

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 5: EXODUS 14:19–31 4TH S. A. EPIPHANY

This week's theme has been the Lord's deliverance. He delivers us from temporal danger, the wicked, fear of our enemies, our sinful flesh, and the devil. Today the Lord delivers Israel from Egypt at the Red Sea. Before the Lord divided the waters of the sea, He went behind the children of Israel so that the pillar of cloud stood between the Egyptians and the Israelites. God's deliverance was "a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night." The pillar of cloud was Gospel to the Israelites, enlightening their path through the sea. It was Law to the Egyptians, darkening their sight. The next morning the Lord closed the path through the sea and drowned the Egyptians. When the people of Israel saw God's great deliverance they "feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses."

The Lord promises to deliver us from all spiritual dangers. He promises to deliver us from earthly dangers if it is for our eternal good and His glory. As often as we see God's deliverance—especially deliverance from temptation, sin, and the devil—we should stand in awe of the Lord and more confidently believe His power and promise to save. Each day we can stand in awe of the great work He accomplishes for us, and in us, through Christ and His Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Almighty God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright, grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

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JANUARY 2—FEBRUARY 5, 2022

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The Calendar

The Lutheran Hymnal (1941): TLH; *The Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (1912): ELHB;
The Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary (1913): ELH

(Monday: M; Tuesday: T; Wednesday: W; Thursday: R; Friday: F; Saturday: S)

January 1 (S)	<i>Festival of the Circumcision</i>	TLH 116
January 2	Second Sunday after Christmas	TLH 122
January 6 (R)	<i>The Epiphany of our Lord</i>	TLH 92
January 9	Epiphany 1	<i>Happy the Man Who Feareth God</i>
January 16	Epiphany 2	TLH 625
January 19 (W)	<i>St. Henry of Finland, Bishop and Martyr</i>	
January 23	Epiphany 3	TLH 429
January 24 (M)	<i>St. Timothy, Bishop and Confessor</i>	
January 25 (T)	<i>The Conversion of St. Paul</i>	ELH 356
January 26 (W)	<i>St. Titus, Bishop and Confessor</i>	TLH 489
January 30	Epiphany 4	ELH 275
February 2 (W)	<i>The Presentation of our Lord and the Purification of St. Mary</i>	TLH 137

“THE RISE OF THE COMMON SERVICE”—At the request of several pastors of the diocese, Bishop Heiser has prepared a five-part DVD presentation, “The Rise of the Common Service,” which sets forth the early history of the English Divine Service.

Most histories of the English liturgy have presented this topic in a cursory fashion, usually from the perspective of particular Lutheran synods, and were very limited in scope and usually as a defense of a given synod’s current hymnal, rather than providing an overall history. The bishop’s presentation covers the course of liturgical development on a broader scale, leading to the widespread adoption of the English Divine Service.

These first five presentations cover the history of the Lutheran Church in America from 1748 to 1888. (A second set of presentations will cover the period up through 1979; the third set will cover from 1979 to the present.) The bishop’s five-part study is being distributed to all pastors of the diocese on DVD so that they may be shown to the congregations.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4: DANIEL 6:20–28

4TH S. A. EPIPHANY

When the king calls to him to see if he is still alive, Daniel responds to his call and confesses that his God sent His angel to shut the lion’s mouths. The Lord delivered Daniel because he was innocent in God’s sight. This doesn’t mean that Daniel was not a sinful man. It means that Daniel was righteous in God’s sight by faith, by repenting of his flesh’s sinful impulses and believing in God’s mercy. Nor was Daniel guilty of any offense against the king. For these reasons the Lord delivered him.

This is a picture of how God delivers us from the mouth of our adversary, the Devil, who walks about like a roaring lion. Though he is in our midst, we do not fear his accusations against us for our sins. Like Daniel, we are innocent in God’s sight, not in ourselves, but by faith that God forgives us for Jesus’ sake and clothes us with His righteousness.

The devil can do no injury to those who confidently believe in the true God. St. Paul writes, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1). Forgiven and declared righteous by God, we then walk according to the Spirit. We put aside the flesh’s impulses and ignore the devil’s temptations, knowing he cannot harm us because we are in Christ.

Prayer: Almighty God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright, grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Paul sees that nothing good dwells in him. The inner man, the new man of faith created by the Holy Spirit, delights in God’s Law. But he sees the law of sin at work in his heart and mind. His sinful flesh daily tempts him with wicked lusts, wicked impulses, and sinful desires. He sees how his sinful flesh impedes the good works he truly wishes to do. He doesn’t minimize it and say, “These are only internal thoughts and desires.” He doesn’t rationalize them and say, “Everybody’s a sinner, so these aren’t a big deal.” Nor does he justify himself and say, “At least I’m not acting on these wicked lusts.” He says, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

Paul teaches us how to repent of the sinful flesh’s impulses, desires, and lusts. We should lament that our flesh is so fallen and contrary to God’s Law. The faithful man flees to Jesus. “I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!” He has sin in his flesh, but trusting Christ’s mercy and the Holy Spirit’s power in him he fights against it and strives to serve God all the more. If we do consent to the flesh’s lusts, we acknowledge our wretchedness and flee to Christ for forgiveness and newness of life, so that we may delight in His Law once again.

Prayer: Almighty God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright, grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

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

The musical score is written in G major (one flat) and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems of music, each with a vocal line (treble clef) and a bass line (bass clef). The lyrics are printed below the vocal line of each system.

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.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Sunday after New Year

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 2: MAT. 14:22–33 PRESENTATION AND PURIFICATION

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

Jesus delivers us from fear. He doesn't always take the cause of our fear away, but He always gives a better word for us to believe than what our fears tell us. The disciples see Jesus walking towards them on the water and fear tells them it's a ghost. But Jesus has a better word. "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." He tells them to take courage because it isn't a ghost, it's their teacher and Savior.

Jesus allows Peter to test Him in this instance so He can teach the disciples that He exercises power over creation for Himself and others. Peter walks to Jesus on the water. But fear comes back, this time because there's not a ship's hull between him and the sea. His fear causes him to sink, but not before his faith cries out to Jesus and Jesus delivers him.

There are many things that cause us to fear: our sins, our flesh's impulses, the devil's accusations, and the world's perversities are a few. The changes and chances of life can also tempt us to fear the world rather than God. But Jesus gives us a better word. He has overcome all these things. He bids us to be of good cheer, for He has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind focused on His promises and power.

Prayer: Almighty God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright, grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Judgement for false prophets isn't idle, even though it may seem like it at times. The entire world, except eight souls, was destroyed in the flood. Before the flood the Lord saw that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Years later, the Lord turned Sodom and Gomorrah to ash as an example to all who would defile themselves with homosexual acts. Although the ancient world and these two cities were secure in their sins for some time, the Lord's judgment came at the precise moment He intended.

But with the judgment of the wicked came the deliverance of the righteous. The flood destroyed all life, but delivered Noah and his family. Fire from the Lord devoured Sodom and Gomorrah, delivering Lot and his family so that he would no longer be tormented by the sights and sounds of unlawful deeds. These examples show us that "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment."

God will not let evil men go unpunished, even if that punishment isn't until the next life. Neither will God fail to deliver His saints from trials and temptations. He delivers us now through faith in His promises. On the last day He will deliver us from all evil by condemning and punishing evil forever.

Prayer: Almighty God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright, grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through 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

In Advent, we heard John the Baptist prepare the way for the Lord, saying: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” When Jesus begins His public ministry He says the same words: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” These are important words. In fact, it is the number one topic of Jesus’ preaching. The phrase “kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God)” shows up in the New Testament 103 times. “Repent” and “repentance” show up over 100 times in the Bible. John warns the Pharisees and Sadducees who are coming for Baptism to flee the wrath to come and bear fruits worthy of repentance. God’s “wrath” shows up in Scripture over 300 times! John clearly points out that judgment is coming.

He also proclaims the Messiah is coming, and His coming is going to bring judgment. This judgment is a dividing between two groups: wheat and chaff. The faithful “wheat” will be gathered and kept, but the impenitent “chaff” will be burned with fire. That is the warning that John gives the impenitent. But for us, the faithful, we also hear a promise: The Messiah will baptize with the Holy Spirit. This means that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, is so anointed with the Holy Spirit that the Spirit will overflow from Him, and He will share that Anointing with us.

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.

When the natives see that a viper has attached itself to Paul’s hand they assume he is a murder and that justice has finally caught up with him. Paul shakes the viper off into the fire and nothing happens to him. The natives change their mind about Paul, thinking him a god. He wasn’t a god. But the Son of God had said that His apostles “will take up serpents” (Mark 16:18) to demonstrate that the Gospel they preached was divine.

This signifies the content of Paul’s message. He preached Christ crucified as the fulfillment of the first Gospel promise to Adam and Eve, “He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). The viper in the brush that attacked Paul was a regular viper. But it serves as a reminder of the devil’s temptations which often attack unexpectedly in our daily life. That Paul so easily shook off the viper from his hand teaches that even though temptation often affixes itself to us, we can easily shake it off by relying on God’s promises. The same Paul wrote, “The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20). God crushes Satan under our feet when, in temptation, we remember that we are His baptized children who have the Holy Spirit. We have better things to do, say, and think about than whatever the ancient serpent might suggest to our flesh.

Prayer: Almighty God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright, grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

VII.

Also they teach, that One holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: “One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,” etc. [Eph. 4:5, 6]

VIII.

Although the Church properly is the Congregation of Saints and true believers, nevertheless, since, in this life, many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled therewith, it is lawful to use the Sacraments, which are administered by evil men; according to the saying of Christ: “The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat,” etc. [Matt. 23:2]. But the Sacraments and Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, notwithstanding they be administered by evil men.

They condemn the Donatists and such like, who denied it to be lawful to use the ministry of evil men in the Church, and who thought the ministry of evil men to be unprofitable and of none effect.

—The Augsburg Confession

TUESDAY, JANUARY 4: LUKE 3:1–9

2ND S. A. CHRISTMAS

God called John the Baptist to prepare the people for the first arrival of the Messiah by calling them to repentance. This, of course, is how we too can prepare for Christ’s second coming: Repent! God’s Holy Spirit makes you able to do that. As you read God’s Word, pray that His Holy Spirit reveals where your life is out of alignment with His holiness. Behavior matters. Character matters. And even more importantly, Christ matters! His Word is the most important part of repentance. Without Christ, true repentance is impossible, and you will never truly change. But with Christ, all these things are possible. As Paul says in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

After the Holy Spirit helps you to identify your sins, confess your shortcomings to Christ. And rejoice because He forgives you all of your sins. Your pastor says, “...in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins...” Christ died on the cross for all your sins. As you receive that in faith, you are forgiven.

That is when you experience true Christian joy. As Christ forgives you, He also goes to work on you through His Word and Spirit. In this way, over time, He reforms your character so that your behaviors also change. Most importantly, Christ matters.

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.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 5: MATTHEW 2:1–12 2ND S. A. CHRISTMAS

The star of Bethlehem leads the wise men to the Christ child. That event is commemorated tomorrow: “Epiphany”—the showing forth of Christ to all nations. This is significant because it means that Christ is not just for the people of Israel, but also for the Gentiles. That was God’s plan all along. He was going to redeem the whole world, all nations, but He was going to do that through one particular people, the people of Israel. That is why the Epiphany to the wise men is so significant, because those wise men are Gentiles, and they now are coming to the Christ. That means good news for us because our ancestors were Gentile nations, sitting in spiritual darkness. Christ is the Light of the World that comes to us and scatters the darkness of sin and death. Christ came and took all of our sins, and carried them to the cross.

The wise men were seeking “the one born king of the Jews,” and later the title above Him on the cross is: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” The Messiah of Israel wins the salvation of the world by dying on the cross for sin. On the third day He rose again, bringing life and immortality to light. This good news is now preached around the world to all nations. Truly, He is the Light of the World.

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.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 29: ROMANS 11: 13–22 3RD S. A. EPIPHANY

In Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus built up the olive tree, even while grafting in a new branch. He healed a leper and sent him to the priests so he could be readmitted to the fellowship of God’s people, in accord with the Law. At the same time, He was willing to be considered unclean by bringing healing to the house of a Gentile. By the centurion’s stopping Him from doing so, he confessed that he didn’t need Jesus to make His message objectionable to the Jews on his account. He knew that Jesus speaking His Word would be effective, regardless of how near or far He was to the man’s paralyzed servant. Through both, Jesus demonstrates His taking away of whatever stigma might divide us from one another by taking away the sin that divides us from God.

St. Paul shows the Romans there was to be no disunity between Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ—specifically, no thinking that their being a branch grafted into the good olive tree makes them superior to the root. Indeed, they were not any more deserving than the Jewish branches that had been cut off to make place for them. They could still fall under the same severe punishment if they started thinking that their position in the body of Christ was by their own works or power, like the removed Jewish branches had done. In humility, all must reckon their salvation to be by grace alone!

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

St. Paul writes boldly to the Romans because they seek to believe and live in accord with God’s Word. In the first chapter of the epistle he discussed the understanding of the Law by means of created reality. He set forth man’s condition apart from God, which necessitates a justification that is by grace alone and through God-given faith alone. He shows them the necessary gift of death and resurrection through Holy Baptism and what it implies, and he admits his own failure to manifest this purely. He recounted the situation of Israel, the required attitude and actions of Gentiles under a persecuting empire, and how those who teach falsely are to be dealt with. The Spirit accomplishes a great brevity in covering weighty topics because St. Paul does not have to navigate his way through a sea of problems and failings in the parish. There is no need for illustrating and backtracking in the hope that they will hear him and not take some part of his writing as a license to sin or believe falsely.

Many take pride in their ability to “speak bluntly.” Quite often, that simply means “speaking lovelessly.” Others believe themselves “tough enough” to “handle the truth.” What St. Paul says, though, is neither unloving, nor written to the Romans because they are “tough”. He writes straightforwardly because they are confessing the faith accurately, speaking to one another lovingly when reproofing error, and doing good after the pattern of Christ. So straightforward is our growth in faith, if our reason and feelings are in submission to God’s Word!

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus is the ultimate Christmas gift, from God to us—a gift that keeps on giving! He brings God’s love and truth to us. The result is that we who believe in Jesus, who receive Him in faith, become His sons and daughters in the only-begotten Son! This is because we have been born again of God, by water and His Spirit in holy Baptism. By God’s grace we are no longer part of what John the Baptist would call a “brood of vipers,” because we are born again. Jesus lives in us through His Word and Spirit.

Since we are born of God in faith and Baptism, we are now children of God. And since we are children of God, we are to live as children of God. As Jesus said: “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32)

Jesus comes as our Savior—to save us from our sin, to set us free from sin, to set us free from sin’s condemnation, and to set us free from sin’s grip over our lives. Now we can live again as children of God, not as children of sin, Satan, and death. In Jesus Christ we are made children who are full of grace and truth. That is your true Christmas gift!

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.

“What do you seek?” We are usually looking for something in life, though often we don’t know exactly what it is we are looking for, or why. Some people are looking for a type of religious experience. Jesus went off by Himself in the mountains to pray, and His disciples came and said, “Everyone is looking for you!” (Mark 1:35-37). Everyone needs to be looking for Jesus. Most times, however, they simply don’t know it. What they need is real contact with God in their lives, and only Christ can provide that for us.

St. Augustine said, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our souls are restless until we find our rest in you.” We need God; nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. We need God’s Word and Spirit at work in us, in every aspect of our lives. Only Jesus can make that happen.

In His Word today, Jesus asks us, “What do you seek?” He also invites us to “Come and see.” When we do see and have found what we seek in real contact with the living God—through His Son, His Word, His Spirit, and His Sacraments—we, like the disciples in our Bible story, joyfully proclaim: We have found the Christ!

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.

St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4 that those in the Office of the Holy Ministry are “stewards of the mysteries of God.” In 1 Timothy 3:16 he speaks of the “mystery of godliness.” A “mystery,” in the Greek-speaking world of the Bible, was a thing that you couldn’t know or understand unless the originator or keeper of that mystery revealed it to you. Unlike Gnosticism and Greek “mystery religions,” authentic Christianity reveals all its “mysteries” in Holy Scripture. None of it remains “hidden knowledge” reserved for elites; it is clear in God’s Word so no one can “deceive us with vain words” (Ephesians 5:6) if we compare all things with what God has explicitly revealed in writing.

The mystery of which St. Paul now writes is that once the Christ would appear, believing Gentiles would be incorporated into one body with those Hebrews who would receive their Messiah with the same faith. In Christ, God’s “eternal purpose” was accomplished. The provision of righteousness for all the fallen children of Adam was revealed, just as God had ordained before the Fall—indeed, before He created the world (Matthew 25:34, Ephesians 1:4). Until that time, God kept them separate so the promise of the Messiah and the record of His promise, including how to recognize Him both by lineage and by sign, would be preserved. In this way, all would see His “manifold wisdom” and we would be able to rejoice in the “unsearchable riches of Christ” through whom we have bold and confident access to the Father through faith.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Those who tell their audiences that Jesus wants everyone healed now, in this life on earth, say it is because He went to this or that place and “Jesus healed them all.” Since He did it then, they say, He will also do it now... unless you don’t have enough “faith”, which, they also say, is shown by what you will or won’t entrust to their “ministry” via cash, card, or check.

What does Jesus say? Not only will He not be accepted “in His own country,” but God specifically didn’t even send Elijah to any of the starving widows of Judah. The prophet went only to the widow of Zarephath, even though the Lord could certainly have fed them all. Consider St. Paul, whose conversion we celebrated yesterday. He gives evidence in his epistles of suffering various afflictions—especially of how he prayed three times for his “thorn in the flesh” to be removed—but God told him that His grace seeing Paul through whatever trial he is talking about was sufficient for him. God taught him faith and endurance, just as he was taught to depend on Him during the blindness that overcame him on the road to Damascus.

Instead, as we see with Saints Timothy and Titus, whose fathers did not consent to circumcision in their infancy, the Holy Spirit “in His own time and place, works faith in those that hear the Gospel,” and thereby brings the perfect healing of the resurrection to be received in glory.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus said, “You will see greater things.” And indeed, through the whole Gospel of John, Nathanael, with all the disciples, sees greater and greater things in the works of Jesus; from water turned into wine to the raising of Lazarus. These are indeed great things, but the greatest was yet to come.

This is how it will be for us during these next few weeks in the season of Epiphany. We will hear of Jesus casting out demons and healing the sick, greater and greater things, until we come to the glorious manifestation of the Lord Jesus’ divinity in the Transfiguration. But the greatest remains: Jesus opening heaven for us by dying in our place on the cross.

This is a sight which can be hard to look at because our sin has caused it, but it is also beautiful to the eyes of faith. It is the greatest thing of all: Christ crucified for us! Here we see the very heart of God—His fatherly love for us, His grace and mercy for us—in the forgiveness of all of our sin. On the cross Jesus fulfills the promise that we will “see heaven opened.” We’ve seen the greater things, indeed!

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

TUESDAY, JAN. 25: LUKE 4:38–44 CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL

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.

Some incorrectly teach that the sickness of Peter's mother-in-law—and, thus, all sickness—is a matter of demons needing to be cast out, because Jesus rebukes both the fever and the demons. Yet, Jesus also rebuked wind and waves (Luke 8:24). He is the God of creation: even inanimate objects must obey Him, so every aberration sin causes in His creation must take flight at His command. We need not rebuke “the demon of strep throat,” but must recognize that, as fallen creatures in a fallen creation, such sickness is a consequence of the Fall. We need to commend the sick to the care of Him who is Creator and Redeemer, trusting that His gracious will shall be accomplished to our good and His glory.

The same crowd that makes the previous error often follows it with this one: Jesus “laid His hands on every one of them and healed them,” so, they say, “He will physically heal every single one whose faith in Him is real.” Yet, Jesus didn't visit every sick person on earth, or even in Judea; nor did the Apostles. Physically healing everyone on earth at that time wasn't what Jesus came to do. Rather, He healed (and raised the dead) to show that He could, so that when He promised the resurrection of all flesh and eternal life to all who trust in Him, we could be secure in believing He can do such things. Doing so on the Sabbath is for the same reason: that we may know He is the Lord, who has authority over everything.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The apostles asked the Lord to increase their faith because they had just been tasked with a particularly difficult duty: they must not be the cause of anyone's stumbling from the faith. They must, instead, rebuke their sinning brethren, and forgive them when they repent! Their plea and Jesus' answer shows how easy it is to misunderstand what faith is.

“Give us special gifts so that we can fight off the impulses of our flesh toward both sloth and revenge, so we can live as you say! Increase our faith!” Yet, Jesus says the tiniest faith can accomplish far more than we can comprehend. There is not a need for more faith, so much as for being returned to the understanding of what faith is and, therefore, what faith does. Faith does whatever is commanded, because faith reckons that all it has and all it will ever need is given by grace—by God's favor to an unworthy sinner for the sake of Christ.

It is why the Divine Service revolves around repentance and faith, and why St. Paul tells St. Timothy that godliness is a mystery. The focus is not the development of good behaviors, but faith in Christ's Incarnation and Passion (1 Timothy 3:16). Patience, perseverance, holy living; these require no more than what is given to a new Christian, no more than what is given to an infant at the font. They simply require being kept in mind that faith is God's gift through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, and letting these do what they do.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth the right hand of Thy majesty to help and defend us; through 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,

“So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord...”

It was very important that Mary and Joseph perform all that the Law of the Lord required of them in regard to our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, He was circumcised on the eighth day. As a firstborn son, He was redeemed with the payment of the redemption price, and the appropriate sacrifice was offered for Mary’s purification (cf. Num. 18:15-16; Lev. 12:1-8).

Why was this important? Jesus fulfilled all the demands of the Law in our stead and then, as our substitute, redeemed us from the curse of the Law by His innocent sufferings and death upon the cross. The Bible tells us that “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

Why did Christ fulfill the Law for us and then go to the cross to redeem us? He did it so we might, through faith in Christ, be forgiven of all sins and “receive the adoption as sons” and a place in Christ’s eternal kingdom.

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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

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

XVI.

Of Civil Affairs, they [the Lutheran theologians] teach, that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and that it is right for Christians to bear civil office, to sit as judges, to determine matters by the Imperial and other existing laws, to award just punishments, to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to make oaths when required by the magistrates, to marry, to be given in marriage.

They condemn the Anabaptists who forbid these civil offices to Christians. They condemn also those who do not place the perfection of the Gospel in the fear of God and in faith, but in forsaking civil offices; for the Gospel teaches an eternal righteousness of the heart. Meanwhile, it does not destroy the State or the family, but especially requires their preservation as ordinances of God, and in such ordinances the exercise of charity. Therefore, Christians are necessarily bound to obey their own magistrates and laws, save only when commanded to sin, for then they ought to obey God rather than men [Acts 5:29].

—The Augsburg Confession

“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.” St. Paul emphasizes the fact that God proclaims His truth and glory through all sorts of events and conditions. In small things and in grand works, He is working for the help and benefit of those who are faithful according to His calling.

Our current society is especially bad about encouraging fools to think that they are wise. People are urged to share their opinions and their judgments about every little thing that happens in the world of “social media”, but the overwhelming majority of those people have no knowledge from which to make informed assessments. The wisdom of God says, “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil” (Proverbs 3:7). Christ Himself was silent and humble in certain situations so that the Father’s holy will would be accomplished. In the events that led up to our Lord’s crucifixion, He was unconcerned with how weak or foolish the malefactors thought He was. He was accomplishing the most holy and glorious sacrifice known to man as He was slain for our redemption!

As our Lord worked through the “foolishness” of the Cross, He can also work through the small, seemingly foolish good works that His faithful people do according to His commands. He can even work through our silence, because even that can bear witness to His Word which accomplishes all things for the sake of His beloved children.

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.

“Then He said to them, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they kept silent.”

The Pharisees missed the point of God’s commandments. God had forbidden work on the Sabbath that man might devote one day each week to hearing and learning God’s Word, for considering His ways and His promises (cf. Exo. 20:8-11; Isa. 58:13-14). While the Pharisees were sticklers about avoiding work, they failed to see it was God’s will that they devote the day to considering God’s ways and doing His works.

What is God’s work? We learn from God’s commandment against murder that He also requires love and doing good to our neighbor (cf. Exo. 20:13; Rom. 13:9-10). “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” The God-pleasing thing to do was, in love, to help this man and heal his infirmity.

A question for us to consider is whether we ever miss the point of God’s Word and become legalistic about our outward obedience to a commandment of God, but miss the true point of the commandment. In Christ’s Word and example we have His holy guidance!

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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

It is God’s gracious will that all His elect hear the preaching of the Gospel and come to trust in Christ Jesus for forgiveness and life eternal. As Jesus said, “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.” St. Paul expressed the same truth when he wrote to the Philippians: “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). It is the gracious will of our heavenly Father that we, who have been brought to faith in Christ through the hearing of the Gospel, would be preserved in the true and saving faith through the continued use of His Word and Sacraments, and be raised up on the last day unto everlasting 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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

These verses from St. Paul sum up the ideas expressed in the previous readings for this week. The glory of God that is revealed to us, and to the whole world, through His Church is the peace and hope that we have through His Spirit and Truth. In spite of our sinful past, in spite of the twisted notions of men, in spite of suffering and martyrdom, we are given peace and hope in the revelation of God’s mercy toward us in Christ crucified.

Our age is characterized by distractions and selfishness. Wicked leaders are unashamed of their hypocritical pursuits of power. Institutions are bold in their agendas to profit from dissension and discord. People are proud of foolish vanity and materialism. But even though there is constant noise and chaos from this sinful age, there are still moments when God’s truth is proclaimed. There are still moments when wisdom and virtue are heard. The Church still abides in this broken world, the Word and will of God is still proclaimed, and the Sacraments are still given to God’s faithful people. There is still reason for hope, and there are still moments of peace in Jesus Christ, even as the world heaps up tribulations and disappointments. Be encouraged by this truth from God’s Word, and be strengthened by His Spirit. Christ Jesus continues to work in this world as He still abides with His Church and His people, as He promised, to the end of the age.

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.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 20: MATTHEW 5:17–26 2ND S. A. EPIPHANY

False teachers lead others to ignore and break the commandments of God. Whether these wicked people are declaring the Ten Commandments obsolete, or are acting as though perversion and vanity are acceptable, they are working against the Word of God and His kingdom.

Our Lord does not teach us mere generic statements about “love” and “peace”. He works mightily through the whole counsel of His Law and Gospel, and through His Spirit and Truth. Christ reveals His glory according to His divine will and wisdom, not according to man’s reason or manipulations. This is why we are taught to observe all that He commands. The children of God are taught to hear, learn, serve, and obey, in all things. Our small works and our major life-events are all meant to be in fear, love, and trust in Him above all other things. Through these He makes things work together and He declares His wisdom. However, the devil would have us think otherwise.

God calls us to listen to His Son because in Him is all truth and righteousness. There is no way for us to improve on the wisdom of God’s grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. Hold fast to that one true Faith in all things, in all our works and deeds, because He is the only One who can fulfill all good things in the lives of those who are His through faith.

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.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 13: MATTHEW 16:24–27 1ST S. A. EPIPHANY

We trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and for the gift of everlasting life. But do we trust Jesus with our daily lives? Jesus tells us: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Are we willing to deny ourselves, take up the cross of suffering which comes with being a disciple of Jesus, and follow Him wherever He leads? Are we willing to give up our own personal goals and ambitions, our jobs, our pleasures, our property, and even our lives, in order to follow Jesus? Do you trust Him enough to commit all to His care and direction?

If we try to save our lives in this world--if we live for ourselves and do those things we desire--we lose our lives. But if we give up our own earthly goals and ambitions, if we deny ourselves and follow Christ, we will find true life. This faith gives us life in Him now as we serve our God and Savior and walk in fellowship with Him, and in eternity as we glorify Him for the gracious gift of salvation He won for us by His innocent sufferings and death in our stead (cf. John 10:10; Rev. 5:9ff.).

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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”

Jesus told His Jewish hearers who were seeking to stone Him for claiming to be the Son of God that, if they did not believe His words, they should consider His works and believe in Him because of them. His works confirm Him to be the Son of God who has come into this world to redeem fallen mankind.

Even before Nicodemus became a believer, he recognized that “no one can do these signs that [Jesus did] unless God is with him” (John 3:2). Jesus opened blind eyes and deaf ears. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and even raised the dead. After He had made atonement for the sins of all by His innocent sufferings and death on the cross, He rose again on the third day! What more could we desire to prove that Jesus is indeed God in the flesh, one with the Father, and our Savior and Redeemer!

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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Word of God has been declared to man from the beginning of time. It is His holy, eternal expression of righteousness and love toward us. As Moses bore witness, we were rightly condemned in our sins on account of Adam and Eve, but the grace of God would come in the Offspring who would fulfill all righteousness. The people of God now declare His grace and truth in Jesus Christ. Saints like Bishop Henry of Finland have been part of that ongoing proclamation to this day.

The Word does not change, but the context does. Moses and the Old Testament prophets declared that the Christ would certainly come. John the Baptist was given the high honor of being able to say, “This is He...” In Medieval Finland, Bp. Henry proclaimed this same Word by teaching the Church and calling sinners to repentance and faith. The bishop was martyred for the sake of God’s Word at the hands of a treacherous murderer, but still the Gospel of grace and truth in Jesus would continue.

The glory of God’s eternal Word is revealed to us in His holy Church by the preaching, teaching, and faithful observance of His holy Sacraments. All the sons and daughters of God’s house, ministers and laity alike, may face suffering and martyrdom for the sake of Jesus Christ and His truth, but as we are in Him, our salvation is secure and we will not lose our eternal life!

Prayer: O God, who dost guide Thy Church through the faithful ministrations of Thy servants, grant that Thy ministers, like St. Henry, stand steadfast against those who would work iniquity; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Yesterday's reading showed God's grace toward an adulterous woman. Today's shows His grace toward a tax collector. Christ's glory is revealed in His mercy toward those who repent of their sins and are made faithful by the work of His Spirit and Truth.

Once again, our Lord Jesus initiated contact with a sinner by requesting a simple act. The Samaritan woman was clearly able to give Jesus a drink at the well because she had the vessel and was approaching for the purpose of drawing water. Zacchaeus was publicly known as a person of wealth and means, so he would surely be able to host a traveling guest. But Jesus also demonstrates His power by calling on this man as a public acknowledgment of God's work in him. The people wanted to judge Zacchaeus by his sinful works, but Christ accepted his repentance and declared that this man was faithful!

People would not necessarily be wrong for some wariness about this tax collector, but once he made his public confession and was accepted by Jesus, the people should have listened to the Lord's righteous judgment. In Zacchaeus the Lord was teaching those who can hear and see that all men are in need of this faith. Sons of Abraham are those who repent and believe in the Christ, not just those who are of the Jews. Our Savior continues to call and convert sinners through the lives and deeds of all His faithful children as He continues to bring people from all nations into His House, the one holy Church!

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.

“And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

Jesus taught the people with authority, for He is the giver of the Holy Scriptures and has the authority to fully explain them and apply them to His hearers. Jesus' authority as the Son of God was seen in the fact that He even commanded an unclean spirit to come out of a demon-possessed man, and the evil spirit had no choice but to obey Him.

We also see Jesus' use of this authority in His sermon on the mount as He expounded the true meaning of the Scriptures. He said numerous times, “You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you...” (Matt. 5). In the “Great Commission”, Christ's Church is to make disciples of the nations, by baptizing and teaching all that Christ taught and commanded (Matt. 28:18-20). The true meaning of Scriptures is centered in Christ Jesus; it must be understood through Him and His teaching, for He is the Son of God and His Word is truth (John 8:31-32)!

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, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

MONDAY, JANUARY 17: JOHN 4:5–26

2ND S. A. 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

Our Lord is all-powerful and all-knowing, so He always does the right thing in the right time. In His divine wisdom, our Lord Jesus was resting at the well so He could reveal His truth and righteousness to the Samaritans in that area. It all began with a simple act of kindness; the Lord asked the woman for a simple drink of water. From there her questions showed that she had been blessed with some level of humility and willingness to listen, which God was then completing with His proclamation that He was indeed the Messiah.

We are often tempted to overlook the importance of small works. God makes all things work together for the good of those who are called to be His (Romans 8:28). He directly worked through this small act at the well so that He might bring His Good News to the Samaritans, and He continues to work through His saints for the same reason. Our small works done in faith are important in the whole work of His kingdom and His righteousness. Remember that our Lord is always seeking to reveal His Spirit and Truth to all people, all nations, and He does so through us as we are made His children, His people, and members of His Body. In all things, let us serve and walk according to His will and His mercy!

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.