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Sts. Peter & Paul L. C., Simpsonville, SC; All Saints Lutheran Mission, Myrtle Beach, SC; St. Michael & All Angels Lutheran Mission, Martinez, GA; St. Bartholomew Lutheran Mission, Fort Myers, FL

Rev. Douglas Handrich

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Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

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St. Luke Lutheran Church, Kenai, AK
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Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

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Good Shepherd L. C. Rogers, AR

Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

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THE LUTHERAN HERALD



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The Calendar

The Lutheran Hymnal (1941): TLH; 2022 Supplement: ASBH

(Monday: M; Tuesday: T; Wednesday: W; Thursday: R; Friday: F; Saturday: S)

January 1	<i>Festival of the Circumcision /1st S. a. Christmas</i>	ASBH 7
January 6 (F)	<i>The Epiphany of our Lord</i>	ASBH 9
January 8	<i>Epiphany 1</i>	ASBH 10
January 15	<i>Epiphany 2</i>	ASBH 11
January 19 (R)	<i>St. Henry of Finland, Bishop and Martyr</i>	ASBH 73
January 22	<i>Epiphany 3</i>	ASBH 12
January 24 (T)	<i>St. Timothy, Bishop and Confessor</i>	ASBH 74
(Hymn in this issue of the Herald)		
January 25 (W)	<i>The Conversion of St. Paul</i>	ASBH 75
January 26 (R)	<i>St. Titus, Bishop and Confessor</i>	ASBH 76
January 29	<i>Transfiguration</i>	ASBH 15

ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY UPDATE—Classes for the Winter Quarter will run from November 28–December 16, with a Christmas Break from December 17 through January 1, and then the remainder of the Quarter lasting from January 2–February 17. Classes for the Winter Quarter:

- E006—The Gospel of St. John (3 hrs.)
- P005—Homiletics 2 (3 hrs.)
- S009—Apologetics 1 (3 hrs.)
- P009—Parish Administration (1 hr.)

UPDATE ON THE ASBH SUPPLEMENT—Once again, you will find another hymn in this issue of *The Lutheran Herald*: “True Shepherd, Who in Love Most Deep,” the office hymn for the Festival of St. Timothy, Bishop and Confessor (ASBH #74). As noted when the *Supplement* was published, we will continue to distribute additional office hymns as they are selected and typeset.

As regards distribution of the *Supplement*, nearly 400 copies have been ordered for use in the diocese. (Several congregations have ordered additional copies beyond their initial orders; shipment is expected between January 15 and February 1.) Congregational Feedback Forms should be available by mid-January. The Liturgics Committee is reviewing rites for Marriage and Ordination. The English text of Johannes Bugenhagen’s “Passion History” (the earliest form used in the Lutheran Church) has now been typeset, taken from the 1913 *Lutheran Hymnary’s* Altar Book.

To teach and rule and serve Thy fold;
Be faith-ful shep-herds, like their Lord.
Through per - se - cu - tion, shame, or loss. A-men.

4. No better trophy hath this day
Than hearts new-kindled to obey
The call, for Thee that bids them live,
And gladly yield all earth can give.

5. Nor for ourselves we pray alone,
In Thee Thy Church is ever one.
Unite us here in faith and love
Until we worship Thee above.

Festival of St. Timothy

74. True Shepherd, Who in Love Most Deep

Tr., C. Winkworth

1. True Shep - herd, who in love most deep
 2. We thank Thee for that gra - cious care,
 3. Yea, all who own Thee for their Head,

Didst watch and suf - fer for Thy sheep,
 And pray that now and ev - 'ry - where
 Oh, let them in Thy foot - steps tread,

And didst ap - point Thy saints of old
 Thy ser - vants call'd to preach Thy Word
 Own - ing and lov - ing more Thy cross

Lesson from the Book of Concord Sunday after Christmas

Chapter XIII.

In the town of Eisenach in Thuringia there was, to our knowledge, a monk, John Hilten, who thirty years ago was cast by his fraternity into prison, because he had protested against certain most notorious abuses. For we have seen his writings, from which it can be well understood what the nature of his doctrine was. And those who knew him testify that he was a mild old man, and serious indeed, but without moroseness. He predicted many things, some of which have thus far transpired, and others still seem to impend, which we do not wish to recite, lest it may be inferred that they are narrated either from hatred toward one or from partiality to another. But finally when, either on account of his age or the foulness of the prison, he fell into disease, he sent for the guardian, in order to tell him of his sickness; and when the guardian, inflamed with pharisaic hatred, had begun to reprove the man harshly on account of his kind of doctrine which seemed to be injurious to the kitchen; then, passing by the mention of his sickness, he said with a sigh that he had borne these injuries patiently for Christ's sake, since he had indeed neither written nor taught anything which could overthrow the position of the monks, but had only protested against some well-known abuses. "But another one," he said, "will come in A.D. 1516, who will destroy you, neither will you be able to resist him." This very opinion concerning the downward career of the power of the monks, and this number of years, his friends afterwards found also written by him in his Commentaries, which he had left, concerning certain passages of Daniel. But although the issue will teach how much weight should be given to this declaration, yet there are other signs which threaten a change in the power of the monks, that are no less certain than oracles. For it is evident how much hypocrisy, ambition, avarice there is in the monasteries, how much ignorance and cruelty among all the unlearned, what vanity in their sermons and in devising continually new means of gaining money. And there are other faults, which we do not care about mentioning. Although they once were schools for Christian instruction, now they have degenerated as though from a golden age to an iron age, as the Platonic cube degenerates into bad harmonies, which Plato says brings destruction. All the most wealthy monasteries support only an idle crowd, which gluttonizes upon the public alms of the Church. Christ, however, teaches concerning the salt that has lost its savor, that it should be cast out and be trodden under foot (Matt. 5:13). Wherefore the monks by such morals singing their own fate [requiem]. And now another sign is added, because they are, in many places, the instigators of the death of good men. These murders God undoubtedly will shortly avenge. ...

—Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. XXVII, §1–7

John's ministry was done in a most fitting setting: the Desert of Judea. It was desolate and untamed. How fitting that he would be preaching to a people who were also "desolate and untamed." His first recorded word was "repent." How stern and serious was John? What did this little word "repent" really imply? "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance..."

John's audience was no different than we, as we also need to hear the stern word of God's Law. Additionally, repentance is no casual one-time act, for even as Christians we sin daily and must confess our many sins. Luther himself said in the first of his 95 Theses that the entire life of the Christian is to be one of repentance. He also said in the Small Catechism that we should, "by daily contrition and repentance, drown our sins and all evil desires." So it is not only about confessing our sins, it is about battling against them. "Bearing fruit" means to amend our sinful ways. Just like faith without works is dead, repentance without fruit is no repentance. May God work in us to live out our faith each and every day.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure, that in the name of Thy beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

"Do not be haughty, but fear." St. Paul gives a sobering reminder to the saints that we should not be pompous in our salvation, but humble. God's grace is a free blessing. No one deserves it. And just because some reject it or fall away, no one has the right to think himself better than those pitiable souls.

The theme for this week's devotions has been humility and service in faith. God gives us His Spirit and power. He gives us our good vocations. He forgives us and blesses us in His Church. And we are still lowly sinners and unprofitable servants, even if we are converted from being enemies of God. In all this we must remember that all glory and thanks belong to God, and that He came to save sinners! Furthermore, pride and laziness can easily cause us to fall away from true faith and become as lost, or worse, than those who are not faithful.

Like St. Paul, any boasting that might come from us is not to be about us. It must be about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And even in that, we do so with humble awareness for all that He teaches us and all that He does to bless and sustain us. Satan never stops attacking us or trying to tempt us back into rebellion and disobedience. But the right hand of our Lord truly does deliver us from evil.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

No matter who does the outward work, if it is faithful and righteous in God's Word, His Spirit is causing the work. We confess in the Small Catechism, concerning the 3rd Article of the Creed, that it is the Spirit that enlightens and empowers us to all things that are faithful.

If we act in vanity and self-will, we get the credit for that. Proud sin points toward ourselves, and it serves the will of the father of lies. That is why demons and lawless, wicked men can say that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," but they are still strangers and enemies to the kingdom of God.

St. Paul makes his distinctions about the work of the Ministry and evangelism here because he is trying to keep the focus on Christ and His salvation for all nations. The Apostle is trying to keep his hearers focused on the Gospel and the Holy Spirit rather than on distracting debates about man's accomplishments. As we saw in our Lord's teaching in Luke 17, a humble servant does not seek his own comfort, glory, or will. He simply does what is commanded and he lets the Master be glorified in any good order that comes from the work.

God lays the foundation for all good things in Jesus Christ. He forgives our sins and renews us by His Spirit. From that foundation, all other service and good works are done in obedience to our good Lord, even if such things are done for wicked men or enemies.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

One of the tasks civil engineers have to do is site preparation, which involves a lot of "cutting and filling." You need a flat site so truck and rail traffic can move about easily and construction can commence quickly and smoothly. There are hills, ravines, and trees to be dealt with, and mucky soil that has to be removed and replaced with suitable fill. There is much preparation work to be done below before any building can be done above.

If the engineers and earth-movers thought they had it tough, look at the mountains and valleys God has to move and fill to prepare the way for the Gospel. There are the heights of self-righteousness, as well as the valleys of weak faith. There is crookedness and roughness in our sinful straying that takes us away from the straight and smooth path of God's commandments.

But we don't like being "leveled." We don't like having our "kinks" straightened out. We no longer wish for preachers to preach. We should not go into God's House expecting to come out feeling better about ourselves. Rather, we should expect to get "leveled." God's Law will never make you feel better about yourself, only worse. But such prep work clears the way for the Gospel. We come to expose ourselves to the Son now to prevent burning later. For it is only in the Son that we ultimately find warmth, light, and salvation.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure, that in the name of Thy beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The long journey of the magi and their arrival at Bethlehem produce some interesting themes. There is the subject of human ignorance and divine revelation. There is the contrast of normal expectations and hidden realities. Consider how the story develops. The magi arrive in Jerusalem not knowing where the King is supposed to be. They go to Jerusalem instead of the prophesied Bethlehem, and consult with the pagan Herod to find out where the real King is. But alas, some priests and scribes recall the prophecy and mention Bethlehem. And so, off the magi go and link up again with the star, which is now parked over Jesus' new residence. The magi can't miss. In short, God won't allow the ignorance of the magi, nor the evil cunning of Herod, to thwart His promise to save His people through the coming of this newborn King.

Once God gets the job done by accomplishing salvation, He makes sure it gets delivered as well. For like those "wise men" who were in need of the greater wisdom, He takes you unwittingly to the font to make sure you get to the right place. Once you get there, a miracle happens. The pagan becomes a believer, and the ignorant becomes a wise man. In spite of ignorant and rebellious man, God accomplishes salvation. In pity of man, He also delivers the goods.

Prayer: O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know Thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

St. Paul went from being a hostile enemy of the true Church to a great servant of Christ, devoting himself to spreading God's gracious blessings to as many people as possible, even to the point of humble suffering and imprisonment! He glorified Jesus Christ and the Gospel of His forgiveness, and he taught others to do likewise, as we see with St. Titus (whom we remember today on his festival).

The readings this week have had a theme of faithful humility and service. False teachers continue to act in vain ways, justifying themselves and teaching others to follow their example. But the Word of God manifests Himself in kindness, self-sacrificing humility, and service, and He continues to teach His faithful saints to do likewise.

God's people are called on to manifest His will and powers. The faithful saints are to be a witness according to our various vocations so that even sinners in high and powerful positions in the world are taught to seek God's kingdom and righteousness. Not every saint is an apostle, prophet, or pastor and teacher, but we are all called to serve in our proper vocations according to the Lord's Word and example. His holy purposes are given to us, and His Holy Ghost enlightens us so that we understand what truly makes for good order and righteous service. The world continues to hate and plot and manipulate, but Christ's saints are sent with His power to bring His saving Gospel through sincere love and mercy!

Prayer: O God, who didst adorn St. Titus with apostolic virtues, increase in us a spirit directed to a life of duty and justice which is the fruit of a faith that trusts in our Savior, Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

God's Law says, "You shall not murder." But some in the synagogues—who even claimed to be God's people—thought it was right to murder those who offended their vain piety. St. Paul was such a person. Known as Saul before his conversion, he consented to Stephen being murdered in similar circumstances. Such sinners had no right to kill Jesus or Stephen; they had no vocational justification to punish the Lord or His servant. But this is the work that Satan stirs up in the hearts of men and women. They say, "Lord, Lord! I am just and faithful..." but they despise those who preach repentance and humility to them.

We must not delude ourselves; our sinful hearts are viciously hostile to God's holy will and Law. Even if we don't physically try to kill the messengers of truth, our hearts are inclined to resentment that is just as wicked. "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. ... whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire." (Matt. 5:22)

The conversion of St. Paul is a great comfort for those who are brought to faith. Even as he was turned from a wicked and hostile enemy of God to a humble and faithful servant, Christ can do the same in us by the profound power of His merciful Word and Sacraments in His true Church!

Prayer: Merciful Lord, we beseech Thee to cast the bright beams of Thy light upon Thy Church, that it being instructed by the doctrine of the blessed Apostles, may so walk in the light of Thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Word finally became flesh, and the long Old Testament wait was over. God and man have come together in one Person. The Infinite has dwelt bodily in the finite. But we must ask: "How can the Word, who fills all things, who made all things, who is before all things, now limit Himself? How can He become 'bone of our bone' and 'flesh of our flesh' and yet still remain God?"

Here is where reason must bow in humility, just as the shepherds bowed before the manger; and just as we must bow at the altar before the bread that is His Body and the wine that is His Blood. We are in no better position to understand that sacramental mystery than we are the mystery of Christmas. In fact, the two are inextricably linked. Just as we cannot separate the Body of Christ from the bread of His Supper, we cannot separate the eternal Word from the Babe of Bethlehem.

So, do you want to see God? Do you want to behold His glory? Do not be like so many others, who look up into space or grope inside their heart. Go to the Babe in the manger, as the shepherds did. Go to the young Child in the house, as the wise men did. Go to the Man on the cross, as the disciples did. But since we can't literally do those things today, go to the Word and Supper, where the Son of God manifests Himself, so we can both perceive and receive our Savior.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure, that in the name of Thy beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Epiphany of our Lord

Article XVIII. Of Free Will.

The eighteenth article Of Free Will the adversaries receive; although they add some testimonies not at all adapted to this case. They add also a declaration that neither with the Palagians is too much to be granted to the free will, nor with the Manicheans is all freedom to be denied it. Very well; but what difference is there between the Pelagians and our adversaries, since both hold that, without the Holy Ghost, men can love God and perform God's commandments with respect to the substance of the acts, and can merit grace and justification by works which reason performs by itself without the Holy Ghost? How many absurdities follow from these Pelagian opinions, which are taught with great authority in the schools! These Augustine, following Paul, refutes with great emphasis, whose judgment we have recounted above in the article Of Justification. Nor indeed do we deny liberty to the human will. The human will has liberty in the choice of works and things which reason comprehends by itself. It can to a certain extent render civil righteousness or the righteousness of works, it can speak of God, offer to God a certain service in outward works, obey magistrates, parents; by a choice of outward works can restrain the hands from murder, from adultery, from theft. Since there is left in human nature reason and judgment concerning objects subjected to the senses, choice between these things, and the liberty and power to render civil righteousness, are also left. For Scripture calls that righteousness of the flesh which the carnal nature, i.e. reason by itself without the Holy Ghost, renders. Although the power of concupiscence is such that men more frequently obey evil dispositions than sound judgment. And the devil, who is efficacious in the godless, as Paul says (Eph. 2:2), does not cease to incite this feeble nature to various offences. These are the reasons why even civil righteousness is rare among men, as we seen that not even the philosophers themselves, who seem to have aspired after this righteousness, attained it. But it is false that the man does not sin, who performs the work of the commandments without grace. And they add further that such works *merit de congruo* the remission of sins and justification. For human hearts without the Holy Ghost are without the fear of God; without trust toward

TUESDAY, JANUARY 24: LUKE 4:38-44

ST. TIMOTHY

The demons were saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" In Matthew 7:21-23 our Lord says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

Those who are truly faithful will serve and be humble, because such are the works of His Holy Spirit in us. But many are full of pride, and refuse to serve, even using the name of Jesus in their vanity. This is tragic, and frustrating, but it is how things are and will continue to be in this broken, sinful world until Christ comes again in glory at the end of the age. Until then, He continues to teach us, bless us, and heal us according to His Word and Sacraments. These holy blessings were entrusted to His Church and faithful servants like St. Timothy so that we would continue to be blessed throughout the ages. Christ is with us through such saints and the work of His Holy Ghost in the Church. May He also make us to be diligent and faithful in service to His holy work through all our days.

Prayer: O Lord, as Thou didst preserve faithful Timothy to a steadfast confession of Thy Holy Word, even as he instructed those who would be set apart for ministry in Thy Church, we pray that Thou wouldst so bless Thy people in this generation with steadfast confessors; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Sinners despise these words from our Lord. The unfaithful think such humility is foolishness that doesn't apply to them, because they refuse to see themselves as servants. Or, they use feigned humility and service to manipulate others for self-important ends. However, our Lord Jesus Christ blesses us with this example because this is how His faithful people ought to act.

Some call themselves Christians, and yet they act as though they have no need to serve in their vocations. They act as though they have no need to love others, even their enemies, as Christ has taught us to. But this is how our Savior increases the faith of His people. His Spirit creates humility and love that serves according to God's wisdom and righteousness. The kingdom of heaven is shown to us in all that the Word of God teaches and commands, so those who love and serve humbly in their vocations are bearing witness that Christ is truly with us. Our Lord humbled Himself out of love. He chose to serve, even when He did not have to.

Satan will always encourage us to find reasons to do what is right in our own eyes. He encouraged Eve to unfaithfulness in the simple act of eating from the fruit tree. She decided it was a good idea, and she fed herself and her husband in vanity. But our Lord teaches us to be humble and obedient, to not feed ourselves in self-importance, but to love and serve according to His gracious will and example in Christ Jesus, our Savior.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

God, they do not believe that they are hearkened to, forgiven, benefited, and preserved by God. Therefore they are godless. For "neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:18). And "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6).

Therefore, although we concede to free will the liberty and power to perform the outward works of the Law, yet to the free will we do not ascribe these spiritual matters, viz. truly to fear God, truly to believe God, truly to be confident and hold that God regards us, hearkens to us, forgives us, etc. These are the true works of the First Table, which the heart cannot render without the Holy Ghost, as Paul says (1 Cor. 2:14): "The natural man," i.e. man using only natural strength, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." And this can be decided if men consider how hearts are disposed toward God's will, whether they are truly confident that they are regarded and hearkened to by God. Even for saints to retain this faith is difficult, so far is it from existing in the godless. But it is conceived, as we have said above, when terrified hearts hear the Gospel and receive consolation.

Therefore such a distribution is of advantage, in which civil righteousness is ascribed to the free will, and spiritual righteousness to the governing of the Holy Ghost in the regenerate. For thus the outward discipline is retained, because all men ought to know equally both that God requires this civil righteousness, and that after a manner we can afford it. And yet a distinction is shown between human and spiritual righteousness, between philosophical doctrine and the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, and it can be understood for what there is need of the Holy Ghost. Nor has this distribution been invented by us, but Scripture most clearly teaches it. Augustine also treats of it, and recently it has been well treated of by William of Paris, but it has been wickedly suppressed by those who have dreamt that men can obey God's law without the Holy Ghost, but that the Holy Ghost is given in order that respect to that which is meritorious may be added.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession
The Book of Concord

Advertising is all about attention-getting. The goal of the advertiser is to get and hold your attention. If the plan succeeds, you'll end up purchasing the product. And if the advertiser is really successful, you'll tell others about how great the product is. Throughout Scripture, especially in the New Testament, we also see "advertising." We come across the words "Behold!", "Lo!", and "Look!" In each case, those words are there to grab your attention. But those words are wanting you to notice something far more important than a consumer product. God Himself is trying to capture your attention, to "stop you in your tracks," and point you to the truth.

In the text for today, we hear the advertising cry of God's prophet John: "Behold! The Lamb of God!" That was John's job: to be God's "pointer." And now that is our job: to point to the Lamb, and direct people to the Lamb. To the world, "Lamb of God" seems like such a strange title for one who is supposed to be conquering sin, death, and the devil; for lambs are only good for sacrificing and eating, which is hardly the stuff of conquering. But to the believer, it makes perfect sense. Our God plays by a different set of rules. He wins while appearing to lose. He gives Himself over to death, that death might be defeated. He allows Himself to be eaten as bread, that our bodies might receive the "medicine of immortality."

Prayer: O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know Thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Third Sunday after the Epiphany

XVI.

Of Civil Affairs, they [the Lutheran theologians] teach, that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and that it is right for Christians to bear civil office, to sit as judges, to determine matters by the Imperial and other existing laws, to award just punishments, to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to make oaths when required by the magistrates, to marry, to be given in marriage.

They condemn the Anabaptists who forbid these civil offices to Christians. They condemn also those who do not place the perfection of the Gospel in the fear of God and in faith, but in forsaking civil offices; for the Gospel teaches an eternal righteousness of the heart. Meanwhile, it does not destroy the State or the family, but especially requires their preservation as ordinances of God, and in such ordinances the exercise of charity. Therefore, Christians are necessarily bound to obey their own magistrates and laws, save only when commanded to sin, for then they ought to obey God rather than men [Acts 5:29].

—The Augsburg Confession

The wise of this world, the mighty, and the noble are enticed by the temptations of this world. They seek their wisdom, their might, and their fortune from the world, whereas we Christians, who are spiritually minded, seek these things from God. The preaching of Christ crucified is the wisdom of God because it teaches us how He loved us and sent His Son into the world, that we might live through Him. It teaches us that we are forgiven of all our sins through His holy, precious blood and by His innocent suffering and death. It makes us wise unto salvation through faith in Him.

If we are considered to be foolish for believing the Gospel of Christ crucified, if we are to be considered weak for relying upon the Lord instead of ourselves, and if we are to be considered the lowest of the low for placing our hope of salvation in a Savior who was also so despised and rejected of men, then we are not to feel ashamed for it. God has ordained the simple things to conquer the great things of this world. Just as the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ will endure forever, we who have been brought to its saving knowledge and trust in its simple message will share in its ultimate victory.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, ‘Follow Me.’” Many people talk about our need to “ask Jesus into our heart.” But here we see that Philip wasn’t even looking for Jesus! It was Jesus who was looking for and finding Philip. Philip is found by the direct and deliberate will of God. In other words, Philip is found in the same way as you and I. It is the only way by which sinful man can be saved.

Then Jesus gives the imperative, “Follow Me.” In Greek that means, “right now, and don’t stop following.” How does Philip respond? Not with words, but by action: “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’” Philip is so convinced, so convicted, that he immediately shares his newfound faith with his friend Nathanael. The found becomes a finder. One lit torch serves to light another.

Note that Philip doesn’t try to “hook” Nathanael by using some trick bait. He doesn’t try to convince Nathanael by what he has “experienced.” Philip’s testimony to his Galilean friend has nothing to do at all with Philip. Rather, it has everything to do with the tangible, objective Word of God and its linking to the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the promised fulfillment of the Old Testament Word of God.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure, that in the name of Thy beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The First Sunday after the Epiphany

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

The parental estate God has especially honored above estates that are beneath Him, so that He not only commands us to love our parents, but to honor them. For with respect to brothers, sisters and neighbors in general He commands nothing higher than that we love them; so that He separates and distinguishes father and mother above all other persons upon earth, and places them next to Himself. For to honor is far higher than to love, inasmuch as it comprehends not only love, but also modesty, humility and deference as though to a majesty there hidden, and requires not only that they be addressed kindly and with reverence, but most of all that both in heart and with the body we so act as to show that we esteem them very highly, and that, next to God, we regard them the very highest. For one whom we honor from the heart we must truly regard as high and great.

We must, therefore, impress it upon the young that they should regard their parents in God's stead, and remember that however lowly, poor, frail and strange they may be, nevertheless they are father and mother given them by God. And they are not to be deprived of their honor because of their mode of life or their failings. Therefore we are not to regard their persons, how they may be, but the will of God who has thus appointed and ordained. In other respects we are, indeed, all alike in the eyes of God; but among us there must necessarily be such inequality and distinction with respect to order, and therefore God commands that you be careful to obey me as your father, and that I have the precedence. ...

God knows very well this perverseness of the world; therefore He admonishes and urges by commandments that every one consider what parents have done for him, and he will find that he owes to them body and life, as well as sustenance, support and rearing, since otherwise he would have perished a hundred times in his own filth. Therefore it is a true and good saying of old and wise men: *Deo, parentibus et magistris non potest satis gratiae rependi*, that is, to God, to parents and to teachers we can never render sufficient gratitude and compensation. He that regards and considers this will indeed without compulsion do all honor to his parents and cherish them as those through whom God has done him all good.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20: ROMANS 5:1-5 2ND SUNDAY A. EPIPHANY

When sinners are acquitted of their guilt and justified, God's verdict is pronounced gratuitously, that is, it's a free gift; something unmerited and unearned. God's gracious judgment is based upon the ransoming action accomplished by Christ when He paid in full the penalty of sin for the entire world. According to this judgment, God is both just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus (Romans 3:26). All of these wonderful truths are summarized by this little phrase, "justified by faith;" namely, that we are declared righteous and free from sins, and absolved from eternal punishment for the sake of Christ's righteousness, which is imputed by God to faith. What follows is a list of the blessed results of having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul writes that we Christians not only glory in the positives, such as the hope of seeing God's glory on the Last Day, but also in those things which we often view as the negatives, such as tribulations, afflictions, and distresses. He shows us that we glory in these things because of what they produce in us. The more God delivers us, the more confidence we build in His assurances. As that confidence grows, so does our hope, so that when He gives us His immutable Word on something, we eagerly wait to see its fulfillment. In this way, we know any and all tribulation we face in this life works together for our benefit.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Fifth Commandment includes much more than physical acts of violence. According to the Lord, any evil thoughts or emotions that we have about our neighbor, such as hatred, constitute murder in God's eyes (1 John 3:15). Any unjust anger or rebuke toward him to embitter his life is the same as if we caused him physical harm, and just as offensive as murder to God.

The substance of the commandment is not simply about killing, but about having a true lack of love for your brother or sister. If we recognize from God's Word that we've wronged our neighbor and sinned against him, we should go to him and confess our sin to him, humbly asking for his forgiveness, so that we can both come to the Lord's house and offer our gifts to God as reconciled brethren. The righteousness of faith should be clearly visible by our righteousness of life, not only in following God's commandments, but also in our efforts to be reconciled to our brethren. As God has forgiven us, so we ought to desire the forgiveness of our brothers and sisters, and forgive one another. May the Lord always work in us by His grace through the Holy Spirit to keep us humble and penitent, gratefully receiving the forgiveness of our sins through the redemptive work of our Savior and His exceeding righteousness for our entry into the kingdom of heaven.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Besides all this, it should be a great inducement to influence us the more to obedience to this commandment, that God adds to the same a temporal promise and says: "*That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*" ...

In connection with this commandment it is proper to speak further of all kinds of obedience to persons in authority who have to command and to govern. For all authority flows and is propagated from the authority of parents. For where a father is unable alone to educate his child, he employs a schoolmaster that he may instruct it; if he be too weak, he obtains the assistance of his friends and neighbors; if he depart, he confers and delegates his authority and government to others who are appointed for the purpose. Likewise he must have domestics, man-servants and maid-servants, under him for the management of the household, so that all whom we call masters are in the place of parents and must derive their power and authority to govern from them. Hence also they are all called fathers in the Scripture, as those who in their government perform the functions of the office of a father, and should have a paternal heart toward their subordinates. As also from antiquity the Romans and other nations called the masters and mistresses of the household *patres et matres familiae*, that is housefathers and housemothers. So also they called their national rulers and chiefs *patres patriae*, that is fathers of the country, for a great sham to us, who would be Christians that we do not call them so, or, at least, do not esteem and honor them as such. ...

Thus we have two kinds of fathers presented in this commandment, fathers in blood and fathers in office, or those to whom belongs the care of the family, and those to whom belongs the care of the nation. Besides these there are spiritual fathers; not like those in the Papacy, who have indeed caused themselves to be so designated, but have not performed the functions of the paternal office. For those are to be called spiritual fathers who govern and guide us by the Word of God. Of this name St. Paul boasts (1 Cor. 4:15), where he says: "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel." Because they are fathers indeed they are entitled to honor above all others.

—Large Catechism, the Book of Concord, §105–8, 129–131, 141–142, 158–159

This short passage connects the Lord Jesus' infancy to the time He was twelve years old. It confesses that He grew and matured like every other child, but with this exception: He was the perfect Child. We might like to know what the perfect Child was like, but St. Luke does not indulge our curiosity and he passes over our Lord's childhood in only two verses. Why?

If we knew what the Christ was like as a child, parents would demand the same perfection of their children. But that is an impossible standard and, besides, the Law already demands perfection. The Christ came to be the Savior of children, too. That means He did what they cannot. He did not come to compel us to be perfect; He came to forgive us because we are not perfect.

By being the perfect Child, the Christ redeemed all mankind. Not everyone lives to old age, but everyone was once a child. Hebrews 2 explains, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same" (v. 14). Taking that which all men share in common (that is, human infancy and childhood), He redeemed all mankind and promises salvation to everyone who believes in Him.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

God reveals Himself to mankind through means and messengers. Sometimes these means are supernatural theophany such as a burning bush, a pillar of fire, or a whirlwind. Other times he speaks through His angelic messengers, such as Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. But what is most familiar to us is when the Lord reveals Himself through His called and ordained servants, such as the Prophets, the Apostles and Evangelists, and even pastors today. In every case, the Lord reveals something about Himself to His people.

Through Moses, the mediator of the First Covenant, God gave us His holy Law. St. John the Baptist was the messenger of God prophesied by Malachi to prepare His people by the preaching of repentance. But the greatest of all God's messengers was His only-begotten Son. While the Apostles and Prophets could only proclaim what the Lord had revealed to them, Jesus Christ had no need of revelation. St. Paul teaches us that, as true God, "in [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). And what Christ came to declare concerning the Father is His everlasting grace and mercy toward sinful mankind.

Dr. Luther expresses: "We could never attain to the knowledge of the grace and favor of the Father except through the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the paternal heart" (Large Catechism, 3rd Article of the Creed). Whoever, then, knows Christ by faith, knows the true mind which the Father has toward him.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Epiphany season teaches us that the kingdom of heaven does not appear the way the world expects it to, and that God's grace manifests itself to those whom the world would ignore. Zacchaeus was not highly esteemed by his neighbors. He was a publican, i.e., a tax-collector, and by the people's own estimation, a sinner. He was not even tall in stature, and as the Lord passed by, he climbed up into a tree simply to get a glimpse of Him. Though Zacchaeus was despised by the crowd, the Lord took notice of him. Zacchaeus was one of the lost whom Christ had come to seek and to save.

By listing off his works of penance, Zacchaeus demonstrated to the Lord that he was bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. In other words, Zacchaeus was showing his faith by his works. When Jesus proclaimed, "Today salvation has come to this house," He affirmed that Zacchaeus had been saved, not by his good works, but that he had proved himself a faithful penitent and an heir of Abraham's promise.

It might seem at times as though we are seeking the Lord as Zacchaeus did when he climbed the tree. But really, it is the Lord who has initiated our redemption and, by His Spirit, has brought us to Himself. Christ came to seek and to save the lost, and He continues to draw us unto Himself through the Ministry of His Word today.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

He looked around with anger. True justice is angry with wickedness. Psalm 7 says, "God is angry with the wicked every day" (v. 11). Anger is not sinful of itself. Anger can be sinfully misused. But, if in faith, one is angry against wickedness and does not harm the innocent in his anger, that anger is a good thing. The season of Epiphany is about our Lord revealing Himself to the world as God in the flesh. In this text, He reveals Himself to be true Justice.

The Lord Jesus Christ is angry because of the hatred which the Pharisees have for their fellow man. Here in their synagogue is a man in need of help, who has only one good hand. But, instead of helping him, the Pharisees use him as a tool for blaspheming the Christ. The Large Catechism explains that to refuse help is the same as causing injury. Thus: "if you see one suffer hunger and do not give him food, you have caused him to starve" (LC, 5th Commandment). The justice of our Lord's anger is that it comes from compassion—compassion for the helpless.

All men must repent of anger which proceeds from selfish and impure motives. Then, all must console themselves in that forgiveness which comes by our Lord's compassion for poor sinners, who cannot save themselves.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“You do not have to do anything to be saved; all you have to do is believe.” Does that sound easy? It is not. It is impossible for you to believe by your own powers. Belief in the Christ is impossible, unless the Holy Spirit creates in you a new heart. The stubborn unbelief of the Jews shows this. The Jews ask what works they must do and Jesus tells them, in essence, “all you have to do is believe.” And they cannot do it. It is too hard for them. If He had said, “give to the poor,” or, “pray and fast,” they immediately would have done it. But He gives them a command which they cannot do, no matter how hard they try.

If faith is impossible, who, then, can be saved? Our Lord answers in Matthew 19, saying, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (v. 26). The Holy Spirit is able to create faith even in what was formerly an unbelieving heart. The ordinary way He does this is through the sacrament of Baptism, for our Lord says, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). When we trust in Baptism and when we baptize our children, we are trusting in God’s strength to save us, because Baptism is His promise.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Lord Himself prescribes the qualities of true worship: it must be done in spirit and in truth. True worship must be a fruit of faith wrought by the Holy Spirit, so that our own spirit bears witness together with the Spirit that we are the children of God. Moreover, true worship must be directed and governed by God’s own Word, by which He leads us into all truth. This worship is beautiful in its simplicity. It does not require great and awesome ceremonies or mountaintop cathedrals. It is often belittled and despised by the world, because the world cannot understand the work of the Spirit in the hearts of God’s people. The world looks for the outward appearance, but God searches the heart.

The world did not recognize the true value of the Messiah when He came; He did not live in a grand palace or wear fine clothes. In His humiliation, Jesus did not seem to be greater than His father Jacob, and yet He promised to give something greater than Jacob’s well could yield—living water, which is the gift of salvation. Christ came to reveal Himself by His Word and His miracles so that those who genuinely looked for Him would see Him for who He truly was. Even so, the worship of God’s people might seem simple, yet nothing is more pleasing to the Lord than the prayers of the faithful.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

XI. Of the Marriage of Priests.

In prohibiting marriage, and burdening the divine order of priests with perpetual celibacy, they have neither reason nor right, but have treated it as antichristian, tyrannical, sceptical scoundrels, and have afforded occasion for all kinds of horrible, abominable sins of impurity, in which they still wallow. But just as the power has been given neither to us nor to them to make a woman out of a man, or man out of a woman, or to annihilate both, so also it has not been given them; so also power has not been given them to sunder and separate such creatures of God, or to forbid them from living honorably in marriage with one another. Therefore we are unwilling to assent to their abominable celibacy, nor will we even tolerate it, but we wish to have marriage free as God has instituted and appointed it, and we wish neither to rescind nor hinder His work; for Paul says that this prohibition of marriage is a doctrine of devils (1 Tim. 4:1sq.)

XIV. Of Monastic Vows

As monastic vows directly conflict with the first chief article, they ought to be absolutely abolished. For it is of them that Christ says (Matt. 24:5, 23 sqq.): “I am Christ,” etc. For he who makes a vow to live in a monastery believes that he will enter upon a mode of life holier than the ordinary Christians, and by his own works wishes to earn heaven not only for himself, but also for others; this is to deny Christ. And they boast from their St. Thomas that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Art. XI, XIV

THURSDAY, JANUARY 12: MATTHEW 16:24–27 1ST S. A. EPIPHANY

The Christ commands us to take up our own cross and follow Him. Now, the cross is an instrument of torture, so every Christian should expect torture. But that is not all Christ says; compare these words from Matthew 11: “Take My yoke upon you ... for My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (vs. 29-30). How can the cross of Christ be both torture and easy? It is as He Himself says: “what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” The Christian will suffer torture of various kinds. Nonetheless, he rejoices because his soul is safe with God. This faith makes even the torture light and easy to bear.

In this way, the martyrs of old faced their deaths with rejoicing. Consider St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, who wrote on the way to his death, “May I have the pleasure of the wild beasts that have been prepared for me... and if when I am willing and ready they are not, I will force them” (Letter to the Church in Rome, 5:2). These are not the words of a suicide; they are the words of a Christian confident of his salvation and about to realize his salvation in his flesh. May God grant us the same joy and confidence.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13: JOHN 10:31-38 1ST SUNDAY A. EPIPHANY

The Lord Jesus quotes Psalm 82, from which we read, “I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes’” (vs. 6-7). The Jews had received a profound gift; they received the Word of God through Moses and the prophets. By this Word, God adopted the family of Israel as His children. He names them “gods” for two reasons: 1) because they are children of the true God by grace and 2) because they received the wisdom of God over all the other nations. But the nation of Israel has squandered those heavenly gifts by rejecting God’s only begotten Son. For this reason, they will die like ordinary men.

The Christian Church, on the other hand, is not a human organization. She is the communion of all true believers. She is established by God Himself, therefore she will never fail. The saints—her individual members—are the children of God and brothers and sisters of the Christ. They are “gods”, not in the sense of being superhuman, but because they are God’s family, having been adopted through Baptism. As the Son is in the Father and we are baptized into the Son, so we have peace with God.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14: MARK 1:21-28 1ST SUNDAY A. EPIPHANY

The topic of demon possession is very confused, and the unchurched frequently get their ideas from movies. We note two things about demonic possession from this text: first, where it happens; second, how it is cast out.

The demon-possessed man is in the synagogue where the Christ is teaching. There is a demon mixed in among the worshippers. This requires sober reflection: the devil loves to attack the Christian Church from the inside. We are not free of his influence even in the Divine Service.

However, when the Christ gives a command, the devil must obey. The devil is cast out by the Word of God. Our only protection is in the Word of God. This does not mean that the devil obeys us. Though our Lord, at one time, promised the apostles that the devil would obey them, He has not promised this to all saints of all time. But He has promised us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through His Word and sacraments. It is not the work of exorcism that protects us, but the ordinary marks of the Church—faithful preaching, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. Sometimes God allows the devil freedom to test us, but if we trust in God’s Word and sacraments, there is nothing meaningful the devil can do: he cannot take away our salvation.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.