

# B.A.S.I.C.

*Brothers And Sisters In Christ*

## The Lord is Coming

By Missionary Matthew Ude

Advent is here. Advent means “coming.” It is the season during which we wait and prepare for the coming of our Lord. This makes it the perfect time to remind your congregation about the Means of Grace, which is the method through which our Lord comes to us. Here are four advent themes with notes to help you teach your congregation about the Means of Grace.

### The Lord comes through His Word

There are many passages that give us the promise that the Lord will work through His Word. For a pastor it can often be a very discouraging to faithfully preach the word. Most people don't listen, and even those who claim to be Christian don't act like they are listening to the Word. Sometimes we are tempted to resort to other means to convince people to come to church. Some pastors use miracles. Some pastors try to make the service more entertaining. Some are tempted to preach a great deal of law. Some preach prosperity preaching and teaching only those things that humans like to hear. All of these tricks and methods might get people to come to the church building, but spiritually they accomplish nothing. Preaching the Word faithfully won't always fill our churches with lots of members but it will accomplish spiritual growth, life, renewal and salvation.

1 Kings 18 and 19: Here we have the story of how Elijah tried to use a great miracle to convert the people of Israel because he thought that no one was listening to his preaching. Although the miracle seemed to work at first, the next day the people of Israel turned against Elijah because they were afraid of Queen Jezebel. Elijah fled to the wilderness. Here in the wilderness God taught Elijah that God does not come to people's hearts through miracles, but God comes instead through the still small voice of His word.

1 Corinthians 1:21-29; Romans 1:16,17: Although the Word and the preaching of the Word seem like nothing in the eyes of men, this is the method that God has chosen to bring people to salvation.

Isaiah 55:11,12; Matthew 18:20: Christ promises that He is present and His power is at work wherever the Word is preached. To be gathered in Christ's name means to be gathered around His Word and His sacraments, doing those things that He has commanded.

Acts 2; Romans 10:17; 2 Timothy 3:15: It is only through the Word and the Sacraments that the Holy Spirit works and that people come to faith. In Acts 2, notice that when the apostles spoke in tongues the people did not come to faith, but when Peter preached the Gospel about Christ's death and resurrection and the forgiveness of sins, then they came to faith.

## The Lord comes through baptism

### How do we baptize?

Mark 1:8; Mark 7:4; Matt 28:19; Eph 5:25,26: We baptize by using water and God's Word. The method of applying water is not important. We can pour it. We can drip it. We can immerse people in the river. God's word does not tell us that we should use one method and not another. We simply use water and speak the Word of God.

### Who should be baptized?

Matt 28:19 – All nations, this includes infants because they are part of all nations

John 3:5 – Anyone who would enter the kingdom of God,

Acts 2:38,39 – All repentant sinners. Children are also sinners ( Psalm 51:5 ) even though they cannot express repentance, yet we trust the power of God working in baptism to create repentance and faith, even as God has promised in His word.

Summary: John 3:5 –Everyone should be baptized in order that through faith they may receive the promises of Christ.

### What does baptism do?

Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5 – Baptism gives the forgiveness of sins

Romans 6:3; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21 – Through baptism Christ creates faith, through faith we receive eternal life

### The power of baptism

Eph 5:26,27; 1 Peter 1:23; Titus 3:5 – The power of Baptism is in the word and promise of God. It is not in the water or in the actions of man.

In baptism Christ comes to us and makes us a part of His kingdom. It is His power that is at work in baptism. Through His power He creates faith in our hearts through baptism. With His power He forgives our sins in baptism. In 2 Kings 5 Naaman is told to wash in the Jordan in order to cleanse his leprosy. At first Naaman refuses to do it, because he thinks that there is no way that washing in the Jordan can possibly accomplish anything. Normally he would be right. Normally washing in the Jordan would not cleanse leprosy, however he had God's promise. Similarly many people think that baptism is nothing, that it is merely symbolic, that washing in water cannot really do anything. But like Naaman we have God's promise and therefore God's power is at work in baptism to wash away our sins.

## The Lord comes through Communion

### Who should receive the Lord's Supper?

Matthew 26:26-28 –

1. The blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins, therefore those who are sinners and need forgiveness should come to the Lord's Supper.
2. The body and blood were given "for you," therefore whoever has faith that Christ did this for them should come to receive the Lord's Supper. That is to say whoever has faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins.
3. "This is my body . . . This is my blood." Christ tells us that His body and blood are present in the bread and wine. We cannot

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see or taste the body and blood in the Lord's Supper. We do not know how it is possible that the body and blood are present. But we have faith in the words of Christ "this is my body." Therefore whoever believes the words of Christ that His body and blood are present in the bread and wine should come to the Lord's Supper.

4. 1 Corinthians 11:27,29 – Paul says only those should come who are able to examine themselves. To examine ourselves as Paul talks about means to look at our hearts to see if there is repentance and faith. We look at the first three points we made about the Lord's Supper to see if they apply to us. 1. Am I a sinner? 2. Did Christ save me by dying for my sins? 3. Is Christ's body and blood present in the Lord's Supper? Everyone who answers yes to all three questions is ready to receive the Lord's Supper.

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## What is given in the Lord's Supper?

Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19,20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 –

1. Forgiveness of sins
2. Christ's body and blood
3. 1 Corinthians 10:16,17; Fellowship with Christ
4. Fellowship with one another (Therefore only those who are in agreement with scriptural teaching should join together in the Lord's Supper.)

The Lord's Supper is a continuation in a new form of the Passover festival of the Old Testament.

The Lord saved the Israelites from the Egyptians and the Passover was to be a reminder of that event. The Lord saved us and set us

free from death and sin. He has given us the Lord's Supper as our constant reminder.

The Passover was also a shadow of Christ, reminding the Israelites of the fact that the Messiah was going to come and live among them. In the Lord's Supper Jesus does come and dwell with us, since He has promised that it is His body and blood. As Paul says, it is the communion ( the joining together ) of ourselves with the body of Christ.

The Angel of death passed over the houses of all who did as God commanded on that first Passover. God's judgment passes over us, giving us the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper.

In the Lord's Supper Jesus comes to us not just in words that we hear, but in the bread and wine that we touch, taste, and smell. For this reason we often recite the words of Simeon, Luke 2:24, "My eyes have seen your salvation . . ." For just as Simeon saw and held the Christ child, so also we see and touch and taste Christ and His love in the Lord's Supper.

## The Lord comes through Absolution

Mark 2:1-11 – Here we have the story of one who does not even have a name, and was paralyzed from birth. Yet, there is no man in all of scripture that was given a gift greater than what was given to this man, not Naaman who received cleansing from his leprosy, not Elisha who received a double portion of Elijah's spirit, not even the wisdom and riches of Solomon. Here is a man who received from the mouth of the Lord himself the words, "your sins are forgiven." Consider the life of Martin Luther, who beat himself, who wept, who pleaded, who went on pilgrimages, who kissed holy relics, who fasted and prayed, in all of

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this he was searching for one thing: forgiveness and mercy. In all of this Martin sought fervently that very same thing that is here given to the paralytic. In all those things that Martin did, he never found and was never given this mercy and grace.

The paralytic did not come asking for forgiveness. He came apparently seeking only physical healing of his body. But Christ did not give him only what he thought he needed but so much more. He gave him grace and forgiveness. He gave these to him without his asking. He gave these to him without any works of charity or any outward show of repentance. He simply gave them freely and richly.

In all the rest of his life who could ever challenge or say anything against this man? No matter what men or demons or conscience said to this man, he could always respond, "Jesus has spoken to me, 'Your sins are forgiven.'" If anyone said to him, "Who is Jesus to forgive sins? How do you know that He has the power to forgive sins?" This former paralytic could respond, "I was lame but now I can walk. He proved His power when he healed me."

And now this same gift is given to us, in God's word and in our baptism and in the Lord's Supper. It is given to us in the words of absolution.

<sup>22</sup> **And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (Joh 20:22-23 NKJ)**

This is the reason that Jesus sent out His apostles, his disciples, his evangelists and yes even us. He has sent us to speak in His name and His stead the same words He spoke to that paralytic. He has sent us out to freely, without cost, and without restriction give the grace

and forgiveness that He has given to us. It is this gift which the angel choirs of heaven sang above the fields of Bethlehem, "Peace on earth." What peace? The peace of the forgiveness of our sins.

Christ has given to us the authority to speak in His name and with His power, so that everyone on earth might receive from Christ the same gift which He has here given to the paralytic. No more is there any need for men to offer sacrifices, to roll around on stones, to cut themselves, to meditate, or to go on pilgrimages. You cannot make yourself worthy of this gift, yet it is given freely without cost or work.

Martin Luther did receive this gift from God. Not from any of the works which he tried to do to make himself worthy, but when, like the paralytic, he simply came to Jesus in His Word and there heard the words that Jesus said to him. Your sins are forgiven.

This is why our Lutheran churches begin every service with a confession from the congregation, so that the Minister might do the one thing he has been sent to do. He might respond to the congregation saying, "In the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins." What is the sermon compared to this short sentence? In the 30 seconds that the confession and absolution take place, the congregation lays before Christ as the paralytic lay, and the pastor stands as Christ, by Christ's own command and with His authority. So that we might know from the very lips of Christ, the promise has been given, "Your sins are forgiven."

Christ stands before us in the absolution as He stood before the paralytic.