


SILOAH

Sermons On Old
Testament Texts



William Ziethe

Translated by John Richards

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Siloah

SERMONS ON OLD TESTAMENT TEXTS
AS PARALLELS TO THE GOSPELS
OF THE CHURCH YEAR.

By
W. ZIETHE

VOL. I.

Translated by Pastor John Wm. Richards

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P R E F A C E



THE Old Testament is still too little known in our Christian congregations, and there is a relative scarcity of sermons on it. We ministers of the Word must lead our people deeper into these Old Testament Scriptures, and like our Lord on the way to Emmaus, "open unto them all the Scriptures, beginning at Moses and the Prophets," for in this field many a treasure lies hidden.

Such is the author's endeavor in this volume, and he has meanwhile followed the great themes of the Church Year, which is a wholesome custom, fitting the selected Old Testament passages into its Seasons and Sundays. The kind reception given his sermons on the Gospels and the Epistles, 12,000 copies of which were distributed in six years, filled him with thankfulness to the God of all grace, and gave him courage to send out this third book.

Here, as in all his sermons, he has taken to heart the saying of Luther: "Into our churches come poor little children, maidens, old men and women, who have no use for abstruse doctrines and can not understand them. Even though they may say: "He gave us a fine sermon," if one asks them what it was about, they will answer: "I do not know!" So we must preach to them in the simplest way, with clear plain words, that they may have it in *black and white*."

The Prophet (Isaiah 8, 6) sings of the "Waters of Siloah that go softly." May these sermons go out thus on their quiet errands before the eyes of the Lord, and do honor to Him, who is the One among ten thousand altogether lovely, and to His atoning Cross. For in none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved. (Acts 4, 12). This is their bold confession and joyous testimony.

Our Saviour sent the man born blind to wash in the Pool of Siloam (N. T. form for Siloah), and he went and washed and received his sight. Soon after he fell in the dust at Jesus' feet, and cried: "Lord, I believe," and worshipped Him. (John 9, 38.) May the gracious and merciful God bless these sermons, until many a blind eye beholds His beauty, and many a tongue confesses with John (1, 14): "We beheld His glory, glory as of the Only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." Unto Him be glory in the Church in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3, 31.)

W. ZIETHE.

Berlin, on the Monday after the Reformation Festival, 1869.

THE TRANSLATOR

has found delight for his own heart, as well as profitable material for his pulpit ministration, in the translation of these sermons. He has aimed to reproduce their Evangelical soundness and unction in a brief and Americanized form, that he may share with others the pleasure and profit he has received from them.

In publishing this volume he acknowledges his debt to his wife, in whose home church he, as a visitor, first acquired a taste for such sermons in their original tongue.

“By cool Siloam’s shady rill,
How fair the lily grows,
How sweet the breath beneath the hill
Of ‘Sharon’s dewy Rose.’

* * * * *

“O Thou, whose infant feet were found
Within Thy Father’s shrine!
Whose years with changeless virtue crowned,
Were all alike Divine.

“Dependent on Thy bounteous breath,
We seek Thy grace alone,
In childhood, manhood, age, and death,
To keep us still Thine own. Amen.”
—Old Gen. Council S. S. Book, No. 179.

JOHN WM. RICHARDS.
Pastor at St. Luke’s, Philadelphia, Pa.

ERRATUM.

On Page 165 name of Sunday read:
Sexagesima; likewise in headlines to
Page 174.

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FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Gospel: Matthew 21, 1-9.

II, Sam. 6, 12-23: "And it was told King David, saying, Jehovah hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth to him, because of the ark of God. And David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with joy. * * * And David danced before Jehovah with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of Jehovah with shouting and with the sound of trumpet, etc.

*Hymns:

4. The Advent of our God. v. 1f.
6. O How Shall I Receive Thee. v. 1f.
15. Arise, the Kingdom Is at Hand. v. 5f.
7. Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates. v. 1 and 4.
321. Approach My Soul, the Mercy-Seat. v. 1.

Behold! Thy King Cometh Unto Thee.

That was a joyful procession of which our text speaks. The ark had been left in the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite, ever since that day, when Uzzah laid his hand upon it carelessly as they were hauling it home from the Philistines, and was struck dead in his lack of reverence for sacred things. Later King David brought it to Jerusalem, where on Mount Zion he had built a tabernacle for it. All Jerusalem was decorated for this occasion, and the streets resounded with trumpet and song. Even the king laid aside his royal robes and joined the procession in the simple white robe of a priest.

This too is a joyful procession of which our Gospel speaks, as our Lord rides for the last time into

*The numbers are from the Hymnal of the United Lutheran Church.

Jerusalem upon an humble beast of burden, amid the palm branches and hosannas. This Gospel tells us that we have come to the season of Advent, that now the old Church Year is past and we have begun a new year with the Lord and His Church. This year also begins with the cry: "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." In it He will still come and dwell among His congregation with His Holy Word and Sacrament, to bless us with the glorious gifts of His grace. And lest we forget how real this coming is and how much it means, we picture Him as holding His entrance among us anew with the beginning of another Church Year. We let the prophet Zechariah (9, 9) cry out to us once more: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold thy king cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass." And in our hymns we sing:

"The Advent of our God
Our prayers must now employ,
And we must meet Him on His road
With hymns of holy joy." No. 4.

And we ask:

"O how shall I receive Thee,
How greet Thee Lord aright?" No. 6.

Our Old Testament text will help us to realize, first,

Who This Is That Comes to Us.

Wherever the ark was, there was the sanctuary of Israel. It was the symbol of God's gracious presence among His people, the visible throne or footstool of their invisible King, who promised: "I will dwell

among the children of Israel, and will be their God (Ex. 29, 45).” Therefore it stood in the Holiest Place of their Tabernacle. It was a chest of fine wood covered with gold. In it were kept the tables of the Law, showing how God had revealed Himself unto Moses through His Word; the golden pot filled with manna, as a memorial of His goodness to Israel in the desert; and the rod of Aaron which budded, as a warning that God tolerates no quarrelling in His Church, whose things He has established (Num. 17, 10). The lid of the ark was of pure gold. On it the blood of the atoning sacrifice was sprinkled, and it was well called the “mercy-seat,” because it hid from sight the Law which condemns the sinner, and shut it up so that it could not speak. Above the mercy seat stood two golden figures of cherubim, which was the reason why the Psalmist spoke of God as “dwelling between the cherubim,” for thither He descended in the Shekinah cloud which hid Him and yet revealed His presence.

That was a happy day, then, for Israel, when they brought back to Jerusalem the ark, so long in the possession of their enemies, and were assured that the Lord, no more displeased with them, would dwell among them as their Covenant God. To this day we love to sing from the lofty Psalm (24) they raised, as they came with the ark to the gates of Jerusalem:

“Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates.” No. 7.

Then the watchman on the walls demanded:

“Who is this King of Glory?”

And they answered:

“Jehovah strong and mighty,
Jehovah mighty in battle.
Jehovah of hosts,
He is the King of Glory.”

But in itself the ark was the poor work of men's hands. When God ceased to dwell between the cherubim and bless His people, because they had forsaken Him, then the ark had no blessing for them, and their enemies did with it and them as they pleased. Nebuchadnezzar carried away its gold, and burned the ark when he set fire to the Temple, (II. Chron. 39, 18f).

But we have a better token of God's gracious presence among us. It is the Son of God, who dwells among us in His means of grace. He it is whom "God set forth to be a *propitiation*" through faith in His blood (Rom. 3, 25), and what a pity it is the word is not translated always as Luther did: "A Mercy-seat." We have the Christ, who is the "end of the Law for righteousness," and makes an end of it for us believers, as far as its condemnation is concerned. We have the Christ, the living Bread from Heaven, far better than that old-time manna. We have the Christ, the Rod of Jesse, ever fair and green and full of fruit. This is the one who comes among us, the Lord of Hosts and King of Glory. He comes again with each new Church Year as its Sundays review the old Gospel story; He makes it the power of God unto salvation. He comes in His Holy Sacrament, to comfort those who labor and are heavy laden. He comes by His Holy Spirit, to call and gather us, enlighten, sanctify, and preserve us in the true faith. He comes with goods and gifts to bless us for time and eternity. And now we ask another question:

Wither Would He Come?

We are told that the ark was not simply brought into Jerusalem, but "set in its place" in the tabernacle. What place does our Lord Jesus choose? He does not

choose Heaven in our Advent season, for He has already ascended thither, and sits at the right hand of the Father. He does not come to earth, for thus He came once of old, when the angels sang: "Glory to God and Peace to Men." One of our Advent thoughts (though not for this Festival Day) is that He will come again among us with glory, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God. But this is His second coming, when He shall judge the quick and the dead. We cannot say that His advent is into this sanctuary, for since its consecration as a House of God, He already dwells here. Here stands His altar, at which we receive the Sacrament of His Body and Blood; the pulpit from which His Gospel is proclaimed; the font where our children are baptized into His name and made citizens of His Heavenly Kingdom. He is here already, and so fully, that we may well cry with Jacob, "How dreadful (much to be revered) is this place! this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven." (Gen. 28, 17).

What then is the idea of our Advent season? It is that He should come in renewed measure into the hearts and homes of His brethren, where He belongs. This is the "set place" for Him, who asks: "My son, give Me thy heart;" who says: "Behold I stand at the door and knock." This is whither He would come, because our hearts and homes are not wholly and altogether His as yet. It may be that we are His in name, but like the wicked husbandmen have refused Him the fruits of the vineyard. Or we may have half surrendered our hearts to him, but allow the old Enemy, the World, and our own Flesh to contend with Him for their possession. Thither then He would hold His Ad-

vent in this new Church Year, that by His Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacrament He may take complete possession, "reign supreme and reign alone," until we can say: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And He comes with rich gifts; He would bring to heart and home righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, all we need for body and soul, for time and eternity. He would bless us as once of old the house of Obed-edom, when the ark rested there. We ask therefore in conclusion:

How Shall I Receive Thee?

Surely, as David brought up the ark: "with joy, with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet." He was so glad to have the ark of God here in the capital of his kingdom, that "he danced before Jehovah with all his might." I need not remark that his dancing has nothing in common with our modern dance, sometimes an indifferent thing and again thoroughly bad in its influences, but never the expression of a good and holy emotion as here. So Miriam danced and the women of Israel, when the Lord overthrew horse and rider for Pharaoh in the Red Sea. So Jephthah's daughter and her maidens danced to greet her father returning victorious from the battle with the Ammonites. So the women of Israel met Saul after his triumph over the Philistines, singing:

"Saul hath slain his thousands,
But David his tens of thousands."

As Zacchæus made haste to come down from the sycamore, when our Lord offered to abide in his house, so we should receive this Lord of Glory with thankful joy. The prophet says: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout O daughter of Jerusalem." And so the

last of our Advent Epistles bids us: "Rejoice in the Lord always," and again it says: "Rejoice." Today that sacred dance has altogether disappeared, and even the solemn procession has fallen into disrepute because associated with the carrying in of the host, or pretended body of Christ, in the Romish Church. We have far less expression for our joy. The trumpets are missing as a rule, unless found as some sonorous stop in the organ. And as for the shouting, so much of it has been mere nervous excitement with no spiritual meaning, that it is rarely tolerated except in the backwoods. We have very few ways left of rejoicing outwardly, unless it be in our hymns. All the more then should the hallelujahs of the 150th Psalm resound from our very hearts: "Praise ye Jehovah. Praise Him in the firmament of His Power. * * * Praise Him with trumpet sound * * * Praise Him with loud cymbals. * * * Let everything that hath breath praise Jehovah. Praise ye Jehovah."

Again we see how David in his joy girded himself with a linen ephod, or coat of the priests. He laid aside his royal robes for this, to show his God the greater honor, to serve Him as a priest when he might have ruled as king. There are times when our very dress means much. The Evangelical pastor often wears, for example, the simple black gown of the teacher in the Middle Ages. He and his hearers are both helped by such dress. Again there are gaudy garments, which make blasphemous claims for their priestly wearers. All of us very properly put on our "Sunday go-to-meeting clothes" as an outward mark of respect for the Lord's Day and House. Here, too, there may be a display of fashions which is out of

place, though usually on the part of the ignorant and vain. But the "white ephod" for us is found in the 132d Ps.:

Arise, O Jehovah, into Thy resting-place;
Thou, and the ark of Thy strength.
Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness;
And let Thy saints shout for joy."

Isaiah (61, 10) tells of the great High Priest who arrays us for His service: "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." And Peter (I. 2, 9) bids us: "Show forth the excellencies of Him who hath called you out of darkness," while our Epistle today (Rom. 13, 12) cries out: "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. * * * Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." When we walk like our Lord in all godliness and honesty, that is the right dress for His servants, and shows our reverence for Him who comes to us in Word and Sacrament.

Furthermore, when the procession with the ark had only gone six paces, David began to sacrifice burnt-offerings and peace- or thank-offerings. The first were a confession of sin, and besought God's forgiveness. The others thanked Him for His mercy and truth. And David had good reason to do this. From his childhood God's holy name had been revealed to him. God had guided and guarded him in his youth, and given him victory over proud Goliath. He had been saved from Saul's plots, called from tending the flock to sit upon the throne of Israel, and he had wonderfully enlarged his kingdom. How David thanked God for all this we read in the seventh chapter. It is after that goodly

fashion, with burnt-offerings and thank-offerings, that we should begin our Church Year, beseeching God to forgive us for the sinful thoughts, words, and deeds of the old year, and thanking Him for the blessings and mercies with which He has crowned it. With such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Would that none among us might fail to greet our Advent King with such offerings of praise and incense of prayer! So all Israel welcomed the ark: king and people, priest and Levite. May our rulers, like King David, think more of being active in the Church and honoring God, than of shining in the state. May they say with Joshua: 'As for me and my house (official family), we will serve the Lord.' May all who teach and labor in the Church, like the priests and Levites, greet Him in the pure garments of faithfulness and unselfishness. May all the people, rich and poor, high and low, young and old, consecrate themselves anew as the "People of His possession." Then shall this be a year of blessing for our land.

But we must not encourage vain hopes; and just as little does our text. Not all received the ark with joy; not all put on a white ephod and danced mightily before it. Now as then some must be excepted, who take no share in these sacrifices of praise to God. One soul at least did not rejoice on this day. It was Michal, the daughter of Saul, David's wife. As she looked out of her window, and saw the king dancing before the ark in the simple garb of a priest, she despised him in her heart. She was too proud to lay aside her royal robes, and put herself on the level of the priests and common people; and she was angry with her husband for such undignified behavior. But David did not let

the scolding of his wife disturb his joy. He tells her that because the Lord has chosen him above his fathers and appointed him prince over Israel, he will humble himself a great deal more than this whenever he can do honor to the Lord. Those were noble words of David's, and with them God was well pleased, who declares that He will "exalt the humble, and humble those who exalt themselves." "And Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child unto the day of her death." There were none to sit after her upon a throne in Israel.

Her only descendants are a spiritual line. Her children and children's children of this sorry sort are still among us: those who smile contemptuously at the faith of others, at our worship of God, and our Christian walk and work. We hear many an unkind word from such at times; and often as we come home in holy joy they meet us with the scornful pride of a Michal. Let us answer them, as David did, that because of what God has done for us we will in the future humble ourselves still more, to serve and sacrifice unto "Him that cometh in the name of the Lord." Let us say with Paul: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." With such a good confession let us receive the King of Glory, who holds His entrance among us again today. By some He may still be called "Despised and Rejected of men," but by us "Beloved and Accepted." Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Gospel: Luke 21, 25-36.

Gen. 19, 12-27; espec. 17: "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the Plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

Hymns.

4. The Advent of Our God. v. 4.
3. Hark! An Awful Voice Is Sounding. v. 4.
10. Once He Came in Blessing. v. 2.
513. Lo! He comes in Clouds Descending.
515. Day of Wrath! That Day of Mourning! v. 1 and 7.

The Days of Lot—An Example of Christ's Second Advent.

The Gospel of the First Advent Sunday shows us how the Lord Jesus once came to earth in grace as our Saviour. But the Gospel for this Second Advent Sunday shows us how He will one day come in glory to be our Judge. That is the day, when the hearts of millions will "fail them for fear, and for looking after the things that are coming to pass on earth." That is the day, when other millions will "lift up their heads with joy, because their redemption draweth nigh." "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh;" this is our Lord's warning to us at the close of today's Gospel. Our sermon then must dwell on our Lord's Second Advent, and our preparation for it. But why this O. T. text about Sodom and Gomorrah? What has that to do with the Second Advent? Jude in his Epistle sets these cities before us as an example of those "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." And Peter

(II. 2, 6) says: "God made them an ensample unto those who should thereafter live ungodly." And our Lord speaks of how in the days of Lot (Luke 17, 28f): "They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all." And then he adds: "After the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of Man is revealed." But Lot escaped, and so we may well say with our Epistle today (Rom. 15, 4): "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope." In Sodom and Gomorrah the N. T. truth is set forth as an O. T. object lesson. Here, too, we have a foretaste of our Lord's second coming to judge the world.

A Doctrine of Unquestionable Truth.

The Son of Man "will come to judge the quick and the dead," as we confess in the Creed. He will come "in the clouds," "with power and great glory," "with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God." "The dead shall hear His voice and come forth." "The Heavens shall pass away with a great noise, the elements be dissolved with great heat, and the earth and the works therein shall be burned up (II. Peter 3, 10)." The great Judge shall sit upon the throne of His glory, and all nations shall be gathered before Him. The judgment books shall be opened, wherein are recorded the deeds, words, and even the thoughts of men. To some He will say: "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom," but to others: "Depart from me, ye accursed, into everlasting fire."

This Second Advent is a part of the Apostles' Creed, an article about which all the Church agrees. Yet there are unbelievers in our day, who deny this doctrine and laugh at it. They cannot understand how the earth, which they see about them with its mountains and seas, towns and cities, can be destroyed by fire. They think that the researches of science demand a different kind of end for the world, though some great scientists show that this end also is possible, and our moon is a burnt-out world. There are mockers, just as Peter (I. 3, 3f) predicted, "in the last day scoffers would come, saying "Where is the promise of His coming, for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the world."

Thus today the very thing happens which we find 4000 years before in Sodom. The angels said unto Lot: "Hast thou here any besides? son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whomsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of the place, for we will destroy this place." Lot believed their word, and ran to his sons-in-law with the cry: "Up, get you out of this place; for Jehovah will destroy the city." "But he seemed unto his sons-in-law as one that mocked." They laughed at the old man for bothering himself about such foolishness. And the others in Sodom to whom they told it as a joke, laughed with them. They refused to be disturbed by such fables. Lot had always stood aloof from their manner of life, and they were accustomed to mock at the old man who would not share in their pleasures of sin. So after a good laugh they went to bed in good spirits. The night passed, and the day began to dawn. A summer shower seemed to come up suddenly. The thunder rolled, and the

lightning flashed now, as they had never seen it before. Fire fell in great masses upon the earth, and as the ground there was full of petroleum springs, the very earth began to blaze about them, until where once that valley had lain, lovely as the garden of God, there was left only the barren shores of the Dead Sea. To this day that wasted region, and that lake in which no fish can live, declares how "This world passes away, and the lusts thereof, but the Word of God abideth forever." The words the angels spake to Lot that night were true, and the scoffers found this out soon enough to their sorrow and destruction.

So also this prophecy of Christ's Second Advent, though questioned, remains an unquestionable truth, no matter who may try to laugh it away. Let him bring forth his doubts and objections; here we rest on God's Word. Even David sings in the 102d Psalm:

"Of old Thou didst lay the foundation of the earth;
And the heavens are the work of Thy hands.
They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure;
Yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment;
As a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed;
But Thou art the same,
And Thy years have no end."

And Isaiah (51, 6) speaks of "the heavens vanishing in smoke, and the earth waxing old as a garment." In our Gospel our Lord says: "Heaven and earth shall pass away." And John in his vision sees "a new heaven and a new earth" replacing the old. There are many more such prophecies, so that on this solid ground of "it is written" stands this truth which is unshakable.

A Message of Saving Grace.

appears also in this story of Lot. Peter (II. 2, 7ff) gives us a goodly record of him, calling him righteous

Lot, and speaking of how he vexed his righteous soul with the ungodly deeds of Sodom. Yet there was much in Lot which was faulty even in the eyes of men. He acted foolishly in separating himself from his uncle Abraham, a faithful teacher and safe leader; in pitching his tent toward Sodom, because it lay in a fertile valley; and there in Sodom he did not play the manly part of a strong, clean soul, in that last night. We find also that his daughters were betrothed to men of that ungodly city. In spite of the angels' warning of judgment to come, he miserably delayed and did not flee in haste. He, too, had a mild attack of their contagious unbelief, and his heart clung to Sodom even while the judgments of God were descending upon it. So when the angel brought them out of the city, and bade them flee to the mountains, he stops like a spoiled child to complain that that some evil may overtake them there, and to beg that the little town of Zoar be spared for his sake. These are faults which even human eyes discover in righteous Lot. How must he have appeared before the holy and righteous God, of whom David writes (Ps. 143, 2): "In Thy sight shall no man living be justified;" and Job says: "He putteth no trust in His saints," and "The heavens are not clean in His sight."

Yet faulty Lot was saved, saved for Abraham's sake, whom God remembered (v. 29), and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." The message the angels brought Lot was one of saving *grace*. For that reason they cried: "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." In that same grace the Lord plans to save his wife and daughters and their

Sodomite husbands, and all that belongs to him in Sodom. By that grace the judgment upon Sodom is held back, as the angel expressly says: "Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither (to Zoar)." In grace also Zoar was spared: "I will not overthrow this city for which thou hast spoken." Lot himself, and all that is here related about how he was saved, is a story of God's grace and mercy.

And so is also the prophecy of the Second Advent. Of the men of our world we must confess just what the angels said of the cities of the Plain: "Their cry is great, and their sin is very grievous." This earth from the time it was stained with the blood of Abel shed by his own brother's hand, has been crying to God because of the misdeeds of men. The sun protests against abominable things it has to witness; and the moon because of deeds of shame done in its shadowy light. The dumb creatures appeal to God because of the cruelty they often suffer at the hands of men. And the angel will one day cry out to Him that sitteth on the cloud: "Send forth Thy sickle, and reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (Rev. 14, 15)." The holy and just God cannot long postpone the Day of His Wrath. But as of old He was willing to spare Sodom if ten righteous men could be found in it, so now the storms of His judgment upon an evil generation tarry, because of His believing children who dwell among them. As He spared Israel in spite of their idolatry before the golden calf, because Moses interceded for them, so He delays the great and dreadful day, because His Son intercedes for us as our merciful High Priest. The plea of the Heavenly Gardner for the unfruitful

fig tree: "Let it stand this year also," stays the axe of God uplifted in judgment. Therefore Peter is right when he says (II. 3, 9): "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness; but is long-suffering to youward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Thus the Advent unto Judgment turns out after all to be only another part of the Gospel of saving grace. The best of us are like Lot, half-hearted, not loving God with all our heart and strength, but led astray in many ways by the world and its lusts, by the children of this world and their ways. But we shall be saved in spite of our weakness. Our Saviour pleads for us, who have been redeemed by His blood and baptized into His name. We are His and shall not perish. Therefore He sends us this message of saving grace, even as the angels were sent to Lot, that we may "watch and pray," "flee from the wrath to come," and "be counted worthy to escape these things." But here, too, there is

A Word of Solemn Warning.

Lot and his daughters were saved, but what became of his sons-in-law who laughed at the angel's message? They lie buried, buried beneath the ruins of Sodom, the booty of an eternal destruction because of their unbelief. And what of Lot's wife? She left the city-gate with her husband and daughters. God's grace reached out a helping hand to her. She was almost saved. But then she stood still and looked back! Was it in unbelief about God's keeping His threat, or because her heart hung upon her household goods left behind, or in pity for those who perished, or in curiosity to look into God's judgments? What feeling

moved her to this act of disobedience we will never know. Neither will we know just what happened to her. All we are told is that an evil death came upon her. She was cut off suddenly in the midst of her sin. When they sought her after a few days, they found her dead and encrusted with salt, like the objects today about the Dead Sea.

By the shore of that Sea there stand today many pillars and blocks of salt, and one of the Apocryphal Books speaks of such a pillar as the "monument of an unbelieving soul." Whether this then still marked the spot where she died we do not know, but of this we are sure: the Lord Jesus says: "Remember Lot's wife," and makes her fate a solemn warning for us. She was almost saved, and yet lost forever, that is what He means.

Yes, here there are four warnings. "Escape for thy life." That is the one thing for which a man will give all he possesses. It is the undying soul which we dare not lose to gain the whole world; and which ought to be our first and great concern, though we often deal with it as though it were the last and least. Again the angel said: "Neither stay in all the plain." We are to have no fellowship at all with this unbelieving world, but stand as far from her as we can, and the judgment which hangs over her. "Look not behind thee," was the third solemn warning. For, "He that putteth his hand to the plough and looketh back is not fit for the Kingdom of God." Paul says: "Forgetting the things that are behind, I press toward the mark (goal) for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus." and finally the angel said: "Haste thee, escape thither" (to Zoar). We, too, have a city like that of which

Isaiah sings (26, 1) : "A strong city. Salvation will God appoint for its walls and bulwarks. Open the gates that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in." Into that city we enter, when we put on the righteousness of Christ our Saviour, through the means of grace and our life and work in the Christian Church. That is why we are to turn our backs upon this world and its alluring temptations, and let these things have no power over us. Then when our Lord comes again, we can give account of ourselves with joy and not with trembling. The Lord help us to believe this doctrine of unquestionable truth, to accept its message of saving grace, and to heed this solemn warning which accompanies it. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Gospel: Matthew 11, 2-10.

I. Kings 19, 1-8: "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. * * * But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die, and said: It is enough; now O Jehovah, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers, etc.

Hymns:

- 8. Comfort, Comfort Ye My People. v. 1.
- 9. Hark, the Glad Sound, the Saviour Comes. v. 4f.
- 14. The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns. v. 6.
- 15. Arise, the Kingdom Is at Hand. v. 2f.
- 349. O Morning Star! So Pure, So Bright. v. 2f.
- 406. Father, Whate'er of Earthly Bliss.
- 412. Come Ye Disconsolate, Where'er Ye Languish. v. 1 and 3.
- 348. O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go. v. 3f.

Elijah and the Angel. An Advent Scene in the Wilderness.

The season of Advent, in which we find ourselves, has a twofold meaning, and calls forth two kinds of sermons. It is first of all a time of holy joy. We hear the gracious message: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion," etc. We think now of Him who came into the world to save sinners, and stands among us in His Word and Sacraments with all His goods and gifts. The joyful Christmastime is at the door, and its sunshine streams out into the days before it. In the words of the first Advent Gospel we cry: "Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord;" and with the last Advent Epistle we bid our souls "Rejoice in the Lord always."

But this is also a season of solemn preparation. Throughout these weeks and days there re-echoes that cry: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." Jesus Christ, the King of Glory, would enter our hearts, and we must make room there for Him. In the olden Church, Advent was a time of fasting and prayer, when worldly pleasures were laid aside to make ready for Christ's coming. The first Advent Epistle warns us that "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep, etc." And the second Advent Gospel pictures to us the last and glorious coming of Christ, and closes with the admonition: "Watch ye and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

There are two great thoughts in this season, and two great figures which express them. One is our "King, just and having salvation, lowly and riding on" an humble beast of burden; the other is the stern figure of John the Baptist, he of whom it is written: "Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, who shall prepare Thy way before Thee" (Mal. 3, 1). And here in our O. T. text we find those same thoughts of solemnity and joy with John the Baptist's familiar background of the wilderness for this older Advent scene.

Elijah Is Despondent.

Of all the prophets who lived from Moses to John Elijah was the greatest in word and work. He did what he could to restore the honor of Jehovah among his idol-loving people. By prayer he closed the heavens, so that here was no rain or dew for three years and six months. He called down fire from Heaven

upon his sacrifice on Mount Carmel, that all the people might know the true and living God. He slew by the brook Kishon 450 priests of Baal, who had been misleading God's people. After that he prayed the heavens open, so that a refreshing rain fell upon the parched fields. He shook King Ahab's evil heart by such words and works, until even he was ready to forsake the idol Baal and worship Elijah's God who made heaven and earth. Ahab went home and spoke of this to his wife Jezebel; but all that Elijah said and did had only hardened her heathen heart, and embittered her against him. She sent a "messenger unto Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as one of them by tomorrow about this time."

This threat unnerved Elijah. Hitherto we read: "The Word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying "Do this or that;" and he let himself be guided fearlessly by God's word and will. But now, without stopping to inquire of the Lord, "he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness." He seems to have no plan except just to flee from the vengeance of the blood-thirsty Jezebel; no goal in view, but to escape out of her kingdom into Judah where the Word of God was still revered, and His prophets lived in safety. Only when he came to far-away Beersheba did he stop in his flight, leaving his attendant and journeying on alone to throw himself down under the juniper tree, and cry: "It is enough, now, O Jehovah, take away my life."

What is it that so unmans him, and makes him flee

in this aimless fashion. If it were another man, we would say that he fled in fear of his life before this weak and changeable king, his bitter, bloodthirsty partner, and this people who one day shouted their approval and the next raged against him as a mob. But it was not this fear which upset Elijah. He, too, was no "reed shaken by the wind, no man in soft clothing," courting the favor of the king. One day during the drought, Ahab met him and said: "Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?" And Elijah told him to his face: "I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of Jehovah, and thou hast followed the Baalim," (18, 18). And on Mount Carmel, Elijah demanded of that fickle multitude: "How long go ye limping between the two sides? If Jehovah be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him" (18, 21). That was not the kind of a man who would flee into the desert, and throw himself down under a juniper tree, simply because he was afraid to lose his life.

This Elijah had spared no toil and trouble, avoided no danger and persecution in trying to lead Israel back to their deserted God. He could well say that "zeal for God's house had eaten him up." Up to this time he had leaned upon the promises of God, and believed He would triumph over the unbelief and idolatry of Israel. But now at last he feels he has hoped and labored in vain. No vision of better days cheers him. He may have "put his trust in princes," and if so, Ahab utterly failed him. He sees on all sides only the victory of heathen ideas and unclean customs, the triumph of Baal. No results have followed his preaching and miracles. He has come to look upon himself as a use-

less tool which God has cast away, as one deposed from office. After all he has done and borne, the Lord does not own the work of His servant, but lets his enemies triumph over him. This is the reason for that despondent cry: "Take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

He wished that he might die. He does not speak these words as many do today, who are weary of a life of sin, and forget that death will only set them down before the judgment-bar; neither as Job, when he cursed the day of his birth in his misery; nor as Jonah, when the gourd withered in which he had so much pleasure. It is a great temptation into which Elijah has fallen, because his work seems a failure, and he himself discredited of God. And many another faithful witness for God has felt the same way under such discouragements, and like Elijah wished he were dead. The great prophet Jeremiah (20, 7, 14 and 18) complains that he has testified for God, and the only result is that he is laughed at and mocked on every side. He too asks why he was born, if he must end his days in shame, and curses the day he saw the light. And this is the mood of John as he sits in prison, and waits day after day in vain for God's Kingdom to come after his own ideas. In his despair he asks the very Christ: "Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?" He overlooks those six marks of the Messiah, who makes the blind see, etc. And likewise the great reformer Luther writes at the close of his sad life: "I have lived long enough. God grant me in mercy my end. For all things grow worse, and the Devil reigns on earth. I do not wish to live any longer." He, too, has forgotten how God's seed must lie long beneath the crusted earth

until the rain softens it, and then the blade appears at last. These despondent words came from the same man who wrote for us:

“The Word they still shall let remain,
And not a thank have for it.”

No. 195.

But what place has such despondency among our Advent rejoicing? We are thinking now of what God has done for us in the old Church Year, how faithfully He has ministered to us in Word and Sacrament. But we, too, think now of how little fruit all this has brought forth in the lives of our church and people. That is the solemn question confronting us in this Advent season. When the pastor has striven with all faithfulness to preach the Word, and others too have waited upon their office in the congregation, we naturally ask what fruit we are to have for this. It is not enough for zealous servants of God, that the congregation has met its expenses, and continues about as it was. We long to see a great advance in spiritual growth, many virtues and graces to reward our efforts like the rich fruits in our gardens. If some walk in ways of sin, and many a heart brings forth only leaves and no fruit, we, too, cast ourselves down under the juniper tree, with the despairing feeling that we and our work are failures and the sooner it is over the better.

And you fathers and mothers, striving to bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, are you not heavy hearted when they go wrong, and all your counsels, prayers, and tears seem in vain? You teachers in the school, do you not often feel like discouraged Elijah and John, when in the foolish hearts of childhood there seems room for every thing else but

the knowledge of salvation and eternal life in Christ, and your instruction seems poured out as water upon the sand. Yes, how many a striking parallel we find among us, to these Advent scenes in the wilderness. Our own, or others' unfaithfulness to us, our sins and misfortunes, or theirs, cast us down under the juniper tree with Elijah, crying: "It is enough; now, O Jehovah, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." We wish in our discouragement that the struggles of our life were over.

The Angel Comforts Elijah.

Weak and weary, Elijah falls asleep under the shadow of the juniper tree. And behold the angel comes and touches him, saying: "Arise and eat." He looks about him and finds a cake baked on the coals, and a jug of water at his head. Refreshed by these, he begins to take heart again. Even there in the wilderness, there is manna, and in the hardest bits of our pilgrimage God has times of refreshing for us. These have not failed us in the year past. How often we have come into His House weary and troubled, and found comfort in the hymns we sang, or the prayers that rose to His throne. These lifted us up out of our despondency. The Gospel and the Sacrament sent us home with a very different spirit from that in which we came. We "lifted up our eyes to the hills of help;" our discouragement vanished; and the whole world assumed a brighter hue.

In this new Church Year we will also find by our side the "cake baken on the ashes, and the cruse of water." It is Advent. Our King comes unto us! Here is more than an angel, the Son of the living God Him-

self! And Christmas is at hand; soon we will hear the glad tidings which none but angels are fit to proclaim: "Unto you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Here is He who is the very Bread from Heaven and Water of Life for us. These words are more than pretty figures of speech. Let us eat and drink of Him by faith, and make Him our Saviour. Then we may lay ourselves down in peace in His everlasting arms, and rest as Elijah slept at last so peacefully under the juniper, for,

"This is the Christ, our God and Lord,
Who in all need shall aid afford;
He will Himself our Saviour be,
From all our sins to set us free."

No. 19.

But the angel comes again, and says: "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee." Elijah had said: "It is enough;" but God says: "No! It is not enough, Elijah. You have more to do." Elijah was not a worn-out tool, and his labor was not in vain. God puts a journey before him, and has an errand for him to run, for which He will give him fresh courage and strength. He rises from his sleep, eats and drinks and in the strength of that food goes on for forty days and nights, "until he reaches Horeb the mount of God."

A new Church Year lies before us, a "great journey." God has use for us, and would carry on His work in and through us. Our calling, whether it be in the church or school, shop or store, city or field, in the busy round of public life, or the quiet circle of the home, is the way appointed for us. And it is God's way too, which He will walk with us in the New Year. If we are to bear the heat and burden of its day, we need His

refreshing grace. If sorrows are there, still it is our way, and His way also by our side. This thought, that it is His way, and that He walks it with us, will help us over its desert stretches. It may only go on for some of us a few years more, yet is it a *great* journey; great in its end and object, for through these experiences God's Kingdom is coming to us, and through us to others; and in it we shall be *greatly* strengthened, if we walk it with God; and shall reach the great and blessed goal He has fixed for us.

Therefore we must "arise and eat," lay hold on the Living Bread and Water of Life He offers us in the Christ who is ours. His Word will guide us, and His Holy Spirit strengthen and keep us. His rod and staff shall comfort us, and we will fear no evil because He is with us. So we will go on, not forty days only, but many of us forty years and longer, if He please. And we, too, will come at length to the "mount of God," the Heavenly Jerusalem, the general assembly and church of the first-born, who are enrolled in Heaven (Heb. 12, 22). And there we shall drink of the water of life and eat of the hidden manna (Rev. 2, 17) He will give to him that overcometh. And our earthly hosannas and cries to the Lord for help shall be changed into hallelujahs of Heavenly praise. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.

Gospel: John 1, 19-28.

I. Kings 19, 8-18: "And he arose and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and behold the Word of Jehovah came unto him, and He said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for Jehovah, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And He said, Go forth, and stand on the mount before Jehovah. And behold Jehovah passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and break in pieces the rocks before Jehovah; but Jehovah was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but Jehovah was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but Jehovah was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice, etc."

Hymns:

- 10. Once He came in Blessing. v. 2.
- 8. Comfort, Comfort Ye, My People. v. 2.
- 346. Thou hidden Love of God, Whose Height. v. 3.
- 2. On Jordan's Banks the Herald's Cry. v. 1f.
- 171. Thy Word, O Lord, Like Gentle Dews. v. 2.

The Glory of the Lord at the Cave on Horeb.

Our Gospel sets before us again the figure of John the Baptist. He is the Elijah of the New Testament. There are many points of resemblance between these two prophets. In the opening chapter of II. Kings (v. 8) Ahaziah's messengers describe Elijah, who met them with a rebuke on their way to the oracle of Baal-zebub: "He was a hairy man (in rough, shaggy mantle), and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins," which is exactly John's raiment of camel's hair (Mat.

3, 4) and rawhide girdle. And they were as much alike in their spirit as in their dress. In the next to the last verse of the O. T. John is called by the name of his prototype: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Jehovah come." And in the N. T. the angel foretells his birth and work: "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn unto the Lord their God. And he shall go before His (Christ's) face in the spirit and power of Elijah, etc." (Luke 1, 16f). Our Lord says of John (Mat. 11, 14): "And if ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, that is to come." And when the disciples remind Him after His Transfiguration, that Elijah is expected before the Kingdom of his Glory begins on earth (Mat. 17, 10), He replies: "Elijah indeed cometh and shall restore all things: but I say unto you that Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but did unto him whatsoever they would."

So if we would find an O. T. parallel for our Gospel, it must be this narrative of Elijah on Mount Horeb. It, too, is an Advent scene, and sets us asking how we should draw near to the Christmas Day. The Lord bless it unto our hearts, that we may keep the feast aright. Its first answer is,

With Humble Repentance for Our Sins.

In the strength of that food he found under the juniper tree, Elijah went on forty days and nights to Horeb. Here God had appeared unto Moses and called him to lead his people out of Egypt. And here on Israel's journey through the wilderness, Moses brought water out of the rock, and the Amalakites were dis-

comforted while Aaron and Hur upheld his hands in prayer.

But now we are thinking of what took place in the stable at Bethlehem, which in all probability was a cave in the rocks like many other stables of the Orient. So we will ask only about this cave on Horeb, where Elijah beheld the glory of the Lord. "What doest thou here?" is the question God asked of Elijah, and he could truthfully answer, that he had spared no toil or trouble, and single-handed he had risked all manner of dangers to restore the altars and worship of the true and living God, and that he alone survived of God's prophets.

That same question God asks of us, as we draw near Christmas and the end of the year, and He has a right to do so. Behind us lies the Old Year, in which His Gospel has been proclaimed to us, and He has borne so patiently with us, and blessed us so abundantly. But as we look back upon it, can we say with Elijah: "I have been very jealous for Jehovah the God of hosts"? His answer humbles us. Some among us have done nothing for the Lord. They have looked out well for the body, provided for their homes, and followed their callings. But amid all these earthly cares they have neglected the service of God. Some have done a little for the Lord. They have spent a little time, strength, and money in His service, but have not done what they could and should. And if there is anything the Lord hates, it is this half-heartedness. He says (Rev. 3, 15): "I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew (or spit) thee out of My mouth." Of course, there are many among us who have been

“jealous for the Lord,” and busily at work for Him. But they will be the first to realize how their works have been soiled in many ways by sins, and that they have fallen short of the good they would like to have done in thought, word and deed.

So this question: “What doest thou here?” bows us down in humble repentance on this last Advent Sunday, as we review the past year. It bids us fall down in the dust before the Manger, and confess with Paul (Titus 3, 15): “Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, being justified by His grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” This is the right frame of mind for Christmas, when with all our hearts we poor sinners long for the great Christmas gift of God. Though many other gifts of earth may be lacking, yet it will be a blessed Christmas for him, upon whom the Father in Heaven bestows His Beloved Son, and unto whom He is born as his Saviour. Again, we keep Christmas

With Thankful Praise for God's Grace.

And now Elijah goes forth at God's command, and stands in the door of the cave. Mighty signs and wonders pass before his eyes. The storm wind rends the mountain, and breaks the very rocks in pieces. The earthquake follows, and the fire, and at last the still small voice, as when the stars shine out after the storm, and evening zephyrs whisper in our ears. Some have thought these signs were a rebuke for Elijah,

because he tried to build up God's ruined Kingdom in Israel in so rough and stormy a way. But they are meant rather to comfort and instruct him. They tell him God is about to take a hand in this struggle with evil, where Elijah has accomplished so little. Therefore he is sent to anoint Hazael (v. 15) king over Syria, who shall be like a storm wind falling on Israel from without, blasting her cities and slaying her children. And Jehu he is to anoint king over Israel, who will shake the land like an earthquake from within. It was he, you recall, who caused Jezebel to be thrown from the window, slew the sons of wicked Ahab and the remaining priests of Baal, cast down the idols in their temples, and thus fearfully avenged the insult put upon God's altars. And in his own stead, Elijah was to anoint Elisha, who should come upon that land and people as a fire, carrying on Elijah's work with such zeal that before him the godless were as stubble before a forest fire. Thus Elijah is assured that God will visit and judge this people, with whom he could do nothing. But he is also convincingly told, that when their iniquities have been purged away by these judgments, there will come times of refreshing from the Lord, like the gentle voice he heard on Horeb. That was a wonderful glimpse into the councils of God, which He gave here to Elijah. God saw further into the future than these few years ahead. The whole era of the Law was such a storm-wind, earthquake, and fire; and after that O. T. Dispensation came the "still small voice" of the Gospel.

We can understand far better than Elijah did on Horeb, how after God has rebuked sin, He will speak peace to His people. For we look into the cave at

Bethlehem, and hear there the voices of the New Dispensation. John declares (1, 14) : "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." And Paul writes (Titus 2, 11) : "The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men." Who among us has not heard the still small voice which speaks to us in the Silent Night from the Manger. The angel brings tidings of great joy : "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." And the Heavenly host sing : "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased" (Luke 2, 11ff).

He who would hear more of this still small voice let him note how the Lord Jesus goes His way through His earthly life, meek and lowly, gracious and merciful, the Friend of sinners. Mark how He bears poverty and persecution, hatred and scorn, and yet never wearies of loving, praying for, and blessing men. Though He suffers and dies at their hands, His hands are lifted in a benediction upon our race as He ascends to Heaven. All this is but the voice of the Gospel, revealing the "grace of God that bringeth salvation" to all men.

And though there is no more any dispensation of the Law, those wonders Elijah saw on Horeb have an important lesson for us. It was necessary for the storm-wind of the Law to clear the air, before the Gospel voice, like a sighing zephyr, could be heard. Such messengers must still go before the Lord, if there is to be room for Him in the hearts of men. John the Baptist must always "prepare the way of the Lord" before Him. First the storms of the Law must sweep

over the soul, leveling the hills of pride, and breaking the rocks of defiant self-righteousness. First the earthquake must set our hearts shaking beneath the curse of God's violated Law. First the fire must come, the consuming, purifying fire of repentance, and destroy all that is worldly, unholy, and ungodly in our hearts. And only then can come the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, who brings us pardon and peace; the still small voice of Jesus our Saviour, who says: "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee."

Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle when he heard that voice, and felt the presence of the Lord. And the very seraphim, who wait upon Him, cover their faces (Is. 6, 2) with one of their three pairs of wings, before the majesty of His grace and the wonders of His love. So, too, must we look into the Manger at Bethlehem, where the Christ Child lies. It is with reverent step and thankful speech that we draw near to the gracious Christmas Day. Again we come

With Joyful Hope for Christ's Kingdom on Earth.

That was a mighty encouragement for Elijah, when God told him that there "were still 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal." He had lamented: "I, even I only, am left." But God answers now: "No! You are not alone! As you walk, I will take your hand, and by your side there will be 7,000 to keep you company, who also walk in the ways of their fathers and keep My covenant." That assurance was like a cheering ray of light for Elijah in all the dark days to come. Even so Isaiah was comforted in the days of Israel's backsliding (10, 21): "A remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the

mighty God." And Paul walks in that same hope, that as there were the 7,000 in Elijah's day, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."

We, too, need this light of hope. The more thankful we are for the grace of God in the Christmas story, the more it pains us to see the indifference of so many. Though baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus, they have their pleasure in these days only in the gifts of men and the things of the world. For the true Christmas joy and the precious gift of the Christ, they care nothing. Many walk in this holy season as the open enemies of Christ and His Gospel, giving themselves up bodily to the lusts of the flesh and the service of the devil. Sometimes in a whole household there seems to be but one (and often a child there) who waits for and welcomes the Christ Child! And in a whole great congregation how few there are who gather to worship Him on this Day we celebrate in honor of His birth!

Therefore we, too, will remember with joy the 7,000 faithful ones of Elijah's time, and the remnant God preserved in the days of Isaiah and Paul, and through all the bloody persecutions of the early Church, through the horrors of the Inquisition, 400 years ago, and through all the icy chill of rationalism a century ago. So, until He comes to earth again, He will keep for Himself a little band of those who love His Word and glorify Him as their Saviour. "The gates of Hell shall not prevail against His Church," even though it be but "a little flock." When He appears, even though it be after the Great Tribulation, there will still be on earth the 7,000 who have not bowed their knee

to the god of this world, but who lift up their heads in those days because their redemption draweth nigh." This joyful hope for the Kingdom of Christ on earth must cheer and strengthen us, as it did Elijah. Then our Christmas joy will not be disturbed by the little faith or the great indifference of those who keep it as a mere holiday and an occasion for the flesh. But we will strive the more earnestly to have our part and lot among that faithful remnant, who thank and praise God for His grace, and who wait patiently for the victorious coming of the Christ at the end of this age of the Church. Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

Gospel: Luke 2, 1-14.

Micah 5, 2-4: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting, etc."

Hymns:

- 34. Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come.
- 31. O Little Town of Bethlehem.
- 45. O Saviour of Our Race.
- 19. Good News from Heaven the Angels Bring. v. 6.
- 32. Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord. vs. 2 and 3.

The Christmas Booklet of Micah.

The blessed Christmas time is come again. Its hymns resound; its story is told; its joy thrills our hearts. The glory of the Lord which shone over the fields of Bethlehem streams out now over all the earth. There is no land today where it does not shine and gladden the hearts of men; no speech or language where the voice of its songs is not heard. From one end of the earth to the other, in palace and hut, the children are rejoicing and older folks look on happy and thoughtful. Even the sick and sorrowful find comfort and joy in this Day. Through all its pleasures there rings the old, yet ever new Christmas story: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord!" (Luke 2, 11).

And this glory of the Lord will shine on to the

end of time. As long as poor sinners are pilgrims in the dust of earth, this Gospel, this good news, will be their light and manna, their rod and staff. As long as human hearts beat here below, the Christmas Day will be kept, until the Christ comes again to bring in the acceptable Year of the Lord, and the Eternal Christmas Day in Heaven begins.

This glory of the Lord, this Dayspring from on high, like any earthly day has its twilight or dawning. Its first beams appear in the Garden of Paradise. Its rays gild the tents of Abraham in the plains of Mamre, and light up the dying bed of good old Jacob, Moses and David and all the Prophets walked in the beauty of its rising. Even the Prophet Micah saw this day from afar, and spake of it as he was moved by the Holy Spirit. His prophecy is our Christmas Booklet; and as we open it we will find there first,

The Poverty of the Christmas Place.

A few miles south of Jerusalem lies the little town of Bethlehem. The place is full of holy memories. Here Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, died and was buried. Here Ruth gleaned in the fields. Here David, the man after God's own heart, was born, and here he watched over his father's sheep, until Samuel anointed him king.

But how poor is all this story of the past, compared with the undying glory Micah sees as he writes: "But thou Bethlehem, etc." That saying was recalled by Israel from century to century. When the Wise Men came 700 years later, asking where the King of the Jews should be born, the scribes all answered without any hesitation: "In Bethlehem of Judæa: for

thus it is written through the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, art in no wise least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come forth a Governor, who shall be shepherd of My people Israel." Bethlehem is the Christmas place. There in the city of David, the great Son of David was born, "whose throne God promised to establish forever," (II. Sam. 7, 14)." There where there were so many shepherds, the Good Shepherd was born. Its ancient name was Ephratah, or The Fruitful, and there the branch out of the stock of Jesse sprang up (Is. 11, 1). And Bethlehem itself means House of Bread; there the living Bread came down from Heaven.

But how strange a thing it was, that the King of heaven and earth, when He came to be Israel's Lord and ours, chose this little town as His birth-place. It never numbered 100 families within its walls; it was little among the thousands of Judah. Yet it was here that the Christ was born; not in the capital, or some other city rich and great. His mother, too, was poor. She brought forth her first-born son in a stable or khan such as poorer travelers occupied, wrapped Him in a few yards of cloth, and laid Him on the hay in a manger.

And by this we are reminded where the Christ wills to be born again today. The Christmas place for all time is not where there is pomp, pride, and show, but the humble heart. He who feels himself the least of all the Apostles, who is so poor in spirit that he thinks there is no good thing in him, as he bows down

in the dust like the Publican, has the kind of heart the Lord loves to enter,

“Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.” No. 31, v. 3.

and again we look at

The Break of the Christmas Day.

Before the Christ came to earth, before the Day broke and the Day-star arose, there was a time of patient waiting. Through 700 years of darkness Israel waited for the dawn of the Christmas Day. We read in our text: “Therefore will He *give them up*, until the time that she who travaileth hath brought forth.” God let it be night indeed for Israel. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Temple, and carried away the captives to Babylon. And even when they had rebuilt Jerusalem and the Temple, Antiochus came up against them, and until the days of the Maccabees filled it with the abomination of desolation. And the darkest hour before the dawn came when the Romans subjugated Israel, and God’s peculiar people paid tribute to such Gentile rulers as Herod and Pilate.

But there was another way in which God also gave them up. They were under the Law through all these centuries, and grew weary of its bondage. The Pharisees, who tried to keep the Law that came by Moses, fell into a mere outward form of godliness, which was the most miserable hypocrisy. The Sadducees went their way in unbelief and indifference. And the zealous Essenes withdrew in disgust from the wickedness of the world into the solitude of the desert.

Even the Gentiles felt that God had “given them

up" also for a time. They had no pleasure any more in their idol worship, though there had once been something of beauty and truth in it. The heathen priests winked at one another as they met in the streets, and mocked at all that was left of religion for the souls of men. The Greeks and Romans found no comfort or peace in their boasted wisdom. Unbelief and superstition reigned everywhere. Some sneered with Pilate: "What is truth?" Others were duped by lying fortune-tellers and sorcerers. Men plunged into the lusts of the flesh, and abominations of wickedness. A night of hopeless despair lay everywhere on the earth. Then through all the world there went a rumor, that a great King should rise in the East, who would bring back the Golden Age. It was this which brought the Wise Men from the far East, following the Star. Even among the Jews there were few who, like Simeon and Anna, waited for the consolation of Israel and looked for redemption in Israel. First came the whirlwind, the earthquake, and the fire, as to Elijah on Horeb; and only then did the nations hear that still small voice of God, which said "Let there be light!" And after the darkness of the night came the dawn of the bright Christmas Day, with its message of "A Saviour which is Christ the Lord."

And how often this history of the world is repeated in the little world of man's heart! Many, who once listened to the Christmas story and rejoiced in the tree and its gifts, have gone out of the Paradise of Childhood into the world. That child-like faith has died out in many a heart; they are cold and indifferent to the Gospel. Their ears are deaf to the voice of God; they walk in the ways of the world and of sin.

This thing of which our text speaks has come upon them: God has "given them up" for a time, that they may feel the poverty and emptiness of their life with all its sin and guilt, and turn from that night to the Light of Truth which shines in the Christmas Day. Unto such, too, the Saviour is born. May they believe and rejoice in the Gospel message! May their night be far spent, and may the Christmas Day soon dawn in their hearts! The last verse of our text fills the measure of our joy, as it declares

The Glory of the Christmas Child.

"And He shall stand, and shall feed His flock in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the Name of Jehovah His God: and they shall abide; for now shall He be great unto the ends of the earth." Poor as He may lie in His Bethlehem-birthplace, He is God's Ruler, whose goings forth are from everlasting. It is He of whom John writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He said of Himself: "Before Abraham was, I am." He prayed in the night of his betrayal: "And now, Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine Own Self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." How such thoughts thrill our hearts! Poor and mean as is the Christmas-place, there is a glory in the Christmas child, which is not of earth and fills our hearts with heavenly joy.

About Him there is only a little group who greet Him at His birth into our flesh, and wicked Herod is already plotting to slay Him; yet is He "the King of the Jews," and because of Him the "residue of His brethren shall return unto the children of Israel"

(v. 3). And they did return, as Micah prophesied. The little band of the Apostles came, the fishermen of Galilee. Holy women ministered to Him of their substance, and sinners and publicans sought Him in His days on earth. And now they come by thousands from the east and the west, from all peoples and lands, all tongues and races. And we, too, come rejoicing to His manger-bed, Who is not ashamed to call poor sinners His brethren. We, too, sit down with Abraham, Isaac, Israel and his children to the Kingdom of God; and "come to Mount Zion, and to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in Heaven." (Heb. 12, 22).

Of Him Micah says, that "He *shall stand.*" Though His enemies assail Him on every side, "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against His Church." Again Micah says: "He shall feed His flock in the strength of Jehovah * * * and they shall abide." That is a worthy prophecy of Him, born in the city of shepherds to be our Good Shepherd, knowing His sheep and letting no man snatch them out of His hand. If amid all our rejoicing there flashes upon us the recollection of our weakness and sinfulness, the temptations of the world, and the malice of the roaring Lion who seeks to devour us; if we ask whether this Good Shepherd will keep such poor sheep as we are in safety unto the end, and gather us all into His Heavenly Fold; then let us remember what Naomi said to Ruth in this very Bethlehem: "Sit still, my daughter * * * the man will not rest until he have finished the thing this day." (3, 18). Here is another citizen of Bethlehem, who like manly Boaz, will not rest until He has done His duty by us, His needy brethren. Let us in our weak-

ness only hold fast to Him, who has begun a good work in us, and He will perfect it until the day of His coming. It is the Light of Eternity which shines about the head of the Christ Child, and the power of an endless life which we feel by the manger at Bethlehem. This Child gives us courage, comfort, and joy. Therefore we sing with the Heavenly host:

“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased.”

Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

Gospel: Luke 2, 33-40.

Gen. 28, 10-19: "And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took one of the stones of the place, and put it under his head, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to Heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold, Jehovah stood above it, and said, I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, etc."

Hymns:

- 407. Nearer, My God, to Thee. v. 2-4.
- 32. Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord. v. 3.
- 254. O God of Jacob, by Whose Hand. v. 1 and 4.
- 476. Abide With Me, Fast Falls the Eventide. v. 1 and 5.
- 261. Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah. v. 1.
- 23. The Happy Christmas Comes Once More. v. 3.

The Outlook of the Christian Pilgrim on the Last Sunday of the Year.

It is the last Sunday of the year. Soon the Old Year will have passed, and we will set foot upon the New Year, which lies all untrod and unknown before us. It is in these days that we feel with David,

"I am a stranger with Thee,
A sojourner, as all my fathers were. (Ps. 39, 12)."

Or we say with Heb. 11, 13: "We are strangers and pilgrims on earth." We are like the patriarch Jacob, who journeyed for many a year in strange lands, and bore the heat and burden of many a day, before he rested in the loved and longed-for Fatherland. Whether

ours be a longer or shorter pilgrimage than his matters not. As he left his childhood home and familiar scenes, so must we, too; and some of us in this very year have left behind much that was dear to us. Our earthly life means a continual parting with things we love. As he went alone on his journey, so we will often feel lonely and forsaken by the world. The accusations of conscience traveled along with him, and we too can not forget that we are sinners. He knew not what would befall him, or when his journey would end, and just so our way is dark and uncertain before us. Our last Sunday of the year ought to be like that quiet spot among the mountains of the Holy Land, where Jacob once spent the night and rested on his way. Its outlook will comfort and strengthen the Christian pilgrim as Jacob's vision at Bethel did him. Here, first of all.

We Look With Joy Into the Manger at Bethlehem.

Jacob sleeps on his way to Haran, and sees a vision of a Heavenly ladder climbed by angels to the Throne of God. That was a joyful sight for the lonely, troubled pilgrim. It told him he was not cut off as a poor, helpless child of man from the bright and blessed Heaven above, but there was a bond and bridge from him to it. The ascending angels were a promise that his sighs and prayers were borne to Heaven, and God's Word, His help and salvation brought back.

Is it not something like this we long for, too, in life's journey? The Paradise of Eden lies so far behind us, lost like Jacob's home through sin. The cherub stands with a flaming sword at the gate, and like Esau blocks the way home. In short, Heaven is

so high above us, and our sins have closed its gates against us, as Isaiah says (59, 2): "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you." Where then is our bridge over this great gap, our ladder binding earth and Heaven together, so that the angels of God can ascend and descend to us?

Century after century the O. T. Fathers asked this question, and waited for its answer. The rainbow was a comforting sign, that God would rule the earth in grace, and spare us in mercy; but its bright colors faded very quickly. Jacob's ladder was the vision of a dream, and vanished before the dawn. The Tabernacle and the Temple told how the glory of God dwelt among Israel, yet Solomon was right, when he prayed: "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold Heaven and the Heaven of heavens can not contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded Thee." (II. Chron. 6, 18). So throughout all the O. T. runs the longing: "O that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down."

But we look with joy into the Manger, and upon the Child in Simeon's arms, of whom Anna spake to all them who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. We hear in the Christmas Gospel, of the Silent Night when the angels of God came to earth and brought the glad tidings and sang the first Christmas hymn. That was a better night at Bethlehem than this of Jacob at Bethel. Since that time it has been Christmas on earth, and Jacob's vision has become a reality. Our Saviour says to Nathaniel (John 1, 51): "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the Heaven opened, and the angels

of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." He Himself is our Heavenly Ladder!

Eight times He has opened Heaven for us: When the Son of God came to earth as a poor child of man; again when He was baptized and the Spirit descended and the voice from Heaven said: "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" when the Saviour had overcome the tempter in the desert, and angels ministered to Him; when He was glorified on the Mount of Transfiguration, and Moses and Elijah appeared; as He wrestled in prayer in Gethsemane under the sins of the world, and an angel strengthened Him; as He died upon the cross, and commended His spirit into His Father's hands; as the angels came down to roll away the stone on the Easter morn; and when He Himself ascended to Heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father. So in this Son of God who became man we find the Ladder, reaching from earth to the sky, and binding Heaven and earth together. And the angels who announced His birth, ministered to Him in the Temptation, strengthened Him in Gethsemane, and proclaimed His Resurrection and Coming again in the clouds of Heaven; these are they who ascend and descend upon this Ladder.

We look with joy upon the Manger at Bethlehem, for since that time, Heaven and earth have been bound inseparably together. We know now that the Father created us for Heaven, and the Son redeemed us for Heaven, and the Holy Ghost is sanctifying and fitting us for Heaven. The wall of separation between Heaven and earth is broken down. Our sins are forgiven in Heaven; our confession of faith is recorded there; our hymns rise and re-echo there; and our prayers

find there a listening ear and a loving heart. The angels of God bring down to us grace and peace, help and salvation from Heaven. The earth becomes the outer court of Heaven, and the light of Heaven falls upon our pilgrimage here in the dust. We see that Way, which leads us to the Heavenly Father-house and the Father-land. Therefore on this Sunday after Christmas we look with joy into the Manger, and praise God for the mercy whereby, not only angels, but the Dayspring from on high hath visited us. And again will

We Look With Faith Up to Heaven.

Jacob sees more than the ladder and the angels: "And behold, Jehovah stood above it, and said, I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." (Vs. 13-15). With these words God reminds Jacob of all His promises to his fathers and the blessings showered upon them, and renews His covenant with Jacob. And from the closing words it is plain that He will be Jacob's God, too, and guide and defend him in his journeyings, until traveling days are over.

On this last Sunday in the year we too look with faith to our God in Heaven. His providences have ruled over us and ours; He has preserved us in body

and soul, blessed us in our work, provided for our needs and defended us from all danger. He has given us many a joy, and showered upon us many a blessing. And in our days of sorrow He has been our "Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble." (Ps. 46, 1). This Sunday after Christmas especially moves us to cry out with returning Jacob, (Gen. 32, 10): "I am not worthy of the least of all the loving kindnesses, and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant," or with the Psalmist (103):

"Bless Jehovah, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless Jehovah, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;
Who healeth all thy diseases;
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;
Who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies."

And now this faithful God renews His covenant with us. To each of us He says: "I am with thee and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest." He will bring us at last into the land we hope for, the glorious Fatherland on high. And meanwhile we shall lack nothing, for, "He will not leave us until He have done that which He hath spoken to us of." And what does this mean? If we are troubled by our sins, He hath said: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins (Is. 44, 22); return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee." If doubts of His mercy assail us, He promises: "For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my loving kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall My covenant of peace be removed, saith Jehovah that hath mercy on thee," (Is. 54, 10)." If we fear some danger or evil, He comforts us, saying: "Fear not, for I have

redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou passeth through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee," (Is. 43, 1f). If we need comforting, He declares: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem," (Is. 66, 13), or with the paraphrase of Isaiah 49, 15:

Can a woman's tender care
Cease toward the child she bare?
Yea, they may forgetful be,
Yet will I remember thee!

How good and gracious the Lord is, my brethren! He will do what He has spoken of, and not leave us until He has brought it to pass. So with believing confidence we will set out upon the New Year, saying with this same Jacob: "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." And at the close of the year

We Look With Thanksgiving Upon the Church.

When Jacob waked from his sleep and remembered the blessed vision, he exclaimed: "How dreadful (much to be revered) is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven." He had not expected God to reveal Himself to him here, far from the altars his fathers had built and dedicated. This makes him the more thankful for the glorious things he has seen and heard in this place. As a sinful child of man a holy awe is put upon his soul by this spot. Therefore he sets up the stone which has been his pillow for the night, makes of it an altar, pours consecrating oil upon it, and calls the name of that place

Bethel, the house of God (v. 19). And he vows that here when he returns he will worship God. Then he goes on his way joyfully and believingly to far distant Haran.

Where is our Bethel, beloved? We know that first of all our heart should be such a Bethel, and that here this ladder is to stand, which reaches from earth to Heaven, and on which the angels ascend and descend. Here God's Word and promises should find their hearing. Jeremiah says: "Ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me within all your heart," (29, 13). But when our heart becomes such a Bethel we will always be ready to say with the 84th Psalm:

"How amiable are Thy tabernacles,

O Jehovah of hosts!

My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of Jehovah;
My heart and my flesh cry out unto the living God."

Or with the 26th Psalm (v. 8):

"Jehovah, I love the habitation of Thy house,
And the place where Thy glory dwelleth."

Therefore on this last Sunday of the year we pause for a moment in thanksgiving for this House of God. It is here we find our Bethel; here stands the Ladder from earth to Heaven. Here we are keeping a blessed Christmastide about His Manger-bed; and beneath His Cross and by His empty Sepulchre we will soon praise Him as the King of Glory, until we see Him ascending on high. As the angels ascended on Jacob's ladder, so here our sighs and prayers, our hymns and praise ascend, and God's promises and comfortings descend to us. Here God has spoken to us, reproving, correcting, instructing, and comforting us as He did Jacob. Here He blesses us with word and

Sacrament. Here we have seen the Heaven open, for we have looked into His fatherly Heart and wonderful councils for our salvation. Yea, by faith we have beheld the glory of God, and looked into those things eye hath not seen, and ear not heard, which God has prepared for them that love Him. Therefore we look with thanksgiving upon this Church, and say: "How dreadful is this place, etc."

Such thanksgiving will be the oil with which, like Jacob, we consecrate anew our Church. In this New Year it shall also be a House of God for us, and we will come into it diligently to hear God's Word and to have His gifts. The Lord bless our going in and coming out here, until we ourselves become a Bethel, and are built up into a Spiritual House and Holy Priesthood to offer unto God acceptable offerings through Jesus Christ our Lord. Then everywhere we go, we will bear about us this Ladder and its angels that go up with our needs and prayers, and come down with God's help and comfort. And each day of our pilgrimage will bring us a day's march nearer home. When at last we depart, it will be like aged Simeon, "In peace;" and like Jacob we will come again some day to the Heavenly House of God, the eternal Bethel, where the many mansions are. There we shall keep the Christmas Day for ever, and enter upon the eternal Year of Jubilee. This is the only way we can reach eternal joys, for, as John G. Holland writes:

"Heaven is not reached at a single bound;
But we build the ladder by which we rise
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
And we mount to its summit, round by round.

Only in dreams is the ladder thrown
But the dreams depart and the vision falls,
From the weary earth to the sapphire walls;
And the sleeper wakes on his pillow of stone."

So may each day spent in His House find us growing in grace and guided by His Spirit, and thus be another round on the Heavenward Ladder. Amen.

NEW YEAR.

Or Sylvester Evening.

Gospel: Luke 2, 21.

Numbers 6, 24-26. "Jehovah (the Lord) bless thee, and keep thee: Jehovah make His face (to) shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:

Jehovah lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

Hymns:

- 35. Jesus! Name of Wondrous Love. v. 3f.
- 36. To the Name of Our Salvation. v. 1.
- 480. A Few More Years Shall Roll. Refrain.
- 481. For Thy Mercy and Thy Grace. v. 4.
- 482. Great God! We Sing Thy Mighty Hand. v. 3.
- 19. Good News From Heaven the Angels Bring. v. 6.
- 208. Lord of Our Life and God of Our Salvation. vs. 3 to 6.

God's Name and Blessing Upon His Children.

A New Year lies before us with its many weeks and days. All its toils and triumphs, struggles and achievements, joy and sorrow are hidden from our eyes. We stand therefore upon its threshold, hopeful but timid. Our friends and relatives greet us with good wishes for our health, wealth and happiness. But the Church, like the good Mother which she is, gives her dear children the richest and best blessing. In our New Year's Gospel she gives us the name of "Jesus," our blessed Saviour. In that Name is all our hope amid earth's toil and rest, want and abundance, sickness and health, life or death. This we should confess by all our words and works in the coming year. So we will write this old, yet ever new, benediction as our watchword for the year, inscribed over heart, home, and all our life.

There was the same hope and confession in it when Aaron and his sons were commanded of God to pronounce it upon His people: "So shall they put My Name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them." From century to century it has been pronounced upon the people of God. This benediction greets us at our Baptism; and under it we ratify our Baptismal covenant at our Confirmation. With it we comfort ourselves at Public Confession and after the Holy Communion. Under this blessing our hearts and hands are united in marriage. It closes each Divine Service; for the N. T. Benediction at Vespers is only a paraphrase or improvement upon the O. T. one, and says the same things. And now with this blessing we enter the New Year. It is the best we can take with us on the journey of life, until with this Benediction our journey here below shall end. It reminds us to seek first, and above all other things

The Love of God.

It is of the love of our Heavenly Father we are thinking today. Here we raise our Ebenezer, or stone of help, and confess: "Hitherto the Lord has brought us." We call upon our souls and "all that is within us to bless His Holy Name, and forget not all His benefits." That is our first and most delightful duty this Day. Behind us lies the old year, a large piece of our life, and in it our faithful God has blessed our land and each of us, providing us daily and abundantly with all the necessaries of life. Therefore we bring Him first of all the thank-offerings of our hearts and lips.

And now we look forward into the New Year. We know not what awaits us there, but of course there will be some toils and trials there. The Word says of

this life of ours, that "even if by reason of strength it last fourscore years: yet is their pride but labor and sorrow" (Ps. 90, 10). We question anxiously whether our labors will be successful and followed by God's blessing? Are we to have and to hold through this New Year all that belongs to us of our daily bread, as Luther sums it up: "A believing spouse and good children, etc." "Except Jehovah build the house, they labor in vain that build it," (Ps. 127).

"On His behest,
Our all doth rest."

Therefore we sigh with the Psalmist (67): "God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us." We pray with Jacob: "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me;" or declare with David: "If Thou bless the house of Thy servant, it shall be blessed for ever."

And the love of God answers from on high: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee." It is no man, mark you, or angel who blesses here, but Jehovah; He who is Lord of Lords, Lord of the Past, Present, and Future, Lord of Heaven and earth, Lord of life and death. "He speaks, and it comes to pass; He commands, and it stands fast." From Him "cometh down every good and perfect gift, even from the Father of Lights with whom there is no shadow caused by turning." He will continue to bless our land and Church, our homes and those we love, our going out and our coming in, our words and works. That is the glorious promise which greets us at the opening of the year; the hope with which we set out on our way. If He bless us we shall want for nothing, for

"The blessing of Jehovah, it maketh rich;
And He addeth no sorrow therewith." (Prov. 10, 22).

But there are many dangers lurking along the pathway of the New Year. Here hatred and spite wait to hurt and harm us. Our earthly goods are threatened with loss. Sickness and death menace the beloved circle of the home. So we commend ourselves to Him whom Job calls (7,20): "O Thou, Watcher (or Preserver) of men." And the Psalmist says (121):

"Behold, He that keepeth Israel
Will neither slumber nor sleep."

And the love of God answers, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee." That is our comfort, that in the year to come He will keep our land from foes without and within, from war and bloodshed, plague and pestilence, from failure of harvest and from famine; that He will keep the Church and all believers from all evil; and though His unsearchable Providence appoint this or that evil for us, He will make it work together for good to them that love Him.

Jehovah is thy Keeper,
Jehovah is thy shade upon thy right hand.
The sun shall not smite thee by day,
Nor the moon by night.
Jehovah will keep thee from all evil;
He will keep thy soul.
Jehovah shall keep thy going out and thy coming in
From this time forth and for evermore."

And with that saying: "He shall keep thy soul,"
we come to

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This appears in the second verse of our text: "The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be *gracious* unto thee." That, too, is a goodly promise for the New

Year. How beautiful it is, on a dark winter day, when the sun shines again with mild and friendly ray. In a little while we know its magic power will bring forth the flowers with all their fragrance, and the birds will sing again in the branches. The earth will put on its robe of green, and the heart of man will swell with the joy of the Springtime.

Even when it is a human face which shines upon us; when we look into eyes which are faithful and true and hear kind, loving words, how we rejoice. How happy the child is when the face of father or mother beams upon it with love; or the subject when the face of his ruler shines upon him. Solomon says (Prov. 16, 15): "In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favor is as a cloud of the latter rain" falling gently upon the ripening crops. But there is a more beautiful and blessed thing; it is when God makes His face shine upon us. This means life, salvation, peace and joy; such grace as we need in the trials, temptations, and struggles of the coming year, where we are so apt to go astray, stumble and fall. So we pray with Asaph (Ps. 80, 3):

"Turn us again, O God;
And cause Thy face to shine, and we shall be saved."

God knows our need of the sunshine of His face, and so this is part of His New Year's greeting for us. But what does this mean? The face of a man is what we see of his person, and the "face" of Jehovah is thus His Only-Begotten Son, who is "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person." (Heb. 1, 3). Christ is what we see of God. He it was who wrestled with Jacob at the ford, after which Jacob could say: "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

(Gen. 32, 30). He it was who spoke with Moses "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend," (Ex. 33, 11). He was the angel of the covenant, the presence and countenance of God in the pillar of cloud and fire, who led Israel through the wilderness. And we, too, know this face. We have gazed into the eyes of the Child in the manger, who "became poor for our sakes, that we through His poverty might be made rich." We have seen the pity which shone there in the days of His flesh, as He beheld the misery of poor sinners. We have seen that face "Stricken, smitten and afflicted," crowned with thorns and bleached by death upon the Cross. And He who humbled Himself thus for us promises to make His face shine upon us in the year to come.

"As each happy Christmas
Dawns on earth again,
Comes the Holy Christ Child
To the hearts of men.

Enters with His blessing
Into every home,
Guides and guards our footsteps,
As we go and come." No. 539.

Therefore He comes in the Word and Sacrament to reveal his grace and bestow it upon us. This grace is but the shining of His face upon us. It lights up the way we should walk, works in us to will and do after His good pleasure, and makes us perfect in every good work to do His will. It confirms, strengthens, and establishes us unto the end. It is the forgiveness of our sins, great and small, which are no more remembered against us for ever. Therefore we bless His holy name (Ps. 103) :

“Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;
Who healeth all thy diseases;
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;
Who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies.”

And that we may always praise Him thus, we need

The Communion of the Holy Ghost.

Of this the last verse speaks. Often in these days the sun hides his face behind clouds and fogs, and all is dark and cold on earth until it lifts it up upon us again. So, too, into our Christian life there come clouds and fogs, doubts and temptations, that veil the sun of grace. It seems sometimes as if the Lord had hid His face from us, and we are ready to lament with David (Ps. 13, 1) :

How long, O Jehovah? Wilt Thou forget me for ever?
How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?

Therefore this third promise rings out from the sanctuary: “The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”

This assures us of the constant communion of the Holy Ghost, of Him who calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us by His gifts, and will sanctify and preserve us in peace in the true faith. This speaks of the Spirit of Adoption, who bears witness in us that we are children of God, and teaches us to say, “Abba, Father; of the Spirit of Faith, who will not let us sink in the storm-waves, but lifts up our heart, hands, and eyes to the Lord from whom cometh our help; of the Spirit of Prayer, who moves us to cry again and again, like the Caananite, and not despair, until at last we hear His answer: “Be it unto thee even as thou wilt;” of the Spirit of Glory, who in all our earthly troubles assures

us, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. And where this Spirit is, there the sun breaks forth from behind the clouds, and the Lord lifts up His countenance upon us in grace and blessing.

By this Spirit the Lord gives us ever and again the peace here promised: peace in our guilty need, so that we can say: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Peace in the days of trouble, so that we learn to be still and wait upon the Lord, and in quietness and confidence we find our strength. Then we can say with the 42nd Psalm:

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul?
And why art thou disquieted within me?
Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance."

Yea we will even learn to rejoice in tribulations, because tribulation worketh patience, then experience, then hope that maketh not ashamed. Yea, this Spirit gives us peace even in the last great struggle, when the darkness of death would be gloomy and cheerless indeed without Him. Then, too, the Lord lifts up His countenance upon us and gives us such peace until we can say with Simeon: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart *in peace*."

Well may we thank the Lord for this Benediction, which takes us by the hand, and leads us over rejoicing and fearing nothing into the New Year. God's promises are sure and never fail. And this promise is to each of us; its very form declares this: "The Lord bless *thee*, etc." As the angels of God met Jacob at Bethel when he set out on his years of wandering, so the great God meets each one of us at the threshold

of the New Year, and lifts his hands over us in this Benediction. But such a blessing as this lays on us

A Solemn and Holy Duty.

In the year 1773 the Swedish General Steenbock determined to burn the city of Altona. John Sasse, who was its pastor, begged him on bended knee to spare its homes. But Steenbock thrust him away fiercely, and pretended that he was compelled to do this by the command of his superior. "If that is the case," said Sasse, "and you are innocent of this wicked deed, I will pronounce the benediction upon you, of Him who will one day be our Judge." And lifting up his hands he spoke these words, which God bade Aaron put upon the children of Israel as His blessing. The rough general shuddered and shook beneath them; yet he carried out his shameful intention and laid Altona in ashes. But from that day the blessing of God forsook him; he was defeated and captured by his enemies. As he lay dying in prison, he told the visiting pastor that much as he had been troubled by the curses of the thousands he had wronged, heavier than all these was that benediction which the pastor of Altona pronounced upon him, when he might have spared the city, but would not: "I die as a perjurer, condemned for ever by the blessing to which I pretended I had a right."

That sad story has its lesson for us. The Triune God comes to us with His blessing today. He is ready to go with us and to bless us throughout the coming year. But that blessing will become a curse, if we tread it under foot. Woe unto us, if this year we disdain the love of God, our Heavenly Father! Woe unto us, if we receive the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ

carelessly and in vain! Woe unto us if we despise the means of grace and the communion of the Holy Ghost! May this Benediction, which we hear each Lord's Day, warn us in every hour of temptation, when the old Enemy would deceive us, or the world and the flesh would lead us astray. Then let us ask ourselves: "Was it for this that the blessing of the Triune God was put upon us at the opening of this year?" Watchful and prayerful, believing and obedient, let us look to the Almighty Hand which blesses us, and let Him guide as well as guard us.

"For such His hosts on joyful wing,
A blest New Year of mercy sing."

Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

Sunday after New Year.

Gospel: Matthew 2, 13-23.

Ex. 14, 9-16: "And the Egyptians pursued after them * * * and they were sore afraid; and the children of Israel cried out unto Jehovah. * * * And Moses said, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah, which He will work for you today: for the Egyptians whom we have seen today, ye shall see them no more forever. Jehovah will fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. And Jehovah said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward. And lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go into the midst of the sea on dry ground."

Hymns:

- 470. Now From the Altar of Our Hearts. v. 3.
- 447. Jesus, Still Lead On.
- 298. Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing. v. 2.
- 409. God Moves in a Mysterious Way. v. 3f.
- 400. Give to the Winds Thy Fears. v. 1.
- 482. Great God! We Sing That Mighty Hand. v. 2f.
- 516. Heavenward Still Our Pathway Tends. v. 1 and 4.
- 413. Peace, Perfect Peace. v. 2 and 4-7.

Israel's Pilgrimage and Ours Through the New Year.

In the Gospel for today we have two journeys that Joseph and Mary made with the Christ Child. First, they walk the way of anxiety and sorrow; they go from Bethlehem to Egypt. They leave their beloved fatherland, that they may save the Child from the plots of King Herod. In this journey they are obeying the Word of God and trusting in His grace and help, which lightens their anxiety and sorrow. Again they walk a way of hope and joy; they return from Egypt to

Canaan. The news has come that their enemy and persecutor is dead. The angel bids them return to the land of their fathers, and with joyful, thankful hearts they leave that strange land and people to dwell in their own Nazareth. This also becomes an easy journey because of God's command and blessing.

We stand yet on the threshold of the New Year. A great journey lies before us. It may be one of anxiety and sorrow; then, like Joseph and Mary, we must walk it humbly obeying the Lord and trusting His grace and help. This will lighten its burdens, and make it an easier way to walk. Again our way may be one of hope and joy, as when Joseph and Mary returned; then we should walk it with thankful hearts and mindful of God's blessings. And whether the way be smooth or hard, like Joseph and Mary we should take the Christ Child with us. Whether it be over Egypt's soil, or under Canaan's skies, let us walk as in God's presence and led by His hand. Let us pray with David (Ps. 25, 4f) :

“Show me Thy ways, O Jehovah;
Teach me Thy paths.
Guide me in Thy truth, and teach me;
For Thou art the God of my salvation;
For Thee do I wait all the day.”

Let our way in the New Year be, first of all,

The Way God Chooses for Us.

The children of Israel were in great trouble. At God's command they had encamped by the Red Sea. Before them roared the waves, as they dashed upon the shore; behind them and to their right rose great cliffs they could not climb; and to the left, along the way

they had come, they now saw the Egyptians pursuing after them. To human eyes there was no prospect of escape; all hope of help was vain. Therefore they murmur against Moses, saying: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to bring us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we spake unto thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it were better that we should serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." But there was one way of escape still open to them, though they forgot it. Moses looks up to the hills from whence cometh our help; he calls upon the Lord to deliver His people. And the word comes: "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward," forward in the way God has chosen, forward in His name, through the waves of the Red Sea. That is their way because God wills it so.

And our way, beloved, whither does it lead? How often we have heard the Proverb (15, 24):

"To the wise the way of life goeth upward,
That he may depart from Sheol beneath."

How often we have sung: "Heavenward still our pathway tends." (No. 516). For that the Son came to earth on the Christmas Day, and redeemed us with His holy and precious blood. For that we have been baptized into His name. For that His Word is preached, and His Sacraments cleanse and strengthen us with His Body and Blood. And the Lord's Day stands before all the other days of the week, as if to remind us of this pathway Heavenward.

But on this Heavenward way we often have the same experience Israel had at the Red Sea. We, too, have difficulties which would hinder us or turn us back. The Prince of Darkness pursues after our souls to turn them from the way of life. The indifferent and unbelieving of the world now threaten and then flatter us into joining in their sins and deserting from our God. Our own shortcomings trouble us; our weakness discourages us; and the cares and sorrows of this life make our hearts heavy and our footsteps slow. Like Israel, we find precipices of difficulty on the one hand, and hosts of adversaries on the other. There is only one way open for us through the New Year: that which Moses took when he had called upon the Lord, and the answer came: "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." For us it means just what it did for Israel: forward in the way God prescribes and points out, even through the Red Sea if God so wills it. The waves will not roll over our heads and drown us, if He chooses for us such a way.

That is the first lesson we should learn for our pilgrimage through the New Year: to walk the way of God's appointing. Though His thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways our ways, yet we will find them ways of peace and not of evil. This comforts David in the 139th Psalm (v. 3):

"Thou searchest out my path and my lyingdown,
And art acquainted with all my ways."

Then with all confidence let us commit ourselves to His gracious guidance, whether the way He chooses for us run through "scenes exalted or depressed," riches or poverty, health or sickness, joy or sorrow. Again let us walk in

The Light God Kindles for Us.

The children of Israel went on without fear or stumbling. The pillar of the cloud and fire lit up their pathway through the divided sea like a searchlight, whilst its lightnings flashed angrily in the face of the pursuing foe. In quietness and confidence Israel walked between the waters walled up on either side, because of this wonderful beacon, which led them from that time on through the wilderness until they entered Canaan. It showed them where they should rest, and when they should set out again on their journey. How blessed and happy they must have been with such a guiding light!

But have we no such wonderful light, which God has kindled for us from Heaven, and does it not shine brightly enough to cheer us in the darker days and the gloomy nights of our life? Did we ever fail to find an answer, when we asked: "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" with His Word opened prayerfully before us. Were there not always godly friends who could assure us of God's way and will therein? There are some today who would take the Word of God away from our homes and our schools, but we will allow no such thing, for, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my way (Ps. 119, 105)."

It shows us even as children the right way, that we may not depart to the right hand or the left; it shows us our enemies, who would hinder us and lead us astray; it shows us the help Divine we look for in all our temptations. It gives us courage

and strength to keep on our way, and fills us with comfort and peace.

In this Light God Himself has kindled for us we will walk through the New Year. We will read His Word more diligently, and strive in its light to see more clearly the path of duty and the Way of Life. We will use it for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. It shall be our favorite among all books, and the treasure we prize above all else in the home. We will pattern our words and works after it, order our household by it, and shape our course by it through good and evil days. As we willingly hear and learn it, in God's House and our own, it will make each of our days a Lord's Day and a Festival. Again let us take with us through the New Year.

The Rod God Loans Us.

"Lift up thy rod," He said to Moses. This rod with which Moses had wrought the plagues in Egypt was now stretched out, as a symbol of his authority, over the Red Sea, and the waves recede as though the arm of the Almighty had smitten them. They rise up in walls on either hand, so that Israel goes over dryshod. Again this rod is lifted, and the sea plunges over Pharaoh and his chariots in awful destruction. This rod Moses carried with him through the desert, and with it brought water out of the rock for thirsty Israel at Massa and Meribah. While he held it up in his hands and prayed, Israel prevailed over the Amalukites. Day after day as Israel journeyed, Moses went before them, but always with this rod in his hand. Leaning on it as a staff he ascended Mt. Sinai to receive the tables of the Law from the hand of God.

Leaning on it again he went up Mt. Hor, where Aaron, his brother, died. He never laid it down until on Mt. Nebo he folded his hands in death, and this rod fell from his lifeless grasp. Then he was with the Lord.

But where is there such a rod for our journey through the coming year? That we will find only in our Christian faith. By this we do not mean such a faith as even worldlings have, that God rules over the world in some indefinite way, and means every thing for the best. Such a faith would do for Jew, Turk, and Hottentot alike, and when great troubles come would leave them all wringing their hands in despair. Our faith holds that the Son of God is my Lord, who has redeemed me from sin, death, and the devil, that I might be a child of God and heir of His glory and blessedness in Heaven. This faith will carry us safely through all the way, and prove a staff and stay. It works greater miracles for us than did Moses' rod. It shields us against the assaults of the Devil, and delivers us from the accusations of a guilty conscience. It makes a way of escape for us out of trials and temptations, "for who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? * * * Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8, 35-39)." Yea, with this rod in hand we shall be numbered among those "who are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, and poor, yet possess-

ing all things." This rod of Christian faith let us hold fast, trusting and thanking God when He tries and purifies our faith. Then, like Moses, we too shall bring water out of the rock, overcome the enemies of our soul, and pile up even the waves of the sea in walls of defense. Then with the Psalmist we may cry:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." (23, 4).

Therefore forward on our way, in the light and with the rod of our God, into

The Land God Prepares for Us.

Israel was not only called out of Egypt and its bondage, not only called to wander in the wilderness, but after these things to enter into the land He had promised the fathers and prepared for His people. None of them had seen its mountains and valleys, its cities and rivers. But they believed that it lay waiting for them in all its loveliness beyond the Red Sea and the desert. The way thither was difficult. They were often obliged to hasten away from some Elim with its wells and palm trees, and for months and years they wandered in dry and desert places. But the Almighty Himself, who cannot lie, had given His pledge that Canaan should be the end and goal of their journey.

We, too, are not journeying aimlessly through these years on earth; we have a land of promise on high. We have not beheld its towers from afar, or gazed into the city with the streets of gold. We have not sat down by the river of living waters, or in the shade of the tree of life, "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things that God hath prepared for them that love

Him." But we believe the promise of our God, that beyond our Jordan of death there awaits us the Heavenly Canaan with all its glory and blessedness. His Word pledges this as the end and goal of our Christian pilgrimage, and that this poor race which was banished from Eden shall find its eternal Paradise in Heaven. To that end the Son of God came down from Heaven for us men and for our salvation. For this He ascended up from earth to Heaven, "to prepare a place for us."

And if we are journeying thither, then the toils and tribulations of earth must become light; we will be always patient in tribulation and rejoicing in hope. We will seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, the one thing needful; and we will work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Neither will we sorrow by the grave of those we love, as those who have no hope; but we will rejoice that they are done with their desert wanderings and have already entered the Heavenly Canaan. And though our outward man perish, our bodily powers fail, our hearts and souls shall rejoice, because we are nearer our journey's end and the rest that remaineth for the people of God. And in our last hour we shall say: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day." (II. Tim. 4, 7f.)

So with the opening of another year the command comes to us to "go forward in God's appointed way, walking in the light of the Word, with the rod of faith in our hand, and into the land which God has prepared for us. Amen.

THE EPIPHANY FESTIVAL.

Gospel: Matthew 2, 1-12.

Isaiah 42, 1-8: "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My Chosen, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry, nor lift up His voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street. A bruised reed will He not break, and a dimly burning wick (flax) will He not quench; He will bring forth justice in truth, etc."

Hymns:

- 38. As With Gladness Men of Old.
- 40. O Thou, Who by a Star Didst Guide.
- 42. Hail to the Lord's Anointed.
- 223. Saviour, Sprinkle Many Nations.

The Glory of the Great Servant of the Lord.

"The Word was made flesh," is the message of the joyful Christmas season; but the rest of the verse: "And dwelt among us," belongs to the Epiphany season which we have now entered. The Gospels of the Epiphany reveal His glory, beginning with His first recorded word, and then the first miracle. They continue to set the Servant of Jehovah before us, as our Good Physician, healing the Centurion's servant; the King among men, whom even the winds and waves obey; the Judge of the living and the dead in the parable of the wheat and tares; until on the last (sixth) of these Epiphany Sundays we behold Him on the Mount of Transfiguration in all His glory as the Son of God.

But this same Jesus comes to us today, not in this glorious outward show, not in the Shekinah pillar of fire, not with all His holy angels. He comes now in

the preaching of the Word, in the water of Holy Baptism, and the bread and wine of the Holy Communion. Just so, wherever we see Him in the days of His flesh, His glory is hidden and veiled in a servant's form. Then, as now, it is only the eyes of faith, which mark the glory in His Word and works. Therefore we read how at Cana He "*manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed on Him.*" Even on the Mount only three, His most intimate disciples, saw His face shining as the sun, and His raiment white as the light. And these were commanded to "Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man was risen from the dead." "The glory of the Lord Jesus, though in the form of a servant," is the theme of this whole season of the Epiphany. It is especially profitable for us, who are to believe in His Holy Word, and to receive from Him great and Heavenly gifts, which He has seen fit to wrap up for us in the earthly elements of His Sacraments. Here, too, there is an Epiphany, and He manifests forth His glory to us. By faith we see it shining forth in Word and Sacrament. Thus we come to know

His Holy Person.

"Behold, My Servant," so our God speaks by the mouth of the prophet; and these are mighty sayings which describe who and what He is: "Whom I uphold." In this we see the hand of the Almighty God, leading, supporting, strengthening His beloved Son, through all that way and work of our Redemption, from His Baptism at Jordan to the Cross on Golgotha. This hand never let go, never failed to uphold Him. Therefore Jesus could say: "He that sent Me is with Me; He hath not left Me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to Him (John 8, 29)."

Again we read: "My Chosen, in whom My soul delighteth." Never did the Almighty God speak thus of any human servant of His. None such did He call His Elect. Moses he called: "Faithful in all Mine House?" but even he sinned at Massa and Meribah. Here, as the names imply, thirsty Israel "tempted and strove with" the Lord; and Moses forgot that he was the representative of God's free grace even toward this erring people, and began to scold these rebels and to smite the rock. At this water of strife and provocation he fell from God's favor, so that he was not allowed to enter the promised land. But here is a Servant of the Lord, of whom He declares at His Baptism: "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" and much later these words are repeated at His Transfiguration, and the Father adds: "Hear ye Him." Yea, this is "His Chosen, in whom His soul delights."

And yet again we read: "I have put My Spirit upon Him." That was never said of any mere man on this earth. The Apostle Peter testifies that: "Men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit," (II. 1, 21). But never does he say that God put His Spirit upon any of them. All the children of God are enlightened by His Holy Spirit, as a tree flourishes in the sunshine, but never is it said of them that they are Joshuas over whom the sun stands still. There is only One upon whose head shines this crown; of whom the Word says: "And the Spirit of Jehovah shall *rest* upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah." (Is. 42, 2). And this is the Great Servant of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. In these Epiphany Gospels His Holy Person is clearly

described, so that we may see His glory, and bow before Him with the Wise Men. Therefore do we view Him in the Temple at Jerusalem, at the marriage in Cana, in Capernaum, in the storm on Galilee, and on the Mount of Transfiguration. Always is He here "the Servant of Jehovah, whom He upholds; His Chosen in whom His soul delights, and upon whom He has put His Spirit." Again our text speaks of

The Meek Mind of Our Lord Jesus.

Those words of v. 2 tell us how meek and gentle He was, who went about doing good all His days in the flesh. He did not come among men with any outward show; there was no glitter and blare of earthly pomp. No trumpet blew before Him, no signal guns were fired to say: "I am here! I am here!" He did not cry out loudly in the street as those do who would draw attention to themselves, who seek their own honor. But He went about His work quietly, and loved to hide away from the sight of men.

Because of this, His foes despise and disown Him, and yet before these, too, is He patient and gentle: "Despised and rejected of men, He is led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep is dumb before her shearers, so He opened not His mouth." He seeks not His own glory, and therefore He bears these things they say in foolish trifling or bitter unbelief. Even when that woman in the crowd lifts up her voice to say: "Blessed is the womb that bear Thee," He wards off this earnest praise, so far removed from all empty flattery, by modestly saying: "Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it." So He hides Himself away, and only by some heart which diligently

seeks Him does He let Himself be found. In gentle pity, and not self-seeking pride, does He say: "Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

So He still walks among men today. So, too, the world still despises and disowns Him, because He does not reveal to them His Divine Majesty in signs and wonders, arousing their curiosity and idle admiration. So He still hides Himself away in Word and Sacrament, and goes on quietly with His work. So He still comes today to those who are "the poor in spirit," to "them that are quiet in the land" (Ps. 35, 20), that He may bring to them His salvation, His comfort, and peace.

Again the prophet says, describing the mind of the Lord: "A bruised reed shall He not break, etc." This means a poor sinner, who feels the misery of his sin and in the consciousness of it is bowed down to the earth before a Holy God. Such a reed He will not break; such a sinner He will not cast away. We know how gently He dealt with the woman, who was a sinner, because she acknowledged her sin and had such shame and proper hatred of it. We know how He forgave Peter after his fall, when he wept so bitterly because he had denied his Lord and Master. We know what He said to the thief on the cross, who confessed: "We indeed receive the due reward of our deeds," and prayed: "Lord, remember me, when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

And "the dimly burning wick" stands for the believer, who has already received the forgiveness of his sins, in whose heart love has been kindled, but alas! what a weak flame it has become, perhaps only a mis-

erable spark. Our knowledge of Him is often so faulty and dim; our faith so little and wavering; our hope so weak and lame; our love so poor and cold; the fruits we bring so scanty; our sanctification so imperfect; our heart so dry and dead. We are a wick, which a puff of temptation would blow out, a little stormy affliction extinguish. But He will not quench it; He will feed such a wick with holy oil and strengthen its struggling flame. Of this every closet bears witness, where He hears the sigh of repentance; every pillow, wet with tears of godly sorrow; our churches, where He offers free grace and full forgiveness; and every dying bed, lit up with His greeting of peace.

His own brethren of Israel, to whom He came in all humility, repaid His meekness and love with ingratitude. And to this day thousands treat Him thus, though they have been baptized in His name and redeemed with His blood. They thrust away this meek and lowly One, and despise the salvation He brings them. May none of us so reward His love, only with base ingratitude. Let Him not call and plead with us in vain. Let us come that we may have life, and more abundantly. And now let us look at

The Great Work of His Grace.

Of this the 6th verse speaks: "I Jehovah have called Thee in righteousness, and will hold Thy hand, and will keep Thee, and give Thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house." This is a picture of the great work of Redemption, which this servant of God wrought in obedience to God and in

love to His brethren. He "called Him in righteousness, "that is to make us right in His sight, to establish such righteousness upon earth. What the servants of sin have not done, that He fulfills: namely the whole Law of God to its very last jot and tittle. What these servants of sin must needs have borne and suffered, that He bears and suffers for them: namely the just judgments of a righteous God against sinful man, so that they are satisfied for time and eternity.

He is indeed "a covenant of the people." In His blood is made that covenant of eternal grace and peace between us and God, which Isaiah records: "The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither the covenant of My peace be removed." Now in spite of our sinful misdeeds, there is mercy for His sake. Now we have forgiveness of sins in Him, and become acceptable to God through His Beloved. Now we are children of God in Him, and can cry in all our guilty need and anxiety, "Abba, Father." Now we are heirs of glory, and can sing with joyful confidence:

"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are and shining dress." No. 329.

"He opens the blind eyes," so that they see their own misery and His glory, and believe in Him with all their heart. He breaks all bonds, and "brings out the prisoners from the dungeon" into the glorious liberty of the children of God. He delivers us not only from the guilt of sin, but from its power; it has no more dominion over us. That is a great and glorious emancipation. Therefore as He dies on the Cross, and such a work for us is done, He cries in triumph, and not

pitifully as he told of His thirst: "It is finished," or accomplished.

Well may we mourn, that we made Him serve thus with our sins. And well may we praise His great and Holy Name, who "did not fail nor be discouraged, till He set justice in the earth," and carried out God's gracious plan to its triumphant completion. Here there could be "no peace without victory." But if the Servant of Jehovah is so crowned in our text, how careful we should be not to rob Him of a single jewel in His crown. If one of us is lost through indifference, unbelief, or disobedience, then one of the jewels will have fallen from His crown, which He purchased with such a price and paid for with His life. Therefore let us vow solemnly that in this New Year we will cleave to Him in true faith and faithfulness, be the people of His possession, live under Him in His Kingdom, and serve only Him.

That is the best New Year's resolution we can make, and it includes all the others we should make and keep. Let us not look at ourselves, in all our weakness and shortcomings; neither at the children of this world, who have no eyes or heart for this great Servant of God and cast stones of contempt at Him; but let us look to Him as "our wisdom and righteousness, redemption and sanctification." Here is the great difference between the children of God and those of the world. The latter in this season of outlook into the future, set out upon the New Year in their own strength, while we seek Him whose strength is made perfect in our weakness. They mean honestly enough to be better men in the New Year, but they forget that water will not rise above its source. We put ourselves

in connection with the great reservoir of Heavenly grace and holy living, that the power of God through Word and Sacrament may cleanse and strengthen us. They rely upon earthly means and fellowship; we look to that great Servant of Jehovah, whom Isaiah foretold, and whose Divine work in the heart and life of man is the wonder of the ages.

He Will Bring Forth Justice to the Gentiles.

This promises a great and glorious victory. It means the revelation of the gracious rights and privileges which a faithful God has provided for them, and is a precious promise. As we look back over the history of these nineteen centuries we see how it has been fulfilled. Our Gospel today celebrates a Festival, which consists in the coming to the Christ-child of the Wise Men from the East with their gifts and homage. We are not told how many they were. The tradition that says they were three, is like all such legends; but we are sure they were not numbered by hundreds. How differently the millions of Gentiles come now. The Cross stands on the altars of every land, so that the sun never sets upon it. The Gospel of peace in His Name is preached to the ends of the earth. In ever-widening circles this promise of "justice in truth" or a favorable, faithful decree for the heathen is being carried out.

Of course we see also how hatred and enmity arise to oppose the spread of His Word and Kingdom. But we are not dismayed by that. No one will be able to lie away the Word of God, or to defeat His gracious purposes. He will win the day, and hold the field for ever, as He did in the recognition of the Church by the

state in the days of Constantine, and its triumph over the bloody persecutions by Imperial Rome. The Christians are no longer thrown to the lions, but themselves become lions in their missionary zeal and courage. We have God's own Word for this final triumph: "I am Jehovah, that is My Name; and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images" (v. 8). "He who created the heavens and stretched them forth, who laid the foundations of the earth, and gave breath to all people who walk in it, will know how to defend His cause and Kingdom from these idols and their mad followers. He will not rest until these enemies become the footstool of His Dear Son, who sits at His right hand.

This is He, who said: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world!" and again: "It is finished!" We can trust Him to keep on overcoming the world and to finish His work in it and in us. Isaiah says: "He will not fail or be discouraged, till He have set justice in the earth." In spite of all the guile and might of the old enemy, of all the rage and enmity of the world, of all the weakness and failure of His followers, He will not fail or be discouraged, until He has carried on His work to its final victory.

Therefore we ourselves, beloved, ought not be discouraged. Though many a stumble and fall keep us busy, we shall not fail. Though there be many a backset and hindrance in our spiritual life, it will not fail. If we hold fast to the hem of His garment here in the Word and Sacrament, we shall be helped; if our works begin and continue in His name, they shall prevail. Therefore we need not be discouraged about those we love. Though they strive against His grace, that

work of grace will go on in their souls, and not fail. He will search them out and knock at their hearts again and again, until He has won them for Himself and made them blessed in His Kingdom. Only let us not grow weary of confessing His Name before them in word and work, and of praying diligently for them.

Neither should we be discouraged about this whole wide sinful world. Though the heathen despise His person and refuse His Word, this promise is especially for them, the Gentiles. "The isles shall wait for His Law," and hunger for His Gospel at last. Only let us not grow weary of doing our part with our prayers and gifts and works of love. The Epiphany is a missionary season, and bids us go on with such works in firm and joyful faith, until these sure promises of God are fulfilled. This Servant of Jehovah shall prevail over all His enemies. "To Him the heathen are given as an inheritance, and the ends of the earth as a possession." And therefore, "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous: the right hand of Jehovah doeth valiantly," (Ps. 118, 15).

One day every knee shall bow before this Servant of Jehovah, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Of that we can have no doubt. Let our only anxiety be, that then He will confess us before His Father in Heaven. "Blessed," says our Lord Jesus "are they that hear the Word of God and keep it." May that blessing abide with us today, as with believing heart we do His bidding. May our New Year be another year with Him, in the Word for study and strength, and in the Work as servants like our Lord ever "about our Father's business." Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY IN EPIPHANY.

Gospel: Luke 2, 41-52.

I. Sam. 1,26-28: "And she said, Oh my Lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto Jehovah. For this child I prayed; and Jehovah hath given me my petition which I asked of Him: therefore also I have granted him to Jehovah: as long as he liveth he is granted to Jehovah. And he worshipped Jehovah there."

Hymns:

- 535. Once in Royal David's City. v. 3f.
- 559. Heavenly Father, Send Thy Blessing. v. 3.
- 174. Saviour, who Thy flock art Feeding. v. 2f.
- 38. As With Gladness Men of Old. v. 2f.

Children Are a Gift From God and to God.

The childhood of our Lord lies before us like a garden, behind whose walls we know there is much beauty, but into which we cannot look. The only gap in that wall is the Gospel for this Sunday, in which we see the twelve-year-old child Jesus going up with His parents to the Passover at Jerusalem. We mark how He tarries behind because of His great love for the House of God and God's Word. We see Him among the teachers of the Law, both hearing them and asking them questions. We hear from His lips the meaningful inquiry: "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" We see how He returns with His parents to Nazareth and is subject to them. And at its close this Gospel records how "He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

What a holy and blessed childhood! Who does not wish that his own children and all the children of the

church might grow up like this Christ Child? And this is not a foolish wish, which can never be fulfilled. We read just such a record in the O. T. of a poor sinful child of man: "And the child Samuel grew on, and increased in favor both with Jehovah, and also with men," (2, 26). What we can do to bring this happy consummation to pass, we learn from the parents of Samuel, and especially from that good woman Hannah, his mother. We properly remind ourselves on this Sunday of the serious view Christian parents should take of their children, and first of all that

Children Are a Gift We Receive From the Lord.

"Lo, children are a heritage of Jehovah;
And the fruit of the womb is His reward," (Ps. 127, 3).

That Hannah had learned. For many years the Lord had withheld from her the joy of holding in her arms a child she could call her own, and because of this, her heart was full of sorrow. But she turned after a time to the right source of help; she went to Shiloh where was the Tabernacle of Jehovah. Here she prayed and wept before the Lord, and vowed, if He gave her a son, she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life. And the Lord heard her prayer, and granted her petition. Therefore she called his name "Samuel," heard of God, and sang that great song of rejoicing which we find in the next chapter, and coming to Eli said: "I am the woman that stood by thee here * * * and Jehovah hath given me my petition."

Children are a gift from the Lord, and He gives them to whom He will, and refuses in like manner. Prosperous people, who could easily bring up a whole

family of children, often have few or none at all to rejoice in; and poor folks, who have a hard time to earn their crust of bread, often have more than one would think they could care for. Godly couples, whom we could trust to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, sometimes have no children; and others, whose example leads their own children astray, have children only to ruin them in body and soul. Those who long for such a gift from the Lord with all their heart, may not receive it; and others complain bitterly because they have more than they think they can provide for. All this is true without reckoning in those sins which interfere with the good and gracious will of God. We need not speak of these, for every secret sin He sets in the light of His countenance, and the punishment for it which follows so speedily in the years on earth is a sufficient preaching of His wrath against adultery and abortion. Apart from human sin which gives and takes life contrary to His laws, God's ways in sending or withholding children are marvellous in our eyes in spite of the wicked talk about birth-control. It is not we who order things here, but "Children are a gift from the Lord."

Again, they are a precious gift, and we value them the more, because they are so easily taken from us. In its tender weakness a child is a feeble flame which a puff of air can extinguish. How many diseases threaten them, and what days of worry and sleepless nights they cause us! In spite of all our care a very large proportion of children die before they are a year old, or in the first three years of their life.

They are precious also because of God's holy angels, who are sent to minister unto them. Our Lord Jesus

says (Mat. 18, 10): "See that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father who is in Heaven." They watch over them more wonderfully than we realize, and report daily at their Heavenly headquarters the good and the evil men do to these little ones. We must have a conscience in our care of the children at home and in the school, for each of them is the prince of a noble House; they are all little Majesties surrounded by an unseen but glorious retinue.

Again they are precious because our Lord sets them before us as examples. When He called that little child (Mat. 18, 2), and set him in the midst of the disciples, He said: "Except ye turn, and become as *little children*, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." Thus God makes them in a way messengers to us. When the children raised their hosannahs before the Lord, and the high priests and scribes were provoked at this, Jesus said: "Yea; did ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou has perfected praise" (Mat. 21, 16). He took a special pleasure in their hymns of praise, and gave their prayers a hearing.

This the godly men of ancient days knew, and therefore in every time of need and danger they brought with them into the House of Prayer their children. When Melanchthon at a conference was troubled by the dark future of the Evangelical Church, he was comforted more than by anything else as he heard the children nearby singing: "Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word," (No. 167). He returned to the pastors and delegates, exclaiming: "Friends, let us not doubt or fear.

While these children pray for us, no power of Pope or Devil shall do us harm!" The pious Elector Frederick the Magnanimous recognized how God indulges the prayers of His little ones. When after five years of exile for the Gospel's sake he returned to Coburg, and a chorus of children in the public square welcomed him with the hymn: "Lord God, we worship Thee." (No. 496), he said with tears in his eyes to the court-preacher by his side: "There is the power which prayed me out of my exile."

And once more they are precious because our Saviour said: "Whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me," (Mat. 18, 5). And our last doubt about their being precious in His sight vanishes as we hear the fearful warning of the next verse: "But whoso shall (is about to) cause one of these little ones that believe on Me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he be sunk in the depths of the sea."

Therefore Christian parents rejoice with all their hearts in the birth of their children, and thank the Lord as did Hannah. They provide for them carefully as they grow up, but the ancients had a quaint saying, which suggests that often our children really provide for us instead. They believed that at the Creation the stalks of wheat and corn were lined with ears from top to bottom, and that after men fell, God began to strip these off one after another, until He remembered the little children, and for their sakes He left that one ear on top of the wheat-stem and the two or three on the side of the corn-stalk. For a like reason Luther was wont to say: "We old fools eat along with the children; not they with us." And there is foundation for this

view in Holy Scripture. When Hagar wandered with her son Ishmael in the wilderness, and cried for thirst, we are told in so many words that "God heard the voice of the child," and sent an angel to show them a spring in the desert for its sake. Many a home has been blessed because of the children there, and God has provided it with food for their sakes. This is what the old proverb means: "Many children, many blessings." And many a city has been spared, like Nineveh, only because there were in it "many children too small to know their right hand from their left."

Christian parents then will know how to value their children. When the Duke of Tuscany had shown a guest all the treasures of his house, and his vessels of silver and gold, he ended by saying: "The best of all remains to be shown you," whereupon he called his sons and daughters, and introduced them to the visitor. And we will gladly shoulder some care and trouble to bring up our children. A good mother, who had been up all night with a sickly child, was asked: "How can you put up with so much annoyance, and still love that child?" She answered: "I am doing this for one of the children of God, whom Christ redeemed with His precious blood." Again these precious

Children Are a Gift We Give to the Lord.

We have a holy duty and great responsibility toward our children because we must one day give account how we have dealt with this great trust. The gift must be returned unto the Lord again. In this too we may learn of Hannah, the godly mother of Samuel, who says to Eli: "Therefore also I have granted (or lent) him to Jehovah; as long as he liveth he is

granted to Jehovah." She brings him to the Tent of Jehovah, and there he grows up and serves the Lord. And how faithfully she cares for him even there, we see by the coat she makes each year, and brings for little Samuel, when she and Elkanah come up for the yearly sacrifice (2, 19). It was very hard that she could not keep her son with her and rejoice over him as he grew up, but she bore this with godly patience. The white ephods she kept on making for him reminded her of her vow; and each year as she went to Shiloh with her gift, she gave him anew to the Lord, repeating in her heart that she "had lent him to the Lord, as long as he lived." This mother looked upon children as a gift which must be returned to the Lord.

That view must be ours, too, and so thoroughly that we will let no other wish interfere with it. Our one prayer must be that one day we may say before the Throne: "Behold, I and the children whom Jehovah hath given me" (Isaiah 8, 18). Therefore we should bring them early to the Lord in Holy Baptism. That is our first errand, when as a united family we can once more go up to the House of the Lord, or can arrange for friends and relatives to gather in our home. For we know that our children, flesh born of flesh, are made by this act of God His children, and born anew of water and the Spirit as heirs of His Heavenly Kingdom.

Therefore we teach them to pray, as soon as they can fold their hands and lisp the words, for this, too is surely included in our Saviour's saying: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me; forbid them not; for to such belongeth the Kingdom of God," (Mark 10, 13). This is especially the mother's duty, while the father

should take them to church when they are old enough, as Elkanah led the way to the Tabernacle at Shiloh and Joseph to the Temple at Jerusalem. Like Abraham we are to "command our children and household after us to keep the way of the Lord."

Neither should we forget the wise Solomon's warning about wholesome discipline:

"He that spareth his rod, hateth his son,
But he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." (Prov. 13, 24.)

Those who are not enough in earnest to punish, when kind words and moral suasion are poured out as water on the sand, only lay up wrath for themselves and their children in days to come. Yet here we must not forget what the Apostle Paul writes (Eph. 6, 4): "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord." That forbids us to beat them unmercifully, because they annoy us. It must be the Lord's displeasure we think of, and they are made to feel. Luther says: "The apple and the rod must keep each other company." Our children should feel the same love in our chastening of them, as they do in our indulging of them at other times; and that our only desire is to keep them out of evil and what is evil out of them. That which is not a godly anger only thrashes more of the devil into them than out of them.

Above all else we owe to them a goodly example in our own lives, if God's gifts to us are to be returned to Him. We ourselves must deem God's Word holy, willingly hear it in His House, and love to read it in our own, or we fail in our duty to our children, and our own souls as well. It is sheer folly, when a par-

ent decks a child with finery, gives it an education, teaches it good manners, and sees to it in short that the child gets along in the world, and then speaks of having done his duty by the child. A part of this duty is to lead the child on the Heavenward way, and an awful judgment awaits those who neglect this, for "their children shall be their judges." Many children are sent to the Catechetical Class whose parents we miss at our services, and their sons and daughters miss the influence of parental example sadly in their lives. Every parent ought to feel that he is a co-worker with God in bringing up His children; and then God will be a co-worker with him, and bless their home training.

Then, like Samuel, they will "grow on, and be in favor both with Jehovah, and also with men." Then when the time comes for them to leave our roof, we need not feel anxious about them. Our teaching, prayers, and example will tell. Though for a time they may stray from the right path, we may rest assured that the child of so many tears and prayers will not be lost, and may comfort ourselves with the promise: "Believe on the Lord, and thou shalt be saved, *and thy house,*" or "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Though we may be called away from our children, we need not be troubled about them in the hour of dying. Then we can say with David:

"I have been young, and now am old
Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken,
Nor his seed begging bread," (Ps. 37, 25).

Neither, if they be called from us will we mourn them, as they do who have no hope. When the children of the great commentator Bengel had just died, his wife

asked in her sick room: "What are the children doing?" He answered with composure: "Loving and praising God!" So we may say with Job: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" Or with Hannah: "I have lent him to the Lord."

And if some ask: What has this sermon to do with us who are not parents? Perhaps you are sponsors or relatives to little children. You too, then, have a part in returning those children, who are a gift from the Lord, to the Lord again. And even if you are not sponsors or relatives, yet in our schools you have an opportunity to work lovingly for these least of Christ's brethren, and in our orphans' homes you may reap the reward promised such. He who would build up the Kingdom of God on earth must begin with the children, the foundation of the future Church. For that may the Lord give us all wisdom and grace and loving faithfulness. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Gospel: John 2, 1-11.

Psalm 128: "Blessed is every one that feareth Jehovah,
That walketh in His ways,
For thou shalt eat the labor of thy hands:
Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.
Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine,
In the innermost parts of thy house;
Thy children like olive plants,
Round about thy table, etc."

Hymns:

- 416. O Blessed House, That Cheerfully Receiveth. v. 1f.
- 414. Lord, who at Cana's wedding Feast. v. 1.
- 37. Songs of Thankfulness and Praise. v. 2.
- 447. Evening and Morning. v. 3.
- 328. Jesus, Thou Art My Righteousness. v. 4.

The Blessed House.

We find our Lord Jesus in these Epiphany Gospels in different places: now on the mountain, then in the plain; now on the land, then on the lake; now in the city, then in the desert; now in the Temple of God, then in the home of men. Thus He would hallow each place where "we live and move and have our being." We find Him among different kinds of men: scribes and Pharisees, fishermen and publicans, the leprous and the clean, men and women, old folks and little children. Thus He manifested His coming to earth to save "all sorts and conditions of men." We see Him on different occasions: now at a marriage feast, then by a sickbed, and near to a grave. Thus He manifests Himself as a Saviour for the sad and the glad, the sick

and the sound, the living and the dying. One who pities and helps us all and always.

In our Gospel today He is at a wedding. It is the only wedding the N. T. records, but this one instance makes plain that He would also hallow and bless our wedded life. And if we make Him our Chief Guest on that occasion, and the Great Friend of our home and heart ever after, His blessing shall never fail here. This Gospel message only repeats the promises of our O. T. Psalm. The Lord bless us in this also, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished to every good work. Both picture "The Blessed Home," and tell us

On What Its Blessing Rests.

The children of this world often begin their wedded life in a very loose and careless way. It is founded largely on a pretty face, a pleasant disposition, social position, wealthy or influential relatives. These are the strands out of which many a marriage tie has been woven; and so they enter into this holy estate. They think they have a good start in life; they expect to be happy together. But what happens as time goes on? One can soon see enough of a handsome face and tire of it, especially if behind it there are the snaky contents of a "Frau Welt," as a wise sculptor pictured the world. Often those who modestly think themselves homely, try to compensate for this by cultivating many "homely" virtues, which make them lovelier far in the end than their empty brothers and sisters. Position in the world and money never yet made any one happy. And that pleasant disposition is often only frail stucco-work and paint, and not the iron framework which lasts. There come times in any home

when views and wishes cross and class, sensitiveness is aroused, and good humor vanishes. These are days when we should arm ourselves with humility and patience, gentleness and love. But the strength for that is lacking in the children of this world; they do not cultivate and exercise these Christian virtues. Therefore many of the world's marriages prove a failure. The four walls cannot make a home; they seek their pleasures outside of it, and are not always very choice in their selection of these poor substitutes for the solid joys of a true home-life. They quarrel, and make home a veritable place of torment. This is one reason adultery and divorce are frequent among us, though we are nominally a Christian nation.

In such a marriage there is little or nothing seen of "The Blessed House," which is our theme. And no wonder, for it was not built up on the right foundation. The blessing of the Christian home rises out of the fear of the Lord. Our Psalm, which describes it, begins: "Blessed is every one that feareth Jehovah, that walketh in His ways."

Like this Psalm, then, our marriage must begin in the fear of the Lord. Not the outward attractions of face and disposition, position and wealth, dare lead to the choice of a spouse; but above all things we must ask whether the fear of the Lord dwells in that heart. They tell of a wedding, where a good Christian woman heard the man who was to be her husband mocking at God and His Word, and at the last moment said: "I have changed my mind. I will not be your bride. You do not love the Lord. The wife of such a man can never be happy." She was wise, as subsequent events proved. The daughter of Jean Paul Richter, the great

philosopher, prayed that God would send her a husband who loved the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart, and who for His sake would love her, even if beauty faded and health decayed. The same story is told of the wife of John Mathesius, one of the early reformers, who published the first biography of Luther with seventeen of his sermons.

In a matter of so much importance no one should risk the happiness of a lifetime upon the poor expectation that the fear of God and the love of Christ will come afterwards with the years of married life. The word and example of a godly spouse do not always convert the unbelieving and indifferent one; but instead they may catch the contagion of the godless and worldly and be led astray from their Christian faith and life. Paul writes to his first converts at Corinth, where many had a heathen spouse: "How knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O husband, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" (I Cor. 7, 16). And so he counsels them to let the unbelieving spouse depart, if he is set on doing so, and live unmarried unto the Lord.

And inasmuch as parents stand over us in the place of God, we ought not to enter into this estate contrary to their counsels and consent. If we despise those who are God's representatives, we really despise God Himself. Where their blessing is lacking, there God's blessing is lacking, too. Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) says in the Apocrypha (3, 9): "The blessing of the father establisheth the houses of children; but the curse of the mother rooteth out foundations."

The Christian banns and service, with which marriage is solemnized among us, are the outward expres-

sion of this desire to begin our married life in the fear of the Lord. It stands as such in contrast to the civil marriage, which may be consummated by any officer of the law. Here the O. T. Apocrypha have another great lesson for us, as the youthful Tobias enters into his marriage estate with prayer. Though not inspired writings, we have many helpful hints in them, which our Psalm sums up in the blessedness of those who "walk in God's ways." Those who honor His House as they visit it together, and His Word as they read it diligently in their homes, unite their own hearts and hands by each day of worship and prayer, and such a godly union grows more close and inseparable every day. And now we ask concerning "The Blessed House."

In What Does Its Blessing Consist?

Our Psalm speaks first of the man, as the head of the house. To him the promise is given here:

"For thou shalt eat the labor of thy hands:
Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee."

Here in the Christian home we labor honestly and diligently in the sweat of our brows, as God commands. What that work is makes no difference to the Lord, whether in the field or shop, office or store, if it is only an honest and useful work. But we are not to drop some work we do not feel like doing, and loaf around until we find something we like better. We are to follow the calling God's providence sets before us, and be obedient to His will. To such a one the promise here is, that he shall be supported by the work of his hands. There will be food for him and his, so that they may be content and "happy." It shall be well with him even in sickness and trials, and he shall see much good even

in what men call hard times. But men have a rod in pickle for the promoter, the manipulator, the agitator, and the speculator.

Again the promise is:

“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine,
In the innermost parts of thy house.”

How beautiful and meaningful this picture is! The First Psalm says of the godly man, who walketh not in the way of sinners, but delights in the Law of the Lord:

“And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water,
That bringeth forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also does not wither;
And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

But the wife is not likened to a strong tree which defies the wind and weather; neither to a pretty flower which blooms in a garden along the street, where any one may reach over and pluck it. She is a vine clinging to the walls of the patio, or inner court, unseen from the streets, and spreading coolness and loveliness in the intimate family circle. Moreover she is pictured here as no mere ornament, but a fruitful vine, whose luscious clusters of grapes hang before each window and door, where her dear ones look for nourishment and comfort. Her husband refreshes himself with her love and faithfulness; she adorns and blesses the home. The wise Solomon says (Prov. 31, 10):

“A worthy woman who can find?
For her price is far above rubies.
The heart of her husband trusteth in her,
And he shall have no lack of gain.
She doeth him good and not evil
All the days of her life.”

And yet again the promise runs:

“Thy children like olive plants,
Round about thy table.”

Sometimes God withholds children from the godliest couples, but not as Israel thought, in reproach or punishment. He may have a special work for them to do among the children of others, or for His dear orphans. What our Psalm has in mind is, that when the Lord bestows upon us such gifts, they shall be like the layers or runners of the olive. It does not say they will be props, neither that they will already yield us much fruit and usefulness, but that our children shall be like these green branches, which refresh our eyes in summer and in winter. In time they will grow into sturdy props, and gladden our hearts in days to come as fruitful branches. Meanwhile they make our table and every room in the house lovely and worth living and laboring for. And even if they are called from "The Blessed House" on earth, they will remain "olive branches," forever green and flourishing in His garden on high. So is it with him who fears the Lord.

But with the children of this world things are very different. Wife and child are often a burden there, or idols upon which we hang our hearts, only to be repaid for this with bitterness of soul. They are not the vine and olive which adorn and enliven the house, but often thorns and thistles which wound and trouble the heart. What our Psalm would teach us is, that in the Christian home the man is the pillar supporting the home, the wife the vine adorning it, and the children the hope of its future. In it there will always be good days, come what may; and God's blessing will bring sunshine even when the skies are dark. And finally we ask:

How Far Does Its Blessing Reach?

“Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
That feareth Jehovah.
Jehovah bless thee out of Zion;
And see thou the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.
Yea, see thou thy children’s children,
Peace be upon Israel.”

This is the goodly close of the Psalm. It shows us how far the blessing of God reaches, and how broad and deep it is. Jerusalem was their Holy City, and every Jew felt himself a citizen of it. Here was the royal palace from which the land was governed; here the Temple whence God’s blessing flowed into every home. The “good of Jerusalem” meant the good of the whole land, and the welfare of the Church. Out of such blessed houses a blessed city is built, and out of such cities a blessed land. And if the Church has such homes to rest on, then it will stand fast and flourish among men. Both the King’s throne and God’s altars stand upon god-fearing marriages and homes, or else they both fall when they have only the godless to look to for support. No true patriot or zealous servant of God can wish anything more or better for State and Church than that marriage feasts like this at Cana be celebrated, and the next generation be brought up in homes like that of Mary and Joseph at Nazareth.

And now our Psalm reaches out into the days to come, and speaks of a blessing outlasting the years. Its promises are not only for the young, who are setting out on their married life like the couple at Cana. Think not that it has no meaning for us who are growing old, whose children have become men and women, and whose life draws to its close. There is a blessing here for those whose day is spent, and in whose sky the shades of evening are gathering, God’s blessing that abides on to the close. The promise is that “they

shall see their children's children." The joys of earlier days shall return, as new little olive branches gather about the table, none the less dearer than those which first adorned it. Those anniversaries are indeed worthy of the name of a silver or a golden wedding, which see the fear of the Lord we have sown, bearing rich and abundant fruits not only in the regard and affection of our fellow men and the favor of our God, but fruits ripening then in the godly lives of our children and children's children. That is a glorious evening of life, when in the "Blessed House" we rest from the burden and heat of the day, and rejoice in the fruits of our Christian life and labor.

And this evening is lit up by the sunset glory of the blessed hope, that one day we shall all meet around the Throne of God, to love and praise Him forever. Some times in these homes of earth, the promises of the Word seem to have failed us, and there is many a loss and cross to be borne, yet here, too, we find that last saying fulfilled: "Peace be upon Israel." Here men shall fold their hands like the Psalmist, and say:

Whom have I in Heaven but Thee,
And there is none on earth that I desire beside Thee."

Here faith and hope shall lift up our heads, because we know that God's promises have their perfect fulfillment for us in another life and a better world, and because we Christians always look out beyond the blessings of earth, few or many as they may be. Therefore,

"Blessed is every one that feareth Jehovah,
That walketh in His ways."

No matter what shadows rest upon its roof-tree

for a time, where the peace of God abides upon His Israel, we write above that door :

“Blessed House! It shall be well with thee.”

“O Blessed house, that cheerfully receiveth
Thy visits, Jesus Christ, the soul's true Friend,
That far beyond all other guests, believeth
It must to Thee its warmest cheer extend; * * *
Where every heart to Thee is fondly turning,
Where every eye for Thee with pleasure speaks,
Where all to know Thy will are truly yearning,
And every one to do it promptly seeks.” No. 416.

Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Gospel: Matthew 8, 1-13.

II. Kings 5, 1-14: "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him Jehovah had given victory unto Syria: he was also a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out in bands, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maiden; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would that my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! then would he recover him of his leprosy. * * * So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call upon the name of Jehovah his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he said to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then he went down, and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again, like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

Hymns:

264. O for a Heart to Praise My God. v. 3f.
135. O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing. v. 3f.
286. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation.
v. 1 f.
37. Songs of thankfulness and Praise. v. 3.
360. My Faith Looks Up to Thee. v. 3.
371. Jesus, Lover of My Soul. v. 3f.
323. And wilt Thou Pardon, Lord? v. 3.

Why Is Our Lord's Gracious Purpose Toward Sinners So Often Defeated?

In our Gospel today our Lord has come down from the Sermon on the Mount, and the leper approaches

Him, saying: "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." He puts forth His hand, touches him and says: "I will, be thou clean." After this a heathen centurion comes, lamenting: "My servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." He asks nothing in so many words, but our Lord reads the wish in his heart. While He walked on earth He was always ready to heal and to bless, and such an One He still is as He sits at the right hand of the Father. He is willing to help in our bodily needs, and especially in those of our poor sinful souls. His invitation stands good today, as set forth in the Christus Invitator of our church windows: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

But why are so few helped? On every Lord's Day, thousands confess their sins before Him with penitent prayers. Yet not all find the peace and joy of perfect healing without and within. The fault is not His. He still says: "Come for all things are ready." His Word and Sacrament have the same grace and power for all time and all men. The fault is ours alone, if we lack the joy of spiritual health; and who knows how many bodily ills might be remedied as well in His mercy? This is the new lesson we learn from that old story of Naaman the leper. It tells us that many are not helped because

*They Have No Eyes for the Harm Sin Has
Done Them.*

Our O. T. lesson leads us into a rich and honorable Syrian home. It belongs to the Chief Captain of the king, Benhadad. This general had been victorious in many battles, and often delivered Syria from her

enemies. He was the idol and pride of the Syrians, their Wellington, Washington or Hindenburg. And yet he was poor and unfortunate above all others, because he was a leper. His name did not fit him, for it meant "Beautiful," or "Pleasant," while he was fast becoming an object of disgust and horror, even to his own family. We know by report what this leprosy is like, which the Greeks called, "The Eldest Son of Death;" and we do not wish to know it by sight, as do our missionaries in lands still cursed by men's sins, until the limbs of human beings rot off in a living death. To this day it is a question whether there will be found a remedy for it; and no better preventive is known than the keeping of God's commandments. There was no help for Naaman with all his wealth. Amid all his honors, this disease raged in his blood, gnawed at his limbs, and the shadow of the grave loomed over him. And Naaman realized his misery; knew his need.

We have open eyes for outward loss and damage, for bodily sickness and danger; but we are blind to the dangers threatening only our souls at first. This leprosy is everywhere in the Scripture a type of sin, which spreads like bodily diseases and destroys one part after another of us: good thoughts, kind feelings, and noble deeds, until from the soles of our feet to the crown of our head there is no soundness in us (Is. 1, 5f). Sin also affects a whole neighborhood, as children catch it from their parents. One sinner may spread this disease of sin in some form through a whole city. Its contagion is so great, that even in the Christian congregation we are not immune from it. That is why we must sometimes make an example of some sinners

in the Church, to warn others; as the Law does daily in the State. The fornicator, thief and drunkard must at times be disciplined among Christians, to help the younger generation realize that such sins are not merely occasions for a little talk, and are then soon forgotten, but high crimes against God's commandments, which alone lift our Christian civilization above the wretched heathen lands. And sin must be sternly dealt with also in ourselves, if we would not see it spread in the lives of our children.

In Israel the leper was shut out of human society, and at last died a miserable death. And that sin still does. Those who go on in evil ways are cut off more and more from their fellow men and even their best friends. But worst of all, sin closes against us the door of joyful fellowship with Heaven. It is written that into the Heavenly Jerusalem "shall enter in no wise anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Rev. 21, 27). Such is the train of fearful consequences following the leprosy of sin.

We see them among our people, and in every family the warning is repeated now and then as some skeleton, which one generation hides away in a closet, points the next one to safer paths and the right life. Yet how few open their eyes to this dread disease of heart and life. Inquire for yourself; ask those in charge of our prisons how the inmates blame everybody but themselves for putting them behind the bars. Their very familiarity with sin has begotten an indifference and trifling, a coarseness and defiance, which is amazing. You hear excuses, as poor as they are pitiable. Here and there you may hear a weak, luke-

warm confession, that all men are sinners, but not what Isaiah (6, 5) and Paul meant (Rom. 3, 23), by such a saying. Seldom do you hear any cry with him: "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Seldom do men pray with the publican: "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"

This is why our Lord Jesus, the merciful Saviour of sinners, has no help for so many; because they do not realize the guilt and misery of their sin. He is the great and good Physician for body and soul, but who ever heard of a doctor curing a man who did not feel sick enough to place himself in his care. Many insist they are not sick, and do not need a Saviour, but can get along very nicely without Him. Away with such folly and trifling. Let us examine our words and deeds at the close of each day in the light of the Word, and look closely into the mirror of the Ten Commandments. Then the Lord will open our eyes to note our sinful need, and like the leper we will cry: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." That is what we need. Again our Lord's gracious purpose is hindered by sinners, because

*They Have Not Open Ears for God's Gracious
Invitation.*

How wonderful are the ways of our God. He loves to carry out His great thoughts and works for us through seemingly trifling things. The army of the Syrians went on a marauding expedition through the land of Israel, and among other captives brought back a little maid to serve Naaman's wife. In that strange land she wept and bewailed the hard lot which befell her as a slave far from the mountains and moors of

her beloved Canaan. Yet in the providence of God this poor captive was intended to heal the best man in all Syria, and bring him to faith in the living God. The despised slave was His feed-wire to conduct joy into that wealthy home, and through her the Light of Truth streamed into the dark shadows of death, which had fallen upon that heathen land. When she spoke of the mighty prophet of Jehovah who was in Israel, Naaman had an open ear for the message of hope, and resolved to follow her suggestion. Loaded down with gifts he soon accomplished that journey of 100 miles from Damascus to Samaria.

God still does such wonderful things today. An old proverb says: "God greets many a one, who does not thank Him for it." He still has messengers to send to poor sinners; those who run and speak at His nod, as this maid did to poor sick Naaman. We often come across some verse of Scripture, which pierces as a sharp sword our very soul, or as a hammer smites in pieces the rock of our pride and self-righteousness. Some hymn knocks at our heart or lifts a finger in warning. Now it is a good book, a Church paper, or a Christian friend who talks earnestly with us. Again it may be a person, unknown to us, whose witness and testimony is directed of God to our hearts. A gentleman told me that when he was a lad he went one Sunday to a church in the distant south, where he heard a sermon which could not have been a plainer call to do his duty if it had been written expressly and made to order for him. Yet he had never seen that minister before in his life. This is the mark of God's Word, that there is always something in it for each attentive and honest listener, though he who speaks the Word is thinking

largely of himself, and how the Word applies to his own life.

Again God makes a messenger out of some sleepless night, when we toss on our beds alone with the thoughts of our hearts. A picture of the thorn-crowned Christ, which Zinzendorf saw in his youth, shaped all his after life with its: "This hast Thou done for me, what have I done for Thee?" And how often God speaks in our conscience, which is the receiver of a Heavenly telephone in our hearts. We wait by a sick-bed, lie upon one ourselves, or a coffin is carried through our front-door, and who does not then realize that the Almighty God has other preachers beside those in the pulpit, to speak in His name to poor sinners? No matter in what form or garb they come, these little maid-servants of God make us take heed to our souls, and help us on to our salvation. But when such messengers come, such grace goes before, how few follow Naaman's example! Having eyes they see not, and having ears they hear not the things that belong to their peace. That is the second reason so few let themselves be helped of Him, and the last is because

*They Have No Heart to Walk His Way
of Salvation.*

At first Naaman also took the wrong road. He thought of the prophet as a kind of sorcerer or power-wower, who did the bidding of the King of Israel obediently. Therefore he takes with him a letter from his King to King Joram, who only thought this impossible appeal to heal a leper hid an excuse to make war against him. In our sinful need we too often turn to men for help. But there is no help in them, because

they are all poor sinners themselves. There is no other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, but that of our Lord Jesus. It is to Him we must turn, and walk the way of salvation He sets before us in His Holy Word.

When Elisha hears how the King had rent his garments in despair at this demand to heal a leper, he sends word: "Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman comes at last with his retinue to Elisha's door. But the prophet simply sent out a servant to say: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times." We wonder that Elisha, generally so kind and friendly, treats him so coldly; but he knew what he was about. Naaman must learn humility, before he can be healed. Therefore he must stand at the door with all his proud retinue, and have only a message by a servant. He must believe; therefore he is not to see the prophet himself, for he is dealing here only with God, the living God. With that God there is no respect of persons, but his gifts are free to all. For this reason Elisha refuses to look at the costly gifts Naaman brought, though Gehazi gloated over them to his ruin.

At first the proud General would not walk the way of salvation which the prophet shows. He is offended because Elisha shows him so little respect, and most of all because he bids him wash in Jordan. He would gladly have given all that wealth of presents he brought with him, had Elisha only made a great ado over him, and tried to cure him after the fashion of the sorcerers of that day (and in our day they are much the same). But simply to wash in the muddy little Jordan was too much for his pride, while in his

own land flowed rivers clear as crystal, with sands of gold, which seemed far better fitted for washing. Therefore he says: "I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of Jehovah his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leper." "If I am simply to wash in a river, I might have done so at home." It is only when his servants say so sensibly, that if he was willing to do some great thing much more ought he to do this little thing, that he washes and is cleansed. He lays aside his pride and unbelief, and goes down humbly and believingly into the Jordan. And when he has washed seven times as the prophet commanded, when his faith is as that of a little child, then his flesh becomes sound and clean as a child's, and he returns joyfully to his own country.

Like Naaman we all have little love by nature for God's way of salvation. It is written: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." But we often refuse to learn the humility and faith which this saying demands. We wish to be saved in the way we think will do, the one our own smartness prefers. That one word of Naaman, "I thought," tells the source of the trouble. There is scarcely a passage or doctrine of Holy Scripture, to which men do not oppose their "I thought." When it speaks of the wrath of God against sin, men reply, "I thought He was merciful." The Bible records the miracles Jesus wrought, but men keep on thinking miracles contrary to the laws of Nature. It speaks of condemnation and Hell as clearly as of the heavens above our heads, yet men love to think this is a figure of speech, and there is no real Hell or Devil. It is this "I thought," which brought sin into the world in the beginning, and is still

robbing thousands of their salvation today. With this slogan of Reason they pronounce their own sentence. as those who refuse to let God's word teach them what they should think about sin and grace, eternal life and condemnation.

Again the grace of God in Christ offends man's pride. The poor heathen torture themselves to earn the salvation they reject as a free gift from God. The orthodox Jew keeps the Law with all diligence, as if righteousness came by it, instead of simply the knowledge of sin. The Romish Christian plagues himself with fastings, pilgrimages, and penances, that he may work out his own salvation. And many an Evangelical Christian trusts entirely too much to his outward decency and a few good works. Yet all these things have nothing to do with our salvation. There is only one way: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "No man cometh to the Father but by Me." He who chooses another way of works done in pride, and closes up this way of salvation through Christ's merit alone, is trifling away his hope of eternal life, just as truly as the hypocrite, who smoothly professes faith and love for the Lord, but belies it by his works and life.

When we look at the means of grace which Christ appointed, we see many behaving just like Naaman. They despise the water of Baptism, as he did the Jordan, and think there must be a better way. They ask: "How can water produce such great effects?" In a way, Naaman was right; Jordan was no better than other streams. But because God appointed this water by the mouth of His prophet, this only could cleanse, and no Abanah or Pharpar. Just so the water of

Baptism does not produce these effects, but the Word which stands here makes of *this* water "a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost." Likewise men ask about the Lord's Supper: "How can bodily eating and drinking produce these effects?" And the Catechism answers: they in themselves do not, "but the words which stand here, namely, given and shed for you for the remission of sins; which words, beside the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief things in the Sacrament." Blessed therefore is he who has not seen, and yet believes; who as he walks God's appointed way of salvation holds fast His ordained means of grace.

And now the sermon is at an end. Once more our Lord God has declared to us His gracious will to save. In whom shall His Word have saving power, because they lay aside their own wisdom and pride, and hear it, believe it, and obey it? Our Lord said to His fellow-townsmen of Nazareth: "There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them were cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." It is just as plain, that none of us shall be saved, unless we have eyes to note the misery sin has wrought in us, ears to hear the Gospel message about the Christ, and hearts to walk in His appointed way of salvation. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Gospel: Matthew 8, 23-27.

Gen. 8, 1-20, and its summary in Heb. 11, 7: "By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."

Hymns:

- 422. Pleasant Are Thy Courts Above. v. 2.
- 371. Jesus, Lover of My Soul. v. 1.
- 266. O for a Faith That Will Not Shrink. v. 3.
- 270. Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me.
- 501. The Ocean Hath No Danger. v. 2.
- 502. O Lord, Be With Us When We Sail.
- 503. Eternal Father! Strong to Save. v. 2 and 3.

Noah, an Example of Joyful, Patient Thankful Faith.

"Like Noah's weary dove,
That soared the earth around,
But not a resting-place above
The cheerless waters found:

O cease, my wandering soul,
On restless wing to roam;
All the wide world to either pole
Has not for thee a home.

Behold the Ark of God,
Behold the open door;
Hasten to gain that dear abode,
And rove, my soul, no more."

G. C. Bk. No. 365.

A ship was struggling along through a great storm at sea. The waves were breaking over her deck, and threatened to engulf her. The passengers on board

were filled with anxiety and terror. Only one little lad ten years old, seemed calm and fearless. "Are you not afraid?" some one asked. "No," he replied, "my father is at the helm." As we take up this Bible narrative we may well recall our Savior's words (Mat. 18, 3): "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

That little lad puts these disciples on the lake to shame. They had Jesus, the Almighty and Merciful Saviour, with them in the ship. And how often they had seen His glory manifested to them in wonders of grace. Yet when the waves break over their little vessel, they cry in despair: "Lord, save us, we perish." Our Lord must needs rebuke them: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"

But we dare not sit in judgment upon them. How seldom we are any better and braver than they. By faith we, too, have taken the Lord Jesus into the little ship of our lives, have seen His glory and experienced His might. His love for us we have known; it is not hidden from us. Yet when storms of trouble roll, and waves of temptation dash over us, we are often disheartened and full of fears. How many cares then fill the heart; how many complaints stream from our lips. Verily, we too need more faith in the grace of God. To this may the Old Testament record of Noah help us. It tells of another vessel which was in great need and danger; and the man at its helm, godly Noah, is an example for us, first in

His Joyful Faith.

We see him building the ark. Few men ever lived through such stirring events, as this Noah. In his

godly life on earth he beheld with sorrow that "the wickedness of man was great, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only vanity." It was not easy to stand so utterly alone amid an evil generation, as Noah did in his day. At length the Lord commanded him to build the ark, and announced that He would destroy all flesh, except him and his household. And Noah did all that God had commanded him. As when one builds a church today, there were few to help and many to criticise. But Noah trusted in God with prompt and joyful obedience.

When the day comes, at God's word he enters into the ark and takes with him the persons and animals which are to be saved. And now the windows of Heaven are opened, and the fountains of the great deep are broken up. It rains forty days and nights, one after another. Higher and higher rise the floods in this Deluge of Sin. It buries the evil generation in its fearful surges. Still higher it rises, until the highest mountain-top there is twenty feet under water, and all life is destroyed on earth. That was a barren, lonely earth which Noah knew, as only the ark floated on the measureless expanse of the waters. He was having an awful experience.

One whole year Noah and his household dwelt in that ark. At first the storms swept over it; the billows rose and fell; and dark clouds hid the friendly face of the sun. No mountain, or green tree, or house met the eye. No bird enlivened the air with song; all was silence on earth, from which every other thing had disappeared, except the ark. Most certainly Noah's heart was timid and troubled.

Moreover, his faith was tried in another way. At the end of the first half-year, when the waters had stood 150 days, we read that, "God remembered Noah." This does not mean that God had forgotten His servant, but that there was no revelation; He had not spoken to him, as before. There had been no word of direction or comfort in all this time for the man in the ark; no ray of the sunlight of His grace, so that it seemed as though God had utterly forgotten about him. Yet Noah trusted in God, relied upon His promise, and waited confidently until He bade him leave the ark, even as he had done to enter it. He believed and was assured that such a day would come in God's good time. Therefore we read that "Noah became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."

Our life, beloved, is often like the little vessel of the disciples on Galilee, or like the ark in the wild deluge of waters. As we launch out into the deep, the bright hopes of youth fade away, and there are floods of trouble on every side, the storm rages, and the sun of grace is hid for days from our eyes. No word of Divine comfort refreshes us. All about us is a great waste. It seems as though God had forgotten us; the Lord Jesus is asleep in our little ship. We are ready to cry with the children of Korah (Ps. 42, 7): "All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me!" Or with David (Ps. 69, 2): "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me!" In such days we may well learn from this trustful, joyful man in the ark. This is the time to remember our Baptism, where God made His covenant with us (Is. 54, 9): "I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so I

have sworn that I will no more be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my loving kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall My covenant of peace be removed, saith Jehovah that hath mercy on thee." Or our Baptism will teach us to say joyfully with David (Ps. 42, 12): "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" Noah was also a model for us in

His Patient Faith.

The waters begin to fall, and the ark rests upon Ararat. Now the higher mountain-peaks appear. Noah opens the windows which formed the upper part of the ark all around, and the bright sunlight and fresh air stream in. Hope revives in his heart; he longs now to escape from these narrow quarters, where he has been shut in for nearly a year. He sends out a raven to see whether the dry land has appeared. It is an unclean bird, and finds food on the mountain sides. Its fear of the flood drives it back again, and its appetite for carrion sends it out; it neither returns to stay, nor does it stay away. The raven had no clear, sure message for Noah. After the raven he sends forth a dove. This clean bird finds no food or resting place for herself, and returns to the ark. This is a sure sign that the valleys are still covered. Another seven days Noah waits, and this time the dove brings back a green olive leaf in her bill. And a week later she does not return at all. The leaf filled Noah with hope, for the olives grow in the level fields; and when the dove did not return he knew that the dry land had appeared.

The deluge has gone, but still this patient man waits. At God's command he entered the ark, and

only thus will he go out. He does not take one step without the Word of the Lord. And at last God speaks to Noah, saying: "Go forth from the ark, etc." What patience he has shown here! Each time he sends out the raven or the dove, he is asking a question of God. He would know what He wills at every step of the way. Noah teaches us (Is. 30, 15): "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

And well for us, if our faith in His might and mercy stands as firm and fast. The best remedy for our troubles is this patience, of which Noah is such a shining example. As he sends out the raven and the dove time and time again, so we should direct our prayers to God. They are addressed to His very heart, and ask what His will for us really is. And if they seem vain, in spite of our diligence, as when the birds returned to Noah, we are not to grow weary and cease to ask and plead. From day to day, from Sunday to Sunday as the seven days imply, we should cry out of our depths unto the Lord. And at last the dove will fly back with the olive branch which bespeaks God's peace and salvation.

And like Noah we should never try to help ourselves out of trouble by ways and means contrary to God's will. The world is always doing such things. What forbidden, unholy means they use in trouble. He who is in want reaches into his neighbor's pocket or breaks into his home. That is bad enough, but what shall we say of those who would ruin others in business, body, or soul, in order to add to their riches! He who is sick tries to cure himself by that sorcery which God so solemnly condemns in the Word. He who is troubled

drowns his troubles in drink or drugs, and often his soul as well. But not so the children of God. They say with Joseph: "How can I do this great evil, and sin against my God?" Or with Paul: "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?" They wait His answer like Noah, and walk in His ways.

Neither do they make undue haste to escape from their troubles. God's good things for body and soul often take time, but they are well worth waiting for. Had Noah hurried out of the ark, he might have defeated God's gracious plan, and brought ruin upon himself and all the poor creatures in his care. God had a good reason for letting him wait, and also in our troubles of body and mind, heart and soul. They must first carry out His loving purpose in our lives before they cease. With Noah let us continue to send out the dove, and uncover the ark, looking the more freely unto Heaven, "as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid unto the hand of her mistress" (Ps. 123, 2). Only when He says: "Enough," "Go forth," can we with joyful heart leave our trials and troubles behind us, and rejoice in His help. And what shall we do then? Here again Noah is a godly example with

His Thankful Faith.

The doors of the ark are opened. The men and animals stream gladly forth. Birds and beasts delight in their freedom, and enliven with joyful sounds the air, the fields and the rivers of the new earth. But what does Noah do? Is his first thought the building of a house, wherein he may enjoy the life so wonderfully preserved to him? Does he stand and mourn the

damage and desolation the deluge has wrought? No! His faithful heart moves him first of all to thank the Giver of life and gracious Helper! He builds an altar to the Lord, and there he offers burnt offering. It is a confession that he is a poor sinner, and what God has done for him is all grace. It is an offering of thankful love, praising the God who has so graciously kept His promises. It is a prayer that God would bless and hallow his going out of the ark and his coming into the new earth. It is a holy vow that hereafter the Lord shall be his Refuge and Dwelling-place in every time of trouble, and that as for him and his house they will serve the Lord. Therefore it is a sweet savour before the Lord; and God makes a covenant of peace with Noah, that He will never again for man's sake curse the ground with another deluge.

There on Ararat is the first altar mentioned in the Bible. As such it is important, but the more so because here we learn from godly Noah how to behave when God has delivered us out of our troubles. Be it far from us also to recall them and forever weep over them; far from us to count up how much they have cost us in earthly goods, or to worry about new troubles in the future. Neither let us plan to make up what we have lost in darker days by plunging headlong into worldly pleasures. Our first, our holy duty is that altar to the Lord, and Noah's sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour. When the Lord has delivered us out of trouble, let us not forget to confess before Him our sinfulness, because of which the cross was laid upon us in loving chastisement. Let ours, too, be an offering of thanksgiving, as with thankful hearts we bless His Name "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;

who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies," (Ps. 103, 4). Let it be our prayer, that God would graciously bless what we have borne to the purifying and saving of our souls; and our vow that we will love and serve and trust in Him for all the days to come. Then ours also will be an acceptable offering. The cross will bring forth in us rich and blessed fruits. Tribulation will work for us patience and experience, hope and faith that make not ashamed. The Lord Jesus will still abide in the little ship of our life. And often we shall ask in joyful wonder: "What manner of man is this, that the wind and the sea obey Him?" In every new trouble we shall be able to say with that little lad: "My Father is at the helm. I will fear no evil!" Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

Gospel: Matthew 13, 24-30.

II. Kings 6, 15-23, especially 16: "And he answered, Fear not; for they that are with us are more than they that are with them."

Hymns:

484. Come, Ye Thankful People, Come. v. 2f.

430. On What Has Now Been Sown. v. 1.

432. Almighty God! Thy Word Is Cast. v. 3.

Our Attitude Toward the Enemies of the Gospel.

The king of Syria was at war with Joram, king of Israel. But each attack came to nought, in spite of the host which followed his banners, because the Prophet Elisha was warned by God, where and when the attack would be made. Suspecting this, the Syrian monarch sent a mighty army to Dothan to capture this troublesome prophet. In the night they surrounded the city; and when the servant of Elisha rose in the morning, he found to his horror that the place was besieged on every side by the horses and chariots of the enemy. Wherever he looked, there were forests of spears, and beneath them the cold glitter of armed ranks. He hurried back in terror to Elisha, crying: "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" That is the first scene which our narrative sets before our eyes.

And we see something like it in our days. The Gospel of Christ is surrounded by hostile ranks. Our prisons and houses of correction are full of them.

Drunkards stagger along our streets. Beggars and tramps knock at our doors; and few of them are "God's poor." God's holy Day is openly despised in many ways. Wait until the May-walks begin, and you will see the only use many have for it. God's name is tossed about on many lips, as lightly as the dust in the streets. And many a doubter and mocker lays his dirty hand on the Word of God to argue it away, when it rebukes his evil heart and life. The Spiritualists are glad to forget that this Book is God's only Revelation from the world of spirits; and the Scientists use it only as a doctor-book for the body, and teach a faith which has no use for God's common sense means for healing our bodies. Few hold it to be the only rule for our faith and life; and round about us are a host of enemies who hate Christ and His Word of Truth. We, too, are often ready to sigh: "Alas, my Master! How shall we do?"

But it is of no use to lie down with Elijah under the juniper tree, and sigh: "It is enough, etc." It is still worse to wrangle with our God, like Jonah, because He is patient and long-suffering with those who break His laws and twist His Gospel all out of shape. We dare not fold our hands in our lap, and look on idly at this ruin of the faith and life of men. We must be up and doing; but we must ask carefully what He would have us do, or we may harm the Kingdom of God among men more than we help it. The servants in our Gospel have the right zeal, but also the wisdom to ask the Master before they begin to root out the tares, and, as He warns them, the wheat with them. His plan is: "Let both grow together until the harvest." And once more in our O. T. lesson which parallels this Gospel, we

learn from the example of Elisha, the right attitude toward these tares in doctrine and life, which spring up in the wheat-field of the Church and in the world beyond its walls.

*We Should Not Fear Them Though Many
and Mighty.*

The army sent to besiege Dothan and capture Elisha was a mighty multitude. So far their plan had succeeded; they had blocked every exit from the city. They were sure now that the prophet could not escape them; and rejoiced in his capture as an accomplished fact. All this the servant sees at a glance, and therefore his terror. But Elisha who is most concerned in this matter, is quite unconcerned in spirit. "Fear not," he replies to the anxious cry of his servant, for they that are with us are more than they that are with them!" He knows that the God of Israel is with them, the Lord of Sabaoth or Hosts, Strong and Mighty. He knows that all God's unseen angels are encamped about them for their defense. By faith he sees their serried ranks as a wall round about, and therefore is full of quiet, joyful confidence. He goes out with his servant to view the visible enemy, and prays: "Jehovah, open his eyes, that he may see." And when his eyes are opened, he beholds "the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha!" These were the hosts sent to deliver Elisha from his enemies.

If we look only at the might and multitude of the enemies of the Gospel, we will often be timid and afraid. They besiege the City of God on every side. They attack the Word of God, and question its inspired

truth. They dishonor the person of Christ, making a mere man out of the Son of God, as for instance the Unitarians. Others attack the Christian church; they say there are hypocrites in the Church, and that they can do just as much good at home, and have many like objections to the Church. Or they give nothing to support it and spread its membership, which is just as real an enmity. Some attack Christian marriage by their own evil examples; or Christian law and order, as the anarchists and all who twist or break the laws. So every gate is besieged for God's people today. What can we do against such enemies, so many and so mighty? "With might of ours can naught be done." These are the visible portion of the hosts of the Devil, who is the Prince of this world; against such a supernatural Spirit of wickedness we are utterly helpless.

And yet we are to be unafraid, because those who are with us are more than those who are against us. We have mighty allies on our side. One of these is conscience. It can be choked into silence for a time, but not silenced for ever in any heart. It is always fighting for us in the ranks of our foes. It unnerves their hands, and strips those who attack the truth of all courage and hope.

And here is Christian custom. That goodly armor among our people has blunted many a weapon against the Lord and His church. It has become a habit for many of us to hear the Word of God and worship Him each Lord's Day, and even the Devil has a hard time to overcome this and other excellent Christian habits.

Here, too, is the civil law in Christian lands. That steps in to defend the Gospel from many an attack. Men cannot do anything they please on our Lord's

Day, and set a bad example to the young. And there are severe penalties for those who disturb Divine services. Meanwhile the Christian is protected in his teaching and living according to the Word of God, and not persecuted for this as were the Apostles and the early Church.

But all such friends cannot help us much. Our hopes must look higher; our eyes must be lifted up "unto the hills from whence cometh our help." On our side stand a cloud of holy witnesses, who once strove and suffered here on earth, and now wear the crown on high. They lift up their hands before the Throne of God, and pray Him to bless the cause of His Church with victory. And here are the holy angels, who carry out God's commands:

"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."

And we have kept for the last the best of all; the Lord is with us, the Mighty God and faithful Saviour. He has promised that "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against His Church;" "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world;" "Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give unto you the Kingdom." His word is true, and His promise shall never fail.

All these are with us; and they are more and mightier than any who can be against us. We have holy allies who cannot be outmatched and overcome. They stand by our side, even when we do not see them, just as they surrounded the mountain of Dothan. It is only the fault of our unbelief and little faith, if we do not feel them about us. If we pray the Lord to open

our eyes, we too shall realize that there are horses and chariots of fire round about us; and then we will cry with David (Ps. 27, 3) :

“Though a host should encamp against me,
My heart shall not fear
Though war should rise against me,
Even then will I be confident.”

Or will say with John: “He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world;” “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” Or we will exult with Paul (Rom. 8, 31) : “If God is for us, who is against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?” It was from such verses that Luther learned to sing:

Though devils all the world should fill,
All watching to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill,
They cannot overpower us.”

Again,

Our Attitude Must Be Prayer to God.

It is not enough, simply not to fear. We have a duty to discharge against the foes of the Gospel. We must defeat them by our prayers. Here again Elisha is an excellent example for us. It was not enough, that he himself felt safe in the Lord's keeping. He wishes to defeat, and render harmless, these enemies of his fatherland. He goes out to meet these Syrians, and as he draws near, lifts up his hands to the Lord. He has no other weapon against them. He prays: “Smite this people with blindness,” and his prayer is heard. Elisha, whom they seek, stands before them, and they know him not, because their eyes are holden. He says:

“This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek.” Blind and helpless they are led into the midst of the city of Samaria. There he prays that their eyes may be opened, and as he promised, they find the man they are seeking, but they also find themselves captives, surrounded by the army of Israel. What a wonderful power there was in the prayers of Elisha; opening first the eyes of the young man, blinding those of the enemies, and then so opening them that they could see resistance was useless.

This is the plan we are to follow. We are to defeat the evil purposes of the enemies of the Gospel. For they are most dangerous: enemies of our peace, of good order, of our property and our country, of the Lord Jesus and of His Church. They must be overcome, and made harmless and helpless. For this here are many weapons. Our own good confession of the Lord Jesus in word and work will do much. Our warnings and rebukes may stir up their conscience; our entreaties move their hearts. In many a case we will win the victory thus by the grace of God. But often our confession of Christ is only laughed at; warnings and entreaties fall on deaf ears and hardened hearts. Then we must mourn with Jeremiah: They set their faces like flint; they refused to return.”

But we have one more weapon, and it has the promise of victory: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you.” And here, when we are dealing with enemies of Christ’s Kingdom, and not our personal ones, we are truly praying in His name, and as He would pray Himself. This weapon we must not fail

to use, as Elisha did to strengthen his servant's faith; and we, too, must thus open the eyes of the Lord's disciples against such enemies and their evil example; and that the enemies may be blinded, and kept from doing the harm they intended. For their own sakes, as well as the Church's their wisdom should be put to shame, the self-righteousness they build on crumble into the dust, their earthly goods and pleasures made bitter to them, and the false lights they have been following taken from them. And in such prayers we should persevere daily, until we can say to them with Elisha: "This is not the way; follow me, and I will bring you to the man ye seek." Then it will be time to pray that God would open their eyes to see Him, whom they have been persecuting, Him who is made of God for us wisdom and righteousness, and that they may find in Him their God and Saviour. Such prayer is not in vain; the faith of many a father and mother prays away the destruction into which a son or daughter is running. There is no lack of blessed answers to such believing prayer, which deals not so much with earthly things, riches and health, as with the coming of God's Kingdom. Presented in our Master's name and spirit, they have the promise of being heard, and will work such miracles as Elisha wrought. We never cease to wonder over them, and to praise God for them. And if the enemies of the Gospel still resist, there is one last thing we may do, and that is to

Overcome the Evil by Love.

Elisha leads his foes into the city of Samaria, where they find themselves in the power of the Israelites. There is terror in their hearts; each house seems a prison or a grave, each Israelite an executioner.

They look to Elisha with fear and trembling. The king, seeing his foes in his power, wishes to slay them. He asks eagerly: "My father, shall I smite them? Shall I smite them?" But the prophet reminds him they are not his captives, taken by his own weapons; but God's, overcome by His power. Therefore he bids Joram set food before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master. And reluctantly Joram obeys. A great meal is prepared, and when the Syrians have been fed, they are sent away with not a hair of their heads harmed. Neither was such love in vain, for we read: "And the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel."

Here is a glorious example of how we should deal with the enemies of the Gospel. I know that many an honest heart often feels with John and James (Luke 9, 54), like calling down fire from Heaven upon them. But it forgets what manner of spirit it is of, and our Master's rebuke in Gethsemane: "He that taketh the sword, shall perish with the sword." Vengeance belongeth unto God, and the rulers He has ordained bear the sword not in vain. But as individual Christians our one great weapon is love. Any kindness we show the enemies of the Gospel is "coals of fire" upon their heads, burning its way down into the heart, until they too must forsake their enmity against the Word and Church, and return to their true Lord and Master. For His sake we are to love them, that His Name may be glorified; for their own, that their souls may be saved; and for our own, who must show forth His praises worthily, if we are to share His love.

If we abide in such love, we will surely win the day and hold the field in the end. The enemies will no more

mock at our confession of Christ, or turn a deaf ear to our warnings and entreaties. Love will put them to shame and turn their hearts, and from enemies of the Gospel they may become its best friends and supporters. Then what a glorious victory will be ours. And even if our prayers and love fail, we have at least kept our Lord's command, and done what we could. The result we may leave to His might and mercy with all confidence. The Lord strengthen us for this holy warfare against the power of the Evil One. May He Himself write on our hearts that noble saying of the Epistle for the day (Col. 3, 12 and 14): "Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long suffering * * * and, above all things, put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. Amen.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD.

Last Sunday After Epiphany.

Gospel: Matthew 17, 1-9.

Exodus 33, 17-23, and especially v. 18: "And he said, Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory."

Hymns:

- 333. Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.
- 83. Son of Man, to Thee I Cry. v. 3, and Refrain.
- 43. O One With God the Father. v. 1.
- 49. 'Tis Good, Lord, to Be Here!
- 129. Beautiful Saviour, Lord of Creation.
- 294. O Worship the King, All-Glorious Above.
- 295. Blessing and Honor, and Glory and Power.

*The Great Transfiguration Hour in Moses'
Life and Ours.*

With this service the Epiphany draws to a close. It manifests to us the Lord Jesus Christ in all His lowliness and all His glory. At its beginning it roused us with the cry (Is. 60, 1): "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of Jehovah (the Lord) is risen upon thee." Then it showed us the glory of the Lord in His first recorded word as a twelve-year-old lad in the Temple. A ray of Heavenly light shines in that saying: "I must be about My Father's business," and reveals the holy mystery of His coming to earth. Again, His glory is manifested forth at Cana, in His first miracle. And the other Epiphany Sundays, which are often crowded out by an early Easter, tell us how He heals the sick, stills the storms of our life, and rules over His Church with unspeakable wisdom and patience.

The last of them, which is our theme to-day, tells of His Transfiguration. There on the Mount (tradition says Tabor, but Hermon is more probable) His glory burst through the servant's form, in which He was veiled at other times. His face shone as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. The Apostle Peter (II. 1, 17) was an eye-witness of His majesty, and says: "For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there was borne such a voice (testimony) to Him by the Majestic Glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." There appeared also to the astonished disciples two Old Testament figures, shining with the same glory which transfigured our Lord. They were Moses and Elijah, the representatives of the Law and the Prophets; one the founder, and the other the restorer of God's Old Testament Kingdom on earth. These men in their lifetime had looked deeper than others into the glory of God. In the Advent season we have dwelt on how God appeared to Elijah on Mt. Horeb (or Sinai) in the still, small voice, and revealed to him the near and distant future of the Kingdom. Today we will meditate on a like hour in the life of Moses. May the Lord open our eyes and heart, that by faith we too may see His glory, as Moses did on Sinai in this

*Climax of God's Old Testament Revelation
to Man.*

Just before our text Moses stood before the Tabernacle, and besought the Lord to show him His ways, that he might know Him and find favor in His sight; and to "Consider that this nation is Thy people." And because God knew him by name and he had found favor in His sight, He promised: "My presence shall

go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Then Moses was encouraged to ask further: "Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory!" Now this servant of God had already seen many a revelation of God's glory: in the burning bush on Horeb, the plagues in Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea where the waves divided before Israel but closed in upon pursuing Pharaoh, in the manna from Heaven and the water out of the rock, and in the holy words he had already heard in the Mount at the first giving of the Law. But hitherto the Lord had appeared only in the pillar of the cloud and of fire. Moses heard His voice as "He spake with him, as a man speaketh unto his friend," but he longed to see the Almighty and Eternal God face to face. It was not curiosity, but love which moved him to make this request, even as we long to see the foreign friend who writes us kind letters from a distant land. The desire grew out of his office and his faithfulness in it. If he was to be a true mediator between God and His people, he must come very near to God even as he did to Israel. So God's first gracious promise emboldened him to make this second great request.

And the Lord was not angry at His servant for this. He said: "I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and will proclaim the name of Jehovah before thee. * * * Thou canst not see My face; for man shall not see Me and live." Where is the human eye, which can gaze upon the sun in its flaming glory without being darkened and blinded! Just so little can sinful man behold the face of our Holy God, and a dying creature of the dust look upon the ever-living God. Yet Moses was to see the hem of His garment of light. God promised to put him in a cleft of the

rock and to cover him with His hand until He had passed by. Thus Moses would have a glimpse of His glory in His vanishing trail. The next morning he was to come up into the Mount, and then he should see all that the eye of mortal man can endure of the glory of God.

What thoughts must have raced through his brain in that sleepless night! How his soul must have trembled and rejoiced by turns in the revelation promised him on the morrow. No wonder he rose early and began to climb up the mountain in haste. He was alone; no friend dared accompany him. Far aloft, near the highest peak of Sinai, there was a cleft or cave. Here very probably Elijah stood centuries after, and heard the voice of Jehovah. Here Moses stands now and waits in believing prayer and trembling fear. A cloud comes down from the summit over the face of the mountain. The Lord is passing by for His servant. A Heavenly glory shines about this man born of the dust. But a merciful hand is laid upon his eyes that the sight of the glory of the Lord may not destroy him. He hears the voice of the Lord his God, sweeter than the songs of the redeemed, and lovelier than angels' voices: "Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth; keeping loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, etc." As the voice dies away in thundering echoes, the hand is lifted from Moses' eyes, and he sees the afterglow of the glory of the Lord passing by.

It is not strange that Moses, casting himself down in the dust, bows his head to the earth and worships. He had seen and heard what no human eye had seen, no ear of man heard, what was hidden before even from him, the great prophet and friend of God. There at a burning bush God had revealed to Moses His eternal and unchangeable nature. At the court of Pharaoh and in the waves of the Red Sea he had beheld the All-might of God. On Sinai, when he first received the Law, he had learned to know the holiness of God; and a few days later His righteousness, when 3,000 of the idolatrous Israelites who were dancing about the golden calf, were slain by the swords of the Levites.

But here, in this blessed hour, God reveals Himself in a very different way. This is not so much that he sees God's back, or trail of glory, but that he sees Him who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth." It was a foretaste of the Gospel which he had as he looked into the glory of God's sin-forgiving grace. This was the climax, the crowning hour, of his whole life! This was the reason why his "face shone" (34, 35), so that he must needs cover it with a veil when he spake to the people. Nowhere in the Old Testament do we read of anything like this; it is the climax of God's Old Testament revelation of Himself as One who "keeps loving kindness for thousands, etc." Now the two tables of the Law, which Moses had dropped and broken before, are renewed, and with them God's gracious Covenant with His people. Once more the mercy seat stands in the Tabernacle for that Israel who has forsaken the golden calf; once more the smoke of the sacrifice ascends to the Throne of Grace. Now Israel may com-

fort themselves after the fashion of the 130th Psalm: "O Israel, hope in Jehovah; for with Jehovah there is loving kindness." Now they may sing, as David did to his harp (Ps. 103, 8) :

"Jehovah is merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness,
He will not always chide;
Neither will He keep His anger forever.
He hath not dealt with us after our sins,
Nor rewarded us after our iniquities, etc."

This glory of the Lord Moses saw in the Mount is also

A Mirror of the New Covenant.

It was the morning-dawn of a greater glory which now shines for poor sinners in this dark world, the day-break of "The Gospel of the Glory of Christ," (II. Cor. 4, 4), the beginning of God's New Testament revelation of Himself. Moses prayed: "Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory," and his petition was granted as far as was possible then. But John rejoices later: "We beheld His glory, glory as of the Only-Begotten from the Father, full of *grace and truth*" (1, 14).

"God is Love!" That is the inscription written now in letters of gold on earth and sky. "God is Love!" That is above all else the message of our preaching. For this is the glory of Him, who is the "Effulgence of His glory, and the Very Image of His Substance" (Heb. 1, 3)." In Him the grace and glory of God are revealed; they shine full and clear only in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His holy walk, as he eats with publicans and sinners, seeking the lost; in His holy Word, as He teaches, rebukes, and prays for His erring brethren; in His holy works as He goes about doing good, from His first miracle wrought in kindness to the

needy couple at Cana, to the last, as in the night of sorrow in Gethsemane, He heals the ear of His wounded enemy. It shines also in His death, and the glory of God is more bright and beautiful on Golgotha than when Moses saw it on Sinai. The Lord God Himself wrote over the Cross in letters of light: "God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3, 16). And beneath that Cross all believers rejoice with John (1, 3, 16): "Hereby know we Love, because He laid down His life for us." God's love shines also in all His New Testament gifts of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which supply our every want and bless us in life and death. It shines also in the ways of His Providence. Often these are dark, and we do not understand them; our feet grow weary and our hearts rebel. Yet often out of this very cloud of our darker days we hear the voice saying: "God hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

And this New Testament revelation of God's grace and glory is not reserved for Moses alone, who was "faithful in all God's House" (Numb. 12, 7). It is offered now to each poor sinner. It is true that God adds here for the unrepentant who trifle with His grace, that "He will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34, 7). Yet even this is grace, grace which admonishes and warns them betimes. All who feel and confess the misery of sin, may rejoice in the mercy and grace, loving kindness and truth of their God. Therefore we say rightly, that this revelation to Moses is a mirror of the glory God reveals more fully in the

New Testament; and we too fall down with him in the dust, bow our heads, and worship. But we have a still greater reason to do this: What Moses saw was

A Prophecy of the Glory of Heaven.

What did Moses see, after all? Little enough, compared with what he longed for! The glory of the Lord was veiled, and His hand upon his eyes, as He passed. He heard the message, "Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth," but only saw the back, or vanishing trail of God's glory. Then he went down from the mountain, and dwelt once more in the barren, comfortless desert. Forty years he wandered there, and was the meekest of all men on earth, though tried, as few are, by that stiff-necked people. He lived to experience what he wrote in the 90th Psalm:

"The days of our years are three score years and ten,
Or even by reason of strength four score years;
Yet is their pride but labor and sorrow;
For it is soon gone, and we fly away."

He had only the memory of that glorious hour to sustain him; only the word he then heard to comfort him. With these he must needs be satisfied, until he enters into the rest that remains for the people of God, and sees the glory of the Lord in eternity.

Our life is like his! Here and there on our way through its deserts there is a Sinai with its revelation of God's glory, hours of spiritual uplift, times of refreshing from the Lord. But it is only the hem of His garment of light we behold; we see only as through a glass darkly. And after such brief hours have been vouchsafed us, we go on like Moses through the desert.

Our sinfulness and weakness makes the way hard; temptation and trial, cross and loss weary our souls. We, too, have only the Word of the Lord to comfort us, and with this we must be satisfied.

So from year to year that longing grows in our soul which the Psalmist voices (42, 2):

My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God,
When shall I come and appear before God?"

And the Lord answers us as He did His servant Moses: "Thou canst not see My face; for man cannot see Me and live." Good old Augustine as he comments on this text, writes: "So be it Lord, then I will die that I may see Thy face!" It is a bold saying, yet one without a flaw in the light of eternity, one which shall be fulfilled. The years will come and go, until our last hour strikes; and well for us if our last wish and prayer be this of Moses: "Show me, I pray Thee, Thy glory." For then the cloud shall be lifted in the hour of our dying, the hand taken away from our eyes. No more shall His glory be hidden from us. Then we shall see more than the hem of His garment, and the vanishing sweep of His glory. No more shall we see as through a glass darkly, but face to face; and we shall know him even as now we are known by Him. Like Stephen in his martyr death, we shall see "the glory of the Lord, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God," "Him whom not having seen we loved." And round about the Throne shall resound from saints in glory seated the eternal hallelujah, as once on Sinai from the cloud: "Jehovah, our God, is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth." Then the blessed Epiphany Season of Eternity shall have begun!

But until then we must be satisfied with this Word spoken to us. Until then our Lord would comfort us, as He did Martha before He raised her brother: "Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?" Therefore, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." The beautiful hymn, "Rock of Ages Cleft for Me," was based on this passage. He who like Moses is hidden in the cleft of the Rock, the crucified Christ; who lives in Christ and His Church, shall one day see the glory of God, the Eternal Springtime of His presence and joy. Amen.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

Gospel: Matthew 20, 1-16.

I. Sam. 16, 4-13, especially v. 7: "But Jehovah said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him: for Jehovah seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh on the heart."

Hymns:

- 304. All That I Was, My Sin, My Guilt. v. 1.
- 273. Here Behold Me, as I Cast Me. v. 3.
- 257. As Pants the Hart for Cooling Streams. v. 1.
- 291. Lord, With Glowing Heart I'd Praise Thee. v. 3.
- 264. O for a Heart to Praise My God.

God's Thoughts Are Not Like Man's.

"So the last shall be first, and the first last." This saying of our Lord sums up today's Gospel; and this parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard is an illustration of it, and is framed in by these words at the beginning and the end. It shows us God's idea contrasted with man's. We would think that the first, who had borne the burden and heat of the day, deserved more than those who labored but an hour. But God says: "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a shilling? * * * Is thine eye evil, because I am good? It is my will to give unto this last even as unto thee." So God deals with men to this very day, and so He will to the last hour. Those who are first in their own eyes, and often acclaimed as first by men, are usually last before God; and those who are last and least in the estimation of themselves and of others, are frequently the first and greatest with Him. God's ideas

differ from man's; His thoughts are not ours. Man looks about for that which is great and renowned; God regards the humble and unknown. Man is impressed with that which makes a great noise and show; God with the "Quiet in the land." Man judges by the outward appearance; God by the hidden man of the heart. So we are taught in this Old Testament text.

*The Lord Looketh Not on the Outward
Appearance.*

The heart of man is by nature full of pride. We are easily puffed up by this or that; and this pride we do not lay aside in worship, prayer or the labors of God's Kingdom, as our Gospel reminds us. It often leads us astray when we work and walk with our fellow-men. Many things minister to this pride. We boast that we belong to this or that people; there is a national pride which shows itself in the language question, disturbing our churches. Again the dweller in the town often thinks himself superior to the man from the countryside; the citizen of some great metropolis looks down upon the man of the smaller town.

Our narrative humbles such pride exceedingly, for the High Priest Samuel is sent by the Lord to Bethlehem, to anoint a king over Israel and Judah in the stead of disobedient Saul. Not to rich and mighty Jerusalem, with its proud and exalted position in the land, is he sent; not to the priestly city of Hebron, whose hills were covered with olives and its mountainsides with the finest grapes; not to Jericho, celebrated for its palm-groves and gardens. No! Samuel must turn to poor, little, insignificant Bethlehem. It is true there were sunny hills and goodly pastures there; but

it was so small, that in the 15th of Joshua with its list of the cities of Judah, Bethlehem is not even mentioned! And 600 years later, though the place had surely grown, the prophet Micah says of it: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah * * * art little to be among the thousands of Judah." Those who lived in cities which had their thousands looked with pitying patronage upon the man of Bethlehem. Even the elders of this town do not understand why the great Judge and High Priest of their people, Samuel, should visit them. They *tremble* and ask: "Comest thou peaceably?" They fear they have done some wrong, and Samuel has come to punish them. Yet this little town the Lord had chosen! Here a king was to be found for His people; yea, centuries later a Virgin was to bring forth here a Son, who should "save His people from their sins." "The Lord looketh not on the outward appearance." This Bethlehem, despised of man, was honored in His sight.

Again we boast of the family to which we belong. We are proud of its long line of illustrious ancestors: generals, statesmen, and scholars. Bethlehem also had some honored and even noble families. The royal house of Saul was represented there by the family of god-fearing Jonathan. Captains and officers of the king were there. But Samuel passed by all these houses; he did not visit the oldest and best families. One family there was especially little and unimportant, that of Jesse. It had no long and glorious history, and few rich and famous forefathers. One of its ancestors, Elimelech, was a poor man, who in the time of famine was obliged to flee away with his two sons, and died in a distant land. Boas, it is true, owned a little land, but that was not worth much, because it was located in

this rural settlement. And his wife, Ruth, had come from Moab, a poor girl, and gleaned as a beggar in his fields, that she and her mother-in-law might have bread to eat. Those were no names to stir the world, or even this small town. But God looketh not on the outward appearance. The family of Jesse did not find favor in the eyes of man, but it did in the sight of the Lord, and there He chose a king for His people.

And yet again, our hearts are lifted up in pride because of our superior gifts. One talks in a confident way of good looks, another of his knowledge. One is proud of his wealth, another of his position. Even the High Priest Samuel is dazzled by these gifts. When Jesse sets his first-born, Eliab, before him, Samuel thinks: "Surely Jehovah's anointed is before Him!" It was the giant stature of the youth which deceived him; Eliab's strength and noble bearing. But just then the words of our text are recorded: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have rejected him: for Jehovah seeth not as man seeth, etc." Now Jesse brings a second and a third son; but all are allowed to come and go. Each of the seven has his excellencies and special virtues, but on each the same verdict is pronounced: "Neither hath Jehovah chosen this!" And now Samuel must ask whether Jesse has no more sons, and is told that there is one more, the youngest, who is out keeping the sheep. The father seems never to have thought of him, and it did not occur to any of them to call him in, and present him to the High Priest. Yet when this young man, despised of his father and brethren, is brought at Samuel's command, the voice of the Lord says: "Arise, anoint him; for this is he!" One lightly esteemed by men is highly

esteemed by God, and made king of His people. God looketh not, as man, on the outward appearance.

This history teaches us, that the superior gifts and graces we often make so much of, leave us worthless in the sight of God. The Almighty God cares nothing whether we have come from this land or that; out of a great city or the meanest village; from a celebrated family or a lowly one; whether we are first or last in our own home; honored of men or despised of them; homely or handsome; learned or with little education.

When we gaze out from some high mountain over the valley beneath, all there seems small and petty. And the Lord looks from His throne, high over all the mountain-tops of earth and Heaven. Our cities and palaces, all our treasures and ornaments of earth, all that seems so great and shines so bright to us, is as nothing to Him who sits on high. All the show in which our hearts delight, the bright colors which please us, disappear from His viewpoint. All our glory and renown vanishes before Him, as the mist when the sun looks upon it with his heat. Before Him we are poor worms of the dust. Therefore we should not deceive ourselves, or let others deceive us. Let none build, like these laborers in our Gospel, upon his virtues and good works. These are nothing, nothing at all, in the sight of the All-Knowing and Holy God. And as our Saviour's lips declared: "He that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted," (Luke 18, 14).

If you are annoyed, because you are so little thought of among men, and seem to amount to so little, then take comfort in this story. The Lord looketh not as men

do. He called David from the sheep to the throne of Israel. He looked lovingly upon the publican in the Temple. He lifted up the woman who was a sinner out of the dust where she had cast herself. And He made Peter, the rough, profane sailor, a fisher of men. So He may deal with us, even though we do not find favor in the eyes of men, for,

The Lord Looketh on the Heart.

That is the second thing we learn from this narrative. Samuel had already declared to Saul: "But now thy kingdom shall not continue: Jehovah hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and Jehovah hath appointed him to be prince over His people." Such a man after His own heart He had not found in Jerusalem, Hebron, or Jericho; but in Bethlehem. Such a man after His own heart He had not found among the rulers and elders of the town, but in the house of Jesse. Such a man He had not found in Eliab and his older brethren, but in David the youngest son of the house. The youth who fed his father's sheep in the fields of Bethlehem had wholly given his heart to the Lord. When by day and night his attentive eye rested on the wonderful works of God in Heaven and earth, he saw in them the hand and heart of his God, whose very Being is Love. He sang to his harp of His holy and reverend Name, and of the wonders of His almighty hand. He sang also of the mountains and valleys, but above all these the burden of his song was the love and goodness of God. He trusted in the Lord, committed to Him his ways, and clung to Him as "the strength of his life, and his portion for ever." Therefore he became humble, and waited quietly until the hand of the Lord should exalt him in His service,

and call him away from this child's play of watching the sheep. On rare occasions when wild beasts attacked them, he showed how manly a part he could play in defense of his helpless and timid charges. But it was his humility, piety and spiritual mind the Lord looked upon; and this in His sight made the youth fit to wear the crown among His people.

Now some one may say: "But David was not always such a man, as you are picturing." No! Clad in the purple and seated on the throne, he committed several great and shameful sins. He caused Uriah to be foully murdered, and committed adultery with Bathsheba; and for this, God punished him severely. Moreover in disobedient pride, David numbered his people, to see how well he could help himself without the Lord's help; and for this the judgments of God fell on him and his land. All this is true, and all this weakness the Lord knew. He who says: "The imagination of man's heart is only evil continually," also says: "The Lord looketh upon the heart." It was not a heart unspotted by any sin, that God was seeking; for where would He find such among the poor children of men? The Lord seeks only a repenting, humble, believing, and thankful heart; and where He finds that, He takes pleasure in it. Such a heart He did find in David.

David had a *repentant* heart. When the prophet Nathan rebuked him for his sin, He confessed with no delay or evasions: "I have sinned against the Lord;" and in the 51st Psalm he sighs:

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness, According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

And he prays there :

“Create in me a clean heart, O God;
And renew a right spirit within me.”

Years later, when Absalom, his son, raises a rebellion against him, he sees in it God's righteous chastisement because of his sin. He goes over the brook Kidron to the Mount of Olives, barefooted, weeping, and hiding his face. And when Shimei curses him on the way—though he is the Lord's anointed—and casts stones at him, David does not desire him to be punished, but looks upon his shame as a just rebuke from the Lord, and says: “Let him alone, because Jehovah hath said unto him, Curse David (II. Sam. 16, 10).” And when the pestilence comes upon the land because of his pride in numbering the people, and 70,000 of his men of war are slain by it, David humbles himself in true repentance: “I have sinned and done evil, but what have these poor sheep done? Let the hand of the Lord be upon me and my father's house!” No one can read the Penitential Psalms thoughtfully (6, 32, 38, 51, 143) and doubt the sincere repentance of David's heart.

His was also a truly *humble* heart. Therefore he folds his hands, when he is made king, and says: “Who am I, O Lord Jehovah, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me thus far?” (II. Sam. 7, 18). Therefore he exclaims, as he worships (Ps. 8) :

“What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?
And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?”

Therefore he confesses that “God's gentleness has made him great;” and again: “Who knoweth how often he sins? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults.”

But he has also a *believing* heart. He loves the "Habitation of God's House and the place where His honor dwelleth." He "Compasses the altar of God, that he may make the voice of thanksgiving to be heard, and tell of all His wonderful works (Ps. 26, 6)." He sings on his harp (Ps. 36, 5):

"Thy loving kindness, O Jehovah, is (high as) in the heavens;
Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the skies."

No prophet looked deeper into the lowliness and the glory of the Messiah than the royal prophet David. From the day when he was anointed, the Spirit of God came upon him; and it is David who foretells the utter humiliation of the Cross in which our Saviour must cry: "My God, My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Ps. 22, 1). He knows how the Messiah will become "A reproach of men, and despised of the people" (v. 6). He foresees how the heathen will rage against Jehovah and His Anointed, and say (Ps. 2): "Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us." And it is David again, who sees the King of Glory ascending up on high (Ps. 24), and leading captivity captive; and hears Jehovah say to His Son and Lord (Ps. 110):

"Sit Thou at My right hand,
Until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool!"

David has, finally, a *thankful* heart as well. Therefore he lays aside his royal robes, and in the simple white garb of a priest dances before the ark as it is brought into Jerusalem, though his wife, the proud daughter of King Saul, sneers at him for doing such an undignified thing. This grateful David communes with God in the night watches, and his thankful heart meditates on God as he lies upon his bed. There is one

Psalm, the 103rd, which in itself convinces us of his thankful spirit:

“Bless Jehovah, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His Holy Name
Bless Jehovah, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, etc.”

That was why the Lord chose David to be king, for “the Lord looketh upon the heart.” That was why David was called “a man after His own heart,” “who walked before God in integrity of heart (with his whole heart), and in uprightness” (I. Kings 9, 4), and “who walked in God’s ways, and did that which is right in His eyes” (11, 38). And for his sake God’s blessing of the “sure mercies of David” descended for centuries upon his line, and the very Son of God was not ashamed to be called the Son of David, the one-time shepherd boy of Bethlehem.

“The Lord looketh upon the heart.” This we dare never forget. All we have and are, our gifts and graces are nothing in His sight. But a repentant, humble, believing, and thankful heart, that is everything with Him. He will not even judge our hearts by our words and deeds, as do men; but He will judge our words and deeds by what He sees in our hearts. And that is the reason why many who are first shall be last, and the last first. Amen.

“O for a heart to praise my God,
A heart from sin set free;
A heart that always feels the Blood
So freely shed for me!

A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
My great Redeemer’s throne;
Where only Christ is heard to speak,
Where Jesus reigns alone.

A humble, lowly, contrite heart,
Believing, true, and clean,
Which neither life nor death can part
From Him that dwells within.

A heart in every thought renewed,
And full of love Divine;
Perfect, and right, and pure, and good,
A copy, Lord, of Thine.

Hymn 264.

SEXIGESIMA SUNDAY.

Gospel: Luke 8, 4-15.

Numb. 13, 25 to 14, 10, especially 30f: "And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. But the men that went up with him said, We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we."

Hymns:

- 518. There Is a Land of Pure Delight. v. 5f.
- 420. Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty. v. 3f.
- 289. Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven. v. 2.
- 432. Almighty God, Thy Word Is Cast.
- 430. On What Has Now Been Sown.
- 378. Am I a Soldier of the Cross? v. 4.
- 195. A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. v. 2.

The Dignity of the Divine Word.

Our Gospel contains an impressive parable. Our Lord shows us how differently the hearts of men receive the Word of God. Into the hard heart it can not even enter; the Devil takes away the Word lest they believe and be saved. Into the shallow heart it can strike no root; they receive the Word with joy, but in time of temptation fall away. In the unclean heart it cannot grow; it is choked out by the thorns of riches, pleasures, and cares. Only in the good and honest heart does it spring up, and bear fruit an hundred fold. With such words our Lord describes the hearts of men; this is a looking-glass for every hearer of the Word.

This parable warns those who teach, not to expect too much, and yet not to hope for too little. It reminds us that many of our words will be wasted on

stony ground; but also that here and there that promise of Isaiah (55, 10f) will be fulfilled: "As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, and giveth seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." This parable also warns each hearer to examine his heart, put away what would hinder the Word, and make it good soil and a fruitful field. In our O. T. story the same solemn warning appears: so he that hath ears to hear, let him hear what God saith; for the dignity of the Word brooks no contempt. We note, first,

The Message That It Speaks.

The Lord had promised Abraham in the plains of Mamre, to give him and his descendants the land of Canaan (Gen. 12). And again, and yet again (13 and 17) He assures him: "Unto thy seed will I give the land of thy sojournings." To Isaac also He announced that "He would perform the oath which He swore to his father Abraham." And as Jacob prays on his stony pillow at Bethel, the promise is renewed to him: "The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed," 28, 13). Four hundred years later this faithful God declared to Moses, that the time had come to fulfill this promise, and that Moses was to lead the children of Israel (Jacob) up into Canaan. And Moses announced this to them as His authorized agent. It was a wonderful promise, full of comfort, for Abraham and Isaac, as they wandered in that strange land, full of hope for Jacob, as he fled from it, and as he re-

turned again home; a promise full of joy for Moses, who had seen the bondage of his brethren in Egypt.

The Lord allowed nothing to turn Him from His promise. He wrought miracles of might and mercy, that He might fulfill this word to His people. He delivered them out of the hand of Pharaoh, led them dry-shod through the Red Sea, and went before them day and night in the pillar of the cloud and fire. He fed them with water out of the rock, and manna from Heaven. He smote the Amalakites for their sake, and gave them His Holy Law from Sinai. All this showed how faithful and true He was in His promises.

‘And now Israel stands on the southern border of the promised land. At the command of Moses the twelve spies are sent to search it, and bring back news about it. Their report is very favorable, as to the land itself. It is a “good and fruitful land, flowing with milk and honey.” The evidence of this appears in the orange-like pomegranates and figs they brought back, and the immense bunch of grapes hanging from a staff over two men’s shoulders. That was a joyful sight for this people, who had been wandering now for a year in the barren desert.

And the Word we hear and read brings us good tidings, for we also are pilgrims to a Heavenly Canaan. Our Lord has promised us that “There remaineth now a rest for the people of God.” How sweetly that message of the Father-house and the many mansions rings in the ear of each weary pilgrim. There we shall rest from our labors. In that holy and blessed land God shall dwell among us, and we shall be His people. There shall be no more sickness, or sorrow, pain or

death. We have a better promise than the old Patriarchs; and it, too, is attested by miracles of might and mercy. A more than Moses is sent to be our Leader, even God's beloved Son. It is not merely from bondage to an earthly king that He delivers us, but from all sin, which is the worst slavery, and from death and the Devil. He prays for us: Father I will that those whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory." He ascended to Heaven, and went on before to prepare a place for us.

As yet we are only on the border of this goodly land of promise. But we already taste its fruits, sweeter than the pomegranates and figs the spies brought out of Canaan. The fruits we taste are the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. All these this blessed Word brings us, and therefore it is called the Gospel, or good tidings. It records the promises God has given to the poor children of men, tells of the wonders of His grace wrought for our salvation, and shows us the way we must walk into the promised land. And on that way it has many goodly fruits to strengthen the weary hand and the weak knee, and to comfort the doubting heart. What a blessed Word it is! Ought not all men to hear it with joy? Yes! But the reason they do not, is because of

The Struggle It Demands.

The spies had something more to report about Canaan. A strong people dwelt there within walled cities, and some were of gigantic stature. It was plain that Israel could not win it without a hard struggle. The races that dwelt there must be driven out with the sword. But in this the spies belied the people,

when they said it was "a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof," so crowded that they destroyed one another. And it was plain that they lied again, when they stated: "*All the people* we saw in it are men of great stature," for they only said "*some*" before. They left the impression that the only outcome of a fight with these nations would be Israel's fearful defeat, but the source of their opinion was plainly their own cowardice, because they said "We were *in our own sight* as grasshoppers" before them.

Because of this report, the Word and promises of God fell on stony, shallow, and thorny ground in the hearts of the great majority of Israel. The people lifted up their voices and cried and wept throughout the whole night. They murmured against Moses, and wished they had died in Egypt or in the wilderness: "Wherefore doth Jehovah bring us unto this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will be a prey; were it not better for us to return to Egypt? Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt!"

Of such foolish and shameful behaviour Israel was guilty. Why did they believe the ten spies and their faint-hearted opinion, more than the Word of God? Why did they load upon themselves the same guilt these ten had shouldered by their false report? Why did they think only of the struggle before them, and not of the reward which would follow it; of their enemies, and not at all of their ally, the Lord God?

They sinned greatly because they forgot all the wonders He wrought for them. He who delivered them out of Egypt and smote Amalak before them, was able

also to cast out these nations, and willing to do so in order to fulfill His promise to their fathers. But they doubted His might and mercy, yea, even His faithfulness and truth. They really accused God of not being able and willing to do what He had promised! They utterly despised their God, and lusted after the flesh-pots of Egypt, where they had toiled and sighed for centuries. The good seed of the Word fell upon stony ground in many a heart; in others it took no root so that in this time of temptation they fell away; and in still others it was choked by their love of fleshly ease and pleasure. In few indeed did it bring forth fruit.

This impressive bit of Israel's history is a mirror, in which we may behold our own faces aright. The Gospel of Jesus Christ demands a struggle from us also. There are great enemies we must overcome, before we can enter Heaven. We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with supernatural spirits of wickedness. And besides these we have the world with its cares and pleasures to contend with, and our own flesh with its evil impulses and appetites. We must run as one in a race, fight and not merely feint, if we are to win that crown which is more than a wreath of laurel, and never withers. We must endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, if we would lay hold on eternal life. He who has set out on the Christian life with honest earnestness, knows this by experience. If it costs no struggle, it is not a Christian life at all. The Heavenward way is a way uphill.

This struggle it is which keeps thousands from doing the will of God, and makes them unwilling even to hear His word. They count the cost, like Israel, and

not the reward. They despise God and his blessed promises, and drift idly with the world, because they are not willing to struggle against its current, in a Christian life. They fall by the wayside, and bring no fruit to perfection.

And we must confess, that we ourselves have often acted just like foolish Israel, before we came to a clear, conscious faith. And even now we often murmur in our hearts against the "hard sayings" of the Word, some command or duty which is not easy to do. When God's ways are hard for us, we doubt His wisdom and loving faithfulness. Then we think the children of this world have it easier and better. All this comes about, because we let our hearts become a wayside soil where the good seed of the Word cannot enter, a shallow soil where it cannot grow up, and a thorny soil where it cannot bear fruit. We may well pray for good and honest hearts because of

The Curse or Blessing It Brings,

as men despise or obey it. That was a sinful complaint of unbelieving Israel: "Would that we had died in Egypt or in the wilderness!" For them now it is fulfilled. The Lord declares in His wrath: "All those men that have seen My glory, and My signs which I wrought in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have tempted Me these ten times, and have not hearkened to My voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swear to their fathers" (14, 22f). As they spoke in His ears, so did He do to them. The bones bleached in that wilderness, of all these murmurers who were twenty years and more. 600,000 men had gone out of Egypt with their wives and children, and only Caleb

and Joshua, the two faithful spies, entered into Canaan. The 106th Psalm says of them (v. 24) :

“Yea, they despised the pleasant land,
They believed not His Word,
They murmured in their tents,
And hearkened not to the voice of Jehovah.
Therefore He swore unto them,
That He would overthrow them in the wilderness.”

And the Apostle says (I. Cor. 10, 6) : “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.” He who does not believe the Word of God, and bring forth its fruits, can never enter into the blessed land of promise. “The fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolators, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death,” (Rev. 21, 8).

But there is life, salvation, and blessedness for those who believe God’s Word, and by His grace obey it. Among the spies were those two, who denounced the false witness of the others. Caleb speaks of the promised land to the people: “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.” And when they murmur against the Lord and rebel, these two rend their clothes, and cry: “The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If Jehovah delight in us, then He will bring us into this land * * * only rebel not against Jehovah, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is removed from over them, and Jehovah is with us: fear them not.” Because of their faith, these two, Caleb and Joshua, died not in the

wilderness, but came in at last and dwelt in the promised land.

Christian faith still acts today like Caleb and Joshua. It has nothing in common with that boastful pride, which laughs at the enemies in its own imaginary strength. But neither has it any likeness to that timid fear, which thinks the enemies too mighty, and forgets God's helping hand. Faith knows the goodly land which the Lord has promised us, and His faithfulness, as well as the mighty enemies in the way, and the struggle before us. But it looks first and most to the Almighty and Merciful One by our side, who fights for us. It knows that "with might of ours can nought be done;" but relies on His help to win the day, and hold the field forever.

So the Word of God strengthens believing souls in every struggle, and gives them new courage, confidence and patience. That is the rich fruit of the Word in every good and honest heart. And therefore the faithful come at last into the land of promise, and see and possess the things that God has prepared for them that love Him." Its struggles end in victory; its watching unto prayer in eternal peace and joy. Such is the dignity and value of the Divine Word we hear and read. It speaks glad tidings, but demands an earnest struggle. It brings a curse or blessing, as we despise or obey it. Therefore with Joshua and Caleb, let not our hearts be troubled, when others doubt and despair, and disobey the Word. With Moses and Aaron let us fall on our faces, and pray for our poor brethren who sin against God's Word. And let us mourn because we ourselves are so often but half-

hearted in our faith and obedience. May the Lord give us firm faith and whole-souled love for His Word, that it may bring forth fruit in us with patience, and we may one day enter into the inheritance He has promised us in the Heavenly Canaan. Amen.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

Gospel: Luke 18, 31-43.

Isaiah 63, 1-8: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in His apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength? I that speak in righteousness mighty to save. Wherefore art Thou red in Thine apparel, and Thy garments like him that treadeth in the winevat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the peoples there was no man with me; yea I trod them in Mine anger, and trampled them in My wrath; and their lifeblood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My raiment, etc."

Hymns:

- 90. Glory be to Jesus.
- 383. The Son of God Goes Forth to War. v. 1.
- 384. Soldiers of Christ, Arise. v. 1 and 4.
- 97. When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. v. 1f.
- 99. O Sacred Head, Now Wounded. v 1f.
- 72. Art Thou Weary, Art Thou Languid. v. 2-5.
- 91. The Royal Standard Forward Goes. v. 2f.

Behold, We Go Up to Jerusalem.

With next Wednesday we enter the Lenten Season. With it there comes even into homes and hearts where the Lord Jesus does not live and reign, more of thoughtful earnestness. In the Church we lay aside our Hallelujahs, and the merry-making of worldly society begins to die out about us. The faithful disciples of our Lord love to gather in these weeks about Golgotha, the Hill of Death, and look up to the Man on the Cross, who redeemed us with His precious blood. For them that Cross is a veritable Jacob's ladder, with angels of God ascending and descending on it. Streams of blessing flow into each heart which keeps this season aright with devout worship and meditation.

Our Gospel this Sunday stands as the gateway to Lent. There we read: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things shall be accomplished which are written concerning the Son of Man, etc." Our text belongs to those things written by the prophets of old, and now fulfilled in our Saviour's Passion. Therefore, as we stand on the threshold of this season, we will let these verses direct our eyes first to

The Man of Sorrows.

The prophet Isaiah sees here a noble figure. This One comes from Edom, the people who persecuted Israel with bitter hatred, and whose chief city was Bozrah. This hero wears garments dyed a deep red. He is "glorious in His apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength." He "speaks here in righteousness, mighty to save." The prophet marks the blood-red spots on His garments, and asks why His apparel is red; and the answer is: "I have trodden the wine-press alone."

It is plain that this dialogue is a prophecy which deals with Christ's redemptive struggle and victory. Isaiah need not tell us who this holy and heroic figure is. We know whom he foresees here in spirit. When our Lord had rebuked the winds and waves, and calmed the tumult by His almighty hand, they said: "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" And when He entered into Jerusalem for the last time, the whole city was stirred and asked: "Who is this?" But we know this One who "marches, or travels, in the greatness of His strength." And we know Him by the "glorious apparel He wears. Many a time, with that poor suffering woman (in Mat.

9) we have laid hold upon the hem of His garment in faith. Though Herod put on Him a white robe, and the soldiers of Pilate a purple one, and though these afterward divided His garments among them, and cast lots for His seamless mantle, He still stands before us in this deep red apparel. It is He who "comes from Edom," back from the fray with our foes, the false and bloodthirsty, who betrayed, persecuted, and put Him to death. It is the Man of Sorrows, to whom all eyes turn in this holy and solemn season with adoration.

Every sermon now is meant to fix our eyes on Him. There are many figures in the History of our Lord's Passion, but this is not printed in our Church Books, and read at home and in our services, that we might become better acquainted with Herod and Pilate, Annas and Caiphas, Peter and Judas, the women and the disciples, the dying thief and the centurion under the Cross. In it we are to behold before all these and above them all Him who first loved us, and whom our souls love. As the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration "saw no man, save Jesus only," so we have eyes only for Him, "who bare our sorrows, and carried our griefs." And again there follows in this O. T. picture

The Great Work He Wrought for Us.

It is set before us in many different ways by the prophets. Now our Saviour is portrayed as the great Servant of Jehovah, in whom He delights; then as the Prophet, whom we are to hear; or as the King who will execute judgment and justice in the earth; the Shepherd, leading His flock; the Hero to whom the gathering of the people shall be; or the Bridegroom,

adorning His Church with rich array. But here the prophet sees Him as One who treads the winepress. It was the custom of Israel to place the grapes in a vat hewn in the rock, and tramp upon them until the juice of the grapes ran through a sieve into the waiting vessel. Thus the treading of the grapes became a familiar figure in the O. and N. T. for the wrath of God against sin. What is pictured here sums up all we see our Saviour doing for us in the Gospel: Destroying the works of the Devil, cancelling sin, and abolishing death.

We see Him at the Last Supper, saying to His disciples: "Drink ye all of it; for this is my Blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins" (Mat. 26, 28). And then He rises from the table, and says: "Arise, let us go hence." His treading of the winepress is about to begin. We see Him in Gethsemane, lying on His face and praying: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." We behold Him before Pilate in the purple robe and with the crown of thorns, bleeding from His scourging at the hands of the rude soldiers, and such an object of pity, that Pilate cries: "Behold the man! This is not one to fear as a rival of Caesar." We see Him on the Cross, stricken, smitten, and afflicted, thirsting, suffering, groaning, expiring. In all this He is treading the winepress of God's wrath against sin. "The day of vengeance (upon His foes and ours) was in His heart, and the year of His redeemed is come" (v. 4).

Isaiah continues: "I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore Mine own arm brought salvation unto Me; and My wrath, it upheld Me" (v. 5). No man or angel

could do aught to help our Redeemer. The 49th Psalm says (v. 7) of those who boast themselves in the multitude of their riches:

“None of them can by any means redeem his brother,
Nor give to God a ransom for him;
(For the redemption of their life is costly,
And it faileth for ever);
That he should still live always
That he should not see corruption.”

Even His intimate disciples could not watch one hour with Him there in Gethsemane, and later “they all forsook Him and fled.” “He looked, and there was none to help.”

That saying, “I wondered,” means more exactly, “I was terrified.” Our Saviour was troubled as He wrestled alone with death, so that His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. The earnestness of that struggle was like the desperate fury of a battle, so that He is pictured (v. 6) here as battling with Edom and others who were the implacable enemies of His people: “And I trod down the peoples in Mine anger, and made them drunk in My wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.” Yet even here He is fighting single-handed against our foes; it is only an angel from Heaven who appears in His Passion and then but to strengthen Him, though the twelve legions stand drawn up, to march at His command. The timid disciples flee, and even Peter, who swore faithfulness unto death, denies Him in the High Priest’s palace. When He is crucified there are none to help; there even His Father in Heaven seems to have forsaken Him. Thus He trod the winepress alone, and wondered, or was terrified “that there was none to uphold” Him.

The grapes He trod were those sins, which are our soul's worst enemies, each of them blood-red with guilt. Who shall describe all the weariness, pain and anguish He bore for us who made Him to serve or "burdened Him with our sins, and wearied Him with our transgressions (Is. 43, 24)." In one thing this prophecy falls short; it says nothing about the shedding of His own holy and precious blood for our sins. It is these which really sprinkled and reddened his garments, and this makes Him more glorious than any hero returning victorious from the battles of earth, with the blood of his enemies upon him. It is we, rather than the O. T. prophet, who realize fully how "glorious He is in His scarlet apparel."

And the true "greatness of His strength" is this, that "He speaks in righteousness, mighty to save." This is the Champion of whom Jeremiah spoke (23, 5) : "Behold the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is His name whereby He shall be called: Jehovah our righteousness." This is the Heavenly Bridegroom, who "betrothed himself to us in righteousness, and in justice, and in loving kindness, and in mercies" (Hos. 2, 19). He "was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (I. Cor. 1, 30). And His Kingdom is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14, 7). The poor sinner may now say confidently with Paul: "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus

Christ" (Rom. 5, 1). Thus is He "mighty to save." And finally Isaiah speaks of

The Thankoffering We Ought to Bring Him.

When he comes to the seventh verse of our chapter, he can no longer contain himself, and bursts forth into praise and thanksgiving: "I will make mention of the loving kindnesses of Jehovah, and the praises of Jehovah, according to all that Jehovah hath bestowed upon us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He hath bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His loving kindnesses." Even the blind man in our Gospel, when restored to sight, followed after the Lord and "glorified God." And all the people, when they saw it, "gave praise to God." It is true that in this holy Lenten Season we sorrow over our Lord's bitter sufferings for us, and mourn our sins which He bore for us. Yet this is not a sad and melancholy season. The remembrance of these things makes of it a real joyful thanksgiving season, a time for His praise. Our Lenten hymns are full of the "Glory that should be to Jesus."

It were cause enough for hearty thanksgiving, if He had only fed us with earthly bread, as He did the hungry multitudes in the wilderness; if He had only healed our sicknesses, as He did the blind man and the leper; if He had only delivered us from bodily danger, as He did the tempest-tossed disciples on the Lake. But we have much more to thank Him for; we know that "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed" (Is. 53, 5).

Another reason for thanksgiving is suggested in

the eighth verse: "For He said, Surely, they are My people, children that will not deal falsely: so He was their Saviour." He expects us to live up to what He has done for us; we must not disappoint Him. We dare not be unbelieving, false, and thankless children. He must have no cause to sorrow over us, as He did over the nine lepers, who "returned not to give thanks to God."

Again, our thank-offering is acceptable and pleasing to Him. Many sacrifices were brought to our Lord in the days of His flesh. The Wise Men opened their treasures before Him, and gave Him gold, frankincense and myrrh. Levi, the publican, renamed Matthew, made Him a feast in his house. Zacchæus received Him with joy, and vowed to give half of his goods to the poor, and to return each dishonest gain four-fold. Martha was busy with many things, and cumbered with much serving for His sake. The women who followed Him out of Galilee ministered unto Him of their substance. And all these sacrifices He accepted; indeed of one He said: "She hath done a good work on Me. This shall be spoken of as a memorial of her." Just so acceptable will be the hymns and prayers, the offerings and services we bring Him, as we stand in spirit beneath His Cross.

But woe unto us, if we thank Him only with our lips, and that saying (Matt. 15, 8) applies to us:

"This people honoreth Me with their lips;
But their heart is far from Me.
In vain do they worship Me,
Teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.

We dare not be such children that deal falsely; our thankoffering must be in deed and in truth; the faithfulness which follows our Master and walks in His ways, the earnestness which keeps our flesh under

the love which for His sake leaves all that hinders His service, the patience which bears the cross after Him, and walks humbly and meekly among our brethren. Such thankofferings are pleasing indeed to Him.

These let us bring with diligence, for the day is coming when these words of the prophets shall have their complete fulfillment. Then, as John saw in his vision on Patmos, the great winepress of the wrath of God shall be trodden again. The same Saviour, who came in grace to tread down our sins, will trample in judgment upon that "vintage of the earth" who hold fast their sins at His coming. John saw Him upon the white horse, coming to make war upon all who are false, unfaithful and unrighteous. He was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, and the armies of Heaven followed Him. His enemies will be made His footstool. May none of us be put to shame in that Day. As yet there is time to prepare. The holy Lenten Season is before us; our day of grace is not yet ended. "Behold now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation," for now we may still look up to the Man of Sorrows who was crucified for us, and rejoice in the great work of redemption He wrought for us, and bring Him the thankofferings in heart and life, which He so well deserves.

"Who is This that comes from Edom,
All His raiment stained with blood,
To the captive speaking freedom,
Bringing and bestowing good;
Glorious in the garb he wears,
Glorious in the spoil He bears?"

'Tis the Saviour, now victorious,
Traveling onward in His might;
'Tis the Saviour; O how glorious
To His people is the sight!
Satan conquered and the grave,
Jesus now is strong to save. Amen."

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

Gospel: Matthew 4, 1-11.

Gen. 3, 15: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed. He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel."

Hymns:

- 63. O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High. v. 3.
- 82. Saviour, When in Dust to Thee. v. 2.
- 52. My Dear Redeemer, and My Lord. v. 3.
- 451. Now That the Sun Is Beaming Bright.
- 195. A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. v. 3.
- 62. In the Cross of Christ I Glory.

The Holy War Against the Serpent.

When our Lord came to Bethany for the last time, and sat at meat in Simon's house (John 12, 3), Mary anointed His head and feet with precious ointment. We remember how the disciples murmured at the waste (as they called it) of the ointment, which might have been sold for 300 shillings. We recall also how He commended her, saying that wherever this Gospel is preached her deed of love shall be cited.

We have entered again upon the hallowed Lenten season, the yearly celebration of our Lord's Passion and Death. What may we do to show our love for Him, and to honor Him aright? This Gospel of the Cross is now preached, that we may learn to bring forth works well pleasing in His sight. Well for us, if it awaken us to repentance, and deepen in us godly sorrow for the sins which nailed Him there; if our faith in the grace and merits of the Christ is strengthened,

and we follow Him in His holy war against sin and Satan; if we learn of Him patience under the Cross, and joyful hope in life and death! We can bring Him no sweeter spikenard than this. May this House of God, and our own homes be full of it! May this season with the message it brings richly bless our homes and hearts. At our Lenten services we will meditate upon our Lord's Passion as it is foreshadowed and set forth in the Old Testament; and today we will hear about the first promise of our Saviour, given to men in Eden. It calls us to the holy war against the Serpent, and is first of all.

A Word to Strengthen Our Faith.

The Serpent had deceived the woman, and despising God's commandment she had eaten of the Tree of Knowledge. Therefore the Lord God said to the Serpent: "Because thou hast done this, cursed art thou above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life; and I will put enmity, etc."

This sentence went into effect at once. That the Serpent could speak to Eve was the first miracle of the Devil; and this change, which came upon him was the first miracle of God after the Creation. Moreover the enmity between them lasts to our very day. The serpent is a constant and dangerous enemy of man, as it lurks beneath the lovely flowers of the tropics, or springing out of the bushes bruises his heel with its deadly bite. And on the other hand there is no other creature for which man has such a horror and hatred. We kill serpents, and often those which are perfectly harmless, because of this great enmity

come down from the day when God cursed this beast. Nature has no better proof for the truth of God's Word, and even of this earliest record with which the critics find so much fault.

But after this sentence upon the Serpent follows something more important and glorious. Behind the Serpent stands the Devil, who made use of it as an instrument to tempt our first parents. Therefore the sentence falls also on him as the father of all lies and sins. His head is to be bruised, and his power destroyed. Here is the first Gospel, the promise of the woman's Seed, who comes to wage a holy war against the works of the Devil, and as our Champion to set us free from sin, death and Hell.

Therefore the first three Lenten Gospels show us how our Lord contends with the Devil and overcomes him: in the Temptation, in healing the Canaanite's daughter, "grievously vexed of a devil," and by "casting out the devil which was dumb, not through Beelzebub, but with the finger of God." This warfare was the real life-work of our Lord and Saviour. For this He became man and took upon Him our flesh, that He might step into the arena as our Champion. When all Israel dared not face the mighty giant Goliath, David went out to meet him in their stead. So the Son of David, when we were too weak for the struggle, came into the world to take up our cause against Satan. With His teachings, first of all, He delivered us from the dominion of the Devil and translated us into the Kingdom of God; with His miracles He broke the power of the Devil and drove Him and his demons out; with His sufferings and death He robbed him of his power and set at naught him who had the power of

death, the Devil; by his glorious Resurrection He left Death without his sting and the Grave without his victory; and by His victorious Ascension He made a show openly of the principality and power of the Devil and triumphed openly over him. And still today He wars triumphantly against him, as He guards His Church of believers from his might, and grants that prayer of Paul, that "the God of Peace may beat down Satan beneath our feet." But a greater day is coming when His warfare shall be accomplished, and Death, the Devil, and Hell shall be cast into the lake of fire. So Christ, the Seed of the woman, bruises the Serpent's head. All his venom and power is in his head, you note; and this shall be crushed and put to shame.

But that other word must also be fulfilled; the Serpent is to bruise the heel of the woman's Seed. This is the story of our Saviour's Passion. These temptations in the wilderness and His after-life were the bites of the poisoned fangs of the Old Serpent; and the bitter hatred, mocking scorn, and unbelief He experienced on every hand. And as this holy war waxed fierce in the days of His Passion, the wounds became more severe; they grappled hand to hand in Gethsemane where His soul was sorrowful even unto death, and His sweat like drops of blood. He was betrayed by one of His own disciples, "into whom Satan entered," and taken captive by a wicked band. In the palace of the High Priest they spit in His face, and smote Him with their fists. And hearken how Peter, once His faithful follower, denies Him, because "Satan is sifting him as wheat." All these are wounds in His warfare against the Serpent, and Satan's bruising of His heel: the scourging by Pilate's soldiers, the purple

robe and crown of thorns; the awful death on the Cross amid the shameful company of malefactors; the mocking of the priests and scribes who pass by wagging their heads; the last hellish anguish of body and soul, out of which He cries: "My God, My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

We sorrow as we remember these things He must needs bear for our salvation. But we rejoice that these wounds, sharp as they were, were only the bruising of His heel, and already on the third day were healed, as He rose all glorious from the grave in His triumph over the Devil. And especially do we rejoice, because He who bore this for us, so bruised the Old Serpent's head, that if with all our heart we believe in Christ, Satan can have no more dominion over us, and can do us no lasting harm. In this season, when His Passion and death are declared to His Church, we bring therefore our homage and thanksgiving to the Great Captain of our Salvation. And the Easter season becomes the day of His power, when His people should be "willing and serve Him in the beauty of holiness." Such is the precious ointment we may bring, which will fill the whole house with its sweet odor. But our text also contains

A Word of Warning for Us.

When Gideon went out against the hosts of Midian with his little band, he said to his 300 followers (Jud. 7, 17): "Look on me, and do likewise; and behold, when I come to the outermost part of the camp, it shall be that, as I do so shall ye do!" So our Heavenly Gideon admonishes us, and this message of the holy war which strengthened our faith, becomes also a word of warning; we too are to wage that war.

Hundreds of years ago bands of Christian Crusaders, with the Cross upon their shoulders, marched to the Holy Land to wrest our Saviour's sepulchre from the hands of the infidel. Those were called "the holy wars;" but this is holier still, the holiest of them all. We who are baptized into His Name renounce the Devil and all his works and ways, and are bound to share His warfare against the Devil; as Israel baptized to Moses, followed him through the Red Sea. He is a craven coward, who hangs back when his Captain leads the attack.

We, too, must war against this Prince of Darkness. He is not yet fully overcome; he still has much power;

Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight."

How mightily he works today in the children of unbelief and disobedience! They are the seed of the Serpent, to which our text refers. Therefore our Lord called them a "generation of vipers," when he found some of them in His Church; and spake words like these: "Ye are of your father, the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." Therefore John says (I. 3, 8): "He that doeth sin is of the Devil; for the Devil sinneth from the beginning. To this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the Devil." Against this seed we too must arise, and especially in our day when they are many and bold. When they carry on the Devil's teaching, and carry out his work, there we must meet them face to face. When they would take from our Christian law and order the Lord's Day, harm the Christian Church or home, or take the Bible from our schools, we ought to stand as watchmen on the walls to defend

them. Shame on any Christian, who in such a time of warfare, folds his hands in his lap, and either makes common cause with the enemy or looks with idle indifference upon their doings. Many nominal Christians have no consciousness of sin; they are ready to do away with the death penalty; the suffragette movement is a protest against man's lazy selfishness and sinful self-will, which leaves great sins unrebuked.

But the post where each of us must stand guard is first of all our own heart. The Devil still "goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Only he does not always roar; he pretends to be our best and truest friend; he offers us gifts, but only to arouse evil desires and to lead our hearts astray. So he offered Eve the fruit which was pleasant to the eyes, and promised she should be as God, knowing good and evil. He did not tell her that all the good she knew already, and the evil she would soon bitterly experience, if she listened to him. So he offered Achan "the goodly Babylonian mantle and 200 shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold" (Josh. 7, 21), to make him a thief; and David a beautiful but weak and worthless woman, to make him an adulterer; and Judas the 30 pieces of silver, to make him betray his loving Master; and our Lord all the kingdoms of this world, if He would fall down and worship him. We also have our weak points, and the Devil knows them very well. He does not tempt us with what we care little about, but what our hearts delight in. He would lead us deeper into selfishness, pride, error, unbelief, and despair, that we may become his servants, and be forever his possession. Oh! It is a bitter war he wages against us. And what makes the struggle so hard for us, is that

our fallen nature inclines us to be friends with the Devil; we gladly follow the desires of our flesh and do his will. But as the woman's seed we are called of God to this enmity and warfare against the Deceiver of Souls. So we must battle against the lusts of the flesh and passions of our hearts, and be faithful and true to our Leader, that we may finally prevail and gain the victory.

In such a war we must not expect to go scot-free from all wounds. The old Enemy still seeks out the believer, as in Luther's day, to rob him of his goods and good name, his worship of God and civil liberties, to exile him and even drive him out of life. That is the record of Church History from the beginning to this day; each faithful follower must feel something of this world's persecution. For this reason many try to lean to both sides; they do not dare to break with Christ, yet they hope to avoid a break with the world and its Prince. But those who carry water on both shoulders in this contest, will surely be punished and put to shame in the end, because they are aiding and abetting the Enemy.

But the Christian, who in all his heart believes in his Saviour, goes into this holy war with joyous courage. He knows the wounds the world inflicts will be light, the bruising of his heel, and that these will soon be healed; if not here, then there above. If the enemy takes his goods, he knows there is a treasure in Heaven he will not lose, and that what he leaves here for Jesus' sake he shall receive of Him a hundredfold again. If his good name is evil spoken of by men, he remembers what our Lord says (Mat. 5, 11): "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you and persecute you,

and say all manner of evil against you falsely, *for My sake*. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in Heaven, etc.”

Even if he must lay down his life, he knows that “He that shall lose his life for My sake, shall find it,” and have eternal life in its poor stead. He, whose heart is full of faith thinks not of these wounds, but of the Master’s promise (Rev. 2 and 3) “to him that overcometh, how he shall eat of the tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God, and not be hurt by the second death, and of the new name and the white raiment, and of sitting with Christ upon the throne.” We should strive all the more earnestly for these rewards, when in our day and land we are called upon to lose and leave so little for the Lord’s sake, when our wounds are so light in this holy war compared with the saints and martyrs of old.

Our Lenten season shows us the Author and Finisher of our faith, as He leads on against the Old Enemy. The best offering we can bring Him, the ointment He values most, is our earnest vow to follow Him and fight under His banner against the Devil, the sins of this world, the lusts of the flesh, and every evil thought which would turn our hearts from Him. God open our eyes to see what is left of the seed of the Serpent in our home, heart, or life, and to make a good fight against it with the weapons of the Word and Spirit. God keep us from counting the cost sorrowfully; and grant that we may rather rejoice, when we are accounted worthy to suffer with Christ, and to enter into His reward. Amen.

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

(REMINISCERE).

Gospel: Matthew 15, 21-28.

Gen. 22, 1-19: "And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and He said unto him, Abraham; and he said, Here am I. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of, etc."

Hymns:

- 61. Sweet the Moments, Rich in Blessing. v. 2 and 4.
- 62. In the Cross of Christ I Glory. v. 1 and 4.
- 266. O for a Faith That Will Not Shrink. v. 1-3.
- 348. O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go. v. 1 and 3f.
- 360. My Faith Looks Up to Thee. v. 1-3.
- 394. O Thou, From Whom All Goodness Flows. v. 3f.

A Father's Great Sacrifice.

The Word of God tells of many a hard way which sinful men have walked. That was no easy journey, when Adam and Eve turned their backs upon the peaceful quiet and blessed fellowship of Paradise, and the cherubim barred the gates behind them with flaming sword, while before them waited a life full of toil, trouble, and death, the wages of sin. That was a hard road Jacob traveled away from his father's house, and the land of his happy childhood, into a strange and unknown country. That, too, was a hard journey David made up the slope of Olivet, with bare feet and covered face, because of Absalom's rebellion. That was a hard way the woman in our Gospel walked after our Lord, in spite of sharp rebuffs. But all these are

only faint parallels to our Saviour's Way of Sorrow in the days of His Holy Passion. If we would find a real comparison for this, we must seek it in the journey Abraham made to Mt. Moriah to bring the sacrifice God demanded of him. Heaven and earth know no greater revelation of God's pitying love, than when His dear Son went out to Golgotha, a sacrifice for the sins of the world. And Heaven and earth know no greater revelation of human faith, than when Abraham at God's command went up the mount to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, the beloved son of promise. This memorable journey will always be for us, first

A Type of Christ's Way of the Cross.

The three great religions of the world look back with reverence to this journey of Abraham. The Mohammedans still read in their holy book of this public trying and testing of Abraham. And the Jew sees in it a deeper meaning, believing that Abraham's interrupted sacrifice atoned for the sins of their nation. They still pray in the synagogue, that God would "regard the binding of Isaac, and not their sin." But it is only in the Christian Church that Abraham's faith finds its full depth of meaning, in not withholding his son, his only son. Paul uses almost the same words, when he speaks of God's gift to man (Rom. 8, 32): "He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." Here the true import of Abraham's journey is revealed; it looked forward to Christ's Way of the Cross, and pointed to the great sacrifice of God the Father.

We see in Abraham a kind father. He was reluctant to cast out of the house mocking Ismael; yet at

God's command he did this and more, sacrificing even the beloved son of the promise. So the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is full of holy and pitying love. He desires not the death of the sinner, but that he turn from his way and live. He sent His only-begotten Son into suffering, shame, and an awful death, that the demands of His righteous Law and of His Divine Love toward us might be satisfied. As Abraham's sacrifice proved his love for God completely, so God gives us the strongest evidence of His love for us in the sacrifice of the Christ. Now a sinful world must cry beneath the Cross: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3, 16). Abraham provided the knife and the fire for Isaac, and so God the Lord lifted up the sharp sword of His righteousness against His Son, until He must needs cry: "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

And if we compare our Saviour with Isaac in this familiar Bible story, we will find many more parallels here. Isaac was the only son of his father, and the heir of his goods and the promises. For many years such a son was mentioned repeatedly in God's promises, and Abraham had been expecting him in faith. By the power of the Almighty he was born, when both Abraham and his wife were aged. Again Isaac was the beloved of his father, the joy and delight of his heart. He had done nothing worthy of death, but must suffer as the innocent one, simply at God's command. He went obediently with Abraham, and was submissive even when laid on the altar, and the knife was lifted to take his life, still so new and beautiful.

In all this we find a wonderful resemblance to our

Saviour, the only-begotten of the Father, whom He "appointed heir of all things" (Heb. 1, 2). Through the centuries He had been promised, and awaited in faith by godly patriarchs. His birth of the Virgin was another miracle of God's power. And that this is His well-beloved Son, God attests at His Baptism in the Jordan, and again on the Mount of Transfiguration. He, too, had done nothing worthy of death, but was "holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the Heavens" (Heb. 7, 26). This even Judas, His betrayer, confessed, Pilate and his wife, the thief on the Cross, and the centurion beneath it. The real reason for His sacrifice on the Cross was that it was the will and plan of God, wherefore "God exalted Him who was obedient unto death, and gave Him a name above all others" (Phil. 2, 8).

And the deeper we look into this narrative, the more resemblance we find. Isaac is not to be sacrificed in the house of his father, but on a mount. And so Jesus is not sacrificed in the Temple, His Father's House, where all the other offerings of the Old Covenant are brought. His altar of sacrifice, the Cross, stood on Mt. Calvary in full view of the Temple on Mt. Moriah. Isaac goes to his death silently; only once does he open his mouth to speak in these verses. And our Saviour was "led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not His mouth" (Is. 53, 7). When He spoke on that way of the Cross, it was only in prayer to His Father, or to warn poor sinners. Isaac began his one question, "My father." And Jesus' first word on the Cross was "Father, forgive them," and his last: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." Even the wood for the

sacrifice laid on Isaac at the foot of the mount, finds a striking parallel in the Cross our Lord bore part way to the place of execution, and as Isaac was bound, so was our Lord before he was nailed to the Cross and lifted up. Moreover, for three days, as they journey to Moriah, Isaac had been as one dead to the heart of his father. This was about the space of time our Saviour lay in the tomb. On the third day, Isaac began to live again to his father, when the knife in his up-lifted hand had been stayed. And just so our Saviour rose on the third day. Isaac returned again to his father's house; and our Saviour ascended to His Father's House on high. In this Isaac, who survived the sacrifice, all the promises of God were renewed and confirmed to Abraham; and so in the Christ risen from the dead, the promises of God are yea and amen, fulfilled and sealed to Abraham's believing children. Yea verily, now it is true, that "In thy Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Where ever we turn our eyes, this journey is a type of Christ's Way of the Cross. Even the ram which Abraham sacrificed instead of his son, was the beginning of all the O. T. sacrifices, offered for centuries in the Temple on Mt. Moriah for the children of Abraham, until at last God spared not His Only Son and the eternal and perfect Sacrifice was offered for His people. Thus our text becomes of great importance in the revelation of God's plan of salvation. Before Abraham's time the coming Saviour was known only as He who should bruise the Serpent's head, as the victorious Hero. But now His vicarious and atoning sacrifice begins to have its place in the promises of God and the hopes of man.

The faithful wife of Luther could not get it into her head, that God would ever command such a horrid thing as this, that a father should slay and sacrifice his own son. Luther answered: But, dear Katie, can you then believe that God gave His only Son to die for us, when there was nothing in Heaven or earth more dear to Him?" That question and answer bring out God's way of salvation in all its wondrous love for us poor sinners. When we speak of it, we may well with Moses take the shoes from off our feet, for the place in which we stand is holy ground. But this is also

A Picture of the Way of Our Pilgrimage.

This holy narrative with its depths of meaning concerns us in another way. It pictures our journey on earth. In many ways, Abraham had shown his faith and obedience to God, both in life's joys and sorrows. Yet here the Lord tests him as never before, demanding the sacrifice of his son. How the heart of that father and mother rejoiced in Isaac! They watched this lovely young life unfold with delight, as each day brought some new evidence of his childlike love and obedience. He became the light of their old age, and what hopes they cherished as they looked out into the future, when in and through him God's promised blessing should be fulfilled to all nations. Yet this child Abraham is now to give up as a sacrifice to the Lord! Only that father or mother, who has stood by the death-bed of a beloved child, and followed his coffin to the grave, can begin to know what a hard trial and painful way this was for Abraham.

And much as we love our children, none of them is an Isaac. The hopes we build on them are only earthly. And even if we must lay them in the grave,

we know that in the last Day they will return to us, bright and glorious as never before. But upon the life of this Isaac hung all the precious promises God gave to Abraham. With this son of the promise, if he is sacrificed, all the promised blessings are dead, too. This is what made Abraham's journey so hard. God seems to be taking away all the spiritual good things He once gave and promised; and so through those three days this father's love and self-interest is fighting against his obedience to God. Verily, no greater temptation ever came into any heart, than this testing of Abraham.

And yet it was necessary. He must show that at God's command he was ready to sacrifice all, absolutely all. There dared be nothing upon which this man's heart hung, so that he would withhold it from God. Before angels and devils and men he was called to give an example of the faith which trusts God in spite of the hardest trials. He was to show us how much higher God's thoughts and ways are than ours, and how we must follow them out, though we cannot understand them. He was to live out in deed and truth the verse which says (Ps. 73, 25) :

"Whom have I in Heaven but Thee,
And there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.
My flesh and my heart faileth;
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever."

And how does Abraham stand this test? He counsels not with flesh and blood. He does not talk it over with Sarah, whose mother-heart would shrink from such faith and obedience. He rises early in the morning, and girds himself for the journey. Three sad and weary days he travels on, and then as he sees the mount of the sacrifice, what emotions must have overwhelmed him.

Yet he proceeds calmly up that slope. When Isaac asks: "My father, behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" it must have cut his heart like a knife. Yet with more than human patience and trust he answers: "My son, God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering." He himself cannot understand, but he can and must obey, assured that all will be well in the end, because it is from God. They come now to the top of the hill, and Abraham gathers the stones for an altar, each one as he carries it to its place, heavy as lead with the weight of sorrow wrapped up in it. He lays the wood in order, and each stick is a new load upon his heart. And now he binds his son, lays him upon the wood, and lifts the knife.

Whence has this man this more than human strength for such a sacrifice? Only out of his faith in God, which is so strong and unshaken. It is this which shines out brightly in his saying to the servants: "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship, *and come again to you.*" He still trusts in the mercy of God, and believes that even this hard journey will end at last in praise and thanksgiving. Therefore it is written (Heb. 11, 17ff): "By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac: yea, he that had gladly received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; even he to whom it was said, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back." But let no one say that such faith is easily learned. We too believe that God is able to raise up the dead, that Jesus is our Resurrection and Life; and yet what sorrows, tears and laments, as we stand by the grave! Before the faith

of this man Abraham we bow in shame, and do him honor with all our heart.

And we, beloved, are the children of Abraham. We too must walk this way. God means to put our faith to the test, like Abraham's and as when this heathen woman in our Gospel is told: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." We too are to fear, love and *trust* Him, as did these noble souls. Therefore, when anything comes between us and God, and lessens the wholesouled love we owe Him, He deals with us as with Abraham. If we make too much of money and lands, God may take them away; if we seek honors, put us to shame; if we idolize human beings, call them from us. Who of us has not felt something of His holy earnestness here? Which of the disciples of our Lord walked not such a way? And has not He a right to demand our surrender of these things, even if we do not misuse them? He who spared not His only Son, but delivered Him up for our redemption, may He not ask us to make some sacrifice in turn? He does this for His own sake, that He may not be without witnesses of His sovereignty before angels, devils, and men; and for our sakes, that the "proof, or trial of our faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I. Peter 1, 7).

A father stood by the sick bed of a beloved child. The little one had gladly learned the Bible stories, and so he promised her "a story book about the dear Father in Heaven, our blessed Saviour, and the holy angels." The little one's eyes opened wide with pleasure, but she requested that the book should tell also *about Abraham*. It flashed upon that father, that this was a story of obe-

dient sacrifice, and he might be called upon to make a like one; and so he tried to change the subject. But she insisted that the story of Abraham must be in the book. And the time came when he too mastered that lesson which his child had first learned and loved, the great lesson in Abraham's life, which is learning to say: "Thy will be done!"

If such faith is ours, then the trial of it will end as did his. It will bring forth the fruits of righteousness; tribulation will work experience, patience, and hope that maketh not ashamed. The Mount of trial will become for us also a mount of the Lord's grace and goodness. New promises and greater blessings will reward our faith, as they did Abraham's.

But how much more our faith has to rest upon, than Abraham's did! We have for our example and encouragement the Man of Sorrows, who humbled Himself to "bear our griefs and carry our sorrows;" the patient Lamb of God, who was "obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross." We should therefore be able to say with Paul: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." His atonement on the Cross is a well of salvation for us, out of which we may always draw the full assurance that God loves us as His dear children. Thither let us turn daily, and then we shall be able to bear each cross God lays upon us here below and to follow God's hard ways patiently and obediently, until with Abraham we receive the reward of our faith on the Heavenly Mount.

"His trial o'er, and now beneath
His own Cross faintly bending,
Jesus the fatal hill of death
Is wearily ascending.

And now, His hands and feet pierced through,
Upon the Cross they raise Him:
Where even now, in distant view,
The eye of faith surveys Him.

O wondrous Love, which God most high
Toward man was pleased to cherish!
His sinless Son He gave to die,
That sinners might not perish." Amen.

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THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT (OCULI).

Gospel: Luke 11, 14-28.

Exodus 15, 23-26: And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto Jehovah; and Jehovah showed him a tree, and he cast it into the waters, and the waters were made sweet. There He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them; and He said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of Jehovah thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His eyes, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and wilt keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon thee, which I have put upon the Egyptians: for I am Jehovah that healeth thee."

Hymns:

- 66. We Sing the praise of Him Who Died. v. 2f.
- 61. Sweet the Moments, Rich in Blessing. v. 1.
- 62. In the Cross of Christ I Glory. v. 4.
- 390. Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken. v. 4.
- 518. There Is a Land of Pure Delight. v. 6.
- 348. O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go. v. 3f.
- 8. Comfort, Comfort Ye, My People.
- 368. Thou Art the Way, to Thee Alone. v. 2.
- 201. Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow. v. 2f.

The Tree of the Cross Sweetens the Bitter Waters of Our Troubles.

A good old Christian writer said: "If any one will compare the history of Israel's wanderings in the desert with his own life, he will find a wonderful likeness between them." We need only remember how Israel was "baptized unto Moses," or sprinkled by the spray of the Red Sea; how the Lord went before them, leading the way in the pillar of the cloud and of fire; how He fed them with Bread from Heaven; and at last with many

“a sign from Heaven” brought them safely into the Promised Land. And on the other hand, we need only think of how Israel murmured against the Lord; how often and how easily they fell into shameful unbelief and disobedience. Verily, it is our own life, which is pictured here; in many a small detail, and not simply in the great outlines, there is a resemblance here to us.

Naturally then, we would expect to find in Israel's History that Cross of Christ, which is the soul and center of our Christian faith and life. And here it is, in many a prophetic word and figure. Let me only remind you, that when Israel encamped, their camp lay about the Tabernacle in the form of a cross. Not only in the lamb of sacrifice, and the brazen serpent, but in many other ways we find the mystery of the Cross of Christ foreshadowed, where we would never think of looking for it. So in this tree, which sweetened the bitter waters of Marah, it is plain that we are being pointed to the Cross. It speaks first of

God's Fatherly Heart Toward Us.

The people of Israel had crossed the Red Sea, where their enemies were engulfed, and had now wandered for three days in the desert under the blazing sun. They find no water. In the Red Sea there had been nothing but water, and no land; here there was nothing but land, and no water. They forgot how the Lord had helped them out of the former dilemma, and how they had been healed from their “demon of dumbness,” and praised Him, saying:

“Jehovah is my strength, and song,
And He is become my salvation.” (Ex. 15, 2).

They soon lost patience and heart. At last they

came to the slope of a hill, where a spring poured forth an abundance of water. This spot they afterward called Marah. Now they rejoiced and hastened forward to satisfy their great thirst. But alas! They could not drink the waters, because they were very bitter. Then the people murmured against Moses, saying: What shall we drink? They gave him to understand, that as their leader he must find water for them, and it would be his fault if they perished. And when he cried unto the Lord, the Lord "showed him a tree, and he cast it into the waters, and the waters were made sweet." There is no tree which in itself can sweeten bitter waters. All attempts to find such a tree in that neighborhood have failed. "The finger of God" and His Fatherly heart must have given it the wonder-working power for this occasion.

Now this Marah is one of the stations on our Christian pilgrimage, to which we often come. We need not call the world "a vale of tears," yet we will find enough that is bitter along life's pathway. There come hours and days of bitter trouble for our hearts. Whether these come directly by God's Providence, from our fellow men, or through our own fault, we will not stop to consider now, neither the particular name for them. Now it may be a question of food or clothing, then some great sorrow of heart caused by the envy and enmity of our fellow men; or sickness, pain, and death. We all have experienced some of these things; and this was the bitter water of Marah we could not bear to drink. We sighed then with the children of Korah: "My tears have been my food day and night," (Ps. 42, 3); or with Jeremiah (9, 15): "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will feed them,

even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink."

The children of this world find no comfort amid such days. Hardened and indifferent as they are, it does not relieve their misery to find company for it. They say: "It comes to all; it is the way of the world; it can't be helped." But what a wretched sort of comfort that is! It only leaves the heart bitter toward God, and tempts a man to become a "rum-dub," to seek oblivion in the deadly cup of worldly dissipation, or of such a mental stupor as Christian Science. Neither will it help to reason about it, as many do, and say: "I can't see what I ever did to deserve this." That only makes the heart the more impatient and discontented. Borne after this fashion, our troubles bring us only a curse, instead of the ultimate blessing God intended.

But the Cross of Christ, like the tree at Marah, sweetens our troubles. Under it we learn to know ourselves as lost and condemned sinners. That is the first lesson taught us by this Man of Sorrows, who "was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities" (53, 5). Only when we know ourselves as sinners, will we bow humbly beneath the chastening hand of our God, and be no more a "kingdom divided against itself." Then we will confess that by our sinfulness we have deserved this and more, and that,

"His strokes are fewer than our crimes,
And lighter than our guilt."

Then we will thank Him for not entering into judgment with us more severely, and look forward hopefully to His exalting those He has brought low, and "healing the bones He has broken."

But the Cross has a still greater comfort for us. There we look for the first time right into the Fatherly heart of our God. There we begin to realize that great saying: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3, 16). And there we learn to trust this "God of mercy, God of grace," whose Fatherly heart is revealed to us. The message of the Cross is not only that we are sinners, but: "If God be for us, who is against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8, 31f). That is the comfort found beneath the Cross. He who grasps it in humble faith will not despair in his troubles, or seek some silly or desperate remedy, but "wait patiently for the Lord." So the Cross makes us "patient in tribulation, rejoicing in hope, and instant in prayer." The Fatherly heart of God in Christ sweetens the bitter waters of our troubles. Again our text sets before us

Christ as Our Example.

It was an unfortunate thing that Israel did not know all about the way from Egypt into the Promised Land. They imagined that it led through green pastures and fruitful fields; and when they found it a desert-roadway, they wished themselves back in Egypt and lusted for its flesh-pots. This was why they murmured so often against God and his servant Moses. Had they but known the real character of this only way into Canaan, they would have trodden it more bravely, and been more thankful for every bit of goodness by the way, more patient amid the toils and deprivations of that journey.

Many Christians make the same mistake about the Christian life. They do not learn what it really is. The wise Solomon says:

“A man’s heart deviseth his way;
But Jehovah directeth his steps” (Prov. 16, 9).

We need only think of the daydreams of youth, or the plans the children of this world are always making, to understand what kind of ways the heart of man devises. In all this we do not wish to hear much about the “narrow way.” But Christ says of Himself: “Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory?” (John 24, 26). His way led “through the Cross to the Crown,” and we are to follow Him. Yet it is through flowery fields we wish our way to run. We dream only of joys and pleasures on every hand. And then, if the mighty hand of God reaches into our life and shifts this scenery, we complain in our ignorance about our troubles, and rob ourselves of God’s intended blessings. For Hosea tells us (2,14) how God leads His people into the wilderness, that He may “speak comfortably to them, or to their very hearts, and give them vineyards from thence and a door of hope.”

The Cross on Golgotha, like the tree at Marah, shows us how to turn suffering into joy. Jesus Christ, the Father’s First Born, goes before us, so that all God’s children may walk in His footsteps. “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, etc.” (I. Peter 2, 21). We see how obedient He was under every burden the Father laid upon Him, “obedient even unto death;” and we learn of Him to say: “Not My will, but Thine

be done." In our troubles, laid upon us by our fellow men, we should mark how "When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (v. 23). From Him "the Stronger One, who takes the Devil's armor from him," we learn meekness and patience in all the troubles God or man may lay upon us; and thus the example of our Suffering Saviour sweetens for us the bitter waters. Since they had a place in His life, we know, when we bear them patiently, too, that we are "entering in through many tribulations to the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14, 22). And finally our text reminds us of

The Glory of Our Christian Estate.

If Israel had not been such a forgetful folk, they would not have murmured against God, as they did. Behind them lay the House of Bondage, where they sighed under the rod of the overseer, made bricks without straw, and had their baby boys cast into the river. Behind them lay the Red Sea, through which God had led them so wonderfully, and in which He buried their enemies. Before them waited the Holy Land, flowing with milk and honey. There the bones of their fathers rested, and at every turn it spoke to them of the glorious estate He had promised them. There they were to enter into His rest. Had they but considered all these things aright, that way with all its toils and trials would not have seemed so hard. It would have been easy, compared with their hopeless bondage and by reason of the promised blessings awaiting them in Canaan at its end. This wonder-tree which God showed Moses at Marah was a new pledge

of their glorious estate, which this God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would soon reveal to His people.

And beneath the Cross of Christ we, too, learn our glorious estate, and see our lives in a higher, Heavenly light. From that Cross we look out into a land of promise, rest and Heavenly inheritance, as Moses gazed from Mt. Nebo into Canaan. If for our sakes the Son of God became a poor child of man; if He for us put on a servant's form and died on the Cross, we may be sure this great price was paid to win for us no mean estate. He prayed: "Father, I desire that they also whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory" (John 17, 24); and so from the Cross we look up to the Father's House on high, where the many mansions are, which the great Captain of our Salvation has gone to prepare for us. Beneath that Cross I learn how one day,

"I too with Thee shall walk in white,
With all Thy saints shall prove
What is the length, and breadth, and height,
And depth of perfect love." No. 363 G. C. Book.

Though here we are often troubled and weep, the Cross points us above, where "God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 21, 4); and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more." All the bitterness of our life is sweetened by the Saviour's promise: "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mat. 5, 4); and the assurance that "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30, 5).

And our Christian estate is glorious, because even now there is this Tree of Life to sweeten our bitter

waters. We read in the last verse of this chapter, how Israel journeyed from Marah to Elim, "where were twelve springs of water, and three score and ten palm trees; and they encamped there by the waters." How sweet was their rest there in the cool shade and by the refreshing waters! So there come in our Christian life hours and days when we say :

"Jehovah is my shepherd;
I shall not want,
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside still waters," (Ps. 23).

From Elim they went on through the desert until they crossed over Jordan. And so we go through much tribulation until we come to the bitterest water of them all, the River of Death. Here the Cross alone can take away the bitterness of the cup we must drink. This One with the pierced hands and side is the only One who can comfort us in this "Valley of the Shadow of Death." For He brings us safely through it to the Heavenly Elim, where all our bitter waters are forever past and forgotten. There we shall rest by "the River of Water of Life, which proceeds out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb; and under the Tree of Life, which stands on either side of it with its perfect fruits, and its leaves for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22, 1f).

May God help us in this Holy Passion season to look up to the Cross of Christ with believing eyes, and to read what is written there in larger letters than here at Marah; His Fatherly heart toward us, our Saviour's example for us, and the glory of our Christian estate. Then when our own Passion seasons and times of suffering come, the wonder-tree of His Cross

shall sweeten our bitter Marahs, for "blessed are they who hear the Word of God and keep it."

"The royal standard forward goes,
The holy Cross with mystery glows,
There death by life was put to shame,
And life from death triumphant came.

Here from our Saviour's pierced side
Flows forth the purifying tide,
That lets no sinful spot remain,
As blood and water cleanse each stain.

Fulfilled is now the hope foretold,
That faithful prophets sang of old;
When God His wondering people see,
Ruling all nations from a Tree.

Hail! only source of hope and life;
In this sad time of pain and strife,
To faithful souls Thy grace increase,
And to the guilty give Thy peace. Amen."

Hymn No. 91.

"Faithful Cross! Above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peers may be.
Sweetest wood and sweetest iron,
Sweetest weight is hung on thee."

Passion Hymn of Venantius Fortunatus.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT (LAETARE).

Gospel: John 6, 1-15.

Numb. 17, 1-8: "And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of them rods, one for each father's house * * * twelve rods. Write thou every man's name upon his rod. And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi. * * * And Moses laid up the rods before Jehovah in the tent of the testimony. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and put forth buds, and produced blossoms, and bare ripe almonds."

Hymns:

- 91. The Royal Standard Forward Goes. v. 1-3.
- 62. In the Cross of Christ I Glory.
- 409. God Moves in a Mysterious Way. v. 1 and 5.
- 44. Join All the Glorious Names. v. 3.
- 97. When I survey the wondrous Cross.
- 120. See the Conqueror Mounts in Triumph. v. 3.

The Dry Rod Which Bore Fruit.

The Cross has been from all antiquity the accursed tree. We read in Deut. (21, 23) how the evildoer, hanged in Israel, was not to remain all night upon the tree, but to be buried the same day, lest the land be defiled by such a one accursed of God. Paul refers to this O. T. passage when he writes: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3, 13). In all the Passion History the Cross is still the accursed tree, and we therefore laud and magnify the love of Christ, who bore it for us and turned it into a blessing. Since that time the Cross has come to high honor. It shines among the stars of heaven; one great constellation being named the Southern Cross. It stands on our altars and the spires of

our churches. It glitters in the crown of kings, and on the breasts of the world's heroes. It stands over the graves of those we love and have lost a little while, as a confession that only the Cross of Christ can unlock for us the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven. In gold and silver, marble and bronze, we find it spread through all Christendom. The barren tree of shame and cursing has become the living tree of honor and blessing.

The Cross has fared like Aaron's dry rod. Once Israel despised it, and murmured against Aaron and his brother Moses. But when this wonder had been wrought, of which our text speaks, Aaron and his rod came to honor. It was preserved in the ark with the tables of the Law and the pot of manna. Our Saviour is often compared in the N. T. to Aaron, and called the true High Priest, because He made the sacrifice which atones once for all, intercedes now for us before the Throne, and puts His Heavenly benediction upon His Church. Therefore we may well compare our Saviour's Cross to this rod, which brought forth buds, blossoms and fruits. These we will find, first of all,

In the Great History of the World.

It was only a dry rod which Moses took, and laid with the others before the ark. Yet in it a great wonder was wrought, and God "made to cease from Him the murmurings of the children of Israel" against Moses and Aaron. Its night-blooming flowers and fruits so impressed them, that no one dared say to Moses and Aaron after this: "Ye have killed the people of Jehovah" (16, 40f), and there were no more Korah's rebellions against Aaron and his sons; they now stood

in their office, clad in a God-given authority and dignity.

Such a dry rod was the Cross on Golgotha. It was no more promising than "the five barley loaves among so many." Men shook their heads in dissent, and sneered at the idea, that it could make any contribution to the History of the World. It promised nothing compared with the wisdom of the Greeks, which stood among men as a tree in full blossom; or the glory of Israel, whose bulk was like a cedar of Lebanon. This dry rod was a barren tree of shame and cursing, and therefore was "to the Jews foolishness and to the Greek a stumbling-block." What was this carpenter of Nazareth to the priest, Pharisee and scribe, compared with Abraham, whom the Great God Himself called to serve Him in the Holy Land; or Moses, to whom He spake face to face, as a man with his friend? And when He hung upon the Cross how they despised Him and it! They mocked Him, saying: "He helped others, Himself He cannot save." What was this meek and lowly villager in the eyes of the Jewish people? They saw in Him no beauty, nothing of the might and majesty of their long-expected Messiah, and so they turned their backs upon Him. When he hung upon the Cross they mocked, saying: "If Thou be the King of Israel, come down from the Cross, and we will believe Thee." Even to His own disciples the Cross was a thing of shame. Peter cries at the mention of such a thing: "Lord, save Thyself. Be that far from Thee!" And when they saw Him die on the Cross, all their hopes died and were buried with Him. They lamented, saying: "But we hoped that it was He who should redeem Israel" (Luke 24, 21).

Yet only by this death on the Cross, despised as it was of Israel, could the 53rd of Isaiah be fulfilled: "He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised." But Isaiah spoke of the Christ and His Cross as an Aaron's rod, for that goodly fellowship of the prophets also foretold how the Cross would bud over night into the Easter Morning glory, blossom forth in Christ's Ascension, and fill the earth with rich fruits on the day of Pentecost.

Since then it has been budding and flourishing with the eternal power of God. All the might and malice of the enemies could not hinder the Cross; neither could all the drought and deadness of the times destroy its life. The Church of Jesus Christ, rooted in this Cross, still thrives and grows apace today. One land and people after another have tried to cast the Cross into the shadow, but the shadow of the towering Cross fell upon them, and the tree of Grecian wisdom withered, the cedars of Jewish pride fell, but the Cross on Golgotha remained, full of fresh, strong, and glorious life. As our Lord said, the birds of the air, who would once have destroyed this seed and sprout, in the end come to dwell amid the shelter of its branches. How many Jews flock into Christian lands; and what heathen land could exist today without the protection of some strong, flourishing Christian nation. The blatant infidel never moves among the heathen cannibals, but lives in the shadow of the Church.

And now look at the lovely blossoms. The Word of God is the one book of imperishable beauty above all others. Thousands and thousands have refreshed themselves with it, and will to the end of time. These

blossoms do not wither and fall to the ground: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away." Where do we not find today the Heavenly blossoms of the Cross? Note in the sky-line of any great city among us, how the towers and spires of our churches rise high above the dwellings round about them. Look at our schools, where useful knowledge and Christian virtues are nurtured; and at our hospitals and homes, where the work of Christian mercy goes on. All these are the blossoms of the Cross of Christ. It is still working "miracles on those that were diseased."

And where are its goodly fruits? It is the Cross which has taught men true brotherly love; it proclaims Him who in love laid down His life for us, and bids us lay down our lives if need be for our brethren. In the shadow of that Cross a new commandment was given: "That ye love one another, even as I have loved you."

The Cross is the foundation of the Christian home, with all its love and kindness. It has brought into the world true education, decent morals, and refined manners. And more than this: righteousness, peace, and joy, and all that gladdens the heart of man are its fruits. Many of the world's good things dry up in seasons of trial, but the Cross ripens its fruits, whether the wind is from the North or the South; whether the sun of good fortune beams upon us or hides behind dark clouds of trouble. The Church is always singing with Solomon in his Song (4, 16):

"Let my Beloved come into His Garden
And eat His precious fruits."

And the story is the same, whether the Cross of Christ is planted amid the ice-fields of Greenland, or

the burning deserts of Africa; in the primeval forests of America, or the lovely isles of the South Sea. Everywhere it makes the desert blossom like the rose, and bears its precious fruits of the spirit: "Love, joy, peace, etc." And we find these not only in the great history of the world, but as it has blossomed here and brought forth its incomparable fruits, so too,

In the Little Story of the Heart.

Here, too, the Cross seems at first only the dry rod of Aaron. Many a man shakes his head at it, doubts the living virtue in it, or even mocks it. Yet here, too, it can blossom over night and bear fruit. The dying thief experienced this on his cross. When faith sprang up in his heart, and blossomed into his penitent petition: "Lord, remember me, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom;" its rich fruit soon followed: "Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." Paul set out on his way to bind the Christians at Damascus and bring them to the high priests at Jerusalem; the Cross was only a dry rod for him as yet. But as he lay there on his face in the Light which streamed from Heaven, the Cross began to bud and bear fruit in his heart, too, until it made of him the great missionary to the Gentiles. And this change many thousands of poor sinners, and surely many among us, have experienced to our joy and the glory of God.

The Cross still buds in the heart; without that Cross of Christ there would be no spiritual life in us, and we would be dry, dead, and bear no fruit. We cannot resist sin in our own strength. Here and there we may succeed, when that victory over sin brings us some present advantage. But when sin promises us speedy

pleasure, honor, or advantage; and to resist it threatens us with pain, shame and loss, how miserably we often fall before it. The Cross of Christ alone can give us strength to conquer our own weak hearts, and order them aright.

Again we can do no good in our own strength. Our Lord warned us: "Without Me ye can do nothing." Here and there the natural man may perform an occasional good work. The motive power for it is often some selfish, false, or even crooked one, and seldom is it done in true, brotherly love. We soon become weary of well-doing, backslide from the Church, drop out of its busy societies, and drift with the world, which looks out for Number One. And as for that greatest good work of our life, loving our God with all our heart, that we can never do of ourselves. Only the Cross, rooted in our hearts with all its living strength, can reach all our members and dedicate them to Him and His service.

And the Cross must still blossom in our hearts, if life is to be bright and beautiful for us. An honored title, fine education, worldly wisdom, and social grace may seem the chief adornment men and women should seek, but these often deceive and disappoint us. Look at some of our poor, plain Christian friends, without this thin varnish of worldly excellence, and what a world of beauty there is in their lives. There is solid oak with polished grain, infinitely superior to the cheap veneer worldly advantages produce. A real difference exists between those who despise the Cross of Christ, and those who believe in Him with all their hearts. Their very faces are different, the words they speak, and the works they do. Their homes and the

whole way of life lie far apart. Worldly culture and outward refinement cannot compete with that "inner man adorned with a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price." Tom Paine, the educated and cultured infidel, lived in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, long enough to disgust his one-time admirers, so that one of them crowded him off the pavement, and flung him headlong in the muddy street. Where the Cross is not, there is a disgusting coarseness in the heart, though it may not always show on the surface; but where the Cross is, we forget that the clothes are shabby, the homely face becomes handsome, and simple words and works are ennobled. We have all felt this uplift of Christian character, and the hollowness of fleshly beauty or worldly accomplishments without it. It is the fulfillment of God's promise to His people (Hos. 14, 5-7): "I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell (fragrance) as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the grain, and blossom as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon."

And now what is to be said about the fruits of the Cross in the hearts of poor sinners? Where does the Christian learn obedience to his God but beneath the Cross of Him who "was obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross;" submission to his rulers unworthy as they are at times, but of Him who let Himself be "led as a lamb to the slaughter by His godless overlords; brotherly love and thorough unselfishness, but of Him who laid down His life for the brethren, and prayed even for His enemies: "Father, forgive

them, they know not what they do;" strictness with himself in resisting sin and striving after righteousness of life, but when he accompanies his Saviour on the Way of the Cross, and hears Him say: "Weep not for Me, but for yourself and for your children." Where shall we learn diligence in our calling, but from Him who "worked while it was day," and even on the Cross ceased not to seek the lost; where patience under suffering, but from Him who says: "If any man will come after Me, let him take up his Cross and follow Me;" where joy in the hour of death, but from His: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." And what ever other peaceable and precious fruits of righteousness you can name, they are all fruits which the Cross brings forth in heart and life.

Therefore let the unbelieving and indifferent pay due reverence to the Cross of Christ. That dry rod has become a Tree of Life. It is the sign and proof that "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world," and that God has set His Son over the world as its High Priest. When unbelieving Israel saw that wonder of Aaron's rod, they cried: "Behold, we perish, we are undone * * * every one that cometh near unto the tabernacle of Jehovah dieth." A wholesome fear filled their hearts. Would that we all felt that fear before the Cross of Christ, and realized our need of such a High Priest, whose authority is Divine. Then the blessings and fruits of the Cross would soon find their way into our hearts; for where ever it strikes root, there it buds, blossoms, and bears its blessed fruits. May we all gain a greater measure of them, as in these days we tarry beneath the Cross of Christ. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT (JUDICA).

Passion Sunday.

Gospel: John 8, 46-59.

Numb. 21, 4-10: "And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way to the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, and there is no water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And Jehovah sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. * * * And Jehovah said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a standard: and it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, when he seeth it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it upon a standard; and it came to pass, that if the serpent had bitten any man, when he looked upon the serpent of brass, he lived. And the children of Israel journeyed, and encamped in Oboth."

Hymns:

- 360. My Faith Looks Up to Thee.
- 97. When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. v. 1f.
- 339. Not All the Blood of Beasts.
- 368. Thou Art the Way; to Thee Alone. v. 1f.
- 74. Jesus, Meek and Lowly. v. 3-6.
- 155. O Enter, Lord, Thy Temple. v. 1f.

The Brazen Serpent and the Tree of Our Redemption.

There stand in Sacred History and Prophecy three trees, toward which the children of men are ever gazing. The first is that Tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which stood in the Garden of Eden. When our first parents disobeyed God and ate of it, sin and death came into the world. As our eyes rest upon it we realize our guilt and misery as sinners;

we beat upon our breasts and say with the publican: "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

The second is that tree by the River of the Water of Life, which flows from the Throne of God and the Lamb. Toward it we journey on, until beneath its fruitful branches we reach the goal of our faith and hope. Thither our eyes must ever turn, lest we forget our "inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away in Heaven."

And the last of these three trees is this one on which our eyes are fixed in the Holy Lenten Season: the barren tree of shame and the curse, which nevertheless has borne blessed fruit. It speaks to us of our redemption from sin and guilt unto the Heavenly hope. It bridges the way for us, as when the pioneers fell a tree across some stream, from the Tree in the Garden to the Tree of Life. We will let it speak to us first of

Our Need of Redemption.

Israel had reached the border of the promised Land, and had been obliged to turn back again to the Red Sea. They were provoked at this, and at the long desert stretches and hardships of the way. They missed the flesh-pots of Egypt, and murmured against God and Moses, complaining even about the wonderbread showered upon them from Heaven. They were as hateful as those in our Gospel, who said to our sinless Master: "Thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil." Therefore the Lord sent among them fiery serpents, whose bite left a burning wound.

The O. T. teaches us in simple object lessons what the N. T. sums up in elaborate doctrines. In this great

sin of Israel our own sinful estate is set before our eyes. Already in Noah's day the faithful God mourned over man, so deaf to His voice: "My Spirit shall not strive with man for ever" (Gen. 6, 3). Jehovah saw: "That every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (v. 5). And man has not changed much since that day. It was about a thousand years later that He was grieved with this generation in the wilderness, and said: "They do always err in their hearts, and have not known My ways. So I swear in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest." And so He must still mourn over men today, unless His grace has created a new heart and renewed a right spirit within them.

We need only look at the ways we used to walk, or even at the sins which still beset us, to know our guilt and ruin. We, too, like Israel, have been stiff-necked and stubborn. We demand that not only our fellow men, but even our God shape things to suit and please us. The evil lusts of the flesh and the world are so thoroughly rooted in our members, that we have our hands full to "keep our body under." We are ungrateful to the gracious and faithful God, whose blessings are showered upon us daily and abundantly. We forget to thank Him for His great salvation, and to render Him the glory due unto His name. And when He leads us into darker days, we are often provoked and murmur just like this Israel. We, too, doubt his ability to help us, or His willingness to do so, and thus we fall into little faith or utter unbelief. We, too, neglect and despise His Word and Sacrament, the precious gifts of His grace meant to refresh us in this vale of sorrows, and our very attitude toward these says with Israel:

“Our soul loatheth this light bread.” Not one of us can say with the Christ: “Which of you convicteth Me of sin?”

By nature we are all afflicted with three spiritual diseases: hardening of the brain, so that the natural man comprehendeth not the things of the spirit; enlargement of the heart, but always on the side toward the world; and paralysis of hand and foot, when we are to serve any one but old Self. This is the ruin, which the Fall brought to us all. And the judgment of God follows it now, as there in the Garden and here in the wilderness. Our lives are so often labor and sorrow, and our consciences troubled by the fear of a holy and righteous God. Blind to the things of God, and prone to evil as the sparks fly upward, we bear about with us the wounds of the Old Serpent, the great enemy of God and man. Our whole race is such a sick, sore body, as Isaiah (1, 6) says: “From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and fresh stripes: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with oil.” And worst of all, “death has come into the world by sin, and passed upon all men, in that all have sinned.” In this misery we can help neither ourselves nor our fellow men. Such is man’s great need of redemption, that

“None of them can by any means redeem his brother,
Nor give to God a ransom for him.” (Ps. 49, 7).

The Fact of Our Redemption.

Thank God we may also speak of this. Moses interceded for poor Israel there in the desert, when they said: “We have sinned because we have spoken against

Jehovah and against thee; pray unto Jehovah, that He take away the serpents from us." And then came the command to set up the Brazen Serpent, and "look unto it and live." "And Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life" (John 3, 14f). That gracious token in the wilderness was a type of the Crucified Saviour, the shadow which this coming event cast before itself.

The Brazen Serpent stood for sin, since this was the form our old Enemy took, when he deceived Mother Eve. The Apocrypha says (Ecc. 21, 2): "Flee from sin as from the face of a serpent: for if thou comest too near it, it will bite thee." We wonder that the Brazen Serpent, which was a reminder of the people's sin, could be a type of the Holy Son of God, who could say boldly to His bitter enemies: "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" Yet our Lord claimed it, and declared it, pointed to His death on the Cross, where "He, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

The Brazen Serpent, however, was not fiery or poisonous, but only resembled such outwardly. So our Lord was "made like us in all things, only without sin." He who was holy, harmless, and undefiled, took our sins upon Him, with all their curse and punishment. The Apostle writes (Gal. 3, 13): "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us."

Again the serpent was of brass, the common and useful metal, and not of ornamental gold or silver. So our Saviour came not in selfish pomp and pride, but

“meek and lowly, and having salvation.” It was lifted up on a pole, as a sign of healing and help for each dying soul who looked upon it. And He was lifted up upon the Tree of Life, “that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life.”

This is the great and holy fact of our redemption: Jesus Christ is the true and eternal High Priest, who made for us the one and only sacrifice which is always a sweet smelling savor before God. He is the Passover Lamb, whose blood redeems our life from destruction, and frees us from the bondage of sin. That He was “wounded for our transgressions,” is the shining fact held up before us, like the Brazen Serpent, in every faithful preaching of the Gospel, and rightly administered Sacrament. But, lest we deceive ourselves, there is also

The Condition of Our Redemption.

God did not say at once to Moses: “Make thee a serpent of brass, etc.” This was conditioned upon Israel’s confession and Moses’ intercession. The children of Israel did not deny the ruin their sin had brought upon them, nor the judgment of God upon it. They saw parent, spouse, and child bitten by those fiery serpents, and dying before their very eyes. On every hand were groans and laments, wounds and death. The serpents glided among them: they felt their fiery bite, and the poison of death at work in their veins. Then they confessed that they had sinned grievously against the Lord, and they humbly asked their much abused Moses to pray for them. And when he had made the Brazen Serpent, and set it on a pole, they delayed not to gather about it and gaze up to it in faith.

Here we have the simple condition, without which we cannot be saved from our sins. We, too, must first feel and confess our sin and misery, and not in that vague and empty way men have of saying: "We are all sinners." Each of us must recognize the ruin sin has wrought in his own heart and life, and how much it has blasted there, that might have been good fruit. We must learn to say with Ezra (9, 6): "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God; for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our guiltiness has grown up unto the heavens." We must learn like the publican, to beat upon our breast and say: "God, be Thou merciful to me, a sinner." Then we are fulfilling the condition, and will be allowed to take hold of this Tree of Life, and shake down its precious fruit into our hearts and lives.

But this is not all; our faith must not be a still-born child, or even a sickly one, if God is to take pleasure in it. We must speak with firm, full confidence of Him on the Cross, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption" (I. Cor. 1, 30). The world may pick flaws in Him; the unbelieving reject His Gospel and Church. They may question His Divinity, sinless life, and miracles; try to snatch the crown from His head, and tear from Him the purple robe of Divine Majesty. But this should never disturb our faith, and lead us astray. "He that is of God heareth God's words;" and "If a man keep my sayings he shall never see the death," toward which these are hastening. We will still keep our eyes fixed on this Man of Sorrows, and have no other refuge or hope. We will declare boldly:

“Myself I cannot save,
Myself I cannot keep;
My only help from Him I bring
Whose eyelids cannot sleep.”

For all our virtues and good works, all outwardly decent life cannot deliver us from the hand of “our God who is a consuming fire,” and who says: “Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the Law, to do them” (Gal. 3, 10). He who imagines he can keep this Law with all its wealth and depth of spiritual meaning, has never looked into his own heart aright, as “God searcheth the heart and trieth the reins.” So nothing is left for us, but an honest and whole-souled repentance and faith, which means seeing ourselves and our Saviour in the light that streams from Heaven upon the Brazen Serpent and the Holy Cross. And if we fulfill this condition of repentance and faith, we shall also taste

The Fruits of Redemption.

Of these, too, we hear in this story. We read that, “If a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived.” The burning wound was healed; the pain ceased; the fever no longer raged in his veins. He was delivered from death; he felt health and strength, and life in his members. Therefore the 10th verse tells us how “the children of Israel journeyed, and encamped in Oboth,” continuing their journey into the promised land.

And so it is with us, as we look up in faith to the Crucified Saviour. All the guilt and pain of that sickness of sin in our hearts is healed. We feel our sins are forgiven; and justification and peace flowing into

our troubled souls. Then we can cry with David (Ps. 103) :

“Bless Jehovah, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.
Bless Jehovah, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits;
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;
Who healeth all thy diseases;
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;
Who crowneth thee with loving kindness and
tender mercies.”

The fever and delirium of sin is broken; its phantasies have no longer power to deceive us. We hate the sins that once we loved; for we know that: “Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works” (I. Titus 2, 14). We live under Him in His Kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. We watch and pray, keeping ourselves from all presumptuous and deliberate sins. And if we are overtaken in a fault, and fall through weakness, we do not wallow in the mire, but struggle penitently out of it, to walk more circumspectly in the future.

To this our faith impels us, for we dare not make our Saviour a convenience unto sin, or a soft pillow for an evil conscience. To this our love drives us, for we would not distress Him by receiving His grace in vain. To this our hope draws us, for we would not trifle with our eternal salvation, and run the risk of losing it.

Thus we taste of the fruits of our redemption, as our Saviour works in us to will and do after His good pleasure. In His strength we go forward in our pilgrimage, and the fruits of the Spirit hang invitingly by the wayside: “Love, joy, peace, etc.” And now these

heralds of death: sickness, loss, and sorrow, are no longer God's angry judgments upon us, but meet and greet us on the way as His Fatherly chastening and loving correction, beneath which we bow humbly and trustingly. We know they will "bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness in them that are exercised thereby." When we walk the Valley of the Shadow, we lean by faith upon His almighty arm, who has "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light." And when we join the throng about His Throne on high, and mingle our voices in the song of Moses and the Lamb, then this Gospel of the Cross shall have brought forth its last and perfect fruits in our lives. We too, like Abraham, shall see His Day, and be glad." Amen.

PALM SUNDAY.

Sixth Sunday in Lent.

Gospel: Matthew 21, 1-9.

II. Sam. 15, 23-30: "And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over toward the way of the wilderness, etc."

Hymns:

- 90. Glory Be to Jesus. v. 4.
- 96. My Lord, my Master, at Thy Feet Adoring. v. 3.
- 545. Hosanna! Loud Hosanna! v. 4.
- 87. Jesus! Exalted Far on High. v. 4f.
- 390. Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken. v. 1.
- 388. O What, if We Are Christ's. v. 1.
- 82. Art Thou Weary, Art Thou Languid?
- 53. Behold, Where in a Mortal Form. v. 5.

Crossing the Kidron.

The prophet Zechariah (9, 9) looks far out into the future as he cries: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass." All this came to pass, when our Saviour entered Jerusalem and walked for us the way of the Cross and of death. This last Lenten Gospel describes this scene, and shows us our King in all His meekness and love. This is the King of whom Jeremiah prophesied (23, 5) as the "Righteous Branch raised up unto David," "and He shall reign as King, and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." This is the King whose birth Gabriel announced to Mary (Luke 1, 32), who is to be called

“The Son of the Most High : and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David : and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of His Kingdom there shall be no end.” The Wise Men recognized Him, and did Him reverence as such, even as they had asked : “Where is He that is born King of the Jews ?” Even in His humiliation He is a King ; yea, in His Passion and Death He is more than ever a King. “He humbled Himself and became obedient even unto death * * * wherefore God hath also highly exalted Him, and given Him a Name that is above every name, etc.” (Phil. 2).

It is to this King with the Crown of Thorns, this King of kings, that we cry : “Hosanna to the Son of David ! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord !” The service we now attend, the hymns we sing the prayers which rise from our hearts are all the homage we bring to our King.

Our text shows us another king, David, as he leaves Jerusalem, and goes weeping up the slope of Mt. Olivet (v. 30). David’s journey in those days was a living picture and promise of the way of sorrow our Saviour would walk. He, too, was to cross the Cedron (N. T. form), like His royal ancestor. We will consider today, first,

The Two Kings Who Walk This Way.

No name in either Testament is so commonly and closely joined to that of our Lord and Saviour, as that of David. The angel Gabriel says : “The Lord God will give unto Him the throne of His father David.” The glad tidings to the shepherds ran, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, etc.” In the

family tree of our Lord (Mat. 1 and Luke 3) He is shown to be a descendant of David. Therefore the sick and afflicted, when they cry to Him, call Him: "Thou Son of David." And when for the last time He entered into Jerusalem, the multitudes cried: "Hosanna to the Son of David." He himself never refused this title, as He did that of "Good Master." Moreover, long after David was dead, God spake of the Christ to come, through Hosea and Ezekiel under the title of "My servant David."

If we compare their lives we will find some striking coincidences. Both were born in Bethlehem, and were of the same house. David kept the flocks of his father Jesse, and defended them from the wild beasts. Our Saviour calls Himself the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep. David was early called to the throne of Israel, yet he waited many a year, unknown to the people, until he sat upon it. So for thirty years our Lord was hidden from the people He was to rule over, and all that we know of Him is that "He increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." David met the giant Goliath as the champion of his people; and Christ faced the Prince of Darkness for us all in the wilderness. David had at first only a small part of Israel for His following, and bore much opposition and persecution. But at last his humiliation ended, and he ruled over all Israel and many other lands. So our Lord was followed at first by only a few good men and women, and must still suffer many things from His enemies. But He, too, will rule at last in great might and glory, over all the kingdoms of the world.

This David was much more than the ancestor and

prophet of the Christ. He is a type of the Christ, which gives to all his life, and what he wrote in the Psalms, a holy, hidden meaning. Therefore, we look for something more in this account of how David "crossed the Kidron, and went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as He went up." And we find it in our Lord's Passion History lesson, which says: "He went forth with His disciples over the brook Kidron, where was a garden into which He entered." This crossing of the brook leads the Christ to Gethsemane, and His capture, the Cross and His death. And this way, both kings walked becomes more noteworthy as we consider

The Sorrow Which Burdens Them.

It was the same in its cause, the way they bore it, and its outcome. David sorrows because his ungrateful people have rebelled against him, in spite of his wise, just and glorious reign. His own son, Absalom, was the leader in that rising, and it was this which bowed the poor king so low. He might have put down the insurrection by force, and hacked the rebels to pieces. But no! For him it is a judgment of God. He bows beneath it humbly; he takes the guilt of that wicked son and this foolish people upon himself; he leaves the city, that no misfortune may fall upon it, but only upon his own head. He remembers "the sins of his youth and his many transgressions."

Yet in another sense he is entirely innocent. The people are not now rising against David, hating and persecuting him, for any sin of his. They would have stood by him faithfully enough as king, if he had only let them enjoy themselves and do as they pleased, under

his scepter. It was his holy earnestness against sin, his firm resolve to be a king after God's own heart, which displeased them and enabled Absalom to stir up his rebellion. David suffered beneath the unjust judgment of an unrighteous people, because he was the king anointed of God and ruling in righteousness.

How much resemblance there is in this to the sorrow of our King with the crown of thorns! His own people rose against Him, saying: "We will not that this man reign over us" (Luke 19, 14). When Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your king?" the chief priests answered: "We have no king but Cæsar." And as Israel preferred the murderer (II. Sam. 13, 30f) Absalom, so this people chose Barabbas. Moreover, David was betrayed by his own son, and Jesus by His own disciple. He, too, might have taken vengeance on His enemies by a single command, for which more than twelve legions of angels waited by His side. But, like David, He bows His head beneath a judgment of God against His Anointed, and bears the misery caused by the sinning of others. For this reason it is written: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed" (Is. 53, 4f).

When David bears his sorrow he relies solely upon God. The high priests, Zadok and Abiathar, follow him with the ark; but he bids them return with it to Jerusalem, until it shall please the Lord to bring him back to his palace and the Temple. David does not rely upon the strength of his own arm, or his wis-

dom and eloquence; not upon human friends, or even upon the ark in a superstitious way; but alone upon the Lord God. If He is not with David, then even the ark of the covenant cannot help him. And if God be with him, then David does not need this outward sign of His presence.

The same reliance upon God we see in our Lord, as He crosses the Kidron into Gethsemane. He has left behind the disciples, except the three He loveth best. And now He separates Himself even from these, as He wrestles and prays. He bears His sorrow, though even unto death, without human help. When the enemy finds and surrounds Him He surrenders Himself calmly to them, asking only that "these may go their way." He treads the winepress of the wrath of God alone, relying for help and comfort upon His Father in Heaven.

Mark also how humbly David behaves as he crosses the Kidron. He bows his head in sorrow for his own past sins, and the present sin of his people. He goes barefooted and weeping up the slope of Olivet. It is with a like, but greater humility, that our Saviour casts Himself upon the ground, with His face in the dust of Gethsemane, and offers up "prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death (Heb. 5, 7)." His face, too, is covered, as He stands before Pilate, so that nothing of His glory and goodness appears, and Pilate only cries in contempt: "Behold the man!" And on the Cross so little of His Divinity appears, that they wag their heads and mock Him, as one "rejected of men and despised by the people."

Notice, too, the meekness of David. When he crosses the Kidron, Shimei comes out, of the family of David's old rival, Saul, and curses David, and casts stones at him: "Begone, begone, thou man of blood and of Belial (base fellow). Jehovah hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned * * * thou art taken in thine own mischief, because thou art a man of blood" (II. Sam. 16, 6). Abishai, one of David's captains, cries out: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord, the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." But David only answers: "Jehovah hath said unto him, Curse David. * * * Let him alone and let him curse." It is in the same meekness, only more true and great, that our Saviour heals the ear of Malchus, a servant of the High Priest, sent to take Him captive; and prays for his enemies on the Cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" So He, too, crosses the Kidron.

In all his sorrow David trusts and confides in the Lord, as the three Psalms testify, written when he fled from Absalom. He mourns because so many rise up against him, and yet can add:

"But Thou, O Jehovah, art a shield about me;
My glory, and the lifter up of my head.
I cry unto Jehovah with my voice,
And He answereth me out of His holy hill." (3, 3f.)

Our Lord breathes the same confident spirit, as He comforts Himself (Luke 23, 46) with the very words of David: "Into Thy hand I commend my spirit" (31, 5). These two cross-bearers are so mingled together in many of the Psalms, that we scarcely know whether David speaks of himself or prophesies of the Christ.

And the outcome of their sorrow is the same. David's enemies are put to shame. He reigns more gloriously than ever, and labors as never before for the Kingdom of God. And our Saviour triumphs over sin, death, and grave, and rising enters into His glory even as He said: "Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24, 26). The city and name of David, with David's psalms and life shine now in the glory which streams from his greater Son. But we must also glance at

The People Who Follow These Kings.

There were faithful ones who walked with David his way of sorrow. They had shared his good days, and refused to desert him now in his evil ones. And there was at least one whom David had not expected to follow him. Ittai, the Gittite, a stranger and exile from his own country had only come a few days before to David's court, and now sets out with him upon a second exile with all its uncertain wanderings (15, 19f). David would have sent him back; and is so affected by his faithful affection that he prays mercy and truth may be with him. But Ittai answers: "As Jehovah liveth * * * surely in what place the king shall be, whether for death or for life, even there also will thy servant be." And many others went with David across the Kidron, and wept with him.

And this King with the Crown of Thorns is not without His following in the Way of His Passion. You remember the good women who mourned and lamented Him on His way to the Cross, until He turned and said: "Ye daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but for yourselves and your children" (Luke 23, 28). His

mother, and the beloved disciple John, and the women who followed Him out of Galilee, tarried by His Cross until He died. Yea, on that Via Dolorosa many another Ittai turned to Him in unexpected love! Simon of Cyrene, bore the Cross for Him when He no longer could. The thief at His right hand prayed: "Lord, remember me, when Thou comest in Thy Kingdom." And the very centurion beneath His cross exclaimed: "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"

And that little group has been growing through the centuries, until no one can count the multitude, who in this Lenten season cross the Kidron with Him, and worship in thankful love beneath His Cross. In these holy days many another heart turns to Him, which was indifferent and careless before. Who knows how many, who worship with us during this Holy Week, will be drawn more closely to their crucified Master; and surely many of our youths and maidens, who now make their public confession of their Saviour, will become truly His, and serve Him with a godly life even unto the end. To that happy consummation may the Lord bless His Word today, that with Ittai, the Gittite, we all may say: "Surely in what place our King shall be, whether for death or for life, even there also will Thy servant be!" David may be said to belong to the multitude which "went before Him" in the Way of His Passion; but may each of us be gathered into the multitude which "follows after Him" in His holy footsteps. May we bear with Him the Cross, until with Him we wear the Crown above. Amen.

EASTER DAY.

The Resurrection of Our Lord.

Gospel: Mark 16, 1-8.

Ps. 118, 22-25:

"The stone which the builders rejected
Is become the head of the corner.
This is Jehovah's doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day which Jehovah hath made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.
Save now, we beseech Thee, O Jehovah:
O Jehovah we beseech Thee, send now prosperity."

Hymns:

- 443. This Is the Day the Lord Hath Made.
- 442. This Is the Day of Light. v. 4.
- 440. This Day the Light of Heavenly Birth. v. 2.
- 108. Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain.
- 119. Welcome, Thou Victor in the Strife. v. 2.
- 114. Christ, the Lord, is Risen Again. v. 5.
- 118. Welcome, Happy Morning. v. 4.
- 331. My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less.

Easter, the Day Which the Lord Hath Made.

It is the evening of the Easter Day. The disciples are assembled together. They have heard the wonderful message of the women, that their Lord is risen from the dead. Peter and John have visited the cave where He was buried, and found it empty. But they had not seen the angel, or the Lord Himself; and so they did not yet believe. The Easter wonder seemed to them an idle tale; therefore they sit there quietly and in deep sadness. The doors are shut for fear of the Jews. Then came Jesus among them, the living Jesus, and said: "Peace be with you!" And when He

had so said, He showed them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Then the Easter sun rose for them at last, and their hearts were filled with holy Easter joy. And in that joy they preached the Gospel of the Crucified and Risen Saviour in the streets of Jerusalem, unhindered by the threats and scourging of the Chief Council. In that joy they went out among the heathen, like sheep among wolves. And in that joy they laid down their lives at last for their beloved Lord and Master.

It is this joy which finds utterance in our Easter Hymns. We, too, have heard the message, and have assembled in the House of God to keep this Day, which is the weekly celebration of our Lord's Rising. The church doors are closed; and perhaps many a heart also is closed by earthly cares or doubts. Would that we, too, might see the Risen One in our midst, and hear His greeting of peace; that He would show us His pierced hands and sides. Would that one of those bright messengers of the Most High, who convinced the women He was risen, might speak to us. Then we would cry out with Peter in his Epistle (I, 1, 3): "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begot us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, etc." And then we can join with all our heart in this Psalm which shows us how to keep a blessed Easter, first

When We Believe the Easter Wonder.

That "stone, rejected of the builders, and yet set in the place of honor in the end," was a description of God's people Israel. They were only a poor little people, despised by the proud and mighty nations of earth.

How insignificant they appeared as they languished in their Egyptian house of bondage; and again as they sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept in their later captivity. And yet they are the corner-stone in the World's History. To this people before all others did God reveal Himself; and in their midst stood the Temple of the only true God. All hope of salvation comes to us through this people. Our modern law is based on the Ten Commandments, given to them amid the thunder and lightning of Sinai. The Psalms we love were the hymns they used to sing. What their prophets foretold is dear to us, and the writers of the New Testament were nearly all from their race. Even our Lord and Saviour after the flesh was one of them. Israel, rejected by human builders, was nevertheless God's corner-stone among the nations.

But these words of the sweet singer of Israel have a higher and holier meaning. The Kingdom of God was taken from them and given to the Gentiles. Israel proved themselves unworthy of their Messiah, when they nailed him to the Cross. Their Temple fell into a mouldering heap; and another is built upon its ruins, a holy House of God not made with hands. It is the Christian Church, that Temple of God which shall stand to the end of days. Its pillars rise from the earth to the skies, and its walls enclose all the lands and peoples of earth. And of this Temple Jesus Christ is the corner-stone. So He called Himself, as He quoted this Psalm to the high priests and elders of Israel, who rejected Him. They chose the murderer Barabbas in His stead, and delivered Him to be crucified. They cried: "We will not have this man to rule over us. Crucify Him; His blood be on us and our children." Yet by His resurrection from the dead He became the

corner-stone of the Church, as Peter testifies before the rulers (Acts 4, 10) : "Jesus of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, God raised from the dead * * * He is the stone which was set at naught by you the builders, which was made the head of the corner. And in none other is there salvation, etc."

And Jesus Christ is the corner-stone of the World's History. All that happens in it, only serves to glorify His name, spread His Gospel, and build up His Kingdom in the end. He is the corner- and foundation-stone of all nations. It is not their millions of population, their mighty armies; no not even their worldly education and wisdom which exalts a people. A nation can only stand firm in the currents of Time, when it is built upon Christ as the living corner-stone. "He that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust" (Mat. 21, 44).

"He is the corner-stone of families and homes. It is not earthly prosperity and mere human affection, which build up and preserve the household, but the faith and life in Christ Jesus. A home on that foundation is built on a rock. The rains of dark and evil days may fall upon it, the floods of sorrow surge, the winds of adversity do their worst, and yet it will not fall. But woe unto the family which builds upon the sand, how soon only the wreck and ruin of its once honored name remains.

And Jesus Christ is the corner-stone of the Church and congregation. It is not wealth, or social prominence, which make it prosper. It matters little whether the kings of the earth belong to it or not. This alone matters, that it rest upon the Lord Jesus and His

Word, and that it hold these fast in their purity and power.

And if you ask how the Lord Jesus becomes the corner-stone of the Church, our Psalm answers: "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." It is a great and glorious miracle of God, when we see the Christ Child in the manger, the Man of Sorrows upon the Cross, the Prince of Life rising from the empty grave, or when we watch Him ascending in triumph to sit at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And no less is there a Divine miracle in the founding and preserving of the Church on earth. We need only read the history of its first three centuries to realize that. From all sides enemies gathered together to destroy the little flock of believers. Everywhere there were massacres and martyrdoms. The Roman emperors tried to blot out the Gospel with streams of saintly blood. And yet the living Word, never buried out of sight, grew until it was mighty enough to burst the old dead shell of heathendom about it, and to bury it out of sight beneath its spreading branches.

We need only mark how the Lord Jesus still spreads His Church; how He defends it from its enemies, and pours upon it the fullness of His blessing. In how many a center, where there was 100 years ago a mere handful of earnest Lutheran Christians, we today see many flourishing daughters gathered about the old Mother Church. No earthly power brought this to pass; it cannot be explained by human wisdom or influence. "This is the Lord's doing, and marvelous in our eyes." Yes! The history of the Church is a never-ending miracle! And all this grows out of the Easter-wonder itself, and follows because He, the

Church's Head, is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. All the power and glory of the Church on earth has its root in that empty sepulchre, where the angel said: "He is risen!" But we are to do more than believe the Easter-wonder.

We Rejoice in the Easter Grace.

"This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." Men also make festivals or holidays, which are kept with great display. They go from one to another, and yet the heart is not glad. The flesh enjoys them, but after a time comes the reaction, and these festivals only leave us poorer in the end. How different it is with those three great festivals, which the Lord has made: Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide! They are the three suns of the Church Year, about which all the other Lord's Days and week-days revolve as planets. It is hard to say which of the three is the greatest and best loved. One old writer says truly enough, that each one seems the best while we keep it. Today we rejoice in the Easter grace. "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous * * * I shall not die but live (v. 15). Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

By His rising our Saviour proves Himself the true Prophet. More than once He foretold this. If He had not risen, He would have been a false prophet, and all He taught unworthy of belief. But now we rejoice in the truth of His Word: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away." All He has promised of the New Jerusalem and its reward stands fast.

His resurrection proves Him our true High Priest. Death is the wages of sin. Had He been holden in the hands of death, then He were a sinner, such as we, and His sacrifice on the Cross would be no atonement for our sins. But God the Father declared it such, and sufficient and satisfactory unto Himself, in that He raised Him from the dead. Now we may confidently say that "Christ was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification," as our great High Priest.

His resurrection also makes Him the King of Glory. Had He remained dead, the Devil would have triumphed; but now is He "declared to be the Son of God with power * * * by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1, 4). It is plain that He is the Lord over the living and the dead, King over Death and the Devil.

Our text speaks of rejoicing *in* this day." This does not mean *on* it, or *through* it until it end, but *over* it, *about* it, which we may do long afterward. Easter should be an evergreen wreath about our life, a joy that glows for ever in our hearts. And that will come, when we hold Him fast as our true Prophet. The world may despise His Word, and attack it with the weapons of doubt, unbelief, and mockery; but we hold it fast, and say: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation." He is the Prophet in whose word we can always rejoice and be glad.

Again, we "rejoice in this day" whenever we believe in Him as our High Priest. Our heart condemns us, but God is greater than our heart. Because of this High Priest we can say: "Who shall lay anything to

the charge of God's elect? Who is He that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died (for us), yea rather that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8, 33f).

And after the same fashion we may rejoice always in this Day and its grace, whenever we own Him our King. Many a stony grief may weigh down the heart, but He remains the Almighty King who can help, and the All-merciful who will. As He bade angels roll the stone away from His own grave, which had so troubled the women, so He will roll away our griefs. We may be called upon to stand by the graves of those we love best, or to walk that way ourselves, yet it will but lead us to glory if we hold fast this Easter-King, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. This is the Easter-joy, which should fill our hearts at all times. But alas! it fails to do so, because it is so poor and weak in us. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We lift up our heads in this joy, but fail to keep them up. They are so soon bowed down again by some new sorrow. Only One can give us grace and strength for this, and make this Easter joy ever greater, fuller, deeper, and truer. But if He is to bestow upon us such gifts, then

The Easter Prayer Must Rise From Our Hearts.

We remember the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, and how when our Lord seemed about to leave them they constrained Him to stay, saying: "Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent" (Luke 24, 29). Then went He in, and sat at table with them. Such times will come in

our lives, when the evening comes on apace, and the Easter sun with its joyous light seems about to set for us. Then let us pray: "Abide with us, Lord," like the disciples; or in the closing words of our text:

"Save now, we beseech Thee, O Jehovah;
O Jehovah, we beseech Thee, send now prosperity."

This Easter-prayer, the "Hosanna," is first of all a prayer for ourselves, that our eyes may be opened to believe the Easter-wonder, and our hearts to rejoice in the Easter-grace. But it goes further. Beneath our roof, or among our acquaintances are those we must sorrow over, because they have not yet found the Saviour, and do not love His Word and House. For them too we pray: "Save now, we beseech Thee, O Lord."

How many a heart about us is troubled in this Easter season, and feels lonely and forsaken as never before. The true Easter-joy will not turn in and abide with them. Our Saviour after His Resurrection sought such out first, and blessed them with the sight of His Risen glory. He visited Peter, sorrowing over his sin; Mary Magdalene weeping beside His grave; and the two, sad of heart, on their way to Emmaus. And so we pray, He would enter through the closed doors of every sorrowful heart, and gladden it with his greeting of peace.

And we dare not forget the doubting and indifferent, mocking and defiant sinners; for He came to seek and save all who were lost. He turned Paul the persecutor of the Church, from his wicked way to a blessed apostleship. Our Hosanna is a prayer, that a ray of that Heavenly glory Paul beheld, may fall upon

every heart which cleaves to its sins. And here is the whole Christian Church on earth, besieged in many places by the hatred of the world, and often not at one among themselves, but divided into hostile camps. For it we pray, that the Lord God would keep it steadfast and united in His Word, and defend it from all these assaults of the Evil One. Again, here are the Jews who still keep their worn-out Passover, while we keep our Easter. They still cry: "We will not have this man to rule over us!" and have not for their sacrifice "The Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." And beside them are millions of heathen, who live on in their sin and shame, and know not the true and living God. We pray for all these, too, that our Saviour in mercy would hasten the day, of which He has spoken, when there shall be "One Fold and One Shepherd." All these we embrace in our Easter-prayer: Hosanna, or "Save now, we beseech Thee, O Lord." Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

Quasi Modo Geniti.

Gen. 14, 14-24: "And when Abraham heard that his brother was taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued as far as Dan * * * And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot. * * * And the king of Sodom went out to meet him, after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him. * * * And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine: and he was priest of God Most High, and he blessed him, and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of Heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him a tenth of all, etc." See also Heb. 7, 1-10 and 15-17.

Hymns:

- 443. This is the Day the Lord Hath Made. v. 1-3.
- 284. The God of Abram: Praise. v. 1, 4, 5 and 7.
- 114. Christ the Lord, Is Risen Again. v. 2-4.
- 116. Alleluia! alleluia! v. 1f.
- 108. Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain. v. 1 and 3.
- 117. Christ Is Risen! Alleluia! v. 2f.
- 398. If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee. v. 1-4.
- 255. The Lord My Shepherd Is. v. 5.
- 257. As Pants the Hart for Cooling Shade. v. 1f.
- 136. I Know That My Redeemer Lives. v. 2f.

Melchizedek, A Type of Our Easter King.

In each new season of the Church Year it is always the same figure which is set before our eyes, the Lord Jesus Christ. But each shows Him to us in a different light. Epiphany shows Him to us as a Prophet, mighty in word and deed; Lent as the great High Priest, who offered up Himself for us on the Cross; Easter as the King of Glory, triumphing over sin, death, and Hell. Thus in this season we hear of the King and His King-

dom. The glorious liberty we enjoy in this Kingdom is peace, and therefore He greets His disciples so graciously: "Peace be with you." The officers are the Holy Apostles, whom He now sends even as the Father has sent Him, and gives them authority to remit or to retain sins, as they are guided by the Spirit in the Word. And if you ask about the Kingdom's code of laws, there is but one law: that we should believe in Him, which includes "believing" and "be loving" in Him God and our fellow-men. So John closes this Sunday's Gospel: "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name."

There are three men especially in the O. T., who are types of this eternal King: David, from whom He descended after the flesh, in whose city of Bethlehem He was born, and who like Him was humbled and suffered many things, but at last honored and rewarded so that from a shepherd lad he became a Shepherd of God's people. The second was Solomon, with all the wisdom, glory and peace of his reign; and the third was Melchizedek. This is really an Easter picture, unfolded before our eyes in the words of our text, as Abraham stands before him in the King's Vale. May the Lord bless it unto us, that like Thomas we may bow before our Easter King and cry: "My Lord and my God."

The Dignity of Melchizedek.

Abraham rescued his nephew Lot from Chedorlaomer and his allies. With only his 318 servants he won a complete victory, and came home laden with

spoils. Hearing of this the King of Sodom goes out to negotiate with him for the return of the goods to the surviving citizens of Sodom. And with him goes another king, a mysterious person whom we would like to know better, but the more we learn of him the more we think of our Lord and Saviour; for Melchizedek is an index finger for the Christ, and points men to Christ rather than to himself.

The very person of this man is wrapped in mystery. Moses never fails elsewhere to add a surname to notable persons, and an account of their death. But Melchizedek is not the son of so-and-so here; he comes stealing mysteriously into the Sacred Record, and the next moment is lost to our view just as strangely, with no account of his decease. Nothing is told us of his father, or tribe, or family; and nothing of his birth and death. Therefore Hebrews (7, 3) says he is "Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, he abideth a priest continually." The things which are simply not recorded of him here, point us to the transcendent mystery of the Christ. He had literally no earthly father, but was begotten of His Father from eternity; yet we see Him as a Child in the Manger, and as the Man of Sorrows upon the Cross. How is it possible that He who was true God from eternity, could become a child of man; that He, who died for us, could rise and live forever? The more we think of it, the more we feel His endless mystery, which we can never understand, and into which angels desire to look. We must confess with David (Ps. 139, 6) :

"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot attain to it."

We can only cry with Paul (Rom. 11, 33) : "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out!"

Another prominent feature of Melchizedek is that he is a king. That, too, sets us thinking of our Saviour. The Prophet Zechariah (9, 9) foretells Him as a King: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee, etc." Before His birth the angel declared: "Of His Kingdom there shall be no end." The Wise Men call Him the "King of the Jews;" and likewise the multitude, as He rides into Jerusalem, add to their hosannas the title "King of Israel" (John 12, 13). Pilate asks: "Art Thou a King then?" And Jesus answers in the Hebrew way: "Thou sayest it, I am a King." And that was the title he wrote over the Cross and refused to change: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." And on that mountain in Galilee the Risen One declares: "All authority hath been given unto Me in Heaven and on earth" (Mat. 28, 18).

Again, the very name of Melchizedek is made up of two familiar Hebrew words, which occur often in such names: Melek, king; and zedek, righteousness. So any student of the Bible knows this one as the King of righteousness, which was just what the men of his day meant by that title. Here, too, he is a type of our Saviour. The prophet Jeremiah, who foretold the coming of this King as a branch from David's family-tree, adds: "And this is His name whereby He shall be called: Jehovah our Righteousness (23, 6)." His enemies could not convict Him of sin, and even unrighteous Pilate must wash his hands and say: "I find

in Him no crime at all. I am innocent of the blood of this just person." But Christ is more than righteous Himself; it is written that He is "our Righteousness," and a very Melchizedek, or "King of Righteousness," because He makes us righteous before the Father, being "delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification."

And yet again, Melchizedek is King of Salem, or Peace, another familiar Hebrew word, which gives a name to many of our churches. Salem was only the name of the city or kingdom where Melchizedek ruled; but here it is more than a name, a living fact in the Kingdom of Christ. He is indeed the "Prince of Peace," wherever He rules. The angels sang of it at His birth: "On earth peace," and Zacharias declares He came "To guide our feet into the way of peace." The Gospel He sent His disciples to preach was the "Gospel of peace," and their very feet were shod with it (Eph. 6, 15). And peace is His greeting on the Easter Day, and His bequest to us in His last will and testament: "Peace I leave with you" (John 14, 27). Peace is what He obtained for us by the blood of the Cross (Col. 1, 19), wherefore Paul writes (Rom. 5, 1): "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Always in His Kingdom,

"Mercy and Truth are met together;
Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other." (Ps. 85, 10.)

And the last of Melchizedek's titles points just as plainly to the Christ. He is "a priest of the most high God." It is remarkable that here in a heathen land Abraham finds a man who, like himself, knows and believes in the one true God; and still more remarkable

that he is a *priest* of this God, and stands in an office which was formally instituted only hundreds of years later, when Aaron and his sons ministered before the Lord. And the climax is reached in the fact that he was king and priest at the same time. Later on this was forbidden in the Law under the penalty of death (Numb. 3, 10) ; and King Uzziah who attempted it became a leper-king (II. Chron. 26, 19). As the one man in Sacred History to unite in himself these two offices, this Melchizedek seems more than a prophecy, almost a dim O. T. appearance of the Christ, who was to be a "Priest upon His Throne" (Zech. 6, 13), and not simply in a temple.

David sings :

"Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent:
Thou art a priest for ever
After the order of Melchizedek." (Ps. 110, 4).

Let no one think then, that this parallel is a bit of human invention, since even David in his day speaks of him as a type of the Christ who was to come. Though this Psalm opens as the song about a King, there is no error in its reference to Him as Priest. Hebrews 7 makes plain that we have more than the usual O. T. priest in our Christ, One who like this Melchizedek is before them all, above them all, and mighty to save.

And now we see Melchizedek bringing forth the bread and wine for weary Abraham's refreshing after his hard-fought battle. This is simply an O. T. picture of Him, who refreshes and strengthens us in His Word and Sacrament, so that under His banners we may go on with the good fight of faith against sin and self.

Finally, Melchizedek blesses Abraham, as our

Saviour blessed the little children brought to Him, and left a benediction upon His disciples as He ascended to Heaven. From His hands countless blessings flow into our lives from the cradle to the grave. We owe our prosperity in our calling, grace to help in time of need, our health of body and growth in grace, every joy which comes to our heart, each tear of repentance we weep, every victory our faith attains, and each fruit the Spirit brings forth in us, to this One, whom Melchizedek foreshadowed as he blessed Abraham there in the King's Vale. And in these days, especially, as we follow Him from His open Easter-grave to the Mount of Ascension, our eyes should mark in our King and Priest the rich fullness of His blessings. Let us note also

Abraham's Humility Before Melchizedek.

Our text says: "And he gave him a tenth of all." Abraham gladly accepts the bread and wine, and is just as thankful for the blessing. This servant of God knew that in his descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, yet he bows humbly before this stranger-king, because he is a priest of the most high God, and rejoices in the blessing Melchizedek pronounces upon him. As he gives him tithes of all his sword has won, Abraham thanks God for the victory over his enemies, and dedicates a portion of the spoils to the Lord, that the remainder may be sanctified and God's blessing may rest upon the enjoyment of it. He deals with Melchizedek as God's representative.

We may learn much from this edifying scene. Before us stands in this Easter season the great High Priest, whose office is so clearly of God. It is our Risen

Lord and Saviour. He brings to us His Word and Sacrament and all the rich goods won for us by His death and resurrection. He blesses us with righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. It is highly in order then for each of us, like Thomas in our Gospel, to bow humbly before Him, and confess Him as "My Lord and my God;" to acknowledge that His gifts and blessings are our true riches in all our poverty, our strength in weakness, and comfort in our troubles; and to promise that we will willingly hear and learn His Word, come to His Sacrament, and bring forth fruit by patient continuance in well-doing. We should desire His blessing for heart and home more humbly than Abraham before Melchizedek. For we have a greater victory to thank Him for, even as John writes in our Epistle today: "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith" (I. 5, 4); and as Paul writes: "Death is swallowed up in victory." We owe Him, too, earnest repentance for our daily shortcomings, and vows of new obedience even as He is risen in newness of life. God grant us the right earnestness in such thank-offerings. Then this will be indeed a Sunday "*Quasi Modo Geniti*," and as newborn babes we shall put on that new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

But we must not forget the tithes Abraham brought; they, too, have a meaning for us. This tenth part of the goods he had acquired calls upon us to give willingly and generously to His Church and His poor. It was the decency of even a heathen's worship of his gods, that he brought these tithes, and much more should it mark ours as Christians. Then what is left will be sanctified by what we have given, and we will

be blessed in our enjoyment of it. Then our faith will be that only faith which avails, or amounts to anything, "the faith that worketh by love" (Gal. 5, 6), and this King and Priest of ours will pour upon us the fullness of His blessings for body and soul.

But this scene in the King's Vale is more than a promise for earth and time. The day will come when our last battle has been waged against the Prince of this world and his allies. Like Abraham, we will turn our faces homeward to the Eternal City, the Jerusalem which is above. Then there will come out to meet us a King of Salem, the Heavenly Prince of Peace, and to him that overcometh He will give to eat of the Tree of Life and the hidden manna. We shall eat and drink with Him in His Kingdom (Luke 22, 30), and He will bless us through all eternity. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Misericordias Domini.

Gospel: John 10, 11-16.

Psalm 23:

“Jehovah is my shepherd,
I shall not want,
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside still waters,
He restoreth my soul:
He guideth me in the paths of righteousness for His
name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow
of death,
I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine
enemies:
Thou shalt annoint my head with oil;
My cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all
the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever.”

Hymns:

- 255. The Lord My Shepherd Is.
- 565. Saviour, Like a Shepherd Lead Us.
- 174. Saviour, Who Thy Flock Art Feeding.
- 177. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. v. 1f.
- 136. I Know That My Redeemer Lives! v. 2-4.
- 345. The King of Love My Shepherd Is.
- 410. We Are the Lord's: His All-Sufficient Merit. v. 1 and 4.

The Lord, Our Good Shepherd.

The prophets of the O. T. foretold the coming of a great Shepherd for God's people: “He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and will gently lead

those that have their young" (Is. 40, 11) And Ezekiel (34, 11-23) prophesies of our Lord: "Behold, I Myself, even I, will search for My sheep * * * and I will deliver them out of all places whither they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. * * * And I will set up One Shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, even My Servant David (patronymic for Christ); He shall feed them, and He shall be their Shepherd." All these promises are fulfilled in our Lord Jesus, whom the Apostles call the "Shepherd and Bishop of their souls" (I. Peter 2, 25); the "Chief Shepherd" (5, 4); and the "Great Shepherd of the Sheep" (Heb. 13, 20). And our Lord describes Himself as a man having sheep, who will "go after that which is lost, until He find it" (Luke 15, 4). He calls His believers His "Little Flock" (Luke 12, 32); and commands His Apostle to "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep" (John 21, 16). Likewise in our Gospel today. He declares: "I am the Good Shepherd," for He lays down His life for the sheep. His love and faithfulness are shown by His knowing them; and seeking the lost, until they all hear His voice and there is one Fold, one Shepherd.

What now is the response His believers should make to such a message of love? We can find none more beautiful and blessed than this Psalm of David, who himself tended sheep, and knows what a friend he has in this Good and Faithful Shepherd. David who confesses Him, sings of Him here, walks only in the dim light of prophecy. How then we ought to rejoice in Him, who walk in the clear light of the Gospel! We, who have just kept the Easter Feast! Let us first confess that this Good Shepherd is

Our True Riches in All Our Poverty.

The children of God are often here on earth poor, despised, and plagued. Many of them have only little homes, shabby clothes, scanty fare, and belong to the humbler class of society. They have many a care, anxiety, and sorrow. But yet they can all rejoice, saying: "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want." For the Lord Jesus is their treasure above all treasures, their most precious possession. He dwells among them, and honors their little home. This Sun of Righteousness shines under their roof, and lights up each dark room and faded wall. They put on the Lord Jesus, and are clothed with the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness, costly and elegant raiment which no money can buy. They have the living Bread from Heaven, and drink the water of Life; their table is richly spread after all. They are children of God, brethren of the Lord Jesus, citizens of Heaven, and comrades with the holy angels; rightly viewed they are the only "first families" of our land. In our Lord Jesus they have the true Care-taker-away and Fountain-of-Joy; so that these who seem sorrowful, are always rejoicing; who apparently have nothing, yet possess all things.

What are these green pastures and still waters in which they, with the sweet singer of Israel, may rejoice? These are the green pastures of the Divine Word, the softly flowing springs of the Gospel and the Sacraments. The words of man at their best are but bare and unfruitful fields, for they cannot nourish and refresh the needy soul. But God's Word has shown its power and comfort continually throughout the centuries. It never becomes stale and unprofitable. "The

wells of God are full of water;" so kings and emperors, wise men and unlearned, the rich and the poor, masters and servants, the captive and the free, the old and the young confess.

Have we not often experienced this, beloved? When in the morning we open our Bibles, we here find strength for the toils and cares of the day. When we turn to them at nightfall, we find green pastures and still waters here to refresh us after the heat and burden of the day. Again this has been our experience on so many a Lord's Day. We came into the House of God with burdened conscience, and our poor heart full of anxious cares. We were depressed, downcast, almost ready to despair under the burdens of life and under our load of guilt. And here the Good Shepherd led us to green pastures and by still waters; His greeting of peace gave us new strength and comfort; and the smile of the Lord sent us home rejoicing. This has been our experience also as we came to His Table. We felt weary of well doing, restless in heart, and peaceless in conscience, but we were nourished and refreshed there, and went away rejoicing:

"Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation:
Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people."

"My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour."

Yes, we acknowledge thankfully, that God's Word and His Holy Sacraments are strength, comfort, and refreshment for us. Now they are a Bread from Heaven to strengthen, then a flowing spring to refresh; again they are medicine in sickness, or balm for our wounds; a staff to lean upon, or sword and shield to arm us against our foes. Our Lord Jesus is indeed our

riches in all our poverty, and His Gospel our truest treasure. Even in bodily need He sees to it that we lack no good thing; and gives all that is wholesome and needful to us, who know His grace and truth, love His Word, and walk in His ways. As once He asked His disciples: "Lacked ye anything?" and they answered: "Nothing!" so we too shall always reply with thankful hearts. Let this then stand fast for us:

"The Lord is my Shepherd,
I shall not want."

Our Strength in Weakness.

The great burden, which crushes us down into the dust of earth, is our guilt. This is the thing which embitters our memory of the past, darkens the present, and fills us with terror at the thought of the future. But under our Saviour's Cross and by His open Easter-grave this burden rolls away as Bunyan pictured it in the Pilgrim's Progress, for "He was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification."

Yet it is this same old sinfulness which adds to the evil burdens of each day. We contend against it, and still cannot always overcome it. We stumble, and our progress in the way of life is slow and hard. We would so gladly deny ourselves and crucify the flesh with all its evil lusts. Yet we are so often tempted, and find the spirit willing, but the flesh weak. We resolve to control our hasty temper, but when a harsh word or an offensive look is cast at us, the hot blood rushes as swiftly and wildly as ever through our arteries. We plan to root out our selfishness, but a very little praise fertilizes it, and up it springs ranker than before; or a little blame makes us feel as deeply offended and

sorely wounded as ever. We would tame our impatience, but when the Cross is laid upon us, it seems heavier or lasts longer than we expected, and we are impatient once more, if not doubting and despairing. Yes, sin is the thing which makes us so much trouble, in spite of all our watching and praying. We must daily say with Paul: "I delight in the Law of God after the inward man: but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" (Rom. 7, 22ff). But we, too, may continue with him: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord," for my Good and Faithful Shepherd is my strength in all weakness. "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

These paths are the way of His Holy Commandments. Jesus Christ shows us this way, walked it before us, and left us an example that we should follow His footsteps. Moreover He gives us the strength and desire to walk this way, opening our eyes to note our least departure from it, lifting us up when we fall, and affording us gracious help and faithful guidance in it.

But will He always do this? If I fall again and again, will He not withdraw His hand and forsake me? No, Never! He guides me in these paths of righteousness not for my sake, but *for His name's sake*. My demerits and unworthiness do not count here, but the fact that He is "Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth" (Ex. 34, 6). Since this is the name He has chosen, He must

live up to it. And my pride must bow down before it, because my merits are not reckoned in here at all. Here therefore I have sweetest comfort, for I am assured I will never be rejected for my unworthiness' sake. He cannot forsake me, even though I may forsake Him. He must still hold and lead me by His hand for His name's sake. Thus He is my strength in weakness.

Our Comfort in All Our Trouble.

What a precious thing is this:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me."

With these words Gregory of Nazianz refreshed himself, when for his faith's sake he was brought before the judge. With this Bishop Ulrich of Augsburg girded himself, as he led his men into battle against the wild hordes of Hungary. And a wiser and more renowned man, the philosopher Immanuel Kant, said: "All the books I have read never comforted me, as did this Bible verse."

The Valley of the Shadow is that of the Cross, affliction, and tears, where the sun does not shine, and our feet walk dim, hard ways. Yet here our Good Shepherd goes before us, and "Thou art with me" is the promise which rolls away the stones of care and mountains of anxiety from our hearts. Yes, Jesus goes with us, tells us in His Word why we must suffer, encourages us by His own splendid example, gives us strength to bear our Cross; and more than this, lays it on His own shoulder lest we be tempted above that we are able to bear. He shows us the glorious goal which awaits us, so that with Paul we too "Reckon

that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory" of the future, while "our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

We further confess as our comfort:

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine
enemies;
Thou anointest my head with oil;
My cup runneth over."

Here a soldier is pictured sitting down to a banquet, calm and unconcerned, in full view of his enemies, because he has an ally who will attend to them. Let the world mock and persecute, false brethren attack in selfishness, envy and bitterness; we still sit unworried at the table our Lord has spread for us! He anoints us with the oil of the Holy Ghost, fills for us the cup of salvation, and is ever our Comforter. For His sake and with His help we may bear much, and hope to overcome evil with good; forget and forgive. Let the old Enemy rage against us, attack and accuse; we fear not his threats and tricks, for we sit safely at the table of our Master, and eat and drink of the good things of His House. "Of His fullness have we all received, and grace for grace," one bit after another. Blessed are those who know and follow this Shepherd.

Our Hope Mid All Earthly Changes.

We are pilgrims and strangers on earth, and have here no abiding city, but seek one to come. Therefore we must experience many changes, where there is nothing abiding, and all is only vanity under the sun. There is nothing we can keep for ever, nothing we can rejoice

in for ever, or safely build our hopes upon. But God be thanked we have an Eternal Shepherd, who lives and reigns to all eternity, and lifted up above all change, is with us always even unto the end of the world. He walks all our ways with us, dwells in our homes, sits at our tables and by our sick-beds, and stands by the graves of our loved ones. Therefore we may exult:

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

Neither time or space, years or miles, separate me from Him; for the whole world, and even the Valley of the Shadow, is for me such a house of the Lord, and abounds with His goodness and mercy. Of this I am sure, and when my last hour comes, I can say even more joyfully: “I shall dwell in the House of the Lord for ever;” for then I shall enter the Father’s House where the many mansions are, and find an eternal habitation.

Is this not a precious Psalm? That godly soul was right, who said: “The Twenty-third Psalm is the nightingale among them all, timid, small, and singing only in the dark; but filling the whole world with joy and comfort. Blessed the day when this Psalm was born!”

Our Lord Jesus said: “I know My sheep, and am known of Mine.” He who can not sing this Psalm, does not know Him; and he who cannot sing it always, does not know Him fully. Seek to know Him better. Then in green pastures and the dark valley, at His Table and in the presence of your enemies, you may rejoice thus. Then in all poverty and all weakness, amid all sorrows and changes of this present time, you may exult:

“The Lord is my Shepherd,
I shall not want. Amen.”

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

Jubilate.

Gospel: John 16, 16-23.

Psalm 126:

"When Jehovah brought back those that returned to Zion,
We were like unto them that dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing:
Then said they among the nations,
Jehovah hath done great things for them.
Jehovah hath done great things for us:
Whereof we are glad.
Turn again our captivity, O Jehovah,
As the streams in the South.
They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.
He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves
with him."

Hymns:

- 198. The Church's One Foundation. v. 3.
- 411. What Cheering Words Are These.
- 480. A Few More Years Shall Roll. v. 4f.
- 412. Come Ye Disconsolate. Ref.
- 177. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. v. 1 and 6.
- 413. Peace, Perfect Peace. v. 37.
- 409. God Moves in a Mysterious Way. v. 3-f.
- 520. Forever With the Lord. v. 2-4 and 7.

Christian People Sorrowful Yet Always Rejoicing.

In 1740 a ship carrying two Moravian missionaries, Fedor and Israel, was wrecked in a winter storm on one of the West Indies, the island of Skrop. The captain and sailors escaped in the ship's boat, deserting them. Rev. Feder tried to swim through the raging surf, but was dashed upon the rocks and killed. A few negro slaves were left on the wreck with them,

but one after another of these was washed away, until only one slave and Missionary Israel were left. These two were rescued after many hours, by ropes which the islanders threw from the cliffs above. And for many a year they told how, as he clung to the wreck, they heard the missionary singing our familiar Christian hymns of the Cross and Comfort. They marveled much, that in the midst of death, as one after another of his companions were swept away, his heart could find such courage and comfort. It came from his faith in the Risen Saviour, who has promised to be with us always, even unto the end of the world.

That missionary clinging to the wreck, with the storm sweeping over his head and the sea raging at his feet, is a picture of the assaults and trials the Christian often meets with in this poor life. Then we experience what our Lord foretells in to-day's Gospel: "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: ye shall be sorrowful." But then we ought to lift up our eyes to our Saviour's promise: "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." That saying of Paul (II. Cor. 6, 10) ought always be the Christian's motto: "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." The same thought runs through this Psalm; it is still the Song of Ascents for us pilgrims to the Heavenly Zion, and with it we may comfort ourselves. In all our sorrows we can rejoice, first in

Our Thankful Memory of the Past.

Luther translated this Psalm, as though it were sung during the long captivity at Babylon, where Israel looked through their tears for the time when the Lord would "turn again their captivity." But here our English Bible is right: "When Jehovah brought back those

that returned to Zion." They who sang this Psalm, looked back to a captivity already turned. Much of the time they "were like unto them that dream," when under Zerubbabel and the High Priest Joshua they zealously began to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple of God. With this Psalm they comforted themselves, whilst Sanballat attacked them, and slandered them to the king of Persia, so that at last he reversed his decree and forbade the work on the Temple walls. Only under his successor was the work continued. But even then the days were dark, for the Samaritan and Ammonite mocked this little band, and came with an army to hinder them by force. In such days this godly singer bade them remember that when the Lord brought them back,

"Then said they among the nations.
Jehovah hath done great things for them."

The Psalmist points them not to the future, but to the past. They are to have a thankful memory for God's past deliverances. They are not to forget that,

"Jehovah hath done great things for us:
Whereof we are glad."

Such memories are to give them joy and courage in their present difficulties.

This bit of Jewish History applies to the tasks which lie before us as a congregation, and especially in our personal lives. Now of these I know but little, little of the present and less of the past. But of this I am sure, that all of you have had some troubles. Yes, we have seen many of our plans suffer shipwreck, and have buried many of our hopes. Our feet have walked many a hard way, and may still be standing in such

paths. Some among us are very sick; many a heart today mourns with David (Ps. 13) :

“How long, O Jehovah, wilt Thou forget me for ever?
How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?
How long shall I take counsel in my soul,
Having sorrow in my heart all the day?”

Some are sorrowing over toils which reaped no reward, others over the ruins of a happy future they once felt within their grasp, still others by the graves of those they loved.

And even if there were none such among us, we have all one sorrow in common as Christians: Our sinfulness. We have often vowed on such a holy morning as this, that we would do better, keep all sinful thoughts out of our hearts and all loveless words from our lips, walk in true humility and gentleness among our brethren, and serve our God with all diligence and faithfulness. Then came the rush and hurry of the week, with its labors and cares, the daily friction with our fellow-men, and the irritation growing out of it. And ere the week closed we were ready to confess sadly with Paul: “The good which I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practice” (Rom. 7, 19). So we are always as the sorrowful.

And yet we are always rejoicing, too, because of our thankful memory. We have just celebrated Good Friday and Easter, and rejoiced in Him, who “was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification.” As often as we think of this through the year we must say with the Psalmist:

“When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion
We were like unto them that dream,
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing.”

As often as we think of what that first Good Friday and Easter mean for us poor sinners, we must cry with Paul: "If God be for us, who can be against us, etc." (Rom. 8, 31).

Again, amid our sorrows we look back upon lives crowned with His loving kindness and tender mercy. How many blessings we have enjoyed in our calling; how many benefits for body and soul! What quiet, happy days of peace in our homes; what wondrous grace to help in time of need! How God has refreshed us by the services of His House and His Holy Sacraments! These flowers, which bloom by life's wayside, we dare not trample thoughtlessly under foot. The more honest we are with ourselves, the more we will confess:

"The Lord hath done great things for us;
Whereof we are glad."

He has turned our mourning into dancing, many a sorrow into joy, and much sighing into thanksgiving. We have been "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." And even if we could find no comfort in such a thankful memory of the past, we surely must in

Our Strong Defence for the Present.

That little band at Jerusalem was hemmed in on every side by foes. Only one avenue of help was left them: "the lifting up of their eyes to the hills from whence cometh our help" (Ps. 121). He who had already helped them so mightily was still their Strong Defense. Now, so to speak, they were in captivity again, but their Covenant God was able to break these new bonds and cast these cords also from them. Their hearts were full of care and sorrow, and like the parched lands in the South which thirst for rain. But

over them hung clouds big with Divine mercy, and ready to pour upon them floods of blessings, to fill again the streams, and bring back verdure to the meadows and harvests to the fields. That is what they mean when they pray:

“Turn again our captivity, O Jehovah,
As the streams in the South.”

A captive is a poor fellow. He is cut off from human society by his chains or the walls of his cell, which hem him in on every side. He longs in vain for the golden sunshine and a breath of the free fresh air. And his misery is increased by an accusing conscience, because it is often his own wickedness which is punishing him, and his forsaking the fear of the Lord. This is a picture every Christian heart can understand. We look back to that Paradise, where man walked in blessed fellowship with God, and every day was a Happy Christmas. We feel that we are captives here in this flesh, and yearn for the fulfillment of that promise:

“Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.”

We long in these prison walls for a ray of that Heavenly light and a breath of celestial air. But meanwhile our own hearts condemn us as sinners who deserve nothing better. We are “as the sorrowful.”

But yet we are always rejoicing, too, because we still have this Strong Defense. We, too, can pray with the Psalmist:

“Turn again our captivity, O Jehovah,
As the streams in the South.”

Our God bids us call upon Him, and promises that “He will deliver us and show us His salvation.” Our

Saviour says: "Whatsoever ye ask in My name ye shall receive." Such prayer is still our strong defense in all the sorrows of our souls; when man troubles us, or when we are sick and needy. It opens our eyes to God's wondrous works of grace, and fills us with humility and patience, to bow beneath His Fatherly hand and submit to His will. It gives us courage and strength to mount up as on the wings of eagles, to run without being weary, and walk without fainting; because we know it will bring God's answer and His loving choice of what is best for us. Prayer is the Jacob's ladder from earth to Heaven. David's harp which drives out the evil spirit, Moses' rod which brings water out of the rock, the key to God's Heavenly treasures, the ship which carries us safely through earth's storms, and David's shepherd-pouch whose stones fell the mighty enemy. When we gird on this weapon, we have a Strong Defense by our side, and if we are only diligent in its use, we may be as the sorrowful, yet must be always rejoicing.

Our Joyful Hope for the Future.

Even when it pleases God to let us wait for His help, we may have this comfort, that

"They that sow in tears shall reap with joy,
He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves
with him."

This promise was gloriously fulfilled to that people at Jerusalem. The day came when once more the Temple of God stood among them, and about it and them the strong walls of the city. They dedicated it with joy, offering sacrifices and singing psalms of praise to Him, whose mercies were renewed to them.

But the promise is for us all, who sow in tears. Only mistake not what God says here. The tears are not the seed which yields the harvest. We sow in tears, go forth weeping and bearing precious seed. There are those who think their many tears and sorrows on earth entitle them to joys hereafter. But no! There is no promise attached to our tears. If ours be only worldly sorrow, such tears are the beginning of eternal woe instead of everlasting bliss.

When Esau had trifled away his birthright for a mess of pottage, and found it had become Jacob's he lifted up his voice and wept; and though he sought to regain it with tears, he was rejected. When Joseph sat in prison he wept, but it was not these tears which brought him out of jail, and to joy and honor. No! It was his fear of God, which said in the hour of temptation: "How can I do this great wrong, and sin against my God?" It was his faithfulness in Potiphar's house, and as an under-keeper in the prison. It was his faith which held fast unshaken to God, and his prayers addressed daily to the Throne of Grace. This was the seed he sowed and watered with his tears; and out of that precious seed grew his harvest of joy. All the tears of the builders, for whom this Psalm was written, would not have built again their Temple and city walls. But their faithful, prayerful work, the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other, ripened into sheaves of rejoicing.

The seeds we sow are the holy thoughts, words, and deeds of the Christian life. It is often hard for us to do God's will rather than our own; to serve our brethren instead of ourselves; to walk in God's ways and not the world's; and to please God rather than men. So

this good seed is sprinkled with many a tear; tears of repentance for much we have done amiss, of sorrow for the right and good things neglected, of sympathy with our brethren in their misery, and of longing for deliverance from our own. But with these tears we dropped the seed for sowing: the fear of God and the love for man. And though much we undertake may fail, and mockery seem our only reward; though we are often dissatisfied with ourselves and our own poor life and work; after the sowing of a Christian life, the harvest cannot long be delayed. We may not see it here in full, but the day will come when this sacred Psalm shall have its final and most blessed fulfillment. Then those who toiled so hard amid the heat and burden of the day in God's wheat fields, shall shout as they bring in His sheaves. He will turn again their captivity, and wipe away all tears from their eyes. This Sunday Jubilate, with its joyful noise to the Lord, stands here in the Church Year, as a pledge to all who sigh in captivity and who sow in tears, of the eternal Jubilate and rejoicing in Heaven, the harvest that never fails, the "hope that maketh not ashamed." Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

Cantate.

Gospel: John 16, 5-15.

Psalm 87:

“His foundation is in the holy mountains.
Jehovah loveth the gates of Zion
More than all the dwelling of Jacob.
Glorious things are spoken of thee,
O city of God.
I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon as among them
that know me;
Behold, Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia:
This one was born there.
Yea, of Zion it shall be said,
This one and that one was born in her;
And the Most High Himself will establish her.
Jehovah will count, when He writeth up the peoples,
This one was born there.
They that sing as well as they that dance shall say,
All my fountains are in thee.”

Hymns:

- 197. Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken. v. 1, 2 and 4.
- 198. The Church's One Foundation. v. 1f.
- 200. Zion Stands With Hills Surrounded. v. 1 and 3.
- 203. O Where Are Kings and Empires Now. v. 2.
- 145. O Spirit of Life, O Spirit of God. v. 1 and 6.
- 146. Come, Holy Spirit, God and Lord! v. 2 and 6.
- 135. O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing. v. 2 and 5.
- 295. Blessing and Honor, and Glory and Power. v. 3f.

“The New Song Unto the Lord.”

“Sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord all the earth;” such is the exhortation of the sweet singer in Israel (Ps. 96). He sees God's people praising Him in the Temple, filling it with their resounding songs and the accompaniment of psaltery and

harp. But in holy inspiration he looks forward to a time when all the earth shall sing unto the Lord and all peoples worship Him in the beauty of holiness. Yea, even the heavens shall rejoice, and the earth be glad, the sea roar and the fullness thereof, the fields be joyful and all the trees of the wood shall rejoice before the Lord (Ps. 96, 11f). This is the prelude on earth to the New Song of the Lamb, which they who stand about His Throne will sing in eternity.

“O sing unto the Lord a new song: for He hath done marvelous things.” From this Psalm (98) our Sunday receives its name Cantate, or “Sing ye.” It bids us raise our hymns of praise and thanksgiving to God. That New Song above never comes to an end; the saints in light never weary of it. It is the eternal praise of the Lamb, who was slain for us, and who now reigns in glory. And our songs here below must never die out; in Church, home and heart, the praise of Him should go on, who made us the people of His possession, the sheep of His fold, and the heirs of His Kingdom. Especially in these days when there are so many light and trifling songs of the world, the people of God should raise this “new song unto the Lord,” which all the earth shall yet sing. And especially in this Easter season, when it is Springtime in the Church, as well as in the earth about us, we must wish with the old German hymn for “a thousand tongues,” or with John Mason:

“O that I had an angel’s tongue,
That I might loudly sing
The wonders of Redeeming Love,
To Thee, My God and King.” G. C. Bk. No. 103.

Of this our Sunday Cantate speaks, and that we may sing with the spirit and understanding, and make

melody in our hearts unto the Lord, we have chosen this song of the Sons of Korah as our text, which tells us first

The Why and Wherefore of This New Song.

The children of the world have their songs of many kinds, which they sing quite merrily. With these they do honor to the idols they serve, as once the camp of Israel danced and sang about their Golden Calf. With them they celebrate the achievements of their heroes, as the women of Israel sang:

“Saul has slain his thousands;
But David his tens of thousands.”

Their songs often boast of warlike deeds, as Lamech's horrid measures told his two wives how he had avenged himself and slain the young man who wounded him (Gen. 4, 23). The songs of the world are always of the earth earthy; they know nothing of the Living God and of joy in Him. Only now and then does someone, like Kipling in his *Recessional*, open his mouth to rebuke those who “Put their trust in smoking tube or reeking shart,” and to pray:

“Lord, God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget.”

The Church of Jesus Christ also has her songs of many kinds. Now we hear within her walls a mournful Kyrie: “Lord, have mercy upon us;” and then a glad *Te Deum*, or the “Glory be to God on High.” Now we lament over Him, who “bore our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Is. 53, 4); and again with the Psalmist (45) our heart “overfloweth with a goodly matter, and we sing of our King who is fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into His lips, and God hath

blessed Him for ever." Here the burden of the song is ever the same, whether we

"Show forth His love by morning light,
Or talk of all His truth at night."

whether we raise our Hosanna in Advent, our Kyrie in Lent, or our Easter Hallelujah. Our song is ever of the City, whose walls are Salvation, and of Him who is its King. Our text speaks of this in the opening verses, of the Church which is "His Foundation in the holy mountains, of the gates of Zion which He loves more than all the dwellings of Jacob, and the glorious things spoken of thee, O City of God." In the Hebrew "His" begins the Psalm abruptly, and thus announces that God's City and the things of God are its theme. This is also the why and wherefore of our new song.

Once Jerusalem, the City of the Great King, sat proudly upon her many hills, and the festival processions which went up thither sang: "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people, from this time forth and even for ever more." And so the children of God rejoice today in their City, the Church of the Living Christ, whose foundation He laid in the Holy Mount of the Cross, where He bowed His dying head and said: "It is finished;" and in Mount Olivet, whence He ascended to the right hand of the Father, to rule over all as the King of Glory. That is the solid foundation for all our songs of joy.

The Psalmist rejoices furthermore that:

"The Lord loveth the gates of Zion
More than all the dwellings of Jacob."

These gates with their towers were the defense of the old-time walled city; when they fell into the hands

of the enemy, then the whole city was lost and at his mercy. By the Lord's love for the *gates* of Zion the Psalmist means to say that He will keep and defend His people from all their foes, and bless them for ever. How much to be envied is that heart, which amid all its battles against the evils in the world and our flesh, the enmity of man, and the troubles of earth, dwells behind such gates! Only such a one can sing aright the 46th Psalm, Luther's Psalm, that Psalm of Holy Confidence:

"God is our Refuge and Strength,
A very present help in trouble,
Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do change,
"And though the mountains be shaken into the heart of the seas,
Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled,
Though the mountains tremble with the swelling thereof.
There is a river, the streams thereof make glad the city of
God * * *

God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved:
God shall help her, and that right early."

And with the Psalmist the children of God in all ages sing:

"Glorious things are spoken of thee,
O City of God."

He has nothing to say about glorious words and ways of saying and singing them, about studied elocution and elaborate art, for it is in simple, plain words that these "glorious things" are best declared to the Church. That we know right well, who believe these things with all our heart, and taste and see how good they are. We are not disturbed in our faith by those who do not think them glorious at all. We know such do not understand them, because they have no share in them. It is not a mark of superior intelligence and refinement to despise the glorious things spoken of the

City of God, as some think, for these are the riches of God in all our poverty, light in our darkness, comfort in our sorrows, peace in our struggles, and life itself in the midst of death. And the chief of all these glorious things is that we have a Saviour, who forgives our sins and helps our infirmities, and whose greeting to us in every gathering gloom of earth is "Peace;" a Saviour who abolished death by His Resurrection, and by His Ascension to Heaven opened to us the many mansions in that Eternal City of God. Therefore the children of God sing and rejoice here in time and there on high forever. And his is a poor, poverty-stricken heart indeed, who has not yet learned to join in this new song, and cannot keep with us this Sunday Cantate. May all such earnestly seek, and thus surely find, a share in this new song of the children of God. In the second half of this Psalm, we are told

By Whom and How It Is Sung.

The fourth verse makes plain that the new song will be sung far and wide. Whole peoples are to be born into Zion, begin to know the Lord, and join in this joyful song. Great and glorious as this promise is, it is no more so than its fulfillment. Think of that first Easter evening, when there were *only ten* anxious Apostles behind the barred doors, and the Master stepped into their midst. Think of the first Pentecost, when only a handful of disciples were gathered together with one accord in the Temple, and the Holy Ghost was poured out upon them. From those days on this chorus of singers grew greater and greater. The walls and gates of Zion have spread far beyond Rahab (or Egypt) and Babylon, into the icy lands of the North and the burning deserts of the South, into the

primeval forests of America and the lovely isles of the Seven Seas. Everywhere the new song of the children of God rises now in honor of Him who "washed us in His blood and cleaned us from our sins."

In the next verses our Lord God is represented as a king taking a census of His people, and writing down all whose new birth in the Spirit makes them citizens of the City of God:

"Behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia:
This one was born there.
Yea, of Zion it shall be said,
This one and that one was born in her.
Jehovah will count, when He writeth up the peoples,
This one was born there!

All such have their share in this joyful new song; this one and that one, one man after another. Here is some great ruler, like Joshua of old, who decides that, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord;" and there is a poor beggar, like Lazarus, who finds God his hope and help in need. The learned and the plain alike sit down at the feet of Jesus and learn that great lesson, that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and that "The love of Christ passeth all knowledge." Even poor degraded savages have been reckoned in here, who know only this, that they are sinners and that He is their Saviour. Here, too, are proud sons and daughters, who once wallowed in the mire of sin and grew weary of the husks, but have turned back again to their Father's House. And there are little children, who fold their hands and say:

"Oft as I am tempted from the good to stray,
Let me softly whisper: "What would Jesus say."

What contrasts there are here! Some have had a wonderful calling, like Paul; and others splendid gifts,

like Peter. In their religious experience and past history, their social standing and spiritual estate the children of God will always greatly differ from one another. They will never be all alike, until the Master shall appear, and then they will all be like Him. Until then they will be "this one and that one," all kinds of men, and no one has a right to demand that they be exactly the same kind of people. God loves unity in diversity.

Only in this are they alike, that with one mouth and as *one man* they confess: "The Most High will establish Zion." Among the true children of God, not one will boast of his own strength, or rely upon his own virtues; none expects salvation through his own merits and works. They all realize that they are miserable sinners; and that the Most High must establish them. Their only boast is in His grace and goodness. In that confession of His might and mercy they are no longer "this one and that one," but they have all become one. And if any man would be one with them, he must cease to think of his own general decency among men, as if this amounted to anything in the sight of a Holy God. Only he can join heartily in this song, who looks for "salvation in none other," and knows there is no "other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4, 12). God grant that all of us may be born thus again in Zion, counted thus in the Lamb's Book of Life, and sing the New Song.

In the closing verse the singers are represented as celebrating, one after another, their joy in the City of God; they repeat in turn:

"All my fountains (or springs) are in Thee."

All that brings us grace and peace, we find in Zion, the Church of Christ. Our comfort and help comes from Christ's Gospel declared there, His Sacraments administered there, and the blessed fellowship of His believers we find there. Whether we celebrate the wonders of God's grace in the Church on our festival days, or gather in the school to teach and admonish one another as the Apostle exhorts, or plan and labor for the Church in some society, or share one another's joys and sorrows in our homes, as children of God, "All my springs are in thee."

And this Sunday Cantate bids those learn this New Song unto the Lord, who know it not as yet. It needs no voice culture to sing it, but the heart culture of the Holy Comforter. Let him, who does not yet prefer Jerusalem above his highest joy on earth, seek and pray that all his springs may be in her. For those are only leaky cisterns which the world affords; they will run dry in the hot hours of affliction, when we need them most. Only in the Church, the City of God, will we find the living fountains, which always satisfy our need and refresh our souls. And they will not fail us, until our pilgrimage ends at the River of the Water of Life proceeding from the Throne of God and the Lamb, and we lift our voices in that "New Song unto the Lord," for which Eternity itself will be none too long. Amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

Rogate.

Gospel: John 16, 23-30.

I. Kings 3, 5-15: "In Gideon Jehovah appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said * * * Give Thy servant therefore an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to judge this Thy great people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. * * * And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honor, so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days."

Hymns:

- 155. O Enter, Lord, Thy Temple. v. 2f.
- 277. Come, My Soul, Thy Suit Prepare. v. 1f.
- 239. Lord of the Worlds Above. v. 2.
- 279. Lord, Teach Us How to Pray Aright. vs. 1, 3, 4, 6.
- 391. In the Hour of Trial. v. 1f.
- 157. Our Blest Redeemer, Ere He Breathed, vs. 2 and 5.

Our Prayers.

"Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name," so our Lord addresses His disciples in the Gospel for this Sunday, and adds the promise: "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in My Name," so we might say to thousands who do not pray, and to some who do, but do not pray aright. There are many exclamations, suspiciously like the curses of the world upon their lips, but few prayers; much of idle talk, gossip, and slander; many murmurs and complaints; but little thanksgiving and real petition. Therefore this Sunday Rogate, or "Pray ye."

It falls in the season of seedtime. When the fields were sown, this Sunday became the time when they marched in procession around them, and repeated such ancient prayers as the Litany in which we beseech God "To give and preserve to our use the fruits of the earth," and to deliver us "From pestilence and famine." And among our old German forefathers it was the custom, before they began to cast the seed in the furrows of the field, to say, "We sow in Thy Name, Dear Father, Amen." And when they had finished sowing: "On God's behest our all doth rest."

And when in the evening twilight the lamps were lit, they would pray that when these lights of earth faded, God would give them the Light of Eternity. Many of us have descended from that stock, who were always praying, and we should be proud of it. Yet among us there are Christians, baptized Christians, who seldom open their mouths to pray aright at morning or evening, as they work or rest, in good days or evil.

They have asked nothing in His Name; have not prayed aright, asked too much of earth and too little of Heaven. So our Lord must still say to many believing Christians. They may repeat the goodly prayers of the Church Book, or the Lord's Prayer at home; but it is often with their lips, and their heart is not in it; they do not think much of what they are saying. Many of us pray, but few with that humble spirit and Heavenly mind of the Master, which God promises to hear.

There is a meaningful legend of an old hermit, who whenever he thought he had prayed with the spirit and understanding, would drop a nut in a jar

to keep count of such prayers. But when after a long time he opened it, he found to his shame that not many nuts were in it; and these were so old and dry, that only one kernel was fresh and good. How few of our prayers are worth such a count. How many are like those empty, worm-eaten nuts. If we would learn to pray aright, we may well study this prayer of the King of Salem in our text. To it God answered: "Yea and Amen," and granted it almost without a hearing. It shows us first,

The Privilege of Prayer.

Solomon had ascended the throne of his father, and would now thank God for all His goodness to him, and entreat His help for a prosperous reign. Therefore he goes to Gibeon, where they worshipped then, and offers sacrifices and a thousand burnt offerings upon the altar. After such a holy day there followed a holy night. The Lord appeared to him in a dream, and says: "Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon had now a right to ask God what his heart desires, for God has commanded and encouraged him to do so.

Sometimes this privilege of prayer is challenged, and our right questioned. They tell us that God's will is fixed and never changes, and therefore our prayers can not alter His plans and purposes. But these wise-aces forget, that God foreknows our prayers and reckons them into his plans and purposes from the beginning. Again they object: Surely the great God who rules all the earth, can not concern Himself about our small affairs and little sorrows in it. Yet our Lord declares: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them shall fall on the ground without

your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered." None of these objections raised by human reason trouble us. They have all been answered long ago.

The God who appeared to Solomon, comes to us also, and by His Son says: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Mat. 7, 7.) Note, that without prayer we are to receive nothing from His hand, much as we may desire it. But when we pray, all the store-houses of His treasures stand open before us. Earthly kings set a limit to the things they will and can grant. Herod bound himself only to the half of his kingdom in granting Salome's request. But the Almighty fixes no limit. He said to Solomon simply: "Ask what I shall give thee," no matter what it is. With that He sets before Him all the treasures in the Kingdom of Heaven from which to choose. And so He comes to us in His Holy Word again and again, admonishing us to ask, that He may bestow upon us His good and perfect gifts. Let us then call upon Him diligently in the days of trouble, in sickness, in our business difficulties, and every hour of need. In doing this we have all the promises of Holy Writ as a sound foundation upon which to stand. We have a right to pray, and no doubting mocker should hinder us from the use of this privilege. But we must learn to order aright

The Contents of Our Prayers.

God here tests the heart of this youthful monarch. What might he not have asked? Long life, great riches, victory over all foes, honor and power, **h**ll lay before him; he had only to reach out his hand after

them. Who knows what we would have chosen in such a moment as this? But it did not take Solomon many days to decide; he needed little time to consider. He asks the one thing needful for a king: "an understanding heart." He must judge a great nation, and how can he render just judgment without understanding each case, yes, and something more: the Law and Truth of God by which all must be decided. So Luther was not far wrong, when he makes Solomon ask for "an obedient heart."

And for this he asks in the right way. He prays with heartfelt humility. He calls himself but a little child, who knows not "how to go out or come in," and how to order his dealings with this great people. Indeed he makes himself smaller in the eyes of God than he really is. He is not a child, but a young man of about 20 years. Shortly before David died, he consulted with Solomon about several old enemies, whom he had dealt with entirely too leniently, and who still lived to make trouble. It ended with his leaving them in Solomon's charge: "Thou art a wise man and thou wilt know what thou oughtest to do unto them." And in the same chapter (2, 9 and 44) we read of how the swift justice of Solomon fell upon these who had long deserved it by their crimes, and the peace of the kingdom was established in the fear of God. But before the Lord, Solomon counted himself a little child, and felt he had not grown up enough for the great task before him. Israel was so great a people that they could not well be counted; moreover God had chosen them to be the people of his own possession. To rule such a people was a high and holy office indeed. Their very multitude would make it difficult, and much more

the task of keeping them walking in the way of God's commandments. Such was Solomon's prayer, humble and wise.

Let none of us think, because he is plain John Smith, that he has no need to pray in this same fashion. Our calling and place among men may be a small and insignificant thing. Yet in the eyes of God we fill the same high and holy office as Solomon. We are called to the Kingdom of God, anointed with the Holy Ghost, and will one day receive the crown of life. John says, Christ "hath made us kings and priests unto God." As kings we are to rule for Him, and as priests to serve Him, in heart, home, calling, and in the Church of Christ. That too is a high office and a hard one. So like Solomon we may well consider the difficulties and temptations we must meet, and our weakness and sinful folly, in which we know not how to go out or to come in. We too must ask for "an understanding heart." That we all need, if as good servants of Jesus Christ we are to bring forth the fruits of righteousness, and show forth His praises by our words and works.

If we really mean to fill our high office as kings and priests unto God, in this indifferent world, in this sinful flesh, and with the Devil opposing, we will find that we have undertaken a task every bit as hard as Solomon's rule over that great and stiff-necked Israel. For such a Christian life it is not money and property, honors, health, and happiness we need, but above all a "heart which understands" ourselves in all our weakness, the folly of sin, and God's holy law and will. The contents of our prayer must always be a patient heart, and one not so ready to murmur and raise a

disturbance; a willing heart, and one not rebellious when God's orders run counter to our wishes, pride, or lazy flesh; a heart that is "obedient even unto death," as our Lord Jesus was. If we ask for earthly things beside this, we must do so in our Lord's way, which He taught us in the Garden: "Nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done." Those words are a standing rebuke to what is falsely called "Christian" Science, or "Faith" cure, and which would jostle His elbow, and force Him to give us what we want, instead of what He chooses for us in His wisdom and love. But an "understanding heart," which would serve Him and our fellow men aright, we may ask for with the confident assurance that He will surely grant our prayer. For that is a prayer in His Name, a prayer fit for His holy Body, the Church, a prayer which His Spirit prays within us.

The Rich Blessing of Such Prayer.

Of Solomon's prayer we read: "It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing." The Lord gave him what he desired: a wise and understanding heart. There was none like him in his day, as he judged Israel so wonderfully, wrote the 3,000 Proverbs and 1,000 songs, knew all about the beasts, birds, and fish; and the plants from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop which springeth from the wall. The Queen of Sheba came to learn from Solomon wisdom for herself, and went away, saying that the half had not been told her. You will recall how he found out which mother had a right to the child, about whom the two women quarreled, by proposing to divide it into a dead half for each, with the sword; at which the real mother was ready to yield the living child to her rival. As

this third chapter concludes the story, it declares: "The wisdom of God was in him, to do justice." And there is a legend of how he distinguished some wonderfully perfect artificial flowers from the real ones, by opening the window and letting the bees tell the true from the false. So wisely did Solomon reign, that the people of the East speak of his glorious reign to this day. And there is no civilized nation today, where his proverbs are not quoted. Thus did the Lord answer his prayer. And beside this, God gave him gifts He had not asked for: riches, honor, victory over his foes, the Temple on Mt. Moriah and the palace of cedar wood which stood there. The chapters which follow, and Jerusalem for centuries after, tell of the glory of his magnificent reign. God even gave him a new name: Jedidiah, or the Beloved of the Lord.

And what was a special gift for Solomon has become in the New Testament God's rule, His regular way of dealing with us. He who seeks a wise and understanding heart, shall have it from the Lord, and more too. The promise is: "Seek ye first His Kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Mat. 6, 33.) God does not tell us whether it will be chiefly riches, or honor, or long life. You know how on Christmas and birthdays our friends delight to give us more and better things than we expected. And our God loves to surprise us also. He says these things of earth shall be *added*; they will fall into our laps as we seek His Kingdom and righteousness. That is the rich blessing which follows our prayer; and with such promises God would encourage us to walk and talk with Him amid this unbelieving and sinful world. Meanwhile, those who are minded

to be rich, or think they know better than God just what measure of health and riches, or length of days is best for them, get little in answer to their prayers, for those are not believing prayers. The blessings promised in His Word belong only to such prayers as Solomon's, which alone are fit for a holy body like the Church, and winged by the Spirit from out hearts, bring down rich blessings from high Heaven.

But let us not forget the solemn warning of Solomon's life. There was a condition attached to these added gifts: "If thou wilt walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days." As he grew older, Solomon did not trust God to make him great among the kings of earth, but after the fashion of his time married many wives to strengthen his alliances with the neighboring nations; and these inclined his heart after strange gods. His heart was not perfect before the Lord, as David's had been. Therefore he only lived sixty years, and the glory of his kingdom was not handed down to his grandchildren. In the reign of Rehoboam the kingdom was divided, and the Ten Tribes taken from him.

Each petition we ask of God must bind us the closer to Him in holy living and godly service; and each gift He grants us quickens us to greater obedience and faithfulness, lest He takes His grace and blessing from us. Solomon's example, as well as his prayer, reminds us of our need of an understanding heart, that we may walk in His ways and be blessed. In our Christian day and land it ought to be far easier for us to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, which so sadly soils the stories of David and Solomon. Poor sinners though

we are, God is not demanding of us an impossible condition here, when He bids us walk before Him as Father David did. That is no high goal of perfect sinlessness. David is our example in this, that he never hardened his heart against the Lord, but though he fell into sin, he rose again from it in a speedy, humble, and honest repentance. Because of this, he is set before Solomon and us, as a model. We can follow David's footsteps, who with human frailty, yet with all his heart walked in God's ways and kept His statutes and commandments. For we have an Ascended Lord, who sends His Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts abundantly through His Word and Sacrament in the Church on earth. Therefore let us pray for wise and understanding hearts, to live in God's Kingdom and serve Him in righteousness of life; for we have a better assurance than Solomon's dream, that to us "shall be added all these things" we need for our earthly life, when we have laid hold on the one thing needful for the Life to Come. Amen.

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD.

Gospel: Mark 16, 14-20.

Ps. 68, 18-20:

“Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led away captives;
Thou hast received gifts among men,
Yea, among the rebellious also, that Jehovah God might dwell
with them.

Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burden,
Even the God who is our Salvation,
God is unto us a God of deliverances;
And unto Jehovah the Lord belongeth escape from death.”

Hymns:

120. See the Conqueror Mounts in Triumph. v. 1 and 4.

122. A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing. v. 1.

124. Draw Us to Thee, Lord Jesus.

128. O Christ, Our Hope, Our Heart's Desire. v. 3 and 6.

133. Hark! Ten Thousand Harps and Voices. v. 1f.

383. The Son of God Goes Forth to War. v. 2 and 4.

Our Lord's Ascension.

Our Lord's Ascension was foreshadowed already in the Old Testament. We have a type of it in Enoch, who “walked with God; and he was not; for God took him.” (Gen. 5,24.) And again we read that Elijah “went up into heaven by a whirlwind.” (II Kings 2, 11.) And yet again the entrance of the High Priest year by year into the Holy of Holies is spoken of in Hebrews as a picture of Him, who entered not into holy places made with hands, which are but figures of the true, but into Heaven itself to appear in the presence of God for us.

The Ascension of our Lord was also foretold in the Old Testament in so many words. Micah calls Him

the Breaker, or Pathfinder (2,13) ; the Forty-seventh Psalm (v. 5) says: "God is gone up with a shout"; but our text is the clearest of these prophecies. Though first of all it is a song of David, because his people's enemies are overthrown, yet Paul writing to the Ephesians (4, 8) applies these words to our Lord:

"When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men."

So Luther has rightly headed this Psalm "A Prophecy of Christ's Ascension and Glorious Power." Here, as always, the New Testament is the proper commentary to explain the Old. In its light these words of David become wonderfully clear and meaningful. They speak of our Lord's Ascension, and first of

What His Ascension Means.

The Israelites were victorious over their foes. The Lord was their sword and the strength of their arm, their Helper in battle. He had come down from Heaven to fight for His People and scatter their enemies. The ark of the Lord, which Israel had carried down into the battle, is now borne up Mt. Zion, and set in its holy place. David sees in this a prophecy of how the Messiah, when His work on earth is finished, will return to the throne of His glory in Heaven. So he and his thankful people sing this song, which has a meaning for the past and the future as well: "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led away captives." Their foes had been overcome with God's help. "Thou hast received gifts among men." The booty Israel had taken, became a gift to the Lord, the involuntary gift of these foes. And this victory Israel had won, was a pledge to

the royal singer, that the Lord God would continue to dwell among them (v. 19), and that His Kingdom should stand fast forever.

David's song, even in its smallest particular may still be our festival song, as we remember our Lord's Ascension. We stand on Mt. Olivet. We see our Lord with outstretched hands blessing the disciples for the last time. The cloud receives Him up out of their sight. He ascends to Heaven. Once He had come down from those Heavenly heights to this poor earth. He lay as a Babe in the manger at Bethlehem. He walked this earthly vale of sorrow, and even the valley of death. He struggled and suffered in this poor world of sinners, and He won the day. Now the great Servant of Jehovah returns to His Father and the glory He had with Him before the world began. He ascends far above the stars to the eternal Father-house, where the many mansions are, and the Almighty God sits on the throne of His Majesty. And God Himself bids Him sit at His right hand, far above principalities and powers and every name in the world to come. As we gaze after Him reverently and adoringly, we cry with David: "Thou hast ascended on high."

But David adds: "Thou hast led away captives." When a victorious king of the olden time came back from battle, it was the custom to lead before his chariot in triumphal procession his captives loaded with chains. There you might see the king of the hostile land, whom he had captured; the general of that army he had outwitted; and the noblest men and women of the defeated people. It was thus that Germanicus dragged through the streets of Rome the pure and high-minded Thusnelda, the wife of Hermann, who

first united the German tribes, and set them free. But who are the captives to grace the triumph of our Holy Saviour and Ascended Lord? The first is no such noble figure as she, who won the admiration of her licentious captors by her beauty and purity. It is an ugly, unclean form we see there. Christ has overcome Sin, and redeemed us from her sorcery by His holy blood. Next comes a mighty giant, whom all of us fear to meet, and He alone could face without falling. It is Death, whom He stripped of his power by His Resurrection. Before His chariot wheels goes also the prince of this world, the Devil. He is judged now and become a by-word. They may gnash their teeth as they will; they are utterly overcome; He leads them captive.

And who are they, who walk behind the chariot of the King of Glory? A great multitude follows, with whom He divides the spoils: the ten thousand times ten thousand, whom He has redeemed by His sufferings and death, and who now glorify His Holy Name. They are no more in chains; their cords are cast from them, in which once they were holden: the lusts of the flesh, the defiant and desperate wickedness of the natural heart, its love for the world, and lack of all peace. They walk behind the Gospel chariot, and raise here in the Church below their hallelujahs of rejoicing. They stand about His throne above, in white robes and with palms in their hands. They serve Him day and night in His temple. They sing: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive riches, and wisdom, and power, and honor, and glory, and blessing." And we too, if we are persuaded of His worth and won over to His side, may sing with them unto our King,

who leads us away the blessed captives of His Ascension.

But we have here a cause for louder thanksgiving in that, He has "received gifts among men." These are not for Himself, since He has no need of them, who shares the glory of God. For men He has received them, and among His believing brethren of mankind He shares them with generous hand. What are these gifts? We might name a host of them for body and soul, which we owe to Him, for out of His fullness have all we received and grace for grace. Shall we say: righteousness and peace in the Holy Ghost, or forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. No, at this season we may sum them all up in one, the gift of the Holy Ghost, He, who has that, has all the others too. All else in our spiritual life grows out of His saving power in our hearts; and all in our earthly life out of His wisdom which enlightens our minds. To this Holy Spirit we owe our Christian civilization, our hospitals and healing for the body, our inventions and all the progress we boast in today.

Now generally, when a man rises high above his fellows, he forgets the poor and lowly among whom his lot was once cast. But not so our Lord Jesus! Even at the right hand of the Father, He remembers His brethren down in earth's vale. The Son of Man on the throne in Heaven still has a heart for the children of men on earth. He feels for them, intercedes for them, and prays for them, even as His hands were lifted to bless them as He ascended. And from His exalted throne He sends down the fullness of the gifts received for them.

None need despair of His help, and feel that per-

haps because of past disobedience and unfaithfulness they are forgotten. For here it is written, that "His gifts are even for the rebellious!" That is a golden promise, and fills us with great comfort. Though we have often forgotten Him, He is still willing to visit us in this Pentecostal Season, pour upon us His Holy Spirit, teach and reprove, sanctify and comfort us.

And His gifts are not for us alone, but for this whole world of sinners. His Ascension took place, that He might rule in all the earth, as well as in Heaven, and "dwell with men." The unbelieving may despise and attack His Holy Word, deny His miracles, mock His Name, and oppose His Kingdom; but the very gates of Hell shall not prevail against this Church, whose Head is in Heaven that He may dwell and rule everywhere. Again and again is this written in the Psalms:

"Ask of Me, and I will give thee the nations for Thine inheritance,
And the uttermost parts of the Earth for Thy possession."

And again:

"Sit Thou at My right hand,
Until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool."

It is for this He ascends into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, from whence He rules the world, and shall come to judge the quick and the dead. This is most certainly true. And now our text closes with directions, as to how,

We May Celebrate His Ascension Aright.

"Blessed be the Lord," it exhorts. We celebrate this event by praising and blessing God, as did the Apostles. Of them it is expressly written, that after

their Lord's Ascension "They worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the Temple, blessing God." (Luke 24, 52.)

And when we read our text more carefully, we find it saying: "Who *daily* beareth our burdens." Only once in the year do we celebrate the Ascension; only in one season do we sing the hymns of the Ascension. But the rejoicing over it is to resound through the whole year, echo on in our hearts, and hallow and purify our whole life. Paul tells us how our Lord's Ascension ought to be celebrated, and commands, that not on one day in the year, but every day of our lives we should "Seek those things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God." (Col. 3, 1.) Our every-day walk and conversation ought to be in Heaven, and we should feel each day the lifting up of our hearts by the Christ, Himself lifted up on high. We ought daily to walk Heavenward in His footsteps, seeking His kingdom of Righteousness, and never forgetting, among the many things which line the way, the great goal at the end. That is our spiritual Ascension, out of the dust of earth and the mire of sin, which we may and should keep every day. Then we can rejoice, that "God hath raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the Heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2, 6.)

And this blessing of God is to continue, even when dark days come into our life. David does not deceive himself when he sings this song of praise unto the Lord. He knows that he and his people have yet many a hard battle to fight. David did not say God would always "load us with benefits." Luther rendered it: "Who lays a burden on us." And the full,

exact translation of his words appear in our Revised Version: "Who daily beareth our burden," and "is the God of our salvation." We too know something of burdens. We have felt their weight before, and will again after the Ascension Day is past. Just what they will be none of us knows. God may lay upon us poverty, so that we ask anxiously: "What shall we eat, and wherewithal be clothed?" It may be that unrighteous enmity will trouble and harm us; or weakness of body may bind us to our bed in sickness; or the loss of those dear to us may face us some day.

But when such days come, let us bear their burdens like Anna, the wife of the Saxon Elector. Of the fifteen children she brought into the world, she had followed twelve to the grave. How she bore her burdens, you may judge from the fact that this verse was her motto in the form Luther gave it:

"God lays a burden on us,
But he helps us as well."

Let us also write it deep in our hearts, and then in days of trouble we

"Will lift up our eyes unto the mountains;
From whence shall my help come?
My help cometh from Jehovah,
Who made heaven and earth." (Ps. 121, 1.)

Our Helper is that Ascended Lord in Heaven, He can help, because "all power is given unto Him in Heaven and in earth." He will help, because He is our Merciful High Priest.

And David remembers also that last day on earth, which God appoints us, and shows how the light of the Ascension Day streams out into the Valley of Death:

“God is unto us a God of deliverances. And unto Jehovah the Lord belongeth escape from death.” He is not speaking now of our spiritual Ascension, but of the bodily Ascension to Heaven, which shall follow for us. The little birds flap their wings a great deal upon the edge of their nest, before they mount aloft in the air. And when our souls are done struggling thus, up out of the dust of earth and the mire of sin, the time will come when they will “mount up with wings like eagles,” whither this One has gone before us. Godly Stephen, as he died beneath the stones of his persecutors, “saw the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.” (Acts 7, 56.) And with his face shining like an angel’s he prayed: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” So we, if we follow our Lord, after our spiritual ascending, after this rising of the Soul above the lusts of the world and the flesh, shall share with Him this last blessed Ascension of soul and body to Heaven. Amen.

THE SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION.

Exaudi.

Gospel: John 15, 26-16, 4.

II, Kings 2, 8-12: "And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, 'Ask what I shall do for thee, before I am taken from thee.' And Elisha said, 'I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.' And he said, 'Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.' And it came to pass as they still went on, and talked, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which parted them asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into Heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, 'My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!'"

Hymns:

- 120. See the Conqueror Mounts in Triumph. v. 1 and 3.
- 122. A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing. v. 2.
- 123. Thou Art Gone Up On High. v. 1.
- 137. Where High the Heavenly Temple Stands. v. 3-5.
- 127. Alleluia! Sing to Jesus. v. 2.
- 146. Come, Holy Spirit, God and Word! vs. 1 and 3f.
- 145. O Spirit of Life, O Spirit of God. vs. 1-4.
- 155. O Enter, Lord, Thy Temple. v. 2f and 5.

The Holy Day Between Ascension and Pentecost.

This is called the Orphan Sunday of the Church Year. The Ascension is past and the Lord Jesus has gone up on high. But the Day of Pentecost has not yet come, with its outpouring of the Holy Ghost. So on this Sunday the Church is left a lonely orphan on earth. Yet this too is a holy day, richly blessed as few others in the Church Year. It lies between the As-

cension and the Pentecost, like a quiet lovely valley between two lofty and magnificent mountains. From it we *look up to* a wonderful Conqueror, who has ascended in triumph to the Right Hand; and *look up for* a wonderful gift: the Spirit of Grace to be bestowed upon us poor orphans. We look *back to* the Ascension with praise and thanksgiving; and look *on to* our Whitsuntide celebration with prayerful hope. The one tells of a Divine Guest on earth, who has returned to Heaven; the other of a Heavenly Guest, who will come down to earth. What fullness of blessing there is in this day, with such an exchange of visits as its theme! What communion and fellowship between Heaven and earth! It is a Jacob's ladder for the Christian heart to climb from this world to a better one!

We read of something like this in our O. T. text. It shows us how we should keep this holy day between the two great Festivals, first by

*Waiting With Prayerful Heart for the
Heavenly Guest.*

Exaudi means: "Hear," O Lord, when I cry with my voice. The very name, from the ancient Latin Introit, turns our hearts Heavenward. These days of waiting for the Festival of Pentecost should be a season of much prayer for us, as they were for the disciples, when they had seen their Master caught up into Heaven. The good old preacher Hofacker reminds us, that even earthly kings were accustomed to mark their ascension to the throne with special gifts, and adds: "I am sure the King of Kings at this season of His Coronation will not deny the petitions we ask in humble faith." The apostles and the women spent

the days before Pentecost in making such requests; "these all continued with one accord in prayer." (Acts 1, 14.) And we too must wait now with prayerful hearts for the Heavenly Gift and Guest.

"Now our great Elijah offers
Double portion of His grace." (No. 120, 3.)

Our text tells us for what Elisha prayed in such days. He had crossed the Jordan with Elijah, and knew that his master would shortly be taken from his side. When the master says: "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I am taken from thee," the servant cries: "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." Note that he is not asking for twice as much of the Spirit of God, as his great master had. He is referring to a custom in Israel where the first-born son received twice as much as any of the others. He is only one of Elijah's sons in the ministry, but one who desires the double portion of an elder son from this spiritual father: all he can inherit of his spirit of faith and power. He is not more greedy than the other sons the prophet trained in his school; but he is more humble, and feels how much he lacks of being a worthy successor to this beloved master. He would be, not an ordinary follower of his, but just as fearless as Elijah was before Ahab, the idol-worshipping Jezebel, and her blind priests and followers; as faithful in holding to the Living God as Elijah was when all Israel had forsaken Jehovah; as obedient at God's command to go from the palace to the desert, to the home of the poor widow, or the Brook Cherith, where there were only ravens to feed God's prophet; and he would prevail in prayer, as Elijah did, when he broke the long drought with a refreshing rain, called down light-

ening from Heaven upon that sacrifice to Jehovah on Carmel, and called back to life the widow's dead son.

But what shall our prayer be in these days, when our Ascended Master bids us: "Ask what I shall do for thee." Must it not be almost in the very words of Elisha, for the gift of His Holy Spirit? We entreat of Him that Spirit of Grace, who brings and keeps us in the loving favor of God; that Spirit of Adoption, who bears witness in our hearts that we are the children of God; that Spirit of Faith, who plants and replenishes faith in our souls; of Truth, because He leads us into all truth; and of Prayer and Praise, because

"'Tis Thou, O Spirit, teachest
The soul to pray aright;
Thy songs have sweetest music,
Thy prayers have wondrous might." No. 155, v. 3.

And we need Him as the Spirit of Power, because He strengthens us in a holy walk and Christian life, adding to our faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love. (II Peter 1, 5-7.)

And we too may entreat with Elisha, "*a double portion*" of this Sevenfold Spirit of the Christ. For it is written in the Psalm (81, 10):

"Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it."

The more we ask, the more our God will give, if like Elisha we entreat Him in true humility. Indeed we may ask more confidently than this O. T. prophet. He asks, when Elijah is about to be taken from him. But our Ascended Master, instead of being taken from us, is now "with us always," brought nearer in spiritual presence and power than before. And he prom-

ised us that after His departure He would send us the Comforter, and that His Father would give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. But Elijah dare not make any promise; he can only say: "If thou see me when I am taken away from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." In short, we are now to have "whatsoever we ask of the Father in His Name." In these days we also

*Look With Longing Hearts to Our
Ascended Master.*

The master-prophet and his disciple have crossed the Jordan, and are journeying on together, talking by the way. And as they go side by side, a chariot of fire parts them asunder, and Elijah is swept up to Heaven by a whirlwind. Elisha sees this, and cries: "My father, my father, thou art the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." Only a few words he speaks, as he looks longingly after him, but these are full of meaning. They are his last loving farewell to his father in the Lord, his best friend, and tell how he loved and longed to retain him, who was Israel's best defence. In his great sorrow he takes hold of his mantle, and tears it in two after the demonstrative fashion of the Orient.

On this Sunday lies already the sunshine of the Pentecost. We pray for that blest Spirit of the Triune God, whom we need so much, and in so many ways. But on it falls also the glory of the Ascension. We too gaze after One, who has gone up from the midst of the Church on earth, One who is far more for us, than that man of God, Elijah, ever could be for his disciple. He is our Friend and Good Physician, our Saviour and

King, the High Priest and Bridegroom of our souls. How longingly the disciples gazed after Him, as He departed into Heaven. And so we too look, mourning that He is no more with His Church on earth as before. We strain our eyes to see Him, and our ears to hear His voice. We understand why Elisha in his sorrow rends his mantle.

He told us that in the world we should have sorrow, and every day we experience something of this. Our sinful weakness causes us much sorrow, rendering our conscience restless and our heart peaceless. The children of this world add to this sorrow of ours, because they hate His name and truth. The cares and suffering of this poor life in the flesh pile our sorrows higher. To whom shall we look for comfort and help in our sorrows?. The Psalmist says (20, 7) :

“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses;
But we will make mention of the name of Jehovah, our God.”

We may well speak of our Ascended Lord as “the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof”; and beseech Him to defend us from the enmity of the world, keep us from sin, and deliver us from all evil. As we look longingly up to Him, we are thus comforted in all our sorrows and strengthened in every struggle. Exaudi, hear, O Lord, when I cry: this means that the prayers of longing hearts on earth at this season rise to our Ascended Lord in Heaven. But beside this we must not forget to

Cherish With Thankful Hearts His Gifts.

Elijah's mantle fell from him, as he went up in the whirlwind to Heaven. Elisha took it up with joy. It was a precious keepsake and valuable bequest from

his beloved master. This was the mantle which Elijah had cast upon him, as he plowed in the field, and thus called him into the ministry. (I Kings 19, 19.) With this mantle Elijah had just shown his power, for when he rolled it up, and smote the waters of Jordan, they went over it dry shod. (v. 8.) And now it becomes the master's pledge to Elisha, that his prayer is heard, and the mantle and spirit of this great leader shall fall upon him abundantly. And there was no mistake about this, for Elisha was a worthy successor to Elijah, and as he in his turn was departing from the earth, the king of Israel, Joash, wept over his illness, and exclaimed just as Elisha had done before: "Father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." (II Kings 13, 14.)

But when we speak of our Master's gifts to us, we do not number among them His mantle. Rome pretends to have among her relics the very mantle Christ wore, but unfortunately for this pious deception, two cathedrals in Europe both claim that theirs is the genuine one. And since these rags are used in an idolatrous way, we want none of them. Even if Christ's true mantle had been preserved, it would have no virtue and blessing in it now. It was the Living Christ who gave it the power to heal. Him we still have, Evangelical Christians, with all the gifts bequeathed to us by His death on the Cross and His Ascension to Heaven. This Christ we have in His Word, the very thing Rome esteems so lightly, that she counts 150 other books just as good or even better than the Bible. But for us it is His one great precious Heavenly gift, as He meant it should be.

By this Word His Holy Spirit called us, whilst we

yet walked the ways of sin and ruin; gathered us into these congregations which are the workshops of this Spirit; enlightened us to know our misery as sinners, and His grace as our Saviour; still strengthens and sanctifies us in our weakness and sorrow; and will preserve us in the true faith unto His Heavenly Kingdom. This Word by which the Spirit works, is "the power of God unto salvation," and therefore we cherish it with thankful hearts, and strive to keep it in its power and purity, even when many about us weaken and water it down with their own poor ideas, and reason away its great doctrines. The explanation of the sensational preaching of our day, is simply that the people, and the preacher too, do not value the Word aright, as the great gift of the Ascended Christ to His Church, but prefer the traditions of men to the doctrines of the Son of God, just as the Pharisees did in His day. Yet with all our carefulness about sound doctrine, our Lutheran people are also at fault here: they should hear the Word diligently in our churches, and read it more devoutly in their homes!

The other great gifts of our Ascended Lord are His Sacraments, instituted just before His Death and Ascension. In His Baptism His Spirit gives us a second birth, makes us Christ's disciples, members of His great mystical Body, temples of His Holy Spirit and the heirs of His glory. We cherish this gift, in which there is so much of saving grace, and must always rejoice that we were thus brought to the Lord Jesus, and may bring others for the same new birth by water and the Spirit. And the best proof that we cherish it, will be our living out what Paul says of Baptism, that it buries us with Christ into His death to sin, and quick-

ens us to walk with Him in newness of life, as He was raised from the dead by the glory of God the Father. (Rom. 6, 4.)

Again the Lord's Supper is a precious bequest from Him, who is true God as well as true man, and like its founder is a Heavenly Bread mysteriously joined to that of earth. It is an inexhaustible well-spring from which with the Spirit's help we draw "grace for grace," one bit after another; the true "Fountain opened to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." (Zech. 13, 1.) Therefore Godly men of old could not find figures of speech lovely enough to describe this Sacrament. They called it the greatest and holiest of all the mysteries, the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death and hope of resurrection, the shield for our faith and our armor against Satan, our incorruptible fare and Heavenly manna, the tonic for a troubled heart, the central leaf of the Gospel, our pearl of great price in this vale of sorrow. And we too cherish it with thankful hearts, as a *Communion* with the Living Christ and those who are His, His *Supper*, in which we sit at the Lord's Own *Table*, as we shall when we eat bread with Him in the Kingdom above. Let us then deem it holy, come to it regularly, and walk worthily of the strength it gives us. The more thankfully we cherish His gifts, the more of life and salvation the Spirit will help us find in them for time and eternity. On this day there is joined together our praise and thanksgiving for the gifts connected with His Ascension, and our prayers and hopes for the great gift of His Pentecost. Today then we cry: Exaudi, and beg Him to hear when we cry with our voices, for we have so much of thanksgiving and of petition to bring before the Throne of his grace.

THE FESTIVAL OF PENTECOST.

Whitsunday.

Gospel: John 14, 23-31.

Joel 2, 28-32: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. * * * And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of Jehovah shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those that escape, as Jehovah hath said, and among the remnant those whom Jehovah doth call."

Hymns:

- 153. O, Holy Spirit, Enter In. v. 1.
- 141. Lord God, the Holy Ghost!
- 146. Come, Holy Spirit, God and Lord! v. 2.
- 139. Let Songs of Praise Fill the Sky. v. 1f.
- 154. Gracious Spirit, Dove Divine. v. 3.
- 157. Our blest Redeemer, 'Ere he Breathed. v. 4f.
- 550. Holy Spirit, Hear Us. v. 7.

How Shall We Keep the Pentecost Festival?

As Moses kept the flock of his father-in-law Jethro upon Mr. Horeb, the Lord appeared unto him in that bush which burned with fire and yet was not consumed. As he drew near to behold this strange thing, God called him by name and said: "Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." (Ex. 3, 5.) Such a Divine demand for reverence and awe now comes to us as we keep the Pentecost, and hear again the sound from Heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, which filled the hall in Solomon's Temple where

the disciples were assembled. We see the tongues of fire, cloven or branching out from one source to the head of each disciple. We hear them speak with tongues the mighty works of God. Once again the burning bush is before us, which we may not pry into with idle curiosity neither pass with indifference. We stand upon holy ground to hear what *the Lord will reveal and whereunto He will call us.*

Like those disciples and strangers we hear the preacher of the first Pentecost testify how "God hath made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified." (Acts 2, 36.) We ask with them: "What shall we do? And the answer for us also is: "Repent ye and and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him."

It is the same message, which Joel brings us from the Old Testament. Our text is a prophecy of the Pentecost. We know this, because Peter quotes this passage in his great sermon. Joel bids us keep the Day with

Thanksgiving for God's Grace.

He fortells the Spirit poured out on all flesh, as it came to pass on this Day. It was not simply the Apostles, but the whole Church at Jerusalem, who were filled with the Holy Ghost. And believers at other places received the Spirit also after prayer and the laying on of hands by the Apostles. Even upon Cor-

nelius, the heathen centurion, this gift is bestowed, as he listens devoutly to Peter's Gospel message.

When Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp of Israel, and Moses was urged by Joshua to forbid them; he sighed: "Would that all Jehovah's people were prophets, that Jehovah would put His Spirit upon them." (Num. 11, 29.) What he longed for is now come to pass. The Pentecost gift is here for old and young, son and daughter, bond and free. Paul testifies of the congregation at Corinth: "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal." One has wisdom, others knowledge, faith, miracles, prophecy, or different kinds of tongues. That same Spirit is still busy among us, fitting us out with different gifts and graces we may use in the service of God and our fellow-men.

Let no one be deceived because the Spirit comes no longer with those wonderful signs of the first Pentecost. This is just the order that we find in Nature. On the morning of Creation God said: "Let there be light," and at once the light flashed forth out of darkness. At His word the grass and plants and fruitful trees sprang out of the earth; the sun, moon, and stars began to shine, and the earth, air, and water teemed with living creatures. But the wonders of Creation are repeated in a very different way today. Now seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, day and night follow one another so gradually and quietly, that we hardly notice the change. Yet the same Almighty Hand which created, still upholds and orders these things of Nature. So the first Pentecost was the day of the New Creation. Therefore the rushing wind, the fiery tongues, and the wonderful gifts of speech. Yet the same Holy Spirit,

now as then, is poured out on the Church of Christ, and blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed. When a babe is baptized in the Name of the Triune God and becomes a child of His, when the Word is preached, or the Holy Communion administered, when we sing "O Holy Spirit, enter in," it is the same Holy Spirit who is present with power and portions out His gifts to each as He wills.

We must beware of that pride which expects for ourselves something out of God's ordinary way. We would all like the Kingdom of God to come with observation; would all like to look out into the future and see dreams and visions; but those are dangerous things, sharp-edged tools with which we would better not play. It ought to be enough for us to hold fast those sound words of the Catechism: "The Holy Ghost has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me by His gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith." Each preaching and teaching of the Word, with the forgiveness of sins it declares and the peace and joy it brings, is a prophecy in the true Scriptural sense of that word, and prophecy enough for us, better far than visions and dreams. Luther rightly says: "What are such gifts, compared with this, that the very Spirit of God comes to dwell in our heart, and guide and govern us?" Joel's prophecy with its dreams and visions may be summed up in one promise, the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ our Saviour. This is the gracious gift the Spirit brings us through Word and Sacrament. After this goodly fashion He is still poured out upon all flesh, into every heart which seeks Him; and He calls us to Christ, enlightens us to know our sinful selves and our loving Saviour, and sanctifies and preserves us in this

true faith. This grace of God moves us to thanksgiving today, but also lest we despise it to

Reverence and Awe Before His Gifts.

That is the meaning of these portents: the sun turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and terrible Day of the Lord. They tell us of the judgments of a jealous God upon those who despise His Spirit and gifts. Israel must have recalled this picture after they had nailed their Saviour to the Cross, when the sun was darkened in midday, and there was darkness over the whole earth, the earth quaked and the rocks were rent and the graves opened, and from them came forth many prophets by whom the Spirit of God had spoken into the deaf ears of this people. And few years go by for us, without some reminder that God is abundantly able to repeat among us such signs of His righteous wrath and judgment to come upon all who despise His Word and Spirit.

These warnings were repeated for Israel, when their chief city was destroyed and the blood of their children, fire, and smoke filled the streets of Jerusalem. Again and again in the history of the nations, bloody fields of battle and cities smoking in their ashes have been God's rebuke for those who despised His Gospel and Spirit of peace. It is not hard for us to believe that worse days than these may yet come upon an unbelieving world, days as red as blood and as hot as fire, stifling with smoke. Be not deceived; he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption. Our text contains another of those warnings that the world will one day fall. That so solemn a message is joined to this ancient prophecy of God's good Spirit, shows

plainly how God would drive us to a wholesome reverence for this Heavenly Guest, who alone can deliver us from His just judgments. Men's gifts and offers of help we may despise and reject if we will, but no one can treat God in that shameless fashion and go unpunished. He will not hold him guiltless. So does He admonish us to

*An Earnestness That Uses His Gifts
for Our Salvation.*

Now the Prophet lets fall the finger lifted in warning, and speaks to us and all men in gentler tones: "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the Name of Jehovah shall be delivered." Great and awful as the judgments of the Lord will be, there is one sure way of escape for the Church today, and those God will yet call into it, and that is to "call upon the Name of the Lord." Joel declares this, and Peter repeats it in his Pentecost sermon. We too must confess our faith in this promise.

Of course, this calling upon the Lord is not the mere use of His Name by our lips, but must be the cry of the whole heart in true faith. The prophets and apostles mean by this calling upon the Lord, that with all humility and trust we should seek help and eternal salvation from the Lord, and not in anything we can do. Where then may we learn this? Our own wisdom and strength would only hinder us. No man can call Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost. And again we read (Rom. 10,14): "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" That is

the very thing Joel is talking about, when he says: "In Mt. Zion and Jerusalem there shall be those that escape." He does not mean the mountain and city over there in the East, for it is plain that one might live there all his life and yet be a lost soul. He means the Church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, founded upon His Word and Sacrament. Here is that hearing by which faith cometh. Here the Holy Spirit dwells in the means of grace, here the Name of the Lord our Righteousness is declared, and the Spirit of God teaches all to call upon Him aright. This is the true Mt. Zion and Jerusalem. Here is the Lamb which was slain for us, whose blood cleanseth us from all sin. That blood we still sprinkle now again upon the door-posts of our hearts, as Israel did in their better days of faith.

So let us keep Whitsuntide, earnestly using the gifts of God for our salvation. Let us be faithful in hearing the Word and having the Sacrament, even in the warm Sundays of the summer, when many fall away and gather no more with us. We will entreat the Holy Spirit to teach us more and more of the Name of the Lord, which means His true self and the faithful description of all that He is and is for us. Day by day He will endow us more richly with His gifts. Neither will we forget "all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him." (Acts 2, 39.) We will give diligence that the Gospel may be preached unto them, and that they too may believe and call upon the Name of the Lord, and be saved. Amen.

THE END.