmaus disciples. A mere knowledge of the facts did not satisfy. Notwithstanding the information they had about Jesus (vs. 19–24), they remained without hope: “We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel, ...” —and then the thought is interrupted, trailing off in unexpressed despair. They possessed the information, but they did not possess Jesus. They were right in their unexpressed thoughts. There is no hope, joy, or peace without Jesus.

Jesus does not dispel the darkness by direct self-revelation. He leads the disciples to a more solid foundation. Peter’s words come to mind, II Peter 1:19. Back to the Scriptures! The disciples had fallen into the error of speaking and reasoning with their own thoughts instead of searching and in childlike simplicity accepting God’s thoughts.

The words of the stranger were mighty to the breaking down of the strongholds of unbelief. “Abide with us.” This is more than oriental hospitality (cf. vs. 32). And their invitation brought new blessing beyond expectation. Compare the last part of verse 35 with verse 30. The act of “breaking the bread” was strongly reminiscent of the intimate companionship the disciples had enjoyed with the Master. It was the sign of recognition. And that brought peace. Jesus sheds His Easter gift of peace abroad in our hearts when we see and receive Him as our living Savior.

### **Misericordias Domini**

Theme: I am the good shepherd. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. John 10:11, 27, 28

Propers: Psalm 33:1–5; I Peter 2:21–25; John 10:11–16

Hymn 206: Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense

Sermon: AGNUS DEI—Revelation 7:9–17

The first death recorded in Scriptures was of animals by which the Lord provided coats of skin to hide the shame of our first parents. In obedience to faith, Abel hit on this form of worship—the sacrifice of a lamb—to express his devotion to the Lord. The Lord accommodated Himself to the same form when He gave directions for celebrating the Passover. Speaking by the Holy Ghost, Isaiah enlarged and clarified this Old Testament picture and message. John the Baptist was the first New Testament preacher to signal its fulfillment; and it is chiefly in the writings of him, who at one time was John the Baptist’s disciple, that the message of the Lamb is perpetuated in the New Testament. In this picture of the Lamb there is unfolded to us the whole counsel of God.

Therefore it pleases Jesus to reveal Himself as a lamb in the last book of the Bible. Thus He is seen and worshipped by the saints in heaven. They are saints because their Good Shepherd became the Lamb. Without the Gospel of the Lamb, the Good Shepherd picture is lost. Our Good Shepherd is the Lamb of God who wipes away all tears from our eyes by feeding us with the gifts of His sacrifice. He gives Himself to be our meat and drink indeed. Thus we come to the altar for this blessing with the precious name of the Lamb on our lips.

### **Jubilate**

Theme: If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. II Corinthians 5:17

Propers: Psalm 66:1–4; I Peter 2:11–20; John 16:16–23

Hymn 263: O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe

Sermon: DISTRIBUTION—Psalm 34:1–8

The text, especially in its last verse, asks for festive treatment of the liturgical topic on this festive Sunday. As it is worth more to visit a place than to read many books about it, so it is with the gifts of the Lord. The proof of their blessing is in the using them. That includes both Word and Sacrament.

Here the application will be to the Sacrament. A mere hearing about this Supper, a mere watching the participation of others, does not seal its blessings to us. “O taste and see . . .” In the coming and the using, in the eating and the drinking, this Supper becomes precious FOR YOU. Cf. Luther in the Catechism: “. . . *beside* the bodily eating and drinking.” The eating and drinking must be added. The Sacrament was instituted not alone for hearing, certainly not for adoration, but “for us Christians to eat and to drink.”

There can be no honest desire for this Supper if the hunger is missing. The text gets at this matter in verses 4–6. Having sounded the exultant chord of *Jubilate Sunday* in the first three verses—an expression of the joy Jesus describes in the Gospel, which “no man taketh from you”—the text shows who finds this joy: they who have fears (vs. 4), who feel shame (vs. 5), who are poor (vs. 6a) and in trouble (vs. 6b). Briefly, they have a lively sense of sin and of the power of the devil.

### Cantate

Theme: O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvelous things. Psalm 98:1

Propers: Psalm 98; James 1:16–21; John 16:5–15

Hymn 387: Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice

Sermon: NUNC DIMITTIS—Luke 2:25–32

Simeon’s song is a *cantata* for Cantate. Compare verse 26 of the text with verses 13 and 14 of the Sunday Gospel. The text is a practical demonstration and fulfillment of the Savior’s promise, even though in point of time it was spoken before the promise was made.

Simeon’s song is a *cantata* of faith. He voices his convictions that the plan of salvation is going into fulfillment because he holds a forty-day-old infant in his arms. Simeon is not a dreamer or religious enthusiast. Attention should be given to the original sense of the word in verse 25, translated *devout*.

By that same faith worked by that same Spirit, those who have been guests at the Lord’s Supper leave the altar to hymn that same *cantata* which Simeon sang. The analogy between the first part of verse 28 and the intimate reception of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper may be noted.

### Rogate

Theme: And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. John 12:32

Propers: Psalm 66:1–4, 13–20; James 1:22–27; John 16:23–30

Hymn 458: Our Father, Thou in Heaven Above

Sermon: THANKSGIVING PRAYER—John 15:1–11

Our first study of prayer (cf. Sunday after Christmas) was concerned with its general meaning in the communion of saints. There the emphasis was on the *how*. The second treatment of prayer (cf. *Oculi* and *Laetare*) was directed to the *what*. The present study of prayer has to do with the *why*, specifically, why Christians pray a thanksgiving prayer at the close of the service. If this topic is treated on a non-communion Sunday, either one of the collects on page 14 of the Hymnal may be used.

Prayer life belongs to the fruit-bearing which Jesus describes in the text (vs. 1, 2, 8); and being a part of it, prayer concerns itself with those gifts which make fruit-bearing possible (“faith towards Thee”) and give it its sweet smelling savor (“fervent love toward one another”; also cf. text, esp. vs. 9–11; also cf. second collect on page 14 of the Hymnal).

Prayer is the fruit of branches that grow from the true Vine (vs. 4–6), and the connection between Vine and a branch is effected by the Word (vs. 3 and 7), the spoken Word and the Word made visible in the

Sacrament. Hence the repeated abide in the text (cp John 8:31, 32): all depends on this union with Jesus that is created and sustained by the Word. The worshiping congregation which has been nurtured and fed with that Word can and will want to pray. In Word and Sacrament faith has been strengthened, love increased. The church service has not been a good work on the part of the worshipers, but in this service God has done great things for them whereof they are glad.

### Ascension

Propers: Psalm 47; Acts 1:1–11, Mark 16:14–20

Hymn 223: We Thank Thee, Jesus, Dearest Friend

Sermon: SALUTATION—Matthew 28:16–20

The *Dominus vobiscum*, used once in the Order without Holy Communion and three times in the Order with Holy Communion, is a most appropriate sentence to be spoken at the close of worship. On account of the great things that have occurred in the Divine Service, we know that this sentence is not a mere form nor pious wish. The message that it pronounces is made effectual through Word and Sacrament. Our Lord has come to us in the Means of Grace and has intimately joined Himself together with us. *Dominus vobiscum*.

The text anticipates the great Gospel event that is commemorated on this day of the Church Year. In the first place, it treats this event as the climax to our Lord's march of triumph—interrupted forty days in our behalf—from the Easter tomb to the Father's right hand, far above all principality, power, and might (Eph. 1:20–23). In the second place, the text seals to us the fact of *Dominus vobiscum*. Because Jesus ascended into heaven to receive all power, the promise of His abiding presence has become genuine and real. When He walked and talked with His disciples on earth before the Ascension, He was near them in one place at one time. Since the Ascension and on account of the Ascension, He is near them in all situations and at all times. In the third place, the text directs us to the means whereby the Savior continues to be with us, to make *Dominus vobiscum* a reality, the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

The congregation's response to the *Dominus vobiscum* and the refrain of the *Benedicamus* that follows should not be slighted. Here is another demonstration of the reciprocal nature of our worship. Pastor and congregation speak to each other. They encourage each other. They walk together to worship the Lord.

### Exaudi

Theme: Wait on the Lord: be of good courage and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.

Psalm 27:14

Propers: Psalm 27; I Peter 4:7–11; John 15:26–16:4

Hymn 267: If God Had Not Been on Our Side

Sermon: THE ART OF WORSHIP—Philippians 4:4–9

As we approach the close of the Divine Service, a study of proper approaches to and evaluations of the Liturgy is in place. On the one hand, we must guard against formalism and keep a firm hold on our Christian liberty in matters that pertain to liturgy. Liturgics must not detract from nor obscure the essentials of the Gospel. On the other hand, we ought to keep our sights on what is lovely and true in our forms of worship and not let Christian liberty become a license for going off on one's own.

A good approach to liturgics is furnished in verses 8 and 9 of the text. The outstanding fact in this passage is the total absence of constraint. The key word is, *think*. That underlines the freedom of the Gospel; and if by such thinking one grows in Christian knowledge and understanding, something has been gained to make life richer and more useful. Most important is that the freedom be preserved and consciences not burdened.

Paul does not itemize the “things” on which he bids us to think, for the list would be legion. Our immediate interest is in the forms of our worship. The adjectives in the text may be applied to those forms. Our forms of worship are “true” if they proclaim the truth that makes us free. They are “honest” (*semna*: reverend, awe-inspiring) if they teach us to “keep our feet in the house of God” and to purge our lips from an overwhelming sense of our unworthiness before a holy God. They are “just” and “pure” if they tell that God has clothed us in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, by whom alone we become just and pure. They are “lovely” and “of good report” if the Gospel, to which they give testimony, makes our lives lovely and of good report, sweet smelling to God and our fellow man.

In every case, the outward forms of worship must shine by reflected glory of the Lord and His Word. One must guard against exalting the forms above the simple commands of God. One must guard against busying oneself with outward forms to such a degree that the true works of God are neglected or obscured, for example, much attention given to liturgics, little attention to homiletics.

The true works of God are exhibited in the front part of the text. First, there is the joy that belongs to us because God has willed it to all men and has signed and sealed His will on Calvary. To this true work of God there is attached the directive: Let your moderation be known unto all men. Moderation in the sense of patience, kindness, carefulness, is another description for the love that God expects us to render toward one another in reflection of His love to us. Moderation is another true work of God, a necessary component of Christian life. The third essential of Christian life is inferred in the watchword, “The Lord is at hand.” We live in expectation of His immediate return. We live by hope.

Thus the text directs us first to the true works of God that must be part and parcel of Christian life: faith, love, hope - justification, sanctification, and anticipation. With a firm grip on these essentials, the child of God will properly evaluate and make right use of other matters that are related to the Gospel and belong into the sphere of *adiaphora*.

### Pentecost

Theme: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Zechariah 4:6

Provers: Psalm 68:1–3, 18, 19, 32–35; Acts 2:1–13; John 14:23–31

Hymn 224: Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord

Sermon: THE ESSENCE OF WORSHIP—John 14:15–21

The essence of worship is spiritual union with God and Christ through faith. The sermon can move around the following thoughts: worship is a faith activity engendered by the indwelling Spirit of Truth (vs. 16, 17); the faith activity of worship lives, moves, and has its being wholly in Christ (vs. 18–20); this being-in-Christ makes one alive to carry out the Savior’s directions (*entolas*, vs. 15 and 21), namely, to love God and to love one another.

Worship is faith activity. Here is the great contradiction: faith instead of reason and senses. Therefore the world cannot and will not receive (v. 17). The world will seize and secure with the senses instead of surrendering to faith. But the human element must be passive if faith is to be active through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Note the several prepositions by which the indwelling and consequent empowering of the Comforter is described: *μετά* in vs. 16; *παρά* in vs. 17; *ἐν* in vs. 17.

This leads to the other chief component of worship, the *ἐν Χριστῷ*. Hence faith impels to attendance on Word and Sacrament. This is the first requirement in worship. This makes the *ἐν Χριστῷ* a reality (vs. 20). In Word and Sacrament the Savior’s promise is fulfilled (vs. 18), and that fulfillment spells life (vs. 19) here in time—as evidenced in love (vs. 21)—and hereafter in eternity.

### Trinity

Theme: Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. Isaiah 6:3

Propers: Psalm 8; Romans 11:33–36; John 3:1–15

Hymn 237: All Glory Be to God on High

Sermon: BENEDICTION—Numbers 6:22–27

The message of God’s name needs to be studied in the light of Exodus 20:24 and of Psalm 8. With His name God makes Himself known to us, that He is our Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. In the threefold blessing of the Benediction God puts His name on us. He gives us all that He has done for us.

When the Lord says, I bless you, His blessing accompanies His Word even as the daily miracle of birth happens in constant fulfillment of the Lord’s declaration “to be fruitful and multiply.” Luther’s explanation of the *First Article* is an excellent commentary on the meaning of God’s blessing, and in that explanation the phrase, “And that He still, . . .” is of special significance. Luther’s *Second Article* explains God’s “making His face to shine.” “Lifting up the countenance” is a colloquialism for being happy, being pleased, accepting, and forgiving. The Lord lifts up His countenance on us when in faith we possess Jesus.

The Benediction is not only an offer or promise, but with God’s offer and God’s promise comes God’s gift. The benediction proclaims Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. It synthesizes the work of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.