

Content Page

Sunday after Christmas

Luke 2:33-40

Luke 2, 33-40:

And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this [child] is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she [was] a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served [God] with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. Luk And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

1. It is very probable that today's Epistle has been selected by a pure misunderstanding, the one who appointed it for this Sunday probably thinking that it refers to the infant Christ, because it speaks of a young heir who is lord of all. Many other Epistles and Gospels have been selected for inappropriate days from similar misunderstandings. Nothing however depends upon the order of selection; it amounts to the same thing what is preached at the different seasons, if only the right meaning is preserved. Thus the events of this Gospel happened on the day of Candlemas, when Mary brought the child into the temple, and yet it is read on this Sunday. I mention all this, that nobody may be confused by the chronological order, or prevented from correctly understanding the Gospel. We will divide it into two parts, the one treating of Simeon, and the other of

Anna. It is indeed a rich Gospel and well arranged: first, the man Simeon; second, the woman Anna, both aged and holy.

I. OF SIMEON.

”And his father and his mother were marveling at the things which were spoken concerning him.”

2. What are those wonderful things spoken concerning him? They are the things concerning which St. Simeon had spoken immediately before, when in the temple he took the child Jesus upon his arms, saying: 'Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord according to thy word, in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.’ At these things, St. Luke says, they marveled, namely, that this aged and holy man stood there before them in the temple, took the child in his arms and spoke of him so exultingly, calling him the light of the world, a Saviour of all nations, a glory of all the people of Israel; Simeon himself thinking so highly of him that he would now fain depart this life after he had seen the child.

3. Now it must indeed excite wonder that such things were proclaimed openly by Simeon in that public and sacred place with reference to that poor and insignificant child, whose mother was so humble and lowly and whose father Joseph was not wealthy. How could such a child be considered the Saviour of all men, the light of the Gentiles and the glory and honor of all Israel? At present, after we have had so many proofs of Christ's greatness, these words do no longer seem so wonderful; but then, when nothing as yet was known of Jesus, they were indeed marvelous, and this lowly child was very unlike the great and mighty being portrayed by Simeon. But Joseph and Mary believed it nevertheless, and just therefore they marveled. If they had not believed it, the words of Simeon would have appeared to them insignificant, untrue and worthless, and not at all wonderful. Therefore, the fact that they were marveling, shows that Joseph and Mary possessed a strong and sublime faith.

4. But some one might say: why then do they marvel at this? Had not the angels told them before that this child was Christ and the Saviour, and had not the shepherds also spoken glorious things concerning him? It was also very wonderful that the kings or wise men had come from distant lands to worship him with their offerings. Mary knew well that she had conceived him of the Holy Spirit, and that wonderful events had attended his birth. Moreover, the angel Gabriel had said that he should be great and be called the Son of the Most High. In short, all the preceding events had been marvelous, up to this time;

now nothing wonderful occurs, but only those things are announced and proclaimed concerning him which have not happened and are not yet seen.

5. It seems to me that in this case we need not look very far for an explanation. The Evangelist does not deny that they had also marveled before this. He simply desires to relate here what they did when St. Simeon spoke such glorious things concerning the child. He means to say: When St. Simeon spake thus, the child's parents did not despise his words, but believed them firmly. Therefore they remained and listened to him and marveled at his utterances; what could they have done in addition to this? Thus it is not denied here that previously they marveled just as much, if not more.

6. We shall inquire later into the spiritual significance of this wonderment; now we are concerned about the literal sense, serving as an example of our faith and teaching us how wonderful are the works of God concerning us; for the end is very unlike the beginning. The beginning is nothing, the end is everything; just as the infant Christ here appears to be very insignificant, and yet he finally became the Saviour and light of all nations.

7. If Joseph and Mary had judged according to outward appearances, they would have considered Christ no more than a poor child. But they disregard the outward appearance and cling to the words of Simeon with a firm faith, therefore they marvel at his speech. Thus we must also disregard all the senses when contemplating the works of God, and only cling to his words, so that our eyes and our senses may not offend us.

8. The fact that they were marveling at the words of Simeon is also mentioned to teach us that the Word of God is never preached in vain, as we read in Isaiah 55, 11: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth" (i. e. out of the mouth of God's messengers): "it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Thus the Evangelist would say that Simeon delivered a warm-hearted, beautiful sermon, preaching the pure Gospel and the Word of God. For the Gospel is nothing but a sermon whose theme is Christ, declaring him to be the Saviour, light and glory of all the world. Such preaching fills the heart with joy and wonder at this great grace and comfort, if it is received in faith.

9. But although this sermon was very beautiful and comforting, there were only a few who believed; nay people despised it as being foolish, going hither and thither in the temple. Some prayed, others did something else, but they did not give heed to the words of Simeon. Yet, as the Word of God must produce results, there were indeed some who received it with joy and wonder, namely Joseph and Mary. The Evangelist here also rebukes the unbelief of the Jews, for as this occurred publicly in the temple, there were

many present, and yet they would not believe, the fact that the Saviour was only a child causing them all to stumble. Thus we learn here that we should hear the Word of God gladly, for it will invariably produce good fruits.

The Spiritual Meaning of this Gospel Concerning Simeon.

10. This leads us to the spiritual significance of this astonishment of Joseph and Mary. The temple is an abode of God, therefore signifying every place where God is present. Among others it also signifies the Holy Scriptures, where God may be found as in his proper place. To bring Christ into the temple, means nothing else than to follow the example of the people mentioned in Acts 17, 11. After they had received the Word with all readiness of mind, they went into the Scriptures, daily examining them whether these things were so.

11. Now we find in this same temple Simeon, who in his person represents all the prophets filled with the Holy Spirit, just as St. Luke says of Simeon. They have spoken and written as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and have waited for the coming of Christ, just like Simeon. They have never ceased to do this till Christ came, as St. Peter says in Acts 3, 24 that all the prophets have spoken of the days of Christ. And Christ himself says,

Math. 11, 13, that all the prophets and the law prophesied until John, i. e. till the baptism of Christ, when he began to show himself as the Saviour and light of all the world.

12. All this is signified by Simeon, who was not to die till he had seen Christ. For this reason he is called Simeon, which means "one who hears", for the prophets had only heard of Christ as of him who was as yet unborn and would come after them. Therefore, having him in their wake, as it were, they heard him. Now if we thus come into the temple with Christ and the Gospels and contemplate the Scriptures, all the sayings of the prophets are so kind to him, take him in their arms, so to speak, and declare all with great joy: This is indeed the Man of whom we have spoken, and now our utterances concerning him have come to their goal in peace and joy. And now they begin to give the most beautiful testimonies concerning him, as being Christ, the Saviour, the light, the comfort and the glory of Israel; and all this Simeon here declares and announces regarding him. St. Paul speaks of this in Rom. 1, 2, where he says that God promised the Gospel afore through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures; which shows us what is meant by Simeon and by the temple. We also refer to Rom. 3, 21: "But now apart from the law a righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets," also to the words of Christ in John 5, 39: "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me; and in verse 46:

”For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me.” This might be proved by examples, but we have no time here. From the Epistle and Gospel for Christmas we have seen what beautiful and very appropriate testimonies the apostles gathered from Holy Scripture. We have also discussed this in explaining the Christmas Gospel, when we spoke of the swaddling clothes in which the child was wrapped.

13. For the present the prophecy of Moses may suffice, which we find in Deut. 18,15 and which is quoted by the apostles in Acts 3, 22 and 7, 37, and in many other places, and reads as follows: ”Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” Here Moses declares that the people will no longer hearken to him, and that his teaching will end when this prophet Christ appears to whom they should hearken thenceforth. This also demonstrates that Christ was to be a light and Saviour after Moses, and no doubt better than Moses; for otherwise Moses would not have declared that his teaching and guiding would terminate, but that it would continue along with that of Christ. Isaiah also says, 28, 16: ”Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not be in haste.” Behold, how beautifully these and other passages of Holy Writ agree with the Gospel, declaring of Christ what the apostles preached concerning him and what is proclaimed continually by all the Holy Scriptures.

14. Therefore Simeon had to be an aged man, so that he might completely and suitably represent the prophets of old. He does not take the child in his hands nor in his lap, but in his arms. There is a deeper meaning in this, but suffice it to say now that the prophecies and passages of Scriptures do not keep Christ to themselves, but exhibit and offer him to everybody, just as we do with those things we carry in our arms. St. Paul refers to this in Rom. 4, 23 and 15, 4, when he says that all was written not for their sake, but for our learning. And in I Peter 1, 12 we read that the prophets have not ministered these things unto themselves, but unto us, to whom they have been announced.

15. For this reason St. Luke does not say that Joseph and Mary were marveling at the words of Simeon, but ”at the things which were spoken concerning him.” He passes over the name of Simeon in silence, deliberately diverting our attention from Simeon to this spiritual significance, so that thereby we might understand the sayings of Scripture.

16. Only his father and his mother were marveling at these things. It is remarkable that the Evangelist here does not mention the names of Joseph and Mary, but calls them father and mother, thereby giving no cause to point out the spiritual significance. Who is meant by the spiritual father and mother of Christ? He himself mentions his spiritual mother in Mark 3, 34-35 and Luke 8, 21: ”For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my

brother, and sister, and mother.” St. Paul calls himself a father in 1 Cor. 4, 15: ”For though ye have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I begat you through the Gospel.” It is therefore clear that the Christian church, that is to say all those who believe, the spiritual mother of Christ, and all the apostles and teachers of the people who preach the Gospel, are his spiritual father. As often as faith is created in a man, Christ is born anew in him. These are the people who are marveling at the sayings of the prophets; for how beautifully and precisely do these apply to Christ and how gloriously do they speak of him, demonstrating in a masterly manner the truth of the whole Gospel. There is no greater delight in this life than to perceive and experience this in reading the Scriptures.

17. But the great multitude of unbelievers despise this Simeon, scoff at him and pervert his words as those of a fool, carrying on their apish tricks and buffoonery in the temple and even rearing idols and the altar of Damascus there, as did King Ahab, 1 Kings 16,32-33. These are the people who wantonly pervert the Scriptures and bring them into discredit; they judge them according to their human understanding and elevate their favorite idol, reason, thereby making of the Scriptures a doctrine of works and human laws. Finally they desecrate and destroy this temple of the Scriptures altogether and carry on in it their sin and shame, as the pope with his decrees and the great seats of learning with their devotion to Aristotle have done and are still doing. At the same time they are very devout and consecrate many churches, chapels and altars of wood and stone, show their indignation against the Turks who desecrate and destroy these churches, and believe that God ought to reward them for desecrating and devastating ten thousand times more badly his most precious temple, which is immeasurably better and eternal. They are a blind, mad, clumsy people; let them go in their blindness to eternal destruction.

18. Some simple-minded people might be surprised that Luke calls Joseph the father of Christ, in spite of the fact that Mary was a virgin. But he speaks thus according to the custom which prevailed among the people, and in keeping with the tradition of the law, according to which step-fathers, were also called fathers, which indeed is the general custom everywhere and always. Moreover Joseph is properly called his father, because he was the affianced husband of his mother. The Evangelist had sufficient reason to speak thus, for he had previously written very plainly about the virginity of Mary, so that he probably thought nobody would get the impression that Joseph was the real father of Christ. As there was consequently no danger, because of the precautions he had taken, he could write in this manner without any reserve. For the preceding narrative abundantly convinces us that Mary was his real mother and Joseph was his real father only in the conventional sense of the word; and thus it is true that he had both a father and a mother.

“And Simeon Blessed Them.”

19. This blessing means nothing else but that he wished them happiness and joy, honor and all prosperity. Luke relates that he did not bless only the child, but every one of them, the child, his father and his mother.

20. This blessing seems to be a useless and trivial matter, for people generally do this and wish each other all that is good. But to bless Christ and his parents is a great and exceptional deed, for the reason that Christ and our nature are entirely opposed to each other. Christ condemns all that the world elects, gives us the cross to bear and to suffer all evil, deprives this world of all its pleasures, possessions and honors, and teaches that men deal in those things which are altogether foolish and sinful. And behold, nobody will nor can take this from him. Then they begin to execrate, blaspheme and persecute Christ and all his disciples, and there are only a few Simeons who bless him; but the whole world is full of those who curse him and wish him all evil, disgrace and misfortune. For he who is not disposed willingly to despise all things and to suffer everything, will not bless and praise Christ very long, but will speedily stumble.

21. There are indeed some who praise him, because he does what they desire and leaves them as they are. But then he is not Christ and does not do the works of Christ with them, but he is what they are and desire. When however he begins to be Christ to them and they are required to forsake their works and to let him alone dwell within them, there is nothing but flight, blasphemy and execration.

22. There are also some who believe that, if they were to see the infant Christ before them with his mother, as did Simeon, they would also joyously bless him. But they lie; for his childhood and poverty and his contemptible appearance would certainly cause them to stumble. They prove it by disregarding, hating and persecuting such poverty and humble appearance in the members of Christ, and yet they might still find daily among them Christ their head. If they then shun the cross now and hate its contemptible appearance, they would certainly do the same thing if they were still to see him with their eyes. Why are they not showing such honor to the poor? Why will they not honor the truth? But Simeon was of a different mind. Outward appearances did not cause him to stumble but on the contrary, he confessed that the Saviour was to be a sign which is spoken against, and is pleased that Christ rejects the appearance of worldly greatness and exhibits the cross. Therefore he does not bless Christ alone, but also his members, father and mother.

23. Thus Simeon, as a preacher and lover of the cross and an enemy of the world, in blessing the child, gave a remarkable example of exalting and honoring Christ, who was then despised, cursed and rejected in his own person, and is now treated in the same manner in his members, who for his sake endure poverty, disgrace, death and all ignominy. Yet nobody will come to their relief, receive and bless them, but people want to be pious Christians by praying and fasting, and by bequests and good works.

The Significance of the Blessing Upon Christ's Mother and Father.

24. Explaining this figuratively, we find that the spiritual Christ, or his spiritual father and mother, that is to say the Christian church, with its apostles and followers, is subjected on earth to all ignominy, being made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 4, 13. Therefore it is indeed necessary that they receive blessing and consolation from some other source, from Simeon in the temple, which means from the prophets in Holy Scripture, as St. Paul says in Rom. 15,4: *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope."*

25. A Christian must therefore not imagine, nor endeavor to bring it about, that he may be praised and blessed by the people of this world. No, it has already been decided that he must expect reproach and contempt and willingly submit to it. A blessing he can only expect from Simeon in the temple. The Scriptures are our comfort, praising and blessing all who are reproached by the world for Christ's sake. This is the whole teaching of Psalm 37, also of Psalm 9 and many others, which tell us that God will rescue all those who suffer in this world. Thus Moses writes in Gen. 4,9 that God takes such great care of pious Abel after his death as to be moved to vengeance solely by his blood, without having been petitioned for it, doing more for him after his death than while he was still living. This shows that he can not forsake even the dead, nay, he will remember his believers more when they are dead than while they are living. Again, after Cain had been slain, he was silent, showing no interest in him.

26. These and similar passages of Scripture are our comfort and blessing, if we are Christians; to them we must cling and with them we must be satisfied. Here we see how blessed are those who suffer reproach, and how wretched are those who persecute us. The former God will never forget nor forsake, and the latter he will not acknowledge nor remember. Could we desire a more abundant, a greater comfort and blessing? What is the blessing and comfort of this world compared with this consolation and blessing of Simeon in the temple?

”And he said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the falling and rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against: yea a sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed”.

27. Why does he not say this to the father also, and why does he call the mother by name? He desires here to address himself to the real mother, and not to the father. As Jesus was her own child, all that happened to him naturally also happened to her and caused her genuine and real pain. Simeon perhaps also addressed Mary alone for the reason that Joseph was not to live until the time of the sufferings of Christ, which the mother would experience alone; and in addition to all this sorrow she was to be a poor and lonely widow, and Christ was to suffer as a poor orphan. This is a situation unspeakably pitiable, and God himself according to the Scriptures takes great interest in widows and orphans, calling himself a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows.

28. For Mary lived in all three estates, in the state of virginity, in that of matrimony and in that of widowhood, the latter being the most pitiable, without any protection or aid. A virgin has her parents, a wife her husband, but the widow is alone. And in this pitiful condition Simeon announces to her such great sorrow, thereby showing and explaining to her that his blessing is a blessing of God and not of the world. For in the sight of the world all was to be reversed and she was not only to be not blessed, but her child also should become the target and aim of everybody's curses, just as bows and arrows are aimed at the target. Behold, this in my opinion means to be blessed in the temple. It was indeed necessary that she should be strengthened and comforted by a spiritual and divine benediction against the arrows of future curses, for her soul alone was to bear and endure this great tempest of the execration of her child.

29. Simeon declares in the first place that Christ is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel. This then is the first consolation which his mother was to experience in him and for which she was to educate him, namely, that many were to be offended in him, even in Israel, the chosen people. This is a poor comfort in the judgment of men, that she is the mother of a son who is to cause many to stumble and fall even in Israel. Some have explained this text thus, that many have been stirred up by Christ and their pride has fallen, so that they might rise again in humility; just as St. Paul fell and rose again, and all the self-righteous must fall, despair of their own strength and rise again in Christ, if they would be saved. This is a good interpretation, but not exhaustive here. Simeon says of Christ that many Jews would take offense at him and stumble, thereby falling into unbelief, just as it has happened in the past and as it still occurs. It was indeed a dark picture and a terrible announcement to which this holy mother had to listen.

30. Not Christ however is the cause of this fall, but the presumption of the Jews. It happened in this wise. Christ came to be a light and Saviour of all the world, as Simeon said, so that all might be justified and saved by faith in him. If this is to be brought about, all other righteousness in ourselves, sought for outside of Christ with works, must be rejected. The Jews would not hear of this, as St. Paul says in Romans 10, 3: "For being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." Thus they take offense at faith, fall deeper and deeper into unbelief and become hardened in their own righteousness, so that they have even persecuted with all their might all who believed.

31. All those who would be saved by their own righteousness must do the same thing. They depend upon their works, and when faith in Christ is demanded they stumble and fall, burning, condemning and persecuting all who reject their works or consider them useless. Such people are the pope, the bishops, the Scholastics and all the Papists. And this they do under the impression that they are earnestly serving God, defending the truth and preserving Christianity, just as the Jews also pretended to preserve the true service of God and the law of Moses when they killed the apostles and other Christians and persecuted them.

32. Therefore, as Simeon here tells the mother of Christ that not all the people of Israel will receive him as their light and Saviour, and that not only a few, but many will take offense at him and fall, so also the spiritual mother of Christ, that is to say, the Christian Church, must not be surprised when many false Christians, even among the clergy, will not believe. For such are the people who depend upon works and seek their own righteousness, who stumble and fall because Christ demands faith, and who persecute and kill those that oppose them. This has been prophesied long ago by the spiritual Simeon, namely the prophets, who almost with one accord have spoken of this fall. In Isaiah 8, 11-15 we read as follows: "For Jehovah spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A conspiracy, concerning all whereof this people shall say, A conspiracy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be in dread thereof. Jehovah of hosts, him shall ye sanctify; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a square to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble thereon, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken." There are many more passages from which it can be shown that Christ must be a rock against which the best and greatest will stumble, as we read in Ps. 78, 31: "And he slew of the fattest of them, and smote down the young men of Israel," For Christ is set as a Saviour and can not yield nor change. But these arrogant people are headstrong and obstinate, will not give up their vanity, and run their head against Christ,

so that one of the two must break and fall. Christ however must remain and cannot fall; consequently they fall.

33. Again, as firmly as he stands over against the legalists and will not yield before them, so immovably he stands also for all who would found their faith on him, as we read in Isaiah 28, 16: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not be in haste." And in Matthew 16, 18 he says himself: "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Now, as by the falling and breaking spoken of in this connection, nothing else is meant but unbelief and dependence upon works, so rising and being built upon this rock means nothing but to believe and disregard his works. This is done by the believers, for the rising of whom alone Christ is set. And as in the times of Christ many among the people of Israel rose in him, so it will be until the end of the world, for nobody can rise through his works, or through the doctrines of men, but only through Christ. This is brought about by faith, as has often been said, without any merit or works; the works will only follow, after we have risen.

34. You will perceive therefore how the whole Scriptures speak only of faith, and reject works as useless, nay, as standing in the way of justification and preventing us from rising. For Christ will alone be set for the rising of many, and those who will not rise must fall. Nothing can be set beside him by which we might rise. Is not the life of the Papists and priests abominable? For they run their heads against this rock, and their conduct is so directly opposed to Christianity that it may indeed be called the sway and government of the Antichrist. The spiritual Simeon also speaks of this rising to the spiritual mother of Christ. For all the prophets teach the Christian Church that only in Christ can all men rise, and St. Paul in Rom. 1, 17 and Heb. 10, 38 quotes the passage from Habbakkuk 2, 4: "*But the righteous shall live by his faith.*"

35. We see therefore this falling and rising by Christ must be understood spiritually, and that the falling and rising apply to different classes of people. The falling applies only to those who are great, learned, mighty and holy, and who trust too much in themselves. Thus the Gospel tells us that Christ never had a disagreement nor a conflict with sinners, but he treated them with the utmost kindness. But with the select people, the scribes and high-priests he cannot get along, neither is he gracious to them. If then only those can fall who are standing up, only those can rise who have fallen and are lying prostrate. These are the people who know their poverty and long for grace, who realize that they are nothing and Christ is everything.

36. It is noticeable that Simeon adds the word "Israel." For Christ had been promised by all the prophets only to the people of Israel. At the same time it was announced that many among that people would fall away only on account of their self-righteousness. This is indeed a terrible example to us Gentiles, to whom nothing has been promised; but out of pure grace we have unexpectedly been brought into the kingdom and have risen through Christ, as St. Paul tells us in Romans 15,9 and as we have said in explaining the Epistle for the second Sunday in Advent. For this reason the example of Israel's fall should touch our hearts, as the apostle exhorts us in Romans 11, 20, that we may not also fall, or perhaps fall more grievously than the Jews and Turks, being seduced by Antichrist and bearing the name of Christ to the dishonor of God and our own harm.

37. In the second place Simeon says that Christ is set for a sign which is spoken against. Is it not a great pity that the Saviour and light of the world must be spoken against, condemned and rejected, he whom the whole world ought to desire and seek? This shows us the character of the world, and how our human nature uses the freedom of the will. This world is the kingdom of Satan and the enemy of God, and does not only transgress the commandments of God, but with senseless rage also persecutes and kills the Saviour, who would help them to keep God's commandments. But one sin leads to another; those who take offense at him must also speak against him, and cannot do otherwise. On the other hand, those who rise through him must confess him, testify and preach of him, and they also cannot do otherwise. But a sword shall pierce through their souls, as we shall now see.

38. Now give heed to the text. Simeon does not say that Christ shall be spoken against, but that he is set for a sign which is spoken against; just as a butt or target is set for the marksman, so that all bows and guns, arrows and stones may be aimed at it. Such a target is set up that the shots may be directed only at it and nowhere else. Thus Christ is the mark which is noticed by everybody and all opposition is directed toward him. And although the opponents are at variance with each other, yet they become united when they oppose Christ. This is proved by Luke 23, 12, where we read that Pilate and Herod became friends in their opposition against Christ, while before they were at enmity between themselves. The Pharisees and Sadducees could never agree, but in their opposition to Christ they were united. David speaks of this and expresses his astonishment in Psalm 2, 12: *"Why do the nations rage, and the people meditate a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, against Jehovah, and against his anointed."*

39. In the same manner the heretics, however strongly they differed with each other and opposed each other, were nevertheless united in their opposition against the one Christian

Church. Even now, when all the bishops, religious establishments, orders and monasteries are at variance with each other, so that there are nearly as many sects and different opinions as heads, yet they are unanimous in their opposition against the Gospel. Asaph also writes in Psalm 83, 6-8, that many nations conspired against the people of Israel, namely Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagarenes, Gebal, and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre, and Assyria, yet they were at enmity among one another. Wickedness and falsehood are at variance with themselves, but they are united against truth and righteousness, every attack and opposition being directed toward this mark. They believe to have good reason for this. For every faction fights against its own adversary, Pilate against Herod, the Pharisees against the Sadducees, Arius against Sabellius, the monks against the priests. But every faction has its adherents and friends, and their discord or harmony is only partial.

40. But Christ is very impolite and unreasonable, rebuking them all, Pilate being as much to him as Herod, and the Pharisees as much as the Sadducees, so that he does not take the part of any of them. Therefore, as he is against all of them, so they are all against him. Thus truth is opposed to all lies and falsehoods, and therefore all lies are united against the truth and make of it a sign which is spoken against. It must needs be so. For Christ and the truth find not a single man pious and pleasing to God, as we read in Psalm 116, 11: "All men are liars." Therefore Christ must rebuke them indiscriminately and reject their works, so that they all may feel the need of his grace and long for it. But only a few will believe and accept this.

41. Thus we have here two Simeons. The literal Simeon tells Mary that Christ in his own person is set for a sign which is spoken against. In these words he indicates what the spiritual Simeon, that is to say the prophets, would teach the church concerning our Christian faith, namely that this faith and Gospel, the living word of truth is a rock at which many will stumble and by the help of which many will rise, and that it finally is a sign which is spoken against. Thus Isaiah expresses his surprise when he says in chapter 53, 1: "Who hath believed our message?" just as if he would declare that not many believe it. In Isaiah 8, 15 and 28, 13 we also read that many will stumble at this word, so that hardly the dregs of the people will be saved. The prophets have written copiously of this falling, rising, and speaking against.

42. Simeon has declared before that Christ is the light and Saviour of all the world, which has also been declared by the prophets. This shows us the character of Christ and his attitude toward the world. But when Simeon speaks of falling, rising, and speaking against, he shows what Christ will achieve, what is the character of the world, and what attitude it takes toward Christ. Thus it appears that Christ is indeed willing and qualified

to be the light and Saviour of all the world, and abundantly demonstrates himself as such. But the world will not receive him and becomes only worse, opposing and persecuting him with all its strength.

43. This shows us that this world is the kingdom of Satan, not only full of wickedness and blindness, but also loving these things, as Christ says in John 3, 19: "The light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light." Behold, how we sojourn on earth among devils and the enemies of God, so that indeed this life ought to be a horror for us.

44. From this we learn to be assured that we may comfort ourselves and cheerfully bear up when many people stumble at our Word and speak against our faith, especially the great, the learned, and the priests. This is a sign that our message and faith is right, for it receives the treatment foretold by Simeon and all the prophets. They must take offense at it, stumble over it, rise by it, and speak against it; it cannot be otherwise. He who would have it otherwise must look for another Christ. Christ is set for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which is spoken against; consequently his members, or every Christian, must be like him on account of his faith and his message. He is called "antilegumenous," he who is spoken against. His doctrine must be rejected, condemned and execrated as the worst heresy, error and foolishness. It is treated rightly when this is done; but when this does not take place, then we have neither Christ, nor his mother, nor Simeon, nor the prophets, nor faith, nor the Gospel nor any Christians. For what does speaking against mean but to deny, blaspheme, curse, condemn, reject, prohibit and persecute with all disgrace and ignominy as the worst heresy?

45. But we find still another consolation in our text. Simeon says that Christ is a sign which is spoken against, which however will not be overthrown or exterminated. The whole world may condemn my faith and my Word, call it heresy and misrepresent and pervert it in the most shameful manner, but they must let it remain and cannot take it from me. With all their rage and fury they will accomplish nothing, but can only speak against me, and I must be their mark and target. Yet they will fall, and I shall stand. Let them speak against me as much as they desire, God will also oppose them and with his deeds contend against their words. We shall see who will win the victory. Here are the deeds of God, which establish this sign firmly and solidly upon a good foundation. A goal is set up by God, who will upset it? But the others have no more than fleeting words and an impotent breath of the mouth. The flies make a great fluttering with their wings and sharpen their bills, but they only defile the wall and must let it stand.

46. From this it follows that the doctrine and faith of the pope, the bishops, the religious establishments, the monasteries and the universities is of the world and of the devil, for no one takes offense at them or speaks against them, neither do they suffer any harm. They reap nothing but honor, power, riches, peace and pleasure, and fatten themselves at the crib, with the exception of a few that may sometimes be found who are tormented by the devil with spiritual temptations concerning their faith and hope. For where Christ is and his faith, there is also opposition, otherwise it is not Christ. If men do not oppose openly, devils do it secretly. These are sore temptations to unbelief, despair and blasphemy. Such people may be preserved and saved. The great multitude however lives without Christ, without Mary, without Simeon, without the least truth, but meanwhile they read many masses, sing high and low, wear tonsures and ecclesiastical vestments and are the apes of Solomon and like Indian cats. As they will not suffer to be spoken against and are not worthy of it, have nothing and do nothing that would call forth opposition, they become opponents themselves. What else could they do? It is their work to condemn, forbid, curse and persecute the truth.

47. I mention all this because I want to do my duty and point out to every Christian his danger, so that all may beware of the pope, the scholastics and the priests and shun them as they shun the kingdom of Satan, for the Word of God does not prevail among them. Cling to the Gospel and find out where there is opposition and where there is praise. Where you find no opposition, there Christ is not present; and here we do not mean opposition from the Turks, but from our nearest neighbors. Christ is not a sign set for the falling of many in Babylon or Assyria, but in Israel, that is to say among the people in the midst of whom he dwells and who boast to be his own.

48. In the third place Simeon says to Mary: "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul." This does not mean an actual sword, but must be understood figuratively, just like Psalms 107, 10: "Such as sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron," also Deut. 4, 20: "Jehovah hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnaces." It means that her heart was to be filled with great sorrow and grief, although her body would not be tortured. Everybody knows how this happened. Thus we must take these words as a Hebrew figure of speech, expressing great sorrow and grief, just as we speak of a "heart-rending sorrow," or use expressions like "*my heart is breaking*" or "*my heart will burst.*"

49. We shall speak more about this during the Passion season, when we consider the sufferings of Christ. At present we can only notice how Simeon interprets his blessing by predicting such sorrow, in order that it might not be understood as a worldly blessing. But what does it signify that Simeon here speaks only to Mary, the mother, and not to Joseph?

It signifies that the Christian Church, the spiritual virgin Mary, will remain on earth and will not be exterminated although the preacher and their faith and the Gospel, the spiritual Christ, are persecuted. Thus Joseph died before Christ suffered, and Mary in her widowhood was deprived of her child, yet she lived, and all this grief overwhelmed her soul. Thus the Christian Church will always be a widow, feeling great sorrow because the holy fathers, represented by Joseph, die, and the Gospel is persecuted. The Church must feel the sword, and will yet remain until the last day.

50. What can be more painful for a Christian than to see and experience how furiously the tyrants and unbelievers persecute and exterminate the Gospel of Christ? This is done more at the present time under the pope than ever before. With this agrees the name of Mary, which means a "sea of bitterness." This declares that there is in her not only a drop, nor a river, but a whole sea of bitterness, for all the waves of sorrow go over her, so that she may indeed be called Mary, a bitter sea.

51. Finally Simeon says that all this will happen that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed. What a blessed and necessary fruit of this falling and speaking against! But in order to understand this we must notice that there are two different kinds of temptation among men. There is the temptation to gross sins, as for instance to be disobedient to parents, to kill, to be unchaste, to steal, to lie and blaspheme, etc., which are sins against the second table of the law. The people who do these things need not take offense at a sign which is spoken against; their thoughts are sufficiently revealed by their evil life. The Scriptures speak little of this temptation.

52. But the most dangerous temptation is prefigured by Cozbi the daughter of Zur, a prince of Midian, because of whom twenty-four thousand were slain in Israel, as Moses writes in Numbers 25, 15. This is the temptation through the bright and shining sins of good works and the service of God, which bring misfortune upon the whole world and against which nobody can guard sufficiently. These are the sins against the first table of the law, against faith, the honor of God and his works.

53. For a life of good works, blameless conduct and outward respectability is the greatest, most dangerous and destructive stumbling-block. The people leading such lives are so upright, reasonable, honorable and pious that scarcely a single soul could have been preserved or saved, if God had not set up a sign against which they might stumble and by which the thought of their hearts might be revealed. Thus we see their hearts behind their beautiful words and good works, and find that these great saints and wise men are pagans and fools; for they persecute the faith for the sake of their works and will not suffer their ways to be rebuked. Thus their thoughts are laid bare and they become manifested as

trusting in their own works and themselves, sinning not only continually against the first commandments, but endeavoring also in their enmity against God to exterminate and destroy all that belongs to God, claiming to do this for the sake of God and to preserve the truth. Behold, such are the pope, the bishops and almost all the priests, who have filled the world with innumerable snares and stumbling-blocks by making an external glitter of the spiritual life. Among them there is no faith, but only works, the Gospel does not prevail, but only human laws.

54. The whole Scriptures speak of this stumbling-block, and God with all his prophets and saints contends against it. This is the true gate of hell and the broad highway to eternal damnation, wherefore this harlot is well called Cozbi, "mendacium meum," my lie. Everything that glitters lies and deceives, but her beautiful ornaments and embellishments deceive even the princes of Israel, and so she is not merely called "mendacium," but "meum mendacium," my lie, because with her deception she attracts and tempts almost everybody.

55. But in order to protect us God has set up his Christ as a sign, at which they might stumble and fall and which they oppose, so that we may not be seduced by their works and words, nor consider them good and imitate them. We should rather know that before God no moral life without faith is acceptable; where there is no faith, there is only Cozbi, nothing but lies and deception. This becomes manifest as soon as we preach against them and consider their works worthless in comparison with faith. Behold, then you must be a heretic with your faith; they reveal themselves and disclose their heart before you unwillingly and unknowingly. Then you perceive the shocking abominations of unbelief hidden behind that beautiful life, the wolves in sheep's clothing, the harlot adorned with the wreath, impudently demanding that you consider her disgrace and vice, her honor and virtue, or threatening to kill you. Therefore God says to her Jer. 3, 3: "Thou hadst a harlot's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed," and Isaiah 3, 9: "The show of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not." Would she not be considered a mad and impudent harlot who would have her adultery extolled even before her husband? But this is being done by all the preachers of works and faithless teachers, who shamelessly preach righteousness by works, but condemn faith, or conjugal chastity, who call their lewdness chastity, but true chastity they call lewdness. Now all this might remain hidden, and human nature and reason might never discover such vices, for their works are too attractive and their manners too polished. Indeed, human nature devises all this and delights in it, believing it to be well and right, persisting and becoming hardened in it. Therefore God sets up a sign that our nature may stumble and everybody may learn how much higher is the Christian life than nature and reason. The virtues of nature are sins, its light is darkness its ways are errors.

We need an entirely new heart and nature; the natural heart reveals itself as an enemy of God.

56. This is prefigured by the Philistines, I Sam. 5, 6, whom God smote with tumors when the ark of God was with them. The tumors are the thoughts of unbelieving hearts, breaking out when the ark of God comes to them, that is to say when, the Gospel and Christ are preached, which they will not tolerate. Thus it happens that the hearts of these saints, which otherwise could not be known, become revealed when Christ is held up before them. St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 2, 15: "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man," for he knows their disposition and the attitude of their hearts when he perceives that they do not accept the Word of God and faith.

II. OF ANNA.

The Second Part Of This Gospel.

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher (she was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity, and she had been a widow even unto fourscore and four years), who departed not from the temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day."

57. Here some might say: From the example of Anna you see that good works are exalted, as for instance fasting and praying and going to church, therefore they must not be condemned. But who has ever condemned good works? We only reject hypocritical and spurious good works. Fasting, praying, going to church are good works, if they are done in the right spirit. But the trouble is that these blockheads explain the Scriptures so awkwardly, noticing only the works and examples of the saints and thinking that now they are able to learn from them and imitate them. Thus they become nothing but apes and hypocrites, for they do not perceive that the Scriptures speak more of the heart than of the deeds of men. The sacrifice and works of Abel are praised in Scripture, but he himself a great deal more. They however disregard the person and observe only the example, take notice of the works and pay no heed to faith, eat the bran and throw away the flour, as we read in Hosea 3, 1: "They turn unto other gods, and love cakes of raisins." If you desire to fast and pray like Anna, well and good. But take good care that first of all you imitate her character, and then her works. Be first of all like Anna. But let us see what Luke says of her works and her character, so that her example may be correctly understood.

58. In the first place he says that she was a prophetess, and undoubtedly a devout, godly prophetess. Most assuredly the Holy Spirit dwelled in her, and consequently she was good and righteous regardless of all her works. Therefore the works which she produced must also have been good and righteous. So you see that Luke does not want to say that through her works she became holy and a prophetess, but she was a holy prophetess before, and for this reason her works were also good. Why would you mutilate this example and pervert the Gospel, paying most attention to the works, while Luke describes first of all the whole person, and not only the works?

59. In the second place he praises her as a widow, who did works becoming her widowhood and her station in life. But he would not represent them as being unusual and the only good works whereby we can serve God, rejecting all others. St. Paul writes of the life of widows in 1 Tim. 5, 3-6 as follows: *"Honor widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow hath children or grandchildren, let them learn first to show piety toward their own family, and to requite their parents: for this is acceptable in the sight of God. Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, hath her hope set on God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. But she that giveth herself to pleasure is dead while she liveth."*

60. From this you see that Anna must have been a widow, alone in the world, without any children or parents to take care of, otherwise she would not have served God but the devil by not departing from the temple and neglecting her duty of managing her household according to the will of God. Luke indicates this when he writes that she had been a widow even for fourscore and four years. Everybody may then easily calculate that her parents must have been dead and her children provided for, so that as an aged mother she was cared for by them and she did not have anything to do but to pray and fast and forego all worldly pleasures. Luke does not say that all the eighty-four years of her life were spent in this manner; but at the time when Christ was born and brought into the temple she began to lead such a life, when all things, as well as her children and parents, were provided for and she was entirely alone.

61. It is therefore a dangerous thing to take notice only of the works, and fail to consider the whole character of a person, as well as his station and calling. God cannot bear to see any one neglect the duties of his calling or station in life in order to imitate the works of the saints. If therefore a married woman were to follow Anna in this respect, leave her husband and children, her home and parents in order to go on a pilgrimage, to pray, fast and go to church, she would do nothing else but tempt God, confound the matrimonial estate with the state of widowhood, desert her own calling and do works belonging to others. This would be as much as walking on one's ears, putting a veil over one's feet and

a boot on one's head, and turning all things upside down. Good works should be done, and you ought to pray and fast, but you must not thereby be kept from or neglect the duties of your calling and station. The service of God does not consist in the performance of one or two special deeds, nor is it bound to any particular calling, but God may be served in every calling. The duty of Anna and all widows who like her are alone, is praying and fasting, and here St. Luke agrees with St. Paul. The duty of married women is not only praying and fasting, but they should govern their children and household according to the will of God and care for their parents, as St. Paul says in 1 Tim. 5, 4: For this reason the Evangelist, in describing the life of Anna takes such great care to mention her station and age, so that he may discourage those who would take notice only of her deeds and draw poison from roses. He first of all draws attention to her calling.

62. In the third place, the same reason prompts him to write that she lived with a husband seven years from her virginity. Here he exalts the state of matrimony and the duties of that estate, so that nobody may think that he considers only praying and fasting as good works. For she did not devote herself entirely to praying and fasting while she lived with her husband, or during the time of her maidenhood, but only after she had become an aged and lonely widow. Yet her virginity and her wedded life with its duties are also praised and help up as an example of truly good works. Why would you disregard them and only cleave to the deeds of the widow?

63. And with good purpose does the Evangelist first praise her wedded life and then her widowhood, for he wanted to cut the ground entirely from under the feet of the blind legalists. She was a godly maiden, a godly wife, and a godly widow, and in all these three estates she performed her respective duties.

64. May you then do likewise. Reflect on your condition, and you will find enough good works to do if you would lead a godly life. Every calling has its own duties, so that we need not inquire for others outside of our station. Behold, then we will truly serve God, just as Luke says that Anna worshiped with fastings and supplications night and day. But the legalists do not serve God, but themselves, nay, the devil, for they do not perform their duties and forsake their own calling. Thus it depends entirely upon the character of the person and his calling whether his works are good, as we have said above in explaining the Gospel for the Day of St. John the Evangelist. This may suffice for the present. Let us now see what Anna means spiritually.

The Spiritual Meaning of Anna, the Prophetess.

65. We said in §11 and 12 that by Simeon are signified the holy prophets, who have spoken of Christ in Holy Scripture. Therefore Anna must signify those who stand by and hear this message assenting to it and applying it to themselves, as did Anna, who stood by when Simeon spoke of Christ. Thus Anna means nothing but the holy Synagogue, the people of Israel, whose life and history are recorded in the Bible. For Anna is found in the temple, that is to say in the Scripture. And as Mary signifies the Christian Church, the people of God after the birth of Christ, so Anna signifies the people of God before Christ's birth. Therefore Anna is wellnigh a hundred years old and near her death, while Mary is young and in the prime of life. Thus the Synagogue was on the wane at the time of Christ, while the Church was in its beginning.

66. It is then indicated here that the saints before the birth of Christ have understood and believed the message of the prophets and all have been saved in Christ and by faith in him, as Christ says of Abraham: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad"; also Luke 10, 24: "For I say unto you, that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not." Paul says in Hebr. 13, 8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and forever," and more plainly in 1 Cor. 10, 1-4: "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them: and the rock was Christ." Such and similar passages prove that all the saints before the birth of Christ have like us been saved in Christ. Therefore we read in Hebr. 11 of examples of faith, of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and others, who spent their lives in Christ and for Christ who heard him and through the prophet's words knew him, believed in him and waited for his coming.

67. For this reason all the narratives of the Old Testament so beautifully answer Christ and testify of him with one accord, standing around him just as Anna here literally stood near him. It is a great delight to read and perceive how they all look and point at Christ. Let us notice only one example. Isaac was sacrificed by his father and yet his life was spared, a ram being substituted for him, which Abraham saw behind him caught in the thicket by his horns. Here Christ, the Son of God, is prefigured, who like a mortal man died on the cross. Yet the divine nature did not die, the human nature being sacrificed in its place which is designated in the ram that by his horns (this is to say the preaching of the Gospel, rebuking and punishing the perversity and obstinacy of the scribes and priests) was caught in this thicket, being behind Abraham, that is to say coming after him. Many more important lessons might be learned from this narrative.

68. So Joseph was sold into Egypt, and after having been in prison became the ruler of the whole land, Gen. 37 and 41. This occurred and was recorded that Christ might be prefigured, who through his sufferings became the Lord of all the world. But who has time enough to explain all these narratives and to show how Samson, David, Solomon, Aaron and others are appropriate and perfect types of Christ?

69. Luke therefore here uses the word "epistasa" with reference to Anna, which means that she stood over, or beside, or near that which happened to Christ in the temple. In the Latin text we read "superveniens," meaning that she came near at that time. This is also true, but the other expression, that she "stood over" what happened, is better. It means that she pressed forward with great earnestness to see him. Thus we say: How the people press forward to see this or that. Thus do the narratives of Holy Writ act toward Christ, in order that they may typify him.

70. Yet the saints would not have been saved by this, and probably they did not know at the time that by their deeds they became types of Christ. For our faith cannot be based upon figures and interpretations, but it must first of all be established upon clear passages of Scripture, which must be explained according to the natural meaning of the words. Then, after the foundation for faith has been laid by the words of Scripture, such interpretations of history must be based upon faith, which is thereby nourished and strengthened. Therefore, as I have said, they were types of Christ only in their outward conduct and works, through which nobody could have been sanctified, but they heartily believed in the Christ who was to come, whom they literally knew from clear passages of Holy Writ.

71. Thus Christ was promised to Adam and Eve after the fall, when God said to the serpent, Gen. 3, 15: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This promise holds good for Adam and Eve, and they believed in the seed of the woman, who was to bruise the head of the serpent. So it was until the time of Noah, to whom another promise was given when God said, Gen. 6, 18: "But I will establish my covenant with thee." When, therefore, Eve bore Cain, her first son (Gen. 4, 1) she rejoiced and believed him to be the seed of whom God had spoken, saying: "I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah," as if she were to say: This will be the man, the seed, who is to fight against the serpent. She desired to see Christ, but the time was not yet come. Afterwards she realized that Cain was not the Saviour and that her faith must look forward to another woman.

72. Then came the clear promise to Abraham (Gen. 12, 3 and 22, 18), to whom God said: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," of which we have spoken in explaining the Epistle. The faith of all the saints before the birth of Christ until the time of his coming was based upon this promise, so that this passage may also be referred to by the "bosom of Abraham", of which Christ speaks in Luke 16,22. Such a promise was indeed also made to David, but only by the virtue of the promise to Abraham. This child of Mary then is the seed of the woman, waging war against the serpent in order to destroy sin and death. Therefore we read in the text that the seed is to bruise the head of the serpent, by which undoubtedly the serpent is meant that seduced Eve, namely Satan in the serpent, and Adam and Eve certainly understood it thus. Who will show us another son or seed bruising the head? If it had been said of a mere man, it might as well be understood of Adam as of any of his children. Yet not Adam, nor a child of Adam, was to do it, but a woman's, a virgin's child.

73. It is well said, in distinction, that this seed is to bruise Satan's head, the seat of life; Satan however will not bruise the head of the seed, but his heel, or the sole of his foot. This means that Satan indeed injures, destroys and kills the external, bodily life and activity of Christ; but the head, that is to say the divine nature, remains alive and even raises from death the heel, or the human nature, which was bruised by Satan. So in all Christians he injures and destroys their life and work, thus bruising their heels; but he cannot touch the head, or faith, and therefore their life and work will also be restored. On the other hand, Satan's feet remain, his strength and fury are great; but his head, that is to say sin and the inmost essence of his life, are bruised. Therefore his feet must die eternally with sin and death. Behold, in this manner did God save the saints of old by his Word and their faith, and has kept them from sin and the power of the devil until the coming of Christ, signified by this saintly Anna.

74. For this reason she does not take the infant Christ into her arms like Simeon, neither does she speak concerning him like Simeon, but she stands by and speaks about him to others. For the dear fathers of old and the saints have not uttered prophecies concerning Christ like the prophets, neither have they spoken of him, but they have taken the greatest interest in the announcement of the prophets, have believed them firmly and transmitted them to other people and generations, just as Luke here says of Anna.

75. Everything agrees with this that Luke here relates of her. In the first place, she is a prophetess, that is to say, she has the insight of the prophets. Thus all the saints of old have apprehended Christ in the passages of Scripture by faith, and consequently they were all prophets.

76. In the second place, she is called Anna, which in Latin is "gratia", meaning favor or grace. The two names, Anna and John (Johannes) are almost one in Hebrew. Anna means gracious, or one who is favored. This signifies that the fathers and saints of old have not received such faith and the promise of God by their own merit, but by the favor and grace of God, according to whose mercy they were pleasing in his sight. In the same manner all men are not acceptable and pleasing to God on account of their worthiness, but only by the grace of God. This is also the way of human nature, which often shows a predilection for something that is unattractive, and it is a common saying among us that love and favor may as likely fall upon a frog as upon purple, or that nobody can make us dislike what we love. Thus God loves us who are sinful and unworthy, and we are all favored by him. We are all Johns and Annas in his sight.

77. In the third place, she is a daughter of Phaniel. After Jacob had wrestled with the angel, Gen. 32, 30, he called the name of the place Peniel or Phaniel, and said: "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Peniel or Phaniel means "face of God." Now the face of God is nothing but the knowledge of God, and God can only be known by faith in his Word. The Word and promises of God declare nothing but comfort and grace in Christ, and whoever believes them beholds the grace and goodness of God. This is the knowledge of God, which cheers and blesses the heart, as David says in Psalm 4, 6-7: "Jehovah, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart," and Psalm 80, 3: "And cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved." We read much in Scripture concerning the biding and showing of the countenance of God.

78. Behold, in this way the fathers and saints of old were spiritual children of Phaniel, of divine knowledge and wisdom, which filled them with joy. To this they attained by faith in the divine promise and thus they became prophets. But faith and the promises of God they obtained only because they were favored by him, out of God's pure grace and mercy.

79. This brings us to the fourth point, namely that she was of the tribe of Asher. Asher means happiness (Gen. 30, 13). Faith makes us children of divine wisdom and blessedness. For faith destroys sin and redeems from death, as Christ says in Mark 16, 16: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." To be saved means nothing but redemption from sin and death.

80. Anna then is a daughter of Phaniel and Asher, full of wisdom and having a good conscience in the face of all sins and the terrors of death. All this is bestowed by faith in the divine promise of mercy; and thus one follows the other: Anna, the prophetess, a daughter of Phaniel, of the tribe of Asher. This means that we obtain the promise of God and believe in it only by divine grace, whereby we learn to know God and his goodness

thoroughly, which fills the heart with joy, security and blessedness, and delivers us completely from sin and death.

81. We come now in the fifth place to the more profound and spiritual interpretations. She lived with a husband seven years, and after that was a widow for eighty-four years, without a husband. Had one sufficient time and skill he might find the whole Bible contained in this number. But in order that we may see how, as Christians, we do not need Aristotle or human lore, but have in the Scriptures enough to study for all eternity, if we should so desire. Let us also consider this number in connection with the wonders of Scripture mentioned before. The number seven is commonly taken to signify our temporal life, the life of this body, because all time is measured by the seven days of the week (Gen. 1), which is the first and best standard for the measurement of time, established by the Scriptures. For in Gen. 1 Moses writes that God first created days and appointed seven of them as a definite period of time. Of weeks were then made months, and of months years, into which our whole life is divided. These seven years therefore signify the whole course of the temporal life and conduct of the saints of old.

82. But who was the husband? St. Paul explains in Rom. 7, 2 that a husband signifies the law. For as a woman is bound to her husband while he liveth, so all are bound to the law, who live under it. Now the law has been given to no people on earth except to this Anna, the Jewish people, as Paul says in Rom. 3, 2 that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. In Psalm 147,19-20 we read: "He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his ordinances unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his ordinances, they have not known them;" also Psalm 103, 7: "He made known his ways unto Moses, his doings unto the children of Israel." The Gospel however he did not reveal only to one nation, but to all the world, as we read in Psalm 19, 4: "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world," which means the words of the apostles. Therefore Anna, who lived seven years with her husband, signifies the people of Israel under the law, in their outward conduct and temporal life.

83. Now we have heard in the Epistle for today that those who live under the law do not live aright, for they do the works of the law unwillingly and without delight, and are bond-servants, not children. For the law will hold no one righteous who does not keep it willingly. Such willingness however is only bestowed by faith, as has often been said. Faith will produce righteous works and fulfill the law. It is all the same to the believer whether he is under the law or free from it, seeing that Christ also was under the law.

84. But St. Luke, or rather the Holy Spirit, desires to show that this saintly Anna, the holy people of old, was not only under the law and a bond-servant. He points out that besides

her life under the law she also walked in the freedom of faith and the Spirit, fulfilling the law not only with outward works like a bond-servant, but rather in faith. This is signified by the eighty- four years of her widowhood, meaning the spiritual life of faith led by the saints of old. For the widowhood, the life without a husband, signifies freedom from the law. Thus the life under the law and the life of faith existed, side by side. The believers of old, as to their souls were justified without the works of the law, alone by faith, and in this respect they were truly widows; but in their external conduct and as to their bodies they were subject to the law. They did not, however, believe that they were justified by works, but having been justified by faith, they kept the law voluntarily, cheerfully and to the glory of God. He who lives in this manner may also do the works of the law, which will not harm him nor make a bond-servant of him, for Christ and the apostles also have kept the law. Behold, these are the people who at the same time live seven years with a husband and eighty-four years without a husband, who at the same time are free from the law and yet under the law. as St. Paul says of himself in 1 Cor. 9, 20: *"I am to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law."*

85. How can he be at the same time under the law and free from the law? In order to gain others he gladly performed the external works of the law, but in his heart he clung to faith, by which he was justified, without the works of the law. For he fulfilled the law, and yet would not be justified by it, which indeed is impossible. In this manner Anna, the holy people, has kept the law. For whoever believes and has been justified by faith, may keep not only the law of God, but the laws of the whole world, and they will not hinder him; for he keeps them voluntarily, not in the opinion that thereby he acquires righteousness. But those people who only follow Anna in this that they live seven years with a husband, and do not live eighty-four years without a husband, are without the Spirit and faith and are bond-servants. They believe that by doing the works of the law they become righteous. But in this manner they can never become righteous and pious, as today's Epistle sufficiently explains. It is well arranged that first the seven years of wedded life and then the eighty-four years of widowhood are mentioned, for St. Paul also says in 1. Cor. 15, 46: *"Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural."*

86. If man is to become spiritual and a believer, he must necessarily first be under the law; for no one can know his faults without the law, and he who does not know his sin will not long for grace. But the law demands so much that man must realize and confess that he is unable to satisfy those demands. Then he must despair of himself and in all humility sigh for the grace of God. Behold, therefore the seven years come first, the law precedes grace as John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ. The law kills and condemns the natural, sensual man, so that grace may lift up the spiritual, inner man.

87. There is, however, nothing said of the years of Anna's virginity, which signifies the unfruitful life before either the law or grace has been in operation, and which is worthless before God. Therefore virginity as a barren state was altogether despised and disapproved in the Old Testament.

88. But how is it that faith or the spiritual life of the inner man, which without the law is widowed, without a husband, is signified by the number 84? Let us here follow the example of St. Augustine and try to find out the allegorical significance. Every one knows that the numbers seven and twelve are the most glorious in Holy Scripture. For these two numbers are mentioned frequently, undoubtedly because there were twelve apostles who founded and established the faith in all the world, and who exalted only faith by their doctrine and life. Whereas the one Moses received the law from the angels, thereby uniting Anna to a husband and demanding outward works from men. Thus the apostles, who were twelve times more in number than Moses, received the Gospel, not from angels, but from the Lord himself, and made us widows, free by faith and justified without works. Now the saints of old, as we have said before, possessed this apostolic faith along with the law. Therefore they have not only acquired the number seven, but also the number twelve, have not only possessed the one Moses, but also the apostles who were twelve times more, have lived as well under the law as free from the law, as we have heard before. Thus the number seven signifies the one Moses, and the number twelve times as many as Moses. It is therefore unquestionable that the number twelve signifies the apostles, the apostolic doctrine, the apostolic faith, the true widowhood, the spiritual life without the law. So also the number seven signifies Moses, the teaching of Moses, the works of the law, the real matrimonial state of bondage.

89. The twelve apostles are typified by the twelve patriarchs, the twelve precious stones on the holy garment of Aaron, the twelve princes of the people of Israel, the twelve stones taken out of the Jordan, the twelve foundations and gates of the new Jerusalem etc. For the whole Scriptures emphasize faith and the Gospel, preached and established by the apostles. Thus this faith is also signified by these eighty-four years, which contains the number twelve in a wonderful manner.

90. In the first place, eighty-four is equal to twelve times seven. This signifies that the teacher of the law is only one, Moses, being only one time seven, that is to say the law and the life under the law. But the apostles are twelve, twelve times as many as Moses. Eighty-four bears the same relation to seven as twelve does to one. Now as the law was given through one and the Gospel through twelve, it is evident that seven signifies Moses and eighty-four the apostles. So the disciples of Moses are represented by Anna in the

state of matrimony, while the widow Anna signifies the followers of the apostles, the former emphasizing external conduct, the latter a life in the Spirit and in faith. This also signifies that faith exceeds the works as much as twelve exceeds the number one, or eighty-four the number seven. It comprises the whole sum and inheritance, as also the apostles call it "holokleros", the whole inheritance, 1 Thess. 5, 23; for the number twelve comprises all the people of Israel, divided into twelve tribes. He who believes possesses all things, is an heir of heaven and a blessed child of God. Notice also the divine arrangement here. As Anna was not a widow for twelve years nor a married woman for one year, God ordained it so that the years of her wedded life were seven and those of her widowhood eighty-four in number, the former number bearing the same relation to the latter that one does to twelve. Besides this, there is thus also found, as we have seen, a greater spiritual significance in the number seven, in her wedded life and in the state of her widowhood.

91. In the second place, the arithmeticians divide numbers into so-called aliquot parts, that is to say they examine how often a given number may be divided into equal parts. Thus the number twelve may be divided five times into equal parts. For twelve, in the first place, is twelve times one, all aliquot parts; secondly, six times two; thirdly, four times three; fourthly, three times four; fifthly, two times six. In this case there can be no further division into aliquot parts. Seven and five are also twelve; likewise three and nine, one and eleven, but those numbers are not aliquot parts of twelve. Now they add together these aliquot parts to find their sum. Thus, the aliquot parts of twelve are 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, which added together make 16, exceeding the number itself by four. This is called the abundant number, because the sum of the aliquot parts exceeds the number itself. Again, sometimes the aliquot parts of a number added together make less than the number itself. For instance eight is eight times one, four times two, two times four. But 1, 2, and 4 makes only seven, one less than eight. This is called the deficient number. Between these two is the perfect number, which is equal to the sum of its aliquot parts. Thus, six is six times one, three times two and two times three; now one, two and three added together make six.

92. Notice here also that Moses, represented by the number seven, cannot thus be divided, as all odd numbers cannot. For this division is only possible with even numbers, But eightyfour, which signifies the apostles, is an abundant number and can be divided eleven times into aliquot parts. Judas, the traitor, does not belong to the abundant number, although he is one of the number. He is omitted here, so that there may not be twelve. He belongs to the number of the apostles in name, but not in reality. In the first place, eighty-four is 84 times one; then 42 times 2, 28 times 3, 21 times 4, 14 times 6, 12 times 7, 7

times 12, 6 times 14, 4 times 21, 3 times 28, 2 times 42. If you add together the aliquot parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 14, 21, 28, 42, the result is 140, 56 more than the number itself.

93. All this signifies that Moses undivided, or the law, like the number seven, remained by itself, having not passed beyond the Jewish people nor exercised an influence upon other nations, But the spiritual life and the Gospel preached by the apostles has spread abundantly over all the world. And as the number one compared with twelve is very small and trifling, so that it could hardly look more unimportant, so also the number seven compared with eighty- four is very insignificant. For the law with its works confers nothing upon its servants but temporal possessions and worldly honor, a poor and wretched possession, which will not increase, but surely decrease. On the other hand, one is great and will multiply instead of decreasing; for faith has the blessing of God and abounds forever with possessions and honor. We have now rambled about sufficiently and have seen that no tittle of the Scriptures was written in vain. The dear fathers of old have shown us great examples of faith, and with their works have always pointed to that in which we should believe, namely Christ and his Gospel. Therefore we read nothing concerning them in vain, but their whole conduct strengthens and improves our faith. Let us now continue with Anna.

94. Luke says that she departed not from the temple. What a salutary and necessary exhortation! We have heard that by the temple is signified the Holy Scriptures. It was a special sin of the people that they liked to listen to false prophets and human doctrines; this they proved by erecting altars outside of the temple, in high places and valleys. Moses spoke against this in Deut. 5, 32 and 12, 32, when he said: "What thing soever I command you, that shall ye observe to do: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." He desires, as it were, the people to be like Anna, who did not depart from the temple. They were however not all like Anna, but turned from the temple to their altars, from the law of God to their own devices and to false prophets.

95. But this was nothing compared with the state of affairs at the present time. We have not only been seduced by the pope and human doctrines to depart from the temple, but we have also arbitrarily destroyed and desecrated it with all kinds of profanations and abominations, more than we can express. But we ought to heed what St. Anthony so diligently taught his disciples, namely that nobody should do anything that has not been commanded or advised by God in the Scriptures, so that we might by all means remain in the temple. Psalm 1, 1-2 speaks of this: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: but his delight is in the law of Jehovah; and on his law does he meditate day and night." In 1 Peter 4,18 we read: "And if the righteous is scarcely saved, who is in the

temple” (Luther's translation). This means that Satan also tempts those who trust only in the Word of God; they are scarcely saved. How then will those secure and reckless people be saved who base their faith upon the doctrines of men?

96. A holy life can not endure human doctrines, they are a stumbling-block and a dangerous snare. We must remain in the temple and never depart from it. This was done by the saints of old, of whom St. Paul speaks in Rom. 11, 4, where he quotes the answer of God to Elijah: "I have left for myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal." David complains of these persecutors and ensnarers in Psalm 140, 45: "Keep me, O Jehovah, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man: who have purposed to thrust aside my steps. The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me." All this is directed against human doctrines which take us away from the temple. For the Word of God and the doctrines of men cannot agree at all with each other in the same heart. Yet these senseless enemies of souls, the Papists with the Antichrist, the pope, declare that we must teach and observe more than is found in the Bible. With their ecclesiastical ranks and orders they lead the whole world to hell.

97. Finally Luke says of Anna that she worshipped with fastings and supplications night and day. Here we see how good works follow faith. She must first be Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, a widow even unto fourscore and four years, not departing from the temple: then her fasting and praying is right, then the sacrifice of Abel is acceptable, then God may be served with fastings and supplications night and day. But whoever starts with works reverses all things and obtains nothing. Thus, after St. Paul has taught the Romans faith, he begins in Rom. 12,1 to teach them many good works, exhorting them to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which would be their spiritual service. This is rendered to God in that the body is mortified by fasting, watching and labors, which is done by Anna.

98. All the saints of old have done this, for fasting means all chastisement and discipline of the body. Although the soul is just and holy by faith, the body is not yet entirely free from sin and carnal appetites, wherefore it must be subdued and disciplined and made subject to the soul, as St. Paul says of himself in 1 Cor. 9,27: "But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. We also read in 1 Peter 2, 5 that we should offer up spiritual sacrifices, that is to say not sheep nor calves, as under the law of Moses, but our own body and ourselves, by the mortification of sin in our flesh and the discipline of the body. No one can do this who does not first believe.

99. Therefore I have often said that the works which follow faith should not be done with the intention of meriting righteousness; for this must exist before good works can be done. They must be done with a view to discipline the body and to serve our neighbor. Good works are a true service of God if they are done freely and voluntarily, to the honor of God. Why should he desire us to fast if thereby we did not suppress our sin and flesh, which according to his will should be subdued? But many fast only to please the saints or at special seasons, not in order to discipline the body. Such fasting however is entirely worthless.

100. But Anna does not fast only on special days, on Saturdays and Fridays, on apostles' or ember days, nor does she know anything about a diversity of meats. But Luke says that she worshipped night and day and thereby served God, which means that she continually disciplined her body, not because she desired to do a meritorious work, but in order to serve God and to subdue sin.

101. St. Paul also speaks of this fasting in 2 Cor. 6, 4-5, when he says among other things, that we should commend ourselves as ministers of God in fastings. But our foolish fasting contrived by men only consists in not partaking of meat, eggs, butter or milk for a few days, not as a service of God and with the intention to discipline the body and subdue the flesh; but thereby we only serve the pope, the Papists and the fishmongers.

102. Anna worshipped night and day, therefore she must certainly also have watched. But we must not believe that she prayed and fasted night and day without intermission, for she was obliged also to eat, drink, sleep and rest. Fasting and praying were the mode of life she pursued night and day. Doing something during the day or at night does not mean that we do it all day and all night.

103. This is the second part of the service of God, by which the soul is offered up to him, as the body is by fasting. And by prayer we do not merely understand oral prayer, but also the hearing, proclaiming, contemplating and meditating on the Word of God. Many psalms are prayers, although they hardly contain a petition; others teach some lesson or rebuke sin, and by meditating upon them we converse with God, with ourselves and with men. Behold, such was the service rendered to God by the dear fathers and saints of old, who sought nothing but the honor of God and the salvation of men. Thus we read of a great longing on the part of the ancient fathers in Scripture and their longing for Christ and the salvation of the world. This can especially be noticed by any one in the Psalms.

104. But at the present time people only pray at stated times, count beads and rattle off their prayers. Nobody thinks seriously of asking and obtaining something from God, but

they only perform it as a duty obligatory upon them, and then are satisfied. As a thrasher who wields his flail they move their tongue, and only earn bread for the body. Much less do they trouble themselves by serving God with their prayers and petitioning him to relieve the general need of Christendom, but even the best among them believe they have done enough when they are pious for themselves and pray only for themselves.

Therefore, hypocrites as they are, they deserve nothing but hell with their prayers, for they serve neither God nor men, but only their own body and advantage. If they wished to serve God and their neighbor as they ought, they would not think of the number of prayers and psalms they repeat, but with all their hearts would seek the honor of God and the salvation of men, which would be a true service of God. Then for one thing they earnestly desire they would often pray a whole day. This would indeed be praying and worshipping like Anna. When Luke writes that she worshipped God with supplications, he condemns the multitude of our foolish prayers, whereby we only increase and multiply our sins, because we do not serve and seek God. Now let us return again to our text. *"And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks unto God, and spoke of him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."*

105. Our Latin texts read, "for the redemption of Israel." but the Greek has: "that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." Anna spoke to those who were in Jerusalem and were waiting for the redemption. For, as she did not depart from the temple, she could only speak to those who were in Jerusalem, either to the inhabitants or to visitors. In the spiritual interpretation we have spoken sufficiently of the meaning of her standing near. For when we come with Christ into the temple of the Scriptures to present him to God with thanksgiving, there is found at that very hour also this holy Anna, with all the saints of the whole synagogue, who unanimously look and point at him with their faith and their whole life.

106. We also notice here the great distinction conferred upon this holy woman, who was favored more than many great people when she recognized this poor child as the true Saviour. There were undoubtedly priests present who received the offerings of Joseph and Mary, but did not know the child and perhaps considered the words of Simeon and Anna as mere old wives' talk. She must have been specially illumined by the Holy Spirit, and a saintly woman in the sight of God, who enlightened her more than others.

107. Behold, five persons are here brought together: the infant Christ, his mother Mary, Joseph, Simeon, and Anna. By this small number of people every station in life is represented, husband and wife, young and old, virgin and widow, the married and the unmarried. Here Christ begins to gather around him people of every honorable station,

and will not be alone. Whoever, then, is not found in one of these states, is not on the way to salvation.

108. "She gave thanks unto God." In the Hebrew tongue different meanings are attached to the word "confess", for which we need various expressions, as for instance: to confess (sins), to acknowledge, to give thanks. Thus to give thanks is in Hebrew expressed by the word "confess," and very appropriately so. For to give thanks is nothing but to kindness of the benefactor and that the gift is not deserved confess that we have received benefits, to acknowledge the He who will acknowledge and confess this will also sincerely give thanks. To "confess" means also to admit something. Thus Christ says in Matthew 10, 32-33: *"Every one 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."*

109. Now, as it has been said above in explaining the blessing of Simeon that it is a great and extraordinary virtue to bless Christ whom all the world rejects, so it is also a remarkable deed to give thanks to God for Christ. It is done by those who know him, but there are only a few of them. The others blaspheme God, condemn, persecute and oppose Christ and his doctrine. They treat him and God his Father as they treat his doctrine, according to his words in Luke 10, 16: "He that rejecteth you rejecteth me; and he that rejecteth me rejecteth him that sent me." It is a terrible thing that the world is full of blasphemers and persecutors, and that we must live among them. St. Paul predicts in 2 Tim. 3, 1-2, that in the last days there will be many railers. This prophecy is now being fulfilled by the pope and the great schools, the convents and monasteries that do nothing else but reject, persecute and condemn the Gospel of Christ.

110. May you therefore consider it a manifestation of the grace of God in you when you learn to know Christ and give thanks to God for him, when you do not regard him an accursed heretic and seducer and do not blaspheme, despise and forsake God and his teaching, as is done by the great multitude. For Christ does not first of all want his person and name exalted, which is done by all his enemies, but he requires that his doctrine be honored, which is the greatest art. He himself says in Luke 6, 46: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" and Mark 8, 38: "For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him." You perceive here that he cares most for his doctrine. The pope and the Papists also call him Lord, indeed, in his name, to his honor and in his service they reject his doctrine, slay his Anna and persecute her throughout the world. It is dreadful and unbearable to see how great multitudes of people blaspheme God and his Christ, and in their fanaticism go down to hell.

111. He is a sign which is spoken against, and more stumble and fall against him at the present time than ever before. Deo gratias (Thanks be to God!) is a common saying, but there is scarcely one among a thousand who says it in truth. At the time of Elijah, which was still a gracious time, there were left only seven thousand among the Jewish people, who without doubt numbered more than a million; but how many may be left in these last times which Daniel calls the times of the indignation (Dan. 11, 36!)? We might indeed ask God with the words of Psalm 89, 4: "Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swearest unto David in thy faithfulness?"

112. Anna did not only give thanks unto God but she also spoke of him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Luke has a special reason for adding that Anna spoke of Christ only to those who were looking for the redemption. There were certainly not many of them, and none at all among the highly educated priests. What could these great, holy and cultured people learn of such an old foolish woman! They considered themselves the real leaders of the people. Thus the words of Anna were undoubtedly despised by these great gentlemen. For the Word of God concerning Christ must necessarily be contemptible, foolish, heretical, sacrilegious and presumptuous to the ears of these great, learned and spiritual men. Therefore it is only received by the hungry, longing souls that look for the redemption, as Luke says here, who feel their sin and desire grace, light and consolation, who know nothing of any wisdom and righteousness of their own.

113. Now faith and the knowledge of Christ cannot be silent. They break forth and testify, so that others may be helped and receive the light, as we read in Psalm 116, 10: "I believe, for I will speak." Faith is too kind and bountiful to keep all such treasures to itself. But when it speaks it is persecuted by all the unbelieving saints; yet it does not care and goes right ahead. And who knows how Anna was treated! But perhaps they spared her on account of her age and sex, and simply despised her as a silly fool. Otherwise her life would hardly have been preserved, because she proclaimed such error and heresy, declaring of Christ such marvelous things, in opposition to all the doctrines and systems of the learned priests and teachers of the law, who are filled with wisdom and righteousness to such a degree that they do not need any redemption, but deserve only a crown and reward for their good works and great merits. For if we speak of the redemption of Christ we declare that they are bound in sin and blindness. This however is too much for these great saints, to be called blind sinners! Therefore they cannot endure hearing anything of Christ and his redemption, and consequently they condemn it as a dangerous error and a diabolical heresy.

114. We now easily understand how it was that the spiritual Anna gives thanks to God and speaks of Christ to all that are looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. For the dear saints of the Old Testament knew Christ well. Therefore by their whole life they praise God and give thanks to him, exemplifying the Bible and proclaiming only this redemption, how Christ came solely for those who need him and hunger after him. This is proved by all the narratives of the Old Testament. For God never assisted those who consider themselves strong and not forsaken. On the other hand, he never forsook those who were needy and desired his help. This might here be corroborated by all the stories of the Bible, but it is sufficiently clear and manifest to all who will read them.

115. The Evangelist in writing of these things mentions especially Jerusalem, for the reason that Jerusalem means a vision of peace and signifies the hearts that are peaceable, not quarrelsome. St. Paul writes in Romans 2, 8 that the people who are factious will not obey the truth. Divine truth demands tranquil hearts that listen attentively and are desirous to learn. But those who bawl and bluster, who are pig-beaded and demand signs and reasons before accepting the truth, will never find it. They are in the turmoil of Babylon and do not know the peace of Jerusalem. Therefore they neither look for the redemption, nor listen to the words of Anna. But we may also read "Israel" instead of "Jerusalem;" it does not matter much which one of these two words is here used.

III. THE RETURN OF THE PARENTS OF JESUS TO NAZARETH, AND THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS.

"And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth."

116. The Gospel for the day of Candlemas will explain what the things are which they accomplished according to the law of the Lord. The significance of Galilee and Nazareth will be explained in the Gospel for the festival of the Annunciation. But we must refer here to the words of St. Matthew (2, 13 ff.), who writes that after the wise men had departed, who found Christ in Bethlehem and offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and bade him flee into Egypt with the child and his mother, and that Joseph did so. How does this agree with the narrative of Luke, according to whom they returned to Nazareth after six weeks had passed, and they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord? We must here either assume that they went into Egypt immediately after the expiration of the six weeks of purification, and then returned to Nazareth from Egypt in due time, or

we must believe, which is also my opinion, that they returned home, immediately after the six weeks had elapsed, as Luke relates here. Then the appearance of the angel who commanded them to flee into Egypt, whereof Matthew speaks, occurred not in Bethlehem, but at Nazareth; and indeed it took place after the departure of the wise men, as Matthew says, but not directly afterward. But Matthew writes thus because immediately after the departure of the wise men he records the flight into Egypt, and omits what Luke relates here of the presentation in the temple. Thus it is clear that the two Evangelists do not disagree.

117. It is also pointed out here how they were obliged to take up their cross. After the poor mother had been away from home for seven or eight weeks on account of the sudden birth of her child, and after having now returned and settled down to rest from their travels, they must again leave everything behind and without delay start on a much longer journey. Thus the Lord Christ begins his journeys in his earliest childhood, always wandering on this earth and having no definite place or abode where he might stay. How differently from other children is this royal child reared and treated, how did he, especially in this case, taste the sorrows and troubles of life! The poor mother must flee with the poor child into Egypt from the wrath of Herod. We shall speak more of this when this Gospel is explained. "And the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him".

118. Some inquisitive people who were not satisfied with the information given in the Scriptures have desired to know what Christ did in his childhood, and have received their reward for their curiosity. Some fool or knave has fabricated a legendary book on the childhood of Christ, and has not been afraid nor slow to write down his lies and frauds, relating how Christ went to school and a great deal more of absurd and blasphemous tomfoolery. Thus he jests with his lies at the expense of the Lord, whom all the angels adore and fear, and before whom all creatures tremble, so that this rascal would have deserved that a great millstone had been hanged about his neck and he had been sunk in the depth of the sea, because he did not esteem the Lord of all more than to make him an object of his absurd buffoonery. Yet people may still be found who print this book, read and believe it, which, in fact, was the object of this miscreant. Therefore I say that such books ought to be burned by the pope, the bishops and the universities, if they would follow Christ. But they produce books that are a great deal worse, are blind leaders and remain such.

119. Christ never went to school, for no schools like ours existed at that time. He did not even have an elementary education, as we read in the Gospel of St. John, 7, 15: the Jews were marveling, saying: "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" We also read in Mark 6, 2-3 that they were astonished at his wisdom and said: "What is the

wisdom that is given unto this man, and what mean such mighty works wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" They thought it strange that a layman and the son of a carpenter should have such great knowledge, having never studied. Therefore they were offended in him, as the Evangelist relates, and thought that he must be possessed of an evil spirit.

120. Let us therefore be satisfied with the narrative of the Gospel, which tells us enough of his childhood. Luke writes that "the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom" etc. Later on he writes that he was subject to his parents. What else should he have related? The time was not yet come when he performed miracles. He was brought up like other children, with the exception, that as some children excel others in ability, Christ also was an extraordinarily clever child. Thus no more could be written concerning him than is recorded by Luke. If he had related how he ate, drank, and what he did every day, how he walked, stood, slept and watched, what kind of a narrative would it have been?

121. It is not necessary to believe, neither do I think it is true, that his coat which was woven from the top throughout, grew with him in size from his youth. Probably his mother made it, and in that country it was the common garment of the poor. We should have a pure faith that accepts nothing which is not found in the Scriptures. Enough is contained in the Scriptures that we may believe, especially since Christ did not begin to perform his miracles and mighty deeds until after his baptism, as it is written in John 2, 11 and Acts 10, 37.

122. Some hairsplitters are perplexed by the words of Luke according to which Christ, although he was God, waxed strong, filled with wisdom. That he grew, they admit, which is indeed surprising, as they are very swift in inventing miracles where there are none and despise those in which they should believe. The reason for their perplexity and their anxious questions is this, that they have invented an article of faith according to which Christ from the first moment of conception was filled with wisdom and the spirit to the highest possible degree, just as if the soul were a wineskin which may be completely filled. They themselves do not understand what they say, nor whereof they confidently affirm, as St. Paul writes in 1 Tim. 1, 7.

123. Even if I could not understand what Luke means when he says that Christ waxed strong, filled with wisdom, I should yet believe his word because it is the Word of God, and should honor it as the truth, although I might never find out how it could be true; and I should abandon my imaginary article of faith as human foolishness, which is far too worthless to be a standard of divine truth. We all must acknowledge that Christ was not always cheerful, notwithstanding the fact that he who is filled with the Spirit is also full

of joy, since joy is the fruit of the Spirit, according to Gal. 5, 22. Neither was Christ always gentle and calm, but sometimes he was indignant and vexed, as for instance when he cast the Jews out of the temple, John 2, 15-17, and when he was angry and grieved at the hardening of their hearts, Mark 3, 5.

124. Therefore we must understand the words of Luke simply as applying to the human nature of Christ, which was an instrument and temple of the Godhead. And although he was always filled with the Spirit and with grace, yet the Spirit did not always move him, but prompted him now to do this, now something else, just as necessity required. Although the Spirit was in him from the first moment of the conception, yet as his body grew and his reason naturally developed as in other men, so also was he filled and moved by the Spirit more and more. It is no delusion when Luke says that he waxed strong and advanced in wisdom, but the words tell us plainly in age and in stature, and as he grew in stature his reason developed, and with the development of his reason he became stronger in the Spirit and filled with wisdom before God, in himself and before men, which needs no further explanation. This is a Christian explanation which can be accepted without any danger, and it does not matter whether it overthrows any imaginary articles of faith.

125. St. Paul agrees with this when he says in Phil. 2, 7 that Christ, who existed in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man. St. Paul does not speak here of the likeness of Christ's human nature to our own, but he says: Christ, the man, after he had taken upon himself human nature, was made in the likeness of men, and found in fashion as a man. Now as all men grow naturally in body, reason, mind and wisdom, which is a universal experience, Luke agrees with Paul when he says that Christ grew in the same manner, yet being an extraordinary child that developed more rapidly than others. For his bodily constitution was nobler, and the gifts and graces of God were bestowed upon him more abundantly than upon others. Thus the sense of Luke's words is easily understood, perspicuous and simple, if only these wise-acres would leave out their subtleties. So much on this Gospel.



[Content Page](#)

[To The First Page](#)