

TE DEUM LAUDAMUS

We praise thee O God: We acknowledge thee to be the Lord.
All the earth doth worship thee: The Father everlasting.
To thee all angels cry aloud: The heavens and all the powers there in.
To thee Cherubim and Seraphim: Continually do cry:
Holy, holy, holy: Lord God of Sabaoth;
Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty: Of thy glory.
The gloribus company of the Apostles praise thee:
The goodly fellowship of the Prophets praise thee:
The noble army of Martyrs: Praise thee.
The holy Church throughout all the world doth acknowledge thee:
The Father of an infinite Majesty:
Thine adorable true and only Son,
Also the Holy Ghost the Comforter.

Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ;
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.
When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man:
Thou didst humble thy self to be born of a Virgin.
When thou hadst over come the sharpness of death:
Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.
Thou sittest at the right hand of God:
In the glory of the Father.
We believe that thou shalt come to be our Judge.
We therefore pray thee help thy servants
Whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious Blood.
Make them to be numbered with thy saints
In glory ever lasting.

O Lord, save thy people and bless thine heritage.
Govern them and lift them up forever.
Day by day we magnify thee;
And we worship thy Name ever world without end.
Vouchsafe, O Lord:
To keep us this day without sin.
O Lord, have mercy upon us:
Have mercy upon us:
O Lord, let thy mercy be upon us:
As our trust is in thee.
O Lord in thee have I trusted:
Let me never be confounded.

PREFACE

Fellowship is always a unifying force. It is an invisible bond that holds people together and makes them one and gives them direction. It is as important as any word we could use to describe our faith; through Baptism we are initiated into fellowship and through the Lord's Supper we enjoy and share fellowship.

I feel this word is descriptive of the senior class being graduated this year from the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. Our 1966 class has been one of fellowship, unity, and direction. We've grown together since we began and many forces have pushed us and shaped our fellowship; there have been deep concerns, interests in class-mates, competitions, hours not really wasted in bull sessions, and classes and discussions. Even death has drawn us together.

It was with the idea of fellowship in mind that the *TE DEUM LAUDAMUS* was selected for the cover of our devotional booklet. In worship individuals are joined -- united -- with others and fellowship is born. This fellowship is not then just a mark of a class, but the mark of a larger body -- the Body of Christ. This booklet is an effort to keep us in that fellowship and to strengthen that fellowship.

We all have been involved in the production of this booklet, and, as individuals, we are all indebted to each other. As a group, however, we owe special thanks to Dr. Reinartz and the faculty, who helped us by advising, guiding, and writing devotions, and to St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Columbia, South Carolina, for the use of their office equipment. The members of the devotional committee -- Robert Allen, Richard Bansemer, Glenn Boland, and Floyd Sides -- must be commended for their splendid work on behalf of the class.

Bill Stone
Editor

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The Use of Hymns in Private Devotions

Good hymns are positive statements containing powerful images that can do an enormous amount of good in making clearer to the layman the great truths of our Christian Doctrine. Hymns can express a lively faith, give comfort, cheer the faint-hearted and the distressed.

Much of the layman's knowledge of theology will come from his use of hymnody. Hymns become a vital force in bringing into focus the meaning of the Gospel. For this reason they are useful guides for private devotions. Men like Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley have adhered so closely to scripture in their hymns that these might well serve as miniature sermons. Wesley's great hymn, "Love Divine All Loves Excelling" contains at least twelve scriptural references bringing to mind the many facets of the doctrine of Christian perfection. Watts' hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," brings a profound proclamation of Galatians 6:14.

The greatest hymns ever written have come out of times of great stress and despair. We would do well to explore the deep convictions of these hymns in our private devotions. If a person is filled with great anxiety and filled with self-pity, the hymn, "If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee," will surely lift him to a deeper trust in God. If one fails to find the right words to express his true thanksgiving to God, he will find the hymn, "When All Thy Mercies O My God, My Rising Soul Surveys" will supply the unparalleled poem of overflowing joy. "How Brightly Beams the Morning Star" is a profound hymn of praise and adoration, and yet it was written by a man in the depths of despair. It is hoped that men will open their ears to the messages of hymnody that they may also sing with understanding.

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Suggested hymns for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany are listed on the following page.

Suggested Hymns for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany

Advent I

"O How Shall I Receive Thee?" (Reference to Gospel)

Advent II

"Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending" (Reference to Gospel)

Advent III

"Comfort, Comfort Ye My People" (Reference to the Lesson)

Advent IV

"Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding" (Reference to Epistle)

Christmas Day

"Of the Father's Love Begotten" (Reference to Epistle)

St. Stephen, Martyr

"For All Thy Saints, O Lord"

St. John, Apostle, Evangelist

"All Hail to Thee, O Blessed Morn" (Reference to Epistle)

Holy Innocents, Martyrs

"Behold A Host Like Mountains Bright!" (Reference to Epistle)

First Sunday after Christmas

"The Holy Son of God Most High" (Reference to Epistle)

Circumcision and Name of Jesus

"Jesus, Name of Wondrous Love" (Reference to Gospel)

Second Sunday after Christmas

"A Great and Mighty Wonder" (Reference to Gospel)

The Epiphany of Our Lord

"Earth Has Many A Noble City" (Reference to Gospel)

First Sunday after the Epiphany

"Thee Will I Love, My Strength, My Tower" (Reference to Epistle)

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

"Lord, Who at Cana's Wedding Feast" (Reference to Gospel)

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

"At Even When the Sun Was Set" (Reference to Gospel)

Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany

"Turn Back, O Man, Forswear Thy Foolish Ways" (Reference to Epistle)

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

"Come Down, O Love Divine" (Reference to Epistle)

Transfiguration

"O Wondrous Type, O Vision Fair"

Introduction to Advent and Christmas

The conventional theme of Advent is PREPARE. The dictionary tells us that this means to "make ready." But the question is "for what?" What are we to prepare for? For Christmas? For Christ's birth? For the dramatic action of the word become flesh? How can we do that? We can't prepare for something that has happened. And the birth of Christ -- the incarnate Son of God -- HAS happened. It is an event of history and cannot be repeated. This is the scandal of particularity which is so fundamental to our faith.

One way to avoid this dilemma is to spiritualize the whole affair -- to say that each Christmas Christ is born anew into our hearts. This sounds good. But when we turn to the pericopies for the day it is obvious that this is contrary to what they say. The record of Holy Scripture is not referring to a spiritual coming of Christ but to a real, historic, factual event. A peasant girl gives birth to a Jewish child in a Bethlehem inn during the reign of Caesar Augustus. This is no abstract symbol for our imaginations. This is an event in the concrete realities of time and space. How can we prepare for an event which has happened -- an event of the past? It's impossible!

Where we must begin then is not with this word "prepare" which directs attention to ourselves. Rather we must turn our attention to God-- who He is and what He does. Then the central theme of Advent is not our preparation but God's COMINGNESS. Now this involves and demands our preparedness, but let us place first things first. And when we are dealing with divine revelation it is God who is first, for it is His revelation, not ours.

Advent declares first that God is one who moves in on us! Not when and if we are ready to receive Him but when He is ready to move in. Jeremiah in the Old Testament Lesson of the Day makes this clear when he records the words of God, "I will be their God and they shall be my people." There is no talk of conditions here, no talk of man's preparedness or readiness, simply the direct naked will of God. "Tell the daughters of Zion, Behold your king is coming to you." You can't be more direct and definite than that.

This is what Advent is really all about -- God's comingness. There is a history to relate, a story to tell about a baby in a manger, some shepherds in a field, and a new star in the sky, but this is proclaimed not to teach us a certain series of events within the past but to bring us up short in front of the fact that God is not one who stands back and waits for us to make the first move. God is aggressive! He is the one who breaks down the barriers between divine justice and human rebellion and takes hold of us and moves us.

Now our preparedness will determine how we are to be moved -- whether we are going to be knocked down by this confrontation or lifted up. But there is absolutely nothing we can do about this comingness. God comes! That is the central theme of Advent.

The triumphal entrance of our Lord on the first Sunday in Advent is triumphal not because the people were prepared. History proved that they were not. To the majority of the people in Jerusalem this event didn't even attract their attention. If it had they more than likely would have dismissed it as irrelevant. When finally they were forced by circumstances to face this prophet from Nazareth they didn't spread palm branches in his path, they nailed his back to a cross and laughed as they jokingly plunged a wreath of thorns on his head. Where is the triumph here? The only answer is as it must be in God and in God alone. The

tragic reception was the triumph! Because God's action does not depend on our reception of it or the amount of sufficient preparation for it. Advent is God's advent -- not ours! It is His work -- not ours! It is what He does because of who He is that is important. Not what we do in response to what He does. And no matter how we might wish it otherwise -- this is the way it is. God comes and His moving in upon His creation is triumphal despite our tragic reaction or failure of preparedness.

Now once this has been said and we see that Advent is not just a season for our preparation but a proclamation of God's action, then we can consider our responsibility for preparedness. For this Advent of God can become our Advent. His coming can mean our becoming. For He comes to redeem the lost, free the enslaved, and feed those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The only way we can prepare ourselves is by turning our attention away from ourselves and to the dramatic events of His coming in history -- the Babe of Bethlehem, and the Messiah's entrance into Jerusalem. Here is the guide for our preaching. We are not asked to prepare for events which have happened rather the events which have happened are meant to prepare us. The action of God in Christ revealed in the historic ministry of Our Lord prepares us daily to receive and accept the gracious comingness of God -- which is His continual Advent in our lives.

We prepare not by doing something but by HEARING something -- the story of God's redemptive action in history. The Gospel is proclaimed and in this proclamation we are prepared to receive the true and living God.

We prepare for Christ's-mass not by going out and getting something that we might give, but by hearing something in order that we might be made ready to receive. This is truly the Lutheran emphasis of the Mass-- GOD GIVES! The true spirit of Christmas therefore in the light of Advent is not GIVING BUT GETTING. It is a time when we are to learn how to receive, not a time when we are to imitate God by giving. It is a time when our self must be humbled, our pride broken, our helplessness acknowledged so that we are prepared to receive graciously God's continual moving on upon us. This true preparation is done for us by the Word proclaimed -- by the story -- by the witness of Bethlehem and Jerusalem told over and over again. For no man can give until he has first received. And gracious receiving is far more difficult for proud and haughty man than is generous giving. It is God's good pleasure to give through His word even the preparedness necessary to receive His Holy presence. This is where we begin. This is what we must preach. We do not prepare our people for a past event. The record of the past event prepares us and them. Thus God's Advent of Comingness becomes our Advent of Becomingness. For we can become what we are meant to be only by the grace of Him who made us and refuses to let us go until we have become what from the beginning of time He intended us to be.

The First Sunday in Advent - Sunday

Scripture: Revelation 1:4-8

The Collect: Stir up, we beseech thee, thy power, O Lord, and come; that by thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins, and saved by thy mighty deliverance; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

"To him who loves us...be glory and dominion for ever and ever." We live in a love-starved world, a world of crime, violence, brutality, poverty, and war. But we have a message for the people of a world like this. No matter what the circumstance, men can be certain that someone loves them dearly, and this someone is God. God is constantly saying "I love you." He says it in a thousand ways every minute of every day. In disappointment, shame, loneliness, bereavement we can feel the throb of His loving concern. God has demonstrated His love for us in the gift of His Son. His costliest treasure he laid in the bare arms of a human mother. In Jesus, God walked the dusty streets of earth, uttered the words of life through the lips of clay, and on a wooden, Roman cross shed His blood for a cantankerous world. Why? Because He loves us so much. Love is never anything less than the gift of self. In Christ Jesus alone we see perfect love expressed -- alive, vibrant, glorious, redeeming. He gave Himself! "To him who LOVES us. . .be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

Monday

Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20

"For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to RECONCILE to himself all things...making PEACE by the BLOOD of his cross."

Peace is a summer lake, sheep asleep in a meadow, motionless trees, a soft half-moon silvering all with a veil of mystery. Peace is the lack of hatred, war, guns, bombs and uniforms. Peace is serenity, tranquility, quiet, stillness, calm. Such is the world's concept of peace, but God's peace is not the beauty of nature nor the lack of war. God's peace is peace obtained by the "blood of his cross."

Soon we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace: the God who does not counsel for peace, but gives it. He does not give financial peace, military peace nor peace of mind, but His peace that passes our understanding. The peace that God gives is not escape from tribulation, but the transforming of tribulation. Tribulation becomes reconciliation by the "blood of his cross." With death on Calvary awaiting Him, Christ made out his last will and testament. It reads: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you (John 14:27). This peace is not given to the world, but to you. Enjoy it!

Tuesday

Scripture: Acts 3:22-26

Family discipline often rises and falls by a parent's saying, "Child! Listen to what your parents have to tell you." If the child has received training in hearing, obeying and responding to the words of his parents, he will derive the benefits of their love, concern and insight. If the statement of the parent is nothing more than a threat against the child's comfortable existence, little results -- except that the child might suffer physical or psychological punishment.

In the passage we read the reminder that when God speaks through His prophets we should listen. We who listen to what God has to say will hear that we are children of the covenant. God's love is to come to us in the servant who will bless us and turn us from our sin. Those who do not listen when the prophets utter "Thus saith the Lord," shall be destroyed from the people.

We are near the Festival of the Nativity Anniversary of the child who will bless us and turn us. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will give us ears to hear the Promises of God to us.

Wednesday

Scripture: Colossians 1:21-29

To the confused and wavering converts of Colossae, Paul describes the very essence of the task which had been given to him by God. That task was to bring to men a new discovery, a secret, a mystery which had been hidden throughout the ages, kept for generations, but now was revealed. The "mystery" is Christ and the "discovery" is the fact that "you...he has now reconciled". Man is rescued from the threatening perils of his own sin and saved by the mighty deliverance of a loving God, enfleshed in a body of death. It is the heart of this season of preparation that we proclaim the Advent of this Mystery now made manifest in the lives and world of men.

Thursday

Scripture: Hebrews 1:1-4

How we Americans dislike silence! Piped-in music splits the heavy silence of hospital waiting rooms -- car radios blare blatantly across the highways of America -- tongues wag aimlessly as we attempt to hide the silence of our hearts and minds.

How much we miss by this unceasing, unending noise! For only in silence can one hear the violins of the wind in the top of tall pines -- the first gasping gulp of life from a new-born babe -- the whispered word of love from a loved one -- the still, small voice of God as it thunders triumphantly throughout all of His Creation. Only in silence can the Word of God penetrate the cold, hard granite of our hearts and transform them into fertile fields of His labors. Only in silence can the Word of God transform the whitewashed shacks of our inner beings into the jubilant courts of His praise! Hush, my heart, the Lord comes -- and He does speak!

Friday

Scripture: Hebrews 2:1-4

Did you ever stop to realize how much angels are associated with the coming of Messiah? It was an angel who appeared to the Virgin Mary at the time of the Annunciation; it was a multitude of angels who appeared to the shepherds at Jesus' birth; and it was an angel who appeared to Joseph in a dream warning him to take the young Christ child and His mother and flee from the wrath of Herod. Decorators and advertisers have picked up this theme of angels and made it one of the chief motifs in our preparation for Christmas.

But the writer of Hebrews was using angels in a different reason -- for the same reason God uses them. He uses them to point beyond themselves to One upon whose coming our salvation is dependent. The verses of our text come in the context of an elaborate argument for the Son's superiority over other heavenly beings. It is an argument from lesser to greater. If the message of the angels is valid, then of how much greater value is the Gospel of the One to whom they point us, even the Lord Jesus Christ "on whom our hopes of heaven depend!"

Saturday

Scripture: Ephesians 3:1-12

True greatness is always humble. The scriptures bear witness to this essential truth. All men called by God as servants of the Word felt themselves unworthy for such a task, yet served despite their feelings of inadequacy because of God's insistence.

Moses, who was called to be a leader of his people, replied to God: "Who am I, that I should go unto Paraoah? I am not eloquent. I am slow of speech." Then there was Jeremiah who was summoned to be a prophet to the nations. "Lord," he pleaded, asking to be excused, "I do not know how to speak, for I am nothing but a child." Today, Paul, made a minister according to the gift of God's grace," considers himself to be "the very least of all the saints." All of them, prophets of servanthood, had identifying marks of humility. All stood unworthily in the presence of a God who towered above them yet was willing to stoop humbly to their level of living to perform His mighty acts. These acts of humility demonstrated by God's prophets were mere shadows of God's greatest acts of humility...that of taking the form of a Servant, being born among men of flesh to show the Glory of God "hidden for ages."

The Second Sunday in Advent - Sunday

Scripture: Revelation 2:1-7

The Collect: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of thine only begotten Son, so that by his coming we may be enabled to serve thee with pure minds; through the same thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

We have here a message written by John to the Christians in Ephesus. We can see in it a two-pronged message...the first is a message of commendation while the other is a warning. It seems that while the Christians at Ephesus were still standing up against their adversaries it was not with the same zeal with which they had started,

This message seems to speak to us, the 20th century Christians with perhaps even more clarity and in a more pointed manner than it did to the Christians of Ephesus. If their zeal for the work of the church had waned in such a short time, then have we not perhaps become even more lax in our fight for the Church? Have we not weakened even more than they?

We are called upon, in this passage, to hear and heed the message of the Spirit..."He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." To him who hears the Spirit and does His deeds, no matter what the conditions, will come a just reward. It is only after we have come through our trials and tribulations that we receive our reward.

Monday

Scripture: Acts 17:22-24

I have always felt that Monday was a poor day to start a week. The calendar people have sensed this apprehension about getting involved in a week we are not familiar with and have worked it out so that we have one day behind us when we start a new week. You can't even fool a schoolboy with this subterfuge. All the familiar things, the tragedies and triumphs, have come to a glorious quiet climax on Sunday and now what?

I feel like a blind man about to get off a bus in a strange city. I know what to expect but always the unexpected and unknown lurks just out of reach waiting to happen. How can I meet this threat with confidence and help others face this unknown quantity of daily living? I remember Sunday, the one which follows black Friday. We live our lives in the unknown looking forward to that which is known. Because He lives we shall live also.

O God of my salvation, let that promised Sunday come quickly. Amen.

Tuesday

Scripture: John 4:9-15

Love! Love! Love! The word love blares out in song from the radio. Love flashes at us from theater marquees and accosts us from the covers of magazines. The Bible tells us that love is of God. God's love is shown by the giving of his Son. The sacrifice of Christ is the highest manifestation of true love; the love which is of God. It is not that we love God, because we don't love him; but he loved us and sent his Son to pay the penalty for our lack of love. The love that is popularly talked about and sung about is less than a poor substitute for the real thing. True love gives. True love is for others not for ourselves. True love is of God. It is Christ dwelling in us that gives us the capacity for this true love that gives to others. As God so loved us, we ought to love one another. For it is loving others which shows that God abides in us. His love for everybody is perfected and brought to full fruition and completion by his power in the lives of those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God.

Wednesday

Scripture: Colossians 1:1-8

Paul is writing to the Church in Colossae -- evidently a Church and town he has never visited. Nevertheless, even in the sterile atmosphere of a letter, he feels the steriling relationship that prevails among those in Christ. Paul writes to a people who have experienced the love which God gives through His Son. Paul's greeting should speak to us who once again await the coming celebration which awakens us to the fact of God's love revealed in history and time. The Church to which Paul writes and to which we belong today is the historical organization that God still uses to frequent His people with the thrilling joy of His presence. The Church again awaits the splendid gift wrapped in God's dazzling form. As a part of that historical body visited by God Himself, let us never succumb to the sterile atmosphere which surrounds most letters. Let us be renewed in the letter writing of St. Paul and become living letters to an illiterate world that no longer writes or speaks the language of God. Thru the miracle of God's own gift, we, too, can experience love for God and among ourselves because of the steriling relationship that prevails among those in Christ.

Thursday

Scripture: Philippians 2:12-18

With all of the hurried hustle and busied bustle of the rapidly approaching "Big Day" there is just more than can possibly be done. Parish visiting, Christmas pageant, Sermons, and Family...all demanding more time than we have. Some things must wait; some things cannot be completed.

To all of this St. Paul points an enlightening finger. "Work out your own Salvation," or carry it to its completion. Do so with "fear and trembling" for our salvation is the work of God, His Gift. This great gift about to be presented through the coming of the "Babe of Bethlehem" is indeed ours. It is God's gift of a new relationship with Him-Sonship in and through the Christ. The offer of God is here!

It is a gift! But a gift becomes such only when it is accepted. I can never receive salvation unless I answer God's appeal and take what He offers. There can be no salvation without God. What God offers, I must take and the Christ-Child comes as a most precious gift. Is there time in my busy schedule, to day, to accept this gift?

Friday

Scripture: Philippians 3:12-16

In a recent bowling tournament, a team of average bowlers, competing with some of the finest bowling teams in this section of the country, won the match. This was possible through a system of handicapping which attempts to equalize team differences. The team had a goal which they pressed toward -- in every frame. They did not fall by the wayside; they kept up their effort to the end. You and I have a goal in life -- a perfect fellowship with our Father God. We are unequal to the opposing team which seeks to destroy our relationship. Our Father knows this, and He gives us a handicap -- Jesus Christ. Jesus overcame the team which is stronger than we are; He gives us the strength to press on toward the goal of perfection and perfect fellowship with God and our fellowman. May each of us come to know the Christ in us that is working through us perfecting the world. Let us strive with the power and strength of Christ toward God's goal for our life.

Saturday

Scripture: Colossians 3:1-11

We would think it most unappreciative to receive a new suit of apparel and then tear it off and throw it away. Yet we do just that so often with our cloak of righteousness. In our Baptism we have died with Christ unto sin and risen with him unto new life. He loved us enough to cover our nakedness of sin and evil with his righteousness. But as the man thrown out of the wedding feast, we have received our garment of righteousness but have thrown it off. As we are risen with Christ our lives are to be hidden with Christ in God. Instead of a life under the power of sin, Christ has given us his life. We have to live as sinner simply to prepare to receive Him, but to remember he has received us. Put away the things of the earth and "Set your minds on things that are above." Escaping reality? No! But fully participating in the life of the One whose power calls, gathers and sanctifies us amidst reality to be his church. We are not to be like the driver who thinks it is quite simple to be pulled from the ditch and reenters to try to own his own. Risen in Christ? Live like it.

The Third Sunday in Advent -- Sunday

Scripture: Revelation 3:1-6

The Collect: Lord, we beseech thee, give ear to our prayers, and lighten the darkness of our hearts by thy gracious visitation; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

"Now hear this! Now hear this! This is the Captain speaking!" All of us who have even a TV acquaintance with Navy life know the urgency of this call when it comes over a ship's communication system. The message which follows is vital for the survival of the ship's crew, whether it be for the KP duty or an order to abandon ship. It is essential for the ship's welfare that the communications system always be open for the Captain's command and that this command be followed with dispatch.

John, as a faithful scribe to the Resurrected Christ ends the prologue of the letter to each of the seven Churches with "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." This is also the conclusion to Jesus parable of the sower and the seed.

Our calling as Christians and particularly as ministers is to have ears so that we may hear God speaking, and having heard then to broadcast what He says. God's voice always is the command for the crew in the church.

Is the communications system into your life in proper working order, or have you been talking more than God?

Monday

Scripture: Hebrews 10:35-39

CONFIDENCE. What a word! It signals the built bridge -- the attitude which builds bridges when living gets tough. When all is dark and the bottom has dropped out, it is confidence that Christ is WITH us no matter what -- this enables us to endure!

Are you afraid of confidence? Realizing, quite rightly, that confidence and assuredness can easily put the cart before the horse, the confidence before the faith.

In today's scripture passage we are reminded that:

". . . we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls."

Who's man are you? The organizationa wizzard? Rather: Are you God's man?

Do you -- even you -- shrink back???

Do you -- even you -- have true confidence in Christ???

Tuesday

Scripture: Luke 21:5-24

"You will be hated by all for my names sake" (21:17). Hated? Me? When we consider what it means to be "in Christ," we are confronted with the awesome reality that the gospel presents a two-edged sword. It is a joy to witness to those who will openly hear and be strengthened. But how about those who will not hear but will respond with sneers, curses and hatred? This we find difficult to accept. We often feel like dropping back ten yards, punting, and forgetting all about it. But we cannot. For Christ has tackled us and made us his by his love on a cross. Now we are proclaimers of him crucified and risen. His salvation is refuted. We his servants are disliked and are made to suffer.

"If one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God" (I Pet. 4:16).

Wednesday

Scripture: Luke 12:35-39

There is something about "suddenness" which each of us dislikes. For example, we do not like to be "suddenly" called upon to offer a prayer or perform some type of service. We dislike visitors who "suddenly" drop in to see us. Or, we may live for days in a state of shock because a loved one "suddenly" passed away. Suddenness means, in reality, a surprise and God is full of surprises. Men of all ages and nations tremble at the thought of Christ's sudden appearance. However, our whole life revolves around the unexpected midnights of life. These moments are not the sign of doom. Rather, they are moments for the meek, promise for the prepared. We may never know when Christ, or the needs of our neighbor, may become the only important thing to us. Therefore, we can live in hope and faith that when we are faced with a "sudden" decision (a real midnight in life) Jesus Christ will have prepared us with courage to perform duty, patience to work under pain, comfort in situations of sorrow. Christ confronts us in His cosmos. Arise, arise, the Bridegroom comes!!

Thursday

Scripture: James 5:7-11

Suppose a farmer who planted his wheat in the autumn would lose patience with the crop that has laid just above the ground through the cold months of winter and decided to plow it up and replant it. He would find that his second crop did not have the time nor the water to develop properly, and he would never see a harvest. Such a loss of patience would indeed be foolish and costly. Even so, how costly is it when we lose patience with God and fail to remain steadfast to His promise?

The author of James reminds us of the proverbial patience of Job at this point. Job who went through the deepest pits of doubt, pain and sorrow, but never lost patience nor faith in God. Job who says of God that "though he slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15).

There are times in all our lives when we lose patience and are over anxious. All of us experience nights of doubt and sorrow, but we should not lose patience. We of all people should not grumble or lose patience for we are assured that the merciful Christ will come to end the toil and gloom.

Friday

Scripture: Luke 1:1-17

Once in the temple, Jesus read from the Book of Isaiah that which he considered the foretelling of his ministry, to give sight to the blind, release the captives, etc.

In today's passage there is a foretelling of John's ministry, a forerunner, converting rebellious ones to the way of righteousness, preparing a people fit for the Lord.

In his book Pastor to Pastor, Deidar A. Daehlin suggests that ministers of the Lord (John certainly was one, giving his life unselfishly that we might know the Lord of life) are like sheep dogs running alongside the flock, guiding and nudging it, listening to the voice of the great shepherd.

Are we not, in a sense, like John to be running alongside the flocks of God, listening, obeying the shepherd, running in the Spirit under Christ, seeking the total lives of men and preparing them through His word, in repentance, to meet our coming Lord of glory?

As we, like John, bear witness to the coming one, may God shed His light on the paths we run this Adventide.

Saturday

Scripture: Luke 1:18-23

When you were young did you ever feel your parents did not care for you, and then did you angrily set out to show them you did not care either? I remember doing that, but it always ended with my being punished. That is a good cure for unbelief -- punishment! Some of the great men of faith turned to God to bow before him after their doubt and disbelief had been punished. Peter was one of these men; Christ was only a good friend -- until a guilty conscience told him Christ was the Son of God. Paul was another; he thought Christians were criminals until blindness opened his eyes. In the scripture above Zechariah's unbelief is cured by punishment. He doubted God's seriousness when Gabriel told him it was God's plan for aging Elizabeth to have a child. But his doubt turned to hope when he tasted God's power -- when he was struck dumb. During our ministries God will punish us many times for our refusal to believe the Word he has sent, and this punishment will come in many different forms, frustrating and confusing us. If we are tempted to turn from God, we should first pause and consider -- unbelief is cured by punishment.

The Fourth Sunday in Advent - Sunday

Scripture: Revelation 3:14-22

The Collect: Stir up, O Lord, we beseech thee, thy power, and come, and with great might succor us, that by the help of thy grace whatsoever is hindered by our sins may be speedily accomplished through thy mercy and satisfaction; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

We are rich; we have prospered; we need nothing. A good Lutheran would object to that last phrase. We do need something -- the grace of God. But then we go right on and remind ourselves that we have that in Christ, so we really need nothing. Are we hesitant to speak the gospel to an outsider? Never mind, Christ forgives us and we need nothing more. Do we feel embarrassed around "born-again" enthusiasts? Don't worry, Christ sees our good intentions, so we need nothing there. Do we spend our time on lesser concerns than the work of God's kingdom? Fear not, we can't bring the kingdom with our efforts anyway. No, we really are lucky, lucky Lutherans. We lack nothing. Ho, hum.

Could He really be serious when He says, "I will spew you out of my mouth?"

Monday

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-21

As we meditate on this passage of Scripture, we are led to think of the coming of Jesus into the world. We note that the coming of Jesus means changes in the lives of those he touches. Mary and Joseph must face the possibility of ridicule from their neighbors and friends. Joseph considers the possibility of not completing his contract of marriage to Mary, but God leads him to understand that the coming of this son through Mary will bring great blessing to the world. It is fitting that in this fourth week of Advent we think on the purpose for which Jesus came into the world -- "he will save his people from their sins." As we meditate on this purpose we are brought to the realization that Jesus is coming into our lives with his saving purpose -- that he is saving us from our sins. He comes to us with the great good news, we are his people! As Jesus comes to us with his saving goodness, our lives are changed. We are called to give up our ways, to take up new ways, God's ways; just as Joseph was called to take Mary as his wife even though this was against the custom and practice of his day.

Tuesday

Scripture: Luke 3:1-6

At a specific time and place, dominated by international military occupation and local political intrigue, the word of God came. When the top brass in government made the headlines, and a few religious leaders wielded power and got attention, the word of God came -- to John.

We are so prone to think God spoke in the past with obvious clarity in some idealized utopia. But it was in the real life of actual people, amid daily affairs of working, suffering, worshipping and struggling that the word of God came.

Scripture does not record what action government took or what ecclesiastical hierarchy decreed; the only really significant earthly event at that time was that the word of God came.

In the here and now of international disturbance, when LBJ wields presidential power, when Paul VI and Franklin Clark Fry head great Christian organizations, the word of God comes -- how fortunate. In the midst of our split-level living in affluent frustration, the word of God comes -- how frightening. Here and now nothing is more important, more powerful, more blessed than the coming of the word of God.

"The word of God came to John...and he went...proclaiming."
Speak, Lord, and may we go...proclaiming!

Wednesday

Scripture: John 1:29-31

"...For this I came...that he might be revealed...." What a blessing it is, in the midst of a maelstrom of things to be done, to see one's duty clearly and with singleness of vision. Special preparations for Christmas, legitimate claims of family and friends upon our time, the relentless cycle of human need breaking in to disrupt our "schedule;" how easy it is to feel pulled in several directions at the same time. Does God place upon us an impossible obligation to discharge a host of diverse responsibilities simultaneously? Hardly! He it is who enables us to say with Saint Paul, "one thing I do." It is His Spirit Who enables us to see an overarching purpose that gives meaning to all that we undertake. "...For this I came...that he might be revealed...."

Thursday

Scripture: John 1:36-39

A person may associate with another, or seek to, for such varied reasons as hoped-for benefits, mere curiosity, friendliness, or other personal attractiveness. Possibly all of these led Andrew and his companion to Jesus. Perhaps any of them may lead people to Jesus today.

This Lamb of God "takes away the sin of the world" (v. 29). The supreme reason for knowing him is it answers the supreme need in our lives! His friendship was precious and deeply satisfying then, and so it is now. In an old gospel hymn are lines to this effect: He walks with me, he talks with me, he tells me I am his own; and the joy we share, as we tarry there, is the richest ever known. But also: "Were there no heaven to gain, no hell to flee, For what thou art alone I must love thee" (SBH, #489). The earliest disciples had no deep knowledge or understanding of Jesus as either Savior or Lord. But their hearts were strangely warmed. He still invites, "Come and see." No words can tell the blessedness that follows -- but we too can know it.

Friday

Scripture: Revelation 16:1-7

The imagination of St. John reaches the outer fringes of terror and clamity. We share in this terrible vision, an insight into real and awful fear. The vision is a kind of contemplation as far as the mind can picture it, of the absolutely just and Holy God facing the wickedness of mankind. It is the sort of horrible finale that holiness and sin are bound to come to with the wrath of God poured out.

This total dissonance -- this great shrieking agony can only be resolved by a new Chort -- the Son. Jesus is to be born on the earth. What other answer is there to the terrible things we know we can do and why we know they are terrible, except that Christ should come and not only cover the Wrath of God but the blood that men have shed.

Only now, after he has come and put us at peace with God can both the Wrath disappear and the dreams of horror too!

Saturday

Scripture: Matthew 1:1-17

The Advent Season has been nicknamed the "Stir Up" period of the Christian year. That descriptive name comes from the first words in the Collect of three of the four Sundays of the Adventide:

"Stir up, we beseech Thee, thy power, O Lord and come...."

"Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of thine only begotten Son...."

"Stir up, O Lord, we beseech Thee, thy power and come...."

So we pray on the first, second and fourth Sundays of the season of hopeful penitence and joyful anticipation.

The first seventeen paragraphs of Matthew, Chapter I, record the 42 generations from Abraham of Ur to Joseph of Nazareth. Through those centuries the faithful poured out their prayer: "Stir up, O Lord, thy power and come."

Then, O great and mighty wonder, he came!

Every Saturday our prayer may well be: "Stir up our hearts, O Christ, to receive Thee with fresh and joy and obedience as we find another Advent in tomorrow's worship."

The Nativity of Our Lord - December 25

Scripture: John 1:1-14

The Collect: Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the new birth of thine only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free who are held in the old bondage under the yoke of sin; through the same Jesus Christ, thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

What human in his right mind would attempt to explain this passage of Scripture? All we can do is to sit and contemplate. Any one of the things John says about The Word could occupy us for a lifetime. In meditation, more depends upon the meditator than upon the meditation. While we must deal with the obvious, let us think on these things. "AND THE WORD." This is no ordinary word composed of letters and sounds. John knows THIS WORD to be a person. Look at the pronouns used and the things stated. THIS WORD was in the beginning. THIS WORD was with God. THIS WORD is God. ALL things have been made by THIS WORD. THIS WORD is life. THIS WORD is the true light for every man. THIS WORD gives power to become children of God. THIS WORD came to His own, took flesh and tented among men, but all the while full of grace and truth. Through THIS WORD men see the glory of God because the Son is the very image of the invisible God. The transitory character of His earthly tenting should not keep us from realizing the fact that THIS WORD promised He would be with us to the end of the age, and if we believe in Him we shall be with Him through all eternity.

St. Thomas - December 21

Scripture: James 1:1-6

The Collect: Almighty and everliving God, who hast given to them that believe exceeding great and precious promises: Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reprov'd; through the same, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Like St. Thomas and others who struggled to grow up in faith, all of us experience times of uncertainty and trial. As we wait "that day" when we shall be as He is, doubts and testing and conflict are characteristic of many days. In concrete events and specific interpersonal relationships the testings of faith occur. When the quality of these events and relationships -- contemporary, unfinished, and on-going as they are -- is redemptive, they move us toward wholeness. Joy itself is experienced in their midst. Joy is known in that the struggle is happening.

One mark of wholeness, as of maturing, is to learn to ask for what we need or want, rather than to wish that somehow whoever is able to grant our request would magically discern what we wish and grant it without our having to put into humble words our request. "Ask and you shall receive." Asking is maturing; it moves you toward wholeness. That is why prayer is important -- it helps you to learn to ask God for what you need and are interested in, rather than letting you childishly keep on wishing for some magic to be performed.

St. Stephen, Martyr - December 26

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-4

The Collect: Grant us grace, O Lord, that like St. Stephen we may learn to love even our enemies, and seek forgiveness for those who desire our hurt; through thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

SURROUNDED! by militant communism, racial discord, open immortality, pleasure seeking, religious indifference, and slanderous antagonism. Surrounded by classes, books, term papers, debts, and desire for position. Surrounded by our own desires for security, self-gratification, success. Surrounded by enormous subtle and open temptations around us and within us.

But we are also surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, and empowered by the presence of the living God. To be in the thick of life surrounded by martyrs is invigorating. God has not left himself without a witness. Stephen was surrounded by religious terrorists and by a great cloud of witnesses. Looking to Jesus and remembering the joy that was set before Him, Stephen persevered and was faithful unto death and into life.

That's the secret: Look to Jesus, Pioneer and Perfecter, God who took our nature and lived here as we do. He endured hostility and the cross deliberately, for the joy set before Him. For the joy of salvation, for the joy of doing the will of God, for the joy of victory over sin.

Stephen and many other witnesses have engaged in that struggle, but God is with us, Emmanuel! And we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. Therefore, let us run with perseverance...looking to Jesus.

St. John, Apostle - December 27

Scripture: Revelation 1:9-11

The Collect: Merciful Lord, we beseech thee to cast the bright beams of thy light upon thy Church; that it, being instructed by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist St. John, may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

One of the weirdest books in the Bible was written by a man in a strange combination of circumstances. He was on Patmos and in the Spirit. Patmos was a crescent-shaped island some forty miles off the coast of Asia Minor. To be banished to this island was like being sent to Siberia. A great archaeologist tells us that this banishment was "preceded by scourging, marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground, a dark prison, work under the lash of the military overseer". To be in the Spirit is to be raised above the circumstances, the fluxes and flows of the daily round and to be brought into the presence of the ineffable. The torments of Patmos and the ecstasy of the Spirit -- what a combination!

This combination had been turned on for John because he knew the Lord who said: "In the world you have tribulation" (John 16:33); "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32); and "In your patience you will gain your souls" (Luke 21:19). In living relationship with this Lord, John could write: "I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance" (Revelation 1:9). From tribulation through patience to the kingdom--that is God's way!

The Holy Innocents, Martyrs - December 28

Scripture: Revelation 11:4-19

The Collect: O God our Father, who by the birth and infancy of thy Son didst sanctify and bless childhood: We commend to thy love all children, and beseech thee to protect them from every hurt and harm, and to lead them to the knowledge of thyself and the obedience of thy will; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Joy to the World! is the top tune on the hit parade of the hearts of men in this season of the spirit of joy and the joy of spirits. But then we come to this day in the Church Year and find the scriptures speaking of slaughter. The lesson appointed for the day proclaims woe in the face of the problems of the apocalypse. In the encounter with carnage and woe our heart strings would like to skip a measure and go on singing of joy.

But the Church has seen fit to say whoa! in the face of all the woe. Rather than skipping merrily along we are reminded that the Son of Mary brought not just glee. Sorrow comes to those who are reminded of their sin. This festival (and it is a festival) reminds us that our sin was the foe of the Love of God. In the face of all the Joy there were blemishes brought about by the rebellion of man.

On this day in the year the Church calls a halt to all of our celebrating to remind us of the suffering which Jesus brings to the lives of those who rebell against the Love of God and make their theme song "Worldliness is my Joy."

The Circumcision and the Name of Jesus - January 1

Scripture: Revelation 15:1-4

The Collect: O Lord God, who, for our sakes, hast made thy blessed Son our Saviour subject to the Law, and caused him to endure the circumcision of the flesh: Grant us the true circumcision of the spirit, that our hearts may be pure from all sinful desires and lusts; through the same thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

The martyrs in John's vision sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. The song of Moses, the servant of God, is found in Exodus 15:1-18. The song of the Lamb of God extols God the Almighty, the just, the true, the only holy, who does great and wonderful things.

The song of the servant of God and the song of the Lamb of God blend into one mighty chorus as a comparison of Exodus 15:1-18 and Revelation 15:3-4 will show. God acted in the first exodus at the Sea of Reeds to bring Israel out of Egypt and constitute her a nation of suffering servants. This same God has acted in the Suffering Servant to effect a new exodus of His people from the life of sin, constituting the church, the new Israel, a fellowship of suffering servants. The Gospel of Christ is not an historical accident; it is a consummation of the age-old hopes that God had caused to burn in the hearts of His people.

Christians may therefore sing with John of Damascus:

"Come ye faithful, raise the strain
Of triumphant gladness;
God hath brought his Israel
Into joy from sadness;
Loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke
Jacob's sons and daughters;
Led them with unmoistened foot
Through the Red Sea waters."

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Loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke

Jacob's sons and daughters;

Led them with unmoistened foot

Through the Red Sea waters."

The First Sunday after Christmas

Scripture: Hebrews 2:5-18

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

"As it is we do not see everything in subjection to him. But we see Jesus!" How directly and deeply this whole passage speaks to us about the way Christ identifies himself with us. There is profound understanding in the use of "here am I, and the children God has given me." In just such a simple, yet universal sense are we all caught up into the bosom of God's family through Christ's coming into our world. It gives us insight into the depth of family meaning too, for we as well, can stand before our God and say -- "Here am I also, and the children thou hast given me." We do not see (understand) everything about our griefs and suffering, but we do see Jesus. We do not understand that the good God can bear with us in our temptation except that Jesus too knows the weakness of our flesh because it is his same flesh and that path of temptation, he has also known. O happy, happy birthday dear Lord for you left a glory to lift us to glory, you came to sorrow to give joy to every one of us.

The Second Sunday after Christmas

Scripture: Revelation 3:7-13

The Collect: Same as for The First Sunday after Christmas

As we look back to Christmas, we can only marvel that He who found all doors closed to Him from Bethlehem to Golgotha is also He who opens the door for all of us. It seems a small thing to say, "I have set before you an open door which no one is able to shut." But that word is precisely the one a bogged-down pastor can hold to. When a council meeting, a statistical report, or a nagging self-doubt saps our energy to go on, the word of an open door can revive us. To say that Christ is Lord means He is Lord of the future, that is, Lord of all possibilities. Somewhere He is offering us the possibility of an open door. That means a new start, a new and fresh beginning. No one can shut us off from that open door, the open tomb guarantees that!

As ministers of the Lord of possibilities, couldn't we offer other Christians the same message of hope? All human problems plead for "a way out." That means they look to us for an open door.

December 29

Scripture: John 1:15-18

The Christmas tree stands as a silent sentinel guarding the spot where a mound of gifts was resting a few days ago. How quickly the magnetism of the tree fades when the gifts have been distributed.

What a contrast with the unfailing magnetism of Him Who is both the symbol and embodiment of God's giving. "...From his fulness have we all received grace upon grace." With all His giving, His store of blessing is not diminished since in Him, the Child of Bethlehem, "all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell." For the hungry the Bread of Life, for the thirsty Living Water, truly "grace upon grace;" unspeakable gifts are bestowed on persons like you and me because "in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily."

December 30

Scripture: Revelation 10:1-6

Before the sublime manifestations of the infinite power of God we must bow in humble reverence. Even the marvelous radiance of an angel seen in vision, reflecting the shining splendor of heaven, can give only the slightest hint of the supernal majesty and glory of God. He is above all, and to him the adoration of our hearts is poured out.

This wondrous God acts to support and bless his devoted servants, and also to thwart and overthrow hostile forces. It is under this God that we live -- the God who created all and continues to rule. "The whole earth is full of his glory." Under the iron heel of atheistic tyranny or of self-centered materialism, men's hearts may grow faint. But all who know the mighty love of God can look with confidence for his victorious power to bring doom to evil, deliverance to the persecuted, and the dawn of the new age to the faithful. Above both the tragedies and the mysteries of this world is the sovereign God. And the last days, as the first days, are in his hands.

December 31

Scripture: Revelation 10:7-11

Who can understand what this means? Who can understand what any of the book of Revelation means? The real question is, who can understand God's ways? There is mystery. We have no other way to conceive of God and His actions except in terms of our human experiences, thought forms and expressions. But these are both inadequate and inaccurate. How we long for clear meanings and certainty.

God is at work now, but how do we know what God is doing? Just what is God's will and work in a complex racial disturbance, or in the slaughter of innocent people by communists and Americans, or in the broken relationships of a couple desiring divorce? These are more than mere human affairs because God is at work in them. There is mystery.

Let us take heart. The seer records the prophecy of the angel that some day the mystery of God will be fulfilled, or as Phillips translates it, "the mysterious purpose of God shall be completed."

In the meantime, take the little scroll and eat it. Take the written witness available to us and digest it, assimilate it and make it our own. It will be sweet and bitter. And then go prophesy.

January 2

Scripture: Acts 4:23-30

Today is the day after Jesus' Name Day and our lesson is about the ministry of Peter and John and their friends following Pentecost and Jesus' Ascension. To a world both hostile and indifferent, they learned to minister in boldness in the name of the "holy servant Jesus."

"Holy servant Jesus" may also be translated "Holy Child Jesus." This latter title appears in the collect for ordination, in which we ask that the ordained may boldly speak God's word and do the wonders of his grace "by the Name of Thy Holy Child Jesus." Jesus' birth and naming remind us he became human, and his ministry was incarnational. Ours is also ministry of incarnation. God was in Christ, and he is in us. The Holy Spirit fills God's people when they gather and when they minister to the world in the name of the holy servant-child Jesus. Such friends he releases from the bondages of fear and timidity and abstractions, and gives them boldness to be representatives of his Incarnate Word among particular men. They are to make God's Word concrete and specific with particular persons.

January 3

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-6

At this season of the year, it is fitting that we pause in our busy rush and meditate on John's call to repentance. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Now that we have just celebrated the birth of Jesus and are preparing for the season of Epiphany, we need to spend some moments reflecting on our own lives, our own need for daily repentance. We who are called to be student, pastors, faculty members, wives, mothers need special periods of meditation and reflection on our own lives. Repentance however, is not just looking back in remorse or wishing that we had done something differently. Repentance also involves an about face-- a looking to the future to a new way under God's forgiveness. For those in our calling it is easy to evade the contemplation of our own sins by the condemnation of other people's sins. This practice can so blind us to our need that we miss God's gift of new life. We stand in real danger of missing the good news for our own existence. Thus repentance faces in two directions -- backward in remorse, forward in hope and forgiveness in the new life. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

January 4

Scripture: Matthew 3:7-12

What a harsh and rather cruel passage we are asked to meditate upon while we are only a few yesterdays away from the unexampled loveliness and poetic beauty of our Lord's lowly birth in a manger. With the joy and glory of angelic announcements and evangelic hymns still fresh on our minds, why now mention such phrases as, "brood of vipers," "wrath to come," "are laid to the root," "winnowing fork," "chaff" and "unquenchable fire!"

Surely we are to enjoy and celebrate a joyous and happy Christmas but yet we are also to realize that with the birth of this Christ-Child there comes into our world the shining moral and spiritual force destined to bring salvation to the world. He comes not only with a child's appeal but also with the everlasting authority of the Son of God. As there comes into the midst of the world and into the midst of our consciences the "influence" of this Christ-Child, we are compelled to review, renounce, and reshape the values of our life. Look again into the manger!!!

January 5

Scripture: Luke 3:7-9

The piercing words of John the Baptist in the Bible reading brings into focus the fact that one's relationship to God is not inherited. John warned the Jews that there was more to being children of Abraham than pedigree. A true child of Abraham will "bear fruits that befit repentance," and not rely on his family tree.

How many people fill our churches today and claim to be Christian simply because of their pedigree? No one can say for sure, but in all probability there is a sizable number. The number of converts to Christianity is quite small when compared to the number who were born in Christian homes and inherited their religion. The "ole time" religion that was good enough for mother and father but does not mean a thing to me is not enough to be a true child of God. Many people who inherited their parent's religion are finding themselves inheriting the position of religious leadership that has been vacated by their parents. It is sometimes painful when one is forced to realize that his identity as a true child of God is exemplified by his fruits, not in his "roots."

Introduction to Epiphany

Epiphany means manifestation, the showing forth of God in Christ. Here again it is not just a season that concerns us but an aspect of God. It is what God does and what God does reveal to us, to the extent of our capacity to understand, who God is.

The special emphasis of Epiphany is not just the fact that God reveals Himself in Jesus of Nazareth, or that this same Jesus is our personal Lord and Savior. It is certainly this, but it is so much more. The special emphasis of Epiphany is that God's revelation in Christ is not just a religious revelation as we have come to know this term religion -- a discipline designed to win man's loyalty in the realm of personal and public worship, or moral decision and ethical value. Rather it is God's revelation of Himself as the Lord of man's total life; the Lord of the world's destiny and history; the Lord and master of all nature. Epiphany is a manifestation intended to broaden our horizons -- drive us from a limited and exclusive view of personal faith and see God in Christ at the center of all existence. Truly, truly God is Lord of all.

Advent and Christmas have made it clear that God has come and that He has come for us. The comingness of God with its personal thrust is convincing. Now Epiphany points us not only to the realm of self but to all men and to history and nature as well.

The second thing that should be pointed out concerning Epiphany is that its very structure as a season of the Church Year should remind us that if we are to know God as He reveals Himself in Jesus Christ we must see Christ in the totality of His earthly life. God reveals Himself in each particular event in Christ's earthly ministry, but it is not enough to know Him as the Babe of Bethlehem or even as the suffering Savior of Calvary. We must see Him as a guest at a party where the wine runs out. We must see Him in the temple listening and asking questions of the elders. We must see Him on the road to Capernaum healing the leper and on the sea in a little boat with His friends as a great storm rages. No one single event is sufficient because the glory which is being revealed here is a glory which exhausts both our span of attention and our ability

to comprehend. Therefore we must be told in many different ways that this Jesus Christ of Nazareth is God's Son in whom He is well pleased and through whom all creation is to be redeemed. All this is necessary that we might begin to catch the "sight-of-faith" that in this one life is hidden and revealed the Holy God of all existence -- creator, redeemer, and sustainer of life.

Epiphany is a necessary part of the Christmas cycle for it expands, broadens and lifts our understanding of what happened at Bethlehem. Epiphany places the events of Bethlehem at the center of existence. This baby Jew is the Savior not just of the Jews but of all men. This first century child is not only a child of his times, He is the Lord of History. This word incarnate is not only God's answer to rebellious man but God's claim to all existence. This is God's redemptive restoration of all creation.

Epiphany proclaims that this Christ whom we encounter in Holy Scripture is Very God of Very God, not just for the sake of doing honor to Jesus of Nazareth -- He did not claim honor for Himself -- but because man can come to know the true and living God only in an encounter created by the record of this one life. All other knowledge of God no matter how sincere and factually real leads only to idolatry.

Therefore Epiphany confronts us with selected and faithfully recorded events in our Lord's life in order that through them we might come to know Him and through Him the true and living God.

The Epiphany of Our Lord - January 6

Scripture: Revelation 21:22-27

The Collect: O God, who on this day by the leading of a star didst reveal thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles: Mercifully grant that we, who know thee now by faith, may be brought to contemplate the beauty of thy Majesty; through the same Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Quite often we find people who think that their beautiful buildings, their carefully-written liturgies and their musical masterpieces are essentials and are essentially their religion. These are the ends of their religion. To paraphrase the words of Isaiah they use part of their bricks to erect out-houses at a race track and with others they fashion "temples" to which they bow down. They stand in their temples and confess the splendor and grandeur of their accomplishment. They praise the beauty and unsurpassable grammatical order and polish of the ancient liturgies. There is a dependence upon man-made beauty and a desire for man-made light. There is a worship of man and his creation.

There is a sense in which we can say that Christianity is of man, by man and for man, but not in the sense that it is a religion of man-made things. Christianity came through a man, but He was of God, in fact He was God. This is what the writer of Revelation emphasizes when he says that he saw no temple but that the Lord God and the Lamb was the temple. The basic essential of our religion is God as revealed through Christ. The man-made buildings, and liturgies are aids and expression of faith in that God. They are means to an end but it is idolatry when they are ends in themselves.

Monday

Scripture: Luke 3:10-14

". . .and share with him who has none." About the surface of our globe is wrapped a broad band of jagged edges, studded with the ugliness of starvation, poverty, loneliness, want. You hardly have to raise your eyebrows above your backyard fences to see the breadth of human need. Such an illustration is in the frame of an 88-year-old Negro sentenced September, 1922, to the S. C. Penitentiary for having stolen \$5 and a wrist watch. Without family and physically incapacitated, John Davis has spent 42 years of his life behind bars. In all of these years of paying his debt to society, he has never had one visitory and has received only one piece of mail. His income is \$3 a month and was forced to sell his radio to buy a pair of shoes for his swollen feet. As we look at the world through our theological binoculars, how often we single out our millions for missionaries to relieve misery and depression and proclaim the Gospel and we are blind to the need at our own doorsteps -- when even pennies for the penitentiary would work wonders. If the church is to be at the apex of where the Gospel and the world meet, then we must be there -- ministering to the needs of all saints -- ". . .and share with him who has none."

Tuesday

Scripture: Luke 3:15-20

"The people were in expectation" Luke tells us and "all men questioned in their hearts concerning John." Expectations are always coupled with questions, perhaps even doubts. Great expectations create great questions.

Christ has come. Christmas is over. Part of our expectation has been fulfilled, yet we don't seem to be exactly sure about who has come or what is over. Men are questioning in their hearts over the meaning of the event, the holiday, the expense.

What did Santa Claus and reindeer, tinsel and trees have to do with this birth? What will be the impact, if any, upon the world this year, or God become Man? Our task is to point, as John points, away from ourselves to one so mighty that his shoe laces are too holy to touch.

Today, somewhere someone has come under the power and glory of Christ for the first time. Surely, today is the merriest Christmas for him that he will ever know. May the blessed hope of expectation be born anew in all of us daily -- a daily merry Christmas.

Wednesday

Scripture: Mark 1:1-8

Have you ever heard of a pavior?" No, it is not a misprint -- "a pavior!" "Pavior" is a fine, old English word which refers to one who paves a road, one who prepares the way and makes paths straight.

John the Baptizer was a "pavior" who first sent the tide of salvation splashing against human walls of pride and conceit. St. Paul was a "pavior" who smashed the barriers and brought the good news of salvation into the ghettos and slums of the Greek and Roman world. He tore down the man-made sea walls and the tide of salvation flooded the flatlands of daily living and lifted life to a new, higher plain.

As proclaimers of the Word of God, we, too, are "paviors." We prepare the way and make the paths straight when we send the tide of salvation splashing over the rocky, litter-strewn beaches of humanity. All of life is bathed in the salty, healing tide of the Gospel. The tide floods -- all the shells of life are filled with purpose and meaning! The tide ebbs -- the shells of life still cup their precious contents! Thanks be to God!

Thursday

Scripture: Mark 1:9-11

Worshippers are often impressed with a service which is "so quiet you can hear a pin drop." Although there is merit in having times set apart for silent meditating, the Christian has not been commissioned by Christ to contemplate another person's salvation. The calling of a Christian is to proclaim (make known) the saving, strengthening love of Christ.

The preparatory work of the Baptizer in the Wilderness was not a subdued servant's functioning. John was stirring up the people as he pointed out the fact that another was to come baptizing with the Holy Spirit.

When John baptized the one whose shoes he was not worthy enough to shine, the service was far from "so quiet you could hear a pin drop!" The heavens opened, the Spirit descended, a heavenly voice boomed. This was excitement. This was the ultimate in activity on the part of God. Things were beginning to happen.

Things are still happening! We are called to proclaim Christ -- to make Him known to people who need and want Him -- people in a world of reality that is far from pin-drop quietness.

Friday

Scripture: Luke 3:21-22

This is one of the significant epiphanies of our Lord, and it seems clear that the Evangelist Luke intends us to see it as a manifestation of the Lordship of Jesus to all men. Compare the parallel accounts in Matthew 3:13-17 and Mark 1:9-11 where these authors record that the descent of the dove or the opening of the heavens were only seen by Christ. St. Luke wants us to notice that these were objective facts, for he makes no mention that these things were observed by Christ alone.

Rather the opening of heaven, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the voice from heaven were known to all the people in the account of Luke. The Third Gospel writer would have us see that God is here making known his relationship with the Divine Son in no uncertain terms. This is Deus revelatus! God has revealed himself in One who loves us so much as to identify with us even through a baptism of repentance -- for which, of course, he had no need. It was for us that he went through his "Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation."

Saturday

Scripture: Luke 3:23-39

There is an old saying that goes something like this, "It isn't what you know...it's who you know that counts!" Whenever someone makes this statement we generally assume that this person has accomplished a goal, position, or an objective simply on the merits of a friend, an acquaintance, or possibly a relative. It appears that an age-old "tradition" has supplanted qualities of "education" and "experience." This is contrary to our way of thinking today because of the manner in which we have been raised as children and trained "in the way (we) should go" (Proverbs 22:6).

In our society today "tradition" and its brother, "heritage," do play an important part in life's accomplishments...whether we admit it or not. We, as Christians, may not like it -- but it's still there! Now heritage alone is not the best standard of measurement for one's character or capacities but it does help us to know who we are and where we came from. Our Lord was from good heritage..."the house and lineage of David" which from ancient times had foretold of a Messiah from its branches. Luke even traces Christ back to Adam to show that His life is to be identified with all of mankind as "the Son of God." Believing this, we are part of Christ's heritage, and as such, inheritors of his grace and salvation. As Christians we could say, "It isn't what you know..... it's WHO you know that counts!"

The First Sunday after the Epiphany - Sunday

Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17

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

WHY DO YOU WANT TO BE BAPTIZED?

This question was most certainly on the lips of John the baptizer when Jesus requested to be baptized. It has appeared on the lips and hearts of Christians throughout the centuries. This man, who was the Son of God, had no need to be baptized...He had no sin! WHY THEN? Why did He want to be baptized? Not for His own sins, but perhaps to consecrate His mission in the world. Jesus, at His baptism, placed upon His shoulder the cross that He had to bear the rest of His life. The cross upon which He would die. He, at this time placed the sins of all mankind upon His shoulder.

Jesus did not become sinful, but it was in order that He might share our shame and pain. In order that He might take into His own purity our sin.

Christ's baptism by water was indeed a public announcement to all of mankind that He was the Savior...that He was willing and ready to bear our sins...that He could and would redeem the souls of sinful men.

Monday

Scripture: John 1:32-34

I wonder how we would get along without the Pharisaic spirit which prevails in the hearts of so many of our fellow Christians? They form the backbone of the institutional church. They frequently are the work-horses who carry the load and represent to the world the character of the church. This Pharisaic spirit which points an accusing finger at others who are not as righteous as they, is the same spirit that denounced Christ. All of us stand beside them at one time or another and point with them in bitter accusation. I can think of a lot of people who do not deserve God's mercy and many who have offended me that I would just as soon God was not merciful to.

Does Christ abandon the Pharisees to his righteousness? Paul says that God has made all men prisoners of disobedience that he might have mercy upon all (Romans 11:32). Sunday golfers are guilty; the deacon who notes their absence is guilty; and the finger that points from the pulpit is guilty. But when God's forgiveness is proclaimed boldly from the same pulpit or when the Gospel is lived in kindly words and caring deeds we know that he also has mercy upon you and upon me.

Tuesday

Scripture: John 1:40-42

"He brought him to Jesus." It has been noted that every time Andrew is mentioned in the Gospels, he is bringing someone to Jesus. It is natural to Christian experience that all who enjoy it, however partially, desire to share it with others. As soon as a new day breaks, Andrew, first thing, finds his brother Simon, breaks the news that the Christ has appeared and brings him to Jesus.

What a commentary this is on the depth of our experience with Christ. Does the beginning of each new day find us looking for someone with whom to share the news that Christ has come? Or have we allowed the care and pleasures of the world or the routine business of the day to stop up the fountains of the joy of our salvation? Our lives should overflow daily to touch the dried up deserts of some empty life. For it is in giving that we receive; and it is in bringing that we are brought anew to find the Christ.

Wednesday

Scripture: John 1:45-51

It is capturing to wonder what extra-ordinary ability enabled Christ to know all about certain individuals. It seems he could see a person's life by simply giving that person a glance. His piercing stare could read a man's mind. The Samaritan woman, Judas and Peter, Nathanael -- these are a few examples of Christ's ability to look and then know all. How could he do it? What is the secret of his power? That he was the Son of God is an answer, but too often this becomes an excuse to end pursuit. Could it be that Jesus' overwhelming faith in man -- the faith that led him to the cross -- is the answer?

Continue this line of thought and then contrast it with man's faith and knowledge about God. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God." "Rabbi, you are the Son of God!" These are three great confessions of man's that are found in scripture, and all of them are rewarded by a promise: "You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Think of it; vision is the reward of faith!

Lord, increase our faith that our vision may increase also.

Thursday

Scripture: Luke 4:1-13

This type of experience proves to be that fixed, concrete, stance of faith which every believer in Christ should cherish and profess. It is through temptation that growing faith expresses and asserts itself. The faith that Jesus proclaimed through this trying, secret experience was in His first commandment; seek God first in everything!

Jesus knew that He had not come to be a popular hand-out or political deliverer. He knew He could not accomplish a life of total agape love if He submitted to this enticing temptation. He must "let" His total aim and follow it through even if it meant suffering; and so it did. His stern obedience to His Father's calling won for us life and hope.

Anfechtung, as Luther used it, is not only enticement and seduction, but pain, distress and inner suffering to which Christians are subjected in time of doubt. These may come to us, as they did to Jesus, at our height of spiritual experiences. The danger sport is just then because Satan is tempting again. But now Christ is able in His manifest victory to invite us in our unrest to His power -- one to help us up!

Friday

Scripture: Mark 1:12-15

GOOD NEWS! GOOD NEWS! This could be the theme of the whole Epiphany season. Good news! The message of the Living Christ is much more real than is a news forecast, more vital, more exhilarating, more titillating than a Huntley-Brinkley. The "good news" of a Mighty God coming to us manifests the pre-news bulletin -- "A Saviour of the world has been born in Bethlehem. He is a King, a Prince of life. His name -- Jesus Christ." The Epiphany Season, broadcast to man in living color, is the staunch reality that a mighty God became a mighty man. While the boob-tube in our living rooms broadcasts the pessimism of a distressed world, an Incarnate God offers optimism for a living people. The good news is God's promised salvation, His victory over sin, death, and the Satanic powers. The good news is a late news item, beamed to an anxiously awaiting people. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Please stay tuned for further developments.

Saturday

Scripture: Matthew 4:12-17

In the above text Matthew reached back into Isaiah 9:1-2 to find a prophecy which he considered fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Isaiah originally proclaimed a time of deliverance that would come to the territories of Zebulun and Naphtali, which had been invaded and destroyed by the aggressive Assyrian army. Matthew recognized Jesus' journeying in the above areas for a home of deliverance and he spoke of Jesus' work there as "light" to those who stand in "darkness."

The light-darkness motifs are familiar ones in the NT. The NT proclaims that man because of his sin is like a blindman in darkness, unable by his own strength to find new eyes and light. Man today is like that!! He stands in need with outreached hands. Christ is the Light, says the NT. He has forgiven our sins, given us new eyes, and gives us strength in the midst of gloom. He fills our empty hands with the light and love of a cross.

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany - Sunday

Scripture: Matthew 19:27-30

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

Peter: We've left all and followed you.
What'll we get out of it?

This is everyman's question of Christ!

We, each of us, are involved in this question up to our necks aren't we? We like to think that we've left everything and followed Christ. Have we?

Yes, we have left houses, some of us; some of us have left brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, children or lands. Oh, yes, we've become separated and alienated from all these most human ties -- but why? Why?

The phrase which follows this listing of severed relationships contains the key to this whole passage:

"FOR MY NAME'S SAKE"

We have left much, each of us -- but has it been "for His name's sake" or for our pride's sake?

Yes! WE have left everything for you.

Monday

Scripture: Matthew 4:23-25

We can read this passage to see in it a man of fame, a man doing deeds of miraculous healing meriting the praise of all who come seeking for proof by sight. And in so doing we can leave this passage without seeing the man of fame or the proclamation of forgiveness implied.

Christ not only proclaims the Kingdom of God and teaches the ethical instructions of that Kingdom, but he forgives us of our sin so that we can be a part of that Kingdom with Him. "So his fame spread," yes! But let us not allow him to be famous for us because of his wonder works of healing to prove something, but rather see his healing as demonstrating his power of forgiveness. Our Saviour through his power to heal demonstrates for us his power to heal the wound of the broken relationship between man and God that we might be saved to be with him in his kingdom forever.

Tuesday

Scripture: Matthew 5:27-32

Whenever we are in Pennsylvania, my wife and I visit her relatives in Bethlehem. On the highest mountain in that city, just as the city lies, the citizens have erected a huge star that shines all night. As I seek to make my way home through the maze of unfamiliar streets, I can always get my direction from that star; for the road home crosses that mountain just a few hundred feet beneath that star.

There is an Epiphany parable in this experience. This is the time that we commemorate the faithfulness of the Magi who were willing to be led to Bethlehem by a heavenly sign. God gives signs to guide us each day. Will we be faithful in following them? What signs have shown in your life recently?

Wednesday

Scripture: Matthew: 5:33-48

When I was initiated into a professional fraternity during my college days, I was presented with a copy of the constitution and by-laws of the fraternity. These documents contained the formal statement of the purpose and goals of the organization. In addition to these, there was a statement which spelled out the attitude and the conduct that was expected from members of the fraternity. When we were accepted into the fellowship of the society, we were expected to respond with appropriate attitudes and actions. Some people have described the Beatitudes as "The Constitution of the Christian Church." We have been received into the fellowship of the Church through Baptism, and as a result of this there should be a change in the attitudes and actions of our life. The Beatitudes should serve as the guidelines of our response to our initiation into the society of Christ's Church. The Beatitudes are God's gift to us; they are the constitution and by-laws for the life of the new man who is alive in Christ. They are the guidelines for our response to the love of God which changes our lives.

Thursday

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-15

"Beware of practicing your piety before men..." "sound no trumpet before you...." How well our Lord might have prefaced these solemn warnings with the simple word "Pastor." We, as clergymen are indeed in danger of flaunting our piety, our goodness, our excellence before the eyes of men to gain their favor and respect. How well our Lord could see the sad state of man. Even those of us in the service of His Kingdom are too many times guilty of such actions.

In this great passage, in which the Christ would teach us how to pray by giving us the "Lord's Prayer," he first solemnly warns us against showing our "greatness" for the sake of earthly reward and recognition. This temptation is indeed real, ever present, constantly offering itself for us to enjoy. Thus our Lord's warning! Thus our Lord's pattern! Thus His blessed assurance..."and your Father who is in secret will reward you." Today, tomorrow, every day the danger is here in my work, and thus I must pause to contemplate my Lord's attitude and then rise to strive to "listen."

Friday

Scripture: Matthew 7:7-14

Our scripture for this day entwines our thinking around the responsive giving of a father to his child. More than likely most of us have been nurtured in this truth by our own earthly father. How I recall the many tangible and intangible gifts of love from my parents. They sacrificed so much in order to give their love in countless measure. I'm sure we all have felt the pangs of conscience from having taken so much from our parents. But, we also know if we had declined their giving, we would have denied their ways of giving themselves to the children they loved so dearly.

For us it is usually much easier to give than to receive. We've been taught to give but not to receive. Our first impulse when a package is handed our way is that of withdrawal. We experience this fact in all our relationships and this includes also our divine encounter. The Gospel proclaims God's sacrificial giving to all His children. The gift from Him comes in spite of our egocentric doing. This is the way God gives of Himself -- but we withdraw. Therefore, we should religiously cultivate the art of receiving. Only in receiving can we have the pure love that a father gives to His child.

Saturday

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-29

Have you noticed that the passages from the Sermon on the Mount which have been the basis of our devotions for this week center around Jesus' demand for a new way of life? We could characterize it as a life of absolute charity, absolute purity, absolute simplicity, and absolute forgiveness. Not an easy standard! What makes it worse is that today's passage, the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount, warns us that these words are not to be taken "spiritually" or "inspirationally." They are to be taken seriously; they are to be done. If only Paul could tug at our sleeve here and murmur, "Faith, not works," or if only Luther could slap us on the back and say, "We are all sinners, after all!" But we are left with Jesus' own calm declaration: "every one who hears these words . . . and does not do them will be like a foolish man. . ."

God takes our daily life a lot more seriously than we do. Significantly, all the passages about judgment in the Gospels stress daily actions, not faith. What are you going to do about it?

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany - Sunday

Scripture: Luke 17:1-4

The Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty to help and defend us; through thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

O dear, loving Lord let me hang the millstone around my own neck before I do anything that causes my brother to fall or, unthinkable thing, a "little one to sin." O Christ Thou dear Son of God, thou warm fire of life, how great a thing it is to know if nothing else, that at some time and in a particular place, such a One as Thou art said and felt what Thou didst say and feel. Thou didst seize my heart with that one word alone. I want to run out and cry to my neighbor, "let me help you, for my Christ is that way -- let me not harm you in any way -- forgive me for anything and let me explain my Christ and the sort of Lord he is.

Where are the children, the little ones, all of them -- that I might savour every moment of the wonder that is in them because Christ shows me they are His as well as also mine. O count up the wrongs that have been done me that I might also forgive and forgive. No, do not count up the wrongs -- I have forgotten them. I think only of my Christ now. Will I later forget? Forgive me Lord.

Monday

Scripture: Matthew 8:14-22

It is a glorious day in our spiritual pilgrimage when God so directs circumstances as to burn indelibly into our consciousness the fact that we are not able to cope with the needs of men. We give lip service to this truth repeatedly, but people are so kind, so generous with their praise, that we quite unconsciously come to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Then, mercifully, we are confronted by a situation that, humanly speaking, is hopeless. We are forced either to despair or to faith in One Who is sufficient for these things. "...They brought to him many...." Surely this is our mission, to bring "to him many," many who are possessed but not by the Spirit, many who are sick but not yet sick of sin. Count that day wasted when you lead persons to believe that you can meet their need. Count that day wasted when you do not word or example direct at least one person to that One Who "took our infirmities and bore our diseases." Let Christ manifest Himself now -- through you.

Tuesday

Scripture: Matthew 8:28-34

Some people have a knack for doing the worst things at the most unfavorable times. Children are especially keen at this. A parent rants and raves over the abilities of his little tot at age four. Supposedly, he sings "America" in Latin, recites the alphabet, and talks fluently. Then there is the evening guests are in the home to whom all the bragging has been done. At the instant the parents want the youngster to perform, he is a dunce. Not one sound will he utter. Only a vacant stare and a slack mouth does he offer for the occasion. How many the times we have been in the clutches of just such an instance. At the very time we could have "sounded off" for God, we have turned our hushed voices and sealed lips to Him. But Jesus always had the perfect response to life's situations. "Have mercy, Lord" is the plea of two demoniacs. And the word is sent forth that is galvanized for action. The men are FREED. God is everything that men say that He is! He has the perfect response! This is one of the things which makes Him so majestically God!!

Wednesday

Scripture: Matthew 9:14-17

If we were to list the responses men make to the Law, somewhere in the listing someone would suggest fasting. Fasting was a common response, especially for O. T. men, showing strong feeling and involvement. It was a response often growing out of sin-struck sorrow and repentance -- and resulting in the quest for forgiveness. In the lesson today, a group asks Jesus why fasting is necessary; he answers in a unique way. Fasting is part of an old way of life and the old way has been replaced by a new way which demands no strict complicant to a definite pattern of living. Christianity is not tagged onto the legal system and moral codes of a by-gone age; new cloth is not used to patch an old garment; new wine is not put in old wineskins. Christianity is a new way of life.

Fasting is not demanded then because laws are not necessary for one to live in faith. Yet Christ does not disregard fasting. In one place he says to fast in secret, making it no big issue synonymous with faith. Above he says the time will come when men of God will fast. He regards fasting as discipline -- not necessary for faith, but necessary for the Christian. In what ways should we be fasting?

Thursday

Scripture: Matthew 9:32-38

"When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

It's so easy to stray from the shepherding care of God. We become nomadic in our relation to scripture, prayer and worship. Thoughtlessly we graze upon anxieties and troubled pastures. We eat until we're full but we know we're still empty. We constantly allow ourselves to be fed by foreign matter that directs us away from the care of God. We eventually arrive at the perplexing situation of letting ourselves grow emptier and emptier in order to make room for something that only poisons all of life. Life becomes, as Eugene O'Neill has characterized it -- a bag full of holes. Our living then becomes an endless journey of trying to fill the bag.

Jesus had a tender heart for those who strayed from the satisfying things of God. He knew that many wandered from the care of the Father and lived a tormented and powerless life. What a consolation for us to know that Jesus compassionately looks upon the perplexing situations of humanity and bids us to come back to His care and charge.

Friday

Scripture: Matthew 10:1-16

And He Called Unto Him his twelve disciples. . . .

We are constantly confronted with exhortations to get up, get out, and go into the world. The mission of the church is important and constantly challenges us to new approaches and renewed zeal. But it is significant that in this great "mission centered" chapter of Matthew the first call is to come unto him. Before the disciples can go effectively, they must first come unto the Master. Our actions as agents of the Gospel of Christ's missionary purpose have their basis in our relationship as individuals who have come to him for directions. His call is a constant call. Come to me, my children, and I will provide the strength for you to go forth as "sheep in the midst of wolves." Going in our own strength is a lost cause. We receive his strength when we answer his continual call to come unto him.

"We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender!
We go not forth alone against the foe;
Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender,
We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go."

Saturday

Scripture: Matthew 10:17-11:1

As we sit at our desks or lie comfortably in our beds, reading this daily devotional, phrases like "they will deliver you up...flog you...dray you...hate you" may seem fantastic, unreal and unrelated to our daily routine. A portion of the Scripture lesson for the day judges us harshly: "...and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

Crosses are heavy. They hurt. They are designed to kill. They differ radically from those we wear around our necks on Sunday morning. Christ's cross was not quite so shinny, so smooth, so ornate.

In order to bear the cross of Christ we ought constantly proclaim Christ with a new vigor, a new urgency, a new dedication. If persecution does not follow, then indications are that we are not preaching Christ.

The martyrdom of the Christian may differ somewhat from the traditional persecutions of hungry lions and burning stakes. We are called to a daily martyrdom, a daily bearing of the cross that is more deadly than physical death. The glory of all persecution is the fact that God uses this to work his will. May we bear our crosses across our backs, not around our necks.

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany - Sunday

Scripture: Matthew 13:53-58

The Collect: Almighty God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Human reactions are so frequently erroneous. Often this is due to the fact that certain items which really are secondary can overshadow the factors that have greater importance. Even Bible study on a superficial level may lead to little more than literary appreciation and historical problems -- the power of truth and of life may be missed. There seems to have been, on this occasion and others, only half-hearted recognition of Christ's wisdom and mighty works -- astonishment but no genuine appreciation, no perception of the divine grace he was manifesting. Such willful blindness can be as devastatingly harmful as outright antagonism and rejection. Faith cannot develop in an atmosphere of contempt. So Matthew's summary word here is "unbelief."

Jesus is eager to give blessings, but so often we erect a blockade against him -- even unconsciously. Absorption in technical details, or in "practical" activities, or in personal interests, can so blind us to the Christ that he can work no miracle in our hearts. "Lord, help my unbelief."

Monday

Scripture: Matthew 11:16-24

Today I shall judge; today I will shrink from my responsibilities; today I will be indifferent! But my Lord would speak. He would speak to me and say...."NO!"

"Yes," we must make decisions; but not according to our own prejudices. Rather, they should be by giving thanks for those who toil with you in the work of the Kingdom. "Yes" we, as shepherds, have great responsibilities. "Yes," we must act!

Christ again speaks: "My Church...my people...DIE! Not from persecution and hardship, for in these they grow! But from stubbornness and indifference. My Church, my people DIE! Not from the flames of hot revenge, but from the suffocating, freezing cold of not caring."

Jesus turns and looks at us, and we reply: "We did nothing!" And this is our defence. But well should we contemplate this one basic fact: Our "DEFENSE" may well be our "CONDEMNATION."

Tuesday

Scripture: Matthew 12:1-21

John the Baptist was a participant in one of the great events in history. He became a witness that this man surely was the Son of God. John says, "I myself did not know him for what He was and yet I now bear witness that this is the Son of God. One of the great mysteries of God is the manner in which he works through men. Sometimes he turns the hatred and malice of men into an act of lovingkindness as when he used pagan kings to punish the Israelites. God is known in creation as well as in the acts and witness of men but the witness which speaks to us most directly is the witness which came to John and those who gathered around him, the witness of the Spirit.

The Spirit speaks through us when we proclaim Christ. This may take many forms of expression but the Spirit takes our feeble thoughts and stammering tongues and makes of them the Gospel to anxious hearts. The Spirit also speaks and brings conviction of the truth to those who bear witness. Our words may be proclaimed from a heart that is not fully convinced in itself but the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that He is the Christ and that he has made us heirs with him.

Wednesday

Scripture: Matthew 12:22-50

Once a friend of mine was asked why he joined a particular church in our community. He immediately replied, "When a person joins that church he will never have to stand alone. The members stand by one another no matter what happens!" What a wonderful manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies!

How often have we seen people from vastly differing backgrounds welded together in mutual love and understanding. Only a few, short years ago a group of young men, heeding the call of the Holy Spirit, entered Southern Seminary. We studied together, played together, and grew together. We experienced joy and sorrow together. We experienced a oneness in Christ which few people are privileged to experience. For through the work of the Holy Spirit we were welded together into the fellowship of the twice-born -- we were truly made brothers in Christ through our common calling and obedience to that call. What a wonderful manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit in our very midst! O God, help us recognize this oneness wherever we might be!

Thursday

Scripture: Matthew 13:1-23

In a day when the visible results of a ministry are so sought after, it is sobering to meditate on the parable of the sower. The sower experienced both crop failure and success in the same sowing. That which failed to produce seemed to be a complete failure, but that which produced, yielded a "bumper crop." Here in a simple story we have placed before us the fact that the Word of God will not reach the hearts of some men through our words and actions. We also have placed before us the humbling realization that God's Word will reach out and into others through us and our efforts.

In those moments when we become disgusted and tired, let us not forget the efforts of the sower, and take heart, knowing that all is not in vain. Some of what we do will only lay on the crust of a hardened heart; some will take root only to die; some will raise up only to be choked out; some will take root and produce fruit. We are not called to select our hearers so as to have no failures, we are called to witness to the living Word. In the time of good harvest, the failures will disappear amid the joys of success.

Friday

Scripture: Matthew 14:12-26

Jesus is Lord. This was the confession of the early Christians; this is the confession of Christians today. But what does it mean? It means that Christ is the King of man's life; He rules and reigns in us and through us. But it means more than this. Jesus is the Lord of nature as well as man. Jesus exercised His Lordship over nature by feeding a large group of people who followed Him with a very small quantity of food. He exercised His Lordship over nature to come to His disciples in their hour of fear on the sea. Just as Jesus died and rose again to redeem man, He died and rose again to redeem nature. In both incidents reported in our text, which show Christ exercising His Lordship of nature, Jesus provides for men in their time of need. Men were in need of food -- Christ provided food for them. Men were in need of assurance and confidence in their hour of anxiety -- Christ provided their needed anchorage on the sea of anxiety. Today Christ provides for us and for our needs through His Lordship over nature. Jesus is Lord -- Lord of man; Lord of nature.

Saturday

Scripture: Matthew 15:1-20

We find Christ in the midst of a battlefield. A battle between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees. Not a battle of stone-throwing, but a battle of conflicting ideas concerning how man should worship God.

The Scribes and Pharisees with their idea that in order to worship properly a rigid set of rules and regulations had to be followed and Jesus with the idea that worship was an inward act. That worship was the clean heart and loving life.

There is no certain form that our worship must take in the eyes of God. The important thing is that man worships. Worship takes many and varied forms and there is not one that is better than the other. What counts is what we feel within. We must feel, in our own way, the closeness of God to us. If too much stress is put on the form of our worship, then we fail...we seek to place the emphasis on pride in what we are doing, and in ourselves and miss the whole point and reason of our worship.

Aquinas said this, "Man sees the deed, but God sees the intention."

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany - Sunday

Scripture: Revelation 14:14,15

The Collect: O Lord, we beseech thee to keep thy Church and household continually in thy true religion; that they who do lean only upon the hope of thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by thy mighty power; through thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

The verb "sit," according to Webster's Dictionary, has a variety of meanings: to rest upon, remain quiet, or become inactive. For most of us it means to take it easy, relax, and settle down. We sit down for many reasons: to eat, drive, watch TV, read a book, listen to music, or talk to someone. In many cases we "sit" to satisfy our own bodily desires, appease our selfish senses, or rest our lazy bones. Very seldom do we "sit" for others. It is rare, indeed, to find a man who is willing to sit down by, with, and for his neighbor...a "sitting" with a purpose in mind and a meaning to it.

Our Lord was one such man who did a lot of "sitting" in His lifetime for other people. He sat with tax-collectors and sinners to show that He was one with them; He sat in a boat to teach the multitudes God's love for them; He sat on a colt to proclaim Himself Messiah as He rode into Jerusalem to fulfill prophecy; He sat with His disciples in an upper room to establish a new covenant and promised that He would one day in the future "sit" with them again in the new Kingdom; today He "sits at the right hand of God" in glory and majesty and tomorrow He sits on a cloud "with a golden crown on His head" swinging His sickle to "reap the harvest." Are we to be found "sitting" when He comes?

Monday

Matthew 15:29-31

A silence falls upon the courtroom. The defendant rises and faces the Judge. His lawyer also rises, and speaking in behalf of the defendant, says: "The defendant pleads guilty, your honor, and asks for the mercy of the court." This is a picture of man. Guilty! But this is not the entire picture. Frederick William Fabers' hymn "There's a wideness in God's mercy" characterizes our scripture passage for today. Look again. The suffering are placed at the feet of Jesus, "and he healed them." The lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb! All placed in the presence of Jesus, "and he healed them." This is a picture of God. Mercy! This is a picture of God caring for his creation; blessing, curing, loving making whole. We are the guilty, pleading for the mercy of God. Remember, if you will, that yesterday we sang in the Kyrie no less than four times "Lord, have mercy." This should be our cry every day, calling upon God to have mercy upon us, forgiving us of our wrongs, pardoning us of our sins, and making us whole in Christ Jesus. Our God is quite unique, to say the least. Always when mercy is asked for, mercy is received.

Tuesday

Scripture: Matthew 16:1-12

If we did not know better from other texts, or even from the terminus of this portion of the gospel account, we would in all likelihood think that the disciples were either blockheads or bakers.

Jesus says plainly that they should beware of those who would provide the type of leaven that the Pharisees and the Sadducees were adding to the ingredients of men's thoughts. But the disciples were more concerned with bread than they were about perils involved in the menacing questions of the religious sophisticates of the day.

We too are quite guilty of the sin of concerning ourselves with the how and when of the miracles of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather we should be asking the Holy Spirit to purge us of the impurities of our curiosity. Instead of seeking to be better prepared to read the recipe for a successful sign or wonder, we should be praying that the Holy Spirit would give us the ingredients of Christian faith so that we might believe in and glorify the incarnated Jesus Christ, who is the Wonder of Wonders and Miracle of Miracles!

Wednesday

Scripture: Matthew 16:21-28

There is a lot of emphasis in current theology and philosophy on discovering the essential nature of our beings. In theology this search for essential being is reflected by such men as Paul Tillich (The New Being, The Courage to Be) and Paul Tournier (The Meaning of Persons). In philosophy the search for meaning is seen in the Existentialists and in the revolts of the "beatnik."

The search is not new. Some have sought the answer in contemplating their navel, others in athletic prowess. Evidently Christ knew of this problem for he speaks to it in verse 24ff. "...but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self." NEB

Each one of us knows how difficult it is to lose himself. But what a joy it is losing self...only to discover what we basically are through Christ.

Thursday

Scripture: Matthew 17:1-27

Who is this Jesus? We have seen his star in the east. We have followed wise men to the "place where the child was" and have there placed our treasurer at his feet. We have seen him in the temple amazing the "professors" with his understanding and answers. We have drunk of his wine at Cana in Galilee. But yet there still stands for us as the quest of this Epiphany Season, the great moment of Caesarea Philippi, "And you, who do you say that I am?" Into the darkness of doubt and bewilderment of questions caused by a headstrong insistence of this peculiar person to set out on a journey marked with the perils of spit, thorns, nails and cross, there comes the great hour of the Mount of Transfiguration where the whole atmosphere is glory. From start to finish the keynote of this whole incident is glory, a luminous cloud, a shining face, glistening and gleaming garments. There are no question marks here, only exclamation points! "We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father."

Friday

Scripture: Matthew 19:1-15

Verses 13-15 in the above text make up one of the most beautiful and dynamic passages in the NT. Here mothers asked that their most beloved possessions, their children, be blessed by the master. The disciples were protective of Jesus and they tried to keep the children away. But Jesus said, let them come to me, for the Kingdom belongs to them. And Jesus blessed them.

These verses tell us that to Christ no one person is unimportant, not even little children. Jesus considered no one a nuisance. He was never too tired nor busy to give all of Himself to anyone who needed it.

There is a major difference between Jesus and many of us today. We often forget that all men are children of God. We forget that children are God's blessing to a family and occasionally we mistreat them by becoming too busy for them. But Christ shows us how important they are and fills our lives with love toward all men, and especially children, "for such is the Kingdom of heaven."

Saturday

Scripture: Matthew 20:29-34

What sympathy we lavish upon the blind! Our hearts run out to them when we see them feebly tapping along with their canes, we give them coins when we see them on our sidewalks, we help them to cross the streets. Perhaps this is because we can do little or nothing about such an affliction. The Emperor Hadrian, having accidentally put out a servant's eye with a stylus, offered that servant anything in his vast kingdom. The servant could only say, "I wish I had my eye."

The location of the healing of the two blind men in Matthew's gospel shows the high premium which that evangelist put upon seeing. This miracle precedes the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the cleansing of the temple, the crucifixion and resurrection -- events which opened the eyes of all Jesus' followers to the significance of His work. The healing of the two blind beggars resulted in a confession of faith, in spiritual discernment as well. May God open our eyes to the manifestations of His glory in Christ Jesus and lead us anew to the confession that Jesus is Lord!

Transfiguration - Sunday

Scripture: Revelation 1:12-16

The Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of thy only-begotten Son, hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the Father, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons: Mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of his glory, and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through the same thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

In his vision of the glorified Lord, John sees that "his face was like the sun shining in full strength" (Revelation 1:16). John's vision reminds us that in Matthew's account of the Transfiguration Jesus' "face shone like the sun" (17:2).

The Transfiguration came when our Lord was about to accomplish his "exodus" (Luke 9:31; "departure" in the RSV; the Greek is exodos). His journey to Jerusalem would have its issue in his death and resurrection through which his people would be given an exodus from their sin. At Caesarea Philippi Peter had confessed his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Now on the mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John were given the assurance that Jesus was the Son of God. The voice declares: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" (Mark 9:7). Here the disciples were receiving the same kind of assurance that had come to Jesus himself in his baptism.

Peter faltered when he wanted to chloroform the vision for future reference: "let us make three booths" (Mark 9:5). He also erred when he tried to place Jesus in a class with Moses and Elijah: "one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah" (Mark 9:5).

Visitations of grace come to us afresh each moment and can never be mummified. They come not from one who walked as a prince among peers, but from One who walked as a Prince where there are no peers.

Monday

Scripture: Matthew 21:10-46

The man whom Peter has hailed as "Master" at the marvelous transfiguration has descended from this mountain top of glory to the valley of the shadow of death. Here in this final week He goes about cleansing the temple, healing the blind and the lame, manifesting the dunamis, the power of God, and teaching in parables His death and resurrection to glory. Shortly the glory and radiance of the mountain-top experience would end in the most notorious and gloomy manner -- stretched over cross beams of wood. But "the very cornerstone which the builders rejected the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes" for he has risen to glory, the glory of our Father.

Tuesday

Scripture: Matthew 23:13-33

Have you ever thought about hypocrisy? If you are like most folks you probably haven't -- at least not in any rewarding way. Our Scripture passage beckons each of us to be concerned and knowledgeable in this area of life. Each of the "woe's" is directed against the Pharisees and yet even as we say this, don't you sort of get the feeling that our Lord is ever so subtly including us in the group, too? Aren't we just a bit Pharisaeic? Aren't we just a little bit the hypocrite?

Hypocrisy is a concept which means a different thing to each person and may be defined as : "that art of pretending which is couched in a framework of reality by the hypocrite himself." This characteristic is usually viewed as undesirable but it would be wise for us to note that that is not always the case. Jesus tells us, in Matthew 6:16f., that there is a DESIRABLE kind of hypocrisy. Our Lord's answer to the hypocrite's behavior when they fasted was, on the surface at least, just as hypocritical. He suggests "pretending" not be fasting -- not building self in the eyes of men. We are called to put on DESIRABLE hypocrisy. Have you? Christ would TRANSFORM hypocrisy!

Wednesday

Scripture: Mark 1:21-45

In the summer of 1964 I heard a young Japanese Doctor explain to a thirty-eight-year-old Christian man, possessed with Parkinson's Syndrome and shaking in almost every nerve, how he could make an incision into his skull and work a release from his crippling plight. This was a recent discovery and has amazed people who have seen this healing performance. Today the patient is pursuing a livelihood and serving the Kingdom of God again through His church.

Jesus demonstrated to His disciples the need for compassion in the world and His ability to meet this need. They learned through His healing exposition to take their troubles to Jesus and ask help in them.

Wherever we go today there is human need; men possessed with suffering. How great, then, is our belief that Christ has power to meet this need? How much do we trust this man of authority to take charge of the cases with which we cannot grapple? Should we not praise him in peace? Yes! But also for His grace to learn and instrumentally possess truth unto His healing power? He still acts to control man's illness!!

Thursday

Scripture: Mark 2:27

God commands us to rest on the sabbath not because the day in and of itself is holy, but the day is holy because it is a day for the sacred activity of resting. This goes contrary to man who believes that his own personal labor sustains him and accomplishes for him all the necessities of life. God says this is not so. Man does not live by his personal efforts but solely by the gift of God's free grace. This is not to encourage idleness but to present the relaxation of personal effort and rest from daily work as the necessary attitude for receptivity to the work of God in the Word and Sacraments. God says that it is good that one day we cease the struggle for survival and competitive success and remember quietly and leisurely He who gives us all things, Jesus Christ, our Lord. It is rest and not a day that God calls holy. Therefore Christ says that the sabbath was made for men. It was established for man's benefit. Man needs time to turn his attention to God -- to think about God -- to listen to God -- to receive the refreshing, life-giving experience of God's presence. Without this man literally works himself to death.

Friday

Scripture: Mark 3:1-10

Was it a day or week Mark recorded? Either way you can feel the press of people with their endless needs and fixed attitudes. Your mind goes out to him who cares for them. After meeting their hard hearts at a sabbath healing, Jesus sought recreation at sea; but the crowds gathered to hear and be healed. Even unclean spirits recognized him. He had opened himself to care and be pastorally available, and people came. Then on a retreat in the hills, he selected twelve to share his ministry. He needed the resources they could give. No man can fulfill this ministry as a soloist; he needs the contributions of colleagues and disciples.

Home at last, still people sought him out; and because he helped them, his friends though he was having a "break-down." He forgave the sons of men, but some despised his spirit. His mother and brothers sent for him, but he chose brothers and sisters and mother from among those who, like himself, do the will of God. They are his kin and family. Through them -- us -- his ministry goes on day by day. "Day by day: we magnify Thee...."

Saturday

Scripture: Mark 5:1-20

Having experienced Jesus' healing power, we like the man with the unclean spirit are called to go to our friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for us and how he has had mercy on us. This is the call to all Christians! But how difficult it is to venture forth among our friends and neighbors with the witness of God's mighty acts in our own lives -- to be the Church in the world. It is the hardest thing to do -- to witness to our Lord's activity in our own particular world -- to go into our familiar and accustomed world and there to bring our steady witness to the power of our Lord. Rudyard Kipling, in his poem "Muholland's Contract," makes this point well. He represents God as saying to Muholland, who has escaped death in the rush of cattle on the ship, and who wishes to change his job and preach the gospel "handsome and out of the wet:" "Back you go to the cattle-boats and preach My Gospel there." And so for us, from our great experiences of Jesus' healing power back we go to our everyday world -- to our family, to the workshop or study or office or school, to our everyday activity, there to witness in the prosaic routine of ordinary life.

The Conversion of St. Paul

Scripture: Acts 26:12-28

The Collect: O God, who didst teach the multitude of the Gentiles by the preaching of blessed Paul the Apostle: Grant us grace, that we, who this day recall his conversion, may by his example be led to thee; through thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Here in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus we have another example of the fundamental truth that God takes the initiative in coming to us and bringing us to faith in Christ Jesus. This was the marvel for Paul. He was persecuting Christian and yet Christ came to him. Christ used this fact in identifying Himself to Paul. Note also that Christ identified Himself with His disciples, for while Saul was actually hounding the Christians he was persecuting Jesus. Christ is interested in us as persons and individuals but He calls us to faith in Himself so that we in turn may bear witness to the things in which we have seen Christ, so that others may receive the forgiveness of sins and be consecrated by faith in Christ. True faith in Christ makes us willing to submit to God's plan for our lives. Paul went into Damascus; was baptized; declared to both small and great the passion of our Lord, His resurrection from the dead, and how Christ was for both the Jews and Gentiles. Like Paul, we, too, may be considered mad when our lives are given to our fellowmen in this kind of service. There is a kind of holy madness which goes with being a Christian.

The Presentation of our Lord and the Purification of the Virgin Mary

Scripture: Matthew 13:31-32

The Collect: Almighty and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that as thine only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts; through the same thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

What is large is superior. What is small is inferior. So much reasoning runs. But that thought train is off the track. Cut into a huge grapefruit and find its bulk made up of pulp. Peel a tiny tangerine and discover its harvest-moon-colored crescents bulging with juicy fresh-ment. Nature knows how to give the lie to "bigger, therefore better."

So much in the Kingdom of Heaven has to do with the miniature, the minuscule, the tiny. In the appraisals of God, minimums so often become maximums. Little fires kindle great matters, and the still small voice outshouts the raging thunders. The wee bit of a mustard seed becomes a burgeoning bush and a vast motel for migrant birds.

Knowledge of this fact could enable one of America's early Christian greathearts to start planning for a mighty metropolitan hospital when a friend contributed the first one dollar bill. William Alfred Passavant learned from the Lord's parable of the mustard seed that when the forces of the heavenly Kingdom are at work we ought "Never despise the day of small things."

St. Matthias' Day

Scripture: Acts 1:15-26 and II Thess. 3:1-9

The Collect: Almighty God, who didst number thy servant Matthias among the twelve Apostles: Grant that thy Church may ever be instructed and guided by faithful and true pastors; through thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

Substitute for a suicide -- that is what St. Matthias became when by lot the eleven disciples of Christ chose him to take the place of Judas Iscariot. Substitute for a betrayer -- it was no seat of honor Judas left for Matthias to fill.

Joseph Justus was the other candidate for the soiled place.

Both of these nominees deserve the undying admiration of Christians. To be thought worthy to redeem a sullied situation in a holy companionship is to be honored indeed.

Likely the best way to do it is that chosen by Matthias: quiet and humble fidelity. There are no Legion of Merit medals pinned on the chest of this prayer-blessed electee in the next 27 chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. It was enough for him to "take part in this ministry" and "to be numbered with the eleven apostles."

Those steadfast ones whose hearts are directed "into the love of God," and into "the patient waiting for Christ," heal and hallow.

Through their simple and reliable witness they join "the glorious company of the Apostles."