

ALL PRAISE AND GLORY TO GOD

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

All of you sing to YHWH (a) new song; all of you sing to YHWH all the earth; all of you sing to YHWH; all of you bless His Name; all of you tell from day-to-day (of) His Salvation.¹

This evening, after we called upon God using His given Name, the Holy Spirit moved us to sing praise to God. That first hymn follows the biblical pattern of confession of praise coupled with confession of sin (about which many of us heard on this past Sunday). God led us to sing, with words first recorded almost 500 years ago in a language different than ours, God moved us to sing praise for our God Who has delivered us. The words of that hymn, set to an even older melody, were drawn from the 96th Psalm, that which has been given for this late night service as the season of Advent ends and the Feast of the Nativity begins.

In this New Year of the Church, halfway through its fourth week, the Lord's Service to us has shifted this night from a theme of repentant joy to one of praise and rejoicing in the heavenly and earthly realms. That is because we remember in this new Season, which opens in a few moments, the promises which God had given to the faithful of old have begun to be completed in time. Those promises are -- God's unbroken Word is -- namely, to save us from the devil, the world and ourselves. His Salvation, declared in the angels' message to the shepherds who were watching their flocks that night over

¹¹ Psalm 96:1-2.

two millennia ago, is the New Song which our Psalm Hymn declares with these opening words:

*Sing praise to God, the highest good, The author of creation, The God of love who understood Our need for His salvation.*²

God grasped the reality of our, of your, need for saving – from the sin of Adam into which we all have been conceived and born – and from the sins we, on account of the reality that we are sinners, commit against God, His Word and our fellow creatures daily. As the true God, He saw, before sin ever was thought or acted out in us, in you, that nothing you, or we, could ever think, say or do would bridge the chasm of sin which separates us from His holiness.

So, in response to our need, God reached down to us. He became one with us, though without sin in Himself. He was born as we each have been, of woman. He came into this fallen world – the King of kings and Lord of lords – in humble, poor and meek human form. Our Psalm Hymn resounded with that message, as we sang:

*We sought the Lord in our distress; O God, in mercy hear us. Our Savior saw our helplessness And came with peace to cheer us.*³

Three times we tonight called out to the Lord on behalf of those who have no faith, and for we who so often depart from the Faith. Our cry was, “Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.”⁴ Tonight, without the service of the Preparation as part of the Festival Service – that is: Confession and Absolution – the “Kyrie” was first

² Schuetz, Johann Jacob. *Lutheran Service Book*, “Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good,” tr. Catherine Winkworth, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 819, stz 1.

³ *Ibid.* stz. 3.

⁴ *Lutheran Service Book*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 186.

for us poor sinners, and then for those sinners who have no faith. Our pleas for mercy followed upon the words of the Psalm which declared that God did not just come for us who are in the Church, but for all, that they too, with us might be found in the One True Church on earth and in heaven. The 96th Psalm declares:

*All of you declare in (the) nations, His glory; in all the peoples, His marvelous works.*⁵

And so we sang:

*All who confess Christ's holy name, Give God the praise and glory. Let all who know His pow'r proclaim Aloud the wondrous story. Cast every idol from its throne, For God is God, and He alone: ...*⁶

The message of God's praise in sending our Savior is for the whole world. It is for every person, from every tribe and race (just consider all who have come to the Faith in just this one congregation). The message of the Psalm, as was the message of the shepherds tending the flocks of sheep to be sacrificed at Herod's Temple in Jerusalem so long ago, is the message of glory to God on account of His taking on human flesh to save us humans from our sins. To truly Sing Praise to God for the Highest God, we declare His salvation for all sinners, for all time, as His free gift. Whether the message of God's gift of the Savior comes from a distressed father over a sick infant in a delivery room, or from a pastor to one in their eighties whom God has preserved from many illnesses, that Word is one of grace and salvation. It is of God's work for humans, free and unmerited. That is the new song of which we continue to sing, even as tonight's Psalm declares:

⁵ Psalm 96:3 (MT).

⁶ Schuetz, Johann Jacob. *Lutheran Service Book*, "Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good," tr. Catherine Winkworth, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 819, stz 5.

All of you sing to YHWH (a) new song; all of you sing to YHWH all the earth; all of you sing to YHWH; all of you bless His Name; all of you tell from day-to-day (of) His Salvation.⁷

All you have blessed the Name of the One True God this evening. In fact, part of this congregation, and her guests, did so at the 7 p.m. Service of Lessons and Carols. Here, we continue to sing the New Song of the Creator Who has come to restore His fallen Creation, to enliven His sinful human creatures through Divine forgiveness. That is why God has drawn you here tonight, even if you thought you have come on account of family tradition, or to hear the “Christmas Story,” or to see all the gold and lights, or to sing “Silent Night, Holy Night” to candlelight. God has brought you to this place, this most holy night, that you might sing and bless and tell of His Salvation, His Jesus, even as the 96th Psalm declares:

All of you ascribe to YHWH O families of (the) peoples, all of you ascribe to YHWH strength and glory; all of you cause to worship to YHWH in Holy Array, all of you tremble before His Face all the earth.⁸

Or, as you sang,

All who confess Christ’s holy name, Give God the praise and glory. Let all who know His pow’r proclaim Aloud the wondrous story. Cast every idol from its throne, For God is God, and He alone: ...⁹

You who have come from many nations, some new to this land, some whose ancestors came here so long ago you do not know their names, you all have been drawn into this place, this Church, God’s Holy Flock here tonight because of the wonderful

⁷⁷ Psalm 96:1-2.

⁸ Psalm 96:8-9 (MT)

⁹ Schuetz, Johann Jacob. *Lutheran Service Book*, “Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good,” tr. Catherine Winkworth, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 819, stz 5.

story of God's love for you in sending His Son to die in your sins that you might live in His forgiveness now and forever. It is of you who are present tonight, and of those who will someday join us in the One, Holy, Christian and Apostolic Church, that you have sung about tonight. These words, drawn from the 96th Psalm are given for your comfort tonight, as you remember the greatest of gifts which God has given to you – His Son, the Savior, Christ Jesus our Lord:

*He never shall forsake His flock, His chosen generation; He is their refuge and their rock, Their peace and their salvation*¹⁰.

May that message of your song, the Church's song, the song for the world's salvation bring you to a very merry Christmas!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Eve of the Nativity Midnight Mass Sermon Notes (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 96; Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14

December 24, 2013

Pastor Michael H. Merhouse

Solī Deo Gloria

¹⁰ Schuetz, Johann Jacob. *Lutheran Service Book*, "Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good," tr. Catherine Winkworth, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 819, stz 4.