

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



The flight of the Holy Family to Egypt

JANUARY 2011

(S. AFTER NEW YEAR—4TH S. AFTER EPIPHANY)

The Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America

Grace and peace to you in Christ Jesus!

It is a pleasure to present to you the first issue of *The Lutheran Herald* for A.D. 2011. The labors of this little publication are shared among the pastors of our diocese and our brethren in the Association of Confessional Lutheran Churches, and therefore this month our contributors are Pastor Jeffrey Ahonen, Pastor Rob Lawson, Jr. (ACLC), Deacon Tony Oncken, and Pastor Tim Tolar. It is a blessing that our fellowship is blessed with such orthodox servants of the Word, and I hope that the fruit of their labors in Christ will be a blessing to all those who read these brief mediations on the Word.

At the conclusion of this issue you will find a selection from Schmauk's famous book, *The Confessional Principle*. It is my intention to include several such selections in the coming months; as 2011 is the centennial of the original publication of *The Confessional Principle*, we find that much of the wisdom of Dr. Schmauk's analysis is being jettisoned precisely by those who purport to be "confessional" leaders in our own age—it is our hope that the wisdom of a prior age will serve as an exhortation to the faithful today, for the Truth does not change.

In Christ,
The Rt. Rev. James D. Heiser
Bishop, the ELDoNA

From the Propers for the Sunday after New Year

GOSPEL

St. Matthew 2:13–23 (NKJV)

Now when they [the wise men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.”

When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”

Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: “A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more.”

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child’s life are dead.”

Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

The COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Your good pleasure, that in the name of Your beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Monday, January 3: St. Matthew 2:19–23 Sunday after New Year

Even as Joseph, who prefigures Christ, was driven from his home, into Egypt, by his jealous brothers, so is Israel's Messiah driven into Egypt by a tyrant king, jealous of his throne. Soon Jacob's whole family would join Joseph, and there, Old Testament Israel would flourish into the great nation God had promised.

The Lord God called Israel out of Egypt by the hand of Moses, and delivered His people safely through the Red Sea by drowning Pharaoh and his army. So does the angel of the Lord call the toddler Christ out of Egypt by the hand of His step-father, Joseph, in fulfillment of the Scripture: *Out of Egypt I called My Son*.

The Holy Family turns aside and dwells in the despised city of Nazareth, which means "Root." God's Son must grow up as the *Nazarene*, the Root rejected of men, broken in death upon the Tree of the Cross. This He does *for us men and for our salvation*.

So it is that, *in fulfillment of the Scripture*, God's people have their own deliverance: Holy Baptism, for *Baptism now saves you*. In baptism the faithful are delivered from that tyrant prince the devil, from bondage to sin and death, and grafted as branches into Christ. Yet, mark this well: the life of the faithful follows the life of Christ. The devil will work that much harder to break the faithful branches away from our Tree of Life. So we must be ever vigilant to live daily in baptismal repentance and find our life in that Root from whence all mercy and life flow.

Tuesday, January 4: St. Matthew 3:1–12 Sunday after New Year

St. John, this odd recluse dressed in camel's hair and a leather belt, is a good man for our time. For like every faithful preacher should be (and as every faithful Christian should expect his or her pastor to be), John is focused with tunnel vision on Christ. He will not depart one jot or one tittle from the message prepared for him to preach from the time of his own Nativity: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*

The food he eats betokens the message he preaches: First, the locust, hearkening back to that plague upon unrepentant Egypt that devoured everything in its path, as does the preaching of the Law devour. John gives voice to that word from God that condemns sin and kills the sinner.

He does so, however, in service to the Gospel; signified by the sweet honey that He dines on. The Law is God's alien work. It is the bitter, yet necessary preparation so that Christ Jesus may appear, the One who is the way out from underneath the Law.

The Gospel is God's proper work. So, John wants to bring us to Jesus. But Jesus can only be of real comfort to those who have owned up to their sin. So John's fiery preaching serves a purpose: to bring sinners to their knees in repentance and then drive them to Jesus Christ Who comforts sinners with the forgiveness of sins.

Thus does John grant holy baptism to all those who come to him confessing their sin. This is a baptism *for the remission of sins*. To those who confess the darkness of their sin, he points them to the Light. Yes, John certainly is a good man for our time. May all of God's called and ordained servants take him as their example.

Wednesday, January 5: St. Luke 3:1–9 Sunday after New Year

Is there a difference between the baptism bestowed by John and the baptism which we have received? Only in this: John's baptism looked ahead to the atoning work that Christ would accomplish for sinners in His sacrifice upon the cross. Our baptism distributes the benefits of that saving work already accomplished, for Christ has died, and He is risen from the dead. We are now baptized with water *in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost*, and such baptism "effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this."

Yet, John's baptism, too, was a baptism of water *for the remission of sins*. We don't know the exact formula; the precise word from God attached to the water of John's baptism. But we know that his baptism was no mere empty, symbolic act. Rather it was a baptism that washed repentant sinners clean of the stain of sin.

It was a baptism that produced children of Abraham, that is, children of God who shared the faith of Abraham. Abraham believed God's promise of a Savior from sin, death and hell, and his faith *was accounted to him as righteousness*. Abraham looked forward to Jesus' day. He rejoiced to see it, and was glad. So are all those true sons of Abraham who trust in Christ and are justified by faith even as he was.

Rejoice, therefore! In the birth of God's Son in human flesh, and in His death upon the cross God and sinners are reconciled. And in holy baptism God has truly made children of Abraham out of stones. For into stone-cold dead sinners baptized into Christ, the Light of the World has shined as into a dark place, raising them back to Life with God.

Thursday, January 6: St. Matthew 2:1–12 S. after New Year

Here is a mystery: the Star that the Magi from the east saw is Christ Himself! Balaam's prophecy is fulfilled: *A Star shall come out of Jacob*. Even as Jesus testifies in Revelation: *I am . . . the bright and Morning Star.*" Just imagine: the Son of God toddles around as a helpless human child in Bethlehem. At the same time, in a special Star, He is guiding the Wise Men to the place where He dwells. How can this be? He can be in many different places at the same time. This is just as possible for Him as it is for Him to be truly present with His Body and Blood on many different altars every Sunday.

Yes, the Star of David, Jesus Christ, appeared to the Magi to be a lamp unto their feet, and a light unto their path. And yet, He led them first to Jerusalem to inquire after his dwelling place from the Word that the chief priests and scribes preached. Only after they heard that Word did the Star reappear to guide them to Bethlehem. So it is primarily by means of the Word that the wise men were lead to the place where the young child was.

The Word and the Sacraments are "the star [that] proclaims the King is here" for us, too. In preaching we hear a Word that declares to us that we have a Savior Who has died our death on the cross and has been raised from the dead to live and reign as our King. In water and Word our sins are washed away. In bread/ Body and wine/Blood the whole fullness of God's Life is poured into us. Yes, the means of grace are our Epiphany Star in which we find *Immanuel*—God with us.

John's preaching of repentance and his baptism for the remission of sins prepares the way for the Lord to be manifested publicly to Israel. That is what *Epiphany* means, "manifestation." God was manifested in the flesh at Christmas, and manifested to Gentiles as the Savior of the world on Epiphany. Today, Jesus is manifested as the suffering Servant in His baptism. Thus does He begin His Public Ministry.

The wages of sin is death, and so, death is required as the price of man's redemption. Yet, only the sacrifice of the innocent God/Man, Jesus Christ, could satisfy the Father's wrath. In His baptism, then, our Lord "did consecrate a bath / To wash away transgressions, / To rescue us from bitter death / By His own blood and passion. / New life for us creating". (ELH 247:1)

In His baptism Jesus switches places with us. Our sin is placed on Him so that He can receive the punishment due to us. Thus do we receive His righteousness in our baptism. For "All who believe and are baptized / Shall thereby have salvation. / Thus, born again in Jesus Christ / We're freed from sin's damnation. / We shall inherit heaven." (ELH 247:5)

By His baptism, Christ Jesus has made our own baptism what it is—a powerful sacrament that forgives our sins and grants us communion and life with God. So we sing about our baptism: "And though our mortal eye is dim / And sees but simple water; / Faith sees Christ Jesus, and in Him / The Lamb ordained for slaughter. / We see the cleansing fountain, red / With the dear blood of Jesus, / Which, from all sins inherited / And our misdeeds, can free us; / Eternal life bestowing. (ELH 247:7)

Saturday, January 8: St. Luke 3:23–38 Sunday after New Year

The genealogies are easily dismissed because it seems like there's nothing there for us. For whose eyes do not glaze over as they read the seemingly endless lists of unpronounceable names? But do not pass over the genealogy, for there's more here than meets the eye. Jesus, it was supposed (by those with darkened minds), was the son of Joseph. But behold! Joseph is only His stepfather. He has no human father. Rather, He is the Son of God—*very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.*

He is also true Man, united to Adam's flesh in the blessed Virgin's womb and born of that flesh, yet without sin since He has no human father. Adam was formed by God from the dust of the earth, and into Him God breathed the breath of life. But Adam fell from his status as a son of God and brought sin and death upon all his descendants. *Through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.*

Christ Jesus is the second and greater Adam, come to redeem the entire race of fallen humanity descended from Adam and restore them to God. *For as by one man's [Adam's] disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's [Christ's] obedience many will be made righteous.* And again: *As in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.* So the church sings:

*By Adam's sin we all have sinned And earn but condemnation;
So now in Christ we live again Through free and full salvation.
Like as we all through Adam's fall Eternal death do merit,
So now has God through Christ's dear blood Renewed what was
corrupted.
(ELH 430:3)*

From the Propers for the First Sunday after Epiphany

The GOSPEL

St. Luke 2:41–52 (NKJV)

His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.

When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him.

Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.

So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously."

And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.

Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them.

But His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

The COLLECT

O Lord, we beseech You mercifully to receive the prayers of Your people who call upon You; 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, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Jesus Christ is revealed to us.

John the Baptizer does a wonderful job of emphasizing the importance of the Holy Spirit and His work. Too often sin would have us believe the unscriptural chatter about how one has to be “excited” or “on fire” for Jesus in order for the Spirit to be truly alive in him. False teachers emphasize how one should feel about things: “Do you feel like being baptized?” “Did you get fired up by the praise band, and did you find the skits amusing?” “Do you feel welcomed and free to come up and share some bread and grape juice?” However, when John speaks about Christ and His Holy Spirit the emphasis is not on people and feelings, but on God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

“I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.” When John bears witness about Jesus he does so in terms of the whole Godhead. John was sent by God as a final prophet who would testify about His Son, the Messiah, and God’s Spirit, who would anoint Him as such. Not only is John’s testimony focused on God, but most importantly on what *God* does! Jesus is the one who is greater than John, but he does not spend his breath talking about how much he loves Jesus or how much he worships His glory. John focuses on God’s work, not feeling. “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Jesus comes to save us, and the Spirit comes to reveal the salvation that Jesus accomplishes for us! The feelings of joy and zeal that might come from this good news are simply a bonus that comes from the main work of His message, and thanks be to God for that as well!

Jesus Christ is our focus.

“What do you seek?” This is a question we ought to ask ourselves every day, numerous times. And this question is often easier for a Christian to answer than it is for others. One of the great benefits and joys of the Christian faith is that God teaches us according to His wisdom and His Law. He helps us to know and understand, to believe, teach, and confess what we know and seek. We can see this with Andrew in our reading. Andrew’s testimony to Simon (who would become Peter) stated, “We have found the Messiah.” Whether or not Andrew understood it when Jesus asked him, “What do you seek?” he would eventually come to the best possible answer. He found the Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

For some unbelievers the question “What do you seek?” is easy to answer, because they have clear ideas of the selfish or worldly goals with which sin and Satan have preoccupied them. Liars, madmen, and false teachers can create so much intellectual “noise” in the world that some folks are thoroughly confused and even become reluctant to try answering such important questions. But God asks all of us this question, “What do you seek?”, whereas Satan would have us give a wrong answer, or not even think about it. But our answer is seriously important.

What we seek shows our focus. So the more we ask ourselves what we seek, the more opportunity God’s Holy Spirit has to remind us that our focus is Jesus Christ, His cross, and all that He has taught us!

Wednesday, January 12: John 1:43–51 1st Sunday after Epiphany

Jesus Christ shows us the kingdom of heaven.

The conversation between Philip, Nathanael, and Jesus in John 1 contains many cultural and political implications. Philip called Nathanael to come and see the Messiah who fulfills the Word of God given through Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament. Some Jewish expectations about the Messiah taught that He would be a man of worldly power and glory, but Philip points out that Jesus is from Nazareth and the son of Joseph. Nazareth was held in low esteem by people at that time, and the future Apostles might have known that Joseph was simply a local carpenter. These ideas could have been part of Nathanael's skepticism about this Jesus of Nazareth. However, Jesus reveals to Nathanael that His power and glory are heavenly!

Jesus' signs and wonders then were a small preview of the greater work of the Son of God and King of Israel. Jesus would later declare before Pontius Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world. He was then crucified because He *truly* was the Son of God and King of Israel; He was the Son to be sacrificed for the sins of the world, and the King of Kings from the line of David, all according to the Word of God that lead to Philip and Nathanael's faith in Him when He called them!

All these details remind us that Christ's kingdom is indeed spiritual and heavenly, but it also takes place in earthly cultures and events. Likewise, our salvation and eternal life are spiritual realities, but He continues to show forth His power and glory through our earthly lives as well!

Thursday, January 13: Luke 4:1–13 1st Sunday after Epiphany

Jesus Christ purchased us with His innocent suffering and death.

Luther teaches us in his *Small Catechism* the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed confesses that we have been purchased and won from death and the devil by Jesus' innocent suffering and death, so that we may live under Him in His kingdom. We see both Christ's innocence and the true nature of His kingdom in His temptation in the wilderness.

Although Jesus was indeed true man, He was not a slave to the appetites of flesh and blood. Satan tempted Him to sin, to abuse the powers He had as true God, to seek a kingdom and power that were not of God, and to mockingly test God. Our own sinful flesh and blood would have failed these tests, but, thanks be to God, Jesus' divine innocence and power according to His Word and Spirit made Him the victor!

Christ's kingdom is revealed through works of flesh and blood, but it is not *merely* a matter of flesh and blood. He shows us our life is not simply a matter of daily bread, but depends on every Word of God, especially the Word of our forgiveness in Christ! True power and peace do not come from earthly governments, who often seem to have given Satan authority in their lands. The Kingdom of Heaven in Jesus Christ is more powerful, and will bring *eternal* peace! And God's glory is not served by vain public spectacles like jumping off the temple, but by the innocence and humble faithfulness of Christ as He was accused, sentenced, and crucified so that we may live in His glory forever.

The Kingdom of God is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Satan never rests. At the beginning of time he tempted Adam and Eve into sin, and he is committed to enslaving mankind and destroying God's kingdom. But from that time God promised to protect and restore His kingdom among mankind. The Seed of a woman would bruise Satan's head, even as Satan bruised His heel. Many generations later Jesus would finally be born of a virgin to begin the fulfillment of God's holy promise.

Satan was still trying as Jesus began His public ministry. He tempted Jesus, trying to mock both the Son of God and the Word of God. Elsewhere, he was also persecuting the proclamation of God's Word by having depraved men imprison John the Baptizer. However, Satan's efforts to silence the prophets throughout history were to no effect. Christ would proclaim that the Words of the prophets were coming true. He would show that He was, as John said, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, sacrificed for our sins during the time of Passover. The Kingdom of God would not be destroyed by the devil, but instead Christ was raised up as the King of Glory as He conquered death!

Satan still does not rest as he continues trying to destroy us. Thanks be to God that Christ never rests either! His kingdom continues to prevail against the devil as His Words still are proclaimed to us through His Church. May He continue to bless us with the constant message of repentance and forgiveness that comes through His Spirit and Word!

Saturday, January 15: Matthew 4:12–17 1st S. after Epiphany

Jesus Christ is our Great Light!

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” In this one sentence we have a Law/Gospel sermon. Our daily sins and our original sinful nature breed darkness and death in our lives, making it necessary for us to repent. We need the light of Jesus Christ to come to us by His Word and Spirit. God’s call to repentance is His way of waking us up and opening our eyes to the fact that we sit in darkness, living in the shadow of death amidst the whole fallen world.

The whole theme of the Epiphany season is the revelation of Christ our Light and the coming of His kingdom. And we not only need Him to call us to repentance, but we also need Him to accomplish it in us. We need the Word of God to expose our sin and death by the wisdom of His Law. Then we are made ready for the coming of His blessed kingdom in His Gospel.

All these ideas should seem familiar, like we have heard them before throughout the Church year, but that is because the most important things need to be repeated and remembered! Jesus’ message of repentance, forgiveness, and life in His kingdom is, and should be, repeated throughout all the preaching and teaching of the Church. This great blessing is God’s way of keeping His Light among us so that we might always see our forgiveness in the cross of Christ Jesus clearly!

From the Propers for the Second Sunday after Epiphany

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 2:1–11 (NKJV)

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

The COLLECT

Almighty and Everlasting God, Who governs all things in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the prayers of Thy people and grant us Thy peace through all our days; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Monday, January 17: Genesis 17:1–22 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Chapter 17 is full of promise focusing on the institution and confirmation of the covenant. God is the speaker and giver, Abram the hearer and recipient. Abram was to be the father, not of one nation through Ishmael, but of many nations. To commemorate this part of the promise, Abram was to change his name to Abraham. The change was greater in sense than in sound, for Abram (“exalted father”) became Abraham (“father of a multitude”). The new name universalized Abraham’s experience for he is to be the father of many nations as well as kings; and one of those kings would be the Messiah. God’s special covenant relationship with Abraham would endure throughout the generations of his descendants until that promised Messiah fulfilled the covenant initiated by circumcision and ushered in a new covenant. God focused the attention of Abraham on the child yet to be born through Sarah and named by God. This promised Seed of Abraham would fulfill the law and usher in a new covenant sealed by a circumcision not made with hands. A holy washing of forgiveness of sins through which we are called into Christ’s church regardless of age. An outward sign that confesses an eternal reality promised and fulfilled by God. Holy Baptism, like circumcision before it, is a sacrament that identifies “marks” the Lord’s chosen from the mass of condemned humanity. It is not some magic ritual or an act of piety performed by the believer as a show of faith, but a means of grace that presents the reality of the blessed promise of forgiveness of sins through Christ made and fulfilled by God.

Tuesday, January 18: Genesis 18:1–33 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

This text gives a glimpse into the gracious Christian hospitality we are all called to live through faith. These three visitors appear as men to Abraham while in fact two of them were angels and the other was the Angel of the Lord, the Lord Himself. He clearly identified Himself as the Lord by His knowledge of Sarah's name and her secret laughter behind the tent door. He also repeated the promise that Abraham had previously received from the Lord. We do well to remember this text and Hebrews 13:2 in our daily life, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. The Lord graciously visits His people in many ways because He desires to commune with us and assure us in our faith toward His gracious promises. What we do or do not do to the least of His servants we do or fail to do to Him. The words of promise and unity through Christ as One body seem hard to believe for the human mind and earthly logic, but these are just as sure as the promises made to Sarah and Abraham. For nothing is too hard for the Lord to accomplish. Sarah penitently accepted the reproof for her unbelief and lying and "by faith...received power to conceive." The text also says the Lord "knows Abraham." In this way God's choice of entering into a covenant with His chosen is exemplified in Abraham and demonstrates the great privilege of God's covenant people (Old and New Testament): God has revealed his purposes to them and allows their voice to be heard (in intercession) in the court of heaven.

Wednesday, January 19: Genesis 19:1–29 2nd S. after Epiphany

Today's text presents the unending patience and mercy of the Lord regarding those who look to Him for comfort and salvation as their Redeemer. Though Lot realizes his blessed situation in being warned and delivered by the Lord from the destruction coming upon the region in which he dwelt, Lot also was distracted and tempted by his earthly possessions within the condemned city. While Lot was indeed righteous we can see how even the godly can be seduced by evil if they are exposed to it continuously and make their home within it. Lot had not become a participant in the abominable acts of the Sodomites, but he was allowing his family to become ever more closely wedded to the natives of that region. The Lord restrained His hand of judgment upon the ungodly cities, while Lot hesitated due to his misguided emotions, because the Lord remembered the prayerful request of Abraham for mercy to be shown toward any righteous who may dwell in them. God again shows His long-suffering nature and bountiful mercy in withholding destruction upon the city of Zoar because of Lot's prayerful plea to allow him and his family to flee there rather than into the hills. The Lord has to lead Lot and his family out of the path of destruction because they are too blinded by earthly ties to accomplish it on their own, just like only through Christ and the Holy Spirit are we led from the destruction of sin, death, and the devil. Only by maintaining our gaze on Jesus and His cross (and thus averting our gaze from the valley of sin) shall we be spared from the coming destruction of God's judgment upon the ungodly.

The entirety of this text makes it stunningly clear that all happened through the Lord and His plan: The Lord “visited” Sarah, the Lord “did to” Sarah, “at the time of which God had spoken to” Abraham, and Isaac was circumcised on the eighth day “as God had commanded.” Isaac’s name which was “given by” God means “he laughs.” Abraham and Sarah had given way to unbelief and incredulous laughter at the thought that they were to become parents of a son in their old age. When the impossible miraculously happened, Sarah burst out into laughter of joy. At the same time she realized that others would laugh over her when told that she had borne a son at her age. Such a tale would strike them as ridiculous, but she and Abraham now understood that nothing is impossible or ridiculous for the Lord. For His divine reasons and purposes God had delayed the fulfillment of His promise to deliver the son for 25 years. When He finally set a definite date, the long-expected moment arrived as “God had spoken to” Abraham the year before. God in His infinite wisdom and ways (which are often beyond our understanding) always does things in the perfect way at the right time. Let us always wait for the Lord and follow His way, for through His ways and His timetable He will deliver His promise of eternal joy in His Kingdom to those who keep faith in Christ and His perfect life and atoning death upon the cross for sin.

In today's text Abraham is shown possessing an unfailing faith in the promise made to him and his descendants concerning the possession of the Promised Land. Abraham appears to have become convinced that he was near the end of his life and thus placed a responsibility upon his most trusted servant that was to continue even after Abraham's death through the oath he required of this trusted servant. Abraham did not want Isaac leaving the land of Canaan and returning to the land of Abraham's ancestors because that land was no longer Abraham or Isaac's home for God had promised Canaan to Abraham and his offspring. Even though Abraham was currently a sojourner in the Promised Land he acted as though the land was already his possession and exhibits no doubt that Isaac shall live and bring forth descendants for Abraham in this land that the Lord has promised to them as a possession. The servant also exhibits a great faith in the Lord and His almighty power in directing the affairs of men in all lands through his pious prayer for assistance from God in fulfilling his obligation/oath to Abraham regarding the acquiring of a suitable wife for Isaac. He and Abraham both exhibit a patience and confidence that comes through faith in a God who guides and protects those who look to Him for their salvation. Upon realizing that the Lord had safely brought him to his destination he also demonstrates his faith in his giving of reverent thanks to the Lord for His gracious mercy toward him and his master. We too are to live such lives of faith for we also already possess the Kingdom of God through faith and baptism.

The most striking element throughout this text is the faith in the Lord exhibited by all those presented, for none acted on their own emotions or thoughts but instead sought the guidance and will of God at every step. It was considered a breach of good manners for a guest to decline to eat when food was set before him. It was also customary not to present one's chief concern bluntly but only in the course of the conversation at the meal. Abraham's servant however risked offending his host because he was sure his task was being guided by the Lord. His hosts also being convinced that this is from the Lord did not take offense, even refusing to consider whether the request was bad or good from their own point of view. The servant further broke with normal hospitality rules in requesting that he be allowed to leave immediately with Rebekah. It appears he is eager to fulfill his obligation/oath, and not offer any resistance or the slightest delay regarding that which the Lord has so abundantly blessed. Rebekah and her family likewise submit to what does appear to be the Lord's will for a speedy completion of this task, even though that is counter to their own wishes for time to prepare for the departure of Rebekah. Often the Lord moves at a different rate or direction than we desire in our heart or mind, but through faith we also can submit our will and plan to His perfect will and plan revealed in the Redeemer who eventually comes through the bloodline of Isaac and Rebekah.

From the Propers for the Third Sunday after Epiphany

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Matthew 8:1–13 (NKJV)

When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented."

And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.

The COLLECT

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, who liveth and reigneth, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Monday, January 24: Matthew 8:14–22 3rd Sunday after Epiphany

“So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.” In these two short verses you find an entire summary of the Christian life.

The Christian life begins with Jesus coming into your life to touch you, and to cause the disease within you to leave you. For “all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence [i.e., the desire to live apart from God] and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin” (AC II.1). But God’s own Son has come to bring you relief, as Isaiah and Matthew declare: “He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses.” Jesus has removed our sin and taken it into Himself, that “He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men” (AC.III.1). Believe that Christ’s death on the cross therefore is the death of all of your sins.

Trust also that Jesus’ resurrection from the tomb means new life for you, too. For the Risen Christ brings this life to you when you are served His Word and His Sacraments to you, touching your life with His grace and strengthening your faith in Him. “And because through faith the Holy Ghost is received, hearts are renewed and endowed with new affections, so as to be able to bring forth good works.” (AC XX.29). Even as it was for Peter’s mother-in-law, who was given this life by Jesus and then arose and served them, so also it is for all Christians – even for you!

Tuesday, January 25: Matthew 8:28–34 3rd S. after Epiphany

“What does such baptizing with water signify? It signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (SC, IV).

The two demon-possessed men of the Gergesenes illustrate the spiritual state of the unbaptized at first. They possess the sinful nature of fallen Adam and are possessed by the devil himself. They manifest hatred, not love, toward the neighbor. Though alive, they are spiritually dead, and fittingly live among the tombs. When brought to baptism, these men are subjected first to the drowning; their demons are sent into the swine, and the unclean flesh and spirit die in the waters, and they are no more.

As surely as this happened for those two men, so it is for you. The first part of your baptism is a drowning, a death, a burial. It is the drowning of the Old Adam within you as “we are buried with Christ by baptism into death” (Ro 6:4). It is the death of your sin. It is the burial of your old way of life.

And then comes the second part of baptism: your resurrection! “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom 6:5). In Christ, you are raised with Christ as a new man, forgiven of all sins. In Christ, you are raised into life, lived daily before God in Christ’s righteousness and purity. In Christ, you are raised to life everlasting!

Wednesday, January 26: Matthew 9:9–17 3rd S. after Epiphany

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”

The Pharisees felt well. Their self-diagnosis indicated a very healthy spiritual condition. They sacrificed properly, they fasted rightly, and they refrained from consorting with Gentiles. Their righteousness, as measured by the keeping of their own self-appointed law, could not be exceeded. Why would they need a physician?

But they did, for they truly were ill. They were experiencing delusions that God was pleased with their sacrifices, even though they focused upon their sacrificial actions rather than focusing upon the mercy that God delivered through these sacraments. Their fasting was a spiritual bulimia, for they were starving themselves from the true food that God intended them to eat during their fastings: every Word which proceeds from the mouth of God (Mt 4:4). They were suffering from xenophobia, a fear of a race not their own – the Gentiles -- rather than bringing the Good News of God’s salvation in Christ to all nations.

Jesus properly diagnosed the Pharisees’ condition, and gave them the first round of the best possible treatment: a strong dosage of His Law. The Law shows our sin, and reveals the sinner’s terminal illness. Diagnosing the sinner’s sickness by application of the Law is the necessary first step to recovery – even for us; the second and final step is the administration of Christ’s Gospel via Word and Sacrament – even unto us! The Living Water of Holy Baptism and the Living Bread and New Wine of the Holy Supper that Christ prescribes for the sinner brings new and even everlasting life. Truly He is the Great Physician – even yours!

Thursday, January 27: Matthew 9:27–38 3rd S. after Epiphany

“But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” In the previous verses, St. Matthew gives a report on some of the works of mercy that Jesus performed for many, healing every sickness and every disease among the people. Yet, the plight of the people that truly moved Jesus was not physical affliction, but spiritual condition; He was moved with compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

This is one of God’s greatest concerns for His people. God is compassionate about calling faithful shepherds to the flocks who need the care that a good shepherd provides. God is moved into action to ensure that laborers are sent into the world to prepare for the reaping of a harvest of souls.

Even as this is a great concern for our Lord, so also should this be a great concern for all of His people. God’s Church ought to be compassionate about the spiritual condition of the Church, and not only the physical condition of the building or people. Pastors and people rightly are very concerned over the doctrine taught and the administration of the Sacraments in the Church. God’s people ought to be moved at the idea of bringing the Gospel of Christ to all nations, both at-home and abroad, and to pray regularly that the Lord send forth laborers into the harvest.

“Freely you have received, freely give.” This is a command given by Jesus to His apostles at the time that He sent them to the lost sheep of the house of Israel to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is the charge He gave to them while giving them authority and power to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. It is a divine instruction on how to handle this authority and power, sharing it liberally and generously, without charge.

This is the same charge that God gives to all of His people regarding our handling of the things of God. For, truly, we have received freely from God, for He gives all blessings to us without cost. . He does not give them begrudgingly, but freely, out of love for us. Even as He has given His greatest gift, His Only-Begotten Son, Christ Jesus, to us by grace, so also God freely gives every material blessing and every spiritual blessing in Christ. Indeed, freely we have received.

Then, in turn, we freely give. For the child of God delights to follow the command of His Heavenly Father. We who are called brothers by our Lord Himself are pleased to freely give as He has given unto us. We who are led by His Holy Spirit are pleased to share the abundance of our possessions. For freely we have received, and freely we give.

Saturday, January 29: Matthew 10:17 – 11:1 3rd S. after Epiphany

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.” What leads the Prince of Peace to say such a thing? Why would He bring such a fate upon the Earth?

In one very real sense, Jesus does not bring such calamity into the lives of people. It is brought by the unholy trinity of the devil, the fallen world, and the sinful flesh of man. Satan, wicked people, and the sin-weakened flesh of an individual act in concert to set a son against his father or cause a daughter to rebel against a mother.

Yet, in another sense, it is Jesus Who ultimately wields the sword and causes the division of a family – but only so that members of that natural family can be brought into God’s family forever. As God proclaimed to the devil in the Garden of Eden following Adam’s and Eve’s fall into sin, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed” (Ge 3:15). Enmity is the hatred that enemies harbor toward one another, and God’s pronouncement that Satan and the woman would have enmity toward each other indicates that the woman was once again on God’s side, adopted into His family by His grace, for “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” Where Jesus breaks up an earthly family, it is only because certain members of that family do not heed His invitation, and thereby allow Jesus to bring the sword that separates members of families into those who will receive His judgment in the end, and into those who will receive His Heaven forevermore.

From the Propers for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

The GOSPEL

St. Matthew 8:23–27 (NKJV)

Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!”

But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. So the men marveled, saying, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”

The COLLECT

Almighty God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright, grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Monday, January 31: Matthew 11:11–24 4th S. after Epiphany

“Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.” The Third Commandment directed the Christians living under the Old Testament to observe a Sabbath. All labors were to cease for the day so that all Israel could rest for a day – even as God rested on the seventh day of the week following His creative work.

Above all, the Sabbath Day was a day to heed the invitation of God: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” God labored by His Word and His Spirit on that day in order to give a true Sabbath to His people: a rest for their souls. For the soul constantly wrestles with the sin-weakened flesh for control of the Christian.

Chief among the means by which Christ grants this rest is His Holy Supper, by which He conveys His very body and blood to the body, to strengthen it in the one true faith. Lutheran churches outside of the United States highlight this truth by using the words of Matthew 11:28 as a formula to recite during the distribution of the Lord’s Supper, “Come unto Me, all you are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

“Come unto me, ye weary,
And I will give you rest.”
O blessed voice of Jesus,
Which comes to hearts oppressed.
It tells of benediction,
Of pardon , grace, and peace,
Of joy that hath no ending,
Of love which cannot cease.

“Come unto Me, Ye Weary,” William C. Dix

“THE CONFESSIONAL PRINCIPLE OF THE BOOK OF CONCORD AND CHRISTIAN COOPERATION.”

LUTHER AND MELANCHTHON
ON FEDERATION.



Luther and Melanchthon were against Confederation of any kind,—internal, as a brotherhood of Churches; or external, in civil or religious government. But Melanchthon, to whom the Roman idea of visible unity always appealed, would have sacrificed much for the sake of remaining in the historic unity of Rome; and, when that was impossible, for the sake of preventing Protestantism from splitting up into external divisions. Although Luther was less fanatical and better balanced than any of the sectarian and more radical Reformers, he was convinced that his work and duty as a Christian pastor and Professor was to testify to the truth—the whole truth—and become a martyr, if need be, the same as an apostle in New Testament days. The perilous or unpleasant consequences of the truth for the Church or for the generation in which he lived, did not concern him. That was God’s affair, not his. God was able to take care of the world and of the Church. Man’s affair was to stand for the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luther did not seem to feel that any combination of forces, in the modern sense of the term, was important for the Church. He relied solely, like the Lord Jesus Christ, upon the power of the Word. Yet the activities of Philip of Hesse, both at Augsburg and later in the Schmalkald League, with the checks placed upon them, appear to have been part of the plan of Providence. No human mind can say whether, if witness alone had been replied upon, even unto martyrdom; or if the issue between Protestantism and Romanism had been brought to an immediate and final head in the Sixteenth instead of in the Seventeenth Century, the result would have been better or worse for the Truth. Not only is Luther—but Melanchthon like-

wise—always with the Church, to complicate the application of the pure Confessional Principle. Of one fact we may be sure, and that is that the scenes which occurred between 1530 and 1580 were our examples. [1 Cor. 10:11–12]

There is something fascinating in a united attack of the whole visible Church of God upon the strongholds of sin. The advance under one banner, the use of one watchword, the presentation of a solid front toward the wickedness of the world, the substitution for a loose and inconsistent organization, of one that is close, unbroken, consistent and faultless; the enthusiastic crusade under an idea, instead of patient and ineffective toil under wretched fact; the resolving of the narrower Church into the broader Kingdom of God; the great possibilities of accomplishing great work together; the sense of being in a large enterprise, of one that above all things is making progress, of one that has the mighty majority with it and is already bearing the legends of success and victory on its banner; the one concerning which the world—both friend and foe—is obliged to take respectful notice; the life with men of breadth where the whole atmosphere is free, where there is room for plenty of work and plenty of difference in personal opinion; where a distinction is made between a few great fundamentals of Christianity and such minor matters as can be set aside,—these are the characteristics of a confederate Christianity which persuade many that convictions are not as important as work to be done; that the Faith and the Truth on their sharper sides, even if revealed and pressed on us in the Word of God, may be sacrificed—at least in some details—for the sake of a larger movement, which in some way will result in a final unity in the Truth and in its success and will justify the temporary relaxing of our conviction and the overlooking of minor matters in the Faith.

But Luther never yielded to this view. He said of the doctrine (which is not ours, but God's): "We can remit not even a jot, nor can we permit either abatement or addition. It must be, as it were, a continuous and round golden circle. . . . If they believed the Word to be the Word of God, they would know that one Word of God is all His words, and all His words are one; likewise, one article is all articles, and all articles are one." "Luther," says Köstlin, "has evidently no other idea than that every congregation, or church, which desires to be faithful to its duty must publicly and decidedly confess all the truth which we have found him presenting in his doctrinal writings or defending against its assailments; and that they must do this in

view of the thoroughly Scriptural character of the positions thus maintained and their intimate connection with the central point of Christian doctrine. He evidently regarded it as his unquestionable calling to labor with all his power to induce the Church, with whose guidance he was in part entrusted, to make such full and open confession." . . .

"In the confession which he was then called upon to prepare for the Church, i. e., the Schmalkald Articles, he endeavored, without any regard whatever for such [i. e., for those persons to whom he had shown consideration, but who were not in full accord with so important a doctrine as that of the Lord's Supper], to confess the full round truth. Such then is the position of Luther, as indicated by his own writings upon the question of the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines" to us Lutherans of the Twentieth Century.

FEDERATION TO-DAY.

Federation to-day is a conclusion from two premises, in which many important points are implicit, rather than explicit, and much is taken for granted. If the Confessional Principle, in all its bearings, were acknowledged explicitly in advance, by a Federation of Evangelical Churches founded upon the orthodox doctrine of the Atonement and Redemption of Christ, with a recognition of the deep gulf that divides our Faith and non-conservative Protestantism; and if it were not premised, as it always is, that the Lutheran Church is one of "some thirty orthodox Protestant denominations who are fully at one in the essentials and differ only in some doctrinal peculiarities or in gifts of administration," it might be possible to enter into cooperation for definite acts along certain well-defined lines. But it is a question whether cooperation of this character, as it could practically be given, would be of value to the Christian Faith, or to our country; or whether it, surrounded and hedged in by conditions, would be appreciated by the other parts of federated Protestantism. In order to uphold the Evangelical Confessional Principle without cloud or compromise, it would be necessary for non-Lutherans to understand and grant that the Lutheran Church though the mother Protestant church, is catholic, retaining the supremacy of Scripture, and the continuity of history in doctrine, worship, discipline and the like, but purging away Roman error; and that it differs from the other Protestant bodies of the Reformation, commonly called the Reformed bodies of Protestants, and from all more recently arising sects, in its apprehension of

almost every point of doctrine. It, further, would be necessary to permit the Lutheran Church to lodge its protest or record its objection of conscience, to every word and deed of the Federation which indicated Confessional difference from itself.

It differs from these other Protestants in the doctrines of the Word, the Scriptures, the Church, the Sacraments, the Means of Grace, the Ministry, the operations of the Holy Ghost, the freedom of the will (synergism), often on the nature of justification, good works, the Church and State in Moral Reforms, and on the Person of Christ.

These differences appear in all attempts at practical action. The Lutheran Church does not believe that it is showing its zeal in the cause of the Lord or is actively ushering in the Kingdom of God by using its power as an organization to establish divorce laws, race-track legislation, Sunday, or, still worse—*Sabbath* laws, labor legislation, Temperance Reform, and by rooting out civic corruption and immorality. It declares that the Church externalizes itself and falls short of its great regenerative mission when it fastens its eye on temporal reform, wrought chiefly by the arm of law in the State, rather than by addressing the powerful Word of God to the consciences of its members.

[TO BE CONTINUED IN THE FEBRUARY ISSUE]

—from *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of The Lutheran Church as Embodying the Evangelical Confession of the Christian Church*, by Theodore E. Schmauk and C. Theodore Benze, (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), p. 891–895