



Martin Luther the Preacher: † 1546

“FOR LUTHER, PREACHING WAS NOT A PREACHER’S IDEAS STIMULATED BY THE prod of a text. It was not human reflections about God and life. It was not searching around in one’s personal religious insights for some kind of contemporary message that one thinks people need. Christian preaching—when it is faithful to the word of God in the Scriptures about our need and God’s response to it—is God speaking. When it focuses on what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ, it is God speaking. When it invites faith and presents Christ so that faith becomes possible, it is God speaking. It is God’s very own audible address to all who hear it, just as surely as if Christ himself had spoken it.”

This introduction, by my own teacher of Luther, Fred W. Meuser (*Luther the Preacher* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983] 12), explains why Luther’s sermons are still read—not only for their historical value but, more important, because they still preach. It seems fitting, therefore, for *Word & World* to observe 1996, the 450th anniversary of the death of Martin Luther (1483-1546), by publishing in each of the four issues of Volume XVI one of the reformer’s sermons hitherto unavailable in English (at least, as far as we have been able to determine). Each sermon will relate to the theme of the particular issue and/or to the time of the church year. Now, in this season of Epiphany, the first sermon in the series, beginning on the following page, contains both classical themes and delightfully new formulations of Luther’s views on baptism.

Meuser concludes his volume with these words: “Luther was able to proclaim the wonderful news of God’s amazing grace with childlike simplicity. Nothing greater can be said about this preacher or of the gospel he preached. In earthen vessels taken from German soil the living water of the gospel was poured out on a thirsty Christendom 500 years ago. To this day it has not lost its refreshing power” (86).

Word & World agrees and trusts that our readers will find refreshment in these four “new” sermons, even 450 years after the death of their preacher.

F.J.G.