

PRAISE FOR *THE CHRISTIAN YEAR OF GRACE*

Matthew Carver's translation of the postils of Johann Spangenberg is a giant step forward in our appreciation of the worship and preaching of the Reformation. Spangenberg as a colleague and friend of Luther did much to popularize the teaching of Protestant theology. What we find particularly interesting in this translation is how it throws light on the practical life of preaching and teaching at the time of the Reformation. It would serve the modern church well to recover this emphasis on teaching the congregation the basics of Protestant piety.

—H. O. Old, D.théol.

John H. Leith Professor of Reformed Theology and Worship
Dean of the Institute for Reformed Worship
Erskine Theological Seminary, South Carolina

The Christian Year of Grace is a solid resource that can be used effectively with youth and young adults. Utilizing its question/answer format like the catechism, it is an excellent resource for teens serious about Bible study or interested in Reformation history and provides a great outline for a youth Bible study—particularly in churches using the traditional one year lectionary, though it can also be a valuable tool in teaching the Bible for churches using the three year lectionary. In addition, it could be an excellent curricular resource for our Lutheran High Schools and universities, perhaps as an elective course. The text may challenge the reader and the reader may come to some different conclusions, but the questions inspire other questions, open up opportunity for conversation, and build links to our historical past. *The Christian Year of Grace* is also a resource for family devotions and can be a great guide for one's personal scriptural growth.

—Dr. Terry K. Dittmer
Director, LCMS Youth Ministry

Not only a luminous window into the hermeneutics and theological thinking of the Reformation era, but a tantalizing resource for our own preaching: Which of Spangenberg's observations would I—will I—declare from my pulpit today? His questions challenge us: “Do these things still go on in the church?” “Is that how things are?” (pp. 307–8). His answers connect the first, the sixteenth, *and* the twenty-first centuries.

—Dr. Carl C. Fickenschner II
Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Indiana

In a world fragmented by multitasking, Spangenberg's *Christian Year of Grace* offers readers guidance for fruitful meditation on the texts of Scripture.

Using the catechetical format of questions and answers, Spangenberg leads the reader through a methodical contemplation of the words and concepts of Scriptural texts read and preached in what is called the historic lectionary.

While his interpretative commentary is of great historical interest to the scholar, his clarity and precision in meditating upon the main ideas of the text are helpful to the Christian who desires guidance in reading Scripture slowly, carefully, and purposefully in preparation for worship.

—The Rev. Dr. David R. Schmitt
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The Christian Year of Grace



THE CHIEF PARTS OF SCRIPTURE
EXPLAINED IN
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

BY JOHANN SPANGENBERG
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Peer Reviewed

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Quotations with the abbreviation LW are from Luther's Works, American Edition (vols. 1–30, 58, 60, 69, 75, 78 St. Louis: Concordia, and vols. 31–55 Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–86, 2009–).

Translated from *Postilla Deudsch, für die jungen Christen, Knaben und Megdlin, inn Fragestücke verfasset, Vom Advent bis auff Ostern*. (Leipzig, 1543). *Postilla Teütsch, für die jungen Christen, Kna- ben und Meidlin, in Fragstück verfasset, Von den fürnembsten Festen, durch das gantze Jar* (Augsburg, 1547). *Außlegunge der Episteln unnd Evangelien, auff alle Sontag und fürnembsten Fest, durchs gantze jar. Für die jungen Christen, Knaben und Megdlein, inn Fragstück verfasset, durch Johann Spangen- berg. Sampt einer Christlichen Vorred*. (Nürnberg, 1567.); and: *Postilla, das ist, gründliche und deutli- che Auslegung derer Evangelien und Episteln welche in den evangelischen Kirchen auf alle Sonn- und fürnehmste Fest-Tage durchs ganze Jahr pflegen öffentlich abgelesen zu werden, wie auch der heilsamen Passions-Historie, also verfertigt, daß der rechte Verstand der Worte, und der nützliche Gebrauch der Lehren, der heranwachsenden Jugend, durch sonderbare Fragstücke, in dreien Teilen, auf das Allerleich- teste fürgetragen und eingeildet wird* (Nürnberg 1689).

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ABBREVIATIONS

Lenker	<i>The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther</i> (1905–9; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000)
LW	<i>Luther's Works</i> (Saint Louis/Phil.: Concordia/Fortress, 1958–1986, 2009–)
PG	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca</i> (Paris, 1857–1866)
PL	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina</i> (Paris, 1841–1855)
WA	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke</i> (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993)



INTRODUCTION

“To Motivate Young Christians to Practice Reading the Holy Scripture: Johann Spangenberg as Propagator of Luther’s Teaching”

§1. Preaching in the Wittenberg Milieu

THE ancient prophets proclaimed the Word which they had received from the God who had formed all that exists with his Word. In the beginning God spoke, and He has never stopped talking since. When Adam and Eve broke off the conversation, God came looking for them and engaged them immediately in conversation. He re-established the relationship, the community, of conversing through His conversation with them even in the Garden of Eden. His prophets proclaimed his Word, and the synagogue in the intertestamental period shaped its worship around the repetition of the Word delivered to the prophets. Exposition and application of the Scriptures shaped the Jewish worship, in the context of which the Holy Spirit gave birth to the church of Jesus Christ.

Jesus went about preaching (Matt. 4:17), and His disciples learned the habit. Their successors continued to preach; with the golden mouth of John Chrysostom and the homilies of Augustine and Gregory the Great, with the sermons of countless others, the church continued to grow. But when the Christian faith spread into whole populations at a rapid rate, the lack of trained missionaries and trained teachers and preachers initiated a new era in the history of the practice of the faith. As tribes were converted en masse, without enough catechists to combat old pagan worldviews, those worldviews continued to shape the religious rhythms of daily life for many new Christians and their descendents in every corner of Europe. The German lands were no exception.

Thus the religious world in which Martin Luther grew up at the end of the fifteenth century was a world that conceived of the sermon as an important but ultimately incidental part of Christian experience.¹ Vital was the performance of sacred good works, religious activities that could appear worthwhile in God’s sight, just as the ritual sacrifices and practices of earlier Germanic religions that defined and dominated the relationship between people and their gods. Luther experienced the Mass as the high point and center of life in Mansfeld as a schoolboy. Through his attendance at the Eucharistic liturgy and through his performance of other sacred activities he believed that he could win God’s approval and blessing, both for temporal advantage and for eternal security.

His study of Scripture, under the influence of his “Ockhamist” instructors,² guided him into a new concept of what it means to be Christian. He discovered that the relationship between God’s human creatures and God Himself did not rest in any way on the human accomplishment of ritual requirements but rather on God’s initiative, an initiative launched and carried out through His creative Word. Thus Luther came to see that the proclamation of God’s Word and its use in Christian homes and schools as well as churches stood at the heart of the Christian life. In his *German Mass* of 1526 he wrote that the preaching and teaching of God’s Word are “the most important part of the divine service.”³

1 David Steinmetz, “Luther, the Reformers, and the Bible,” in *Living Traditions of the Bible*, ed. James E. Bowley (Saint Louis: Chalice, 1999), 164–66.

2 Ockhamism was one of the major traditions of Scholastic theology in the late Middle Ages, named after William of Ockham (ca. 1285–ca. 1348).

3 “The German Mass,” 1526, LW 53:68, WA 19:78.26–27.

Luther quickly learned the lessons from the media revolution launched by printers with his Ninety-Five Theses in 1517 and 1518. To facilitate the transformation of congregations from their medieval religious habits to truly evangelical communities, he went to the local media moguls, the priests, and offered them a distance learning course as part of a continuing education program by drafting model sermons that taught them the content of his theology and conveyed to them something of his way of proclaiming God's Word in the application of God's Law and His Gospel to the lives of the people. While on the enforced study leave at the Wartburg in 1521 and 1522 he penned his first "postil," the genre that offered preachers sermon texts, or at least notes for sermons, on the lessons (or "pericopes") appointed to be read on Sundays and festivals throughout the church year.⁴

The postil was a well-established genre by Luther's time.⁵ Originally a kind of commentary on a Biblical text, most prominently in the postil of Nicholas of Lyra (ca. 1270/1275–1349), by the sixteenth century the term had come to refer specifically to such sermons on the pericopes. Luther composed the texts for his first postil in Latin; they covered the Sundays of Advent. He revamped his Advent sermons and combined them with German sermons he had prepared for the Christmas season, publishing them in 1522. Three years later he issued his sermons for the Lenten season, and that same year one volume containing all the German sermons prepared in postil form to that point appeared in print as his *Winter Postil*. From 1526 to 1528 a former student, Stephan Roth, published Luther's sermon notes for volumes of a "Luther postil," which won Luther's after-the-fact concurrence but later irritated the Wittenberg professor because of Roth's careless editorial procedures. The *Winter Postil* appeared in an improved edition in 1540. Soon thereafter Luther's former student and then colleague on the Wittenberg theological faculty, Caspar Cruciger, constructed a companion *Summer Postil* with Luther looking over his shoulder. These two have been labeled his *Church Postil*, and they appeared at the turn of 1544. In that year another former student of Luther, Veit Dietrich, pastor in Nuremberg, edited 102 sermons of Luther in the *House Postil*, which was revised on the basis of Georg Rörer's notes in 1559 by another former student of the Wittenberg professor, Erfurt pastor Andreas Poach.

By the end of the sixteenth century Luther's postils had been reprinted frequently, the *Church Postil* at least seventy-five times (mostly in German, some in Latin, some in Low German), Dietrich's edition of the *House Postil* some seventy times (also in Latin and Low German), Poach's edition about twenty times (with translations into Dutch, Polish, and Slovenian). The influence of these sermons on the preaching style of pastors, to say nothing of the faith of their hearers, cannot be overestimated. But Luther made no exclusive claim to the genre. His followers soon began to issue their own postils, in two forms: full sermon texts on the pericopes, for the most part in German, or sermon notes on the pericopal readings, usually in Latin.

\$2. Johann Spangenberg

Prominent among the early followers of Luther was a pastor from Nordhausen, an imperial city in the Harz mountains, not far to the west of Luther's birthplace in Eisleben. Nordhausen had existed for more than a millennium at Luther's time and had received its status as an imperial city, responsible to the emperor alone, some seven hundred years earlier. Students from Nordhausen brought Luther's teaching with them when they returned from studying in Wittenberg in the 1510s, and by 1524 the city council had formally adopted Wittenberg reform.⁶ Johann Spangenberg was called from his post as preacher in the service of the counts of Stolberg after serving there, first as a school rector, since 1520.

Born on March 29, 1484, and thus only a few months younger than Luther, Spangenberg grew up as the fourth and last child of an artisan in Hardeggen, a village in the duchy of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen. He had, like Luther, studied at the University of Erfurt, arriving there after primary

⁴ Luther's postils are found in LW 75–82.

⁵ Benjamin T. G. Mayes has provided an excellent introduction to Luther's postils in LW 75, *Church Postil I*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes and James L. Langebartels (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2013), xiii–xxxi.

⁶ Ernst Koch, *Geschichte der Reformation in der Reichsstadt Nordhausen am Harz*, Schriftenreihe der Friedrich-Christian-Lesser-Stiftung 21 (Nordhausen: Atelier Veit Verlag, 2010), 40–74.

and secondary schooling in Einbeck and Göttingen, both located near his birthplace, and then, it seems, teaching for a brief time at the famous school of the foundation of nuns located at Bad Gandersheim.⁷ It is likely that he and Luther met after his arrival in Erfurt in 1508 and before Luther's departure for Wittenberg in 1511. Spangenberg associated with the group of students whom one of the most prominent of the "Biblical humanists" in the German lands, Conrad Mut, also known as Mutianus Rufus, had gathered to cultivate the study of ancient language and literature. Within this circle, which emphasized good communication skills through the fostering of the study of rhetoric, Spangenberg learned the latest in theories of communication.⁸ Others within this group during the course of the 1510s were Justus Jonas, later Luther's colleague on the Wittenberg theological faculty; Georg Spalatin, later secretary to Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony and then pastor in Altenburg; Johann Apell, later professor of canon law in Wittenberg; Justus Menius, later reformer in Eisenach and Gotha; and Johann Lang, later reformer in Erfurt. The "Erfurt connection" made a lasting mark on the careers of all of them.

Spangenberg began his ministry in Nordhausen as a mature theologian and leader. The city leadership integrated him into its midst, and he effectively secured the city for the Lutheran confession of the faith. In 1527 he married Katharina Grau, and the couple had two daughters and four sons, the most famous of whom was Cyriakus, a prodigious author and editor in his own right. Most famous for his defense of the doctrine of original sin propagated by Matthias Flacius Illyricus,⁹ Cyriakus was among the brightest and best of Luther's and Melancthon's students.

In addition to his regular duties as parish pastor, with preaching at their center, Johann Spangenberg showed particular interest in education, actively aiding in the reform and improvement of Nordhausen's schools. His private instruction in his home moved the city council to reestablish secondary education in the city in 1525. Other towns and princes also sought Spangenberg's advice, particularly in the area in which he had grown up, the principality of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen. He defended his Lutheran teaching and criticized remnants of medieval ecclesiastical habit in his writings.¹⁰

Although he had rejected calls to serve in several places, including Magdeburg, the call that came in 1546 from the counts of Mansfeld, whose lands lay not far from Nordhausen, to serve as the superintendent of their churches proved irresistible because Luther had recommended him as the person who could settle the quarrels besetting the local clergy. There he inherited a well-established church, but as he arrived in Mansfeld in June 1546, his own health was deteriorating, and war clouds were brewing over Germany. The Smalcald War broke out as he was settling into his new home, and a year later Luther's patrons, Johann Friedrich of Saxony and Philip of Hesse, suffered defeat

7 No biography of Johann Spangenberg has been written in nearly three hundred years, see Johann Georg Leuckfeld, *Verbesserte Historische Nachricht von dem Leben und Schrifften M. Johann Spangenberg*, 1720, a facsimile in *Historia Leuckfeldi oder ausführliche Beschreibung von Leben und Werk des Johann Georg Leuckfeld*, ed. Carsten Berndt (Aulaben: Regionale-Verlag, 2003), 110–33. Recent briefer biographical treatments include, Koch, *Geschichte der Reformation in der Reichsstadt Nordhausen*, 116–22, 126–30, Ken Sundet Jones, "Promissio and Death: Luther and God's Word for the End of Life," Ph.D. dissertation, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, 2003; Gustaf Kawerau, "Spangenberg, Johann," in *Real-Encyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, ed. Albert Hauck, vol. 18 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906): 563–67; Ernst Koch, "Spangenberg, Johann," in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 4th ed., vol. 7 (Tübingen: Siebeck/Mohr, 2004), 1536; Robert Kolb, "Johann Spangenberg's 'Christlicher Ritter' als Beispiel der frühlutherischen Erbauungsliteratur," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 28 (2004): 57–80; Robert Kolb, *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick, and On the Christian Knight* By Johann Spangenberg (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007); Paul Tschackert, "Spangenberg, Johann" in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 35 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1893), 43–46.

8 Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 130–54; Helmar Junghans, *Der junge Luther und die Humanisten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 31–49; and Timothy P. Dost, *Renaissance Humanism in Support of the Gospel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 72–77.

9 Irene Dingel, *Concordia controversa: Die öffentlichen Diskussionen um das lutherische Konkordienwerk am Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), esp. 467–541; and Robert Christman, *Doctrinal Controversy and Lay Religiosity in Late Reformation Germany. The Case of Mansfeld* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

10 Koch, *Geschichte der Reformation in der Reichsstadt Nordhausen*, 122–24, 247–51.

at the hands of Emperor Charles V. In Wittenberg, Philip Melanchthon, standing alone as leader of the theological faculty after Luther's death in February 1546, participated in attempts to save Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran preachers and the title of Elector of Saxony for Johann Friedrich's cousin, Moritz. In pursuit of his family's political goals within Saxony, Moritz had allied his domains against Johann Friedrich and Philip, his father-in-law. Moritz thus fulfilled the dreams of three generations of the Albertine branch of the Wettin family. Emperor Charles had awarded Moritz much of Johann Friedrich's lands, including Wittenberg, as well as the electoral title. In return, Moritz had agreed actively to support Emperor Charles' efforts to defeat Lutheran forces with the agreement that he would retain his own Lutheran faith for himself and his lands. Charles and his brother Ferdinand forgot that part of their promise. Moritz attempted an ecclesiastical compromise, formulated in the proposal for the Saxon diet of December 1548, a proposal rejected by the diet, but this proposal was published by former students of Melanchthon's who believed it to be a betrayal of God, Luther, and the faith.¹¹ They dubbed it the "Leipzig Interim." Spangenberg stood among its critics but left active resistance to his colleagues because of failing health. In the midst of increasing antagonisms among members of the Wittenberg circle Spangenberg died June 13, 1550.

\$3. Spangenberg's Literary Service to the Reformation

Spangenberg's literary legacy made him a permanent teacher of the Lutheran way of viewing the world and its Maker. In 1517 printers launched a revolution in public communication of ideas with the publication of Luther's *Theses on Indulgences*.¹² The Wittenberg professor quickly saw how to use the new medium of Johann Gutenberg to spread his message. Many of his followers turned to printers to team up with them to distribute their own formulations of the biblical message, some with great success. The impact and significance of Spangenberg's literary contributions to spreading the Wittenberg Reformation and cultivating Luther's theology in the faith of the people cannot be overestimated.¹³ His interest in education led him to author textbooks for pupils at the level of both the trivium and the quadrivium, in grammar, music, and mathematics.¹⁴ But he also answered Luther's call for expanding the religious instruction offered in his own catechisms, among the first to do so. He informed readers of his conviction that he was not "of the opinion that I could improve on Doctor Luther's hard work, but I want to motivate young Christians to practice [reading] the Holy Scripture, the Holy Gospel, which is the power of God that saves all who believe. Therefore, I admonish all whom God has appointed to be the heads of households to give their children and servants practice by using these questions and answers every day at the table."¹⁵ Spangenberg's efforts in behalf of cultivating the understanding of Biblical teaching extended as well to the secondary level. He recognized the value of Philip Melanchthon's textbook on teaching

11 See *Controversia et Confessio: Theologische Kontroversen 1548-1577/80, Kritische Auswahl*, ed. Irene Dingel, vol. 2, *Der Adiaphoristische Streit (1548-1560)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), esp. 3–14, 16–37.

12 LW 31:17–33.

13 Koch, *Geschichte der Reformation in der Reichsstadt Nordhausen*, 136–72.

14 *Bellvm grammaticale* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1534) (an edition of this work by the Italian humanist Andreas Guarina), *Grammaticae Latinae etymologia, in commodum & usum iuuentutis Northvsianae congesta* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1535); *Syntaxis Ioannis Spangenbergii* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1535); *Prosodia in vsvm inventvtis Northvsianae* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1535); *Qvaestiones mvsicae in usum scholae Northvsianae* (Nuremberg: Johannes Petreius, 1536); *Artificiosae memoriae libellvs, in usum studiosorum collectus* (Leipzig: Michael Blum, 1539); *Comptvvs ecclesiasticvs in pveriles quaestiones redactus, Manu, Scalis, Rotulis & Figuris illustratus, omnibus studiosis vtilis & necessarius* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1539); *Trivii erotemata. Hoc est, grammaticae dialecticae rhetoricae Quaestiones, Ex doctissimorum nostri seculi virorum libris, in puerorum vsum congestae* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1542).

15 *Der Gros Catechismus vnd Kinder Lere/ D. Mart. Luth. Fur die jungen Christen/ jnn Fragestu[e]cke verfasst* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1541), fol. *5a-b, edited in Johann Michael Reu, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte des Katechismus-Unterrichts in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands zwischen 1530 und 1600*, 9 vols. (Gutersloh: Mohn, 1904–1935; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1976), 2/2:299–328. See also Spangenberg's expansion of the *Small Catechism* of Luther: *Des kleinen Catechismi kurtzer begrieff vnd der Haustafel/ wie man sie in der gemeine zu Halle/ fur die kinder handelt* (Halle, 1542), *Quellen* 2/2:285–99.

the faith, his *Commonplaces [= Topics] of Theology (Loci communes theologici)*.¹⁶ Spangenberg's *Theological Pearls* introduced students to Christian doctrine by leading them through the topics of Biblical teaching by posing questions and providing answers.¹⁷

This question and answer method proved useful also as Spangenberg turned to providing believers with tools for personal Bible study and devotion. He composed conversations between teacher and learner on the Acts of the Apostles, and his treatments of secular government and economic life aimed at developing an evangelical ethic in public life.¹⁸ He translated two meditations on psalms by Jerome Savonarola, the fiery preacher of reform, who was burned at the stake in 1498 in Florence for his efforts to improve church life with radical measures.¹⁹ Among his most popular works was his replacement for the literature on "the art of dying," originally designed to equip lay people to minister to the dying when plague struck and priests were dying themselves or overtaxed by the number of extremely ill parishioners.²⁰

Spangenberg was sensitive to the congregation's need for proper, evangelical liturgy, and prepared assistance for conducting it for pastors.²¹ He wrote hymns and edited hymnals.²² By fashioning aids for preaching on hymn texts instead of texts from Scripture, he helped create a new genre of sermons.²³

It was in the service of his catechumens that Spangenberg adapted Luther's postil form of publishing sermons. Spangenberg transformed the postil into a tool for cultivating the biblical knowledge of school children, combining his own insights and pedagogical practice with insights from other postils, including those of Luther, Anton Corvinus, and Johannes Brenz. In this work the pastor of Nordhausen composed questions and answers to help his young pupils review the readings from Scripture which were appointed to be read in Sunday services. His questions guided readers through the content of these Scripture passages with the concepts of the catechism in the background, so that they could learn how to move from the basic instruction of the catechism to the profitable hearing and reading of the Bible.²⁴ Luther wrote the preface for the work, one of his blog-like forewords, which in this case focused on the need to study God's Word diligently in order to proclaim the mystery of Christ.²⁵ The volumes of this work appeared fifty-six times in

16 Philip Melancthon, *Commonplaces: Loci Communes 1521*, trans. Christian Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014).

17 *Margarita theologica, continens praecipuos locos doctrinae christianae, per quaestiones, breuiter & ordine explicatos, omnibus Pastoribus, uerbi preconibus & ecclesiae ministris summe utilis & necessaria* (Leipzig: Michael Blum, 1540).

18 *Der Apostel Geschichte Kurtze auslegung/ Fur die jungen Christen jnn Frage verfasst* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1545). *Eine kurtze vnterrichtung von weltlicher Oberkeit vnd Vnterthanen/ wie sie sich Christlich gegen ein ander halten sollen/ aus Gottes worte jnn fragestu[e]ck verfasst* (Leipzig: Michael Blum, 1540); *Eine Christliche vnterrichtung wie man gu[e]lther vnnd reichtumb Christlich gebrauchen mu[e]ge/ beide am leben mit Almosen geben/ mit Keuffen vnnd verkeuffen/ mit Leihen vnd borgen Vnnd am sterben mit Testament machen Aus den bu[e]chern Doct. Martini vnd anderer getzogen vnd auff's ku[e]rtzest jnn fragstück verfasst* (Erfurt: Melchior Sachssen, 1540).

19 *Der LXXX. Psalm/ Qui regis Israel intende/ Durch den Christlichen Bruder Hieronymum Sauonarolam prediger ordens/ vom Bapst verbrandt* (Leipzig: Nicolaus Wolrab, 1542), and *Der Ij. Psalm Davids Misere mei Deus Durch den Christlichen Bruder Hieronymum Sauonarolam prediger ordens* (Leipzig: Nicolaus Wolrab, and Augsburg: Philipp Uhart, 1542). Cf. Kolb, "Saint John Hus' and 'Jerome Savonarola, Confessor of God,'" *Concordia Journal* (1991): 404-418.

20 See *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick, and On the Christian Knight* By Johann Spangenberg, ed. Robert Kolb (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007).

21 *Cantiones ecclesiasticae Latinae, dominicis et vestis diebus in commemoratione Cenae Domini, per totius anni circulum cantandae . . . KJrchengesenge Deudsch/ auff die sontage vnd fu[e]rnehmliche Feste/ durchs gantze Jar* (Magdeburg: Michael Lotther, 1545).

22 *Alte vnd Neue Geistliche Lieder vnd Lobgesenge/ von der Geburt Christi/ vnsers Herrn/ Fu[e]r die Junge Christen* (Erfurt: Melchior Sachssen, 1544); see Wackernagel, *Das deutsche Kirchenlied von der ältesten Zeit bis zu Anfang des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1870), 923-34.

23 *Zwo[e]lff Christliche Lobgesenge vnd Leissen/ so man das Jar vber/ jnn der Gemeine Gottes singt/ auff's ku[e]rtzste ausgelegt* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1545).

24 *Auslegung der Episteln / so auff die Sontage vom Aduent bis auff Ostern / jnn der Kirchen gelesen werden / fur die jungen Christen / Knaben vnnd Meidlein jnn Fragestu[e]cke verfasst* (Magdeburg: Michael Lotther, 1544), with the second half of the church year, "Auff die Sontage/ von Ostern bis auff's Aduent," attached.

25 WA 53:216.1-218.31.

print in German, sometimes singly, sometimes together (plus fifty-two editions in Plattdeutsch, with seven Latin printings, seven Czech, three Dutch, and one Slovak). This volume of sales suggests that pastors found these questions and answers good guides for their own preaching and that parents found them helpful for devotions with children and servants.

Spangenberg not only prepared treatments of the pericopes. He was the first to adapt the postil genre to specialized purposes. His *Fifteen Funeral Sermons* took another literary form that Luther had cultivated, the funeral sermon, and moved beyond the publication of a single sermon preached at the burial service of an individual.²⁶ Those works honored the deceased and provided pious reading for the living, especially the laity. Spangenberg had a different purpose and a specific audience in mind with his postil-like collection. German Reformation scholar Irene Dingel summarizes his message in these sermons: “In view of the capriciousness of death, which can suddenly befall people, and which God could employ—according to the views of that period—for disciplinary purposes, these sermons admonish readers to a life that takes seriously the Christian hope of resurrection and to depart from all irresponsible and pleasure-seeking tendencies which cast belief in the hereafter to the wind.”²⁷ Spangenberg prepared this work to give parish pastors a model for preaching on the occasion of the death of a member of the congregation. Thus he combined Luther’s postil with the Wittenberg professor’s amplification of the single funeral sermon into a special form of devotional literature in itself. Unlike his funeral sermons, which provided direct models for preaching, Spangenberg’s aides for wedding sermons (also a genre he pioneered) reverted to the question and answer form.²⁸

The Wittenberg Reformation embraced a large number of people who were longing for reform and integrated them into an organic movement that spread rapidly across Germany and into the Nordic lands and Eastern Europe. This was possible only because Martin Luther and his colleagues in Wittenberg successfully attracted individuals of talent and vision like Johann Spangenberg to their ranks. In transforming Western European Christian ways of life many niches had to be filled. Spangenberg’s deep-felt concern for education in the biblical faith blossomed into his adaptation of the postil form. Like Luther he had an ear for the popular mindset and caught the rhythms of daily life in the context of late medieval German town and village society. His agenda directed its attention to the needs of his contemporaries, particularly to the young people of his world. He stands as a model for all Christians in the task they share with him for listening to the culture into which God has placed them and responding to that culture with the presentation of the Biblical message which brings people to faith in Jesus Christ and cultivates that faith in and for daily life.

Robert Kolb

Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, Missouri

The Transfiguration of our Lord, 2014

26 On Spangenberg’s work, *Funffzehen Leichprediget / So man bey dem Begrebnis der verstorbenen / jnn Christlicher Gemein thun mag. Darneben mehr denn LX. Themata / odder Spru[e]che / aus dem alten Testament. Auff welche man diese Leichpredigt appliciren mo[e]cht* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau, 1545); see Irene Dingel, “‘True Faith, Christian Living, and a Blessed Death’: Sixteenth-Century Funeral Sermons as Evangelical Proclamation,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 27 (2013): 399–420, and Jones, “*Promissio* and Death,” 166–91. After his father’s death, Cyriacus Spangenberg used notes from Johann’s pen to publish two similar works, *Acht vnd zwentzig Leichpredigten zum Begrebnis der verstorbenen/ vnd sonst in allerley anligen . . . aus den heiligen Euangelisten Matthaeo. Marco* (Magdeburg: Michael Lotther, 1553), expanded by Cyriacus: *Vier vnd dreissig Leichpredigten/ Aus dem heiligen Euangelisten Lyca. Durch M. Johannem Spangenberg . . . vnd M. Cyriacum Spangenberg* (Wittenberg: Georg Rhau’s heirs, 1555).

27 Dingel, “‘True Faith, Christian Living, and a Blessed Death,” 403.

28 *Des Ehelichen Ordens Spiegel vnd Regel ynn zehen Capittel geteilt/ Darinne man siehet wer den Ehestandt gestift/ was er sey/ vnm wie man sich darinne halten sol* (Magdeburg: Michael Lotther, 1545).



TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THE present volume comes as the result of an original German copy being acquired by a distinguished friend and colleague, who then commended it to the translator in view of its numerous virtues. It was soon apparent that an English rendering would prove useful and edifying to pastors and laymen today. Though much time has passed since that original was first published, even cursory inspection will persuade the reader of the profound applicability to our own time and spiritual situation. Even in parishes where the historic lectionary (the series of Sunday and Festival readings as the Reformers knew and received them) has been laid aside in favor of a newer triennial series, the Bible passages (and their expositions) which form the basis of this book remain salutary and central to Christian faith and life for both pastor and layman. Many of them also appear in the three-year lectionary. The index included at the end will facilitate location of any desired passage, the multiplicity of lectionaries notwithstanding.

Since this book is a translation of catechetical material used for instructing boys and girls on the meaning and interpretation of the main parts of Scripture as they were read in the church in the days of Martin Luther and other early Reformers, the language has generally been kept to a simple, equivalent style. To the extent, however, that the explanations here are drawn from the sermons and postils of the Reformers themselves, there is variation in the height of the style that may test the comprehension of some of our Sunday school students the same age as those who were first instructed from it in the middle of the sixteenth century. The aim has been to preserve the general simplicity of style.

Those with a knowledge of German will be pleased to find here and there the original terms provided in brackets where it was thought useful for distinguishing the precise sense, or when the translation may not convey all the connotations of the original German term. A few explanatory notes are included, but not to the extent usual in critical editions of a work. The enormity of this work (one edition consulted has three volumes and over 1,000 pages) would make the task of exhaustive annotation a hindrance to providing a relatively affordable and accessible resource, one of the purposes here. Many passages throughout Spangenberg's book were lifted directly from other authors, especially Luther. Little attempt has been made to trace the source of all these passages, though the student of Luther will no doubt recognize with pleasure his distinct tone frequently throughout. They have been noted here and there.

Scripture quotations and pericopes (excerpts of scripture assigned to the day) have been translated from the German in order to maintain continuity with their treatment. This has been done with reference to standard English translations, especially the ESV and Coverdale, which often bear great similarity to the German of Luther's Bible from which the pericopes are quoted. Some normalizing (with Luther's Bible as the rule) has been done where the renderings of Scripture varied within the sermon or explanation. This most usually was the case when resort was made by Spangenberg to sermons of very early date, before the availability of Luther's Bible. Verse references have been supplied as well, to the best of the translator's ability, though it must be recognized that these are sometimes little more than guesswork, and that chapter numbers themselves are sometimes corrupted. Traditional contextual formulas used in the church's reading of the Epistle and Gospel (e.g., "Dear brethren, . . .," or "Jesus said to His disciples, . . .") are both scriptural and normally retained by Spangenberg, and included here without indication. For the sake of continuity, they have been restored where sporadically omitted. Note that the formulas "In those days . . ." and "At that time . . ." seem not to have been used, or at least are not regularly indicated in the text.

Some feasts are not provided with an Epistle, or a Gospel, or else feature instead of an exposition of the Gospel a sermon on some related subject. Why this was done is not always easy to say; we must commend the question to Spangenberg and the limitation of his sources. In some instances, good homiletic material from which to draw must have been wanting. Thus, where it seemed edifying to do so, I have indicated in brackets the historical pericope omitted by Spangenberg, taking for my pattern the lectionary as it was noted generally among German Lutherans. Readers who wish to follow the reading guide supplied herein may also refer to these bracketed pericopes for their personal meditations.

In many of the more polemical sections the reader will encounter litanies of papal abuses with respect especially to monastic life and clerical privileges. Some notes are provided in the text, but it is fitting to explain some of those terms here as well. Kalend guilds, a largely northern German phenomenon, began as clerical fraternities of deans (local overseers) that met on the Kalends, or beginning, of each month. Eventually guilds were formed involving laity, which coincided with an increase of abuses, not only in their avowed purpose of promulgating private and requiem Masses for members living and deceased, but also in their immoderate revels, which came more and more to supplant the original purpose of increasing devotion among clergy and laity. There is also frequent reference in these polemical passages to chapter houses and cloisters. These terms collectively allude to the whole monastic institution with respect to both teaching and life, i.e., the accumulation of superabundant grace by work and prayer. Certain clerical classes and dignities are mentioned also, usually in connection with the abuse of confusing sacred and profane rule, or dispensing the sacred as the profane. They are reproached by our teacher for enjoying privileges of estates without exercising the spiritual aspect of their office. A *prelate* is usually a priest of higher rank, such as a bishop or abbot. *Cathedral canons* are clergy belonging to a cathedral chapter, which is responsible for cathedral business, electing the bishop, and other related duties of negligible toil and high prestige. Among the dignities formerly bestowed in the church are *fiefs* or *benefices* (land grants), *sinecures* (stipends not requiring exercise of pastoral care), *canonries* (cathedral estates) and *prebends* (stipends derived from the cathedral), and *provosties* and *deaneries* (estates, moneys, etc., associated with a provost or dean overseeing a certain group of parishes).

Some superficial changes were made to the original structure. In the earliest complete edition, the Transfiguration, still a relatively new festival on the church calendar, had not yet found its present home at the end of Epiphanytide. Its Epistle and Gospel were located at the end of Trinitytide on the 25th Sunday after Trinity. Later editions deferred this to The Last Sunday after Trinity. Following this precedent, liberty has been taken in the present volume to move Transfiguration to the familiar place in Epiphanytide for the sake of easy discovery by the casual reader. The location of two or three feasts dislocated apparently by accident has been restored as well. On the other hand, while the feasts of St. Stephen, St. John, and Holy Innocents, and sometimes of the Baptism of Christ, are in numerous books located with Christmas and Epiphany among the winter postils, they have here been left in the festival section at the end.

Finally, due thanks must not be withheld from the many who assisted in making of a simple translation a worthy and useful book: Dr. Robert Kolb, who in the midst of his busy schedule has kindly supplied a thorough introduction; Rev. Dr. Benjamin Mayes, who organized the reading plan which follows; the good and tireless editor of the text, Rev. Mark DeGarmeaux and his scrutinizing eye; Rev. Jacob Corzine, who like Rev. DeGarmeaux made several suggestions toward the improvement of the book; and Mrs. Amanda Carver, for her help in gracefully containing so much volume in so accessible a package.

Matthew Carver
Nashville, Tennessee
Rogation Wednesday, 2014



READING PLAN

THESE questions and answers may be used in the prayers and devotions of families, schools, congregations, and other groups. The questions (abbreviated “Q.”) are listed for the six days following each Sunday. Alternatively, they may be read during the week before each Sunday, as preparation for each Sunday of the Church Year. The questions appointed for days between the *Fourth Sunday in Advent* (“Advent IV”) and the *First Sunday after Epiphany* (“Epiphany I”) are to be omitted when the days for which they are appointed do not occur. Questions and answers are also provided for the festivals of saints, each usually distributed over three days. These may be used in place of the questions from the previous Sunday. *Italics* indicate that the proper reading for that day is read in its entirety.

SUNDAYS AND SEASONS

Advent I	Sunday after Christmas	Epiphany III	Sexagesima
Mon. Q. 1–13	Mon. Q. 1–7	Mon. Q. 1–7	Mon. Q. 1–5
Tues. Q. 14–21	Tues. Q. 8–14	Tues. Q. 8–10	Tues. Q. 6–11
Wed. Q. 22–36	Wed. Q. 15–23	Wed. Q. 11–17	Wed. Q. 12–16
Th. Q. 37–49	Th. Q. 24–29	Th. Q. 18–23	Th. Q. 17–20
Fr. Q. 50–59	Fr. Q. 30–37	Fr. Q. 24–32	Fr. Q. 21–25
Sat. Q. 60–68	Sat. Q. 38–43	Sat. Q. 33–37	Sat. Q. 26–29
Advent II	New Year	Epiphany IV	Quinquagesima
Mon. Q. 1–6	Jan. 1 Q. 1–9	Mon. Q. 1–7	Mon. Q. 1–8
Tues. Q. 7–12	Jan. 2 Q. 10–19	Tues. Q. 8–14	Tues. Q. 9–11
Wed. Q. 13–22	Jan. 3 Q. 20–25	Wed. Q. 15–18	Wed. Q. 12–15
Th. Q. 23–35	Jan. 4 Q. 26–30	Th. Q. 19–25	Th. Q. 16–22
Fr. Q. 36–42	Jan. 5 Q. 31–35	Fr. Q. 26–32	Fr. Q. 23–28
Sat. Q. 43–49		Sat. Q. 33–38	Sat. Q. 29–35
Advent III	Epiphany	Epiphany V	Lent I (Invocavit)
Mon. Q. 1–7	Jan. 6 Q. 1–8	Mon. Q. 1–9	Mon. Q. 1–12
Tues. Q. 8–17	Jan. 7 Q. 9–16	Tues. Q. 10–19	Tues. Q. 13–21
Wed. Q. 18–26	Jan. 8 Q. 17–21	Wed. Q. 20–28	Wed. Q. 22–27
Th. Q. 27–34	Jan. 9 Q. 22–29	Th. Q. 29–35	Th. Q. 28–32
Fr. Q. 35–41	Jan. 10 Q. 30–37	Fr. Q. 36–40	Fr. Q. 33–37
Sat. Q. 42–48	Jan. 11 Q. 38–44	Sat. Q. 41–47	Sat. Q. 38–44
	Jan. 12 Q. 45–50		
Advent IV	Epiphany I	Transfiguration	Lent II (Reminiscere)
Mon. Q. 1–7	Mon. Q. 1–9	Mon. Q. 1–5	Mon. Q. 1–7
Tues. Q. 8–13	Tues. Q. 10–17	Tues. Q. 6–12	Tues. Q. 8–13
Wed. Q. 14–20	Wed. Q. 18–24	Wed. Q. 13–17	Wed. Q. 14–17
Th. Q. 21–30	Th. Q. 25–30	Th. Q. 18–24	Th. Q. 18–23
Fr. Q. 31–37	Fr. Q. 31–37	Fr. Q. 25–32	Fr. Q. 24–29
Sat. Q. 38–42	Sat. Q. 38–40	Sat. Q. 33–41	Sat. Q. 30–32
Christmas	Epiphany II	Septuagesima	Lent III (Oculi)
Dec. 25 Q. 1–11	Mon. Q. 1–8	Mon. Q. 1–6	Mon. Q. 1–7
Dec. 26 Q. 12–19	Tues. Q. 9	Tues. Q. 7–13	Tues. Q. 8–16
Dec. 27 Q. 20–27	Wed. Q. 10–18	Wed. Q. 14–18	Wed. Q. 17–20
Dec. 28 Q. 28–35	Th. Q. 19–29	Th. Q. 19–27	Th. Q. 21–23
Dec. 29 Q. 36–42	Fr. Q. 30–33	Fr. Q. 28–32	Fr. Q. 24–25
Dec. 30 Q. 43–49	Sat. Q. 34–36	Sat. Q. 33–37	Sat. Q. 26–27
Dec. 31 Q. 50–56			



DEDICATION OF THE WINTER GOSPELS (1542)

*To the serene & high-born princess, the lady Elizabeth, née margravine of Brandenburg, duchess of Brunswick & Lüneburg, widow, my gracious lady:
Grace & peace in Christ our Lord.*

PRINCELY GRACE,

Whereas secular authority is, after the ministry of preaching, the highest service of God and most beneficial office on earth, and whereas God Almighty gives to rulers, princes, and lords the title of “gods” and “children of the Most High” (Ps. 82 [:6]), because every ministration of authority from the least to the greatest is the ordinance, gift, and business of God, it behooves us all unitedly to obey and submit to them with fear and all honor as to the agents of God. For what higher worship can there be than to honor God’s Word before all things, to forge and sustain peace among the children of Adam, to defend widows and orphans, to dispense justice to the God-fearing, and to hold the ungodly in check? And what more beneficial duty is to be found than that a prince or ruler earnestly keep, nurture, and defend God’s Word and those who preach it?

Through such princely defense, a true pastor or preacher is able to build God’s kingdom, fill heaven, plunder hell, rob the devil, beat back death, bridle sin, comfort the afflicted, and establish everyone in his estate; raise up an excellent youth, implant every virtue in the people, indeed, create a new world and build an eternal, beautiful paradise in which God Himself is eager to dwell. Who can praise this divine service and princely office enough? No mountain of gold or silver compares with it. Founding hospitals and charitable funds and assisting the poor are good, admirable works. But preserving God’s Word and assisting a whole nation is a truly princely, nay, heavenly and divine work.

Inasmuch, then, as God, in His grace and mercy, has called Your Princely Grace into government, ordained Y.P.G. as an authority, and added to the task of defending the divine Word the burden of various toils and labors, cares and concerns, I could not in Christian charity neglect by way of God’s Word to console Y.P.G. in the midst of such heavy burdens, insofar as God has granted me. For it is clear that those charged with higher estates and princely offices are forced to bear no small portion of the holy cross, which the world and its prince, the devil, lay on them not merely by the ounce and half-ounce, but by the pound and hundredweight. And although I know that the venerable and worthy Sir Anton Corvinus has treated and preached this and similar wholesome doctrine with great diligence and devotion in the presence of Y.P.G., so that under the circumstances, my writing is unnecessary; nevertheless, because I find myself indebted to serve Y.P.G., and that I, too, might express my gratitude toward my dear country, I have taken the Sunday Gospels from Advent to Easter from the postils of our dear father, Dr. Martin Luther, and of others, such as Brenz, Corvinus, etc., and as a daily exercise for young Christian boys and girls put them into questions following the Catechism; and it is my wish to dedicate and present this to Y.P.G., a true patroness and friend of divine truth, and to have it published under the name of Y.P.G. I pray Y.P.G. will accept with a good will my poor service. Christ our dear Lord and Savior graciously keep Y.P.G., together with Y.P.G.’s young lords and ladies, and the whole court and country, and uphold them in long-lasting health.

Nordhausen. March 10, 1542.

Your Princely Grace’s submissive
JOHANN SPANGENBERG.



DEDICATION OF THE SUMMER GOSPELS (1542)

*To the honorable, judicious, & most wise burgomaster &
councilmen of the village of Hardeggen, my dear, gracious sirs:
Grace & peace from God our Father & the Lord Jesus Christ.*

HONORABLE, WISE, VERY GRACIOUS SIRs, ETC.,

I find from both divine and pagan writings that man is born not for his own consolation only, but for the consolation of others, above all of his dear native land, parents, and friends. For it is clear that, in earnestly directing us in the Fourth Commandment to honor our father and our mother, God Almighty did not exclude the country of our birth and the authorities under whom we were raised. Inasmuch, then, as I was both born and raised in the worthy village of Hardeggen, and may boast a close affinity with it, I count myself indebted to serve Your Honorable, Most Wise Lordships and the whole common citizenry. And though I am not dwelling there in person, I have never forgotten my dear native home, but always wished every good which a man can and ought to hope for the place of his birth, and especially prayed to God that He would also cause the Sun of righteousness, Jesus Christ, and His saving Word, graciously to lighten and shine on it, as has been the case (God be praised!). On that account it is incumbent upon all her landowners to praise the good and merciful Father. In order that I may dutifully express in actions my gratitude toward my dear country and native home, I have determined that the Sunday Gospels from Easter to Advent (as a daily exercise for young Christian boys and girls, arranged into questions following the Catechism) should be dedicated to Your Wisdom and the Honorable Council, and to the whole community, and be published under Your Honorable Wisdom's name. And it is only right that, since my native country is designated dowry of the serene, high-born princess and lady, Madam Elizabeth, née margravine of Brandenburg, etc., duchess of Brunswick and Lüneburg, widow, my gracious lady—and since I have dedicated the first part of this Postil to her Princely Grace, I pray her P.G. will not censure me, her P.G.'s subject, for dedicating the second part to my dear native village. I pray Y.H.W. will accept with good will this my poor service, and suffer myself and my whole family to be commended to Y.H.W. The good, merciful God, who has all authority in His hand, and gives understanding to every ruler, govern, defend, and keep Your Wisdom to the glory of His divine name and to the benefit and good of the land generally.

Nordhausen. St. Martin, Bishop,¹ 1542.

Your Honorable Wisdom's submissive servant,
JOHANN SPANGENBERG.

¹ November 11. —MC.



PREFACE OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER (1544)

Translated by Mickey L. Mattox⁴

ST. PAUL writes now and again that Christ our Lord is a “mystery,” *mysterium*, and indeed the holy Church, too, with Christ, her Bridegroom, can be called a “mystery” [Col. 1:26–27; 2:2; 1 Tim. 3:16; Eph. 5:32]. In times past—when I had to permit myself to be called a doctor of Holy Scripture—I considered this a straightforward expression that I understood very well. But now that I, praise God, have again become a poor student of Holy Scripture and understand less and less as time goes on, I am beginning to look on these words with wonder, and experience, I find, supplies this gloss: that it must be a mystery indeed. For no matter how brightly and clearly the apostles preached about it—even with miracles—nevertheless it still remains hidden and secret to the very greatest and most clever people on earth, just as He says in Matthew, chapter 11 [:25]: “You have hidden these things from the wise and clever, but have revealed them to the children,” etc.

Is this not a sufficient wonder? Is that not enough of a secret? It is preached so manifestly, and it shines more brightly than the sun, and is also confirmed with so many great miraculous signs (which no man can deny that God must be doing). And nevertheless, here the very greatest and most clever, the holiest and best people remain blind, deaf, and senseless, so that they cannot see it, hear it, or feel it. Answer me that riddle! How is that? There is nothing more manifest, and yet nothing more secret; nothing is more comprehensible than Christ in the manger and on the cross; nothing is more incomprehensible than Christ at the right hand of God and Lord over all. So it is also with the Word that preaches about Him.

Our own experience must also testify to that. In what richness, brightness, and clarity we now possess that salutary Word about Christ! But to whom is this manifest, bright, clear light known and welcome? Is it not a great secret and mystery, not only to the Papists but also to our people, who boast of being very evangelical? They simply think that when they have read or heard it once, they are so abundantly supplied that they could even instruct all the apostles, not to mention their poor pastors and preachers. Such folk think that this is no mystery or profound insight, but only a spoonful of wisdom they can down in a single gulp.

Now what will we preachers do, who are supposed to govern churches in the midst of such archangels and super-archangels? Here is what we will do: We will allow them to know everything better, even a hundred times better, than we do, and among them Christ shall be no *mysterium* or mystery but merely an empty nutshell, since long ago, before they were born, they emptied out the nut and threw away the shell. We, however, will suckle at this mystery like a baby at his mother’s breast until we finally get something out of it, and will not let ourselves be weaned from it so quickly and prematurely, the way these lofty people wean themselves from it and are ashamed to suck at their mother’s breasts. For these are people able to run by themselves before their legs and feet are full-grown.

In sum, we have to let the world and the devil run their race, while we keep right on preaching, chastising, and admonishing for the sake of those who will recognize such a mystery. As for the rest, to them it is preached like rain falling into water or, as our Lord put it [Matt. 13:19], like “seed sown along the path.” The mystery [of the Word] will bring forth fruit from only a quarter of the field. Therefore, I would very much like to see this and other similar books go out among

4 Reprinted from LW 60:283–285. —MC.

the people, not only to reveal this mystery but also to displace other, false books. For those who write today are not all pure [cf. John 13:10], and everyone wants to offer himself for sale in the shops, not because he wants to reveal Christ or His mystery, but rather he does not want his own mysteries and lovely ideas, which he esteems more than the mystery of Christ, to be acquired for nothing. With them he hopes to convert even the devils, yet he has never converted nor can ever accomplish the conversion of even so much as a gnat—as if perversion were not the far worse consequence of his efforts.

On the other hand, there are likewise some lazy pastors and preachers who are no good themselves—those who count on getting their sermons from these and other good books. They do not pray, do not study, do not read, do not meditate on anything in Scripture, just as if on account of [these books] one did not have to read the Bible. They avail themselves of books such as the *Formula* and the *Calendar*⁵ to earn their annual keep. And they are nothing but parrots or jackdaws that learn to repeat without understanding. But our intention and that of such theologians⁶ is to use these [books] to lead people into Scripture and to admonish them that they should consider how they themselves will defend our Christian faith against the devil, the world, and the flesh once we are dead. For we will not always stand here in the front line of battle as we do now.

Just as our forefathers have handed this mystery down to us, though it was abominably despised by the pope, so we now also hand it down to those [who read our books]. If they do not have as much to do to purge away such abominations as we had, they will still get just as much to do, if not more, in standing and fighting against the devil so that he does not again inflict such abominations upon the Church. This is the advice: Keep watch! Study! *Attende lectioni!* [“Attend to reading!” 1 Tim. 4:13]. Truly, you cannot read in Scripture too much, and what you do read you cannot read too well, and what you read well you cannot understand too well, and what you understand well you cannot teach too well, and what you teach well you cannot live too well. *Experto crede Ruperto* [“Take it from Rupert, who knows from experience”].⁷ It is the devil, the world, and the flesh that are ranting and raging against us. Therefore, beloved lords and brothers, pastors and preachers, pray, read, study, and keep busy. Truly, at this evil, shameful time, it is no time for loafing, snoring, or sleeping. Use your gift, which has been entrusted to you [cf. 1 Tim. 4:14], and reveal the mystery of Christ [cf. Col. 1:26]. As St. Paul says, “If anyone refuses to know it, let him be unknowing” [1 Cor. 14:38]. Since Baptism and the Sacrament are present, we must not keep silent about the Word of the mystery. It will certainly catch up with them if we have but done our part. Amen.

⁵ Luther refers here to the broad variety of sermon helps that had long been available for preachers. See Frymire, *Primacy of the Postils* [Leiden: Brill, 2010], p. 91.

⁶ I.e., the writers of good books such as Spangenberg’s postil.

⁷ A Latin rhyming proverb (the name “Rupert” seems to be significant only for its rhyme with *experto*); cf. [K.F.W.] Wander [*Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1866–1880)] 1:838, “Erfahrenere” no. 1.



PREFACE OF PHILIP MELANCHTHON (1553)

*To the well-born & noble count & lord, Sir Johannes Albert,
count of Mansfeld & lord of Heldringen, etc., my gracious Sir:
God's grace through His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ,
our Savior & very Helper.*

WELL-BORN, NOBLE, GRACIOUS COUNT, DEAR SIR,

Man's frail and wretched nature is (alas!) filled with doubt of God, and this doubt is inflated by devils. To counter this, however, the almighty, everlasting God and Father of our Savior Jesus Christ, out of great goodness and mercy, has implanted in nature and in man himself far more frequent testimony to His own existence, in addition to which He has revealed His Word (the Law and the promise of His Son), and to dispel man's doubt performed great and visible wonders—leading the people of Israel through the Red Sea, making the sun to stand still and to go backward, raising the dead—that we might know for certain and conclude in our hearts that there is one almighty, everlasting, judicious, just, good, true, pure, free-willed Being, which is to say, God, who created and sustains all things, and that this true, eternal God sent His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into this world to assemble in mankind an everlasting church for Himself.

This everlasting Son of God, Jesus Christ our Savior, is assuredly the Sustainer of His church for all generations. As He says, “No man shall pluck My sheep out of My hand” [John 10:28]. For this reason He also raises up true preachers in every generation, whose testimony is to be preserved for the strengthening of others. Thus we derive great benefit even after the apostolic age, from the testimony of the early and pure church, such as that of Irenaeus, Gregory of Neocaesarea, Justin, Peter of Alexandria, Athanasius, etc., who disputed various articles with heretics, concerning which articles disputes are raised even in these days.

It is beneficial, moreover, not only to preserve the testimony of orthodox teachers, but also to commit to writing whatever testimonies to the truth dominions and churches in common are in a position to give. For the Holy Gospel is no secret preaching, but God in His great goodness desires it to be known in all the world, and that many men may hear His Son Jesus Christ, and receive His grace, and by it obtain everlasting blessedness; to Him be thanks, worship, and praise forever.

Such testimony was also used by many of the ancient Doctors of the church, such as Irenaeus, who being the student of Polycarp (and Polycarp the student of John the Evangelist and Apostle), appeals to the unanimous doctrine of the church, even in German lands—and this at an early time, one hundred and fifty years after the birth of Christ. So long ago was Christian doctrine planted by God in Germany. Moreover, there was such seriousness in the German churches that even foreign nations benefited from their example. For Irenaeus was raised in Asia, and was bishop of Lyon, and became a bishop and martyr in Sirmium, Hungary.

For this reason it is proper to convey to the generations to come the sermons of the honorable and holy man, Johann Spangenberg, that his writings may serve posterity as a testimony of orthodox teaching. For he taught faithfully and purely, and called upon God rightly, as both Your Grace and many Christian men bear witness. It is also proper to inform Y.G.'s person and church of such orthodox writings, that posterity may know the testimony of Y.G. and of this church.

Therefore may it kindly please Your Grace, to the glory of God and of the Lord Christ, that Y.G.'s name is commemorated in this preface, even as in the book of Acts [10] there is a memorial of the worthy Roman centurion, Cornelius, in testimony to the Gospel.

I pray Y.G. will also accept the needy church into Y.G.'s care and be content to help it in its labor. For Y.G. may see how many have endeavored to bring about its destruction. And it is certainly true when the Lord Christ says that this is the last age, when the world will have greater disquiet than there was before. Yet in the midst of these terrible destructions God will nevertheless sustain for Himself a flock to be His everlasting church, even among these men by whom the Gospel is taught in its purity. We are to be aware of this warning and consolation so that, in the startling and incomprehensible divisions of this age, we may not grow fearful, but know that God will sustain His suppliants nevertheless, and each of us in his station is to work for the maintenance of the church, and our calling and labor will certainly not have been in vain. For the Son of God says, "I will abide with you until all the days of the world are completed" [Matt. 28:20]. Y.G. sees war in plain sight, and the intimations of heaven and earth by various omens. Y.G. is aware that three years ago in Bockelheim, blood sprang from the earth like a fountain, and now it is only too clear that this troubling sign was not without meaning. Many other such signs can be recounted also, which have been witnessed in various places in only a few years.

Confronted by these and other warnings and chastenings, we are to remember that God certainly exists, and will punish sin (as He Himself says, "God is a consuming fire" [Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29]). And we are to call upon Him sincerely in true conversion and in faith in His Son Jesus Christ, beseeching Him mercifully to relent from His righteous wrath, and in His wrath to remember mercy [Hab. 3:2], and to preserve in these lands a flock that calls upon Him rightly; this I devoutly pray. And I pray also that the same true God and Father of our Savior Jesus Christ would at all times mercifully defend and govern Y.G., the whole worthy land of Mansfeld, and its church. Amen.

Wittenberg. January 1, 1553.

Your Princely Grace's submissive servant,
PHILIP MELANCHTHON.

1

WINTER CYCLE:
ADVENT—EASTER



Epistle on the First Sunday in Advent

Romans 13 [:11–14]

DEAR brethren, since we know the time, that it is the hour to rise from sleep (for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed)—the night is past, but the day has come—therefore let us put away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light. Let us walk soberly as in the day, not in excess of eating and drinking, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But be clothed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and attend to the body in such a way that it not be corrupted.

1. What is the subject of this Epistle?

This epistle does not teach about faith but about the works and fruits of faith. Indeed, it stirs up, exhorts, urges, and rouses those who know what they should do. These two things, teaching and exhortation, are of necessity to the preacher: teaching what is unfamiliar; exhorting, stirring up, and motivating in what is already known.

2. What then does St. Paul exhort in this Epistle?

Two important things: to rise from sleep, wake up, and walk soberly; and also to cast off the works of darkness and be clothed in Jesus Christ.

3. What words does he use for this exhortation?

That this exhortation may make a far stronger impression and be taken to heart, he uses many fine, illustrative terms, calling sleep “darkness,” waking “light,” night “sin,” and day “good works.”

4. Is Paul speaking here about natural sleeping and waking?

No, rather he is making an apt comparison with natural things in order to stir us up and urge us to a spiritual way of life; as if to say, “You see that when it is day, men rise from sleep, go outside, put away the works of darkness, and welcome the day, go to work and make their living. How much more should we Christians, on whom, Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness, has risen, rise from the sleep of sin, put away all the works of darkness, vices, and wickedness, and with all gratitude receive the gracious preaching of the Gospel!”

5. What does rising and waking from sleep mean?

Nothing other than renouncing ungodliness and worldly desires (see chapter 2).

6. What does walking soberly mean?

Living a pure, righteous, and God-pleasing life in this world, and awaiting the blessed coming of the Lord.

7. What does day and light mean?

The salutary and manifest grace and mercy of God.

8. How are natural sleep and spiritual sleep alike?

Someone who sleeps in a natural sense does not see or perceive any of the things that are here on earth. He lies prostrate like a dead man, pays no attention to anything, all the while involved with utterly useless images and forms, dreams and visions, instead of real things. And when he wakes, these dreams and images vanish entirely. So too, in the spiritual sense, when a man lives in ungodliness, he is sleeping and dead in the sight of God, and does not see or perceive the spiritual goods offered him by the Gospel. Meanwhile, he is involved in the temporal, perishable goods of this world, and occupied with utterly worldly desires and delights, which are no more like eternal joy than dreamed images are like natural, living creatures. But when the man wakes up, either by receiving faith or by dying, he will finally see and recognize that what he loved here on earth was utter fantasy.

9. Can you give proof from Scripture?

The psalm says, “Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, You make their image despised in the city” (Ps. 73 [:20]). And Isaiah, “As when a hungry man dreams that he is eating, but when he awakes, his soul is still empty; and as when a thirsty man dreams that he is drinking, but when he awakes, he is faint and thirsty: so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against Mount Zion” (Is. 29 [:8]).

10. If the pomp, delight, and joy of the world is pure fantasy, why is it that kings and princes rage so terribly over it?

They are still sleeping, and have not yet risen from slumber, and do not yet see the gracious light of the Gospel in faith. This is the cause of their rage and madness.

11. Why should we rise from sleep and wake up?

Because “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.” That is, before the bright daylight of the Gospel, all the patriarchs and prophets believed, hoped, and expected that the Savior Christ would come, and by this faith they were sustained. But we do not have to wait for that coming of His any more, for faith has come into our hand. Christ has already been here bodily, the Light of the Gospel has risen, the blessing of Abraham has been spread into all the world. So because we are all now in the broad daylight that Abraham saw (John 8 [:56]), it is no longer time to be idle and sleepy, but to be active and awake. This also why he says, “The night is past, but the day has come.”

12. What does the night signify?

All doctrine that is not the Gospel, for outside of the Gospel there is no saving doctrine; all is night and darkness.

13. What does the day signify?

The Gospel that enlightens hearts and directs us to eternal goods, that we may be occupied with these and walk soberly in the day.

14. What does St. Paul mean by the words, “The night is past, but the day has come”?

Here he is describing the pleasant part of the day, namely, the joyous light of dawn, as if to say, “When the night is over, and the day breaks, you see all the creatures come out in the light of dawn: men awake, birds sing and shout, all the animals stir, and the world seems new, and everything seems alive. How much more should we be vigorous and go forth, since the true light of dawn and the radiance of the Holy Gospel and divine truth has appeared and risen, which will redeem and save us from all the works of darkness (see Rom. 1 [13:12]).

15. What are the works of darkness?

St. Paul lists six of them here, namely, excess of eating and drinking, sexual immorality and sensuality, quarreling and jealousy. In these, moreover, he includes other evil things that men may do. For hatred and jealousy pertain to the heart and mind, quarreling and strife to words, and excess of eating and of drinking, sexual immorality, and sensuality to works. And these wicked behaviors are connected to each other like a chain: where there is one, the others are not far behind.

16. How so?

Where there is excess, immorality follows, for when one’s belly is full of food and drink, the mouth is full of extraneous, useless words, the eyes stare wildly, hands, feet, and all members are quick to sin, and a man’s situation is no different from that of a coachman who has removed the bit from his horse’s mouth, and a pilot who has lost his rudder. The results of quarreling, jealousy, anger, and hatred, and Sir Spite¹ (often inciting parents against children, children against parents, brother against brother) are clear as day. Therefore St. Paul carefully warns us to flee wickedness, and to put away these works of darkness, and to put on this armor of light.

17. What is the armor of light?

St. Paul describes all the weapons of light in a few words when he exhorts us to be clothed in Christ.

18. How is Christ put on?

In two different ways: First, we clothe ourselves in His eternal virtue, which happens by faith. Second, we follow Him and become like Him, walking in the same clothing of virtue that He walks in. This is what St. Paul speaks of here.

19. How are we then to be clothed in Christ?

See that in Christ there is no excess of eating or drinking, but a moderate life in fasting and chastening of the body, with laboring, walking, preaching, praying, and doing good to others. Neither is there idleness nor immorality, but a sober life, complete decency, purity, poverty, and not sleeping secretly in sexual immorality or fornication. Neither is there anger, quarreling, or jealousy, but complete peace, kindness, favor, love, grace, patience, gentleness, and a charitable good will toward everyone. When, therefore, we follow this example of Christ both in doctrine and life, fasting, praying, waking, laboring, suffering hunger, thirst, heat, and frost, and are merciful, humble, peaceable, kind, chaste, patient, generous, sober, gentle, faithful, and honest, we are wearing the true suit of armor, Jesus Christ, who adorns us and makes us beautiful so that we walk soberly as in the day.

20. What does walking in the day mean?

Putting away by faith all sin, wickedness, and vice, and from that time forward having the kind of conduct in keeping with the Gospel and supported by Christ’s teaching. As Christ says, “Whoever does evil hates the light and does not

¹ Juncker Neidhart.

come into the light, lest his works be punished. But whoever has the truth comes into the light, that his works may be clearly seen, for they are done in God.” (John 3 [:20–21]).

21. What is the summary of this Epistle?

Paul exhorts all Christians, since they have known Christ and are justified by faith, to be active and awake, energetic and undaunted from now on in exercising the fruits of faith, putting to death the old Adam, and extinguishing the

wicked desires and cravings of the flesh, lending help, comfort, service, and counsel to their neighbor, not being idle and careless, not sleeping or being slothful, not quarreling or being jealous, but always going forward, and increasing in all good works and virtues, and finally, by the help of Christ our Savior, coming to the light that will never grow dim, to the day where there is no night, to the life where there is no death, but rather eternal security, peace, joy, and blessedness. God grant it to us! Amen.

Gospel on the First Sunday in Advent **Matthew 21 [:1–9]**

WHEN they came near Jerusalem, at Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village that is before you, and immediately you will find a she-donkey tied, and a foal with her. Untie them and bring them to Me. And if anyone says anything to you, say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and he will let them go with you at once.” And all this took place that that might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King is coming to you, meek, and riding on a donkey, and on a foal of a donkey that bears burdens.” The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them, and brought the donkey and the foal, and put their garments on them, and set Him on top. Much of the crowd spread their clothes on the road, others cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road. But the crowd that went before and after cried, saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

22. What is the subject of this Gospel?

The first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, how He came into the world for the salvation and consolation of the whole human race. As we sing in the Nicene Creed: “Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate,” etc.

23. What was this coming like?

Welcome, humble, friendly, and meek, etc.

24. Why welcome?

Because the dear patriarchs, prophets, and Jews desired and longed for this coming with great sighing.

25. Why humble?

“Being in the form of God, He did not count it robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, was like any other man, and was found in appearance like a man. He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross” [Phil. 2:6–8].

26. Why friendly and meek?

He proved this throughout His life: in His birth, in His Baptism, in His cross, and in His entry [into Jerusalem].

27. How in His birth?

He willed to be born in the lowly town of Bethlehem, in the inn, and to be laid in a manger.

28. How in His Baptism?

He let Himself be baptized by John, whereas He ought to have baptized John.

29. How in His cross?

He had nowhere to lay His head (Matt. 8 [:20]).

30. What was Christ’s entry into Jerusalem like?

Simple as can be, yet accompanied by a royal victory-song and procession.

31. Where is this simplicity visible?

In four different facts: First, He came on a poor, simple beast of burden, riding on a donkey. Second, His dear apostles and disciples went beside

Him on foot without being crowded by riders, horses, or carts. Third, everyone was singing and rejoicing, “Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Fourth, He wept for the city of Jerusalem and for the tragic destruction of the Jews.

32. *Where did He begin His ride?*

On the Mount of Olives, in order to show that He was coming out of pure grace and mercy without any of our merit. For oil in the Scriptures represents mercy.

33. *What did the disciples do during this entry?*

They were diligent and served Christ. Some fetched the donkey and brought it to Christ, some put their clothes on the donkey and set Christ on top, others sang and shouted for joy.

34. *What were the crowd and the children doing?*

Some cut branches from palms and olive trees, and strewed them on the road, others spread their clothes on the road, others sang, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

35. *What did the high priests and Pharisees do then?*

They were indignant at the praising and singing of the disciples and children, and wanted Christ to rebuke them.

36. *But what did Christ do?*

First, He defends His disciples and said, “I say to you, if these are silent, the stones will cry out” [Luke 19:40]. Second, He defended the children, saying, “Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have ordained praise?’” [Matt. 21:16]. Third, He drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and overturned the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of those who sold pigeons, saying, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of murderers’” [v. 13]. Fourth, He healed the blind, the lame, and other sick people in the temple. Therefore “the chief priests and the scribes and leaders of the people were seeking to destroy Him” [Luke 19:47].

37. *Why did Christ come riding on a donkey?*

The Prophet Zechariah proclaimed this: “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Rejoice greatly, and shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you, a Righteous One, and a Savior, poor [and meek] and riding on a donkey,

and on a young foal of the donkey. For I will put away the chariots from Ephraim, and the war horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be destroyed. For He shall teach peace to the nations, and His dominion shall be from one sea to the other, and from the water to the ends of the world. You also by the blood of Your covenant set Your prisoners free from the pit in which is no water” (Zech. 9 [:9–11]).

38. *Why does the prophet say, “Rejoice, O daughter of Zion”?*

To show that this King’s coming is the most comforting to all sinful consciences and afflicted hearts that there has ever been or ever may be. Therefore the Evangelist also adds the word “Say.” For he wants all men to know of this coming. He wants it announced first to the Jews at Jerusalem, then to all good-hearted men.

39. *Why does it say, “Behold”?*

In the spirit he saw that few men would pay attention to this gracious coming of Christ’s, so he reminds us to look for it at the blessed time, which is now at hand.

40. *Why does he say, “Your king”?*

He wishes to be our own King, our gracious God and most beloved Father who will deliver us from all tyranny, tribulation, and evil, if we ourselves are willing.

41. *Why does he say, “Is Coming”?*

He had to come to us first if we were to come to Him. He is too high, too broad, too far. This is why we pray every day in the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come.” He furthermore promised to come and kept His promise.

42. *Why does he say, “To you”?*

Not only did He come to be our King, but also to give Himself to us as our own, so that all that He is and has is ours (see Rom. 8 [:32]).

43. *Why does he say, “A Righteous One, a Savior, poor and meek”?*

He did not wish to come in wrath, as He came to Adam in Paradise after the Fall; nor as He came to Cain after the murder of his brother Abel; nor as in the Flood; nor as at Sodom; nor as to King Pharaoh in Egypt; nor as He came to Israel on Mount Sinai, with great terror, etc. Rather, “He came “riding on a donkey, and on the foal of a donkey that bears burdens,” to show that He

would bear the burden of our sins, and make atonement on the cross by His death.

44. Why does he say, “I will put away the chariots and war horses”?

To show what kind of King Christ will be, namely, a true Prince of Peace who shall make all wars cease in all the world, as the psalm says [Ps. 46:9].

45. Why does he say, “You also by the blood of Your covenant set Your prisoners free”?

He uses this to show by what means our King has redeemed us from sin, death, and hell, namely, by His blood, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6 [:20] and 1 Peter 1 [:19].

46. What does this entry of Christ’s signify?

Nothing other than the preaching of the Gospel in the last age before the end of the world, when He will ride in with His elect to the heavenly Jerusalem. As it was here, so will it also be in that Day.

47. How so?

In that day Christ will also send His messengers out to fetch Him the poor, tied-up donkey, release her, and bring her to Him.

48. What does the donkey represent?

The external man, the old Adam. The idle donkey follows reluctantly, is lazy and slothful toward bearing Christ. Therefore it must be released from its evil, sinful conscience and be brought to Christ by the Gospel and faith.

49. What does the foal represent?

The internal man, the heart, the spirit, the soul, which Christ also wants for His entry into the heavenly Jerusalem.

50. What does it mean that Christ sends the apostles?

No one is to assume the ministry of preaching unless he is sent by God and duly called, as Aaron was (Heb. 5 [:4]).

51. What does it mean when He says, “You will find”?

With this He comforts preachers not to be concerned about who will hear. They are to preach. Hearers will present themselves. Those who will receive the Word are already written.

52. What does it mean when He says, “If anyone says anything to you, say, ‘The Lord has need of them’”?

This is a prophecy that there will always be those who will speak against the preachers of the Gospel, but they should always answer, “It is the Lord’s order. That is how He wants it.”

53. What does it mean that the donkeys stand tied outside at the crossing?

[Man] stood outside at the crossing for a long time. No one knew which way he should or could walk safely. So thoroughly had the doctrines and lies of men gained the upper hand that God at last sent us His apostles, who released our consciences by the Gospel and brought us to Christ.

54. Who are the masters of these donkeys?

The pope and his crowd, who claim to be masters of all men’s consciences.

55. What do they say to preachers of the Gospel?

They say, “What are you doing? Do you want to make people workless and lawless? Are they not to do any good any more?” For as far as the Gospel is concerned, it seems as if it forbids good works, but it does nothing other than teach Christian good works first of all, and cast out false and hypocritical works.

56. How should preachers answer them?

They should give them a good lesson and say, “We do not forbid true good works, but we release consciences from false works, not that they may be free to do evil, but that they may finally be free to do genuine good works under Christ their Lord. And that is what He desires.”

57. What does it mean when He says, “They will let the donkeys go at once”?

With this He comforts the preachers the Gospel, for where there are reasonable and true teachers of the law and of works, and they are given adequate instruction from divine Scripture concerning good works, they yield and let it be. But where there are tyrants who rage against Christians, they are not to be counted worthy of this blessed treasure; the pearls are not to be thrown before swine, nor what is holy given to dogs (Matt. 7 [:6]). And yet, whether they like it or not, the donkey, the poor captive conscience, will be delivered and released. In this case one must obey God rather than men.

58. Did Christ ride on both donkeys?

No, only on the foal, while the she-donkey followed behind.

59. What should this teach us?

This is meant to teach us that when Christ dwells in our inner man by faith, we walk under Him in His governance, but the she-donkey (the outer man) follows behind, is reluctant, and does not bear Christ eagerly. Yet since the foal (the spirit) bears Christ willingly, the she-donkey (the flesh) must follow behind, led by the bridle.

60. Why then does He take both?

He wants both body and soul to be saved.

61. Why does he say that no one has ridden the foal? [Mark 11:2]

He means that no one except Christ with His grace was ever able to make man's spirit and heart willing and tame.

62. Why does he specify a she-donkey "that bears burdens"?

The old Adam is not eager to bear Christ. It must first bear the cross, and be a beast of burden and a pack animal.

63. What do the disciples' clothes represent?

The examples and deeds of the patriarchs and prophets by which the preaching of the New Testament and the way of faith was paved and adorned, as it says in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

64. What are the palm and olive branches?

The comforting sayings of the holy prophets and God's promises. For the trees are nothing other than the books of the prophets from which these comforting sayings are drawn to adorn the Christian faith.

65. Why does He specify palm branches?

The palm tree has such a nature that, when a beam is made from it, it will not give way under any burden, but lifts itself up against the burden. The sayings of God's truth do likewise. The more one tries to suppress them, the higher up they soar. "The Gospel . . . is the power of God" (Rom. 1 [:16]).

66. Why olive branches?

Because they are utterly gracious sayings in which God has promised us His grace.

67. Who are the groups going before and following after Christ?

All the saints before and after Christ's birth, who all sing the same song: Hosanna to the Son of David.

68. What does Hosanna mean?

It is like saying, "Ah, dear God, grant success and salvation to the Son of David for His new kingdom! Let Him ride in in the name of God, that it may be blessed and have prosperity. Let Him alone be our King. Let Him alone reign in us by His holy Gospel, and let us be His foal, and go with Him into the heavenly Jerusalem, into eternal life! Amen."



Epistle on the Second Sunday in Advent
Romans 15 [:4–13]

DEAR brethren, what was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope. But the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded with one another, according to Jesus Christ, that being of one spirit, you may with one mouth praise God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. But I say that Christ Jesus was a servant of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God because of that mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name." And again he says, "Rejoice, you Gentiles, with His people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all Gentiles, and extol Him all nations." And again Isaiah says, "There shall be the Root of Jesse, and He who shall rise to rule the Gentiles, in Him will the Gentiles trust." But the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may have abundant hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. What does St. Paul teach in this Epistle?

He indicates in it the proper book for us Christians to read and study, namely Holy Scripture, saying that our instruction is written in it for our comfort and benefit.

2. Why then was this book of Holy Scripture so rare among the papists?

The colleges, chapter houses, and monasteries swept this book of Holy Scripture under the rug, and made it so rare that it was not possessed (let alone read) by more than a few doctors of theology.² And lest anyone pull it out, they tacked a scandalous label on it, saying that it was such an obscure book, one must follow manmade glosses and not bare Scripture. What is this if not to label St. Paul a liar, since he calls it a book of instruction, and they call it a book of deception, and obscure? What reward should God give such scribes other than to make them spend their lives reading and studying nothing but the doctrines and glosses of men, hauling around their lies, and never coming to the truth? Indeed, if Paul had known of another and more useful book to read, he would have identified it for us.

3. How does this book of Holy Scripture benefit us? What fruits does it yield?

St. Paul tells us by saying, “What was written . . . was written for our instruction, that through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Here he lists two fruits of Holy Scripture: patience and comfort.

4. Why patience?

The confession of Christ and the Gospel always has persecution attached to it. The world hates such doctrines, and therefore casts down all that we have and turns it to dust. Neither should a Christian’s life be anything but putting to death the old Adam and bearing the cross with Christ. Therefore St. Paul calls the Gospel the “word of the cross” (Rom. 1 [1 Cor. 1:18]). However, this calls for patience, and that is drawn from the Scriptures whenever one reads or hears read or preached how things went with the dear patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and disciples of Christ, as Christ says in Luke 21 [:19]: “Hold fast your souls with patience.”

5. Why comfort?

St. Paul calls the Bible, Holy Scripture, a book of comfort because it comforts afflicted hearts and anxious consciences amid cross, distress,

and sorrow. It is no small comfort to suffering men when in time of cross they hear a comforting verse from Scripture about how God their dear Father will preserve them. This is the way the thief on the cross was comforted when Christ said to him, “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” The true use of the Scriptures, then, is to comfort suffering, afflicted, dying men. It will comfort, so it must first find comfort in the cross. When therefore faith by comfort of the Scriptures attains to patience, there is hope as well.

6. What does hope mean?

Hope is nothing other than relying on God’s promise without any hesitation, no matter how contrary things may seem, as Abraham did when he was tempted by God. “He believed upon hope where there was nothing to hope,” as St. Paul says of him (Rom. 4 [:18]). “And he was weakened in faith, and did not consider his own body, which was dead already (since he was about a hundred years old), nor the dead body of Sarah. He did not doubt the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, and gave God the glory, knowing with all certainty that what God promises, He can also do. And therefore it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

7. Is there any other profit to Scripture besides patience and comfort?

Of course, for St. Paul says (2 Tim. 3 [:16–17]), “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, is profitable for instruction, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that a man of God may be perfect.” Therefore “those in Thessalonica received the Word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17 [:11]). In the same way, we Christians should also examine Scripture, so that from them we may gain understanding, patience, comfort, hope, and every good.

8. Why should we read and examine Scripture?

Because our Christian life is nothing other than a daily dueling and striving with the devil, the world, sin, and hell, so that it would be no surprise if a Christian grew faint and feeble. If he had no understanding of the Scriptures and no example in them, he would often waver in his cross. But since God has provided many good examples in the prophets, apostles, and other holy martyrs, a Christian thinks to himself, “Very well, suffer and endure! He saved them, He will not leave you, either.” Likewise, a Christian sees the wicked and ungodly (such as Jews,

² *Doctores theologiae.*

Turks, Gentiles, tyrants) having the best luck on earth, and the godly getting nothing but tribulation, persecution, sadness, cross, and suffering. If he had no comfort from the Scriptures, he would waver again. But since he hears Paul say, “We will be like the image of His Son” [Rom. 8:29], and again, “Through many afflictions we must pass into the kingdom of God” [Acts 14:22], he finds comfort and hope, and this hope and comfort carries him through all suffering into eternal life.

9. Do the doctrines of men also give comfort like Holy Scripture?

What would they give? Let the teachers of works-righteousness, lawgivers, indeed, all papists come forward in one great mass. Let them summon all their books and summists.³ Let us see whether they can comfort one soul in even the tiniest trial. It is impossible to comfort a soul unless it hears the Word of its God. They may well be able to use their books of fantasies and lies to torment and kill, but no book besides Holy Scripture has the power to comfort in time of cross. When the soul takes hold of God’s Word, it learns God’s gracious will from it, clings to it firmly, and remains steadfast in life and death. But whoever does not know God’s will doubts, because he does not know how he stands with God.

10. But how does one get this patience and comfort found in Scripture?

Not by one’s own powers, but from God by prayer. We must seek those things where St. Paul sought them. For he prayed God to give the Christians in Rome patience and comfort, that they, being like-minded, might with one spirit glorify God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we too should pray God that we may be of one mind with one another, glorify God with one spirit, and receive the weak with meekness, according to Christ’s example. For such deeds and endeavors do not rest on our own ability, but God must grant them. Therefore say with St. James (1 [:5]): “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him pray to God.” And further on he says, “Every good gift comes down from above, from the Father of light,” etc. (v. 17).

11. What then is the content of this Epistle?

St. Paul first points to the usefulness of Scripture in its teaching how man is to act in faith toward God, in love toward neighbor, in mortifying the old Adam toward himself.

Second, he exhorts all Christians to be like-minded with one another so that they do not quarrel with each other, one counting this right, the other that, but that they agree as one in the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine of men divides hearts, but the Word of God unites them, even though the works are of many kinds. When the heart stands upright in faith toward God and in love toward neighbor and in mortifying the flesh toward self, one counts as much as another, if only the unity of the faith remains in the heart, God will not reject any on account of his external dealings.

Similarly, he also exhorts us to glorify and worship God with one spirit. In fact, we can do nothing more fitting for God than to glorify and worship Him and thank Him for His goodness and benefits, which is also the true and only worship of God. As He Himself says, “Whoever offers a sacrifice of praise glorifies Me, and this is the way by which I show him the salvation of God” (Ps. 50 [:23]).

Finally, he also exhorts everyone to welcome each other and to show brotherly love according to Christ’s example, bearing one another’s weakness with patience, which is praiseworthy and honorable before God. Then the unbelievers think, “What an excellent God that must be, to have such a kind people!” and God is glorified and worshiped. A Christian life should be continually focused on the glory of God and the good of one’s neighbor, as Christ says in the fifth chapter of Matthew [5:13–16].

12. How does St. Paul conclude this Epistle?

After expressing his judgment that, according to the example of Christ, no distinction should be made between holy men and sinners, nor between strong and weak, nor between rich and poor, for they all have the same possessions in Christ who makes them of one heart, one mind, one spirit, and makes all His possessions common property, whether they be spiritual or temporal; and then founding this judgment of his on solid passages of Scripture, removing all cause for disunity, setting himself between Jews and Gentiles like a true arbiter and mediator, so that none should despise the other, since they all possess Christ in full; he finally concludes with an admirable little prayer that we too should wish upon all men, and pray with St. Paul, saying, “The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may have abundant hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

³ Writers of systematic theological compendiums.—MC.

Gospel on the Second Sunday in Advent

Luke 21 [:25–33]

THE Lord Jesus said to His disciples, “There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on earth the people will be afraid and will tremble. And the sea and the waters will roar, and men will faint with fear and with foreboding of the things that will come upon earth. For the very powers of heaven will be moved. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. But when these things begin to take place, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws nigh.”

And He told them a parable: “Behold the fig tree, and all the trees. When they now shoot forth their buds, you see it in them and perceive that summer is nigh. So also you, when you see all these things beginning, then know that the kingdom of God is nigh. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all is fulfilled. Heaven and earth pass away, but My words do not pass away.”

13. What is the subject of this Gospel?

The second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ at the Last Judgment, what kind of signs there will be, and how we are to prepare ourselves for this coming.

14. When will Christ’s coming take place?

On the Last Day, when He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

15. In what manner will this coming take place?

With wonder and terror.

16. Why with wonder?

Because of the numerous wonders and signs that will take place before this coming.

17. What kinds of signs will there be?

Many different kinds, both in heavenly and in earthly creatures.

18. What kind of signs in heaven?

The sun and moon will lose their light, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be moved.

19. What kind of signs on earth?

The earth will quake, the sea and the waves will roar, and men will faint with fear and with foreboding of the things that are coming on earth. In short, all creatures, both heavenly and earthly, sun and moon, stars and all elements, will display God’s wrath, much darkening of the sun and moon will occur, comets and many strange, remarkable figures will happen in the heavens. The air will be full of poison and pestilence, many unprecedented, unusual diseases will appear, water and fire will devastate land and people, great storms of thunder, lightning, rain, and winds

will arise, overturning houses and trees, great earthquakes will happen, great war, bloodshed, rioting, and rebellion will take place. Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom. Men will devote themselves to excess of eating and drinking, and to temporal livelihood. The ancient serpent, the devil, will be loosed, false prophets, antichrists, heretics, and many deceivers and foolish spirits will arise. And the Gospel will be preached in all the world [Matt. 24:14]. Then comes the end [1 Cor. 15:24].

20. Why will Christ’s coming be with terror?

Because of the great zeal that the Judge will use at this royal assembly.

21. Zeal in what?

In separating the evil and the good, and in distinguishing the works of the godly and of the damned at the Final Judgment.

22. How will this Judge’s coming take place?

Luke says, “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.” (Luke 21 [:27]). Christ “will sit on the throne of His majesty, and all the peoples will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and will set the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.” (Matt. 25 [:31–32]). Then He will take account of every man’s works and finally pass sentence.

23. What are the sheep?

Faithful Christians who have heard and followed the voice of their true Lord Christ.

24. Why does He liken them to sheep?

Because of the character and nature that sheep possess.

25. *What is that character?*

A sheep hears its shepherd's voice at once and follows him; likewise, it depends on its shepherd's protection and lets itself be led in and out and be pastured. So too, faithful Christians hear and follow God's Word, depend on Christ alone as their only Lord, and let themselves be led and pastured by Him with His Word.

26. *What are the goats?*

The wicked, who ignore and do not follow Christ's voice.

27. *Why does He liken them to goats?*

Because of the qualities that goats possess.

28. *What are those qualities?*

A goat is a filthy, stinking animal. So too, the wicked stink before God on account of their sins and iniquities. As a goat knocks down all around with its horns, so the wicked knock down poor Christians with their tyranny and force, cunning and deceit. Similarly, as a goat is not good for gardens, but ruins everything, so the wicked also ruin the LORD's vineyard, as He laments through Isaiah [5:1–10].

29. *For whom will Christ's coming be with terror?*

For the ungodly and unbelievers, who will see an angry Judge above them, the jaws of hell beneath them, their own sins to their right, the accusing devil to their left, a burning world before them, an evil conscience within them. In addition, they will hear the terrible judgment, "Go, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire" [Matt. 25:41].

30. *How will He be to the godly and believers?*

Comforting, because on that Day they will be redeemed from all evil.

31. *Where is this written?*

Christ says here, "When these things begin to take place, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws nigh."

32. *What is His intention with these words?*

He means that we should prepare ourselves for His coming, as if to say, "O poor flock, you have been forced to suffer much in this world for My sake. Now look at Him in whom you have trusted. Where now are those who persecuted you? Where now is their great glory and pride? Have

they not all been put to shame in body and soul? Behold, now your cross and misery are ended, and their eternal damnation and calamity begin. Do not let My power and glory terrify you. It is not against you but for you." And He tells them a delightful parable.

33. *What parable is that?*

He says, "Behold the fig tree, and all trees. When they now shoot forth their buds, you see it in them and perceive that summer is nigh. So also you, when you see all these things beginning, then know that the kingdom of God is nigh."

34. *Why does Christ make this parable?*

He does not make a parable about autumn or winter when all the trees are bare, the leaves fall off, the grass is dry, the birds never sing, and the season of gloom begins, but rather about spring and summer, the season of mirth, when all creatures are glad, and the earth blossoms, bringing forth grass and flowers. And He does so to stir us up and exhort us not to tremble at that Day, but to await and welcome it with great joy, in the same way that all creatures rejoice in the month of May and the advent of summer.

35. *What does Christ mean with this parable?*

He means, "When you see the sun and moon grow dark, the stars fall, comets appear, pestilence and new diseases come, fire and water wreak havoc, winds roar, hill and valley, mainland and island, city and village collapse, heaven and earth collide, people shake and tremble, all the elements change, and all creation seem as if it will fall to ruin and be destroyed, and you hear of war and rumors of war, rebellion, false doctrine, lies and error, then you should say with joy, 'God be praised, it will be summer at last! The buds and leaves are coming out, the beautiful lilies and roses are bursting forth. It has been winter long enough. The devil and his courtiers have caused mischief long enough. At last a beautiful summer will come that will never cease, in which all angels, indeed, all creatures, rejoice because they will finally be freed from the wicked world, and the children of God be summoned into eternal life!'"

36. *How should we prepare for this coming?*

"With holy conduct and godliness," as St. Peter says [2 Peter 3:11], that we may be found before Him in peace without spot or reproach.

37. What does our Lord Christ say in addition to this?

He warns us of three different sins, saying, "Watch yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with excess of eating and with drunkenness, and with cares about livelihood, and so this Day come upon you suddenly. For it will come like a snare upon all who dwell on the earth," as if to say, "At the end of the age, men will still be devoting themselves to excess of eating and drinking, temporal joy, pleasure, and cares about livelihood, so that they live complacently without any fear as if the Last Day were still a thousand years away. But when they are at the height of their complacency, and most concerned with livelihood, building, planting, and living in luxury, the Day will fall upon them unexpectedly, as a snare most often falls upon birds and beasts when they are seeking food and sustenance. So 'be awake at all times, and pray that you may be worthy to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man'" [Luke 21:34–36].

38. What does watching and being awake mean?

It means having a fervent, burning, living faith that is active in love, keeps its eyes on God, and helps neighbor, like the five wise virgins (Matt. 25 [:1–13]).

39. What does sleeping mean?

Sleeping means leading a selfish life according to one's own opinions, not trusting in God, not doing good to anyone, like the five foolish virgins.

40. Must we also go before the Judge?

Thus says St. Paul, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive according as he has done in the life of the body, be it good or evil" (2 Cor. 5 [:10]).

41. Am I to understand that God will judge by works and not by faith?

Since faith is an invisible thing, God will judge by what we can see and touch, namely, by every man's works, good or evil.

42. Why does He want to hold a trial? Doesn't He already know ahead of time where we are going?

Because He is a just Judge, He has no wish to render judgment in secret, or privately, but publicly before the world, angels and demons, and either to save or to condemn men by their own works as a testimony to their faith or lack of faith.

43. What works will He demand?

He will not ask, "Are you a Christian?" but, "If you are a Christian, point to your Christian works by which you have proven your faith. Have you fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, housed the poor, comforted the afflicted, and visited the sick and captives?"

44. Does Christ take all that much pleasure in such works?

Yes, He says, "What you have done to one of the least of these My brothers, you have done it to Me" [Matt. 25:40].

45. Whom does Christ call "the least"?

All poor, miserable Christians, the sick, the diseased, the blind, the lame, lepers, etc. Whatever good is done to them, (He says) He will take it as having been done to Himself.

46. Those surely are comforting promises!

Indeed. He will also keep them earnestly, and punish terribly those who despise this pledge.

47. But God delays His punishment too long, and thereby gives rise to much evil!

There is a saying, "What is long delayed is not yet abandoned."⁴ He will certainly find them. He has appointed a royal assembly and a time of recompense, the Last Day, when He will reform all things, and all cases will be judged and assessed.

48. Does God not render justice at other times?

Yes, He sometimes holds a local assembly concerning some particular affair, sin, and trespass, which He punishes at once.

49. Can you give an example?

On Sodom and Gomorrah He caused a special punishment of fire to fall; on Pharaoh and Egypt, the drowning in the Red Sea; on Jerusalem and Judea, an eternal destruction; on Asia, Africa, and Greece, a decline of the Christian faith; on Rome and Italy, the onslaught of the Goths; on Rhodes and Hungary, the onslaught of the Turks. These are all lesser judgments of God's, mere preludes by which we should learn what zeal and wrath of God is coming upon all wicked men. God grant that we take it to heart, amend our ways and be rectified, and at last be saved. God grant it to us! Amen.

⁴ Quod differtur, non aufertur.



Epistle on the Third Sunday in Advent **1 Corinthians 4 [:1–5]**

DEAR brethren, so let every one regard us, namely, as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Now no more is required of stewards than that they be found faithful. However, it is a small thing to me that I should be judged by you or by a human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything in myself, but I am not thereby justified. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not judge before the time, until He comes, who will also bring to light what is hidden in darkness, and open the counsels of hearts. Then will praise come to each person from God.

1. What does this Epistle present to us?

Three things: First, what apostles, bishops, and preachers are, namely, ministers, not masters; and not ministers of Satan or of the world but of Christ. As St. Paul says here, “So let every one regard us, namely, as ministers of Christ,” etc. Second, what this ministry entails, namely, that they be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e., that they faithfully serve the people the Gospel, in which the goods, graces, and gifts of God are wrapped, and distribute to them the Holy Sacrament as Christ instituted it. This is why he says here, “No more is required of stewards than that they be found faithful.” Third, that godly bishops and preachers should not be deceived in their ministry, though the world judges, sentences, and condemns them for it. They are to attend to their office, perform it diligently and faithfully, and commit their affairs to Christ, the supreme Judge, who is not far, and who will certainly find the men who judge splinters while bearing planks. This is what he means when he says, “It is a small thing to me that I should be judged by you.”

2. How many kinds of divine ministry are there?

Two. One is called *latreia*, which is done without any means at all, about which Moses says, “You shall worship the LORD God, and minister to Him alone” (Deut. 6 [:13]). The other is done toward the neighbor, but in God’s stead and by God’s command, either in physical things, in which case it is called *douleia*, or in spiritual things, in which case it is called *hyperesia*. This must be kept in mind or Paul will be difficult to understand!

3. Which ministry is St. Paul talking about?

Not the ministry that the papists purvey in chapter houses and cloisters, with bell-ringing, signing, singing, ringing, censuring, sprinkling, consecrating churches, chapels, and altars, christening bells, anointing the walls, shaving heads, taking

holy orders, going on pilgrimages, granting indulgences, worshiping saints, saying Vigils and Masses for the dead, and the like. Rather, he is talking about the ministry that God Himself prescribed, ordained, and instituted, namely, ministering to the Christian congregation with teaching, preaching, and instruction in the Catechism, Gospel, and truth of God. It is for this ministry that Christ came down from heaven, was made Man, and proclaimed the will of His Father for three and a half years. It is for this ministry that all the apostles were called and sent into all the world to preach the Gospel. Indeed, it is for this ministry that all bishops, pastors, and preachers, who are God’s messengers and representatives, have been chosen and sent out with His message, the Gospel, to preach it to all men and make it public.

4. Of which ministry does Paul call himself, the apostles, and preachers “ministers”?

They call themselves “ministers,”⁵ and their office “the office of the ministry”⁶ because, while all Christians minister to God in the ministry of worship,⁷ they are not all in the office of the ministry,⁸ like the apostles, bishops, pastors, and preachers, who by virtue of their office must minister to the Christian congregation with teaching and preaching, and giving the Absolution and the Sacraments.

5. What does St. Paul mean with the words, “Let every one regard us as ministers of Christ”?

He means, “Be careful, dear brethren, not to choose another Head, exalt another Lord, make another christ, but to stay with the only Christ, for we are not your heads and lords, nor do we preach our own words or direct you to obey us. Rather, we are messengers and ministers of Him who is your supreme Head and Lord, whose

⁵ *Ministros.*

⁶ *Ministerium.*

⁷ *Cultu latraiae.*

⁸ I.e., *ministerio hyperesiae.* —MC.

Word we preach, whose message we proclaim. That is how you are to regard us, nor are you to expect anything else from us. We are ministers and stewards of Christ, nothing more.

6. What is a steward?⁹

A steward is one who is in charge of a gentleman's household, children, and servants, and sees to it that they have food, clothes, and other necessities, in the same way that hospital supervisors, almoners,¹⁰ legal guardians, managers, and such do. That is what you call a true diaconate.

7. Why does Paul call himself and preachers "stewards of God"?

God also has a household, the Christian church, the gathering of Christians. Over this He has set the apostles, bishops, preachers as stewards and managers, to attend to it and provide it with good food and nourishment of the soul. And that we may rightly understand this task of providing, St. Paul distinguishes the stewards of God's spiritual house from all the stewards of physical houses by the word *mysteries*. In effect he is saying, "The stewards of men's households govern children and servants in a physical sense, and give them physical food and nourishment, but the stewards of God's household only govern the soul, and give the foods [proper to it], that is, they preach the Gospel and give the most worthy Sacrament according to Christ's instruction.

8. What is a mystery?

A mystery is a hidden thing that has been put out of sight and concealed so that no one sees it. Hence when people do not understand something that has been said, they say, "That's obscure, that's a mystery." However, there are two kinds of mysteries: those of God and those of the devil.

9. What are the mysteries of God?

All that we confess in the Creed and learn in the Gospel and divine Scripture, namely, that Christ is the Son of God, was made Man, died, was buried, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, etc., and all for us. These are the great mysteries which the world neither knows nor believes, indeed, regards as a joke and folly, as Christ says in Matthew 11 [:25–27]. And those who distribute and preach these mysteries are true apostles and stewards of Christ.

10. What are the mysteries of the devil?

All that is taught and preached apart from Scripture and God's Word for the purpose of saving souls, such as when it is taught that men's works and merits give salvation, the pope is the head and foundation of the Christian church, the Mass is a sacrifice, monastic life is a new baptism, that water, salt, palms, and spices drive out the devil, and such things, which John saw written on the forehead of the whore of Babylon (Rev. 17 [:5]). And those who distribute and preach these mysteries are true apostles and stewards of Satan.

11. How are the true and false apostles recognized?

By their fruits, says Christ (Matt. 7 [:16]).

12. What are the fruits of the true apostles?

They minister to God for the improvement of many men, and yet for their faithful ministry and blessed admonition gain nothing in the world but utter tribulation, cross, grief, sorrow, and persecution, hunger, and worry, and scarcely have a piece of dry bread as their reward. All prophets and apostles were rewarded the same way.

13. What are the fruits of the false apostles?

They minister to themselves by corrupting many men, and yet for their lies and human additions gain noble dignities, large bishoprics, fat fiefdoms and prebends,¹¹ possessions, riches, and whatever their heart desires. This is their temporary reward; the eternal one will come to light, too.

14. What is the office of faithful stewards?

That they labor faithfully in God's Word. As St. Paul says here, "No more is required of stewards than that they be found faithful." In other words, he says, "What is not required here is that a minister of Christ be a great and mighty prince and lord, that he have many bishoprics, canonries, prebends, and fiefdoms, that he have many lands and subjects, castles and cities; all of which, being external things, are not detrimental to faithful ministers. Rather, what is required here is that a minister of Christ faithfully discharge his appointed office, and faithfully manage and accrue interest on the talents committed to him by God, preaching the Gospel with diligence, keeping faithful watch over Christ's flock, converting many men with his teaching, and setting a good example with his life. That is what is required.

⁹ *Oeconomus, dispensator.*

¹⁰ Church officers charged with the distribution of alms to the poor. —MC.

¹¹ Stipends derived from the revenues of church property. —MC.

15. What do the pope and his clergy require?

Their inventions, madness, and scribblings are all such as follows: they are only lords and rulers in the world, in the ministry of preaching; for the stewardship of God's house they have little concern. What do they teach in all their decrees, church law, and every papal book but quibbling about prebends and dignities? What do the statutes of all the chapters and monasteries speak of but ceremonies, vestments, caps, tonsures, Masses, Vigils, indulgences, pilgrimages, and the worship of saints? This is the "faithful ministry" of the papists. They turned the apostolic faithfulness in stewardship into this: when a bishop or church prelate protects the properties, rents, taxes, lands, and subjects of the church, he has fulfilled his office. Meanwhile the wolf is in charge of the sheepfold, the poor souls die and starve to death, no one preaches, no one fights off the wolf. O wretched, lost people! What answer will they give on the Last Day when God calls them to give an account. Then they will say, "He who had more benefices and delights will also have more punishments and humiliations."¹²

16. What if men reproach and pass judgment on me in my faithful ministry?

Then say with St. Paul, "It is a small thing to me that I should be judged by you or by a human court," etc. In other words, "Even if the world

¹² *Qui pluralis erat in beneficiis et deliciis, erit et pluralis in poenis et supliciis.*

acts more offensively to the minister of the Word, judging or passing judgment on his life when he is not yet mature, a preacher should be at peace, attend to his office, let nothing hinder him, whether praises or reproaches, but commit all matters to God." Even St. Paul refused to praise, reproach, condemn, or justify himself. He refused to condemn himself because he did not know that he had intentionally led anyone astray with false doctrine as the false apostles had; nor would he justify himself, since no one is clean and innocent in the sight of God, but confesses that he is human, and may well have done something through human weakness, as Psalm 19 [:12] says.

17. What does Paul say about those who judge so hastily?

He says, "Do not judge before the time, until the Lord comes, who will also bring to light what is hidden in darkness," etc. Here the disciple agrees with the Master, that is, Paul with Christ, when the latter says, "Judge not, lest you be judged" (Luke 6 [:37]). However, he is not talking here about public sinners, whom both authorities and preachers have to judge and punish, but about the things that are still in the darkness and concealed. These are to be delivered up to God, who will without any doubt judge and reward on that Day all things private and public, the wicked with eternal damnation, the good with eternal salvation. God grant it to us! Amen.

Gospel on the Third Sunday in Advent
Matthew 11 [:2–10]

WHEN John heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and had it said to Him, "Are you He who is to come, or shall we wait for another?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you see and hear: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead rise, and the Gospel is preached to the poor, and blessed is he who is not offended by Me."

When they went away, Jesus began to speak to the people concerning John: "What did you go out in the wilderness to see? Did you want to see a reed that the wind blows to and fro? Or what did you go out to see? Did you want to see a man in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. Or what did you go out to see? Did you want to see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and he is more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My angel ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'"

18. What does this Gospel present to us?

The Gospel presents to us the office of a true preacher, and what he is supposed to do, namely, to preach the Law and Gospel, to point people from themselves to Christ, and to warn against

offense. In addition, it portrays John the Baptist and Christ for us as an example of how this was all expressed with great diligence and devotion. Also shown here is the way the world repays preachers and their labor.

19. What is the subject of John's preaching?

Repentance and forgiveness of sins.

20. How is the preaching of repentance worded?

In Matthew 3 [:2] he says, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven has come nigh." And to the Pharisees and Sadducees he says [vv. 6-7, 10], "You brood of vipers! Who has shown you that you will escape the wrath to come? Beware, bring forth due fruits of repentance. The axe is already laid at the root of the tree. Whatever tree does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire." This was the preaching of repentance.

21. What is repentance?

Repentance is nothing other than a change of life in thoughts, words, and deeds.

22. What are the fruits of repentance?

Being displeased with sin, departing from sin, and living to righteousness (Ps. 24 [1 Peter 2:24]). Cease from evil, and do good. And: "Whoever has stolen, let him steal no more, but labor" (Eph. 4 [:28]). And as the saying goes, "The highest form of repentance is not doing it again."

23. What good does the preaching of repentance do?

It causes me to recognize my sins. For "through the Law comes knowledge of sins" (Rom. 7 [3:20]). If the preaching of Christ's grace and mercy is to stir my heart, I must first see my distress and disease. But if I am to come to such knowledge, the preacher must first impress upon me that I am a sinner, and all my abilities are nothing, and I cannot boast of any good.

24. Was John that kind of preacher?

Clearly so. First, he included all men in sin, "so that no one may boast," etc. [Eph. 2:9]. Therefore he exhorted them to repent with earnest rebukes and reproaches, and omitted no one, but spoke each man's faults to his face, as God says in Isaiah 58 [:1]: "Cry with confidence; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet, and declare to My people their offenses, and to the house of Jacob their sins." And St. Paul says, "Preach the Word, be persistent whether it be in season or out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4 [:2]).

25. Did he also preach the Gospel, then?

Yes, when the people came to him and confessed their sins and were baptized with water for re-

pentance, he also preached the Gospel to them, pointing his finger to Christ and saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God that bears the sin of the world," as if to say, "Although I have terrified you severely in your conscience, and said that you are condemned, lost people because of your sins, nevertheless, since you are sorry for your sins and crawl to the cross and plead for grace, I will comfort you again and show you the Man who can and will save you and the world."

26. Is this the form and way to preach?

Yes, a preacher should first open the books of the conscience and confront sinners with the mirror of the Law, that they may see and discern the state of their life toward God and men. Then when they have acknowledged that they are sinful and sighed for mercy, he should comfort them again, assuring them of forgiveness of sins through Christ. All prophets did the same.

27. What is the preacher's reward for his labor?

Christ says in Luke 10 [:7-8], "Whenever you enter a town or house, and they receive you, eat and drink what they have, for the laborer deserves his wages." And St. Paul says, "Do you not know that those who sacrifice eat of the sacrifice, and those who serve at the altar share in the altar? In the same way, the Lord ordained that those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel." (1 Cor. 9 [:13-14]). And, "Let him who is instructed with the Word share all good things with him who instructs him" (Gal. 6 [:6]).

28. What kind of reward does the world give?

Disdain, persecution, imprisonment, cross, and death. This is the reward that all prophets and apostles received, and the same goes for Christ and John. The world gives no other kind of payment. The reception it gave Christ it also gives all His ministers. Thus John, too, was forced to be Herod's prisoner and finally to die for his preaching.

29. Why did John send his disciples to Christ from prison?

To say to Him, "Are You He who is to come, or shall we wait for another?"

30. Did John doubt that Christ was the Messiah?

John did not doubt Christ, for he knew indeed that He was the Messiah. He pointed to Him, baptized Him in the Jordan, saw the Holy Spirit come upon Him in the form of a dove, and heard

the voice of the Father, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Therefore John had no doubt.

31. Why then did he have this question posed to Him?

John was not asking for his own sake but for the sake of his disciples, who thought that when the Messiah appeared it would have to be none other than their master John, who had a report and reputation with the people, and led a very strict life and without fear of men, etc. They believed that Jesus of Nazareth might well be a true prophet, since their master John had spoken so highly of Him, but they could not regard Him as the Messiah. His works were too little for that. They had not yet heard His preaching, nor seen any miraculous works by Him. The disciples persisted in this opinion, and John could not get it out of their heads.

32. Could John not have left them to their own opinion?

Not at all, for since John had come to prepare the way for Christ, it was fitting that he direct all men from themselves to Christ, the true Messiah and Savior of the world. He therefore tried every way, but it did not help. It was simply their opinion that if Christ would be the Messiah, He would have to approach the matter differently, namely, according to the example of David and Solomon, taking and ruling lands and subjects. Since He did not do this, they could not regard Him as King of Israel.

33. What did he finally do?

When Christ began to perform miracles, and His teaching and reputation spread among the people, John thought to himself, “Now there is no danger, so let your disciples go and direct them to Christ.” He called two of them, sending them to Christ. He said, as it were, “Dear disciples, hear who this Jesus is. He must increase, but I must decrease. Hear how He preaches all around, performs miracles, heals all the sick. Go ask him yourselves whether He is the Messiah, or whether we should wait for another.”

34. What did John’s disciples do?

They went and approached Christ, saying, “John sent us to You with the message, ‘Are You He who is to come, or shall we wait for another?’”

35. How did Christ treat the disciples?

He does not reject them or turn them away roughly, but gave them a twofold answer in works and words.

36. What was His response in works?

That same hour Christ healed many sick, made the blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, and the lame walk, and cleansed lepers. With His works He pointed them to Scripture (Is. 35; 61 [1–2]). He said, in other words, “What was proclaimed concerning the Messiah you see here before your eyes.”

37. What was His response in words?

He said, “Go and report to John what you see and hear: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead rise, and the Gospel is preached to the poor, and blessed is he who is not offended by Me.” In other words, “John knew well from the prophets what miracles and works the Messiah would do, so tell him what you have seen and heard, and he will tell you whether I am it or not.”

38. What does “the Gospel is preached to the poor” mean?

He means, “Until now, Moses, with the Law, threatened every affliction if you did not do this or that, and yet gave you no power to do it. But now say to John that a joyful message is declared to the poor, the contrite spirits, who find no help and comfort in themselves; namely, that through Me they will find a gracious, merciful God and Father, and receive forgiveness of sins and life everlasting from pure grace. When John hears this, he will tell you whether or not I am [the Messiah]. For he is well aware who prophesied such things about Me.”

39. What does it mean when He says, “Blessed is he who is not offended by Me”?

He is saying the following: “Although I have come in a lowly manner and form, I am the One about whom My Father said, ‘This is My beloved Son.’ Likewise, although My teaching is simple and scorned by the wise of the world, it is a teaching that saves all who believe in it” (Rom. 1 [21]).

40. Does that mean that John’s disciples were offended by Christ?

Clearly so. They thought that when the Messiah came, He would come in such glory that He

would be wrapped in gold, silver, pearls, jewels, satin, silk, and purple cloth. They thought that He would be found in a royal palace filled with golden objects among great and mighty people. Now they came, found Him surrounded by sick and miserable men, in the midst of the blind, the lame, deaf, mute, lepers, in such a lowly form that He would be mistaken for a hospital attendant or physician of the sick rather than regarded as the King of Israel, and yet their master spoke very highly of Him. In short, they could not accept the truth of the situation.

41. Are there any who still take offense like this?

The whole world is filled with such people. Since the Gospel returned in our times through a lowly person in a lowly place, the whole world takes offense and stumbles at it. Yet if it had come from the court of a king or from the pope's palace in Rome, all the world would rush to it, with mouth and eyes gaping, throw out both hands and embrace the Gospel. So it is certainly not without reason that Christ calls blessed those who are not offended by Him and His doctrine. In short, the old wineskins cannot hold the sweet new wine of the Gospel.

42. But what did Christ say to the Jews and John?

He praised John, saying, "What did you go out in the wilderness to see? Did you want to see a reed shaken by the wind? Or what did you go out to see? Did you want to see a man in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. Or what did you go out to see? Did you want to see a prophet? Yes, I say to you, and he is more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My angel ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'"

43. In what respects did Christ praise John?

In four respects: first, for his constancy, because he was not a moveable reed, not a hypocrite; second, for his clothing, because he was not a vain nobleman; third, for his ministry, because he was a prophet not only with a written message but also with a spoken one, who presently pointed his finger at Christ; fourth, for his birth, since "among those born of women there had arisen no one greater than John the Baptist" [Matt. 11:11].

44. What is a reed?

A reed is a plant that resembles a thin wooden staff, but is hollow and empty inside.

45. What does a reed signify in Scripture?

Nothing other than the doctrines of men, which gleam on the outside as if they were valuable things, but have nothing behind them except that the animals (the inconstant, wavering teachers of works whose god is their belly) graze among them.

46. What good did it do to praise and honor John this way? Did the Jews change their ways?

Luke says, "All the people that heard Him, and the tax collectors, declared God just, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and scribes rejected the counsel of God against themselves, not being baptized by John" (Luke [7:29–30]).

47. Was all this preaching fruitless in the people?

In every way, so that Christ would say, "To what shall I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market and calling to their fellows, 'We piped to you and you would not dance; we mourned to you and you would not weep.' John came eating no bread and drinking no wine, and they say, 'He has a devil.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'He is a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors, and wisdom must be justified by her children.'"

48. But how should we behave so that we obtain God's grace?

If we wish to be in a position for God's grace and be saved, we must not remain Johannites, but become Christians, hold to no saint or created thing, but only to Christ. We should also join the number of these poor ones, falling at Christ's feet, begging for help and comfort; then He will help us. If we are too blind to see God's miracles and works, He will lighten our eyes. If we are too deaf to hear God's Word, He will open our ears. If we are too mute to confess God's glory and truth, He will open our mouth. If our hands and feet are too lame and lazy to serve the poor, He will make them straight. If we are leprous and stained by false doctrine, He will cleanse us through His Word. If we are dead in sin, He will wake us to life by His grace. However, we must not be offended by His divine teaching, nor despise His divine teaching, but listen with all reverence, receive and keep it with all diligence and devotion, and live our lives according to it. If we do this, God will add His blessing, and finally eternal life. Amen.



Epistle on the Fourth Sunday in Advent **Philippians 4 [:4–7]**

DEAR brethren, rejoice in the Lord always; again I say to you, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known to all men. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And may the peace of God, which is higher than all reason, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

1. What does this Epistle teach us?

Three things: how we should act, first, toward God; second, toward men; third, toward ourselves. Toward God we should have a good conscience and a joyful heart. Toward our neighbor we should have tender good will. [Toward ourselves we should] cast all our cares on God with a devout prayer.

2. How should we act toward God?

“Rejoice,” says St. Paul, “in the Lord always; again I say to you, Rejoice.”

3. What is joy?

Joy is a fruit and effect of faith. Faith alone produces a joyful heart and peaceful conscience, since whoever believes and trusts in Christ, and looks to God for every good, and knows that by faith he has a gracious God, cannot be sorrowful. But whoever does not believe in Christ has an evil conscience, for he knows that God is opposed to sin and will punish it eternally. Then he must be sad, hopeless, and terrified, indeed, [he must] be worried at every moment that God is standing over him with a club and about to kill him and throw him into hell.

4. What does he mean by the words “rejoice in the Lord”?

He means, “Rejoice not in gold and silver, nor in power and dominion, nor in glory and pleasure, nor in excessive eating and drinking, sleeping and idleness, nor in one’s own righteousness, works, and merits, for these are all false, deceptive, deluding joys that never stir the heart nor stand in trial. A Christian should rejoice in the Lord.”

5. What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord?

Nothing other than to confide in the Lord as a gracious Father and merciful God who wishes to help in every concern, anguish, and distress of body and soul.

6. Why does he say, “Rejoice always”?

We should rejoice in the Lord at all times—not only in times of peace and happiness, like lovers of pleasure who only worship God and rejoice in the Lord when things go well for them, and when things go ill and there is misfortune their joy is ended. We Christians should rejoice always, whether things go well or ill, succeed or fail, or are difficult or pleasant, as Job did.

7. Why does he say, “Again I say to you”?

This repetition is very comforting as well as necessary. For since we are in the midst of our greatest enemies here on earth, we must let our joy in God be greater and stronger than the sorrowfulness of sin and misfortune, so that we do not lose hope in our cross and our sin, but take comfort in the goodness of our Lord Christ, who will not leave us as long as we simply cling to Him with firm faith.

8. How should we act toward all men?

“Let your moderation,” he says, “be made known to all men.” In other words, he says, “Toward God be joyful continually in your conscience, but toward men be moderate and meek, living your life in such a way that you hurt or injure no one. Be mild toward all men, yet without infringing on God’s commandments. Be gracious to everyone and put the best construction on what they say and do, that people may plainly see that you are the kind of people who are pleased and content with everything. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, be rich with the rich, poor with the poor, strong with the strong, weak with the weak.” The word “moderation”¹³ has this sense.¹⁴

9. What does moderation mean?

Moderation is the virtue of deferring to others, adapting, restraining, and conforming oneself to everyone’s ability, and to what they do or do

¹³ Ἐπιείκεια, *Aequitas*, *Clementia*.

¹⁴ This is based on Luther. See WA 10.2:174; Lenker 6:96ff; LW 75. —MC.

not do, so that one is not offensive to anyone but fair to everyone in all things. St. Paul was that kind of person. As he himself says, “To the Jews I became like a Jew, that I might win the Jews . . . to the weak I became like a weak person, that I might win the weak; I became all things to everyone, that in all ways I might save some” (1 Cor. 9 [:22]). Dear Paul ate and drank and had fellowship with the Jews according to their customs, yet in such a way that evangelical freedom remained unchecked, and brotherly love was not extinguished. Thus he circumcised Timothy for the sake of the weak, but he refused to have Titus circumcised when they made it a requirement.

10. Why does St. Paul say, “Let your moderation be made known to all men”?

Many men are found who can act fairly friendly toward strangers, but for relatives and those in their household they have nothing good to say, but only murmur and grumble. There are many who can graciously overlook anything in the great, rich, and powerful, and put the best construction and explanation on all that they do, but cannot tolerate a thing from the poor and lowly. In the same way, there are many who are quick to praise their relatives and kinsmen and exempt them even when they stumble grossly and fall, but have no grace or patience for their enemies and opponents. St. Paul reproves such unequal moderation here, and wants Christians’ moderation to be complete, everyone treating the other without any partiality, whether he be friend or foe.

11. If I am moderate and meek, will evil men not abuse my patience, trample me underfoot, and cause me all kinds of hardship?

Hear how St. Paul responds to this: “The Lord is near,” he says, as if to say, “Do not be anxious, do not worry. If there were no God, you would have cause to be anxious, to worry, and to fear the wicked. However, not only is there a God, He is also near, indeed, He has His eyes on you at all times and cares for you. So be at peace, simply be moderate and meek. God will not forget you, nor will He forsake you. Since the Father in His goodness has given you Christ, He will not deny you the least thing to nourish and protect you. For when you have Christ, you have all the wealth of the world.”

12. How are we to guard against ourselves?

“Do not be anxious,” says St. Paul, “but in all things by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

In other words, he says, “If something happens in this life that causes much anxiety and grief, which cannot be avoided, simply turn to God with prayer and supplication and commend the matter to Him, for He cares for us. And do so with thanksgiving. Thank Him that you have a God who cares for you, and on whom you can cast commit all your cares like a child. He alone is the “very Helper in time of need” [Ps. 46:1], and He has promised to help and hear.”

13. How should our prayer be made so that it is profitable and salutary and heard?

St. Paul gives prayer four parts: the words, the thanksgiving, the problem, the supplication. Hence our prayer is prefigured in the incense of the Old Testament. As Psalm 141 [:2] says, “Lord, let my prayer be counted before You as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.”

14. What does burning incense involve?

Four things: a golden thurible, burning coals, incense or thyme, and smoke rising from the thurible.

15. What is the golden thurible?

The words of prayer, such as the Lord’s Prayer or a psalm or else a Christian collect. And as the thurible must be of gold, so the words of the prayer must be precious and come from the inmost heart.

16. What are burning coals?

The thanksgiving for the benefits that have been received, just as in the Old Testament there was a requirement that the priest alone take the fire and burning coals from the altar, and not make any strange fire, as Nadab and Abihu did, for which God punished them. Likewise, we should not base our prayer on our own godliness, works, and merits, but only on God’s goodness, grace, and mercy, with thanksgiving.

17. What is the incense or thyme?

The pressing need that we identify in prayer and bring before God. For as the incense is set on the fire so that it produces a stream of smoke, in the same way we too should identify those things that we wish to obtain from God by prayer and supplication.

18. What is the rising smoke?

The heartfelt supplication that we make to God the Father through Jesus Christ. For in the same way that the smoke ascends to heaven, our prayer, if made in faith, passes through to heaven

and comes before God and obtains everything (Mark 11 [:24]). But if a prayer is made into the wind on the basis of a worthless speculation, as unfortunately is done in chapter houses and monasteries, nothing is obtained.

19. How does St. Paul conclude this Epistle?

He concludes it with an fine little prayer, saying, "May the peace of God, which is higher than all reason, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." St. Paul writes this Epistle in an admirable order, teaching first that a Christian should rejoice in God continually and be glad at heart, then that he should be moderate and meek toward all men, whether they do good to us or evil.

20. Will I become discontented, impatient, tired, weary, and timid in the meantime?

Not at all, says St. Paul. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard you well and sustain you in patience so that when faced with all your enemies' fury and fire, curses and threats, wrath and rage, you will yield nothing, but patiently suffer and bear it all for God, and finally with Christ Jesus, the Son of God (to whose image you have now been conformed and likened by bearing the cross) become a partaker of His kingdom in eternal life. God grant it to us. Amen.

Gospel on the Fourth Sunday in Advent
John 1 [:19–28]

THE Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John, "Who are you?" And he confessed, and did not deny. And he confessed, "I am not Christ." And they asked Him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you a prophet?" And he answered, "No." Then they said to him, "What are you then, that we may give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am a voice of a preacher in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

And those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him and said to him, "Why do you baptize, then, if you are not Christ nor Elijah nor a prophet?" John answered them and said, "I baptize with water, but He has come among you whom you do not know. It is He who will come after me, who was before me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." This took place at Bethabara across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

21. What does this Gospel present to us?

Three things: first, the Jews' guileful interrogation with which they attacked John; second, John's steadfast answer; third, John's call to the ministry of preaching.

was born of a priestly class and led a hard, strict life and rebuked any man without fear, they were more inclined to bestow the honor of Messiah on him than on Christ. Therefore they asked him whether he would accept the honor.

22. What caused the Jews to interrogate John?

At the time there was division among the Jews over doctrine. Some followed the teaching of the Pharisees as their elders. Others followed John's teaching because of his life. Others followed Christ's teaching because of the unprecedented miracles that He performed. In order to abolish this division and to make a sure reformation concerning what could be believed and not believed, who should be followed or not followed, the Jews summoned a council at Jerusalem regarding this issue. They saw that the advent of the Messiah was at hand, for they already had a foreign king in their land, Herod, according to the prophecy of Jacob and Daniel. In addition, they saw before their eyes two charismatic men: John and Christ. It was evident to them that one of them must be the Messiah. But because John

23. How did the Jews attack John?

In three ways: with cunning, with flattery, and with threats.

24. How did they use cunning?

They did not send him simple commoners from a lowly village, but priests and Levites from the capital, Jerusalem, which amounted to the whole people of Israel coming to him, whose cause he was by rights to take up and defend.

25. How did they use flattery?

They did not offer him a lowly honor but the highest of all, the kingdom of Israel. They were willing and ready to accept him as the Messiah. But when he refused this honor, they wished to view him as Elijah or a prophet.

26. How did they use threats?

When no cunning or friendly offer would help, they were angered and threatened him, as is promptly discovered.

27. What did John do in this tribulation?

He remained steadfast. He was not a moveable reed, he would not be challenged by the great prestige of the noble envoy, nor by their flattery, nor by their threats. And though he might have easily answered their question with a word, "I am a voice crying in the wilderness," or, "I am the angel of whom the prophet Malachi speaks," he refused to do so, desiring first to take away their false assumption and opinion. Therefore he said freely, "I am not Christ, nor Elijah," etc.

28. How could John say that he was not Elijah when Christ says in Matthew 6 [11:14], "If you will accept it, he is Elijah"?

John was indeed Elijah in spirit, manner, and life, but not in person and name. Therefore the angel said in Luke 1 [1:17], "He will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah." So because the Jews were asking about the prophet Elijah the Tishbite who was taken away to heaven in a chariot, he freely denied that he was that Elijah.

29. How could he say that he was not a prophet?

Because all the prophets belong to the Old Testament. As Christ says, "The Law and the prophets prophesied until John" (Matt. 11 [1:13]). So since he was a prophet with a verbal message rather than a written one, and while pointing his finger to the Word also pointed to Christ, he therefore said that he was "not a prophet," nor the one meant by Moses (Deut. 18 [1:15]).

30. Why did he let those who were sent to him remain in doubt?

To prompt them to ask further questions.

31. What did they ask?

They said, "What are you then, that we may give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" In other words, they said, "Why all this beating around the bush and using many words? Tell us who you are. How do you want to be regarded? Be assured, we weren't sent by children, but by lofty men, chief priests and scribes, etc., nor are we ourselves children, but priests and Levites. So what's the idea of making us wait so long out here in the desert by the Jordan? Tell us, therefore, in a few words who you

are. We have appointments to keep and need to go back to Jerusalem."

32. What was John's answer?

Here he referred to his call to the ministry of preaching, saying, "I am a voice of a preacher in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, and make His paths straight.' Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and what is crooked shall become straight, and what is rough shall become a smooth way, and all flesh shall see the Savior from God." [Luke 3:5-6].

33. What did he mean by these words?

He was describing the ministry of preaching. He said, as it were, "This is my office: I cry and exclaim not my own word but Christ's. I am only a voice, Christ is the Word."

34. How did that voice and preacher sound? What was his cry?

"Prepare the way of the Lord," etc. In other words, "The Lord is on the way, and is following me on foot. Therefore step aside, make way, that He may walk among you. Amend your life and let Him find your proud, greedy, envious heart humbled and cleansed from all sins. Clear the road of the rough clods and rocks of unbelief, and all that stands in Christ's way; above all, your pharisaical ungodliness, false teaching, and blasphemy, and repent, that Christ may walk and work in you with His grace. And I am not the first one to preach this; the prophet Isaiah also preached it long ago."

35. What did those who were sent by the Jews say to this preaching?

They were angered and said, "Why do you baptize, then, if you are not Christ nor Elijah nor a prophet?" In other words, "Who gave you authority to baptize and preach? Should you not first have asked the chief priests and elders and obtained a title and name from them? You are charging ahead on your own authority and making such a mess of the people of Israel that no one knows who's the cook and who's the keeper."

36. What was John's answer?

He said with all meekness, "I baptize with water, but He has come among you whom you do not know. It is He who will come after me, who was before me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

37. Why did he not simply say “God called me”?

He could have easily given a simple answer and said, “God sent me to baptize and preach.” But if he had said this, they would have said, “When did God speak with you? Where did you see God?” Therefore he answered in the simplest way possible, but in such a way as to show that the Messiah was at hand and that he was His forerunner.

38. What did the chief priests and scribes say to John’s proclamation, “Prepare the way of the Lord”?

They became indignant and angry at this, because it suggested that they had not prepared the way for Christ, in fact, that they should start doing so. If John had written this proclamation in a book or letter and sent it to them, or had preached these words privately just to them, it might have been tolerable. But here he declared it before everyone, publicly humiliating the holy people and all their ways, conduct, and life, so that no one paid attention to them any more. Whoever heard it, thought, “Woe to us! Are these our leaders, representatives, and priests to whom we give our tithes, firstfruits, offerings, and alms, to point and teach us the way of God, and do they not walk in it themselves? O Lord God, how poorly we are provided for!” Likewise today, if someone were to step up and say, “O dear clergy, popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, and monks, prepare the way of the Lord!” they would say, “Are you mad? Are you saying we haven’t already prepared the way of the Lord? Pray hold your peace! If the people heard this, they would think that our Lord God were not with us and among us,” etc. Behold, this is why they became so hostile to John. This business would have made the whole synagogue fall and bring all their joy and grandeur to ruin.

39. Would things happen thus with our Pharisees, the clergy?

Very much so. If they were able to remain in an ungodly life according to their manner, and act as they please, there would be no more acceptable teaching than the Gospel, though they would abuse it to the extreme, indeed, not keep it, not fast any more, not pray, not celebrate a true Mass, not heed proper conduct, obedience, or discipline any more. These things they would accept readily. But believing and trusting in God, loving one’s neighbor, shunning fornication, adultery, and other shame, and being chaste, celebrating the Mass as a testament, distributing the

blood of Christ to all Christians—they would not be interested: no heresy would have ever been heard worse than this “new gospel.”

40. How will things go in the end?

Just as the Jewish Pharisees, after they rejected John and Christ, fell into blindness and hardness of heart, and perished eternally in body and soul, the same thing will also happen to these pharisaical clerics if they do not amend their lives and repent.

41. What do they get for rejecting God’s Word?

Three injuries: first, a bad conscience; second, a bad reputation with all godly Christians; third, a bad end; for if they cling to the devil’s doctrine and lies, and persist and die in them, they die without God’s Word, and that dying is an everlasting death.

42. What should we learn from this Gospel?

Two things: First, whoever is a preacher should do as John did, freely declaring to the world its sins and vices however they rage or ridicule. As the prophet Isaiah says, “Cry with confidence; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet, and declare to My people their offenses, and to the house of Jacob their sins” (Is. 58 [:1]); and St. Paul, “Preach the Word, be persistent whether it be in season or out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all patience and teaching. For the time is coming when they will not tolerate the wholesome doctrine, but they will heap up for themselves teachers according to their own passions, itching their ears, and will turn their ears from the truth and will wander off into myths. But as for you, be sober in all things, endure suffering, do the work of a preacher of the Gospel, fulfill your office properly.” (2 Tim. 4 [:2–5]). Better to die once for the truth with a good conscience and live eternally with Christ than to live briefly in hypocrisy, falsehood, and lies, and afterwards go to the devil forever.

Second, whoever is a hearer should receive John’s preaching with his ears, and believe it with his heart, and put it into practice with works, departing from sin, and amending his life. If sins oppress him in his conscience, let him cast them on the Lamb of God and pray for the forgiveness of his sins. Where this is done, a way and place is cleared for Christ to carry out His office, namely, to forgive us our sins, pour the Holy Spirit into our heart, and finally bring us after this life to the life everlasting. Amen.