

# THE LUTHERAN HERALD



JANUARY 5-31, 2026

A PUBLICATION OF  
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

# *The Calendar*

*The Lutheran Hymnal (1941): TLH; 2022 Supplement: ASBH*

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

***Please note that hymn numbers for Festival Days reflect the enumeration of drafts of ASBH supplied at the most recent synods.***

January 4	Christmas 2	ASBH 8
January 6 (T)	Epiphany	ASBH 9
January 11	Epiphany 1	ASBH 10
January 18	Epiphany 2	ASBH 11
January 19 (S)	St. Henry	ASBH 74
January 24 (S)	St. Timothy	ASBH 75
January 25	Transfiguration/Conversion of St. Paul	ASBH 15
January 26 (S)	St. Titus	ASBH 77
February 1	Septuagesima	ASBH 16
February 2 (M)	The Presentation of our Lord	ASBH 78

## ***St. Ignatius Lutheran Seminary***

Winter Quarter begins December 8; the Christmas break begins on December 20. After Christmas break, classes resume January 5 and run through February 27. The classes offered in the winter quarter are as follows:

E009—Greek Readings 2 (1 hr.)

E003—Psalms (2 hrs.)

H003—Medieval Church (3 hrs.)

H009—Readings in Medieval Theology (1 hr.)

P002—Catechetics (3 hrs.)

St. Ignatius currently has two students, Duncan Geldenhuis (Australia) and Jonathan Teo Zin Han (Singapore).

**2026 SYNOD AND COLLOQUIUM**—As we begin a new year, please remember that this year's synod and colloquium will be held later than has been our custom in recent years. This year we observe the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of our diocese and the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Salem Lutheran Church. The colloquium begins with Vespers on Tuesday, June 2. The colloquium will continue through Wednesday, June 3, and the morning of Thursday, June 4. The synod will begin Thursday afternoon and continue through June 5 (the Festival of St. Boniface). The diocesan and congregational anniversaries will be observed over the weekend (June 6–7). Charity Lutheran Church (Burleson) will host the diocesan family camp which will take place immediately after the anniversary observances (more information in the next issue of *The Lutheran Herald*).

**RECENT PUBLICATION**—Repristination Press has been busy in recent months and we share one of highlights which may be of interest to readers of *The Lutheran Herald*.

**On the Concept of Church Government**, by J.A.A. Grabau. In *Vom Begriff des Kirchenregiments*, Grabau (1804–1879)—pastor, confessor, and founder of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Buffalo—sets forth one of the most systematic and uncompromising defenses of the Lutheran doctrine of church order ever written. Composed around 1860, the work distills decades of pastoral struggle into a single argument: that the Church's life and government must arise solely from the *ministerium verbi*—the divinely instituted preaching office through which Christ Himself governs His Church. Against the twin errors of papal tyranny and democratic self-rule, Grabau advances the classical *evangelisch-ministeriales Kirchenregiment*: an ecclesiastical order that is neither hierarchical nor anarchic, but ministerial—the rule of Christ exercised through the Word and Sacraments. Drawing from Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the early Church Orders of Bugenhagen and Chemnitz, Grabau presents a vision of the visible Church as both ordered and free, hierarchical in form yet wholly evangelical in spirit.

# 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 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

The summary of John's preaching—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"—is sometimes misunderstood. First, repentance is not a one-time event. You can't simply check it off your list of completed actions. Repentance is not just a periodic act, like brushing your teeth in the morning and the evening. It's not an as-needed medication, like taking nitroglycerin only when you experience chest pains. Repentance is the life of the Christian. It's what Christians do. Luther in the ninety-five theses famously stated, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed that the entire life of believers be one of repentance." Believers confess their sinfulness, and they trust in Jesus, at all times.

Second, "the kingdom of heaven" is not merely the other-worldly place believers go after they die. It is not an earthly kingdom which is defined by geographic borders, particular clothing, or the observance of certain traditions and rites. The Smalcald Articles say, "So children pray, 'I believe in one holy Christian church.' Its holiness does not consist of surplices, tonsures, albs, or other ceremonies of theirs which they have invented over and above the Holy Scriptures, but it consists of the Word of God and true faith."

Through the preaching of God's Word, John presented Christian repentance which includes contrition and faith in Jesus Christ. John prepared the way of the Lord so that believers would receive Jesus and His salvation. In this way the kingdom of heaven was present ("at hand"). Through faith the kingdom of God was within them (Luke 17:21).

Collect: Almighty and Everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure, that in the Name of Thy beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

# Lesson from the Book of Concord

## The Epiphany of our Lord

### Article XVIII.

#### Of Free Will.

The eighteenth article Of Free Will the adversaries receive; although they add some testimonies not at all adapted to this case. They add also a declaration that neither with the Pelagians is too much to be granted to the free will, nor with the Manicheans is all freedom to be denied it. Very well; but what difference is there between the Pelagians and our adversaries, since both hold that, without the Holy Ghost, men can love God and perform God's commandments with respect to the substance of the acts, and can merit grace and justification by works which reason performs by itself without the Holy Ghost? How many absurdities follow from these Pelagian opinions, which are taught with great authority in the schools! These Augustine, following Paul, refutes with great emphasis, whose judgment we have recounted above in the article Of Justification. Nor indeed do we deny liberty to the human will. The human will has liberty in the choice of works and things which reason comprehends by itself. It can to a certain extent render civil righteousness or the righteousness of works, it can speak of God, offer to God a certain service in outward works, obey magistrates, parents; by a choice of outward works can restrain the hands from murder, from adultery, from theft. Since there is left in human nature reason and judgment concerning objects subjected to the senses, choice between these things, and the liberty and power to render civil righteousness, are also left. For Scripture calls that righteousness of the flesh which the carnal nature, i.e. reason by itself without the Holy Ghost, renders. Although the power of concupiscence is such that men more frequently obey evil dispositions than sound judgment. And the devil, who is efficacious in the godless, as Paul says (Eph. 2:2), does not cease to incite this feeble nature to various offences. These are the reasons why even civil righteousness is rare among men, as we seen that not even the philosophers themselves, who seem to have aspired after this righteousness, attained it. But it is false that the man does not sin, who performs the work of the commandments without grace. And they add further that such works *merit de congruo* the remission of sins and justification. For human hearts without the Holy Ghost are without the fear of God; without trust toward



God, they do not believe that they are hearkened to, forgiven, benefited, and preserved by God. Therefore they are godless. For “neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Matt. 7:18). And “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6).

Therefore, although we concede to free will the liberty and power to perform the outward works of the Law, yet to the free will we do not ascribe these spiritual matters, viz. truly to fear God, truly to believe God, truly to be confident and hold that God regards us, hearkens to us, forgives us, etc. These are the true works of the First Table, which the heart cannot render without the Holy Ghost, as Paul says (1 Cor. 2:14): “The natural man,” i.e. man using only natural strength, “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” And this can be decided if men consider how hearts are disposed toward God’s will, whether they are truly confident that they are regarded and hearkened to by God. Even for saints to retain this faith is difficult, so far is it from existing in the godless. But it is conceived, as we have said above, when terrified hearts hear the Gospel and receive consolation.

Therefore such a distribution is of advantage, in which civil righteousness is ascribed to the free will, and spiritual righteousness to the governing of the Holy Ghost in the regenerate. For thus the outward discipline is retained, because all men ought to know equally both that God requires this civil righteousness, and that after a manner we can afford it. And yet a distinction is shown between human and spiritual righteousness, between philosophical doctrine and the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, and it can be understood for what there is need of the Holy Ghost. Nor has this distribution been invented by us, but Scripture most clearly teaches it. Augustine also treats of it, and recently it has been well treated of by William of Paris, but it has been wickedly suppressed by those who have dreamt that men can obey God’s law without the Holy Ghost, but that the Holy Ghost is given in order that respect to that which is meritorious may be added.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession  
The Book of Concord



It might seem overly simple, but the point must be emphasized: They came to *worship* Him. Herod wanted to know about Jesus' location, but his plan did not include worship, despite his lying claim to the wise men. The chief priests and scribes knew the answer to Herod's question and directed Herod to Bethlehem. However, these religious leaders didn't go to worship Jesus either. It was only the men from the East that were searching for Jesus in order to worship Him!

And let us not too narrowly define their worship as simply the giving of gifts to Jesus. They came, first of all, to receive gifts from Jesus. They are like the woman in Luke 7:36-50. Our Confessions state, "The woman came, believing that she should seek the forgiveness of sins from Christ. This is the highest way of worshipping Christ" (Apology III). These men came seeking the gift of the forgiveness of sins from Christ. They desired that this Child would be their Ruler who would shepherd them.

Where there is true faith which receives Jesus, the fruits of faith follow. Just as in yesterday's reading John chastised the Pharisees and Sadducees saying, "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance..." so also Herod and the religious leaders show their lack of faith, repentance, and the resultant fruits. The wise men first "fall down and worship Him," receiving His gift of forgiveness, and then give Him gifts of thankfulness.

Collect: O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thy 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.

## WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 7: MATTHEW 4:12-17 EPIPHANYTIDE

John preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2). And now, in today's reading, Jesus preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Even a cursory observation will reveal that they preached the same message! The entire life of believers is one of repentance, confessing their sinfulness and trusting in Jesus at all times.

Without the promise of the Gospel to direct men to trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, this world is only full of darkness. "In this way Scripture calls the natural man simply 'darkness' in spiritual and divine things (Eph. 5:8; Acts 26:18). "The light shines in the darkness (that is, in the dark, blind world which neither knows nor regards God) and the darkness has not comprehended it' (John 1:5)" (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration II). The darkness of man's effort to keep the Law cannot provide salvation. The darkness of the human heart cannot produce new pure and godly desires. The darkness of a land without eternal life leads only to despair.

The arrival of Jesus Christ is the inauguration of a great Light. Jesus is the Light of the world. The preached message of John directed us to trust in the Light saying, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The preached message of Jesus pointed to Himself saying, "Today the Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." The preaching of the faithful pastor is "Repent and believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

Collect: O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thy 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. Amen.

The true Light, Jesus Christ, gives light—the true teaching concerning God’s salvation to man. He comes into the world to suffer, die, and take away our sins through His atonement. His salvific act shines out the Father’s great love for sinners with the promise of the forgiveness of sins. God the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the Word to create faith in that very promise and to enlighten us with His gifts.

Abundant gifts come to those who receive Him in true faith, to those who believe in His name. “The proclamation of the Gospel of our Lord Christ will once more comfort and strengthen them with the assurance that if they believe the Gospel God forgives them all their sins through Christ, accepts them for his sake as God’s children, and out of pure grace, without any merit of their own, justifies and saves them” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration V). Believers are given a “new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). Christ secures their status as children of God and “heirs” (Romans 8:17).

The context of John 1:9 makes it clear that every man who is enlightened unto eternal life has been enlightened by Jesus Christ, the true Light! Sad to say, there are those who are determined to remain in darkness. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world, but they did not receive Him, and thus they are those who “did not know Him.”

Collect: O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thy 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. Amen.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 9: JOHN 1:35–42 EPIPHANYTIDE

The word “Christ” means ‘anointed one.’ In an anointing, oil is usually applied to set a person apart for a particular office or duty. Kings, prophets, and priests were all anointed. Sometimes we use the term “christening” to describe the act of baptizing a person. Someone who has been christened has been anointed by the Holy Spirit and set apart to be a child of God. Since Christ is the anointed Savior of the world, it would also follow that someone who is baptized has been united together with Christ (Romans 6:3ff)—and thus *Christ-ened*.

Although there could be many Old Testament “christs” anointed for various offices, there was only one Christ. The term “Messiah” refers to that one Christ whose particular office was to be “The Lamb of God.” He was to suffer and die as a sacrificial Lamb to make atonement for the sins of the whole world. Jesus is the Christ and the Messiah. Nevertheless, He did not prefer those titles when teaching, because the Jews understood them in worldly terms. They thought of the Christ/Messiah as a revolutionary person. Jesus preferred the term “Son of man” from Daniel 7:13–14 (as we will see in tomorrow’s reading). Jesus, the Son of God, joined Himself to our human nature, and thus He is the unique God-Man, able to reconcile us to the Father.

Collect: O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thy 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 Old Testament is a book which proclaims the coming of the promised Savior of the world. Despite the clear words of Moses and the Prophets, many Jews were not looking for the coming of the Savior. Others gave lip service to their expectation of His coming, but in reality, they were only interested in their own rule and prestige. Thus, so many rejected Jesus when He presented Himself to the Israelite nation by His words and miracles.

The readings of the last few days show us several men who were truly waiting for the Messiah. They listened to John's message and received Jesus when He came. Jesus called some of them to be his apostles. The high praise which Jesus gives to Nathanael was unprecedented. Unlike so many of his fellow Israelites, Nathanael was "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" Despite his skepticism that a Nazareth resident was the Savior, he listened to Philip and came to Jesus. When Jesus reveals to him a fact which only divine prescience would know, Nathanael immediately believes and confesses Jesus as the Son of God and King of Israel.

This confession is consistent with the witness of Psalm 2, which describes the Messiah as the Son whom we should kiss, and the King whom the Father has set up. Jesus praises Nathanael's faith in the Word. Furthermore, Nathanael will get to see that Jesus is the fulfillment of what Jacob's ladder vision revealed.

Collect: O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest Thy 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.

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, *Book of Concord*, §105–8, 129–131, 141–142,  
158–159



When Jesus was forty days old, Joseph and Mary took their young son to the Jerusalem temple for what is called “the Presentation.” According to Levitical law, an offering of a lamb, plus one dove or pigeon, would be offered for the mother to be regarded as ceremonially clean. It is significant that a substitute of a second dove or pigeon was allowed for the lamb. Jesus Himself would be the sacrificial lamb offered for the sins of the whole world.

After His presentation at the temple, the next twelve years of Jesus’ life would be summarized in just two verses. “So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.” Here we have the mystery of Jesus’ two natures, human and divine. He is, at one and the same time, both man and God. Although He matured like any other, He committed no transgressions. He was in every way like us, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

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

In what seems to be a precarious situation, we see Jesus applying Law and Gospel to the right people in the right situation. The setting is the synagogue, but the situation has little to do with formal worship and study. Jesus becomes aware of a man present who has a withered hand. It being the Sabbath, the Pharisees are watching closely to see what Jesus will do. Knowing their hardness of heart, Jesus confronts them with a rhetorical question: “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” Their silent response shows they know the right answer, but do not wish to admit it. Jesus, of course, follows through with the man and heals his withered hand. Interestingly, He does so without touch; He simply tells the man to stretch out his hand and he is cured.

As for the Pharisees, this only makes them angrier. Jesus’ application of the Law yields the all-too-frequent negative response. It is very hard to crack the thick shell of man’s pride, which is illustrated not only by the Pharisees, but known to be in all of us as well. This is why we go through the Confession of Sins every Sunday—to pour out our sinful pride. Only then are we ready to hear the sweet news of the Gospel.

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

We have all heard the saying, “There’s no such thing as a free lunch.” “So what must we do, Jesus, to get this other kind of bread that You say is so good?” This is the wrong question. The food that endures to eternity is not a food you work for, but a food that is given to you. Listen carefully to Jesus’ answer: “The work of God is this: that you believe in the One He has sent.” Not “works”, but a singular “work”. And it is not our work, but the work of God. It is the lone work of God creating faith in our hearts.

It is the work of God that causes belief and trust in Jesus whom He has sent. It is not our good life that saves, but Jesus’ perfect life and sacrificial death. It is His work freely given to us as a gift. Only Jesus provides the work and the bread that gives life to the world. He is the maker and ‘baker’ of a new and better manna, for the bread He gives is Himself. “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’”

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

Just before today's text, Peter rebukes the Savior when Jesus says that He "must go to Jerusalem." But doesn't that "bloody talk" sometimes offend our sensitive ears, too? Even if you are not troubled by it, has the thought "crossed" your mind that the "thing" on the altar is bad for business? Can't we just limit the damage to Good Friday and spread Christmas and Easter cheer throughout the rest of the year?

But the cross is necessary. The cross is what defeats the devil. It is the one thing he does not want Jesus to have. Anything but the cross. The one who once overcame Adam by a tree—the tree of knowing good and evil—would be overcome by the tree of the cross. And he would stop at nothing to have Jesus bypass it. He tried the direct route in the Judean wilderness; in today's reading he tried the indirect route, using Peter, Jesus' 'right hand man'. But Jesus' focus and determination literally saved the day each and every time. As His disciples, we are expected to do no less as we take up our cross and follow Him.

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

In today's reading, Jesus argues with the Jews concerning His identity. He reminds them He is consistently doing the works of the Father, which they cannot deny. Since the works yield proof of His Sonship, they should believe in Him. But they cannot accept that connection. Jesus claiming to be the Son of God is too much.

Jesus then refers to a verse in Psalm 82: "I said, 'You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High'" (v 6). Jesus' title, therefore, should not be foreign to them. Even the children of Israel were given a lofty label. Jesus, because of the works He performs, is not merely a chief among men, or even the highest of men, but a man *in perfection*. Jesus not only does the will of the Father by performing miracles (a fact they cannot and do not deny), but He lives a life free from sin. These are the evidence of His Sonship with the Father. Jesus tells them you cannot separate the Person from His work: "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."

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

There is most certainly demonic influence in congregations. Where people try to gather in the name of the Lord, the demons definitely want to infiltrate these groups and stir up rebellion. The possessed man cries out in petulance, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us?” Some faithful pastors have heard similar reactions from congregations in our own time! And even though such people say with their lips, “Jesus is the Holy One of God!”, they do not love or trust in Him. They fear Him, but they refuse to sincerely honor Him.

The Bride of Christ, His holy and faithful people who are gathered in the congregations of His Church, are characterized by sincere humility, love, and obedience. His people do not scream at His servants to “Leave us alone!” when Law and discipline is proclaimed. They repent, observe His commands, and do the works of loving service that are prepared for them by God.

The devil is active throughout the world, but his attacks in the midst of those gathered in the Lord’s name are especially dangerous. People are taught to be self-important, defiant towards authority, and dishonest in the name of their piety. But the true Church trusts in Jesus Christ for our forgiveness and peace, and we love and serve others, even our enemies, out of faithful obedience to Him.

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

### **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



St. Henry of Finland was a martyr who died because he assigned penance to a murderer named Lalli. All faithful ministers of Christ know that they are required to do their duty in that office up to and including their own martyrdom. As believers in Christ, we trust that God will fulfill His promises to us, and we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, which are among the promises that He has made to us. This is our ultimate consolation in tribulation—that even the worst things the devil, the world, and our flesh can throw at us pale in comparison to the great things that God has in store for those who believe in Him.

This is also a great comfort to us when tribulation does not require the shedding of blood. For our God is a God of mercy, of comfort, and of healing. When we must suffer, we can suffer knowing that the prophets, the apostles, and even our Lord Himself suffered to the point of death. Whatever we are facing will probably not go that far, and even if it does, God will remember His promises. He did for the prophets, the apostles, and for other martyrs, like St. Henry.

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

The account of Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus should bring us no end of joy. How many of the rulers and leading men of Israel worked as hard as Zacchaeus did to actually see and hear Jesus? Instead, many of them sneered and tried to trap Jesus, but Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree for the chance to see and hear Jesus in person. When Jesus sees him, He says that He must stay at Zacchaeus's house. The scoffers, of course, were horrified that Jesus would dine with a "sinner." But as Jesus Himself says, on this occasion and similarly in others, He came to seek and save that which was lost.

Of course Zacchaeus was a sinner. But as we see in our lesson, he was a *repentant* sinner. He showed this by giving of his wealth to the poor, and promising to repay fourfold anything that he had taken by false accusation. Thus, we can rejoice with Jesus when He says, "Today salvation has come to this house." We can be sure that Jesus rejoices in the very same way when any sinner repents, because this is why He came to earth, as He says.

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

We cannot understand how it is that God the Son took on human flesh. We must trust the words that Scripture uses, and believe that it happened. Scripture makes clear that the union of God and man in Christ Jesus is a mystery that cannot fully be understood by our human minds.

But we do not need to wonder *why* this happened. Other passages speak at length of Christ's mission to live a perfect life and die a perfect death to pay for our sins. This passage speaks most directly to Christ's mission to teach us—to reveal to us men the nature of God as God wishes to be known, as only God (the Son) can reveal and show us.

Thus, John shows us a contrast—Moses, who spoke to God face to face (Exodus 33:11), probably understood God about as well as a human can. But that does not and cannot compare to the knowledge of God that the eternal Son of God possesses, who is literally in the bosom of the Father. While Moses revealed the Law, the revelation the Son gives is God's infinite mercy and grace. This does not mean the Law is false; it means that the Gospel is how God wishes for us to know Him and think of Him.

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

It is very tempting for our sinful minds to believe that the Gospel is more important than the Law; in the sense that only the Gospel matters, and that the believer in Christ can do whatever he wants without consequence or concern.

Christ teaches the truth here, that because of our sin our understanding of the Law is wrong. We see the prohibition against killing, and we want to take that only in the narrow physical sense. But God's Law is actually stricter than that. It does not merely prohibit violence leading to the death of another person, but prohibits even thoughts and words that so often precede such violence. Thus, God's Law performs three critical functions for Christians: it still stops some of the coarse outbreaks of sin; it still accuses us and shows us where, what, and how we have failed; and it still shows us how we can live in accord with God's will.

The Gospel is the message that Christ has paid for our sin, and forgives our sins because of His work and merit. This does not free us from the obligation to obey God's Law. Rather, it shows our need for reliance upon the merit and salvation of Jesus Christ, and thus, the Gospel frees us to do our best to keep the Law as we should, by faith in Him.

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

“Hope” is a term that is misused these days. In Scripture, it is more than a wish that ‘things will get better eventually, because things are worse than we want them to be right now.’ In our reading for today, our hope is built on facts, truth, and promises that God has made to us. We hope to see heaven—not just because we wish to, but because God has promised it to us through the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Our trust in this promise, which is our faith, is created and sustained by God’s Word and Sacraments. Through these God holds us close to Himself. This in fact is how God pours out his love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

It is because we have this confidence and trust that we can endure the unpleasant things and the tribulations that come with living in this sinful world. As Paul says later in his letter, “It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns?” (Romans 8:33-34). Thus, let us rejoice in our God and Savior, and trust that He will fulfill the promises He has made to us. This is our hope, that we too will see the glory of God.

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

In our reading for today, St. Paul instructs St. Timothy (and the rest of the Church, for all time) by inspiration how to treat Christian widows and the needy. Younger widows should be encouraged to remarry, for it is God-pleasing for women to have children and manage households. This is another expression of how important the family is in God's plans and desires for us, and how important the role of bringing up children in a Christian home. Timothy would have remembered this, because St. Paul mentions Eunice and Lois (St. Timothy's mother and grandmother, respectively) by name in his second epistle to St. Timothy. St. Paul understands that it is all too human (and thus a problem) to be tempted to idleness, being a busybody and a gossip. Such things are not a credit to the Church but a detriment, as those activities serve no useful purpose and give occasion for those outside to criticize.

Meanwhile, St. Paul uses this occasion to remind us that we have individual obligations to take care of our aged and bereaved relatives, so that the Church can focus on those who are truly alone and have no one else to help care for them.

Collect: O Lord, as Thou didst preserve faithful Timothy to a steadfast confession of Thy Holy Word, even as he instructed those who would be set apart for ministry in Thy Church, we pray that Thou wouldst so bless Thy people in this generation with steadfast confessors; 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

## 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



There is a foreshadowing of this text in Numbers 11: “The Lord said to Moses: ‘Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel... I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you’” (Numbers 11:16–17). In the same way, the Christ says that laborers are needed for the harvest and, therefore, sends out seventy men—other than the Twelve—to help bear the burden of announcing the Gospel. These went ahead of Christ, to announce that He was coming. This is different than, but foreshadowed, the regular New Testament Ministry of Word and Sacraments. The seventy announced that Christ was coming; the minister announces that Christ is here, in Word and Sacrament.

St. Titus, who is among the first bishops, does not travel around, but remains in one place: Crete. St. Paul writes to him, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders [pastors] in every city” (Titus 1:5). The New Testament ministers call people to where the saints are gathered together around the pure Gospel and rightly administered Sacraments.

These three are different: the seventy elders with Moses, the seventy whom Christ sent, and the regular pastor, but all of them were called by the same Holy Spirit for the sake of the one Gospel of Christ.

Collect: O God, who didst adorn St. Titus with apostolic virtues, increase in us a spirit directed to a life of duty and justice which is the fruit of a faith which trusts in our Savior, Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

There is a plant called darnel or “false wheat”, which looks like wheat and grows in the same conditions, but is poisonous. The easiest way to tell them apart is the grain or fruit. The “tares” in the parable are possibly this plant, because it grows among the wheat and the servants do not notice it until “the grain had sprouted and produced a crop.”

This mixture of good and false wheat is an image of the visible Church on earth, in which wicked men are mixed among the saints. These wicked never become true members of Christ (as long as they do not repent), but us men cannot tell them apart, except by their fruits—hence our Lord says, “you will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16). It is a fact that, even to the Last Day, there will be false brethren hiding within the Church, but the Christ knows the true from the false.

Are you wheat or tare? No one can make himself a true Christian. But, just as wheat does not sow itself, so the true Christians are the ones born again in Baptism by Christ. If you are baptized and believing, it is because He has planted and knows you.

Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine 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 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 unbeliever's "claim to fame" can be that he saw Jesus, but he does not really *know* Jesus. He does not acknowledge Jesus as God, nor does he trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins. He treats Jesus like a celebrity, and all he wants is the experience of "getting up close".

The point is: those who trust in Jesus for their salvation are closer to Him than even those who saw Him in the flesh. The eyes of faith mean more than the eyes of the flesh. This is why He flags the patriarchs, "Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets": they may not have seen Him in the flesh, but they saw Him by faith, which is far better and comes with the promise of salvation. Hence He says of Abraham, elsewhere, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56).

To know Jesus by faith is better than to see Jesus with the flesh. Because to know Him is to be known by Him. When He returns, everyone will see Him in the flesh, but only those who know Him by faith will be acknowledged by Him.

Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine 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 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.

It took the prophet Jonah three days to walk the city of Nineveh. But, instead of a three-day long sermon, he preached a message summed up in one sentence: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). One sentence, and one hundred twenty thousand persons were saved.

The kingdom of heaven is spread by the Word, and that Word is the power of God. Though it appears small—even as a single sentence—yet it performs what, for man, is impossible. As a mustard seed grows to many times its size, and as leaven spreads to many times its mass, so the tiniest part of God’s Word is infinitely powerful, and causes both the creation of the world and the salvation of sinners.

At the Transfiguration, the man Jesus was revealed to be the Word of God made flesh. He is the One who taught Moses and Elijah the things they said. It is He of whom the Father says, “Hear Him!” (Matt. 17:5). All the power of God is contained in the Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, all who trust in Him are delivered from sin, death, and the power of the devil, against which the Word of God is infinitely more powerful.

Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine 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 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.

Observe in the first parable that the man, having found the treasure, does not simply take it. First he puts it back, then he sells all he has to buy the field. In other words, he is no thief; he wants the treasure to be his legitimately. The parable of the dragnet teaches that the wicked and the just are mixed together in this world. The just are the ones who pay the legitimate price, whereas the wicked want to be members of the kingdom by theft.

What is that “legitimate price”? We certainly cannot purchase our salvation, but the cost of entering the kingdom of heaven is faithful repentance. Repentance, taken in its entirety, is a sacrificing of all things for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ’s righteousness. Repentance leaves no room for “pet sins” or “side idols”; it is all or nothing. You are either a member of the kingdom legitimately in Christ, or you are a thief who wants to look Christian, but without repentance.

No man can purchase membership into the kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ set aside His heavenly glory and humbled Himself for a time, in the flesh, to purchase us for His kingdom. Those who repent are His pearl of great price.

Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine 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 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.

At the Diet of Worms, 1521, Martin Luther confessed, “My conscience is bound in the word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything; since it is insecure and dangerous to act against conscience” (Jacobs, *Martin Luther* (1898), p.192). There are those who idolize the human conscience and say, “whatever is against conscience is always sin”. This is dangerous, because the human conscience is fallen and sometimes must be taught the good from the bad. Many do not feel guilty when they should. This is why Luther confessed, “My conscience is bound in the word of God.” Luther was not a champion of the human conscience by itself; he was a champion of God’s Word, which guides and redeems the human conscience.

St. Paul says the same. In verse 12, he boasts in the testimony of his conscience, but then adds, “we are not writing any other things to you than what you read,” meaning what they have already received in Scripture. So, St. Paul does not champion his conscience apart from Scripture, but under it. At the Transfiguration, the Lord Jesus revealed Himself as the Word of God made flesh. He must teach your conscience. What He condemns is sin. What He forgives is forgiven.

Collect: O God, who in the glorious Transfiguration of Thine 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 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.

## **Clergy of the ELDoNA, affiliated congregations and missions**

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### **Rev. Michael Henson**

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