



“Meditate
upon these things;
give thyself
wholly to them;
that thy profiting
may appear unto all”

I Timothy 4:15

Journal
of
Theology

Church of the Lutheran Confession

VOLUME 11

DECEMBER 1971

NUMBER 5

A REVIEW OF THE BACKGROUND AND CONTENT OF THE BOOK OF CONCORD

If the Lord permits this world to stand for about another 8 years, then in the year 1980 we shall observe the 400th anniversary of the Christian Book of Concord. In anticipation of that event, the Wisconsin Pastoral Conference of the Church of the Lutheran Confession will be studying the historical background and the content of the various writings in the Book of Concord. This paper is the first in that contemplated series. In presenting this particular study to our readers, the undersigned wishes to state that in this article he considers himself not so much an author as a compiler. Others have written well on this period of history, and we have tried to bring their main points together in this paper. We now take up those parts of the Book of Concord which appeared first in chronological order, namely, the three universal Creeds.

A. The Apostolic Creed (Hymnal, p. 12)

Of the 3 great ecumenical Creeds of Christianity, the simplest and most widely accepted is the Apostolic Creed. We Lutherans in particular have esteemed this confession highly, since Luther in his Small Catechism has given us an explanation of the Three Articles which is matchless in form and content.

In discussing the background of this ancient Creed, let us begin by considering its name: the Apostolic Creed. Widely differing views have been held on this. Some hold that our Lord taught this summary word for word during the 40 days after His resurrection. Others hold that the 12 articles of the Creed were uttered on Pentecost by the newly inspired apostles. Thus Peter is made the author of one clause, James of another, John of a third, etc. Officially the Church of Rome still holds to this traditional account. But this legend must be rejected, since it lacks all Biblical support, as well as support from history.

Reliable scholars have demonstrated beyond doubt that the formulation of this Creed took place over a period of several centuries, and that it involved a number of important changes and additions, so that we may properly speak of the development of the Apostolic Creed. So in speaking about the background of the name, we mean no more than this, that the doctrinal substance of these articles is the same as that taught and confessed by the apostles of our Lord, and that it is therefore apostolic in content, but not in origin.

The earliest form of the Creed must have been based upon our Lord's parting words to His disciples in Matthew 28:19. Thereafter it isn't an easy thing to pin down the exact time and place where this Creed had its beginning, since it did develop over a period of time. Ireneus (around 170 A.D.) gives us several forms of the Creed as it existed in his day in different parts of the Christian world. The form of the Creed used in the Christian churches of Northern Africa (around 200 A.D.) is given by Tertullian in his writings. He mentions that the church had an established Rule of Faith (Creed) with which his readers as well as his opponents were familiar. From this we might assume that this Creed must have originated not later than the last quarter of the Second Century. Taking the writings of Ireneus into consideration, we come to the conclusion that the beginnings of our Apostolic Creed must have been somewhere between 150 and 175 A.D., and its origin was in Rome.

What was happening in Rome about the year 150, which might have had some bearing on a formulation of the Christian faith? At that time the church was seriously disturbed by Gnosticism, a form of religious speculation. The most brilliant and persuasive advocate of this cult was a certain Marcion. In general, they had 3 main claims: 1) the creation of the world was the work of an inferior God, and that the supreme God dwells on an infinitely remote level of existence. 2) The second point goes by the name of Docetism, and holds that the body with which the Savior was endowed was a phantom body. This would imply that He was

not truly born, but only assumed a phantom body as a sort of outer garb. It would also mean that His suffering and death were not actual facts. 3) They taught that the flesh of man is by nature inherently and unchangeably evil, simply because it is matter. Therefore it cannot share in the resurrection, but must be destroyed forever as something which is beyond salvation. They held that the resurrection was something of which the soul alone was capable, but which the flesh could not share. -- Marcion was an able organizer, and he formed his followers into a congregation which not only maintained itself in Rome for some 3 centuries, but also spread to other parts of the Roman Empire.

Some historians contend on the basis of this historical background that the Apostolic Creed in its earliest known version (2nd Century) was not primarily a credal statement, designed to set forth the great facts of Christian teachings, but that it is a polemical formula, written in answer to the heresies of Marcion. And the Creed does seem to touch on these errors of Marcion and the Gnostics: 1) that the work of creation was the work of an inferior God. The Apostolic Creed does speak of God "the Father Almighty." But it would take a stronger statement than this to provide an effective barrier against the Marcion error. 2) That Christ had only a phantom body. The Creed emphasizes the reality of Christ's birth, suffering and death. 3) That man's body cannot share in the resurrection. The Creed speaks clearly of the "resurrection of the body." But again we would have to say that these statements of the Creed would be a very mild way of rejecting such flagrant errors as those of Marcion and the Gnostics.

We incline to the view that even in its original form this Creed should be recognized as a great and yet simple statement of the Christian Gospel. It is either that, or it is a rather weak rebuttal of a dangerous form of error. We feel that it developed originally out of the Trinitarian Formula of Baptism into a simple confession of the Gospel truths.

In order to trace further the development of this Creed, we move along into the 4th Century. At that time a

tremendous movement was taking place, the Great Migration of the German tribal nations, a movement which was to lead to the Fall of the Roman Empire, at least in the west. Those are the years when Alaric and his Goths captured and plundered Rome, when Theodoric ruled the great part of Italy as King of the Goths, and when Vandals who had swept through Gaul and Spain now swept up into Italy from the shores of northern Africa, to rescue a despairing Roman empress, rescuing her indeed, but laying Rome waste a second time.

During all of this the Church of Rome suffered, but still succeeded in maintaining itself. They feared especially a heresy which the Goths and Vandals brought with them, the heresy of Arius, who denied the deity of the Son of God, speaking of Him as the foremost creature of God, but a creature nevertheless. This is the heresy that was condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325. Now the bishops of Rome feared that this false doctrine might gain a foothold in the Church of Rome itself. So the Roman Church introduced the Nicene Creed into the liturgy and used it for the instruction of catechumens, since it is an emphatic and specific rejection of Arianism. So matters stood for about 4 centuries, with the old Roman Symbol (Apostolic Creed) being gone and all but forgotten in Rome itself.

Now a strange thing was happening. As the different Germanic nations settled in their newly conquered lands, they began to forget their Arian heresy and came more and more under the influence of the prevailing catholicism of the established churches. By the end of the 6th Century the crisis was pretty well past. But Rome still continued its use of the Eastern, or Nicene, Creed, while elsewhere the Apostolic Creed still exercised great influence.

As time went on, some new expressions were added to the text of the old Roman Creed. A text of the year 450 adds the word "catholic" to the phrase "the holy church." Perhaps a century later the explanatory phrase was added: "The communion of saints." At the same time the word "conceived" was added to the article of the Incarnation,

as well as details of Christ's suffering and death. Two other phrases had been mentioned earlier and now appeared in the final version, namely, the one dealing with the descent into hell, and the other the beautiful closing reference to "the life everlasting." This then became the final and complete version of the Western Creed, as it was re-introduced in Rome around 750 A. D.

Thus the origin of this Creed is largely identified with the history of Rome. It is truly catholic, that is, universal, in its expressions of the simple truths of the Gospel. It was to this universal confession that Luther and his associates pledged their continued allegiance in the days of the Reformation, including it with the other Ecumenical Creeds as evidence that they had not departed from the original uncorrupted faith of Christ's Church. It is for that reason that we in our day should not only retain, but restudy this precious confessional heritage, defending it against all attacks from without, but guarding particularly against the inward danger of wasting this priceless treasure by our own neglect.

B. The Nicene Creed (Hymnal, p. 22)

An entirely different situation confronts us when we consider the Nicene and the Athanasian Creeds. The historical background was much different. The doctrinal controversies to which they refer are so plainly recognizable that they determine the outstanding features of these ancient symbols of the church.

It was a dramatic setting which led to the formulation of the Nicene Creed. The church had lived under the shadow of persecution for more than 2 centuries. Only a few years before, it had endured the cruelest and bloodiest ordeal of all, the persecution launched in the days of Emperor Diocletian. Now that same church found itself enjoying the warm glow of Imperial favor and protection. A young military leader, Constantine, had risen to sudden power in the west and, casting his lot with Christianity, in a brilliant succession of victories had gained control

over the Western part of the Roman Empire. After an uneasy truce of about 10 years he had also overthrown the Eastern Emperor, his brother-in-law Licinius, and now wielded undisputed authority. Almost overnight the church became the recipient of every kind of Imperial favor and support. -- But Constantine had one definite request. He needed a united Empire. Therefore he wanted a united church. He had heard that the church was divided on some fine point of doctrine. The First Ecumenical Council of the church, in Nicea in 325, was the result. It was called for the express purpose of settling those doctrinal controversies. Some 318 bishops and 1200 to 1500 priests and deacons came from Italy, Egypt, Asia, Asia Minor, Greece, Syria, Gaul, Spain, Africa, and Britain. When the Emperor appeared in the midst of this gathering, they welcomed him with extravagant praise. Then they addressed themselves to the business before them.

The church had long been deeply concerned about the Trinity, specifically whether the three Persons named in Scripture did not in some way contradict the oneness of God. Different solutions had previously been proposed, but had been rejected. One of these so-called "solutions" was called Dynamism, or "dynamic Monarchianism." According to this, Jesus Christ was simply a man in whom the power of God was particularly in evidence, and who was eventually received by adoption into the Sonship of God. The references to the Holy Spirit were simply looked at as particular manifestations of God's power. This false teaching could not stand before the light of John 1, for example, which speaks of the Word being made flesh and dwelling among us. Therefore Dynamism was rejected.

Then came Arius, a learned Presbyter of Alexandria. He spoke in the orthodox terminology of accepting without question the separate personal existence of the pre-incarnate Son of God, and applied to Him the attribute of Divinity. Nevertheless he continued to look for a rational explanation of the oneness of God. His final views constitute one of the most subtle and dangerous departures from Scriptural truth. Retaining the orthodox terminology

of his time, he nevertheless claimed that the Father alone was God in the full meaning of the word; that when the Son is spoken of as divine, this is to be understood in a relative sense, as indicating the image of the Creator that was in Him. Eventually Arius admitted that he thought of the "logos" (the Word) as a creation of God, God's foremost creature. When his attention was called to passages of Scripture speaking of Jesus as God's Son, he would answer by pointing to other passages where all believers are called children of God, where they are also spoken of as "begotten of God." I John 3:1; 5:1. The plausibility of these arguments did not save Arius when he was charged with heresy at the Synod of Alexandria in 321. He was duly removed from office and excommunicated. But it did gain him sympathizers, so that it was not long until he was looked upon as a martyr to the truth, a victim of the bigotry of the Alexandrians. It was this division of opinion that caused Constantine to call the Empire-wide council of bishops.

This Council of Nicea was not the harmonious gathering that one might imagine. Like most assemblies, it was composed of conservative, mediating, and radical groups. The last named were the followers of the heretic Arius. They submitted a Creed which was so contrary to Christian teachings that a tumult was caused, in the midst of which some bolder individuals obtained possession of the document and tore it to pieces. There were 18 signers of this Arian Creed, and 16 of these abandoned their leader. -- The mediating group, led by Eusebius the great church historian, presented a Creed which appeared to be orthodox enough if correctly understood. Even the Arians were ready to accept it. It was the young Athanasius, later to become the great church father, who insisted that there be no diplomatic language. Either Jesus Christ is true God or else He is not. Either He is begotten and not made, or else He is not. Either He is of one Substance with the Father, or He is not.

Recognizing that far more was at stake than merely some theoretical views concerning the nature of the pre-existent Christ, Athanasius eloquently argued that our

entire assurance of salvation is jeopardized if it rests in the hands of a Redeemer who is not true God. Insisting that Scripture shows the Son to be of the same nature as the Father, he exposed the errors of Arius with such skill that the Council not only condemned the latter's heresy, excommunicating him and two diehard followers, but also expressed itself in a confession that sets forth the full divine majesty and glory of the Son of God, and does this in close connection with a very moving description of His redemptive work. A key phrase was: "Being of one substance (homo-ousios) with the Father."

By the grace of God, the decision of Nicea was a decision for the true teachings of God's Word, and against the rationalizing ideas of men. As such we value it highly. -- In the course of time, the original wording of this Creed was enlarged to cover additional points, in particular concerning the Holy Ghost. A certain Macedonius questioned the full divinity of the Holy Ghost, even as Arius had denied the divinity of Christ. A second Council became necessary. Meeting at Constantinople in 381, this Council took a stand against the newest heresy and enlarged the article concerning the Holy Ghost. The words "proceedeth from the Father and the Son" (filioque) were strongly opposed by the Eastern Church and became one of the main issues when the Great Schism of 1054 occurred. While the Eastern Church may have had a just argument in objecting to changes being made in an accepted article of confession without previous mutual consultation and full consideration by the entire church, it was nevertheless wrong in objecting to the doctrine itself, which is well substantiated in Scripture.

C. The Athanasian Creed (Hymnal, p. 53)

As the name indicates, tradition claims Athanasius as the author of this Creed. Yet almost the only thing known positively about the authorship of this creed is that it was not Athanasius who wrote it. For one thing, this is a Latin Creed, of the Western Church. Although Athanasius did spend years of exile in the West, yet he seems never to

have become sufficiently familiar with Latin to have used it in his writings. All his known works are in Greek. Then too, the controversies which are treated in the second part of this Creed, concerning the relation of the divine and human natures of Christ, did not develop until several decades after this "Father of Orthodoxy" had entered into his rest. Scholars agree that the true author is to be sought in the Western Church.

It is possible to be a little more definite as to the time when this Creed was written. It seems quite certain that it could not have been written much later than about the year 550. On the other hand, it can hardly have originated much before 451 since it presupposes the doctrinal controversies which were settled at that time. This Creed devotes considerable attention to a discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, which did not stand in the foreground at the Council of Chalcedon (451 A. D.).

It isn't hard to find a reason why this doctrine was discussed at this particular time and place. The West was discovering that though Arius was dead and his heresy outlawed in the Empire, it was still possible for Arianism to conquer. The Germanic tribes were on the move. With them came the danger that the heresy that had been repulsed at the Church Councils might still conquer via the battle fields. So it was that the men who faced these perils, including Augustine in his besieged city of Hippo, should preach sermons and write treatises on the Trinity, for the purpose of strengthening their people in the true doctrine. And it was only natural that someone finally put this doctrinal material into solemn credal form, using words of different men who had spoken on the subject.

The main difference between the Nicene Creed and the Trinitarian part of the Athanasian Creed is one of emphasis. The Nicene Creed emphasizes the full deity of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, implying rather than explaining the oneness of God. The Athanasian Creed leaves nothing to be assumed, but brings in the inviolate Oneness as a sort of triumphant refrain. New issues don't come into consideration until in the second part.

As already noted, these later controversies dealt with the question of the person and the natures of Christ. That meant that there was no longer any disagreement as to the full divinity of the pre-existent Christ. -- 1) But what happened when He became man? Did the Divine Being simply take the place of the soul which dwells in the normal human body? If so, what becomes of the true humanity of our Redeemer, which makes him like unto us in all things, except sin? 2) Or did the Incarnation mean that the heavenly Christ simply associated Himself with a natural human being who then became the earthly Christ, so that there are 2 separate persons, though perfectly joined together in the one great purpose and work of the Redemption? 3) Or does the Incarnation mean this, that out of the union of the divine with the human there resulted a Being which was indeed more than man, but less than God, an intermediate, third kind of being? If so, what hope is there in a Savior who is neither true God nor true man?

The first of these views had been taught by Apollinaris of Laodicea. Athanasius still had a hand in exposing that error. -- The second theory (of the 2 Christs who are joined in their purpose and work) was advocated by Nestorius and his followers. It is difficult to cope with, since it did emphasize a certain truth by insisting on the true humanity of our Lord. And yet it created a divided Christ, and deprived the Savior's sacrifice of the very element that gave it its value, namely, that God's Son was bearing our sins. This error was exposed and condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. -- This made for additional problems in exposing the third error, the doctrine of the single, but intermediate and hybrid nature of the Savior (which naturally came to be called Monophysitism). Yet it was soon recognized that this doctrine violated the true quality of both the humanity and the divinity of the Redeemer, and this error was exposed at Chalcedon in 451 A.D.

Because each of these departures from the true teachings of Scripture touched upon the article of our redemption, undermining the believer's assurance of salvation, it certainly warranted the calling of councils, as

well as inclusion in the formal Creeds of the church. We have every reason to be grateful for the decisions of Chalcedon. They are sharp, clear, and consistent with Biblical truth. The Redeemer is described as true God and also true man, these two natures perfectly joined together in One undivided Person. We find many similarities between that creed of Chalcedon and the Athanasian Creed, so very likely the one was the basis for the other.

The words of the Athanasian Creed are plainly the terminology of controversy and strife. The anathemas remind us of this. How different all of this is from the simple confessing of Gospel truths in the Apostolic Creed. Surely we have much reason to be grateful for the preservation of the truths presented to us in these 3 universal Creeds.

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The JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY is published at Eau Claire, Wisconsin, by authorization of the Church of the Lutheran Confession.

Subscriptions: \$3.00 per year, \$5.50 for 2 years, payable in advance.

Issues are dated: March, May, July, October, December.

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A STUDY OF MISHPAT

Perhaps the reader will indulge the writer for a few sentences as he explains why the Hebrew word mishpat has held special interest for him. The first reason has to do with the common translation of this word in the King James Version. It is rendered almost uniformly "judgment," which suggests a courtroom scene with judge and defendant, accusation and guilt, verdict and sentence. This legalistic connotation has been attached to the word in the writer's mind for many years, with the result that he missed much of the Gospel proclamation in the prophetic books of the Old Testament.

The second reason for his interest lies in the way that Luther translated the 'asoth mishpat of Micah 6:8. This is the well-known verse which in the KJV reads: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Luther comes up with a perfectly remarkable "Gottes Wort halten" for the two Hebrew words, reminding a person of the Lord's declaration: "If a man love me, he will keep my words." (John 14:23) Surely the two translations, "to do justly" and "to keep God's Word," at least according to their common understanding, differ significantly in their scope and in their application to a Christian's life. The writer was attracted to Luther's "Gottes Wort halten," but wondered whether Luther might have read something into the Hebrew which was not there. The only way to find this out seemed to be a study of the word mishpat as it was used by the prophets of Judah, particularly Micah and his great contemporary, Isaiah.

These reasons provided the motivation for the brief study which follows. Mishpat is used a total of 47 times by the two prophets, in a variety of contexts. As suggested before, it is generally translated "judgment" in the KJV -- 40 times to be exact. Other renderings in this version include "adversary" (ba'al mishpat), "discretion," "do justly" ('asoth mishpat), "ordinance," and "right."

Mishpat and Righteousness

The first significant observation concerning the usage of mishpat in Isaiah and Micah is that in the majority of instances it occurs in close connection with the word "righteousness." Compare the following: "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness." (Is. 1:27) "... he (the LORD) looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." (Is. 5:7) "But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness." (Is. 5:16) "Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice (righteousness) overtake us." (Is. 59:9) "I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness." (Mic. 7:9) And many other similar examples could be given!

In studying mishpat we must, therefore, inquire into the meaning of "righteousness." As we suggested in a previous issue of this journal, this term, when used of God, refers to the saving will and activity of the Lord in creating a people for Himself on earth. "Righteousness," then, is above all a salvation word, which fact would lead us to expect that mishpat too may have a significance that is closely associated with the Gospel -- in spite of its common translation, "judgment."

But how might "righteousness" and mishpat be related? Mishpat is, of course, derived from the root sh-ph-t, which has the significance "to judge," particularly to render a verdict which is in conformity with an accepted standard of right. If the "righteousness" of God is His active will of salvation, we might well expect that His mishpat would be the specific decisions and actions which He has revealed to mankind in carrying out this saving will.

But both "righteousness" and mishpat are used also of men. A "righteous" man is one in whom the "righteousness" of God has carried out its saving purpose -- he is a believer. When such a man is said to exercise mishpat,

might it not mean that whatever he now decides or does is in conformity with God's revealed will? But let us look into Isaiah and Micah, to see if our first impressions concerning mishpat can be defended.

Mishpat and Salvation

In the majority of instances, mishpat is used in contexts which speak of the saving activity of the Lord God. Consider first Isaiah 1:27: "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness." Clearly this "judgment" is in no way punitive, for it is said to be the basis for the redemption of God's people. These people are to be delivered from the guilt and power of sin through this marvelous judgment of God. But what is this judgment? The larger context of Isaiah surely gives us an answer. In Isaiah 53, for example, we learn of the Lord's decision to lay the collected store of mankind's sin upon His Servant, the promised Savior, and then let this Servant suffer the punishment for all that sin. Listen to this "judgment": "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all ... He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken ... Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." (53:6, 8, 10f.) The mishpat through which Zion is redeemed is surely that plan of salvation, devised in eternity, whereby "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; ... For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. 5:19, 21)

In 4:2-4 we read: "In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the

earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning." The elect remnant of Zion will be cleansed from the filthiness and blood-guiltiness of all its sin. This salvation will be accomplished by the Branch of the Lord, the Messiah, and it will be brought to men by the Spirit of God. How appropriate it is that the Holy Spirit is referred to as the "Spirit of mishpat." For He brings men to salvation through the proclamation of the Lord's saving activity!

We next come to the beautiful prophecy of the Child of Bethlehem: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: . . . Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice (righteousness) from henceforth even for ever." 9:6f. It is the New Testament kingdom of Christ that is here foretold. And this kingdom will be established with mishpat and with righteousness. Can there be any doubt that mishpat is here synonymous with "the gospel of the kingdom," of which Christ Himself speaks? (Matthew 24:14) For it is through these "good tidings of great joy" that the kingdom of the Lord is established among men.

Other verses in Isaiah likewise speak of mishpat as the means whereby the promised Savior will deliver poor sinners from death and destruction. In 16:5, the gentiles of Moab are pointed to Him as their only hope for rescue from the wrath of God: "And in mercy shall the throne be established: And he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness." In 42:1-4, we have a prophecy which in the New Testament is applied directly to Christ: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth

judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." Once again mishpat is synonymous with "Gospel," by which the Savior effectively brings salvation to the contrite ones in all the nations of the world.

We find an interesting use of mishpat in Isaiah 49:4 and 50:8. In the former passage, the suffering Servant of the Lord speaks from the depths of His humiliation, oppressed with sorrow and the fear of death in the midst of His atoning work, and yet confident that His mishpat is safely in the Lord's hands: "Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God." In the latter passage, the Servant speaks a defiant challenge to His adversary (ba'al mishpat), again confident that the Lord will give Him victory: "He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me." In both these verses, mishpat takes on the meaning of "cause." The work of redemption has been entrusted to Him as His office and calling, and even though all the hosts of evil are arrayed against Him, yet His cause shall and must prevail!

If the foregoing passages are not enough to establish the fact that mishpat must be counted among the salvation words of the Old Testament, we could suggest still more. In Isaiah 26:8-9, those who trust in the Lord for salvation sing this praise of His judgments: "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Listen now to 30:18, which associates the grace and mercy of the Lord with His mishpat: "And

therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him." In 32:15f. we learn that the establishment of mishpat in the earth is the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: "Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field." We believe that also the following passages from Isaiah, studied in their context, impart to mishpat the concept of deliverance and salvation: 33:2-5; 51:4f.; 58:2 (a description of the hypocrisy of the people of Jacob, with mishpat translated as "ordinance" and "ordinances"); 59:8-15 (a lament that salvation remains so far from the people); and 61:8. Finally, we quote a verse from Micah, in which the penitent people of God look to the LORD for deliverance: "I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness." (7:9)

How beautiful, then, this word mishpat should be in the ears of every contrite sinner. For it declares to the sinner the grace and mercy of the Triune God, as He plans and then carries out the work of salvation. We see the Father, imputing the sins of the world to His Son. We see the Son, bringing about the redemption of the world and establishing His kingdom through the Gospel. And we see the Holy Spirit, working in the hearts of men, bringing about their conversion and sanctification. Henceforth when this writer sees the word "judgment" in the prophets of the Old Testament, he will no longer think first of sin and condemnation, but rather of righteousness and salvation!

Mishpat as Punitive Judgment

Yet it must be recognized that mishpat is used also of God's punitive judgment upon the unbelief and wickedness

of men. In 3:14 Isaiah declares that the Lord will bring punishment upon the leaders of Jerusalem-Judah, because they have misled the people and destroyed His vineyard: "The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses." The following verses also are in contexts which speak of punishment: "But the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness." (5:16) "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." (28:17) "For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment." (34:5)

There is actually no real contradiction between these two uses of mishpat, namely, for salvation and for punishment. For the deliverance of God's remnant must often include the destruction of the wicked leaders and false prophets that have been leading the people astray, or of the heathen nations which have determined to destroy the people. Through such mishpat a separation is made between the unrighteous and the righteous, and the righteous are thereby delivered.

In two other verses in Isaiah mishpat again takes on the thought of punitive judgment. 53:8 speaks of the judicial violence to which the Servant of the Lord was subjected during His trial: "He was taken from prison and from judgment." And in 54:17 the redeemed of Zion are assured that they shall be victorious over all those who bring attacks against them: "... every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn."

Mishpat and Men

In the foregoing paragraphs we have considered mishpat as a manifestation of God's saving activity in this world. The word, however, is used also of men. It is God's desire that those whom He has saved now serve Him

in "righteousness" and "judgment." In making them His own, He has given them a new heart and a new mind, so that their will now conforms to His will. Thus they are able to serve Him in "righteousness." And because of this righteousness which has been created in them (in the sense of Ephesians 4:24), they strive after this, that all their desires, thoughts, words, and deeds be determined in accordance with the Lord's revealed will. Thus they are able to serve Him also in "judgment."

Let us look now at some of the passages in which mishpat is used of men. In Isaiah 1:16 the convicted inhabitants of Judah-Jerusalem were commanded to put off sin. In the verse that follows they are exhorted to "seek judgment," to strive after the divine norm of right in their dealings with their fellowmen. In 28:5-6 (which we take as Messianic in view of 4:2), the promised Savior is said to serve for a "spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment." Even so, in Christ and His Word the believer is able to test all things and decide them aright. In 32:1 we have a picture of the glorious kingdom of the Messiah, in which the "princes shall rule in judgment," namely, according to the revealed will of the divine King who rules over them. In 56:1 the penitent of the Lord are exhorted: "Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice (righteousness): for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed." The wonderful message of salvation should prompt them to walk according to the will of their God, bringing forth "fruits meet for repentance." (Matthew 3:8)

The exercising of mishpat is seen in these verses to be a fruit of faith in the lives of those who have been saved. Where such faith is lacking, mishpat is no longer present among them. Isaiah laments that Jerusalem is no longer "full of judgment." (1:21) The Lord "looked for judgment" in Judah, but found only oppression. (5:7) Likewise Micah upbraids the leaders of the people for failing to know judgment." (3:1) More than that, they "abhor judgment, and pervert all equity," turning away from the divine norm of God's Law, and making crooked everything that should have

been kept straight. (3:9)

Several paragraphs above we found the word mishpat used for the "cause" of the divinely called Servant of the Lord. We find the same word used for the "cause" or "right" of God's people, which He in His grace and mercy is eager to uphold and defend. In Isaiah 10:2, the wicked tyrants are condemned by God, in that they "take away the right from the poor of (God's) people." In 32:7, the prophet comments on the practices of the fraudulent, as he "deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor with lying words, even when the needy speaketh right," even when the needy appeals to the standard of right set up by God in His Word. In 40:27, Isaiah tells the true Jacob and Israel, now suffering evil days, that they need not think that the Lord has closed His eyes to their plight and overlooked their cause: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?"

Miscellaneous Uses of Mishpat

There remain a few uses of mishpat in Isaiah and Micah which do not fit too well in the above categories. In Isaiah 28:26, mishpat is used of divine instruction imparted to the "plowman": "For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him." God is said to instruct this farmer "to mishpat," namely, according to the right rules of agriculture.

In 40:14, the prophet asks this question concerning the Lord God: "Who taught him in the path of judgment?" No one, of course, for He is the source of all mishpat! And in 41:1, the Lord offers this majestic challenge to the rebellious leaders of the gentile world: "Let us come near to judgment." Before this unnamed tribunal, a just and proper sentence will be passed upon their respective causes.

In Micah 3:8, the prophet says of himself: "But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." Because Micah was filled with the

power of utterance by the Holy Spirit, he was therefore able to declare "judgment" unto the erring people. Here mishpat is clearly the Word of God, as it was revealed by the Holy Spirit to the prophet.

A Conclusion

If we were now asked to point to a single concept which especially attaches itself to mishpat in the books of Isaiah and Micah, we would probably suggest "the revealed Word of God." For we have seen that the word is repeatedly synonymous with "Gospel," the revelation of God's plan of salvation for a world of sinners. We have seen also that in several instances it is associated with the Law, as it threatens punishment upon those who dare to place themselves in opposition to the saving work of God. And we have seen it equated with the revealed standard of right according to which God would have His people walk.

We must, then, conclude that Luther's translation of 'asoth mishpat in Micah 6:8 is a most excellent one -- "Gottes Wort halten." And this opinion is shared also by Dr. Theo. Laetsch in his commentary on this phrase: "'Do justly,' literally, establish the norm of justice and judgment, not a human norm, but the unalterable norm of the Lord. His norm of the Law, which demands perfect righteousness, and His norm of the Gospel, which gives to man the perfect righteousness procured by Christ and made man's own through faith in Christ. This latter norm does not annul the former, but establishes it (Rom. 3:31), by engendering and nourishing in man that love toward God and man demanded by the Law. The establishment of God's Gospel is the chief duty of the Church."

Let the mishpat of our God, then, be the object of our study and meditation all the days of our life, treasuring it for what it is -- the precious Word of our Savior God. For as the Lord Christ promises: "Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28)

C. Kuehne

SERMON STUDIES
FOR THE ADVENT SEASON

I.

THE TEXT: Isaiah 62:10-12.

BEHOLD, THY SALVATION COMETH!

This is the season of preparation for Christmas. As a matter of fact, as far as places of business are concerned, this preparation has been going on for some time. We had not yet reached Thanksgiving Day when the window displays in the stores and decorations hanging from the street lights were already turning into their reds and greens. People are looking at Christmas trees and are starting to investigate the condition of their strings of lights and other ornaments. The newspaper is consulted daily to see how many shopping days are left.

One cannot help wondering whether we are equally concerned about the preparation of our hearts! After all, what we have already mentioned applies to the outward observance and preparation. We know, for example, that many store owners cannot help being greatly concerned about this particular season for the sake of the financial gain he hopes to make. Many merchants depend upon people's Christmas spending to bring them up from lack of profit during other seasons. They could not survive without

"Sermon Studies For The Advent Season" are here presented even though this copy of the Journal will not reach our readers until the Advent Season is over. We hope that this will not deter our readers from giving them their full attention since the material here presented is timely and useful for meditation regardless of the season of the Church Year. In fact with the Advent Season over it may be an appropriate review of the messages that have already been delivered. Editor.

adequate preparation for Christmas.

What about the preparation of the heart, then? Is it equally a matter of survival? It is surely to be hoped and expected that for Christian people this is also a time for contemplation of the great event that the Christmas holiday commemorates. The very word "holiday" (meaning, as it does, "holy day") should lead us to dwell more on the spiritual side of Christmas. And let this not be mere outward piety. Whether or not we spell the word Christmas with all its letters, or abbreviate it with an "X" will make little difference, if the Christian heart does not remember Christ. Let it be a matter of inner conviction!

The birthday of Christ was celebrated long before the Babe was born in Bethlehem; that is, it was not done by a special observance of a certain day, but with a longing spirit of waiting for Him to come. The people of the Old Testament received prophecies from those who were their spokesmen from the Lord, to keep the coming One ever before their eyes. In the performance of this task, perhaps no prophet did more than the prophet Isaiah. Our text presents one of his prophecies of the Messiah's coming.

1.

How necessary the words of Isaiah were to the children of Israel! At the time that Isaiah wrote these Advent words, the Israelites were on the very edge of a great national calamity. Their entire land was soon to be over-run by invading hordes of Assyrian soldiers from the north. The period of desolation which would then begin would not cease for many years. Although they would be partially spared from the Assyrian conquest, shortly after that the great Babylonian Empire would arise to crush them and take them all away into the Babylonian captivity. Even though their present King, Hezekiah, tried to serve the Lord, God would still suffer them to enter these terrible times.

It was their past that had brought this about. How

many times had these wicked people not departed from the ways of God? Time and again God's prophets had brought them the truth, and they had rejected it along with the prophets. Even their kings, for the most part, had fostered false worship. Had the Israelites heeded the prophets and repented of their sins, they would have been spared. But this they refused to do, until it was too late for them to escape the Assyrians and Babylonians.

In their captivity they would begin to see this and understand that it had all been their own fault. Then they would mourn for their lost Zion, Jerusalem. Then they would hang their harps in sorrow, not responding to the jeering cries of their captors, mocking them and telling them to sing the songs of Zion. Then they would long to return to the ways of the Lord.

Before this all began, Isaiah, blessed with the gift of prophetic utterance, spoke concerning this dread period of history to the people of his time. He told them of the coming desolation. But he also told them, in the words of the text, of the gracious love of God, Who would, after their repentance in Babylon, again lead them back to Jerusalem. And so, speaking of this glorious day in the future, Isaiah urged the people to "go through the gates; prepare the way; cast up a highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people!" This is how THE WAY IS PREPARED for the glorious time of their return. The gates of Babylon shall be thrown open, so that they might go through them in freedom. The long road from Babylon to Jerusalem shall be prepared; causeways shall be made and cast up through wet and miry places, and the stones to aid in this work of highway construction shall be gathered up. Standards, or banners, shall be set up in convenient gathering places for their direction and encouragement. Thus Isaiah prepared the people for the day of their deliverance from their impending doom at the hands of their enemies.

But the truly prophetic nature of Isaiah's words goes beyond the future deliverance of Israel from the Babylonian captivity. His words have meaning "unto the end of the world." For, as the way was prepared for this deliver-

ance, so was the way prepared for the deliverance from sin which Christ's coming into the world accomplished. John the Baptist came as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." This is the Advent which concerns us most, as well as the Advent of Christ into our hearts. Here, too, the way is prepared by that work of getting ready, namely by repentance over our sins, which St. Paul described to the Ephesians as the "preparation of the Gospel of peace." There is, also, the last Advent of Christ to consider, when He shall return in triumph, to judge the world on the last day. Is the highway ready for that return? Are the gates open? Are the banners flying, showing the world where to stand in waiting for Christ?

2.

As we consider Isaiah's prophecy, a sad realization begins to dawn on us; There are going to be many, at the time of fulfillment, who are not going to be aware of the fact that they are in captivity, nor do they want to leave their particular Babylon! For their benefit, THE PROCLAMATION IS MADE: "Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy Salvation cometh!" Isaiah joyfully tells the people that liberty is theirs again; they may return to the beloved city of Jerusalem and restore it to its former greatness. For their comfort and consolation, the Israelites are to know that their Salvation, the Lord Himself, shall do this great thing for them. The work and reward which He will bring for them will be so great that all who behold it will be filled with awe and admiration. And as a result of this great work of the Lord, they themselves shall be called the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord. That work will make them a holy people, cured by their repentant shame and looking for His grace. The reward He will bring them is the knowledge that they have been redeemed, as slaves bought back from captivity, as only God could redeem them, to be henceforth His willing servants.

More joy shall be theirs. Upon this great deliverance, Jerusalem shall be called "Sought out, a city not forsaken." Though, for many years, during the captivity of her citizens, she has been desolate, without the throngs of worshippers and travelers and traders that had formerly so crowded her streets, now once more Jerusalem will regain her prosperity and importance. She will again be called a holy city and will be sought out by many. Thus does Isaiah's prophecy bring hope to those who were about to enter a terrible tribulation.

Since, moreover, this is a proclamation to be made unto the end of the world, Isaiah, through divinely inspired prophetic utterance, is speaking of a greater Salvation and of a greater Jerusalem. His prophecy speaks of Christ, Who is not only the Savior, but the Salvation of the world, for the happiness of believers is not only from Him, but completely wrapped up in Him! He has the work and the reward in His hands. As the Israelites were released from the Babylonian captivity solely by God's grace, without their having done a single thing to achieve it, so the work of Christ has redeemed all sinners from the captivity of Satan. And the reward that He brings is not only freedom from sin, but it is eternal life.

Therefore, as the Israelites were to be called a holy people, the redeemed of the Lord, so shall the sheep of the flock of Christ be called holy people, or saints, as St. Paul speaks of them. They, too, have been delivered so as to serve the Lord Christ with all willingness and singleness of heart. And, finally, they too shall return to Jerusalem, the Jerusalem that is above -- the glorious city of heaven, in which there are many mansions prepared for them.

May Isaiah's prophetic words ring and resound through all Christian hearts during the blessed season of preparation for the Advent of our Bethlehem King. We are truly celebrating the great liberation day on which, the way having been prepared, the gates of captivity were opened wide, and the Salvation of the Lord was proclaimed!

II.

THE TEXT: Haggai 2:1-9.

THE GLORY OF THE SECOND TEMPLE.

1.

The prophet Haggai lived and performed his ministry during the days after the people of Israel returned from the Babylonian captivity. One of the first tasks that both the civil leader, Zerubbabel, and the religious leader, Joshua, set the people to perform was the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Filled with longing to see their house of worship restored to its former glory, as it had been when Solomon had built it, the people set about this task with great eagerness. However, it was not easy. They were but the remnant, the residue, of the people of Israel. The great wealth which had been at Solomon's disposal was not to be found among them. And so the work proceeded slowly, and it was apparent from the start that they would not be able to use the costly and rare materials with which the first temple had been constructed.

There were other things that hindered the work. The people of nearby Samaria, those who had remained behind during the period of captivity and had now become an intermingled race, sought to come and help in the temple-building. They wanted to contribute to the project, but they did this with the hope that then they, too, might share in the use of the temple. Zerubbabel and Joshua refused their help, and rightly so, for the building of a house of worship is the gift of love of a congregation of believing people, without contributions either solicited from outsiders (Consider the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod's recent discussions concerning profit-making business ventures conducted by churches or church-related groups. Lutheran Witness Reporter, November 14, 1971) or given for the same reasons as those of the Samaritans. But as a consequence the Samaritans became bitter against the Jews

and began to cause disturbances from without to hinder the work.

The people began to feel discouraged in the face of all this. Their discouragement was increased still more, when some of the oldest men, who had seen the glory and splendor of Solomon's temple, destroyed seventy years earlier, began to compare the beauty of that first temple with the simplicity and ordinariness of the one they were engaged in building. One of these old men could perhaps remember the gold with which Solomon's temple had been overlaid; one could remember the precious stones with which it had been garnished; another could describe the magnificence of its pillars; still another the beautiful porches! All this weakened the hands of the builders and robbed them of their enthusiasm.

As the people felt this discouragement, the prophet Haggai came to them with the Word of the Lord, to encourage them. Granted that the present building could not be favorably compared with the first temple in its external beauty! Nevertheless, be strong and work! Why? "I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts. According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not!" Here is the true glory of the second temple, not in its outward appearance, but **IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD**. When God is truly present with us, as the Lord of hosts, this is enough to silence all our fears, as it was sufficient to give the Israelites great encouragement in their difficult and arduous task. Although the Jews had hosts of enemies against them, they had the Lord of hosts with them. God reminded the people that His Word is sure and that He will keep and preserve that covenant which He made with them as He led them out of the Egyptian captivity long ago. He let them know that He was dwelling among them by His Spirit. Even though they had so often grieved the Spirit, He was not taking His gifts away from them. It was the Spirit of God which had stirred up their hearts to return from Babylon and now also to rebuild the temple. Yes, here was truly great reason to be joyful in their work, for although they were not

able to build an outwardly beautiful temple by comparison, theirs was none-the-less very glorious, because God was with them.

2.

Haggai gives the people still more reason to feel encouraged. He gives them a second cause for rejoicing when he tells them that **THE TEMPLE'S GREATEST GLORY IS IN THE COMING OF THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS.** He speaks to them of God's shaking the heavens and the earth in "a little while." And when the "desire of all nations shall come," God will fill this house with glory, yes, with more glory than the former temple.

In giving this prophetic utterance, Haggai was divinely inspired to see that there was to be one more stage of history before the fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecies would take place. And so the people must have patience and hope, for only a little while remained. When the great day would come, God would make its appearance manifest. There would be tempestuous occurrences. In the same way that God shook the heavens and earth at Mount Sinai in the giving of the Law, as He shook the sea to make lanes through it for the safe passage of the children of Israel, as He shook the very rocks to bring forth life-giving water to His people -- in like manner at the fulfillment of the prophecies He would cause a great and glorious star to shine in the heavens; He would shake the earth at Christ's death on the cross.

Yes, with a shaking of the nations, the throwing down of idols, and the break-down of false hopes, the Messiah shall come, Haggai said, as the Desire of all Nations.* Here are all true hopes of salvation fulfilled,

* We are aware of the interpretations of this passage which deny its Messianic nature, as discussed thoroughly in the Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary. However, we do not see in them sufficient reason to doubt the validity of the several pericopes which place this text in the Advent season.

only in Christ. And in His coming shall the second temple find its greatest glory, for the Lord filled it with glory, to the degree that it will be far more glorious than Solomon's temple. They need not be concerned that it does not have the gold or silver with which the former temple was embellished. For, after all, all the silver and gold, and all things of the earth, already belong to their Creator. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." When gold or silver are used to build a temple, that does not add to His possession; it was already His. When David brought sums of money to the service of God, he had to acknowledge: "It is all thine own; and of Thine own, Lord, have we given Thee."

The glorious adornment of the second temple is the coming of Christ, the One whom all nations need and desire. There, in that temple would the Baby Jesus be brought for His presentation, where He would be recognized by Simeon and Anna. There He would discuss the Scriptures with the venerable and learned theologians, amazing them with His understanding. There He would preach and perform miracles. And after His death, resurrection and ascension, there His disciples would continue to preach His Word daily. -- There was the temple's greatest glory, and it was only because the Jews rejected this great glory among them that the temple was finally destroyed, as a sign of the curse they called down upon themselves and their children.

Christ is the glory of the temple, and also of the temples of our hearts, for with His coming comes peace. Haggai faithfully delivered God's promise: "And in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." As we can readily understand, when we realize that the Jews had such great earthly trouble even (especially?) during Christ's presence in their midst in the flesh, this peace is not an earthly, but a spiritual peace. Truly, He is the very Prince of peace.

III.

THE TEXT: Malachi 4:1-6.

THE LAST WORD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

As we meditate on the closing words of the last book of the Old Testament, the words of the prophet Malachi, we see how marvelously they lead us directly into the New Testament, and how similar the times of Malachi were to the times of today.

1.

Malachi speaks first of A WARNING OF THE JUDGMENT to come. How terrible these words are; they are meant to create fear in the very marrow of the bones of those who hear them. They are the words of a righteous God, Who seeks by this terrible threat of a day to come to bring the world to its knees in humble repentance. But to what day do these words refer?

They refer, first, to the day of Christ's birth in the humble manger in Bethlehem. Yes, difficult as it is for us to think of that day in this way, it was a day of fiery indignation. It was also prophesied in that way in the 21st Psalm: "Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them." Do we lack understanding of these terrible words? Do we feel that they are out of place in a preparation for Christmas? Let us look at the background.

Malachi was the last of a long line of prophets. His words are, therefore, a repetition of words which had been spoken many times before. The people of Israel had simply refused, because of the hardness of their hearts, to hear the word of the Lord as delivered to them by His prophets. This they did, even in the days of Malachi, after they had been at one time brought to repentance in Babylon and had

been permitted to return home out of captivity. Surely, one would have thought that after that great deliverance they would live in a grateful spirit of true worship. But what actually happened? Although they continued in the form of true worship, it was really only a dead, empty husk. Although they maintained the forms of worship in the temple, and continued to bring offerings to the altar, their worship was not of the heart and their offerings were not genuine. Oh, how Malachi pleaded with them to stop their abuses. How he chided them for bringing offerings which consisted only of that which they themselves could not use or did not want. How he admonished them to worship God from the heart daily by leading God-pleasing lives in everything they did, not simply coming to the temple on the Sabbath out of habit and then returning home to lead lives far different from that which the Lord desired. However, in their proud hearts they began also to change their ideals and concepts of the Messiah, looking for an earthly king, rather than a Savior from sin.

So, finally Malachi had to bring them a strong warning, telling them that when the Messiah came He would bring a judgment for them, rather than a blessing, and in that judgment they would be the fuel of a blazing fire. For in Malachi's words we learn that the fuel of that fire will be those who are proud -- those who in the stubbornness of their hearts refuse to hear and heed the warning, those who will not submit to the will of God, those who do not desire a Savior. The fuel will also be those who do wickedly, who persist in sin, who stubbornly remain in contempt of God. They shall be stubble that will blaze in a fearful fire.

Yes, for all the proud and wicked, Christ's coming is a terrible thing, for it defeats their Master, Satan, and will leave them neither root nor branch. These words were truly fulfilled when Christ spoke terror and condemnation to the proud Pharisees and others who did wickedly. Having rejected the Babe of Bethlehem, the Jews had their beloved city of Jerusalem destroyed. As a nation they lost their inheritance and had no root or branch left to their posterity.

Let us understand that this is the righteousness of

God. Let us not now point the finger of scorn at the Jewish nation, but let us look to ourselves, and see whether we have not become victims of a dead religion in our own lives, whether we in our offerings have not brought only that which we do not want or need, whether our daily lives are not the same as they seem to be on our days of worship. Let us use Malachi's warning to lead us also to repentance, and then may we properly prepare our hearts to welcome the Christ-child!

2.

For, after delivering this strong warning, Malachi does not omit bringing a PROMISE OF THE GIFT OF SALVATION. Although Christ's birth shall be as a consuming fire for the proud and wicked, Malachi also promises that the Sun of righteousness will arise "with healing in his wings." The Word of God does not go out in vain, but will always accomplish that whereto it is sent. And so there were those who, by the grace of God, would heed Malachi's words and would humbly repent, and were thus prepared for the healing power of Christ's Advent. For them, as it was for the shepherds of Bethlehem's hills, that day would be a bright and shining day of triumph, and not of despair. When the hearts of the proud and wicked fail for fear, they will lift up their heads with joy, for their redemption draweth nigh. Christ, "the Light of the World," is the Sun that comes upon the dawning of a new day, the Sun of righteousness.

For it is His righteousness that has healing power. He is not merely a good example, a worthy leader; He is himself the gift of His RIGHTEOUSNESS that covers the sin of the world and makes the believer now acceptable before God. Those who by the grace of God have lost all hope of salvation through their own efforts, who have seen the utter futility of waiting for a better world in this life through their own accomplishments -- they shall have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost. And it will have the effect of healing in them, that the dread dis-

ease of sin loses its power, that they shall be filled with vigor in their rebirth. They shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall. They shall then be victorious over their enemies. With the power of Christ in their hearts, they will no longer be subject to their age-old enemies -- the devil, the world and the flesh. And at Christ's second coming in glory to judge the quick and the dead, then shall their victory be perfectly evident to all. Then shall those who by their own stubbornness and wickedness have refused the gift of salvation be trodden under foot, as the ashes of Christ's consuming flame that they are. As the Jews were destroyed as a nation in the destruction of Jerusalem, so shall the unbelievers enter into everlasting destruction.

3.

If the people who heard and heeded the words of Malachi realized that his was the last prophetic utterance before the Advent of the Messiah, we can well imagine how their hearts would fail them. "What shall happen to us?" they may have wondered. "Who shall encourage us and keep us in remembrance of the Messiah to come, if we do not have prophets coming to us any longer?" This natural fear was quickly allayed when Malachi gave them AN AD-MONITION TO HEED THE WORD OF GOD: "Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments."

Now that prophecy ceases, the people are not to feel deserted. They are not left alone. For, although they will not have the prophets coming to them any longer in person, they have all the prophets' Words in the wonderful treasure-store of divinely inspired Scripture. So Malachi admonishes them to remember Moses, the first of the prophets, and the Word of the Lord delivered at Mount Sinai. Not only are they to remember this Law of God, but they are to use it as their heaven-sent guide to show them their sins and to point them to their need of a savior. Thus it will serve them well, for they will find constant reminders of the covenant which the Lord had made with them, showing them

that His will is not that they should perish, but that they should receive everlasting life. They will learn from the Word that God's love and mercy is theirs freely, and will be lost to them only if they reject His Word of Promise. In beginning with Moses and leading toward Malachi, these words of our text show us how the Old Testament is a whole, all of it centered upon that one chief message contained in its pages, namely Salvation through the Promised Messiah.

In that Word, the people will find guidelines to lead them on. They shall learn therein of the signs of Christ's coming, as Malachi also tells them. They will learn to wait for the coming, finally, of the last and greatest prophet, John the Baptist, to whom is given the great honor of being the prophesied fore-runner of Christ. Yes, the law and the prophets of the Old Testament would serve them well until the morning star appear. So God has never left Himself without witness on the earth. John the Baptist is that promised Elijah who shall again preach repentance and thus make the way straight for the Advent of Christ, doing this by turning the hearts and making them ready. The Jews as a nation, then, would have one more chance. They would receive John; and if they were not turned by his words, they would surely be smitten with a curse. We know in what a terrible way this curse was surely fulfilled, when in spite of this admonition most of the Jews rejected their Salvation.

May we also, who have no divinely-inspired prophet in our midst, learn to remember Moses the servant of God and all of God's Word, so that we may learn to watch for the signs of Christ's second Advent.

(It has been remarked that the Old Testament ends with a curse of the earth, showing that there is no hope of salvation there, or in men, but only in Christ. The New Testament ends with the greatest of blessings, with which God arms us against the curse of the earth. So may we remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we prepare to rejoice at the celebration of the anniversary of His birth!)

IV.

THE TEXT: Genesis 49:10.

THE BLESSINGS OF JUDAH.

The last will and testament of an individual is a very serious and important matter. Lawyers into whose hands the carrying out of a will is given have been known to go to great lengths, involving much time and much expenditure of money, in order to carry out what they regard as a sacred trust. In the distribution of property after a death, for example, the courts will nearly always uphold a will, and the breaking of a will can be accomplished only in rare cases.

In the days of Moses, who was the divinely inspired writer of our text, it was not the custom that wills be written beforehand. Rather, it was the custom for the father of a family to gather his sons about him before he died, and then, in the presence of all, he would distribute his blessings to them orally.

As a part of our Advent preparation let us consider the oral last will and testament of a patriarch of old. It is, however, no ordinary bequest. It does not have to do so much with the bequeathing of worldly goods, as it contains a divinely inspired prophecy regarding the future of the patriarch's sons and their descendants after them. The patriarch is Jacob, who was delivering blessings to his twelve sons.

As we know, the descendants of these twelve sons of Jacob were the people known as the children of Israel, since Israel was the name given to Jacob by the Lord. These Israelites were the people who were brought out of captivity in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. They were the chosen people of God, who were to inhabit the land of Palestine, and in whose midst and of whose blood the Son of God would eventually be born in the flesh. It was, therefore, an extremely important occasion when Jacob gathered his twelve sons, the fathers of the twelve tribes

of Israel, about him and gave his blessings to them. It is important also to us, in our Advent preparation, for contained in his blessings is a wonderful prophecy of the coming of the Christ. It is a familiar and beloved passage that is dear to the hearts of all Christian people.

1.

As is still customary among the nobility in many nations, the first-born son of the family receives the lion's share of the inheritance of his father, and the others receive only minor bequests. It is also customary that the direct line of descent passes through the first-born son, and if the family has a title of nobility, it, too, passes down through first-born sons. This was also the custom in the days of the Old Testament patriarchs, it seems. However, Jacob passed over not only his first-born son, but his first three sons, in giving his major blessing. Instead, he gave the most important blessing to Judah, his fourth son. The first part of Judah's blessing was that HIS TRIBE WAS TO REIGN OVER THE OTHERS. Our text puts it: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet."

How had it come about that the first three sons had lost their birth-right? The first-born son of Jacob was Reuben. This is what Jacob said to him in his blessing: "Reuben, thou art my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Then Jacob went on to remind Reuben of an occasion in which Reuben had committed adultery. It was by his own unstable character, by his open sin, that Reuben had lost the birth-right for himself. He had lost the ability to lead his younger brothers through this weakness, which they all knew about. He himself admitted that he had lost his authority over them when he had earlier chided them for selling their brother Joseph into slavery, "Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child, and ye would not hear?" -- These were the reasons that Reuben the

first-born lost his birthright.

But what about the next two sons, Simeon and Levi? In giving his will and testament, Jacob made it very clear why they had lost their birthright. He said, "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations . . . In their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel; I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." An earlier chapter tells us of the treacherous way in which these two brothers had committed the murder of a man who trusted them. Because of their anger, wrath and cruelty, they, too, forfeited their inheritance. The tribe of Levi had no property at all in the promised land later on, but were divided among the other tribes; while the tribe of Simeon received very narrow property that was divided into two portions, so that many members of the tribe were unable to support themselves from it and had to seek elsewhere for a living.

Thus did the three oldest sons of Jacob lose out on the major part of the blessing and inheritance. There is surely a striking lesson to be found here. For the same thing was finally true of the whole race of the Jews. They, the chosen people of the Lord, who were to have the Messiah in their very midst, lost their birthright by their pride and hypocrisy.

Judah, the fourth son, received Jacob's blessing. This indeed was through no merit of his but by grace alone. The blessing was first of all, a blessing in earthly things. His tribe was to be victorious and successful. It was to be the tribe from which the rulers in Israel would come forth. It was the tribe into which David was born, and all the kings from David's time until the coming of Jesus were of the tribe of Judah. It was the tribe which led all the Israelites from Egypt and through the wilderness and into the promised land. It was the tribe of Judah that Jacob pictured in his blessing as a lion that has conquered its prey. Therefore, although it was successful in war, yet it shall not always be waging war, but shall peaceably be enjoying

the victory. That is to say, the tribe of Judah was to make war not for the sake of the war itself, but for the sake of the peace which war would bring about.

Judah's reign was to be a lasting reign. Although, after the reign of Solomon, the tribes would be divided by civil war into kingdoms, of the north and of the south, it would be the Southern Kingdom, consisting of only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, that would eventually survive the attacks of the Assyrians and Babylonians, while the ten northern tribes would vanish without a real trace. The Scriptures relate the history of the twelve tribes and so it is easy for us to see how Jacob's blessing was fulfilled. It was the tribe of Judah that returned from the Babylonian captivity, though greatly decreased in number, while historians are still at a loss to explain adequately what happened to the other tribes. -- What a wondrous blessing Judah received!

2.

But the greatest blessing that Judah received was not in the promise that his tribe would reign over the others. Eventually that reign would cease when the greatest blessing was fulfilled. And that blessing was that **HIS TRIBE WAS TO BRING FORTH THE MESSIAH.** The blessed words: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

It is a joyful matter for us to realize that the dying Jacob saw and looked forward to the coming of Christ. How wonderful it is to know that those who lived in the Old Testament times could come to the end of their lives believing in the Messiah, even as we! And what a great and clear prophecy he could make, having been inspired by the Lord to do so! To Judah and to his tribe, as Jacob said, would come the Son born of a virgin mother, known to them as "Shiloh," which means the peace-giving one, the Savior. His Advent would mean that the custody of the promise was no longer to be held by Judah. When we note from history

that Judea became a province of the Roman empire just at the time of the Savior's birth, and that the king of those days, King Herod, was not a Jew at all, but an Idumean; and when we also note that at the time of Jesus' death the Jewish leaders expressly declared, "We have no king but Caesar," -- then we truly see prophecy fulfilled.

When this Seed of Judah would come, Jacob declared, then shall the sceptre belong to Him. He will be that great Messiah and Ruler of whom Jacob said, "And unto him shall the gathering of the people be." In these words the dying patriarch describes the Messiah in the same way as did the prophet Haggai when he called Him the "Desire of all nations." Yes, in Shiloh, the Savior, are the hopes and fears of all the world united. He is the perfect hope and consolation for all those who have come to despair of themselves and their sins, and have come to recognize their need of a Savior. In Him shall the hopes of all be fulfilled, and they shall surely gather to Him! That gathering has surely taken place in the One Holy Christian Church, even as it is taking place today, and shall continue to take place until Christ's Second Advent.

In these words of Jacob, then, as well as in the other words of the prophets, lies a true and proper preparation for the Advent of our Lord and the celebration of Christmas. What a deep and abiding feeling of joy fills our hearts at the knowledge that the Christchild is truly the fulfillment of the hopes and dreams of all the years of waiting for His coming. We pray that the Holy Spirit will fill our hearts with the same breathless feeling of anticipation that filled the hearts of the believing people of the Old Testament. Then, as we celebrate His birth, our joy shall be all the greater.

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C O N T E N T S

VOLUME 11

DECEMBER 1971

NUMBER 5

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