



THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER
EPIPHANY
Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

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Collect of the Day:

Almighty God, You know we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright. Grant strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Introit:

Psalm 107:1, 8, 24-25 (antiphon: Ps. 107:28-29)
— *Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!*

Psalm:

96 (antiphon: v. 2) — *God is to be praised for His greatness by His Church and all creation*

Old Testament Reading:

Jonah 1:1-17 — *Jonah flees from the Lord and in the midst of a great storm is thrown into the sea and swallowed by a great fish*

Gradual:

Psalm 102:15-16 — *The Gentiles, too, will fear the Lord and be brought into His Church!*

Epistle:

Romans 8:18-23 — *Together with us, creation awaits our final redemption*

Verse:

Psalm 97:1—*Alleluia. The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! Alleluia.*

Matthew 8:23-27 ESV

Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused St. Matthew Levi the Apostle and Evangelist to write this gospel around AD 50. After much preaching and healing of many, in fulfillment of prophecy (8:17), Jesus reveals Himself as the God over nature.

²³ **And when [Jesus] got into the boat, his disciples followed him.**

- The boat was prepared according to God's command. What is interesting is that although the boat looked like and actually was carrying Jesus, the God-man, it was really Jesus carrying the boat because He is the true God who is in control over all things. One aspect of this account is to show that Jesus is the true God, the Lord over creation. The Epiphany theme comes through so clearly—the Baby born at Christmas is indeed the true God, the King of Creation.

²⁴ **And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep.**

- Here is a tie in with today's collect: "We are set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our fallen nature we cannot at any time stand upright. Grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations."
- Where did the storm come from? Some would say the devil to try to destroy Jesus and the New Testament Church of the Twelve. Others, pointing to Psalm 107:25 ("For [the LORD] commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea."), would say that the Lord sent the sudden storm to show forth Jesus' glory and

divinity. In either case all of nature is in an uproar seemingly collaborating to destroy the boat and its passengers. Perhaps what we have is both: the devil trying to destroy the boat and its passengers, and God allowing it in order to show the glory of Jesus. He allowed it for His good and gracious purposes.

- By this seismic action of the sea, the faith of the disciples was revealed and brought to light. It's easy to talk and think big, but faith is shone and shines in times of trial.
- It was a strenuous day for Jesus (8:1-22). He was exhausted from traveling and preaching and as true man, Jesus needed His rest.
- As true God, Jesus was still ruling all things, the universe, even though His divine majesty was concealed under His sleeping humanity.
- But here was an example of Jesus' perfect trust in His heavenly Father's protection (Matthew 27:43). This is a picture of that perfect rest of faith that we have in Him (Matthew 11:28).
- Luther points out: "When Christ is in the ship, it will not remain calm and the storms will rage." (cited in Georg Stoeckhard, *Die biblische Geschichte des Neuen Testaments*, 71) But our comfort is that Jesus is with us, even though He may seemingly be sleeping.

25 And they went and woke him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing."

- Here we see the picture of each of us Christians—faith is often mixed with unbelief. Their unbelief is seen in their panic, when they only saw the storm and not Jesus; but their faith is beautifully seen in that in danger, Jesus is their only thought. They recognize that He alone can help.
- Neither the disciples nor we have God's promise to keep us from trial that leads to death. However, we have the promise that God will not leave us in the hour of death. That means that whatever may come upon us, we have no reason to fear because God will only send/ allow what serves our spiritual and eternal good (Romans 8:28).

26 And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

- Jesus doesn't reject them, but He admonishes them and the weakness of that faith. They had faith, but it was weak and Jesus would use this occasion—and every trial we face—to strengthen and deepen that faith. Even though a weak, stumbling faith is still faith and receives all of God's gifts and blessings in Jesus, how much better when that faith is strengthened and purified!
- Jesus is happy to dispel every fear. He hears every prayer prayed in faith—even in a weak faith.
- Jesus, the God-man, shows who He is. By virtue of the divine power and majesty shared with His human nature, a human voice controlled nature.
- That calm was instantaneous and complete. Jesus uses His divine omnipotence for our good and salvation.
- With nature obeying the voice of Jesus, we have a foreshadowing of the new creation we will enjoy.

27 And the men marveled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"

- Mark 4:36 points to other boats with Jesus' boat.
- Here is not an asking in ignorance but one of wonder and faith.
- God allows storms/trials to come upon us but He also rescues us in them so we can all the clearly see His protection. Jesus' kingdom—His Church—is strengthened and grows by sorrow and trial as by these the Lord gets us to turn our attention away from us and toward Him. He uses them to perfect our faith and scold our weakness.
- May we ponder the mighty workings of our Lord for us!

