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Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

Good Shepherd L.C., Tony, WI; Alpha & Omega Lutheran Mission, Winter, WI; Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace L.C., Ironwood, MI

Rev. Ernest Bernet

Discipleship L. C., Mineral Wells, TX

Rev. David Carver

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Sts. Peter & Paul L. C., Simpsonville, SC; All Saints Lutheran Mission, Myrtle Beach, SC; St. Michael & All Angels Lutheran Mission, Martinez, GA

Rev. Douglas Handrich

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL; Port Charlotte Lutheran Mission, Port Charlotte, FL; Memphis Lutheran Mission, Lakeland, TN

Rev. Daniel Mensing

Faith Lutheran Church, Beaverton, OR

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Rev. Paul Rydecki

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Las Cruces, NM; Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Mission, Silver City, NM

Rev. Josiah Scheck

Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

Rev. Eric Stefanski

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR; Emmanuel Lutheran Mission, Conway, AR

Rev. Joshua Sullivan

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Kerrville, TX; Faith Lutheran Mission, Leander, TX

Rev. Timothy Tolar

St. Luke Lutheran Church, Kenai, AK; Homer Lutheran Mission, Homer, AK

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

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Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

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Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Church, Simpsonville, SC; Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Mission, Knoxville, TN

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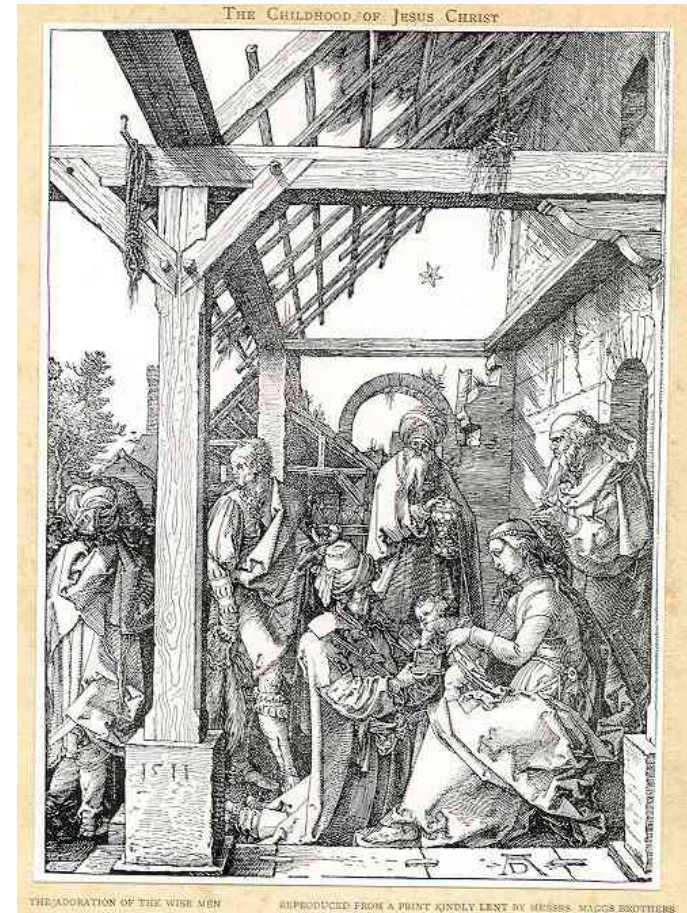
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THE LUTHERAN HERALD



JANUARY 4–30, 2021

A PUBLICATION OF

**THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
NORTH AMERICA**

The Calendar

January 1 (F)	<i>Festival of the Circumcision</i>	TLH 116
January 3	Sunday after New Year	TLH 131
January 6 (W)	<i>The Epiphany of our Lord</i>	TLH 92
January 10	Epiphany 1 Happy the Man Who Feareth God	
January 17	Epiphany 2	TLH 625
January 19 (T)	<i>St. Henry of Finland, Bishop and Martyr</i>	
January 24	Transfiguration/ <i>St. Timothy, Bishop and Confessor</i>	ELH 253
January 25 (M)	<i>The Conversion of St. Paul</i>	ELH 356
January 26 (T)	<i>St. Titus, Bishop and Confessor</i>	ELH 95/TLH 489
January 31	Septuagesima	TLH 377
February 2 (T)	<i>The Presentation of our Lord ...</i>	TLH 137

(All pastors and deacons of the diocese have received the Diocesan Calendar and Office Hymns for 2021 by the Festival of the Circumcision. If you would like a complete list, see your pastor, or contact the diocesan office via email at info@eldona.org)

As space permits, we will include non-TLH (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book-ELHB [1912]* and *The Lutheran Hymnary-ELH [1913]*) at the appropriate place in the devotions. These resources are in the public domain. Hopefully, with time, more of them will be set in modern type for formal republication.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 30: ROMANS 11:13-22 TRANSFIGURATION

We continue to hear God's glorious wisdom from St. Paul. The descendants of Israel were meant to be the firstfruits of God's gracious promise of life and salvation. Jesus Christ was sent to them to bring them holy glory, but they fell to pride and unbelief. With the same humility that was taught in yesterday's lesson, all the saints of the Church are to carefully consider the warning that is in those who fell. God's glory and salvation do not come from who we are or what we do. They come from our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom the Father is well pleased in all things and who gave Himself as the great sacrifice for our redemption!

God's Word teaches us to walk in fear, love, and trust toward Him. All of those attitudes point toward Christ as our gracious helper by the power of His Spirit, and toward manifesting His merciful works to others. That means we are to have compassion on those people who are fallen, hoping that they may yet repent and believe. We should also be thankful for those people who have gone before us and worked as servants of the Lord, by which He blesses us in our time as well!

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious transfiguration of Thy only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29: ROMANS 15: 14-21 TRANSFIGURATION

In spite of St. Paul's manifest intellectual powers and works of loving service for the Gospel, he remained a humble man. Our text emphasizes that the faithful apostles of God did not see the Church's work as a competition or means for personal glory.

Whether in the first garden, or in the synagogues, or in the present Church, Satan still slithers in the midst of God's people. The Serpent tempts us to see ourselves as lords or heroes who accomplish great things, think great thoughts, and deserve great wealth over those who do less or are worse off in their sins. But the real glory of the Church does not encourage vanity. The real glory in the Church is Christ's work of love and forgiveness toward all who will hear and believe in Him.

In Mark's Gospel our Lord teaches the disciples not to pose as lords as unbelievers do, but to be humble servants, as He exemplified in His incarnation (10:42-45). There is to be good order and proper respect of vocations in the midst of the saints, but it all works together according to His will. His commandments and His examples to the apostles compose a big picture, similar to how the members of the Church are built up into one Body. And the glory of that picture and Body is our Savior, Jesus Christ!

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious transfiguration of Thy only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Seminary Schedule

The Winter quarter resumes on Tuesday, January 5. During the Winter quarter, four classes are being offered: Greek, Hermeneutics, Lutheran Confessions 1, and Liturgics Practicum 1. Classes are taught Tuesday through Friday morning, with Matins each morning. The Winter quarter concludes on February 19.

Installation of Pastor Mensing at Faith L.C.–Beaverton

The installation of Rev. Daniel Mensing as Pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Beaverton, Oregon took place during the Divine Service on December 13. Bishop Heiser officiated at the rite and preached for the service, with Pastor Eric Stefanski and Dcn. Anthony Oncken assisting. We rejoice that the Lord of the Church has granted a faithful steward of the mysteries of God to serve as shepherd to the flock in Oregon!



Lesson from the Book of Concord Sunday after New Year

Of the Comprehensive Summary, Foundation, Rule and Standard whereby, according to God's Word, all Dogmas should be Judged, and the Controversies that have occurred should, in a Christian manner, be explained and decided.

Because, for thorough permanent unity in the Church, it is before all things necessary that we have a comprehensive, unanimously approved summary and form, wherein are brought together from God's Word the common doctrines, reduced to a brief compass, which the churches that are of the true Christian religion acknowledge as confessional (just as the ancient Church always had for this use its fixed symbols); and this authority should not be attached to private writings, but to such books as have been composed, approved and received in the name of the churches which confessionally bind themselves to one doctrine and religion; we have declared to one another, with heart and mouth, that we will neither make nor receive any separate or new confession of our faith, but acknowledge as confessional the public common writings which always and everywhere were received in all the churches of the Augsburg Confession, as such symbols or public confessions, before the dissensions arose among those who accept the Augsburg Confession, and as long as, in all articles, there was, on all sides, a unanimous adherence to, and maintenance and use of, the pure doctrine of God's Word, as the late Dr. Luther explained it.

1. First, we receive and embrace the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountains of Israel, which are the only true standard whereby to judge all teachers and doctrines.

2. And because, of old, the true Christian doctrine, in a pure, sound sense, was collected from God's Word into brief articles or sections against the corruption of heretics, we accept as confessional the three ecumenical creeds, namely, the Apostles', the Nicene and the Athanasian, as glorious confessions of the faith, brief, devout and founded upon God's Word, wherein all the heresies which at that time had arisen in the Christian Church are clear and unanswerably refuted.

3. Thirdly, Because, in these last times, God, out of especial grace, from the darkness of the Papacy has brought his truth again to light, through the faithful service of the precious man of God, Dr. Luther, and against the corruptions of the Papacy and also of other sects has collected the same doctrine, from and according to God's Word, into the articles and sections of the Augsburg Confession; we confessionally accept also the first unaltered Augsburg Confession (not because it was composed by our theologians, but because it has been derived from God's

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28: EPHESIANS 3:1-12 TRANSFIGURATION

The fulfillment of the Gospel was hidden until our Lord Jesus came to finish all that was necessary for our salvation. It was a mystery. But that does not mean God was playing malicious games of "hide-and-seek" or "guess-what-I'm-thinking". According to His infinite wisdom and holy will He promised that the Seed would crush the Serpent, and He would make it happen in the best time and the best way according to His created order.

The work of St. Paul, the rest of the prophets, saints, and apostles before him, and the whole faithful Church to this day is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of our sins. That is the mystery that is fulfilled in the right teaching of His Word and faithful administration of the Sacraments. A glorious thing happens every time the holy Church gathers together around these gifts. May He continue to grant us His Spirit so that we appreciate His grace as it is given to us according to His Kingdom, His Power, and His Glory in our midst!

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious transfiguration of Thy only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

God shows His glory according to His will, not ours. In His own country the people wanted Him to show some glory to support the claims He made according to the Scriptures. But His preaching should have been sufficient for them! He brought gracious Words to them and assured them that the Gospel of God's mercy was being fulfilled in their midst. But the people trusted their own knowledge more than hearing Him according to the Spirit of faith. And it is no surprise that they were driven to such faithless anger by His true Words that they were willing to drive Him out and kill Him. Luke's Gospel tells us about numerous instances of demonic influence among the people at that time.

When our Savior shows us miracles and wonders that reveal profound glimpses of His glory, those are special occasions that teach important lessons. But more often His glory is revealed in the steady, patient work of His Word and Sacraments. He spent more time preaching and teaching the masses than He did in moments of high glory like the Transfiguration. We are to remember that the highest wonders and the humble works are all part of the message of His Gospel. All of it points to the cross of Christ and the forgiveness that we have in the name of Jesus!

Prayer: O God, who in the glorious transfiguration of Thy only-begotten Son hast confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of the fathers, and who, in the voice that came from the bright cloud, didst in a wonderful manner foreshow the adoption of sons, mercifully vouchsafe to make us coheirs with the King of His glory and bring us to the enjoyment of the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Word, and is founded firmly and well therein, precisely in the form in which it was committed to the Emperor Charles V by some electors, princes and deputies of the Roman Empire as a common confession of the reformed churches at Augsburg) as the symbol of our time, whereby our Reformed churches are distinguished from the Papists and other repudiated and condemned sects and heresies, after the custom and usage of the early Church, whereby succeeding councils, Christians bishops and teachers appealed to the Nicene Creed and confessed it.

4. Fourthly, in order that the proper and true sense of the often-quoted Augsburg Confession might be more fully set forth and guarded against the Papists, and that under the name of the Augsburg Confession condemned errors might not steal into the Church of God after the Confession was delivered, a fuller Apology was composed, and published in the year 1531. We unanimously accept this also as confessional, because in it the said Augsburg Confession is not only sufficiently elucidated and guarded, but also confirmed by clear, irrefutable testimonies of Holy Scripture.

5. Fifthly, the Articles composed, approved and received at Smalcald in the large assembly of theologians in the year 1537 we confessionally accept, in the form in which they were first framed and printed in order to be delivered in the council of Mantua, or wherever it would be held, in the name of the electors, princes and deputies, as an explanation of the above-mentioned Augsburg Confession, wherein by God's grace they determined to abide. In them the doctrine of the Augsburg Confession is repeated, and some articles are stated at greater length from God's Word, and besides the cause and foundation why we have abandoned the papistical errors and idolatries, and can have no fellowship with them, and also why we have and can have no fellowship with them, and also why we have not determined or even thought of coming to any agreement with the Pope concerning them, are sufficiently indicated.

6. Lastly, because these highly important matters belong also to the common people and laity, who, for their salvation, must distinguish between pure and false doctrine, we accept as confessional also the Large and Small Catechisms of Dr. Luther, as they were written by him and incorporated in his works, because they have been unanimously approved and received by all churches adhering to the Augsburg Confession, and publicly used in churches, schools and families, and because also in them the Christian doctrine from God's Word is comprised in the most correct and simply way, and, in like manner, is sufficiently explained for simple laymen.

—Formula of Concord, Comprehensive Summary , §1-8

John the Baptizer was no stranger to controversy. From his clothes to his demeanor, he did things that brought reaction from the world around him. It is no wonder that Herod would later have John imprisoned and beheaded. John was the last Old Testament prophet preparing the way for the Messiah.

What made John's message controversial was that he preached that the Lord would bring judgement on those who refused to repent and believe in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. So, the world is offended by the idea that they do not measure up, that they cannot earn their way to God. Even more, the Pharisees and Sadducees were offended by him because they believed they had the proper traditions of Moses, and yet he called them a brood of vipers. Similarly, those outside of orthodox, truly confessional Lutheran fellowship (which is faithful to the historic, Scriptural, catholic faith) argue that they have proper tradition and are offended that Lutherans desire pure doctrine.

John was not controversial for the sake of controversy. What John demonstrates is that steadfast devotion to Christ and His Word will be, inevitably, controversial. Let us, by God's gracious giving of the Holy Spirit and the power of our Baptism, also be steadfast in the Word as John demonstrates.

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

“And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of God!’ And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ.”

Remember this verse if you hear false teachers talking about our Savior. Even demons can know and say Jesus is the Christ. In Matthew 7 our Lord preached that lawless men can cast out demons and do wonders in His name, but still He condemned those men and will cast them out as faithless and wicked.

Demons should not be underestimated. In spite of modern assumptions, they are real, but they are not just the monsters we see in fiction, either. They are very shrewd servants of diabolical lies. They teach people to do prideful works and believe corrupt half-truths. By contrast, holy servants like St. Titus (who we commemorate today) were sent by our Lord to proclaim Christ in true faith and do wonders for the benefit of the Church as it would grow through the centuries.

The difference can be subtle, but we are taught to test the spirits (1 John 4). Titus was sent to preach and oversee in the Church according to Christ's Words of humility and discipline, teaching repentance and trust in Jesus Christ alone for God's mercy and regeneration. This is very different from the lies and sickness that come from the demons, even if they do use our Lord's name.

Prayer: O almighty God, who hast built Thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Head Cornerstone, grant us to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Even though St. Paul was a late-comer to the apostolic office, our Lord's Words with His apostles in today's reading do apply to Paul as well. Paul certainly needed to have his faith increased, because in the vanity of his zeal and education for serving the Jewish religion his faith was severely lacking. He served the work of the devil, not the work of the Church of the Lord whom Paul claimed to serve. So according to God's grace and wisdom, He came to Paul directly and increased his faith in dramatic fashion.

Once St. Paul was converted to the true faith that clings to Christ Jesus he became an important and well-known servant for the Gospel of Christ crucified. But he also served in humility. He did not seek to glorify himself or boast of anything other than the glory of Jesus. Paul's epistles frequently show that he understood our Lord's teaching for us servants to regard ourselves as "unprofitable".

All who are faithful in Christ Jesus have been called and converted by the glorious power of God. We are brought to our work and our vocations by Him and made to serve together according to His will. Our sins give us nothing to boast about, but much about which we should be humble and repentant. Thanks be to God that we are made servants to work together with Paul and all the faithful before us in Christ's Church!

Prayer: O almighty God, who hast built Thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Head Cornerstone, grant us to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Today we see St. Luke's account of John the Baptizer. Not only does this show us the witness of the individual Gospel writers as they are inspired by the Holy Spirit, but it also shows us the consistency of the message of John.

As noted yesterday, John was steadfast in his proclamation of God's Word, calling sinners to repent and to prepare for the Son of God. This consistent, steadfast preaching was such an important part of our Lord's work that all of the Gospel writers included John the Baptizer and his ministry as the last Old Testament prophet in the story of the Messiah.

The Holy Spirit made the message clear and consistent when John was preaching, and also in the account of the Holy Scriptures. The fact that we have many accounts of who John was and what he preached highlights the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit as it is breathed out by God.

And so, just as it was in the Gospel of Matthew, the message of today's reading in Luke is consistent in the testimony of John the Baptizer. All of this leads us evermore back to Christ and His Word.

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

Jesus is King. He is the King of Kings over all nations. And, as such, He brings salvation to the Gentiles.

From the very beginning, Jesus is shown to be the Savior of all mankind, the Savior of the entire world. Wise men from the East, who were Gentiles, would come to see the new King. One of the lessons in the story of these foreigners is that in Jesus Christ the nations actually could have true unity!

The kingdoms of the world, the flesh, and the devil stand in opposition to the Christ and His sacrifice for sin. We see in our reading for the festival of our Lord's Epiphany that Herod sought to deceive the wise men, but being divinely warned they went home by another way and did not serve his evil purposes. As we enter into the Epiphany season, the earthly kingdoms would have us deceived into thinking Jesus is not the Savior. Or, they persist in the faithless delusion that we can have unity outside of the pure doctrine of Christ. Let us, by the gift of the Spirit, obey our King, the Christ, and find our only hope for salvation and spiritual unity in Him and what He has taught.

Prayer: O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know Thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

253 L. M.

German, 1543

O won - drous type, O vi - sion fair Of
glo - ry that the Church shall share, Which Christ up - on the
moun - tain shows, Where bright - er than the sun He glows!

- 2 From age to age the tale declare,
How with the three disciples there,
Where Moses and Elias meet,
The Lord holds converse high and
sweet.
- 3 The law and prophets there have place,
The chosen witnesses of grace;
The Father's voice from out the cloud
Proclaims His only Son aloud.
- 4 With shining face and bright array,
Christ deigns to manifest today

- What glory shall to faith be given
When we enjoy our God in heaven.
- 5 And Christian hearts are raised on high
By that great vision's mystery,
For which in thankful strains we raise
On this glad day the voice of praise.
- 6 O Father, with th' eternal Son
And Holy Spirit, ever One,
Vouchsafe to bring us by Thy grace
To see Thy glory face to face.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Transfiguration Sunday

Article III.

Also they teach, that the Word, that is, the Son of God, did take man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary, so that there are Two Natures, the divine and the human, inseparably conjoined in one Person, one Christ, true God and true man, who was born of the Virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, that He might reconcile the Father unto us, and be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but for all actual sins of men. He also descended into hell, and truly rose again the third day; afterward He ascended into Heaven, that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign, and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin. The same Christ shall openly come again to judge the quick and the dead, etc., according to the Apostles' Creed.

—The Augsburg Confession

THURSDAY, JANUARY 7: JOHN 1:9-13

EPIPHANYTIDE

Jesus brings salvation to the world. And yet the world does not receive Him. He came to His own and they rejected Him. How are we then to receive Jesus Christ? We are so bound by our sin that our instinct is to reject our Creator. He became incarnate for us, and we dismiss Him.

The Apostle John tells us that those who receive Christ and His gift of salvation are the ones “who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” In the Church we call this “Monergism”, the fact that God alone enacts our salvation.

If left to ourselves, we would not believe the saving message of Christ Jesus. We would not have faith. Faith is a gift of God, which the Holy Spirit works in us by Word and Sacrament. We are saved, not by our merits or righteousness, but by the divine working of God alone. As His people we continue to proclaim the hope and joy we have through His forgiveness, but the power and the glory are all His!

Prayer: O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know Thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

As Jesus came to give life eternal to all who believe, and the Holy Spirit gives faith by the Word, we sometimes ask the question, “How does this come about?” While we cannot discern the secret will of God, we are shown in today’s reading that the Lord works through means.

The spoken proclamation of John the Baptizer, when he calls Jesus “the Lamb of God,” causes John’s disciples to follow Jesus. Later, Andrew also uses the spoken word to bring his brother Simon to Christ. Jesus then speaks over Simon, giving him a new name.

The Lord continues to work through His means, the means of Word and Sacraments. The preached Word calls sinners to repentance and faith in Christ. The Sacraments grant these things by being connected and combined always with God’s Word.

Some would like to believe that the Lord cannot or should not work through means. However, He is Lord of all, and Creator of all. If the Lord chooses to work through means, and shows us this truth in His Word, then who are we to doubt Him?

Prayer: O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know Thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Epiphany season is about God revealing His truth and wisdom to man in Jesus Christ. There is no greater wisdom than the Gospel of Christ crucified! This Gospel is foolishness and pathetic vulgarity according to the narcissistic world, but the world is broken.

Sinners continue to look for wisdom, power, and glory in everything but the Gospel of our Savior. They think foolish men must be despised and manipulated, weak men must be pushed and dominated, and simple men must be exploited and controlled. But those who believe in the Gospel of Christ and observe His teachings understand that He is Lord over all, and the low things are made to serve His holy purpose as well as the higher things of the world. Sinners are not in control, no matter how much they rant and pretend that they are. The Lord loves His humble saints and hears their prayers for forgiveness, help, and thanks.

The faithful people of Christ’s Church are able to humbly rest in the knowledge that He is in control, and that His glory cannot be taken by the world and sinners. And so we can endure the attacks and tribulations of the vain world, because the real wisdom has been shown to us in the cross of our Savior’s humble death on the cross and divine victory of sin, death, the devil, and the broken world!

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy son, our Lord. Amen.

Of all the things Paul mentions, people too often forget the Holy Ghost. Justification by faith happens because the Holy Ghost creates faith in us. Peace is only achieved with God by the Holy Ghost humbling us before Him, making us to cease from our rebellion. Grace, hope, and glory come to us only because His Spirit makes us able to hear, believe, and walk according to such blessings. Even in tribulations, the ability to endure them faithfully and mature in the results of suffering only comes from the Holy Ghost keeping us steadfast in the faith that clings to Christ crucified.

A common mistake of false teachers is to ignore or suppress the work of God's Spirit in the things of the Church. They want to make God's blessings the result of our work and power. But the Scriptures teach us time and time again that all that is good, within us and without, is from God. He is the one who reveals the truth to us. He is the one who gives us the power to walk in that truth. And He is the only one who deserves the glory and thanks for making good and righteous things happen! In all these things the Spirit of God fulfills His role as Helper and brings our focus to the cross of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy son, our Lord. Amen.

We pick up where we left off yesterday. We continue to see the Word used as means to call people as Philip uses the Word to bring Nathaniel to Christ.

But something interesting happens when Nathaniel meets Christ. The Lord is able to tell Nathaniel of his activities under the fig tree--an event we can assume no one but Nathaniel knew of--demonstrating Jesus to be divine and knowing all things. Because of this, Nathaniel believes, yet it is only the beginning of what is to come. By the end of His ministry, Jesus will demonstrate His divine power by defeating sin and the devil on the cross, and rising victorious over death at His resurrection.

If we doubt like Nathaniel did, the Lord is still able to show through His Word the awesome power of His might. And we see the divine power of Jesus Christ whenever He brings a sinner to faith by His Word and Sacraments. This story of Nathaniel resembles the story of the woman at the well when she told the crowd that Jesus had known everything she had done. Jesus knows our sin and doubt, and yet saves us from that sin by His own means of Word and Sacrament.

Prayer: O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know Thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The First Sunday after the Epiphany

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

The parental estate God has especially honored above estates that are beneath Him, so that He not only commands us to love our parents, but to honor them. For with respect to brothers, sisters and neighbors in general He commands nothing higher than that we love them; so that He separates and distinguishes father and mother above all other persons upon earth, and places them next to Himself. For to honor is far higher than to love, inasmuch as it comprehends not only love, but also modesty, humility and deference as though to a majesty there hidden, and requires not only that they be addressed kindly and with reverence, but most of all that both in heart and with the body we so act as to show that we esteem them very highly, and that, next to God, we regard them the very highest. For one whom we honor from the heart we must truly regard as high and great.

We must, therefore, impress it upon the young that they should regard their parents in God's stead, and remember that however lowly, poor, frail and strange they may be, nevertheless they are father and mother given them by God. And they are not to be deprived of their honor because of their mode of life or their failings. Therefore we are not to regard their persons, how they may be, but the will of God who has thus appointed and ordained. In other respects we are, indeed, all alike in the eyes of God; but among us there must necessarily be such inequality and distinction with respect to order, and therefore God commands that you be careful to obey me as your father, and that I have the precedence. ...

God knows very well this perverseness of the world; therefore He admonishes and urges by commandments that every one consider what parents have done for him, and he will find that he owes to them body and life, as well as sustenance, support and rearing, since otherwise he would have perished a hundred times in his own filth. Therefore it is a true and good saying of old and wise men: *Deo, parentibus et magistris non potest satis gratiae rependi*, that is, to God, to parents and to teachers we can never render sufficient gratitude and compensation. He that regards and considers this will indeed without compulsion do all honor to his parents and cherish them as those through whom God has done him all good.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 21: MATTHEW 5:17-26 2ND S. A. EPIPHANY

The Law and the Prophets are not worthless. They are still the Word of God, and they remain valuable for teaching and wisdom in Christ's Church. False teachers use them in a destructive way when they lead people to believe there is salvation in trying to keep the Law; that is where the Law and the Prophets have no value. Salvation is only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His fulfillment of the Law for our sake! The Law and the Prophets cannot save us, but they can help us to learn and grow in the righteousness that is ours in Christ's Gospel.

Unfortunately there are still those who teach men to ignore the commandments of God. False teachers encourage various forms of "antinomianism", which rejects the purposes of God's Law for Christians. They reject discipline and the need for repentance. They teach that sins and false doctrine can be tolerated as long as the offender says he believes in the Gospel.

But our Lord preached the Law and the Gospel; He teaches us to sin no more, and to repent when we do sin. He teaches us to keep His commands and believe in Him for the forgiveness that we need often, which is why we are also taught to eat, drink, and remember the forgiveness that is given in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood! The Law and Prophets are not destroyed or made worthless; they are made clear according to their purpose in our Savior's fulfillment of all righteousness for our sake!

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy son, our Lord. Amen.

“No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

This is an important point that needs to be taught whenever someone says they are “spiritual” or they “believe in God,” but they don’t want to be part of the Christian Church. God has glorified Jesus Christ and said “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matthew 17:5) No one truly sees or worships God unless they see Him in the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified.

Satan would have us believe that there are different paths to holiness and having a “personal relationship with God.” But any other vision, or version, of God ends up being twisted and incomplete. Apart from Christ, ideas about the divine just end in frightening power and judgment against our sinful, frail humanity. The Jews reject Jesus as Lord and look to a false god that has left them waiting for a king that isn’t coming. Islam rejects Jesus as Lord and looks to a false god who encourages violence and deception. False teachers reject Jesus as Lord and encourage people to look to their own works and sentiments, which change and fail quickly and constantly. But when we look at the cross of Christ Jesus we are shown the true God, who became one of us and laid down His life to pay for our sins. He alone is the God that is worthy of our love and trust!

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy son, our Lord. Amen.

Besides all this, it should be a great inducement to influence us the more to obedience to this commandment, that God adds to the same a temporal promise and says: “*That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*” ...

In connection with this commandment it is proper to speak further of all kinds of obedience to persons in authority who have to command and to govern. For all authority flows and is propagated from the authority of parents. For where a father is unable alone to educate his child, he employs a schoolmaster that he may instruct it; if he be too weak, he obtains the assistance of his friends and neighbors; if he depart, he confers and delegates his authority and government to others who are appointed for the purpose. Likewise he must have domestics, man-servants and maid-servants, under him for the management of the household, so that all whom we call masters are in the place of parents and must derive their power and authority to govern from them. Hence also they are all called fathers in the Scripture, as those who in their government perform the functions of the office of a father, and should have a paternal heart toward their subordinates. As also from antiquity the Romans and other nations called the masters and mistresses of the household *patres et matres familiae*, that is housefathers and housemothers. So also they called their national rulers and chiefs *patres patriae*, that is fathers of the country, for a great sham to us, who would be Christians that we do not call them so, or, at least, do not esteem and honor them as such. ...

Thus we have two kinds of fathers presented in this commandment, fathers in blood and fathers in office, or those to whom belongs the care of the family, and those to whom belongs the care of the nation. Besides these there are spiritual fathers; not like those in the Papacy, who have indeed caused themselves to be so designated, but have not performed the functions of the paternal office. For those are to be called spiritual fathers who govern and guide us by the Word of God. Of this name St. Paul boasts (1 Cor. 4:15), where he says: “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel.” Because they are fathers indeed they are entitled to honor above all others.

—Large Catechism, the Book of Concord, §105–8, 129–131, 141–142,

Happy the Man Who Feareth God

Psalm 128

Wohl dem, der in Gottesfurcht steht

Martin Luther, 1524

Tr. R. Massie, 1800-1887

WO GOTT ZUM HAUS



1 Hap - py the man who fear - eth God, Whose feet His
2 Thy wife shall, like a fruit - ful vine, Fill all thy
3 Lo! to the man these bless - ings cleave Who in God's



ho - ly ways have trod; Thine own good hand shall nour - ish
house with clus - ters fine; Thy chil - dren all be fresh and
ho - ly fear doth live; From him the an - cient curse hath



thee, And well and hap - py shalt thou be.
sound, Like ol - ive plants thy ta - ble round.
fled By A - dam's race in - her - it - ed.



4 Out of Mount Zion God shall send,
And crown with joy thy latter end;
That thou Jerusalem mayst see,
In favor and prosperity.

5 He shall be with thee in thy ways,
And give thee health and length of days;
Yea, thou shalt children's children see,
And peace on Israel shall be.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 19: LUKE 19:1-10 FESTIVAL OF ST. HENRY

Today we commemorate St. Henry of Finland. Henry served as a bishop in Sweden and continued his service to the Lord's Church in Finland. According to his legend, Henry was trying to teach and correct a murderer who had allegedly converted, but despised the efforts of the Lord's servant and killed Henry.

Faithful martyrs do not set out to be killed for the faith. They set out to do the work that our God has prepared for them to do, and if the devil and his servants choose to resist with violence, saints are made to follow Christ even unto death. Our Lord sought to save many sons of Abraham, including not just tax collectors, but also Pharisees, scribes, and other wealthy and powerful men. Our Lord knew that His work would lead to His death, but that was His purpose even from the promise of God that He would crush the Serpent's head and save man.

All of us who are converted to the faith and made sons and daughters of the Church are made aware that we must take up our crosses and follow our Lord, even to a martyr's death. But that does not change the fact that our sins are forgiven by His cross, and we have eternal life in Him even if we lose our life in this world!

Prayer: O almighty God, who hast knit together Thine elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of Thy Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, grant us grace so to follow Thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that we may come to those unspeakable joys which Thou hast prepared for those who unfeignedly love Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, JANUARY 18: JOHN 4:5-26 2ND SUNDAY A. EPIPHANY

The Samaritan woman is given the honor of being part of the Gospel account of Jesus Christ. This is a conversation that teaches Christians how to act. She was a sinner, but she was humble; she asked questions, and she did not try to play foolish word games like the Pharisees did when they conversed with the Lord.

Jesus came to her according to His grace, and He showed her truth according to His Spirit. In this short exchange He illustrated what St. Paul would later articulate to the Church: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:28-29)

The Church would also be characterized by the living water that He mentioned to her. His Church would not be bound to the temple of Jerusalem, but it would spread throughout the nations of the world, and be shown all things needful for salvation and eternal life in the Christ! This woman perceived that Jesus was like the prophets and confessed other truths, but the blessings and the glory in which she participated were all the gracious work of the Lord giving her such righteous words and wisdom.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth, mercifully hear the supplications of Thy people and grant us Thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, Thy son, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, JANUARY 11: LUKE 2:39-40 1ST SUNDAY A. EPIPHANY

The events that precede that of today’s reading are our Lord’s birth, His circumcision on the eighth day, and then Jesus being brought to the Temple on the fortieth day to be presented to the Lord. What follows today’s reading is Jesus appearing once again in the Temple. However, this time He is twelve years old, and we are told that “all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers” (Luke 2:47).

Jesus’ birth, eight days later..., 40 days later..., 12 years later...; in just one chapter of Luke we are taken from our Lord’s birth to age 12. And then, nothing. We hear nothing more about Jesus’ life until about half way through Luke 3, where we are told Jesus is 30 years old.

What are we to make of this? Rather than raising questions about those intervening years, we do better when we remember that Scripture tells all that we need to know about Him. As Jesus told Martha, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42). What we need is Jesus and His forgiveness.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Today's reading from Mark tells us of a rather odd occurrence. What makes it odd is that on the one hand, the Pharisees recognize Jesus' divine ability to heal. Yet, on the other hand, they regard Jesus as a Godless sinner. Why? Because Jesus did not follow their rules regarding the Sabbath. They did not understand what the Sabbath is truly about, as He told them earlier in Mark's Gospel, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). The fulfillment of the Sabbath did not focus upon what men did or did not do. The Sabbath was, and is, about God doing for us as we listen to His Word.

So Jesus presents a simple question that should not have required any thought by the Pharisees: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" "But they kept silent." Their silence spoke loudly. The Pharisees really didn't care about the man with the withered hand, which is what Jesus is showing them by asking the question. Their lack of desire to want to do good is the functional equivalent to committing evil. It is the sin of omission. Faithfully doing good for one's neighbor has no restrictions. Had the Pharisees truly understood the Sabbath as God doing good for us, they would have jumped at the opportunity to help their neighbor.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

XI. Of the Marriage of Priests.

In prohibiting marriage, and burdening the divine order of priests with perpetual celibacy, they have neither reason nor right, but have treated it as antichristian, tyrannical, sceptical scoundrels, and have afforded occasion for all kinds of horrible, abominable sins of impurity, in which they still wallow. But just as the power has been given neither to us nor to them to make a woman out of a man, or man out of a woman, or to annihilate both, so also it has not been given them; so also power has not been given them to sunder and separate such creatures of God, or to forbid them from living honorably in marriage with one another. Therefore we are unwilling to assent to their abominable celibacy, nor will we even tolerate it, but we wish to have marriage free as God has instituted and appointed it, and we wish neither to rescind nor hinder His work; for Paul says that this prohibition of marriage is a doctrine of devils (1 Tim. 4:1sqq.)

XIV. Of Monastic Vows

As monastic vows directly conflict with the first chief article, they ought to be absolutely abolished. For it is of them that Christ says (Matt. 24:5, 23 sqq.): "I am Christ," etc. For he who makes a vow to live in a monastery believes that he will enter upon a mode of life holier than the ordinary Christians, and by his own works wishes to earn heaven not only for himself, but also for others; this is to deny Christ. And they boast from their St. Thomas that a monastic vow is on an equality with baptism. This is blasphemy against God.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Art. XI, XIV

How many times have we read in Scripture about the scribes and Pharisees failing to recognize Jesus as true God? In yesterday's reading we heard of just how incensed they were with Jesus; so much so, that they were ready to stone Him to death. Yet in today's reading we hear "an unclean spirit" call out to Jesus, "I know who You are--the Holy One of God!"

It can be puzzling to us as Christians why some people refuse to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. After all, even the unclean spirit recognized Jesus. Yet, his recognition was not a confession of faith, but simply the realization he was, as they say, "toast". For the unbeliever, this realization will come to fruition on the Last Day.

But what of you? There are those times when the Law comes to bear and you may think, "I am toast!" But the work of the Holy Spirit does not stop with God's Law. The chastisement of the Law only serves to bring you low so God can raise you up through the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. God will not leave you without hope, for you are in Christ and are His beloved child.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

"What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" That is the question that has been on the hearts of countless people throughout the centuries. Written on the hearts of men is God's Law. Deep down people know they owe God.

"What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Basically, Jesus' answer is this: "You can't do God's work." Jesus then goes on to point out that God's ultimate work is to bring people to faith in Him. The interesting thing in today's reading is that Jesus tells them this truth, and the people want to see a sign right away. Why? So that they can do the work and believe.

Such is the stubbornness of sinful minds. It is not so much that some unbelievers do not want to believe. Rather, they are willing to believe in Jesus, but only on their own terms and conditions, thereby substituting their work for God's work. Thankfully, God has not ceased doing His work of creating and sustaining faith. This is evident in your being baptized by Him and as He continually brings His Word of Law and Gospel to you. The Holy Spirit is at work in you daily to call you to repentance and faith in the work of Jesus: His suffering, death, and resurrection.

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 14: MATTHEW 16:24-27 1ST S. A. EPIPHANY

As Christians we are often “less than thrilled” about this notion of taking up our crosses and following Jesus. After all, who wants to deal with all the heartaches and problems life throws at us. The sad fact is that because of sin, heartaches and problems are unavoidable. But there is much more to this command from Christ, that a person “take up his cross,” than the day to day problems that will inevitably come our way, since daily problems affect unbelievers as well as believers.

The cross you bear as a Christian strikes at your very soul. It is the anguish you bear as the result of being a Christian, and it can take many forms. You may be ostracized from family members. You may be singled out by co-workers and shunned. You may not be promoted. Or, as Christ points out, you could even lose your life. There are many adverse things that can befall a Christian for simply being a Christian.

When contemplating your “crosses” you can quickly lose sight of who you are. You are “in Christ,” baptized into Him, and thus part of Him. The crosses you bear are really part and parcel of His cross. More importantly, He not only bears His cross, He is also the one carrying you, and your crosses, all the way to eternal life!

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15: JOHN 10:31-38 1ST SUNDAY A. EPIPHANY

If there is anything of importance in today’s reading it is that Jesus really can annoy sinners. So much so that they are ready to stone Him “again”. But ought we really be surprised? Stop and think of the times in your life when God’s Law came bearing down on you. At that moment a person can be really annoyed, really mad at God, because reality has struck a nerve: “I am a sinner.”

Time and time again, the Jews kept looking for something wrong with Jesus. Time and time again, they came up with nothing. But in today’s reading they think maybe they found it: blasphemy. Jesus, a real man, dares to call Himself God. Can’t have that, now can we?

But once again, Jesus quotes Scripture and turns the tables on the Jews by quoting how God referred to men as “gods”. Jesus basically says, “Look at Me and My works.” Jesus lays before the Jews His good works, works which only God can do.

One of the prayers of thanksgiving at the conclusion of the service of the Lord’s Supper begins, “God the Father, Fount and Source of all goodness...” (TLH, p.31). All goodness is tied inextricably to God, as Jesus told the rich young ruler, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Matthew 19:17).

Prayer: O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.