

The Triumph of the Mystical Meaning

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Part 1

Introduction

My intention today is to meditate on how the mystical meaning of Scripture, or the ‘spiritual meaning’ as it is often called, has come to be widely accepted in confessional Lutheran churches and among confessional Lutheran pastors, and this despite any clear teaching in our seminaries or synodical schools in the discipline of hermeneutics. Though our churches still lack a uniform language concerning biblical interpretation, due to the absence of a unifying textbook, nevertheless we may observe a general rise in the acceptance and use of mystical interpretation, and openness to the presence or concealment of a mystical meaning in Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament. The causes of this phenomenon are to be found especially in the introduction of Old Testament readings to the liturgical calendar, which suggest to the preacher a mystical meaning when paired with the Gospel lesson. In addition, the rediscovery of the Psalms as regularly-used liturgical texts has guided preachers to see Christological (and thereby also ecclesiological) significance in places that were formerly neglected.

The Existence of the Mystical Meaning

The discipline of hermeneutics within our schools has rightly focused largely on the literal meaning of Scripture. Greek and Hebrew languages are required of our seminarians (with exceptions), so that they as pastors will be capable of reading the biblical texts in the original languages. This way, they should be adept to overcome questions concerning the literal meaning, and unravel any knots of uncertainty that arise from ambiguities or inconsistencies between different translations. Beyond the heavy emphasis laid upon the central necessity of understanding the ancient use of words and grammar, the general principles of interpretation are generally set in stone, for the average parish pastor. Founded on the acceptance of Scripture as divinely inspired and the sole authoritative norm of all of Christian teaching and practice, the derivative foundational principles for interpretation may be summarized as (1) Scripture interprets Scripture; and (2) Scripture, relative to human reason, is the master and reason is the servant. These are first steps, but by no means represent a full biblical hermeneutic.

The principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, however, is precisely what has directed Christians, throughout the centuries, to observe that, apart from the literal meaning, God also intended for us to understand a mystical meaning. That is to say, the Scriptures themselves in the New Testament frequently interpret the words, actions, people and events of the Old Testament as containing a secondary (spiritual) meaning; and likewise the Scriptures of the New Testament also at times indicate a secondary (spiritual) meaning to the words and actions of the New Testament, which we ought to understand as intended by God.

For example, the well-known passage from Galatians 4, interprets Genesis 21 as follows:

“²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, ²⁴which things are symbolic (ἀλληγορούμενα). For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— ²⁵for this

Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—²⁶ but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

This is the go-to passage for demonstrating that Scripture itself approves of an allegorical interpretation. It is not used (among us) to show us that we, like Saint Paul, ought to consider ourselves free at any time to allegorize or use the Old Testament to say something other than what it says. Rather, when we consider the apostle to be the agent or instrument of the Holy Spirit, we understand what has taken place in this way: that the Holy Spirit himself, when He initially inspired this passage of Genesis, already knew that in time, through Saint Paul, He would interpret the same passage allegorically. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, who knows all things, intended both the literal meaning and the mystical meaning already at the time of the original inspiration and writing. This same principle may be applied to all passages that the Holy Spirit in Scripture interprets for us, that both the literal meaning and the mystical meaning are intended by the Holy Spirit.

Thus the Holy Spirit, when inspiring the words of Deuteronomy 25:4, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain”, already at the time Moses wrote these words, also intended them to be interpreted mystically, as He would inspire Saint Paul to write in 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:18, that this law concerns support for the pastors of Christ’s flock.

Again, when God caused the great fish to swallow Jonah and keep him in his belly for three days and three nights, and the Holy Spirit caused the book of the prophet Jonah to be written for us to believe, He also knew and intended that the literal event would be interpreted mystically by our Lord, as Jesus explained it in Matthew 12:39-41 (and elsewhere), saying, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

In each case, the intended meaning of the Old Testament passage is not said to be the mystical alone, to the exclusion of the literal meaning. The literal meaning is intended by God to be understood first, and the mystical meaning comes secondarily, remaining hidden until it is revealed. At the proper time, however, the mystical meaning, which God intended from the beginning, comes to be illumined by the light of the Spirit of God, on the basis of the that literal meaning.

The Definition of the Literal and the Mystical Meaning

If all that I have said so far seems unobjectionable, then we have already made significant progress towards a clarification of terms. The literal meaning is that which God intends to be understood by the words themselves. In other words, the literal meaning is what the words themselves immediately signify. The mystical meaning, by contrast, is what God intends for us to understand not by the words themselves, but by what the words signify.

Thus the literal meaning of Genesis 21 is what the words themselves signify: the historical account of Sarah and Hagar, their respective children, and the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael. The mystical meaning, by contrast, is what God intends for us to understand by that historical account, namely, the distinction between the children of bondage to the Law and the children of the heavenly Jerusalem. Likewise the literal meaning of Deuteronomy 25 concerns what the words immediately signify: an ox that is treading out the grain; and the mystical meaning concerns the support of pastors in the Church. The literal meaning of Jonah concerns what the words immediately signify: the historical account of his being swallowed by a fish; and the mystical meaning concerns Christ’s death and resurrection. The literal meaning is understood immediately, and the mystical meaning is illumined at the proper time.

Questions Arising from the Mystical Meaning

At the introduction of the concept that Scripture's own interpretation of Scripture demonstrates the existence of a mystical meaning, our minds come up with all kinds of questions, to which we must provide some answer. Does the distinction between the literal and mystical meanings mean that there is always a mystical meaning? Does the truth of a mystical meaning deny the truth of the literal meaning? Are there passages that have a mystical meaning but no literal meaning? Are there passages that have more than one literal meaning? Are there passages that have more than one mystical meaning? Is the mystical meaning to be found also in the New Testament, or only in the Old Testament? Can Christian doctrine be established on the mystical meaning?

The discipline of biblical hermeneutics, as a branch of theology, looks into questions like these, which are an inquiry into the nature of God's communication with man. The Lutheran answers to such questions may be found summarized in book 2 of Salomon Glass's *Philologia Sacra*, which you can read at your leisure. For today, it should suffice to answer briefly the questions most pertinent to *our* situation, as Evangelical Lutherans who inherited a denomination that emerged from the battle of the Bible in the 1970s. First and foremost we affirm that the literal meaning is not abolished or denied by the admission of a mystical meaning. To the contrary, the mystical meaning is dependent and founded upon the literal meaning. (Thus we reject the false proposition that there is no literal meaning in some places, or that the literal meaning is not true.) Second, we affirm the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture, because we accept the Scriptural teaching that God, in his omnipotence, is perfectly able to communicate with man. This results in the conclusion that there is only one literal meaning for any given word or passage of Scripture. The literal meaning is one, and there is only one literal meaning. (Thus we reject the false proposition that the literal meaning is at all times obscure and in need of an authentic interpreter, namely, the Papacy, without which no one is able to understand the literal meaning; and we reject the false proposition of multiple literal meanings.) Third, every doctrine of the Church that is necessary for salvation is set forth clearly in the literal meaning of Scripture; and the mystical meaning is not needed to support any doctrine. That said, the mystical meaning *may* be used in arguments concerning the Church's doctrine and practice, *when* that mystical meaning is clearly set forth in the literal meaning of Scripture. Fourth, we ought not think that there is a mystical meaning hidden in every passage of Scripture, let alone multiple mystical meanings. (Thus we reject the inclination by which some commentators allegorize every passage in all kinds of fantastical ways, which bear little if any relation to the literal meaning.)

Intended Meaning(s)

Confusion arises because the literal meaning is often equated with the intended meaning of Scripture. From our discussion so far, we may agree with this statement, to an extent. The literal meaning is always *an* intended meaning, or else, when there is no additionally intended mystical meaning, the literal meaning is the *only* intended meaning. Glass sets forth canons for the literal meaning, to the effect that we ought not even look for a mystical meaning in passages that (1) set forth a moral commandment; or (2) include a new divine institution. On the other hand, he grants the presence of a mystical meaning almost everywhere in the *ceremonial* precepts of the Law of Moses.

Thus, where Scripture itself demonstrates clearly that both a literal and a mystical meaning are intended by God, there the literal meaning cannot be called the intended meaning, because it is only one of two intended meanings. The intended meaning, therefore, cannot be equated in general with the literal meaning.

While the literal meaning may always be called ‘the’ or ‘an intended meaning’, the question arises, whether we may always call the mystical meaning intended, or whether there is some uncertainty. In other words, is the mystical meaning always an intended meaning? We may answer this by making a distinction between innate and imported mystical meanings. An innate mystical meaning is one that Scripture itself (in the literal meaning) explains and points to, as if with an outstretched finger, to inform us without doubt that the mystical meaning is indeed intended by God. An imported meaning is one that the interpreter has found, or supposed or suggested is or may be present, but for which there is no explicit explanation in Scripture. An innate mystical meaning, therefore, is correctly identified as ‘intended by God’, while an imported meaning must be judged according to its merits. If an imported meaning is strange or foreign to the text, lacks even implicit support from elsewhere in Scripture, or is not in keeping with the rule of faith (that is, with all that Scripture clearly reveals in the literal meaning), it is often easily judged to be clearly *not* intended.

Indicated Mystical Meanings

This leaves us with a third category to consider, of instances where a mystical interpretation is not *explicitly* explained in Scripture, but is *indicated*. At times Scripture *explicitly* indicates that a mystical meaning is *certainly* present but does not provide an explanation; at times Scripture *implicitly* indicates or *suggests* that a mystical meaning *may be* present. In such cases the interpreter must in humility not presume to speak for God when explaining what seems to be the correct interpretation. Nevertheless, such interpretations, when they are fitting, are not without merit, since they add beauty to the exposition of God’s Word and can help God’s people rightly to understand the teaching of Scripture.

For an example of where a mystical meaning is *implicitly* indicated, we may look to where Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother, and Jesus replies (Matthew 18:22), “I tell you, not up to seven times, but up to seventy-seven times.” The number itself, like many numbers in Scripture, suggests a spiritual interpretation that goes beyond the literal meaning. Whether we read it as 77 or 70x7, we do not interpret the figure literally as the maximum number of forgivenesses to be granted to a brother. The use of the same number, moreover, in Genesis 4:24 (ἑβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ) further suggests that Jesus, while telling Peter to forgive his brother, was also teaching spiritually, “Do not imitate Lamech, the offspring of Cain, who for the sake of his violence upon the earth caused God to be grieved that He had made man, but be the opposite of him. It is not for you to take vengeance, but to forgive; for vengeance belongs to the Lord.” (Gen. 6:8) In this case, however, we cannot know with certainty that this spiritual meaning is intended, because Matthew does not explain it.

For an example of where a mystical meaning is *explicitly* indicated (*certainly* present, but not explained), we may look to Jesus’ washing of his disciples’ feet, when Jesus explains that Peter will understand the spiritual significance of what he is doing later (John 13:7), “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.” That Jesus is signifying something quite different by his action, is clear again in verses 10-11, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.” Thus the explicit indicators of the text pronounce a spiritual meaning. Jesus gives a partial explanation, saying (vv. 12-15), “Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” This passage has never been interpreted literally by the Church, as is clear from the absence of any sacrament of foot-washing (and the existence of such a ceremony during the rite of ordination is also understood symbolically). Similarly, the reference to Judas as not being

clean surely does not mean that Judas had literally failed to bathe. Rather, the ‘uncleanness’ of Judas points to his sinfulness; he has not had his sins washed away, because he has fallen into unbelief in his decision to betray Jesus. Thus the full meaning of Jesus’ action is more than that the disciples should love one another; it is also that they should forgive one another—a teaching that receives greater emphasis in Jesus’ preaching than in our own. The full meaning of this action, however, is never fully explained in Scripture. Therefore, although we may state with a relatively high degree of certainty what the correct interpretation is, the spiritual meaning in this case is useful not in defense of the doctrine (namely, that we ought to forgive one another, which is sufficiently proven by other testimonies from the literal meaning of other passages), but we may at least say that we are more certain that this is the intended meaning.

Classifications of Mystical Meaning

It is commonly known that there are different classifications of mystical meaning, from that famous couplet, “The letter teaches deeds, what to believe does allegory, the moral what to do and where we go does anagogy.” This couplet, however, which seems to identify, apart from the literal meaning, three categories of mystical meaning, was never a universally accepted classification, even among Medieval theologians, and was never considered to be all that precise. (For more on this subject, see Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*) Both moral and anagogical interpretations, after all, can also result from (and therefore are not necessarily distinct from) allegory; besides, both moral laws and contemplation of heaven may be understood as subcategories of what ought to be believed.

We should also guard ourselves against the common misconception that medieval interpreters generally looked for three (or even more) spiritual meanings. In fact, the most prominent of the medieval biblical commentators (the Gloss, Aquinas, Nicholas of Lyra) rarely find more than one mystical meaning in a text. Rather, far more frequently, they present alternative possibilities for a mystical meaning, with the implication that one or the other *may* be intended, without pronouncing a judgment on which one is ‘correct’, for the same reason we Lutherans would not, that is, because Scripture itself does not explicitly and authoritatively approve one interpretation over another.

When distinguishing between classes of mystical meaning, the Lutherans—again represented by Salomon Glass—identified three main categories: allegory, type, and parable, for each of which specific canons were set forth, to guide the interpreter to find the mystical meaning. These are identifiable modes of prophetic speech, which God employs with some regularity through his human agents (as well as through Christ himself), by which God convey a mystical meaning, in addition to the literal.

Mystical Versus Rectilinear Modes of Prophecy

A note of caution must be added to this discussion. When we accept the mystical modes of prophetic speech, by which a spiritual meaning is concealed or revealed from beneath the literal meaning, we are not thereby denying that God also frequently speaks prophetically according to the literal meaning. Rectilinear prophecy is therefore not opposed to mystical prophecy, and vice versa; God uses them both.

The faithful interpreter of Scripture must carefully discern which is being employed in any given passage, without being misguided by reason. Scholars of a more cynical persuasion are prone to fall into one of two ditches. Either they see everything as a type or an allegory, so that the need to accept rectilinear prophecies is reduced to a minimum, as if no prophet in the Old Testament ever truly has a vision of Christ. Or they assume a literalist mindset that is reluctant to accept the possibility of

hidden mystical meanings, and thereby sees the New Testament ways of interpreting the Old Testament as liberties on the part of the authors, who drew out from the texts of Scripture what God never intended for them to mean.

Both pitfalls are equally disastrous, because they ultimately fail to give credence to the testimony of Scripture itself. The reality of rectilinear prophecy is affirmed, for example, by Paul's interpretation of Genesis (in a few places, 12:7, 13:15, 24:7) in Galatians 3:16, where he writes, "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ." By such words, Paul insists that the literal meaning of those passages where the 'Seed' of Abraham is mentioned points directly to Christ, and this, he explains is the reason why the number of the seed is singular not plural. If anyone, therefore, were to claim that Moses (or, allegedly, some later 'redactor' of Genesis) intended something different, namely, that we should understand God's promise to Abraham as being fulfilled by the occupation of the promised land by the tribes of Israel, he would be speaking directly against the divinely inspired writing of the book of Galatians.

Similarly, we may consider the prophecy of Hosea 11:1, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." In context, this passage is speaking about the people of Israel, who in their "childhood", that is, in the early days, as they were still growing as a people, were delivered from slavery and "called out" of Egypt by the Lord's deliverance in Moses. Matthew (2:15), however, interprets this passage as speaking prophetically concerning Christ: "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." The Word of the Lord that was spoken through Hosea therefore bears two meanings—one literal meaning, concerning how God called his son Israel, while he was still a child, out of Egypt in the time of Moses; and one mystical meaning, which remained hidden until the time of its fulfillment in Christ. Therefore, if anyone were to claim that the evangelist allegorized the words of Hosea to make Jesus' return from Egypt more meaningful, and was importing a meaning to the words of Hosea that God did not intend, he would be denying the clear claim of Matthew that this event was the fulfillment of the prophetic word of the Lord.

At other times, it seems necessary for the interpreter to use his best discernment to make a judgment, because Scripture does not always clearly indicate whether every Christological prophecy is rectilinear or mystical, even when the New Testament explains its fulfillment. For example, the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" has been debated (often sharply) for generations. Is it rectilinear or mystical? That is, does this prophecy point to Christ in a rectilinear manner according to its literal meaning, or does it point to a more immediate fulfillment according to its literal meaning, and to Christ according to a mystical meaning? There are sound arguments to both sides of the debate, but my point here is not to make a determination on this question. My point, rather, is that in such cases, there exist temptations for the interpreter (1) to assert his own judgment as being correct with more boldness than is due; and (2) unfairly to accuse his 'opponents' who interpret the text differently of denying the truth of Scripture. "What is at stake?" is the relevant question. Those who assert that it is a rectilinear prophecy with no fulfillment apart from Christ must somehow explain the verses that follow, which seem to indicate a temporally more immediate fulfillment—a difficult task, perhaps, but not impossible. Likewise, those who understand the prophecy as literally fulfilled close to the time of the prophecy, but mystically fulfilled by Christ must be ready to affirm that the mystical meaning was not invented by Matthew, but was intended by God, since the divinely inspired evangelist explicitly identifies the Virgin mother of our Lord, Mary, as the fulfillment of that prophecy (Matthew 1:22-23).

As frustrating as it may be to admit that more than one interpretation is possible, and not to have a definitive answer, nevertheless it is fitting for any interpreter to approach Scripture with humility. The fact is that scholars are overly zealous in their use of the *disqualifying* adverbs ‘certainly’ and ‘indubitably’. One must know and discern when to assert and when not to assert. Again, this interpretive humility characterizes the commentaries of the Medieval church through many centuries, and I would suggest is worthy of imitation.

Mystical Meaning: A Constant in the Lutheran Liturgy

Before getting into the final triumph of the mystical meaning in Missouri, I first want to look at some ways in which the mystical meaning never really disappeared. That is to say, we may note ways in which our liturgical, ceremonial and catechetical practices, continued at least implicitly to affirm the existence and use of the mystical meaning, even at times when many pastors might have been reluctant to admit it.

Prophetic Typology in Traditions and Rubrics

In catechism classes, those of you who still use the 1943 edition of *A short explanation of Luther's Small Catechism* may have noticed that the accompanying Bible passages, the “proof texts”, and Bible stories stick to the literal meaning. There is, for example, no mention of Melchizedek for a suggested Bible narrative in the section for the Sacrament of the Altar. In the section on the Sacrament of Baptism, there is no mention of the significance of the washing of Naaman in the Jordan, or the healing of the blind man at Bethesda. Even the quotation from 1 Peter 3 is conveniently edited to omit the symbolism of the flood, so that it reads simply, “Baptism doth also now save us.” (Contrast this with the Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 313, which—though granted it is a significantly larger tome—lists an entire page of “Prefigurations of Baptism in the Old Covenant.”)

The confirmands, however, did continue to wear white robes, as evidenced by the ubiquitous framed pictures of the classes standing beside their tie- and Geneva gown-decked pastors, and those white robes symbolized something. Likewise, the Lutherans continued to light candles, to signify the presence of Christ among them during the Divine Service. Women wore head coverings, to signify their submission. Pastors wore vestments, though different from those worn today, to indicate their distinct office. A myriad of other local customs indicate an awareness of the propriety of that biblically approved prophetic behavior by which gestures and actions taught something about the faith. The literal actions were bearers of spiritual meaning, whether or not they were rightly explained and understood by those who performed them.

This all may seem obvious or insignificant. “Of course we should kneel before the altar to receive Christ's body and blood!” we think. “Of course we should fold our hands to pray, and of course the pastor faces the altar to pray! Of course we would never bring any other food or drink into the sanctuary! Of course a husband and wife exchange rings when they get married! Of course earth is cast upon the casket while the pastors says the words, “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust”! That's how it's done! Of course the pastor places his hand on the child's head while he prays the Lord's Prayer before a baptism!” These behaviors, however, were *not* practiced everywhere by all Christians; they became normal in our congregational life, because we taught (or it was generally understood and accepted) that they had some spiritual significance, that is, because of our theology. Granted that many such traditions were also sometimes followed for no reason other than that the rubrics of the Lutheran Hymnal required them. That may be our sad reality, and the reason why many such traditions have

been discontinued, namely, because their significance has been forgotten. Meanwhile, however, other historic traditions have been introduced in congregations that did not previously know them—the stripping of the altar, the (much-beloved) crepitus, the veiling of the crosses, Gospel processions, and so on—and the most conscientious of pastors do so with no small amount of teaching and explanation for why such changes are taking place, and what such actions signify.

The Historic Liturgy

The most significant evidence for a continuation of the universal Christian acceptance of the mystical meaning is to be found in the *verbal* content of the church services themselves. —canticles, prayers, Introits, and so on.

Canticles are obvious centers of mystical exegesis, which our churches have never ceased to use. The Magnificat, for example, because it is sung by the entire Church, seems to indicate an acceptance of the interpretation that the Virgin Mary is a type of the Church. She spoke literally about herself, “For he hath regarded the low estate of his *handmaiden* ... for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call *me* blessed. For he that is mighty hath done *to me* great things” but these words are interpreted ecclesiologically, that is, as pertaining to the entire body of Christ, his Church. The words of the Sanctus, immediately before the Communion, “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord,” which were used literally for the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, are interpreted spiritually as pertaining to the Sacrament of the Altar. Then after the distribution, the Nunc Dimittis, which Simeon prophesied literally about himself, is interpreted ecclesiologically as pertaining to the members of the Church who are now at peace after receiving the Sacrament.

We may also note occasional indications of the general acceptance of spiritual interpretations of Scripture in a few of the other propers for the divine service from the Lutheran Hymnal.

1. The collect for the Circumcision and the Name of Jesus allegorizes Jesus’ circumcision, with the petition, “grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit that our hearts may be pure from all sinful desires and lusts”, etc., following Romans 2:29.
2. The second collect for Easter Sunday and the first collect for Easter Monday identify the antitype of the Lord’s Supper by the name of the type of the Paschal Feast.
3. The first verse for the gradual for Easter Sunday and the first Sunday after Easter (Quasimodo geniti) likewise calls Christ ‘our Passover’, following 1 Cor. 5:7.
4. On Rogate (5th Sunday after Easter), the Introit includes the quotation, “The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob.” Ostensibly this is drawn from Isaiah 48:20 and literally concerns the Lord’s redemption of Israel from Babylonian captivity; but is spiritually applied to the redemption of Christ’s people from their sin.
5. The collect for the Ascension allegorizes Jesus’ ascent, saying: “so may we also in heart and mind thither ascend and with Him continually dwell”—seemingly a petition for assistance in meditating on Christ.
6. The gradual for Whitsunday (Pentecost) quotes Psalm 104:30, “Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created: and Thou renewest the face of the earth.”, which literally concerns God’s creation of living creatures, to signify mystically the sending of the Holy Spirit to vivify the spiritually dead.

I give here only a few examples, because many of the Introits or Graduals (especially the Psalm verses), which are capable of being interpreted spiritually, could also be argued to be merely the literal meaning. When dealing with poetic language, we must be careful not to identify as a spiritual meaning what is simply a figure of speech, which would classify as a literal meaning.

Perhaps the most mystical of all parts of the historic liturgy are the proper prefaces. Advent recalls John the Baptist's identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God. This is a figure of speech—not a metaphor, but metonymy, by which the antitype assumes the name of the type. Christmas speaks of the “mystery of the Word made flesh” and spiritually interprets Jesus' teaching that those who have seen the Son have seen the Father (Jn. 14:9) as drawing us “to the love of those things which are not seen.” Lent contrasts the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with the tree of the cross. Finally, Easter calls Jesus again the “Paschal Lamb”.

Conclusion

When we are actively looking for vestiges of mystical interpretation in the historic liturgical practices of our churches, it is possible (even easy) to find and notice them. That said, during the era when the literal meaning was under attack, and as a result the defenders of our faith were necessarily *vehemently* defending the truth of the literal meaning against the enemies of the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, we may observe that mystical interpretation was, in general sidelined, due to the danger it seemed to pose, of an implicit denial of the truth of the literal meaning, and subsequently an overwhelming preference came to predominate, to interpret all prophecies concerning Christ in a rectilinear manner, even when Scripture itself did not warrant such an interpretation; and, concomitantly, an inclination (whether or not it was intentional) to ignore or gloss over those Scriptural passages that indicated any divine intention of a secondary meaning beyond the literal. The rediscovery of Luther's baptismal prayer, therefore, was shocking to many people, and it seemed like something alien, even though the typology contained therein was firmly based on explicit passages of Scripture. Our church today seems to be maturing in this regard, that we are slowly recovering the ancient use of mystical interpretation, without denying the literal meaning or the many instances of literal rectilinear prophecy, and this development is what I hope to demonstrate in the next hour.