

EPIPHANY;

Matthew 2:1-12

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

1. This Gospel harmonizes with the Epistle and speaks of the temporal coming of the heathen to Christ, by which their spiritual coming to Christ, mentioned in the Epistle, is signified and commenced. It is both a terrifying and consoling Gospel: terrifying to the great and wise, the self-satisfied and the mighty, because they all reject Christ; consoling to the humble and despised, because to them alone Christ is revealed.

I. THE HISTORY OR LESSON STORY.

2. The Evangelist first refers to Herod the king, in order to recall the prophecy of Jacob the patriarch, who said: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be." Gen. 49:10 [Gen. 49:10 - RPB]. From this prophecy is evident that Christ must come, when the kingdom or government of the Jews is taken from them, so that no other king or ruler from the house of Judah might sit on the throne. This was fulfilled now when Herod,

who was not of the house of Judah, nor of Jewish descent but of Edom, hence a foreigner, was made king over the Jews by the Romans to the great dissatisfaction of the Jewish people. Hence for thirty years he warred with them before he finally silenced and subdued them.

3. Now when this foreigner had ruled over the Jews for thirty years, had taken possession of the government, and the Jews had acquiesced therein having no hopes of getting rid of him and thus the prophecy of Jacob was fulfilled, then the time was at hand, then Christ came and was born under this first stranger and appeared according to the prophecy; as though he would say: The scepter has now departed from Judah, a stranger is ruling over my people; it is now time that I should appear and become king; the government now belongs to me.

4. These wise men are usually called the three Kings. As not much depends on this, we will grant this opinion to the simple minded people. However, it is not known whether there were two, three or more. But they certainly came from the rich country Arabia or Sheba, which is evident from their gifts viz. gold, frankincense and myrrh. All three of these are very precious in that country. It can certainly not be assumed that they had bought these elsewhere, for it is customary in these Eastern countries to do homage and make presents of the choice fruits and wealth of the country. just like Jacob commanded his sons to carry presents of the choice fruits of the land to Joseph in Egypt. Gen. 43, 11. Had these gifts of the wise men not been of their own country, why should they then have brought frankincense, myrrh and gold produced in the land of Judea, instead of silver and precious stones or fruits of some other country?

5. Therefore these gifts were not presented to Christ like artists paint the scenery that one offers gold, another frankincense and the third myrrh, but they presented the gifts in common as one man. And probably there were quite a number present, a few of them being the leaders, just as now a prince or a city sends a few brave men as messengers to the emperor with presents.

6. The Evangelist calls these men wise men which means in German weissager, i. e. (predictors, diviners); not in the same manner as the prophets predicted, but like those whom we call wise men and wise women, who can tell people all kinds of things; who know a great deal about the secret arts and follow adventures. The art of such people is called magic, which is sometimes accomplished by the black arts and the help of the devil, but not in all things as by the witches and sorcerers. For the wise men imitate the true prophets and prophesy like the true prophets, though not by the spirit of God. For this reason they sometimes happen to be correct as their work is not, like that of the witches, altogether the devil's work, but rather human reason aided by the devil.

7. Again, their miraculous deeds are not altogether done by the devil's cunning, like the doings of the witches, but by a combination of natural forces and the power of the devil. Hence a magician always imitates the real natural arts. For there are many hidden forces in nature, and he who knows how to apply them performs miracles in the eyes of those who know no better as, for instance, the alchemists make gold out of copper.

8. Of these secret forces of nature Solomon knew a great deal by the spirit of God, and made good use of this knowledge when he judged between the two women concerning the living and the dead child, I Kings 3, 25, discovering the real mother by appealing to the deepest feelings of nature. Again, Jacob also made use of this art when he used the peeled rods and the flocks brought forth speckled and spotted lambs, Gen. 30,39.

9. This is a fine and a truly natural art by which is derived all that physicians and others know about the properties of herbs, plants, metals, stones etc. The Scriptures also recognize this art when they make comparisons of animals, stones, trees, plants etc. This art was especially practiced and studied among the Persians, Arabians and in other Eastern countries, was an honorable art and made wise people.

10. But later on swine and block-heads meddled with it, as usually happens with all arts and doctrines, and have gone far from the truth, have confounded this noble art with juggling and sorcery, and have tried to follow and master both. But when they could not do this, they relinquished the real art and became jugglers and conjurers, prophesying and doing miracles by the help of the devil, though sometimes through the forces of nature. For the devil has retained much of this art and at times uses it through the magicians. Thus the word magic has become disreputable, meaning nothing else now than foretelling and doing miraculous deeds through the evil spirit, though at times it is reliable and helps men because natural forces, which are always reliable, are coupled with it and used by evil spirit.

11. Hence these magi or wise men were not kings, but men learned and experienced in this natural art though without doubt they also practiced conjury. Even to this day men from these eastern countries are possessed of great and various magic powers and, when this real art ceased, being despised they brought forth sorcery and spread it throughout the world but prior to this they relied entirely on the course of the heavenly bodies. Thus presumptuous human reason has always mixed and disgraced that which was good by imitation and indiscretion, attempting to ape everything that it sees and bears. Hence false prophets imitate the true prophets, false work-righteous saints the true saints, and the falsely learned the truly learned. If we look at the world we will find, that the work of human reason is but aping to imitate the good, only perverts it and thus deceives itself and others.

12. These wise men, therefore, were nothing else than what the philosophers were in Greece and the priests in Egypt, and the learned among us in the universities. In short, they were the priests and learned in the rich country of Arabia; just as if learned men are priests from the universities were now sent to a prince with presents. For the universities also claim that they teach natural arts which they call philosophy while in reality they are teaching not only tomfoolery, but also poisonous error and idle dreams.

13. For the natural art, which was formerly called magic but now physiology, is to learn the forces and work of nature; as for example, that a deer with its breath through the nose will draw a snake from the crevice in the rocks, kill and eat it and then on account of the great heat of the poison pants for cooling streams as stated in Ps. 42, 1. Again, that a weasel will induce a snake to come out of its hiding place by wagging its tail before the opening to anger

and excite the snake; and then lies in wait so that, when the snake looks up after its enemy the weasel fastens its teeth in the neck of the snake below the venomous fang and thus killing its enemy in its own house. Such arts the wise men studied, and in them is concealed a great deal of wisdom concerning Christ as well as the conduct of men in life. But this art is not taught in the universities now. Hence even the peasants know more about it than our wise men or natural masters who are not wrongfully called natural fools, because in spite of so much labor and trouble they have only retrograded and are the devil's mockingbirds. If we would therefore truly interpret this Gospel we must say: The masters of nature from the East or the naturalists from Arabia have come.

14. Some are also surprised that they could come such long distance in so few days, for it is believed that they appeared the thirteenth day after Christ's birth, the geographers state that the capital city Sheba in Arabia is a sixty days journey from the Mediterranean sea, which is not much over three German (i. e. fifteen English) miles from Bethlehem. But questions of this kind do not trouble me very much, nor is it an article of faith to believe that they appeared the thirteenth day.

15. Neither is it necessary to hold that they came from the capital city Sheba, or from the remotest parts of the country. Perhaps they came from a place near the boundary of the country and thus they had sufficient time to come in the usual way of travel. Mary being unclean had to remain at Bethlehem according to the law for six weeks, just like any other woman, and might thus have been found there even more than twenty or thirty days. However, I will not interpret like the common idea that they came in a miraculous manner; since no one needs to hold as an article of faith the question as to how they proceeded, and what they were accustomed to do in such matters.

Whatever the Scriptures do not reveal we do not consider an article of faith.

16. Now the thought of the Evangelist is this: When Christ was born under Herod, the first foreign king, and the time of the prophecy was fulfilled, this wonderful sign occurred. He whom his own people and fellow citizens would neither seek nor acknowledge was sought by such strangers and foreigners for many days. To him whom the learned and the priests would not acknowledge and worship, came the wise men and astrologers. It was indeed a great shame for the whole Jewish land and people that Christ was born in their midst, and they should first become aware of it through these heathen people living so far away. At least in Jerusalem, the capitol city, they should have known about it. An earnest admonition to seek and to acknowledge Christ was given them. But their neck was an iron sinew and their brow brass as Isaiah says 48, 4.

"Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we saw his star in the East, and are come to worship him."

17. Text and circumstances demand that we speak further about the natural philosophers or masters of nature, because here the wise men knew by the star of the birth of a King as they declared. It must be observed that to every man is known a certain portion of the knowledge of nature. For instance, I know that a dog's tongue is good in healing wounds, that a cat will

catch mice even when she is not hungry, that a hawk catches partridges etc. One individual may know more also than others about nature either by his own experience, or through instruction. God did not however reveal to us all the facts about nature, but only a small portion of them. Yet human reason is inquisitive and always wants to know more and more, and thus originated the study and investigation of nature.

18. But it is impossible that nature could be understood by human reason after the fall of Adam, in consequence of which it was perverted, any further than experience or divine illumination allows. However, restless human reason will not submit and be satisfied with this, desiring to know and see everything. For this reason it begins to speculate and to investigate farther than is permissible, and thus despises what experience or God has given it. And yet it never attains what it seeks after. All study and wisdom is but error and folly. This is the reason why men, despising or not being able to master this natural art, are divided into numerous sects. Some have written about the earth, others about water, some about this and others about that, so that there is no end to investigation and the making of books. Finally when they were tired of the study of the earth, they turned to the heavens in order to master also the nature of the heavens and the stars, with which no one could ever have any experience. Here they were entirely at liberty to dream, lie and deceive and to say about the innocent heavens whatever they pleased. It is a true saying that: Those who lie about distant countries lie as they please, because no one has had sufficient experience to contradict.

19. So also here, because no one can reach up into the heavens and testify from experience as to the truth or falsity of their teachings, they lie without fear. Hence they teach that whoever is born in this or that sign must become a gambler, whoever is born under this or that star will become rich or wise. Again, this one must be killed, or that one who builds, marries or makes a journey on this or that day must fare so or so. They say, it is the nature of the stars of heaven so to effect human beings that happen to be born at such a time. The Lord help us! Human reason in all sincerity has come to this, because these are all great and glaring lies, and captivating and unprofitable fables, in which reason in its blindness finds the greatest pleasure, as it delights not so much in the truth, as in fables and lies.

20. But finally the real champions appeared who, disdainingly to deal with child's play like this, opened their eyes widely and began to investigate the whole world, whence it came and whither it was going; whether it had a beginning or existed from eternity and will continue to all eternity; whether there is a supreme Being who rules all things etc. Here appeared the great light of nature, the heathen master, the supreme master of all masters of nature, who now rules in Christ's stead in all the universities viz: the great famous Aristotle, who taught and still teaches them that a stone is heavy, that a feather is light, that water is wet and that fire is dry; again, as a special masterpiece that the earth is above and the heavens below, which he proves by the fact that the roots of trees and all kinds of plants are in the ground, and the limbs grow heavenward. Now that part which receives nourishment must always be above, and that part to which the nourishment goes, must always be below as we observe in a human being. Therefore man is a tree turned upside down. And thus when a feather flies upward it goes downward, and when a stone falls it rises upward.

21. Furthermore, when he speaks of the Supreme Being he concludes that the world existed from all eternity and will exist forever, and that all souls die together with the body. And the supreme being sits above the heavens, seeing nothing that occurs, but constantly turns as blind fortune is pictured, the heavens around once every day. In this way all things happen just as they do. His argument is this: Should the Supreme Being see all things, he would see much evil and wrong, and that would make him unhappy. In order to remain happy he must see nothing but himself, and consequently rule the world blindly, just like a mother cradles her child in the night.

22. This is the wisdom of the universities. Whoever knows or learns this will have a brown cap placed upon his head and be addressed: Worthy magister artium et philosophiae! i. e. worthy master of the arts and of philosophy. He who does not know this art, can never become a theologian nor understand the holy Scriptures; yes, he is considered a heretic and can never become a Christian. Tell me, what shall we call these people? They are neither wise men nor sorcerers nor jugglers, but are mad, frantic and senseless. Therefore consider whether Christ did not rightly chastise us in that we have despised the Gospel, being unthankful, in that he permitted us to become such disgraceful and vile dupes of the devil that we not only do not apprehend the fact, but even with great expense, trouble and labor seek after it as the greatest wisdom.

23. St. Paul prophesied all this saying: "Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Col. 2, 8. Again: "O Timothy, guard that which is committed unto thee, turning away from the profane babblings and oppositions of the knowledge which is falsely so called; which some professing have erred concerning the faith." I Tim. 6, 20-21. Here the apostle surely condemns in plain words the teachings of the universities so emphatically that none can contradict him, and wills that everything that is not from Christ should be avoided. Surely every one must confess that Aristotle, the chief master of all the universities, teaches not only nothing about Christ, but even teaches such foolish things, as has been stated, that the apostle properly commands us to guard the doctrine committed unto us, calling the natural art of Aristotle unchristian, profane, meaningless babblings in opposition to Christ, knowledge falsely so-called. How could the apostle have explained it more plainly than by designating it thus? There is no greater glory than that of Aristotle in the universities, and yet it is but a false glory. For this art is nothing but an opposition that has arisen for the purpose of destroying Christ.

24. Therefore, my dear hearer, let natural art depart. If you do not know what powers the stars, stones, wood, animals or any creatures possess, after which knowledge the natural art strives, even doing its best, then be satisfied with that which your experience and common sense teach you. Nor does it matter much whether you know all this or not; it is enough for you to know that fire is hot and water cold and wet, that in summer time different work must be done than during the winter; to know how to attend to your farm, stock, home and children. This is enough for you as to natural art. Beyond this think only of how you can learn to know Christ. He will teach you to know yourself, who you are and what power lieth

in you. In this way you will know God and yourself, which no master of the arts of nature ever learned as St. Paul says, 1 Cor. 2, 8.

25. Coming back to the text you might say, Yes, but the Gospel says that these wise men learned from the stars the birth of a king, and therefore it proves that astrology is to be taught and known. God himself giving encouragement by causing a star to rise and thus teaching the wise men.

26. Answer: Keep to the example and learn as these wise men learned from the star, and then you will do right and not fall into error, for there is no doubt about it that the sun, moon and stars were created to be signs and to serve the earth with their light, as Moses says, Gen. 1, 14. When the sun rises, you learn that the day begins; when it sinks, that the day has ended; and when it stands in the meridian, that it is noon-day. Furthermore, it has been fixed as a sign and measure of time and of the hours in which to do your work. So also the moon and the stars at night. Again, you also need the sun as a guide in tilling your farm and in caring for your stock, its heat determining your work. Let it be sufficient to know this much about the sun and the heavens. Whatever more you desire to know, you do not need and is but idle curiosity for the most part, unreliable and inclined to error. For instance, when fools pretend to know how large the sun is, how far it is from the earth, what particular power it has over gold, and that one born in the sign of the sun will become wise, and more such tomfoolery, for which they can give no sure reason.

27. Furthermore, you should also know that when the sun loses its brightness it is surely a sign which forbodes disaster; and likewise when a comet appears. This is taught by experience; and Christ says, Luke 21, 25, that such signs will appear in the sun, moon and stars and will signify the final destruction of the world. Great storms, lightning, floods and fire in the air and on earth are also great signs. But how these things occur or what kind of natural forces there are in all of these signs, or what effect they mysteriously produce, about which the magicians enquire and juggle; all this is of no value to you nor necessary for you to know. It is enough that you behold in all of these signs the wrath of God, and amend your life. During these years there have also occurred many eclipses and many signs have been seen in many countries, presaging great disturbances. Thus the eclipse at the suffering of Christ signified the calamity which rests upon the Jews to this day. These are indeed certain signs for which purpose God created them, but those of which astrologers dream are unreliable.

28. Hence these wise men had nothing else in this star than a sign and only used it as such according to the decree of God. Therefore, astrologers and fortune tellers can not find encouragement for their false art in this Gospel. For though these wise men may also have been infatuated by this art, in this case they used this star only as a sign. They do not at all forfeit what Christ would be in the future, what should happen to him, do not concern themselves about it. They are satisfied that it was a sign of a great king, and only ask where he is to be found.

29. And in order that Christ might forever stop the mouth of such babblers, he created for his birth a special new star as yet unsullied by their babbling. Knowing that they might say that he was born under the power of this star, he meets them beforehand and says: This star is not like one of those about which you are speculating. If the future fate of all men rests in the stars, as you teach, then there can be no such power in this star, which is new and of a different nature than the other stars, of which you have hitherto not heard or known anything. Again, if none of the other stars had any power over Christ, having his own new star, it follows that they have no power over any human being, because Christ was in every respect a man like other men. Furthermore, if this new star had no power over other men, existing only for a short time, it certainly had also no power over Christ, as he is just like all other men. For this reason astrology is mere tomfoolery.

30. But how these wise men could see in this star a sign that unmistakably signified a newborn king, I do not know. Perhaps they read in their histories and chronicles that aforetime the birth of other kings had been signified in the heavens or through a star. For we find also in the histories of the Romans and the Greeks that the coming or birth of some great princes and extraordinary men had been foretold by miracles and signs in the air and in the heavens. These wise men also knew quite well that these Jews were the chosen people of God, who were and had been above all other people, especially favored of God. Therefore, as this was such a beautiful star, they certainly thought that God had given this people a new king. But the claim of some that these wise men knew the saying of Balaam: "There shall come forth a star out of Jacob," etc. (Num. 24, 17), will avail nothing, as this speaks mainly of the spiritual coming of Christ, who is the star himself. But whoever is not satisfied with this may think as he pleases about it. Perhaps they knew all by divine revelation.

31. At first they did not consider this king to be God, but in the usual manner took him for a temporal king, just as the queen of Sheba considered Solomon a king, coming to him with presents from her country. For this reason they also come to Jerusalem, the capital city, hoping to find him in the king's palace and in splendor. For the star that they saw over the Jewish country when they were yet at home in Arabia, must have disappeared so that they did not see it again on their journey till they proceeded from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, as the Gospel states.

32. But when they say, We have seen his star, they do not yet think that Christ had created it, but that it was his star because it signified his birth, just as the astrologers today call each man's sign in which he was born his sign, not as though he had created it himself. For the glory of Christ's divinity remained unseen until his ascension, though glimpses were sometimes afforded.

33. So also when they worshipped him, they did it after the manner of those eastern countries, as the Scriptures state, not as though they considered them gods. The falling down before them and the homage given is called worship by the Scriptures and it is applied both to men and God, just as the words lord and king, yea, even the name of God are applied to man as when Jehovah said to Moses: "See, I have made thee as God to Pharaoh." Ex. 7, 1.

II. THE ATTITUDE OF HEROD TO THE ARRIVAL OF THE WISE MEN.

"And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

34. Why are they troubled? Were not the Jews waiting for Christ who was promised them by God, as we have seen from Gen. 49, 10? Were not Simeon and Anna and many more pious people at Jerusalem at that time looking for Christ's coming and rejoicing in it? That Herod was troubled, there was good reason. He feared the loss of his kingdom because he well knew that he was a foreigner and merited the ill will of the Jews. He also knew that the Jews looked for the Christ who should deliver them as Moses had done. Troubled by his conscience, he feared an insurrection against him and that he be driven from his kingdom. On the other hand the Jews feared Herod and the Romans, believing that to have a new king would mean much bloodshed for them. They had before this, to their own great misfortune, revolted against the Romans and Herod, hence they were minded like the people of Israel in Egypt, who, when Moses was to lead them out and they were oppressed more than before, murmured against Moses. This was a sign of their weak faith, just as this fear of the Jews at Jerusalem indicates unbelief, and more trust in human than divine power.

35. However, the true believers were not frightened, but rather rejoiced. And when the Evangelist says that all Jerusalem was troubled together with Herod, he does not mean all the inhabitants and citizens of the city, but speaks after the manner of the Scriptures, viz., that when it mentions a city only and not its inhabitants also, it means not all who dwell in it but the majority of them. Thus it is often said in the book of Joshua that he destroyed this and that city, killing all the inhabitants and whatever lived in it, but meaning only the largest part and number of them.

"And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written through the prophet, and thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, art in no wise least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come forth a governor, who shall be shepherd of my people Israel."

36. Here we ask, why did not Christ lead these wise men to Bethlehem by the star instead of allowing his birth, which was now known, to be learned from the Scriptures? This was done that he might teach us to adhere to the Scriptures and not depend on our own wisdom nor the teaching of any man. The Scriptures have been given for a purpose. In them he desires to be found, and nowhere else. Whoever despises and rejects these shall and will never find him. We have also heard, in Luke 2, 12, that the angel also gave the shepherds a sign, but not to Mary nor to Joseph nor to any other men, no matter how pious they were, but gave to them only the swaddling clothes and the manger in which he was wrapped and laid; that is, the writings of the prophets and the law; in these he is wrapped, they contain him, they speak only of him and bear witness of him; they are his sure sign, as he says himself. "Ye search the Scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me." John 5, 39. And Paul says: "A righteousness of God hath been

manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.” Rom. 3, 21. Furthermore, we have also heard that Simeon and Anna represent the Scriptures, which manifest Christ and bear him in their arms. And according to Luke 16, 29-31, Abraham would not grant the request of Dives in hell that Lazarus be sent to his brothers, but points to the Scriptures, saying: ”They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. If they bear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead.”

37. Against this divine doctrine our learned men have until now set up all kinds of means to learn the truth. We must speak of a few in order to guard ourselves against them. In the first place they have set up innumerable laws, statutes, articles and teachings invented by men, such as clerical canons, orders, regulations, etc.; all of which are without doubt not the swaddling clothes and the manger of Christ, neither do they represent Simeon nor Anna. St. Paul has earnestly warned us against such teachings and urged us to abide in the Word of God alone. For all human doctrines are dangerous and cause us to depart from the faith, just as Solomon was led astray by strange women, and as Paul says, Tit. 1, 14, ”That fables and commandments of men turn away from the truth.”

38. If any one were to use human doctrines as he eats and drinks and wears clothing, they might be harmless. No one eats or drinks or clothes himself for the purpose of becoming holy and being saved thereby. Such an opinion or conviction would be base folly for anyone. His intention and desire to become holy rests upon this, that he strives firmly to believe in Christ and thus become holy and be saved. Such intention is correct and the desire good. Hence let him who fasts, labors, wears the garments of monks or priests, or keeps the rules of his order, consider this just as he considers eating and drinking, not as making him holy by doing it, or as making him unholy by omitting it. Let him know that he can become holy only through faith. Doing this he will be safe and human teachings will do him no more harm than eating and drinking or the wearing of clothing. But where are they that are doing this? Among a thousand there is scarcely one, for they usually all say: If I do not become holy and am not saved by such a life, order, regulations and work, what a fool I am to walk in them and observe them.

39. It is therefore not possible for human doctrines not to lead away from the truth, as Paul says. For one of two things must take place, viz.; They will either be despised and rejected when it is understood that they will not make us holy nor save us; or they will ensnare and deaden conscience and conviction if it is believed that they do make us holy and must therefore be kept. In this case faith is destroyed and the soul must perish. There is no help nor rescue. For true faith cannot exist nor can it tolerate that anyone should conscientiously hold something else to be necessary to become holy and be saved than faith in Christ alone. Therefore, whoever has this faith can not trust in human teachings, but observes them when and wherever he pleases, being lord over them. But he who follows human doctrines without having faith, can never apprehend faith, remains forever a slave of human commandments and will never do a really good work, as St. Paul says, Tit. 1, 16. For this reason we must hold fast to the plain teaching of Scripture which presents Christ only, and that by faith in

him we become true Christians and then freely do all kinds of good works to the good of our neighbor, as has often been said.

40. In the second place they point us to tradition and the examples of the saints to strengthen and prove their manmade teachings. And this is very effective and leads many souls to destruction. It leads away from the Scriptures and faith in such a smooth unsuspecting manner that no one is aware of it. Thus they point to St. Benedict, Gregory, Bernard, Augustine, Francis, Dominic and many other saints, whom we all recognize as holy men and say that they observed such human ordinances and regulations and by virtue of them became holy men. Tell me how can the simple-minded Christian withstand such arguments and still keep the faith? It must be an apostolic or evangelical spirit that will here remain firm. Oh, how sure they are and how boldly they parade! When they produce such examples of holy men they think that they have kindled a great light.

41. Now, if I say to them, these holy men also ate, drank, slept and wore clothing, does it therefore follow that we should also establish an eat-order, drink-order, sleep-order and clothes-order? They will answer: O, these holy fathers did not observe this, viz., eating and drinking, etc, to become pious and holy men, as they observed these other regulations which they believed to be good and holy institutions. Here I answer, if you say that these holy fathers become pious and holy through such human ordinances more than by eating and drinking, sleeping and wearing clothing, then you are quite mistaken. For God has wisely desisted from ever honoring one of these saints with a miracle on account of his good works, rather were they all full of the spirit and faith. You seem to care not for their spirit and faith, but instead cling to their external deeds only. A fool would do the same if he were to sleep all his life because he heard that St. Bernard also slept once, and were to hope thereby to become holy and be saved. Therefore these holy men are wronged if it is claimed that they observed these ordinances to become holy and be saved, and the people are deceived by the life and in the name of these saints.

42. But you may say: Yes, but they still kept them, did not reject them, nor consider them so important as you seem to teach. Answer: It is not for you or me to judge their hearts and intentions, but we say this, It is not impossible that they considered them of too great importance. If so, they as human beings, have erred concerning them. For everybody must confess that the saints have also erred and sinned. Therefore God demands that we look to his Word only, and not follow the example of the saints except as these agree with the word of God. But whenever they as human beings follow also their own inventions or human teachings, then we should do as the pious Shem and Japhet, who covered the wickedness of their father, and not like the impious Ham, who went around talking about it. Thus we should keep silent about the infirmities of the saints and not make them known that we may follow them only in their strength. It is no wonder that these saints have stumbled and erred in these things. The knowledge of Christ and of faith is so above the natural man that only God's grace can work it in us. Flesh and blood can not reveal it unto us, but only the Father in heaven, as Christ says, Math. 16, 17. Even greater saints than Augustine, Benedict, Gregory and others like them have erred in these things. At the time of the apostles there

were already such teachers, against whom St. Paul wrote all his epistles in order to keep the faith altogether free from works and human doctrines.

43. And that you may marvel still more, the whole Christian church in its early days, and at its best, erred in these things, only Peter, Paul and Barnabas standing firm and holding that neither law nor good works are profitable and necessary for salvation. St. Luke clearly states it in Acts 15. There were great saints there, the apostles and their disciples who insisted and would have continued to insist that the law and good works were necessary for salvation, had not St. Paul and Peter declared against it. And even they themselves would not have known this had not God by miraculous signs from heaven confirmed them in their opinion that only faith is profitable and necessary for salvation, as we read, Acts 10, 43.

44. More than this, although St. Peter knew all this and helped to defend it, yet at Antioch he also erred and made improper use of his Christian liberty, and only St. Paul understood him, as he writes, Gal. 2, 11. Not as though St. Peter believed that he must keep the law, but that he did not at once make proper use of his Christian liberty, which he well understood thinking that he had to hesitate for the sake of others, This was wrong and was censured by Paul. Therefore, it amounts to nothing whatever if those works of the saints are referred to which they did outside of the Scriptures. They are deceiving just as well and even more than the errors of heretics and false teachers, because real and true holiness adorns such infirmities altogether too much. God permits such things in order that he might hold us to his Word and doctrine without which there is neither life nor light, even if all the angels were to teach such things.

45. In the third place, they hold up to us the saints' interpretations of the Scriptures, and consider them a great light. They finally adhere to them and believe that in these interpretations they possess something that no one could reject, and claim again and again in order to keep us away from the pure Word that the Scriptures are obscure and make many heretics.

46. Is not this a masterpiece of blasphemy? But who guarantees them that the fathers are not also obscure? Or who will give us the guaranty that the fathers did not err in their interpretations? Indeed it is well known that they did often err, often contradicted themselves, often contradicted each other and very seldom were unanimous in their agreement. God permitted this to happen to make uncertain also the interpretations of the fathers and to warn us on all sides not to depart from the Scriptures. And yet we stumble here and do not permit ourselves to be guided by the Scriptures. Therefore we should know that it is not true when they say: The fathers give light to the obscure Scriptures. They are doing injustice to the fathers, and belie them. The work of the fathers was not to give light to the Scriptures with their comments, but rather to set forth the clear Scriptures and thus interpret Scripture by Scripture only without any additions of their own.

47. However, that heretics originated from the Scriptures, is true. From where else should they have come? There is no other book that teaches the Christian faith but the Scriptures. Therefore, as no one can become a Christian except by the Scriptures, so also can no one

become a heretic but by the same Scriptures. Christ is indeed a sign spoken against and set for the falling and rising of many. Should we on that account reject him or set up another Christ by his side? You do not at the same time need wine and bread, but should we on that account quit tilling the farm and the vineyards or start others besides them? Satan is the enemy of the Scriptures and therefore he has decried and calumniated them by this clamor and blasphemy.

48. But what does this Gospel teach? In the first place, these wise men did not inquire after the chief priests and do not ask: Where is Annas or Caiaphas, or how did this or that man live? But they ask: Where is the newborn king of the Jews? Yes, Christ permits them, as a warning to us, to go astray and to seek him in Jerusalem in the holy city among the priests, the learned and the royalty. He is not found in the holy place nor in the holy customs. Nor did they receive as an answer any human opinions, but only what the Scriptures say about Christ, which alone are to be sought among the holy people and in holy places.

49. Sufficient examples are here given to show us that disregarding all human works, teachings, comments and life we should be mindful only of the clear Scriptures, and as to the life and teachings of the saints preserve the right not to rake or snatch up everything that they teach or live, but rather to sit in judgment on these things and accept with discretion only that which is compatible with the Scriptures. But what is their own, without Scripture proof, we should consider as human inventions and avoid, as St. Paul teaches: Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. 1 Thess. 5, 21. Moses has also indicated this, Levit. 11, 3, Deut. 14, 6, where he describes clean and unclean beasts, that all animals which are not cloven footed and ruminant are unclean. These are the men who are not cloven footed, who spend their lives carelessly, rake up whatever comes before them and follow it. But the clean animals are those men who by the spirit act with discretion in all external things and doctrines. Whatever they see harmonizing with the Scriptures they keep, but whatever is without Scriptural foundation and mere human inventions they dismiss, no matter how great and famous the saints who taught it may be. For no saint has been so perfect as to be free from flesh and blood, or the continued struggle with flesh and blood, so that it is scarcely possible that all their teachings and works were spiritually perfect and are to be accepted as examples. Human nature and reason often concurred in their work, and these are not to be trusted at all. Hence Moses commands us to be cloven footed and Paul to discern the spirits and not to accept all the works and doings of men.

50. Now in these three things, viz., human teachings, examples of the saints and the comments of the fathers, they think and many believe it that they are quite right, that no one dares to doubt or contradict them and that they rule here in perfect safety. They imagine that no one but they alone possess the holy Scriptures, which they have so beautifully summarized in these three vessels.

51. In addition they sink still deeper into the abyss of spiritual darkness when they claim that natural light or intellect and heathen philosophy are also safe means of discovering the truth. In this direction the universities have gone so far astray that they teach that no one can be a theologian, i. e. one of the best Christians without Aristotle. Oh blindness above all

blindness! It might be tolerated if they were to refer here to truths of nature as would call this natural philosophy, viz., that fire is hot, that three and five are eight, etc., which reason at once recognizes. But they soar high and invent idle dreams and useless thoughts about things that are vain and of which they know nothing; and it is grievous to think of their senseless, absurd studying. They go to so much expense and trouble that even Satan mocks at them, whereby God deservedly punishes them because they would not abide in the pure Word. For this reason they must devour the very pollution of hell and be lost.

52. They then meddled even with the work of the devil and followed the example of the souls or spirits appearing and praying for help and believed everything that these spirits said without fear or hesitation. Thus the mass, i. e. the Lord's Supper, has been so abused by saying mass for souls in purgatory and by the selling of indulgences, that the whole world by shedding tears of blood day and night could not bewail it sufficiently. Thus the devil has permitted himself to be conjured and constrained to reveal the truth and has turned our faith and sacrament into play and mockery to his own liking. All this is the result and reward of our overcuriousness, which has not been satisfied with the Scriptures of God and has made our true and faithful God and Father a fool and clown, who pretends to teach us by his Word and yet does not care to teach us that which we ought and necessarily need to know. For this reason he serves us right in permitting us to become the devil's pupils, inasmuch as we despised his school.

53. But you say: Should we then deny that wandering spirits go astray and seek for help? Answer: Let wander who will, you listen to what God commands. If you hold all these spirits in suspicion, you are not sinning; but if you hold some of them to be genuine and honest, you are already in danger of erring. And why? Because God does not want you to seek and learn the truth from the dead. He himself wants to be your living and all sufficient teacher. To his Word you should cling. He knows best what to tell you about the living and the dead, for he knows all things. But whatever he does not want to tell you, you should not desire to know, and give him the honor to believe that he knows what is not necessary, profitable nor good for you to know.

54. Therefore you should freely and unhesitatingly cast all such ghostly apparitions to the winds and not be afraid of them; they will then leave you in peace. And should it seem, that perhaps in your house you hear a hobgoblin or rumbling spirit, then make no ado about it, but be assured that it can not be a good spirit come from God. Make the sign of the cross and firmly hold to your faith. Has he been sent by God to chastise you, like Job, then be ready to endure it willingly, but should it be the spirit's own sport, then defy him by strong faith and joyfully depend on God's Word. Depend upon it he will not attack that. However, I hold that none of these hobgoblins are ordained of God to molest us, but it is their own mischief to terrify the people, because they have no longer any power to harm. If they had any power to harm, they would surely not engage in much racketing, but do their evil work before you could be aware who had done it. But if a good spirit were to visit you, it would not occur with such noise and frivolity. Do this and manifest strong faith and you will find that such a

spirit is not of God, and will cease its work. If you have not such faith, then he will have easy work, for then God's Word which alone he fears is not with you.

55. The words of the Scriptures upon which you should boldly rely are Luke 16, 29, where Abraham said to Dives in hell, who desired the departed Lazarus to be sent to his brothers living on earth, but Abraham refusing to do this, said: "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." From these words it is plain that God will not have us taught by the dead, but have us abide in his Word. Therefore, no matter how and where a spirit comes to you, do not ask whether he be good or evil, but bravely, quickly and defiantly cast into his teeth the words: "they have Moses and the prophets," and he will soon understand what you mean. Is it a good spirit, he will only love you the more for adhering so gladly and firmly to the Word of your God. Is it an evil spirit, as are all those that are noisy, he will soon bid you adieu. Again, another word of God is spoken by Moses in Deut. 18, 11: "When thou art come into the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found with thee any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through fire, one that useth divination, one that practiceth augury, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a consulter with a familiar spirit, or a wizard, or a necromancer." Here, you are told that it is an abomination in the sight of God to consult the dead or the spirits, and it is strictly forbidden. To this word of Moses Abraham looked when he did not permit Lazarus to come back to the earth. You can also use this passage against these spirits, saying: "Thou shalt not consult the dead, saith the Lord."

56. God has insisted on this so firmly, that there is no example recorded in the Scriptures, where the saints have ever consulted the dead about anything. And this is the third argument that you can use against these spirits: No one ever heard or read of an example in the Scriptures as to such spirits and their work, hence the whole must be condemned and avoided as of the devil.

57. From this we may easily learn, that the coming up of Samuel was an apparition, 1 Sam. 28, 13, inasmuch as it is altogether contrary to this commandment of God. It is therefore not to be assumed that the real prophet Samuel came up by the power of the witch of En-dor. But that the Scriptures are silent on this point, not telling us whether it was the real or false Samuel, is because they demand of everybody to remember well that through Moses God forbade to consult the dead. And he never revokes his Word, as Job says and Balaam also, Num. 23, 19. How can the witch have any power over the saints, who are resting in God's hands?

58. However, should it be said: In this way purgatory will also be denied, I will answer: You are not a heretic for disbelieving in purgatory, as there is nothing said about it in the Scriptures. And it is better not to believe that which is outside of the Scriptures, than to depart from that which is in the Scriptures. Let pope and Papists here rage as they please, who have made purgatory an article of faith because it has brought to them the wealth of the earth but also countless souls to hell, souls that depended and relied on good works for redemption from it. God gave no command concerning purgatory, but he did command us in no way to consult the dead nor to believe what they say. Consider God more truthful and

trustworthy than all angels, to say nothing of the pope and the Papists who, as all their work is but lying and deceiving, awaken but little faith in purgatory. However, if you want to pray for the dead, I will not interfere. I am of the opinion that purgatory is not so general as they say, but that only a few souls will enter it. Still as I have said, it is without any danger to your soul if you do not believe in a purgatory. You are not called upon to believe more than what the Scriptures teach. But should they advance also the sayings and comments of Gregory, Augustine and other saints concerning purgatory, then remember that I have already told you how far these saints are to be followed and believed. Who will assure us that they did not err and were not deceived here as in many other things.

59. Our faith must have a sure foundation, God's Word, and not the sand or bog of human custom and inventions. With this Isaiah also agrees when he says, 'And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits and unto the wizards, that chirp and that mutter. Should not a people seek unto their God? On behalf of the living should they seek unto the dead? To the law and the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them etc.'" Is. 8, 19-20. This is certainly a clear passage that urges and compels us to seek in God's law and testimony all that we want to know. And he who will not do this, shall be deprived of the morning light which no doubt means Christ and the truth itself. Note also that after Isaiah said we should seek unto God, so that no one might stare at the heavens and expect something extraordinary from God, he shows where and whence we should seek unto God, saying: To the law and to the testimony. He will not permit any seeking unto God in himself outside of the Scriptures, much less will he permit it in others.

60. Moses mentions many ways by which men seek knowledge. Deut. 18, 10-11 There are eight classes as follows. 1. The users of divination. They are those who reveal the future, like the astrologers and false prophets by inspiration of the devil. 2. Those that practice augury. They designate some days as lucky for making a journey, for building, for marrying, for wearing fine clothes, for battle and for all kinds of transactions. 3. The enchanters or rather diviners - I know no better name to call these, who conjure the devil by means of mirrors, pictures, sticks, words, glass, crystals, fingers, nails, circles, rods, etc., and expect in this way to discover hidden treasures, history and other things. 4. The sorcerers, or witches, the devil mongers who steal milk, make the weather, ride on goats, brooms and sails (mantles) shoot the people, cripple and torture and wither, slay infants in the cradle, bewitch certain members of the body, etc. 5. The charmers, who bless people and animals, bewitch snakes, bespeak steel and iron, bluster and see much, and can do wonders. 6. The consulters of familiar spirits, who have the devil in their ears and tell the people what they have lost, what they are doing or what they will do in the future, just as the gypsies do. 7. The wizards, who can change things into different forms so that something may look like a cow or an ox, which in reality is a human being, that can drive people to illicit love and intercourse, and more such works of the devil. 8. The necromancers, who are walking spirits.

61. Behold, Moses did not forget anything, stopping up every avenue where men seek to learn, outside of the Word of God. Thus he has often denounced self-conceit and human

reason, especially Deut. 12, 8: Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. And Prov. 3, 5: Trust in Jehovah with all thy heart and lean not upon thine own understanding. He does this that we might know that God wants us to follow neither our own reason nor that which is above reason, but only his Word, as Isaiah said above, not to seek unto the living nor the dead, but to seek unto God only in the law and testimony. St. Peter also says in 2 Peter 1, 19: "And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the day-star arise in your hearts." Does not St. Peter here agree nicely with Isaiah as to God's Word and the dawn of the morning? And when St. Peter says that the Word alone is a light that shines in a dark place, does he not clearly show that there is only darkness where God's Word is absent?

62. This digression was necessary in order to reply to the false teachers and doctrines of men, and to preserve the Scriptures in their purity. We now come back to our text and learn of these wise men to ask: "Where is the new born King of the Jews?" Let Herod consult the priests and scribes, we will only inquire after the new born King. Let the universities ask, Where is Aristotle? Where is the pope? What does human reason teach? What says St. Bernard, St. Gregory, the church councils and the learned doctors, etc., We ask, Where is Christ? We are not satisfied until we hear what the Scriptures say about him. We are not concerned as to how great and holy Jerusalem is, nor how great and mighty Rome may be. We seek neither Jerusalem nor Rome, but Christ the King in the Scriptures. If we have the Scriptures, we cast aside Herod, the priests and the scribes, Jerusalem and Rome, and search in them till we find Jesus.

63. However we learn here that the Scriptures and Christ have three kinds of disciples. The first are the priests and the scribes. They know and teach the Scriptures to all, but do not come to him. Is not this great hardness of heart and contempt on the part of the learned? They hear and see that great and honest men come from a far country to seek Christ, and they are told that a star in the heavens testified to his birth; in addition they themselves produce testimony from the Scriptures. Since they were the priests and most learned men they should have been the first, joyfully and eagerly to hurry to Bethlehem. Yes, if they had been told that Christ had been born in some Eastern country, they should even then by all means have hurried to him, inasmuch as all their hopes and consolation rested in Christ's coming.

64. But they feared Herod who would surely have killed them, if they had without word confessed Christ and their willingness to accept him as their king, as he had before killed Hircanus and many others and slew innocent babes. Hence because they feared death they forsook their Lord and king, and remained with the tyrant Herod and the devil.

65. Afterward when Christ did not appear with splendor and power they looked with contempt and disregard upon all this, believing that the wise men had been deceived. Hence Christ grew up among them entirely unknown, and no one knew whence he should come as stated, John 1, 26. There are disciples of Christ who indeed know the truth, but dare not confess it nor defend it, and are therefore lost as Christ says Math. 10, 32-33: "Everyone

therefore who shall confess me before men him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

66. The second class of disciples are Herod and his people. Herod searched the Scriptures, believing that it was the truth, and that the coming of Christ was predicted therein, and that Christ had now been born, otherwise he would despise all this and not have been concerned about it. Hence it is certain that he held the Scriptures to be the Word of God which must be fulfilled, and that in Christ's birth the work of God was revealed. Yet he at once determines to set himself intentionally and directly against God's Word and work, and thinks he can bring to naught that which God has spoken and done, in spite of better knowledge. Therefore he searched the Scriptures, diligently to learn about Christ, but only for the purpose of bringing to naught and destroying all. He was concerned lest that which God, who cannot lie, spoke, would come to pass. Is not this incredibly foolish arrogance? Who would have thought that such intentions could have ever entered the human heart? And yet the world is always full of such people, and they are generally the rulers and upper classes.

67. The third class of disciples are the pious wise men who left their country, home and possessions, forsaking all in order to find Christ. They represent the people who fearlessly confess Christ and the truth; but Herod stands for those who persecute and destroy the former, though they still claim to serve God, and enter the house of God just as other pious persons do.

The Prophecy of Micah.

68. One may be interested in asking why the Evangelist changed the words of the prophet and said. ”And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, art in no wise least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come forth a governor, who shall be shepherd of my people Israel:” While the prophet Micah says: ”But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.” Micah 5, 2. Matthew says: Thou art in no wise the least, but Micah says: Thou art little. How do these two statements agree with each other?

69. The other difference between Matthew and Micah, the former saying: Among the princes of Judah, the latter: Among the thousands of Judah, can easily be adjusted as the Hebrew word Alpha means both a prince and a thousand, hence whoever chooses may interpret the prophet either way. For instance if I say, There comes a duke, by this one may understand either a prince or an army, as duke means a prince, and also a leader of an army, and whatsoever an army is doing we usually say the duke did it. The law of Moses also provides that men should be made rulers over thousands, Ex. 18, 21, so that we can say among the princes or rulers as well as among the thousands. For the prince stands for the army of thousands into which the people were divided. And among them the princes or thousands in Judah the city of Bethlehem is mentioned as being the least, just as though we were to say: Among the cities of Saxony, Wittenberg is the least. But it pleased the Evangelist to say

among the princes rather than among the thousands, as it is not necessary that there should be just a thousand men, it being sufficient that there be a regiment in which there may be a thousand men, and always having a prince who may rule over a thousand. So also might we call the mayor of each city, or the community, Alpha, i. e. a thousand, or a community in which there may be about a thousand inhabitants who have an Alpha, i. e. a prince or a mayor. Hence we might render the words of the Evangelist and the prophet thus: And thou Bethlehem art a humble and common city among the communities or cities of Judah. And in comparison to such cities as Hebron, Kariath, and Sephar, etc., it was but a small city at that time.

70. That the prophet calls the city Bethlehem Ephrathah, and the Evangelist Bethlehem in Judah, is after all the same, for both of them undoubtedly intended to point out that city which aforetime was called Ephrathah, but now Bethlehem in the land of Judah. We heard in the first gospel lesson for Christmas why this city was called Ephrathah and Bethlehem, that is, a country rich in grain, from which it perhaps has its name. For Bethlehem means a house of bread, and Ephrathah means fruitful, so that it must have been a rich country and blessed with plenty (with plenty of food in it.)

71. Nor does it present any difficulty that the prophet says: "A ruler in Israel," and the Evangelist: "A governor, who shall be a shepherd of my people Israel." The latter speaks of a government without saying how blessed it is nor how it rules.

72. But how can we harmonize the fact that the prophet calls the city little, and the Evangelist in no wise least. These seem diametrically opposed to each other. It would not be a sufficient answer to say that the books were falsified. There can be no doubt that the Evangelist looks more at the spiritual greatness which is also indicated by the prophet, as though he would say: Thou Bethlehem art little before men, but before God thou really art in no wise the least inasmuch as the ruler of Israel shall come out of thee. Hence what the prophet meant but did not express, the Evangelist states clearly. The figure of speech by which a certain thing is not directly mentioned but only indicated is also used in common conversation. If I say for instance: You are my friend, yet you side with my enemies, I really said: You are not of the least among my enemies. Again: The beggars are poor, yet they have much money, that is, they are not the poorest. So also when Paul says in Rom. 2, 22, "Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou rob temples?" he means thou dost not infrequently abhor idols in order to rob the temples.

73. Let this suffice for it does not afford much pleasure to argue very much on this point, nor is it necessary for a true believer to do so for he gives all glory to God and never doubts that everything is truly and correctly stated in the Scriptures, though he is not able to prove everything. For the learned it is necessary in order to defend the Scriptures against the blasphemers and perverse. Therefore we return to the sense and meaning of the Scriptures, which do not speak here of a common master in Israel such as there had been many before, whom the prophets so highly honored and predicted must be altogether different from others. For the passage of Micah reads as if there had been no ruler in Israel before, because he says out of Bethlehem shall he come forth that shall be a ruler in Israel. That sounds as

though he would say: I will give the people of Israel a ruler, so that they may also have their own prince. So far the kings and princes have only been servants, and the people were not their own. This one however shall be a ruler to whom the people belong.

74. For this reason the fathers among them always understood such passages to mean that Christ would be not only man, but God, and that his government would be without end, and not be a temporal but a spiritual government. For no man, nor angel has a people of his own. God alone is the Lord of his own people as David says. "The Lord ministereth judgment to the people." Ps. 7,8. And when Gideon was asked by the people to rule them he replied: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: The Lord shall rule over you." Judges 8,23. And when the people asked for a king of Samuel, God said: "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them." 1 Sam. 8,7. Not that it was a sin to have a King for he gave them one; but they trusted more in human power and government than in God. And that was a great sin.

75. Now if Christ was to be a ruler over his own people, then his government could be neither temporal nor corporeal, but he must rule over the entire people past, present and future. Therefore he must be an eternal king. And this he can only be spiritually. But as God bestows on Christ his own government, he could not be a human being only. For it is not possible for God to bestow his glory, government, property or people on one who is not true God, as he himself declares: "And my glory will I not give to another." Is. 42,8.

76. Therefore Micah continues: "Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." As if he would say: I proclaim the ruler that shall come out of Bethlehem, but he does not there begin to be; he has been already from the beginning before the world began, in that no day or beginning can be named in which he did not already have his being. Now from all eternity and before the creation of the world there existed nothing but God alone. Hence the going forth from everlasting could not be by one person only, for going forth signifies that there was some one from whom he came forth. Hence Micah proves that this ruler must be God's own true son, born of God the Father, and that the one true God must be with him eternally before all creation began.

77. Again, if he shall come out of Bethlehem in time, then he must be a true and natural man. And this, viz. that Christ is God and man is the corner stone of Christian faith. Those are his own people and the true Israel who acknowledged him as such a ruler and permit him to rule and work in their hearts.

78. From this we can easily conclude why Christ had to die and rise again in order to rule spiritually to all eternity. For though the passage here proves that he had to become a true natural man, it yet follows that he had to change this bodily life into a spiritual invisible life, as it was impossible for him to rule bodily as widely and as long as the prophet indicates.

79. Micah continues and says: "Therefore will he give them up until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the residue of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and shall feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God: and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the

ends of the earth.” From these words it is clear that Christ's kingdom should be extended to the ends of the earth by preaching and suffering, of which the prophet says that in the majesty of the name of Jehovah he would preach and feed his flock, showing also that he would be persecuted on account of his preaching. Therefore the prophet also says that they should be given a respite as to their temporal existence and government until a new people had been born. The woman in travail represents the little flock of the apostles which during the sufferings of Christ was in the agony of the birth of a new spiritual people for this ruler of Israel, as Christ himself foretells, John 16, 2.

”Then Herod privily called the Wise-men, and learned of them exactly what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search out exactly concerning the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word, that I also may come and worship him.”

80. From this text we learn that the wise men were not kings nor princes, but common, honest people, like the learned and the clergy. Herod does not treat them as belonging to royalty, but sends them to Bethlehem, tells them to attend to their mission, and, as if they were his subjects, commands them to bring him word again. He would not have done this if they had been kings or lords; he would have invited them to his palace, accompanied them on their journey, and treated them with great honor. For all historians agree that Herod was a pompous man, who knew how to treat people royally after the way of the world, and wished to be admired by the people. As, however, he calls the men privily and without display and parade they must have been of much lower rank than he was.

81. But why does he call them privately, since the land was his and in his full control? He did it for this reason. He knew quite well that the Jews were his sworn enemies and wished to be rid of him. He was afraid, therefore, that if he called the men publicly and the Jews became aware of it, they would go to the wise men and enjoin them not to acquaint Herod with the true state of affairs, so that the new king may live before his eyes.

82. When he asks them about the time of the star he does it out of the same anxiety. He was already resolved in his heart to slay the innocent children. He reasoned thus: If the new king is born the Jews will rejoice, and will secrete him for a while until he is grown up, and then will espouse his cause, put him on the throne and banish me. I must forestall them, therefore, and carefully inquire into the time of his birth; and although he is hidden from me I shall still find him amongst the people when I slay all the children, and their disguise will avail them nothing. He pursues this plan diligently so that the new king might be made known to him, commands the wise men to bring him word again, and puts on a pious and devout face as if he wished to worship the child also.

83. Humanly speaking, he acted wisely enough in his purpose of slaying Christ. But it is true what Solomon says, Prov. 21, 30: ”There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Jehovah.” And Psalm 33, 10: ”Jehovah bringeth the counsel of the nations to naught; he maketh the thoughts of the people to be of none effect.” And Psalm 37, 32-33; ”The wicked watcheth the righteous and seeketh to slay him. Jehovah will not leave him in his

hand.” Herod is here compelled to fulfil such passages against his will, and be an illustration of the same for our own comfort, in order that we might be free and secure and need fear none but God alone. If he is with us neither guile nor force can harm us.

III HOW THE WISE MEN CONTINUE THEIR JOURNEY, FIND CHRIST AND WORSHIP HIM.

”And they having heard the king, went their way; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.”

84. It is not said here that they promised the king to return, but that they heard his request to bring him word again. Yet it appears from the warning they received in a dream that, in the simplicity of their hearts, they were willing to return to Herod, not knowing his depravity nor his purpose and thinking him to be an artless honest man. We learn from this that the children of God may be so misled by the pleasing manners and false pretensions of unbelieving saints that they take that to be good which is not. But they do not always remain in deception, for they are directed and delivered, if need be, from heaven. Their hearing of the king, as mentioned by the Evangelist, may also be understood to mean that they listened to the words of the prophet, that in Bethlehem was to be born the new king for whom they inquired, and who was the object of their search.

85. This is an illustration of how the enemies of Christ may at times be of service and teach others rightly, as Caiaphas teaches, John 11, 50, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people, and as Balaam, Num. 24, utters many beautiful words concerning Christ, although they do it sometimes unintentionally and in ignorance. So Christ instructs the people, Math. 23, 2-3, they should listen to the scribes and Pharisees and follow them when they sit in Moses' seat; but forbids them to do after their works. These wise men were right, therefore, and give us a good example by listening to Herod, not for Herod's sake, neither as said by him, but for the sake of the Scriptures, which he taught them; and they followed this and not Herod's works. From this is derived the good rule that we should hear the evil bishops and priests, as well as the good ones, and should follow, not their lives, but their teachings, provided their teaching is Scripture and not idle talk. For, as we are to listen to the teachings of Holy Writ, even when spoken by Herod, though he also commit murder, so we are not to listen to human doctrine, even if spoken by St. Peter, Paul, or an angel, and accompanied by many wondrous signs.

86. It was said above that the saints often err and give offense by human doctrines and works. It is God's will, therefore, that we shall not be guided by their examples, but by his Word. For this reason he permits the saints often to deliver human doctrine and works. Again, he disposes that the impious sometimes teach the clear and plain Scriptures, in order to guard us against offenses, on the one hand, and from the wicked life of the ungodly, on the other hand from the shining deeds of the saints. For, if you do not follow the Scriptures alone, the lives of the saints are ten times more dangerous and offensive than those of the

ungodly. These commit gross sins, which are easily recognized and avoided, but the saints exhibit a subtle, pleasing appearance in human doctrines, which might deceive the very elect, as Christ says, Math. 24, 24.

87. But now such offense of the saints is directly against the articles of faith and its doctrine; gross sins, however, do not oppose faith and doctrine. If they desert it they do not rail against it, while human doctrine is nothing but rebellion against faith and its doctrine, for it makes men rely upon themselves and upon their works. From this Christ rescues his saints in the midst of human doctrine and work, just as he preserved the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 3) at Babylonia, in the midst of the fiery furnace. Hence the lives of the saints are not to be followed as an example in this but are rather to be avoided, like miracles which are only to be admired and praised. For he does not desire to do wonders to everyone in the fiery furnace, neither does he wish to make everyone a Bernhard, Francis, Gregory, Benedict or Augustine.

88. This was the Evangelist's intention when he omitted Herod's name, saying, they heard the king. He calls him by, the name of his office and dignity, just as John 11,51, says that Caiaphas uttered his prophecies, not because his name was Caiaphas, but because he was high priest. The offices of king and priest are good and by divine institution, although wicked people make evil use of them, as gold and silver and all creatures are good, and yet may be put to good or evil use. God uses Herod when he may be used to advantage as God's creature, and offers him to the wise men for their service. Hence they did not look upon or listen to Herod but to the king. It did not concern them that he was wicked within himself, - they took hold of what was good in him, as the bee sucks the honey from the flower and leaves the poison to the spider. They listened to him when he told them to go to Bethlehem and search diligently for the child, as the prophet had foretold; which intelligence he had not from himself but from the priests. They could not, however, know his wicked counsel and purpose, nor his evil life. Thus we are to learn to hate the vices of men, but love the men; we are to distinguish the honey from the poison.

89. It is also indicated here that this star was not high in the heavens like the other stars, but hung above them in the air; otherwise it would have been impossible for them to discover whether it stood over Jerusalem or over Bethlehem. For, according to astronomy and experience, it cannot be discerned on account of their height over the town the stars of heaven really are suspended, since two cities, ten or more miles apart, both think the star above them. Again, You cannot perceive their movement with the eye, although they move more swiftly than time or lightning. This star, however, they did not see move swiftly but glide slowly before them according to the speed of their journey. A star in heaven moves farther in one moment than ten journeys from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, for they move once around earth and heaven every day and night. Besides, all stars move from east to west.

90. But this star accompanying them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, traveled from north to south. This was proof that it was of another kind, its course and place in the sky different from the other stars in the heavens. It was not a fixed star, as astronomers call them, but rather a movable star that could rise and descend and move from one place to another. With

this those astronomers are again silenced who say that the star had no special significance in Christ's birth or life. It was probably not as large as the stars in the heavens, although it appeared larger on account of its nearness. In short, it was a servant of Christ and had no power or authority over Christ's birth.

91. It seems strange, however, that the star reappears to them now when they do not need it any more, when they know the town of Christ's birth, while it was hidden before, when they needed it and knew not the town. But this was done to strengthen their faith, as the law of Moses says, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. The wise men first heard the word of the prophet in Jerusalem, as a witness of Christ's birth; with this the second witness, the star, agrees and announces the same birth, so that they may be sure of their ground. The prophet speaks only of the Child at Bethlehem; in like manner the star does not go any further than where the child is, to Bethlehem, and remains over him. And they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

"And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him; and opening their treasures they offered unto him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh."

92. It was diligently prevented that the wise men should find Christ through themselves, or men. On the contrary, they found him alone through the Scriptures of the prophet and by the aid of the stars of heaven that there might be put to naught all natural ability, all human reason, all light outside of the spirit and of grace, which now boasts and pretends to teach the truth and lead people aright, as was said above is done in the universities. Here it is concluded that Christ, the knowledge of salvation, is not taught or acquired by human teaching or assistance, but the Scriptures and divine light must reveal him, as he says, Math. 16, 17: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." With this Christ distinctly casts aside flesh and blood with its revelation, i. e., man and all human wisdom, which, being nothing but darkness, cannot reveal Christ. Christ says, John 6, 44: "No man can come to me, except the Father that hath sent me draw him." By this all boasting of human reason is condemned, since it cannot guide aright and all who follow it must go astray. So strongly does God everywhere resist our natural haughtiness and will, that we may know we are blind, despair of our own light, put ourselves into his hands and be led by him into the ways which reason cannot know nor follow.

Of The Faith Of The Wise Men.

93. The wise men here teach us the true faith. After they heard the sermon and the word of the prophet they were not slow to believe, in spite of obstacles and difficulties. First they came to Jerusalem, the capital, and did not find him, the star also disappearing. Do you not think they would have said within themselves, if they had followed human reason alone: Alas, we have traveled so far in vain, the star has misled us, it was a phantom. If a king were born he should of course be found in the capital and lie in the royal chamber. But when we

arrived the star disappeared and no one knew anything about him. We strangers are the first to speak of him in his own country and royal city! Indeed, it must be all, false!

94. Besides, his own people are troubled and do not care to hear of him, and direct us from the royal city to a little village. Who knows what we shall find? The people act so coldly and strangely, no one accompanies us to show us the child; they do not believe themselves that a king is born to them, and we come from afar and expect to find him. O how odd and unusual everything appears at the birth of a king! If a young pup were born, there would be a little noise. A king is born here, and there is no stir. Should not the people sing and dance, light candles and torches and pave the streets with branches and roses? O the poor king whom we seek! Fools we are to permit ourselves to be deceived so shamefully.

95. Having been flesh and blood, doubtless they were not free from such thoughts and views, and they had to battle for their faith. Natural reason could here not have held its own; if they had not found the king as they had expected, they would have murmured and complained and said: The devil must have led us here. A king cannot have been born since everything is so quiet and nothing is going on. There is more noise when a child is born to our shepherd, and a calving cow is more talked about than this king.

96. Reason and nature never proceed any farther than they can see and feel. When they cease to feel they at once deny God's existence and say as Ps. 14, 1 says. "There is no God," therefore the devil must be here. This is the light of the universities which is to lead men to God, but rather leads to the abyss of hell. The light of nature and the light of grace cannot be friends. Nature wants to feel and be certain before she believes, grace believes before she perceives. For this reason, nature does not go further than her own light. Grace joyfully steps out into the darkness, follows the mere word of Scripture, no matter how it appears. Whether nature holds it true or false, she clings to the Word.

97. For the sake of this very strife and struggle, by which the wise men accepted the word of the prophet and followed it into such wild, unnatural appearance of a royal birth, God comforted and strengthened them by this star which went before them more friendly than before. Now they see it near, it is their guide, and they have an assurance which needs no further question. Before it was far from them, and they were not certain where they would find the king.

98. So it is always with the Christian, after affliction has been endured God becomes more dear to him and is so near and so distinctly seen that man not only forgets anxiety and affliction, but has a desire for greater affliction. He gradually becomes so strong that he does not take offense at the insignificant, unattractive life of Christ. For now he experiences and realizes that to find Christ it must appear as though he found nothing but disgrace.

99. Even so the wise men must have been ashamed of themselves if they had doubted and had said, as perhaps they did say secretly in their hearts: We were so successful, let us travel a little farther on and seek new kings. I call this buffoonery, as Dame Gay, i. e. nature, conducts herself in the presence of divine words and works. For from the fact that the wise men were so much rejoiced when they saw the star we can infer that they were in such

temptation and were heavyminded when everything appeared so inconsistent. Their joy indicates that they were perhaps despondent and tempted with unbelief. There was cause enough if you look at nature alone. Hence Christ says, Math. 11, 6: "Blessed is he whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me." Blessed indeed, but how difficult since appearances were against Christ's presence.

100. When the wise men had overcome their temptation and were born again by the great joy they were strong and took no offense at Christ, they had overcome in the trial. For although they enter a lowly hut and find a poor young wife with a poor little child, and find less of royal appearance than the homes of their own servants presented, they are not led astray. But in a great, strong, living faith they remove from their eyes and their minds whatever might attract and influence human nature with its pretense, follow the word of the prophet and the sign of the star in all simplicity, treat the child as a king, fall down before him, worship him, and offer gifts. This was a strong faith indeed, for it casts aside many things which impress human nature. Perhaps there were some people present who thought: What great fools are these men to worship such a poor child. They must indeed be in a trance to make of him a king.

101. This is the kernel of the Gospel, in which the nature and character of faith is explained as an assurance of things not seen. It clings alone to the words of God and follows the things that are not seen, as alone conveyed in the word of God, and looks askance at many things which urge it to disbelieve the Word. What nature calls playing the fool faith calls the true way. Nature may be wise and clever, faith remains nature's fool and idiot, and thus comes to Christ and finds him. St. Paul's words, I Cor. 1, 25 apply here: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." For feeling and believing do not get together.

102. When they give three presents and worship him it does not imply that each gave a separate gift, but, as mentioned above, it was a common gift of the goods of their country, with which they honored him as a king. Nor was the worship like that due to God, for, in my opinion, they did not yet recognize him as God, but after the usage of the Scriptures, kings and dignitaries were worshipped, i. e. honored and respected, by the bending of the knee as we do today.

103. What conversation they had with Mary and Joseph I leave to the imagination of idle minds. The languages in the orient are not so foreign to the Hebrew, so that they may easily have understood each other. They had spoken with Herod and the priests and the citizens of Jerusalem, hence they no doubt spoke with Mary and Joseph. If they had a different language, the Jews still had such business connections and were so well known at the Red Sea that in both countries both languages were no doubt known, as in German lands you find French and in France German. The Red Sea country is on one side exclusively Arabic, and from there the wise men came.

IV. HOW THE WISE MEN BY THE COMMAND OF GOD RETURNED TO THEIR FATHERLAND.

”And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod they departed into their own country another way”.

104. Here it appears that those who believe in God enjoy his special protection. He has an eye upon these wise men so that he keeps watch over their return and directs them in a dream.

105. And why does he not allow them to return to Herod since he could have shielded the child from all the world even if Herod had known and found him? It is done for the purpose of teaching us not to tempt God. Whatever can be accomplished by ordinary means should be done. We should not presume upon faith and say in idleness: I trust in God everything will grow that is to grow. His creatures have no purpose if we make use of them. In Gen. 1 he created and ordained all creatures with their works, and indicated the use man shall make of them. This will he never recall and ordain something special for you.

106. Here the question arises: How can I strike the golden mean to believe and yet not tempt God, for you preach and praise faith alone and can not extol it enough? Answer: You should not believe save where you have a word of God. It is the character and nature of faith to be built and to rely on the Word of God. Where there is no Word of God there cannot and shall not be any faith. Is this not stated clearly and positively enough? Hence the Word of God is called in Scripture: testament, testimonia, pacta, foedera, testimonies, agreements, covenants, as these postulate faith; nor did God ever command us to believe any of his works without his Word.

107. Again, he has confirmed his works and wonders, as Christ says, John 10, 38: ”Though ye believe not me believe the works.” If you have not God's Word you should continue to make use of your power, of your goods, of your friends, and of all that God has given you, and thus abide in the dispensation, established by God, Gen. 1. For he did not give it to you in vain, he will not, for your sake, turn water into wine or stone into bread, but you should use according to his order whatever he has created until he forces you by word or work to use it differently.

108. But when the hour comes that the creature cannot help you any more and all your strength fails, behold then God's Word begins. For then he has commanded us to acknowledge him as God, i. e. expect everything that is good from him. This word, though in force all the time, will yet be only understood and made use of in need, when nothing else avails. Of this he speaks, Ps. 50, 15: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." From this it is clear that we cannot make trial of God in need, for all his words and promises point to the time of trouble, when no one but he is able to help. Hence we read, Math. 4, 7, that when the devil tempted Christ to cast himself down from the temple, Christ said, no, for it is written: "Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God," as if to say: I can go down by the steps, it is not necessary to do signs and wonders. Again we read in the legends of the fathers that two brothers journeyed and one of them died of hunger for God's sake; that is, he went to hell; for they came amongst wicked people, who offered them something to eat, and the one said, he would not take bread from these people, but expect his food from heaven. The other took and ate and lived. That fool did nothing else but set aside God's order and tempted him. However sinful people may be they are still God's creatures as well as thorns and thistles. You make use of a thorn to open a boil or for some other purpose; will you look contemptuously upon it, because it is a prickly brush? Thus we read that Abraham and Isaac gave up their own wives and had them taken from them in order not to tempt God. Therefore God preserved them so that no harm was done to them or to their wives, while great kings were punished. From this it is clear that to tempt God is mere wickedness and frivolity except in time of trouble.

109. There is another temptation also in the time of trouble which was punished severely among the people of Israel and which alas is common as compared to the other temptation and equally irrational. That temptation occurs before God's Word is heard; this after we hear the Word, namely thus: when we know that God has promised help in the time of any trouble, but are not content with it, go forward and will not abide his promise, but prescribe time, place, and manner for his help; and then if he does not come as we expect and desire, faith vanishes. There faith is too long, here it is too short; there it is too early, here it is too late. In both cases men fall from the Word. Those have faith without Word, these have Word without faith, both of which are of no avail. Middle ground is blessed, both Word and faith united in one, as God and man are one in Christ.

110. He who holds fast to the Word alone, trusts and abides in it, does not doubt that what the Word says will come to pass; he who does not dictate aim or time or means and ways, but resigns all freely to God's will and pleasure as to when, how, where, and by whom he will fulfil his Word; he, I say, has a true living faith which does not nor can not tempt God.

111. Learn then what it means to tempt God; it is easily understood; it is a deficiency of true faith. To faith belongs above all the Word of God, as the foundation and rock of faith. Hence to tempt God is nothing else than to deal with him aside from his Word, i. e. to believe when he did not command faith and gave us no Word, or to disbelieve when he bids believe and gives us his Word. He did not give orders to believe that he would feed you when you have food before you or can find it without a miracle. But where you cannot find it, he has

commanded that you firmly believe he will not forsake you. But you should not set time or measure for him, for he deserves to be free, which is becoming, and will not forsake you, which is divine; what more could you desire?

112. Such was the lot of Christ. God could have rescued him from the power of Herod. But since without apparent necessity of a miracle all could be adjusted, he used for our example ordinary means, and led the wise men into their own country by another way. It would have required an unnecessary exhibition of miracles if they had returned to Herod and made known the house wherein the child was to be found. But even this has its meaning, as we shall see later.

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