



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## Preaching the Word (Homiletics)

### Lesson #15

#### **D. Preparing to Preach the Word**

Step 1: Begin with Prayer

► **Step 2: Choose a Text**

Step 3: Study the Text and Context

Step 4: Look for Law and Gospel

Step 5: Find the Main Point

Step 6: Determine the Order of Presentation

Step 7: Apply the Word to Your Audience

Step 8: Choose the Right Words

Step 9: Prepare an Introduction and a Conclusion

#### **2.2 Pericope Systems (Lectionaries)**

In an effort to provide Christian congregations with a well-balanced diet of spiritual food from the Scriptures, various individuals and committees have devised lists of texts from the Scriptures for every Sunday of the church year and also for special church festivals. Each text is called a pericope – pronounced parickapee – which is a text suitable for a sermon. Such lists help the pastors locate suitable texts for the various Sundays and festivals of the year.

Two pericope systems, or lectionaries, can be traced back to the early Christians. Pastors from various denominations, including Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, and Lutheran, have followed these lists. Martin Luther and many Lutherans of the past preached regularly on these old pericopes. One of these old lists is made up of selections from the four Gospels for every Sunday of the year. The other old list contains selections from the epistles of the New Testament.

The first four Sundays of the church year are the four Sundays in Advent. These are the texts in the two old pericope systems:

First Sunday in Advent	Gospel text: Matthew 21:1-9;	Epistle text: Romans 13:11-14
Second Sunday in Advent	Gospel text: Luke 21:25-36;	Epistle text: Romans 15:4-13
Third Sunday in Advent	Gospel text: Matthew 11:2-10;	Epistle text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Fourth Sunday in Advent	Gospel text: John 1:19-28;	Epistle text: Philippians 4:4-7

No doubt these texts were chosen with the idea of Advent in mind. They focus on Jesus' coming – His coming as a fulfillment of prophecy, His coming as Savior of the world, His coming to us today through His Word, His coming on the last day. These same general ideas occur also in many other lectionaries that have been developed over the years.

Another system is named for the city of Eisenach in Germany. This system has three lists of texts: a Gospel text, an Epistle text, and an Old Testament text. These are the texts for the first four Sundays in Advent:

Advent 1 – Luke 1:68-79;	Hebrews 10:19-25;	Jeremiah 31: 31-34
Advent 2 – Luke 17:20-30;	2 Peter 1:3-11;	Malachi 4
Advent 3 – Matthew 3:1-11;	2 Timothy 4:5-8;	Isaiah 40: 1-8
Advent 4 – John 1:15-18;	1 John 1:1-4;	Deuteronomy 18: 15-19

By using these lists, you would have texts for five years of sermons without repeating a single text.

The Lutheran Synodical Conference, which made up of several American synods from 1872 to 1963, asked one of its pastors to devise other pericope systems (lectionaries) for the member churches to use. These are the choices for the four Sundays in Advent:

Advent 1 – Matt. 11:25-30; Luke 17:20-25;	Romans 1:16-20;	Psalm 24
Advent 2 – Luke 17:26-37; Luke 1:67-80;	2 Timothy 3:10-17;	Deuteronomy 18:15-22
Advent 3 – Matt. 3:1-12; Luke 3:3-14;	1 Corinthians 9:16-23;	Isaiah 61
Advent 4 – Mark 6:17-29; John 1:29-34;	1 Timothy 2:1-6;	Haggai 2:6-9

In more recent times, a committee made up of persons from various backgrounds has devised a three-year series of texts for the church year. Each series has four texts: Old Testament lesson, Epistle lesson, Gospel lesson, and a Psalm for the day. These are the selections for Advent in Year A:

Advent 1 – Isaiah 2:1-5;	Romans 13: 11-14;	Matthew 24: 37-44;	Psalm 18
Advent 2 – Isaiah 11:1-10;	Romans 15: 4-13;	Matthew 3: 1-12;	Psalm 130
Advent 3 – Isaiah 35:1-10;	James 5: 7-11;	Matthew 11: 2-11;	Psalm 146
Advent 4 – Isaiah 7:10-14;	Romans 1: 1-7;	Matthew 1: 18-25;	Psalm 24

These are the Advent texts for Year B:

Advent 1 – Is. 63:16b-17, 64:1-8;	1 Corinthians 1:3-9;	Mark 13:32-37;	Psalm 24
Advent 2 – Isaiah 40:1-11;	2 Peter 3: 8-14;	Mark 1: 1-8;	Psalm 85
Advent 3 – Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11;	1 Thess. 5:16-24;	John 1:6-8, 19-28;	Psalm 71
Advent 4 – 2 Samuel 7:8-16;	Romans 16: 25-27;	Luke 1:26-38;	Psalm 89

These are the Advent texts for Year C:

Advent 1 – Jeremiah 33:14-16;	1 Thess. 3:9-13;	Luke 21:25-36;	Psalm 25
Advent 2 – Malachi 3:1-4;	Philippians 1:3-11;	Luke 3:1-6;	Psalm 24
Advent 3 – Zephaniah 3:14-17;	Philippians 4:4-7;	Luke 3:7-18;	Psalm 130
Advent 4 – Micah 5:2-5a;	Hebrews 10:5-10;	Luke 1:39-55;	Psalm 85

This same committee also devised four texts for each Sunday in what is called a one-year series:

Advent 1 – Jeremiah 33: 14-18;	Romans 13:11-14;	Matthew 21:1-9;	Psalm 24
Advent 2 – Malachi 4:1-6;	Romans 15:4-13;	Luke 21:25-36;	Psalm 85
Advent 3 – Isaiah 35:1-6;	1 Corinthians 1:26-31;	Matthew 11: 2-10;	Psalm 111
Advent 4 – Isaiah 12:1-6;	Philippians 4:4-7;	Luke 1: 46-55;	Psalm 92

God, of course, has not commanded that we use of any of these pericope systems, nor has He taught us to follow any pericope system at all. But many preachers find that the use of such a system saves them the time of searching for a text from Sunday to Sunday. These systems also ensure that you will present many of the themes of the Bible over the course of the year. Remember that Paul's aim in his three years in Ephesus was to preach **“repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Acts 20:21), **“to testify to the gospel of the grace of God”** (Acts 20:24), and **“to declare to (them) the whole counsel of God”** (Acts 20:27). Using a pericope system of texts will help you today to accomplish the same goal.

Some hymn books print some or all of the above pericope systems in their entirety. After many years of experience in preaching God's Word, you may want to devise your own pericope system.

Another way to preach God's Word is to choose one Bible book, or a section of a Bible book, and to preach a series of sermons on that Bible section. This is something you may wish to do especially during the many Sundays of the Trinity season. For example, you could choose to take your texts from the first chapter of the Gospel of John. You could divide the chapter into seven or eight sections, and preach on the first section on the first Sunday, the second section on the second Sunday, etc., until you have

presented the entire chapter.

Many Lutherans have chosen to preach God's Word following the order of Luther's *Small Catechism*. On the first Sunday one would preach a sermon on the First Commandment, the next Sunday on the second commandment, etc., until one has taught the whole catechism. There are many other possibilities for a series of sermons on a particular topic or section of Scripture. Of course, a preacher of God's Word may choose freely which Scripture text he wants to use as the basis for his preaching. In making his choices, however, the preacher will keep in mind his own abilities and the condition and needs of his listeners.

### Questions

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1. What is a pericope?
2. What is a pericope system or lectionary?
3. What is the advantage of using a pericope system for finding texts?
4. What is the general theme of all the texts chosen for Advent?
5. What disadvantages may there be in using a pericope system?
6. Where could you find a complete pericope system?
7. What other ways could you use to choose sermon texts?