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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

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## Preachers' Pages.

### HOMILETICAL HINTS AND OUTLINES.

[Contributed by the Rev. S. R. CAMBIE, B.D., B.Litt., Rector of Otley, Ipswich.]

Advent Sunday.

Text : " Behold I send my messenger before Thy face." " Among them that are born of women," etc.—*Matt.* xi. 10, 11.

The work of the forerunner may well engage our attention as the Advent season opens. The question with which John sent his disciples is rather outside the scope of our present study ; it is thoughtfully discussed in Mr. Bernard Lucas' *Conversations with Christ*. It is at least noteworthy that our Lord seems anxious to guard the reputation of the Baptist and to shield him from calumny and misunderstanding. He pronounced, finally, a eulogy which places him in a position of unique distinction—indeed sets him in the foremost place among the world's worthies. Notice—

I. THE AUSTERITY OF THE BAPTIST. He came " neither eating nor drinking " (*Matt.* xi. 18) ; he preached the simple life and practised it—(a) *In respect of his DIET*. It was such as was within his slender means but which was yet wholesome and sufficient for his needs. These are considerations which should guide us at all times but more especially in times like the present, when our country calls us to make every sacrifice and exercise the most rigid economy in the interests of personal safety and national security. (b) *In respect of his DRESS*. What else is there that so plainly reveals character ? The slovenly man displays a disorderliness in his apparel which will be found to reveal itself in everything he does. The over-dressed woman exhibits a vanity which often characterizes almost every act. John's attire was hardly fashionable—it was rough but useful.

II. THE AUDACITY OF THE BAPTIST. The world is tolerably full of men and women who may always be safely trusted to say and do what is called " the right thing "—that is to say the thing that will *pay* because it will *please*. But the Baptist was not one of these time-servers. Such persons will never " boldly rebuke vice "—they are too fearful of personal consequences. Study the Baptist's ministry and see how his proclamation of the Kingdom (a

popular idea upon which he fastened, making it his text and theme) (Matt. iii. 2), was accompanied by fierce denunciations of unrighteousness wherever he discerned it. It was a display of fine courage that at last cost him his life.

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Second Sunday in Advent.

Text : " The Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever."—  
1 *Pet.* i. 23.

The subject of Holy Scripture—its origin, its character and its functions—is brought before us to-day. This is because the ministry of the Word is one of the ways in which our Lord still has an advent—coming to heart and conscience. No other Church in Christendom gives such prominence to Holy Scripture in the public services. The attitude of our Church to the Bible is revealed in Article VI. Consider—

I. THE CLAIMS OF THE BIBLE. What has it to say about itself?  
(a) As to its inspiration (2 Tim. iii. 16 ; Acts i. 16 ; Heb. iii. 7).  
(b) As to its potentiality (Heb. iv. 12 ; cf. Ps. cxix. 50). (c) As to its permanence (see text, Ps. cxix. 89 ; Matt. v. 18, etc.).

II. THE CHARMS OF THE BIBLE. It enshrines the finest specimens of primitive literature, embracing history, poetry, law. Again, take the history alone and see how wide is the range, for it tells us the story of the universe, of the human family and of the Church of God. Yet these things constitute but a few of its many charms. Nor are they by any means the most prominent. Think of (a) *Its unique adaptability*. Written in the East it yet appeals forcibly to our Western minds. (b) *Its unflinching vitality*. Many attempts have been made to silence its witness but it still triumphantly meets every challenge of its foes. (c) *Its unsparing truthfulness*. In a series of portraits it reveals human nature in its true light, without respect of persons. (d) *Its undisputed accuracy*. Modern research confirms its testimony. Containing the Divine programme of the world's history, it shows how God has been steadily working His purpose out according to that programme. The past fulfilment of prophecy is the pledge of the ultimate accomplishment of God's plans.

III. THE CONQUESTS OF THE BIBLE. (a) *Some of these are recorded in the book itself*. E.g., in the time of Josiah (2 Chron. xxxiv. 14, etc.) ; in the days of Ezra (Neh. viii. 9). (b) *Others are recorded in the annals of the Church*. For example take the

Reformation, or the history of the Church in Uganda, or an annual report of the Bible Society.

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Third Sunday in Advent.

Text : " Ministers . . . stewards."—I *Cor.* iv. 1.

General subject—the Christian Ministry. Consider—(a) its opportunities, (b) its obligations (I *Cor.* ix. 16). Observe the four judgments to which the Apostle finds himself exposed. Note the significance of the verbal imagery. Let us think of the ministry as—

I. A RECOGNIZED INSTITUTION. The Church had already a settled ministry and the three orders can be traced in the New Testament. " Whom shall we judge lawfully called and sent ? " See Article XXXII.

II. AN HONOURABLE VOCATION. St. Paul said, " I magnify mine office " (Rom. xi. 13 ; see also 2 *Cor.* v. 18–20). Observe the Apostle's jealousy for its reputation as indicated by 2 *Corinthians* vi. 3, I *Corinthians* ix. 12, etc. (Are not the clergy too often shy of setting before our young men the claims of the ministry ? We hear much of the shortage of candidates for Holy Orders, and there are signs, too, that they no longer, to any considerable extent, come from a class that once supplied large numbers. Even Christian parents discourage their sons from pursuing any course in life which holds out no pecuniary prospects. The subject for the day seems to afford a suitable opportunity for pleading for a consideration of the sacred ministry not as a profession but as a holy calling.)

III. A RESPONSIBLE POSITION. St. Paul, indifferent to praise or blame, had a fine sense of his personal unworthiness (I *Cor.* xv. 9) and responsibility. The world demands that a man be successful, but Christ requires faithfulness (I *Cor.* iv. 3).

To watch and pray, and never faint ;  
By day and night strict guard to keep ;  
To warn the sinner, cheer the saint,  
Nourish Thy lambs, and feed Thy sheep.

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Fourth Sunday in Advent.

Text : " Rejoice in the Lord alway, etc."—*Phil.* iv. 4–6 (Epistle).

This passage brings before us three subjects—all of them of the deepest importance.

I. CHRISTIAN JOYFULNESS. "Rejoice in the Lord alway," etc. One of the epistles of the captivity, we might expect to find here that depression and melancholy have settled down on the Apostle's soul. To our surprise we find that he is possessed by a spirit of joyousness (see chaps. i. 4, 8; ii. 16-18). He exhorts them to display a like spirit (see i. 26; ii. 2, 28, etc.). Who but the Christian has such abundant cause for rejoicing?

II. CHRISTIAN THOUGHTFULNESS. "Let your moderation be known unto all." The A.V. somewhat obscures the meaning. It is not abstemiousness that is in the writer's mind but gentle concession and forbearance—τὸ ἐπιεικές. "Not strictness of legal right, but consideration for one another" (Alford).

III. CHRISTIAN WATCHFULNESS. It is by no means certain that the words rendered, "The Lord is at hand," primarily refer to the second advent. Taking them in their plain and natural sense, they may mean no more than,—the Lord is near in all the dispensations of His providence, in all the affairs of men. He is ever revealing Himself. It is likewise true that He is "near" in the advent sense. "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching" (Luke xii. 37).

IV. CHRISTIAN PRAYERFULNESS. "Let your requests be made known unto God." These would seem to be *conditions*. The consequences that follow when the conditions are fulfilled are that our hearts and minds are to be kept as the citadel is kept, by the peace of God—καὶ. "And then" (Alford). Lose the spirit of holy gladness, of sweet thoughtfulness for others, of watchfulness and devotion and forfeit the blessing.

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#### Christmas Day.

Text: "God . . . hath in these last days spoken to us by His Son."—*Heb.* i. (Epistle).

Jesus is at once the beginning and the end, the first and the last—the totality of God's revelation of Himself and His purposes for mankind.

I. JESUS IN THE HISTORY OF THE PAST. "There never was a time when He was not" (see John i. 1, 2; viii. 58). (a) Associated with the Father in the first acts of His Divine energy. "By whom also He made the worlds" (Heb. i. 2). (b) Occupied in the task of maintaining the unchanging order of the material universe

"Upholding all things by the word of His power" (Heb. i. 3; cf. John v. 17). (c) Exercising, even under the old dispensation, a redemptive ministry. Observe the retrospective aspect of the Cross (Heb. ix. 15).

II. JESUS IN THE HISTORY OF TO-DAY. (a) *In heaven*. Exercises a mediatorial ministry. "He ever liveth to make intercession" (Heb. vii. 25). (b) *On earth*. Present with His people—(1) In their worship (Matt. xviii. 20). (2) In their witness. "Teaching them . . . lo, I am with you always" (Matt. xxviii. 20).

III. JESUS IN THE WORLD'S TO-MORROW. (a) *Will be a greater force than ever*. "To Him shall endless prayer be made, and princes throng to crown His head." (b) *Will quicken the sleeping dead* (Rom. viii. 11; cf. 1 Cor. xv. 45).

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#### Sunday after Christmas.

Text: "They shall call His name Emmanuel . . . God with us."—*Matt. i. 23* (Gospel).

"There is no other personage in human history, himself a moral miracle, heralded by a veritable foreshadowing in a complex literature of previous centuries" (Bp. H. C. G. Moule, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 14). As we once more contemplate the mystery—"God with us" at Bethlehem—we see—

I. THE SUBJECT OF PROPHETIC ANNOUNCEMENT (Gen. iii. 15; Deut. xviii. 15, etc.). Note the frequent use of the phrase, "That it might be fulfilled which was written." "To Him give all the prophets witness" (Acts x. 43).

II. THE OBJECT OF THE FATHER'S LOVE. Mr. Moody once said that he never began to understand what the gift must have cost until he had a boy of his own. "His only-begotten Son" (John iii. 16). "My beloved Son" (Matt. iii. 17; cf. Luke xx. 13).

III. THE OBJECT OF SATANIC HATE. It was unjustifiable. "Without a cause" (John xv. 25). As in the case of Joseph, his brethren hated him (Gen. xxxvii. 5, 8; cf. John vii. 3-5; cf. 1 John ii. 11). Antagonisms are ever aroused by moral goodness.

IV. THE OBJECT OF HEAVEN'S WORSHIP. On earth they set Him "in the midst" between the malefactors. In heaven He is "in the midst" (Rev. v. 6; vii. 17), and the bright intelligences round about the Throne sing, "Thou art worthy."