

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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# HOMILETICS

The pattern of the current church year's homiletics material continues with these Christmas sermon outlines from the Fort Wayne typewriter of the Rev. Herbert Lindemann of Redeemer Lutheran Church. It is accurately stated in this way because during the first quarter of the academic year, when this material was written, Pastor Lindemann was teaching elements of worship and liturgics to the first-year class at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. One of the background books recommended in that course is Lindemann's latest, *The New Mood in Lutheran Worship* (Augsburg, 1971). The pattern holds in this homiletic material of utilizing the Gospel selected in Ordo A of the Roman Catholic Church as a preaching text, considered in relation to the historic lessons and the propers specified in *The Lutheran Liturgy*. The complete listing of the lessons selected in Ordo appeared in the November issue.

## Christmas

Since Christmas is a major festival, the standard Lutheran readings and those of Ordo A are the same, with only a possibility of variation in the lessons from Isaiah. Obviously the theme for the day cannot be anything else but the birth of Christ.

Innumerable sermons have been preached on the Christmas Gospel. Here's an outline for one, with the theme borrowed from C. S. Lewis:

### *The Grand Miracle*

- I. It is a miracle.
  - A. It's what a good God would do — and if God is not good, He is no God at all. The miracle of the Incarnation is in keeping with his character as a God of power and love, but if it had not happened, we should never have guessed that God was as good as that. The miracle is not only what He did at Bethlehem; it's also the love that impelled Him to do it.
  - B. St. Luke was a conscientious historian who was not inclined to accept everything he heard. To him the Christmas story would be just as incredible as to anyone else. Nevertheless he sets it down in his gospel as historical fact.
  - C. We have the testimony of the Holy

Spirit. We moderns are far from being gullible, and we are keenly aware of the unscientific elements in the Christmas story. But we believe it anyhow, because the Spirit has persuaded us of its truth

- II. It requires faith in the supernatural.
  - A. This is essential to authentic religion. Without it, one is left with rationalism or humanism or scientism. Religion involves a relationship with a living, dynamic person: a God who acts.
  - B. This does not mean vagueness, for the Christmas story is very specific as to time, place, and persons. Our faith rests on a supernatural event, not on elusive moral teaching.
- III. It is still relevant.
  - A. It means that God intervenes in human affairs, that the Grand Miracle was by no means the last one, that His kingdom continues to come.
  - B. It means that God and man are forever joined together in the person of Jesus Christ. The Child of Bethlehem is still the link between us and the Father. God comes to us, and we to Him, "through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

## *The First Sunday After Christmas*

The Roman Ordo proposes a shift in emphasis for this Sunday, and quite properly so, since the standard Lutheran Gospel is the second part of the story of the Presentation, which deserves to be included in the propers for February 2. The Roman Church has now designated this Sunday as the Feast of the Holy Family, which might be renamed, in view of the Lesson and the Epistle, the Feast of the Christian Family.

Ordo A has Matt. 2:13-15 and 19-23 as its Gospel. It will be noted that verses 16-18 have been skipped, for these have to do with the slaughter of the Bethlehem babies and are appropriately read on Holy Innocents' Day. The verses designated for this Sunday have to do with the flight to Egypt, the return, and the settling of the Holy Family in Nazareth. The material may be organized as follows:

### *Family Security*

- I. Herod and his ilk — the successful businessman, the political dictator, the entrenched politician, the wealthy racketeer — seem to be secure.
  - A. They are in a position of power: political, military, financial, or just brute force. It seems impossible to dislodge them. "You can't fight city hall."
  - B. There is no security for those whom they control. Herod had ten wives; he murdered one of them and three sons. Emperor Augustus said of him, "It were better to be one of Herod's swine than one of his children."

Remember how the Jews fared under Hitler! The oppressed in every land are at the mercy of those in positions of power.

- C. Herod's end was horrible. His soul was shaken with remorse, his body consumed with fever, his joints racked with decay. He was so universally detested that in his last hour he commanded that certain noble Jews be put to death at the same time that he died, so that there would be some tears shed in the land. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*
- II. Jesus and His people: the Holy Family a microcosm of the great family of God.
  - A. These people are very vulnerable. They have neither money nor power. They are meek, poor in spirit, pure in heart. Jesus himself "had not where to lay His head." The history of the church lists many martyrs and many others who made themselves poor for the kingdom of heaven's sake.
    - B. They are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. The exile of the Holy Family is a type of God's people being away from their homeland and looking forward to their return.
    - C. They are bound together in love, the antithesis of the cruelty to be seen in Herod.
    - D. They have their security in God, which no earthly circumstances can destroy.

## *January 1*

This day in the Lutheran rite is called the day of The Circumcision and the Name of Jesus. The Roman Catholics have now renamed it The Feast of the Mother of God, and the Episcopalians, thinking the support

for this designation to be on the flimsy side, have titled the day The Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It would seem that this last suggestion is the best. Even the Roman Catholics cannot get away from the thought

that this is "name" day, for their Old Testament lesson is Num. 6:22-27, which is the Aaronic benediction, in connection with which the Lord says to the sons of Aaron: "They shall pronounce My name over the Israelites."

Both the Roman Catholics and the Episcopalians include in their Gospels the verses just preceding Luke 2:21, the former beginning with verse 16 and the latter, more properly, with verse 15. Perhaps this has been done because verse 21 all by itself seems an excessively brief Gospel; but the preceding verses have nothing to do with the circumcision and naming and are therefore irrelevant to the theme of the day. It might have been better to assign these verses (about the activity of the shepherds) to the First Sunday After Christmas and to leave the story of the Flight into Egypt for the second Sunday, which is what the Episcopalians do. However, we must work with Ordo A as it stands!

An outline on Luke 2:16-21 might look like the following:

*Response to the Grand Miracle*

- I. The response of action: "They went with all speed."
  - A. The action of God in Christ summons men to activity, not merely to contemplation. The Lord's command is, "Go!"
  - B. This is not action taken under com-

pulsion, but in the spirit of excited joy. The shepherds could hardly get to Bethlehem fast enough.

- II. The response of testimony: "They recounted what they had been told."
  - A. Christians have heard this story for so many years that they have lost much of their wonder at it. Yet it is an altogether marvelous story, to be told and retold with ever new amazement.
  - B. If it is told in this way, those who hear it may well be astonished also, as were those who listened to the shepherds.
- III. The response of quiet meditation: "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered over them." It is important to do this in the midst of all the excitement of Christmas.
- IV. The response of praise and thanksgiving: "The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God." The "good tiding of great joy" should always evoke this reaction.
- V. The response of obedience: the circumcision and naming.
  - A. The first action was obedience to the law of Moses.
  - B. The second action was obedience to the word of the angel at the Annunciation.

### *Second Sunday After Christmas*

If the theme in Ordo A for January 1 be Adoption, the theme for this Sunday may be said to be Growth. The key to this appears in the Lesson from Ecclesiasticus. It is reflected in phrases in the Epistle: "chose us to be dedicated, to be without blemish in His sight, to be full of love." However, the theme is somewhat obscure in the Gospel,

the closest to it being the sentence, "To all who did receive Him, to those who have yielded Him their allegiance, He gave the right to become children of God."

Parenthetically one might ask why the Roman Catholic Church has designated Saint John's prolog both for the third mass of Christmas ("in die") and for this Sunday.

The prolog is a matchless treatment of the Incarnation, but Ordo A at this point is a bit repetitious! However, Ordo A does allow us to omit verses 6-8, which is what was done in preparing the following outline:

*The Religion of the Incarnation*

- I. A look backward.
  - A. By the Word of God flesh came into existence at the time of creation, and, like everything else the Lord God had made, it was very good.
  - B. The fall of man was disobedience to the Word of God; it meant corruption of the flesh as well as of the soul. The image of God was lost.
- II. A look upward.
  - A. The religion of the Incarnation requires looking to the nature of God as well as to the creation of man.
  - B. If we define a word as that which expresses the mind of the one who speaks it, then the function of the perfect Word is to express with complete finality the character of God.
- III. A look inward.
  - A. An honest look at ourselves shows us to be untrue men, as contrasted with Him who was true man.
  - B. But now it is possible to be "in Christ," since He has joined Himself to our nature. The Athanasian Creed says that He has taken our manhood into God. The new creation has been introduced.
  - C. In a sense, the Word continually is made flesh, that is, God comes to us in ways we can apprehend: through the living Word and sacraments. So do we behold His glory, full of grace and truth.

What God is in eternity, Jesus Christ made real to men in time.

- C. The only explanation for the fact of Christ is the almost unbelievable love of God, for which unceasing praise and adoration are owing to Him.

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