



ABOUT THE PROPERS

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

January 29, 2023



The Savior's Sermon: Trust in God's Strength

Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with a series of blessings. "Blessed are..." Jesus says, again and again. In the Latin Vulgate, these all begin with the word "beati" which translates as "blessed" or "happy." Thus, this portion of the sermon is often called "The Beatitudes." It had to give Jesus' listeners pause. For what Jesus calls blessed, the world never would. The world praises the strong and the self-sufficient. Jesus calls blessed what others would see as weak or stupid. But, like any good preacher, Jesus is trying to drive home one crucial point. The weaker you are, the more ready you are to rely on God's strength. The more difficult your present circumstances, the likelier you are to yearn for future reward. All the readings for today teach this truth. We have no real strength or wisdom of our own. But we don't need it. Because God's strength is enough to give the kingdom of heaven to the humble and poor in spirit.

The Propers

The Propers are those portions of the service that change (i.e. are "proper" to) each Sunday or season of the church year. The Propers differ from the Ordinary (from the Latin ordo, which means "regular order") portions of the liturgy, which do not change (e.g. the Lord's Prayer). The Propers offer the variety to the worship service and emphasize particular worship themes throughout the liturgical calendar.

First Lesson

Zephaniah 2:3; 3:11-13

The LORD promises that those who are humble, who trust in his strength rather than their own, will not be put to shame.

Second Lesson¹

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Paul points the Corinthians to themselves as an example of God's strength made perfect in weakness. The majority of them did not come from the upper crust of society or the ranks of the learned. God, however, chose them. Paul's list of God's chosen ones fits well with Jesus' description of the blessed ones in the Gospel. God chooses the losers of this world, not the winners; he chooses the weak, not the strong, so that there is no doubt as to the nature of his one-sided grace. The weaker we are, the more ready we are to trust in God's strength and boast in the work he does in us.

Gospel of the Day¹

Matthew 5:1-12

In the Beatitudes, our Savior turns the world upside down. He calls blessed the people this world never would. He calls blessed people that the world would use as doormats! The world praises the brash, the strong, and the self-sufficient. Jesus calls blessed what others see as weak or stupid. To live this kind of blessedness requires a deep trust in the Lord's strength and a long-term view of life. Jesus calls us blessed even in circumstances like mourning and persecution, because he is looking beyond the troubles of this world to the reward that is waiting for the people of God. Like reading the last chapter of a book, Jesus takes the mystery out of a life filled with sorrow by showing us the end, the outcome of life lived trusting in God's strength. All the weak children of God can rejoice and be glad—even now—because our reward will be great!

Psalm of the Day

Psalm 1 A

"Blessed Are They." This psalm provides an appropriate introduction to the entire Psalter. There is a stark contrast between "the way of the righteous" and "the way of the wicked."

Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 5:3

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, look with mercy on our weaknesses, and in all our dangers and needs stretch out the right hand of your majesty to help and defend us; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

690 “Blest Are They” (David Hass, b. 1957)

Church Year Season ¹

Epiphany

The twelve days of Christmas culminate at the celebration of the Epiphany of our Lord on January 6th. The season of Epiphany highlights the appearance of the Son of God as the Savior of the whole world— both Jew and Gentile. God revealed the mystery of his person and his mission through the words and works of the Father, through the anointing and empowering of the Spirit, and through the preaching and miracles of Christ. This season of the Savior’s appearance is bracketed by two white Sundays: The Baptism of Our Lord and Transfiguration of Our Lord. Since he had come hidden in flesh, recognizing Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God required revelation. From John’s Baptism to the Father’s booming voice, God revealed the truth about Jesus to the world: this son of Mary is the Son of God, come as the Christ. The Father’s testimony about Jesus bookends the season. From the glory of his baptism at the beginning of his ministry to the glory of his transfiguration at its culmination, the voice of the Father declares what flesh had hidden from the world: This is my Son!

Minor Festivals

Presentation of Our Lord (February 2)

There is evidence of this festival being celebrated in Jerusalem as the end of the 4th century. The date of the festival (40 days after Christmas) is in recognition of when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to Jerusalem 40 days after his birth (Luke 2:22-40). In the Middle Ages the feast was known as Candlemas, in reference to the blessing and use of the many candles during the festival, and in connection to Simeon’s words about the infant Jesus, “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32).

Colors & Symbolism

Season of Epiphany: Green

Green is the color of vegetation; therefore it symbolizes life. It represents the new life that Christ gives us in baptism, as well as the spiritual growth we experience during the season as we study the Lord’s ministry.

Nain Paraments

Epiphany

Superfrontal: The Greek symbol at the center of the superfrontal is the *Chi-Rho*. Chi (X) and Rho (P) are the first two letters in the Greek word for Christ (Χριστός). This ancient symbol represents Jesus and his office as the Messiah, the anointed King of kings and Savior of the world (Matthew 16:16)..... Next to the *Chi-Rho* are the letters *Alpha* (A) and *Omega* (Ω), the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. These two letters symbolize Jesus Christ, our eternal Lord and Savior, who is the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Revelation 22:13)..... The vines and vegetation branching out from the *Chi-Rho* represent the spiritual life that Jesus, the vine brings to God’s children, the branches (John 15:5)..... The blue wave at the bottom of the symbol represents both Holy Baptism (1 Peter 3:21) and the living water of the Word of Christ (John 7:37-38). The blue wave is intertwined with a vine of thorns, reminded us of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross to pay the price for our sins (John 19:2;30) and that believers are baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection for their forgiveness and eternal salvation (Romans 6:3-4).

Lectern antependium: The circle surrounding the center of the Latin cross (†) symbolizes the eternal nature of Christ and the gift of eternal life to all who believe in him. The Greek letters ΙΧΘΥC (pronounced: *Ichthus*) form both the word for fish and an acronym for the phrase, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.” A simple drawing of a fish was used in the ancient Church in days of persecution. It symbolized Jesus Christ and also served as a code by which Christians identified themselves to one another as Christ’s followers. It also recalls Holy Baptism and is thus a symbol of Christian regeneration (John 3:5).

Pulpit antependium: The Anchor Cross symbolizes the sure and steadfast hope Christians have in Jesus (Hebrews 6:19). The two fish remind us that Christians are followers of Jesus (see the description above), those who are brought into the ship of God’s church through the efforts of those who proclaim Gospel (cf. “fishers of men” in Matthew 4:19). During Epiphany the Church celebrates the many ways that Christ made himself known as true God to the world. One of these ways was his miracles. The two fish thus also remind us of Jesus miraculously feeding the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two small fish (Matthew 14:13-21).

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author.

² Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year B”. Daniel M. Deutschlander, Author.

³ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author.

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