

Sermon for January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

READINGS

Genesis 46:1-7

**1** So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. **2** And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” **3** Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. **4** I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.”

**5** Then Jacob set out from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. **6** They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, **7** his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters. All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

Psalm 77:11-20

**11** I will remember the deeds of the LORD;  
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.

**12** I will ponder all your work,  
and meditate on your mighty deeds.

**13** Your way, O God, is holy.

What god is great like our God?

**14** You are the God who works wonders;  
you have made known your might among the peoples.

**15** You with your arm redeemed your people,  
the children of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

**16** When the waters saw you, O God,  
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;  
indeed, the deep trembled.

**17** The clouds poured out water;  
the skies gave forth thunder;  
your arrows flashed on every side.

**18** The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;  
your lightnings lighted up the world;  
the earth trembled and shook.

**19** Your way was through the sea,  
your path through the great waters;  
yet your footprints were unseen.

**20** You led your people like a flock  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

1 Peter 4:12-19

**12** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you, as though something strange were happening to you. **13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. **14** If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. **15** But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. **16** Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let

him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. **17** For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? **18** And

“If the righteous is scarcely saved,  
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

**19** Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

#### Matthew 2:13-23

**13** Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” **14** And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt **15** and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Our text for meditation this Second Sunday after Christmas is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

One of the primary causes of the Reformation was the sale of indulgences. Typically in our Protestant circles this gets presented as the Roman Catholic church selling forgiveness, and Martin Luther bravely arguing against it because all of our sins were forgiven when Christ died on the Cross. While I suppose that is a good summary of the matter, it does not touch on the rise of indulgences and why the Roman church established them in the first place.

Why did Rome begin selling indulgences? We might say that it was greed: the papacy loves luxury and gold. We might say that Rome was trying to spiritually enslave people: telling the common Christian that he must go out of his way to purchase Heaven for himself is a powerful way to accomplish that, and Rome certainly loves *power*. But these are insufficient answers, because they discuss the *motivations* for establishing indulgences, not the *arguments* for it. While the papacy, the office of antichrist, most certainly desires power and money,<sup>1</sup> we do ourselves a disservice if we do not examine their case, and why our reading for today teaches us something *very* different from Rome's ideas.

### **On Roman Purgatory**

Indulgences come from the Roman church's conception of something called “Purgatory.” The idea is this: there must be some otherworldly place that “purges” us of our venial sins before we enter Paradise. “What is a venial sin?” you might ask. For us Lutherans, a venial sin is iniquity that we commit without recognizing it; whoever lives a life of penitent faith has these sins forgiven every morning, for God knows our weaknesses and He is merciful toward us.<sup>2</sup> But for Rome, a venial sin is just a sin of a “less serious” variety;<sup>3</sup> it might not be a bad enough sin to *damn* you (that would be a *mortal sin*), but it still has some consequences. Even if you have that venial sin forgiven, Rome claims that you have to do a sufficient amount of *penance* to work that sin off; otherwise, after you shed your mortal coil you must suffer longer and more painfully in Purgatory. That is why it is there, in Rome's mind; God does not want to see so much as a stain of sin before letting someone into Heaven – so

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<sup>1</sup> Indulgences are still being sold, so this is a present reality.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 19:12, Lamentations 3:22-23

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P6C.HTM#:~:text=1862%20](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P6C.HTM#:~:text=1862%20)

whatever sort of imperfection on you must be *burned* off.

To summarize it, the Roman conception of Purgatory is that it exists as a kind of temporary, diet version of hell that believers have to go through before they can be permitted residence in Heaven. The more penance one does, the papacy says, the less time they will spend there. So they introduce the sale of indulgences as a means of *helping* people – yes, they believe this helps people – reduce or abolish their time in the dreadful place of Purgatory. Of course, there is no verse in the Bible that tells us such a place exists, but human reason has a way of “discovering” things, though it is really just making things up to fill in the gaps in our understanding. To the Roman theologian, Purgatory simply *must* exist, or else the stain of our sin stays forever and we are doomed! Thus, whether their true motives were greed and power or not, the papacy framed indulgences as a kind offer of extra penances for Catholics everywhere.

## Lutheran Purgatory

Of course, we Lutherans reject the practice of indulgences, because *all* of our sins were paid for at the Cross. There is no need to worry about whether your venial sins have been washed away, because whosoever has been Baptized has had their sins absolutely *drowned* in the Blood of our Lord Jesus through the water comprehended in the Word. If you believe in Christ, then you are justified; at Judgment Day, God will look at you and see nothing but the righteousness of our Lord Jesus. Does Jesus have the stain of venial sin on His Person? Heaven forbid we tolerate such a blasphemous notion! My friends, He was and is *sinless*; if you are counted as righteous by faith in Jesus, then there is no *need* for Judgment to include every little offense that you may have committed here on earth. Rejoice, for if you are a Baptized believer, then if and when you shed your mortal coil then you will *immediately* be with our Lord in Paradise. After all, St. Paul writes that to live is Christ and to die is gain,<sup>4</sup> and the Apostle who confessed to his own issues with sin<sup>5</sup> expected that if he was executed then he would be with our Lord instantly.<sup>6</sup> The same holds true for all of us.

But there *is* a Purgatory. Only, in the Scriptural understanding of it Purgatory is *this world* that we are living in right now. In our reading, St. Peter says that Judgment begins *at the household of God*, and by this he means the Church here on earth. Our experience of suffering, whether that be the normal slings and arrows of tragedy in this life or if it be the persecution of believers by anti-Christ forces, is how that Judgment plays out. Christians are insulted, martyred, imprisoned, tempted, bereft of social privileges, and hated more than anyone or anything else. The Apostle says that this is the purgation, the fiery trial which has afflicted believers since shortly after Pentecost.

Let us not get things confused though. The Scriptural understanding of Purgatory is not a matter of removing sins that remain upon our flesh. Yes, God does discipline us to help us behave better in life,<sup>7</sup> but that is not a matter of judgment so much as it is relationship; when He does this, He is treating us as any good Father would. Meanwhile, this fiery trial that St. Peter writes about marks the beginning of Judgment, beginning with the Church here on earth, is for the sake of glory. It is distinct from the normal disciplines that help us behave better, for this kind of trial actively conforms us to the image of Christ.

Jesus suffered for the truth. Jesus was insulted for being the true Christ. They crucified our Lord for bearing witness to who He is and for condemning the false teachings among both Jew and Gentile alike. When we suffer and it is not a consequence of sin, God is permitting that calamity for the sake of telling us this: if you share in the sufferings of Christ, then you shall also share in His Glory. We can bear it and rejoice, knowing that it is for something *good*. Christ's suffering brought about our

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 1:21

<sup>5</sup> Romans 7:14-25

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 1:22-25

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 12

salvation; our trials help lead others to faith in Him. The truth about Purgatory in this world is that it is not about purging *us* per se, but rather it is more about purging evil from the earth and bringing us to a greater future.

## Conclusion

So we as Lutherans reject both the Papist sale of indulgences and the imaginary Purgatory that led to them. We do so because we know that all of our sins have been forgiven on account of Christ, and because we hold to the *real* Purgatory. And what shall we say of the place? It is this world, which is the only place wherein Christians suffer. I must repeat it my friends, this world is the *only* place in which Christians suffer. And since it is for a good cause, that of growing the Church and increasing righteousness here on earth, we follow St. Peter's exhortation. We are to entrust our souls to our faithful Creator, who promises us eternal blessedness, and we must continue in doing good so that our cause may triumph over all others. Let us then continue in our path, glorifying God with the peace that says there shall be no "dread hell" in store for us.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

READINGS

1 Kings 8:6-13

**6** Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. **7** For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. **8** And the poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the Holy Place before the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to this day. **9** There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. **10** And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, **11** so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

**12** Then Solomon said, “The LORD has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. **13** I have indeed built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever.”

Psalm 50:1-15

**1** The Mighty One, God the LORD,  
speaks and summons the earth  
from the rising of the sun to its setting.

**2** Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,  
God shines forth.

**3** Our God comes; he does not keep silence;  
before him is a devouring fire,  
around him a mighty tempest.

**4** He calls to the heavens above  
and to the earth, that he may judge his people:

**5** “Gather to me my faithful ones,  
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”

**6** The heavens declare his righteousness,  
for God himself is judge! *Selah*

**7** “Hear, O my people, and I will speak;  
O Israel, I will testify against you.  
I am God, your God.

**8** Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.

**9** I will not accept a bull from your house  
or goats from your folds.

**10** For every beast of the forest is mine,  
the cattle on a thousand hills.

**11** I know all the birds of the hills,  
and all that moves in the field is mine.

**12** “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,  
for the world and its fullness are mine.  
**13** Do I eat the flesh of bulls  
or drink the blood of goats?  
**14** Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
and perform your vows to the Most High,  
**15** and call upon me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

**26** For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. **27** But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; **28** God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, **29** so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. **30** And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, **31** so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Matthew 3:13-17

**13** Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. **14** John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” **15** But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. **16** And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; **17** and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Our text for meditation this First Sunday after Epiphany is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

There is a common objection to God's Commandments and to the Gospel, one to which we ought to pay more attention. Whether someone says this openly or in the depths of their sinful heart, this objection to living the Christian life is raised more frequently than we'd like to admit. It goes something like this:

*“Who is God to tell me what to do? Does He know what it's like to live here in this earth? Oh sure, it's easy to toss out commands and judge people when you're omnipotent. It's easy to tell us to be charitable when you have no needs. Must be nice to be God, having no problems whatsoever but still telling people how to live their lives. But it's harder to be a human, to have to struggle every day for food and shelter and to know you have to die some day. What's His basis for judging me when I watch a bit of porn, when I shoplift a little, or when I tell a lie here and there?”*

To this objection, our Lord might reply "but I do know what it's like." And He truly does.

## The Trinitarian Moment

First, before delving into that, let's talk about the Trinity, and that is certainly present in this text! God the Father announces the identity of God the Son while God the Holy Spirit comes down from heaven and *shows* everyone that this Man is actually Divine. All doctrines that deny the Trinity are decimated by this passage. Modalists, those who think God is one person wearing three deceptive masks (a Father mask, a Son mask, a Spirit mask) cannot explain how all three Persons show up independently. The people who think the Holy Spirit is just a force or emanation cannot explain why the Spirit shows up as a dove, demonstrating agency and choice. The jehovah's witnesses and all others who deny that Jesus is Divine tie themselves in knots trying to claim that the *Son* of God could be anything but true God Himself.

Christ begins His public ministry with the Trinity announcing who He is. Why? Because Moses writes in the Law that it is on the testimony of two or more witnesses that legal matters are established.<sup>1</sup> By the time we enter the New Testament era, this is expanded to a general requirement for *any* big claim at all.<sup>2</sup> Here, our Savior comes to the waters of the Jordan to begin His ministry, and this means that there must be two witnesses to establish that He had begun it. But these witnesses must know exactly who Jesus *truly is* for it to be a legitimate establishment of His labors leading up to the Atonement. It could not have been John the Baptist, for his understanding of Jesus's identity was limited enough to doubt Him later.<sup>3</sup> The Apostles were not even called yet. Christ's own mother, Mary, knew that He was special and that He was going to save God's people, but even she kept reverent and pondering silence when she thought about the mystery of it.<sup>4</sup> So, in order to make sure there were proper witnesses who knew everything about our Savior, the Father and the Holy Spirit make the Divine presence known, so as to establish the beginning of His labors for our salvation.

## The Baptism

So the Father and the Holy Spirit bear witness to the truth of our Lord Jesus in His mission. Yet something else is happening at the same time. There had already been angels witnessing to Christ when the Incarnation began. The magi and the shepherds saw the Christ Child, Anna and Simeon spoke of Him highly, and by the time He was eight years old even rabbis knew there was something about this Jesus that was different.<sup>5</sup> At any point in Christ's earthly sojourn, the Father and the Holy Spirit could have arrived and made this proclamation, but they only did this *at the baptism in the Jordan*. Something about this baptism made it necessary to wait until then.

John the Baptist expresses something like dismay with Christ approaching him to get baptized. He objects, saying "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" John's baptism was for repentance from sins. People were coming to him and confessing their transgressions before going into the water.<sup>6</sup> It was a sinner's baptism, pure and simple - the jews who went to him did it as a demonstration of repentance and to prepare their hearts for the coming Messiah. That's what bothers John, who knew that Jesus is the sinless Christ he was waiting for:<sup>7</sup> why would the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world decide to go through a sinner's baptism? What need does the Messiah have to be baptized in preparation for the Messiah's coming?

Christ replies to John that it is necessary "to fulfill all righteousness." What does He mean by this? To be clear, Christ did not need to repent for any sin. He never sinned at all in the thirty years

1 Deuteronomy 17:2-13, 19:15

2 John 8:17, 2 Corinthians 13:1

3 Matthew 11:2-6

4 Luke 2:51

5 Matthew 2, Luke 2

6 Matthew 3:5-6, 3:11

7 John 1:29

prior to this moment and He never sinned after. But Jesus came to earth to identify with us. He is fully Divine, but from the Incarnation onward He is fully man as well. My friends, could Jesus have sympathized with our own struggles if He never went through repentance?

Yes, our Lord Jesus did what every one of us finds ourselves doing, only He did it with a different aim entirely. To repent is to think *differently* and decide differently. Typically this means regret for sins,<sup>8</sup> and changing the mind and heart's direction.<sup>9</sup> If I were to steal something, and my conscience assailed me, I would regret doing it and change my mind in repentance; then I would bear fruit in keeping with that repentance, returning the stolen goods. But when Jesus went to the Jordan and was baptized, this was not a change of mind caused by regret, but a change in the direction of His earthly life. Before then, for thirty years He patiently lived the life of a normal Judean, only without sin; *now*, having demonstrated His perfect obedience for this long, it was time to orient the rest of His earthly life toward teaching, performing miracles, and ultimately – the fruit of this moment in the Jordan – dying for our sins.

## Conclusion

If anyone should tell God that He does not know what it is like for us, He points us to His only Son. The author of Hebrews puts it quite succinctly, saying “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”<sup>10</sup> Jesus went through hunger, poverty, temptation, frustrations, sorrows, persecution, alienation, and extreme pain to save us. And even though He never sinned and never will, He underwent the same process that everyone around Him went through for repentance sake, and He used that very moment to say “now let's begin.” Three years later, He went to the Cross and said “It is finished.”

And to mark this beginning, this inauguration of the very ministry which results in our eternal salvation, there are those two witnesses. The Holy Spirit appears like a dove and rests upon our Savior, *visibly*, so as to show the entirety of the world that Jesus is not just “filled” with the Spirit like a mere prophet, but rather accompanied by the Spirit as an equal in Divinity. Our Heavenly Father stands as witness from Heaven, and declares who His Son is. And from that moment on forevermore, should anyone ask after all this why we should obey our Lord's Commandments and believe in the Gospel He gave us, the reply is simple: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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8 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3341.htm>

9 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3340.htm>

10 Hebrews 4:15

Sermon for January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

READINGS

Exodus 7:14-24

**14** Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. **15** Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water, and stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him. Take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. **16** And you shall say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, “Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness.”’ But so far, you have not obeyed. **17** Thus says the LORD, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. **18** The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile.”” **19** And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.’”

**20** Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. **21** And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. **22** But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. **23** Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. **24** And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile.

Psalm 111

**1** Praise the LORD!

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,  
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

**2** Great are the works of the LORD,  
studied by all who delight in them.

**3** Full of splendor and majesty is his work,  
and his righteousness endures forever.

**4** He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;  
the LORD is gracious and merciful.

**5** He provides food for those who fear him;  
he remembers his covenant forever.

**6** He has shown his people the power of his works,  
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.

**7** The works of his hands are faithful and just;  
all his precepts are trustworthy;  
**8** they are established forever and ever,  
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

**9** He sent redemption to his people;  
he has commanded his covenant forever.

Holy and awesome is his name!

**10** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;  
all those who practice it have a good understanding.

His praise endures forever!

#### Ephesians 5:22-33

**22** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

**25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. **33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

#### John 2:1-11

**1** On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. **2** Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. **3** When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” **4** And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” **5** His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

**6** Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. **7** Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. **8** And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. **9** When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom **10** and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” **11** This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

Our text for meditation this Second Sunday after Epiphany is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **Introduction**

Here we come across the first of the seven signs in St. John's Gospel.<sup>1</sup> Of all the miracles Christ performed, when writing his Gospel, St. John chose these seven as the ones which most clearly demonstrated Jesus's identity as the Messiah, His role in delivering us from sin and death, and His Divinity. The Apostle does not exclude the other miracles Jesus did because he disregards their *importance*; in fact, later in the book he mentions them.<sup>2</sup> But for St. John, these seven signs help the reader meditate on who Jesus is, and deepens their faith in Him on account of that. Knowing that

<sup>1</sup> The others are: healing the official's son (John 4:46-54), healing the paralyzed man (5:1-15), feeding the five thousand (6:5-13), walking on water (6:16-21), healing the man born blind (9:1-7), and raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44).

<sup>2</sup> John 20:30-31

salvation is brought about by faith in Christ, this remains the author's only goal, to help us believe. Let us then, as good Christians, do so with the account of the wedding at Cana and deepen our faith.

## Searching Out the Meaning

In the other three Gospels, the miracles of Jesus are typically accompanied by *teaching*. Sts. Matthew, Mark and Luke were concerned with how we live for Jesus, and that means that their priority with miracles is showing us what Jesus told us to believe and do. But St. John conspicuously leaves out any teaching for the wedding at Cana, only mentioning that Jesus “manifested His glory” by turning the water into wine. He *assumes* that you have read the other three Gospels, that you *know* what it is Christians are supposed to believe and do; now it is time to ruminate on *why* you should believe in Him. Again, in the twentieth chapter he tells us “These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name.”

If we are to find greater faith in this sign, we must search out more in the event than just the action itself. Yes, Jesus manifested His Glory by turning the water into wine, but we would be silly if we thought it was nothing more than our Savior *showing off*. Any black magician could turn one liquid into another, as we saw in Exodus when Pharaoh's magicians opposed Moses by turning water into blood like Moses did.<sup>3</sup> But Jesus is not some performer or sorcerer: He has a *point* that He wants to make when He shows His Divine power, and we must meditate on it. But speaking of Moses...

## Christ and Moses

Moses was charged by God to change the waters of the Nile into blood. With this first plague upon the Egyptians, the prophet condemned their sins of idolatry, oppression, and murder. But that was a matter of *Law*, and the blood bore witness to it. By changing the waters of the Nile, God showed Pharaoh a representation of the blood he and his dynasty had shed. He was to understand that the blood was required of him by Divine Judgment on account of his sins.

Jesus turns the water not into *blood*, but into wine. Not just any wine, but *good* wine, the best that was served at that wedding, increasing their enjoyment. His arrival means that it is not time for the Law, but for the Gospel. His Atonement worked for us meant that our sins are forgiven; unlike Pharaoh blood is no longer required on our part, and thus it is time for us to celebrate just as the wedding guests were doing when Jesus provided them with more to drink. St. John remembered this miracle, and put it here in the text because it shows us the *Good News* of Christ's ministry and arrival as being superior to anything Moses ever did.

## Communion and Sacrifice

But speaking of water and blood, we cannot forget that blood itself is a theme in the Gospel of John. Jesus says “My Blood is true drink” in the sixth chapter,<sup>4</sup> and in the words of Institution we recite at the Sacrament of the Altar, we recall that Jesus told us the wine in Communion is His Blood.<sup>5</sup> Water, wine, and blood are ever present in John's Gospel, the same way that they are present throughout all of Scripture. And what does Christ say when He institutes Communion? That the wine is His Blood *poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*.

By this we know that condemnation is not absent in the Gospel, as it is rather *redirected*. By turning the water into wine, Jesus shows Himself to be greater than Moses, instituting joy whereas Moses had proclaimed condemnation when he turned water into blood. But the water and blood are present in the Crucifixion, for when Christ was on the Cross these both poured out from His side when

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus 7:20-23

<sup>4</sup> John 6:55

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 26:28

He was stabbed with a Roman spear.<sup>6</sup> You see my friends, Christ took the water and blood unto Himself, leaving us with the wine to drink. He took condemnation that belonged to us, and in exchange He gave us cause to celebrate something *new*.

### **Conclusion: Purification**

This is why it is no coincidence that Jesus used jars for purification to turn the water into wine. The Man who would soon take their condemnation by shedding His Blood and water gave them the wine of celebration. The Man who would one day take a cup of wine and tell everyone that His Blood was in it for their purification, gave them wine to drink from vessels of purification. Do you see, my friends? The Wedding at Cana was a presentation of the Gospel and a foreshadowing of the Communion service, wherein all who partook of Christ's purifying wine were made to have greater joy than before. And when we partake of the Sacrament, we too are purified and brought to great joy as we drink something only Jesus Christ can bring us.

A wedding, may I remind you, is a *covenant* ceremony. Christ turns water into wine to help people celebrate a new covenant occurring, just as He tells us when He takes the cup in His hands that it is the *New Covenant* in His Blood. This event brings us to greater joy in Him, knowing that we are brought to participate in the celebration of a new Kingdom being inaugurated by the Atonement He enacts to save us. By recording this sign for posterity in his Gospel, St. John advises us to do as the disciples did and believe in Christ, for He promises us far greater joy in His New Covenant, and far greater celebration in His New Kingdom, than the guests at Cana ever experienced.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> John 19:34-35

Sermon for January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
The TRANSFIGURATION

READINGS

Exodus 34:29-35

**29** When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. **30** Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. **31** But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. **32** Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. **33** And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

**34** Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, **35** the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Psalm 2

**1** Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
**2** The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel together,  
against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,  
**3** “Let us burst their bonds apart  
and cast away their cords from us.”  
**4** He who sits in the heavens laughs;  
the Lord holds them in derision.  
**5** Then he will speak to them in his wrath,  
and terrify them in his fury, saying,  
**6** “As for me, I have set my King  
on Zion, my holy hill.”  
**7** I will tell of the decree:  
The LORD said to me, “You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you.  
**8** Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth your possession.  
**9** You shall break them with a rod of iron  
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”  
**10** Now therefore, O kings, be wise;  
be warned, O rulers of the earth.  
**11** Serve the LORD with fear,  
and rejoice with trembling.  
**12** Kiss the Son,  
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,  
for his wrath is quickly kindled.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

### 2 Peter 1:16-21

**16** For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. **17** For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” **18** we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. **19** And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, **20** knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. **21** For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

### Matthew 17:1-9

**1** And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. **2** And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. **3** And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. **4** And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” **5** He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” **6** When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. **7** But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” **8** And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. **9** And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead.”

Our text for meditation on the Sunday of our Lord's Transfiguration is on our Psalm reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

### **Introduction**

I'd like you to imagine something. Let's say there is a magical ostrich that follows you around. He sits in your car when you go to work and he follows you to the jobsite. He goes with you when you take a walk outside. This giant bird refuses to leave you alone, he even sleeps next to you at night. If you try to hide, the ostrich finds you. If you try to run away, he is faster than you. If you try to hurt him, he is stronger and tougher than you. For that matter, the creature is invincible. Shooting or poisoning it will not work.

Now, this ostrich has no normal motivations. This is a *failure ostrich*, here to make sure your life crashes and burns at every step. If you pull money out of your wallet to buy a soda at the gas station, the ostrich knocks it out of your hands and eats your spare change. If you try to take a nap on the weekend, he caws and shouts until you just can't sleep. You desperately want to live your life, but this feathered fiend has made it his mission to keep you from enjoying anything but working and helping other people.

What would you do with such a creature? Clearly, it would soon be evident that only two options are presented to you, an easy way and a hard way. First, you could attempt to reason with it, find out what it wants, and do whatever it is this undesired companion demands. That's the easy way, and it has a chance of working. The second option is to fruitlessly fight and struggle with it over and over again forever. That will never work. Now my friends, what are the chances that people would take the first option when confronted by the ostrich? If world leaders were asked...the answer is none.

## The World's Problem

In reality, the ostrich represents the deal that God has presented to the world, and it is a simple one. “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way.” First, all countries are told very simply that they must obey and honor Christ in the administrations of their governments. What does it look like to do this? The Psalmist writes, “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” All the world's leaders are told that they must do so, and God doesn't seem to care what sort of government it is that they lead, whether it is a democracy or a monarchy or a dictatorship or whatever. They are to honor our Lord and keep His Commandments. Now, in case they ask what is in it for them if they *obey* this deal and side with Jesus, the answer is simple: He will bless them. To sum it up, here is the deal: either be a government that rejects Jesus and fails at everything until you miserably perish, OR be a government that honors Jesus and be blessed in all that you undertake.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of world leaders fail this simple deal, and thus God makes a laughingstock out of all of them. The Islamic countries consistently humiliate themselves whenever they attempt to do warfare. Marxist countries are nearly extinct, as their system of anti-Christian political ideology turned out to be so unworkable that the entire Soviet Union didn't last even one century. European nations abandoned Christ and sided with the world, abolishing Christendom; now their militaries cannot fight their way out of a paper bag and their populations are under extreme duress.

Of course, fealty to Christ can be something of a spectrum. Some countries limp idly by with the mere permission for their populations to *be* Christian; on account of that, they are not destroyed despite their wicked leadership. But even they have the “ostrich” around their necks, because they only halfheartedly *permit* the presence of our Lord instead of attempting to stamp the faith out. Their populations are shackled to frustration: as an example, did you know that Americans almost never get the policies that polling data says they want? For that matter, their votes do not actually determine election outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

My friends, I am sure that if you look all around you that you will find nothing but waste, frustration, and failure in the political realm. No one is happy with it. But this is not because some ideology is missing from your government. It is because your government has joined in with the kings of the earth in rebellion against God. They care nothing for His Commandments, they do not recognize Jesus to be the true Christ, and if they are not grudgingly permitting a Christian presence they are trying to chase believers out. The ostrich is right there making their lives harder and harder, but they choose to keep trying the same thing over and over again as though God would ever let them have full success.

Why is this the case? Why aren't there any countries whose leadership goes out of their way to glorify our Lord? The answer is very simple. They want to be gods themselves, and they have driven themselves mad trying to make that happen. To confess Christ, or “kiss the Son,” is to say that *He* is God and we are not. Our flesh rages against that mightily to the point of madness. Our governments would rather say that men can become women, women can become men, that importing innumerable welfare clients enriches their countries, that technology can make man immortal – and a whole host of other impossible and absurd things, because they *want that to be the case*. God says no to them, and they, desiring to be deities themselves, try to rule their domains anyway.

## Man's Problem

Let us not be arrogant here though. We are in no position to judge the world leaders, for governments consist of humans and all humans are sinners. That you and I sin at all tells us that there is a part of each one of us that wishes we were God as well. Every time someone watches pornography, it is not just the urges of our lustful bodies giving them those desires – it is from their flesh saying “I should be able to do this without it being sin, *I* want to be right and *I* want God to be *wrong*.” Every

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1 <https://www.uniteamerica.org/articles/report-most-americans-votes-dont-matter-in-deciding-elections>

time you covet something in your heart, your sinful flesh is telling God that He was wrong in giving something to your neighbor instead of you. Every time you lie about someone or try to harm their reputation, you tell the Lord of all truth that *you* want to be the lord of all truth. Our politicians are awful yes, but have we considered how many of them are operating in service to *other* sinful people?

The threat and the promise are yours as well, even on the individual level. Yes, our Psalm says in no uncertain terms that the “ostrich” is present with the rulers of the world, whether they are in Davos or the World Economic Forum or OPEC or the United Nations or wherever. Yes, God threatens them with destruction if they rebel and with blessing if they submit. But this very same threat and this very same promise hovers over you my friend.

You could decide to live your way. You could do what you want and fight against what God says and be some raucous anarchist your entire life. Sure. But that will not end well for you. Our Lord always wins, He never loses, and no one gets away with rebelling against Him. Even if for a time you enjoy drunkenness and arrogance and theft and stinginess and fornication, even if it appears that for a while you get away with it, it shall not continue on forever. Eventually the Hand of God presses down on the rebel, his world crashes around him, and the next stop on the road (if he does not repent) is hell itself.

### **God's Solution**

You could, on the other hand, listen to what Christ has to say and hear what exactly it is that He wants. While I assume that everyone reading (or hearing) this homily is already a believer, it is worth repeating. The Psalmist says that “Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.” The thing to do is believe, to receive Christ's free offer of salvation, and to tell Him “I am doomed unless You forgive me.” *Then*, as you receive what our Lord has to offer you with no merit of your own, you will find that He will bring about greater holiness and obedience in your very soul. The end of that road is eternal life.

You see my friends, the madness of sin is found in the heart of every human being. It is the madness of trying in vain to rebel against an omnipotent Being who sees our every move and can never be defeated. The rulers of this world do what they do because they cannot do otherwise, and even if they could the insane temptations coming from their hearts means that they would likely choose to rebel anyway. No amount of trying to *earn* our place in Heaven can work, because we sin constantly. God knows this, and so He sent His Son to die for our sins, that we may receive the only true way to escape judgment: “Kiss the Son” - that is, recognize Who He is, and trust in Him.

### **Conclusion**

One Day, Christ will return. The presidents and prime ministers and the kings and the dictators of the world will be at their cocktail parties. They'll be making their next plans together to inch further into the technological dystopia they have coveted for years and years now, infinite power brought to you by AI and globalism. They'll be counting their money and getting ready to do more nefarious things when – BAM! Christ shall come with a rod of iron to destroy every last piece of their ungodly kingdoms. The only people who will escape the moment when Jesus makes every nation His footstool will be those who did not resist the message of the Gospel, who said “I am Yours, save me!” and then proceeded to serve with fear and rejoice with trembling. Those who went to our Lord asking forgiveness for their misdeeds, and took refuge in His mercy. If you do so today my friends, that deliverance is promised to you. Repent and be Baptized, and rejoice at the deliverance He promises. For the “ostrich” I brought up is just a symbol, but the coming Judgment is *very* real.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.