

GOD'S APPEARING IN OUR FLESH

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church:

All of you lift up, O gates, your heads, and lift up, O doors of eternity, and He will come in, (the) King of the glory.¹

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

This evening marks the beginning of another remembrance of God's appearing in our flesh as King of kings, and Lord of Lords. It is heralded with the 24th Psalm, not read or chanted today, but sung, as the "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates" was our chosen Psalm. This evening, by Jewish reckoning of time as each day's beginning is at evening (see Genesis 1), begins the third season of this Year of our Lord 2020 or so. The words we sang this evening are ones with which you are familiar, for the 24th Psalm also begins each New Year of our Lord, as the first of the Propers of the Day for Advent 1.

To assist in setting the season's tone, that of Jesus as God with us, the Light of the World incarnate with Jews and Gentiles alike, light illumines this season. The Advent candle is gone, but the tea lights still twinkle in the windows, the gold of the Nativity passing still glows from the Nave and Chancel, and the white of Christ adorns the pulpit and Table of the Lord. The coming of the King of glory to save His people has been again proclaimed, for the second time this year which began on December 1. The true narrative of the worship of wise men before King Jesus, the record of events long ago which have eternal significance, rings out repeatedly through today's hymns and readings. This day

¹ Psalm 24:9.

is all about the triumphal entrance of King Jesus, in a home, in the little town of Bethlehem, the place where the sacrificial sheep were raised for slaughter in the Temple on Mount Zion's heights.

God's Word to us began as the hymn writer, declares just Who our God is, as this song begins,

Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates! Behold the King of glory waits. The King of kings is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here. Life and salvation He doth bring....²

You may recall that on the first Sunday of Advent, you were taught that the word we translate "Psalm," may be rightly translated to mean that this text is given "to make melody, to make music." For centuries, into perhaps three thousand years, today's Psalm has been used as a processional hymn. What this means is that, in the words which we sung this evening, there may discovered the music that shows that YHWH is God in the Real Presence of Jesus, Who has comes, comes, and will come, to be with His people – those like us who the Word calls into the Temple of the Lord by grace through the Faith.

The opening words of the hymn, which you have heard repeated, were composed in the early 17th century. The texts that followed them today declare prophecy and fulfillment of God's Word as the Magi, bearing three gifts, bowed down before our Lord in His infancy. Their three gifts have inspired many legends, and eventually led to the composition, in the mid-19th century, of the song known as "We Three Kings," was

² Weissel, Georg. *Lutheran Service Book*, "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates," translated: Catherine Winkworth, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 341.

written by a Pastor for a Christmas Pageant at General Theological Seminary.³ History from the Scriptures and elsewhere, for the first few centuries after the birth of Christ has been silent about exactly how many wise men, and just what country or countries they may have started out from. Yet, leaders of the Church throughout the centuries, in trying to help people appreciate the biblical narratives, have created stories, myths or legends really, in hopes that such will assist people in remembering the truths of Scripture. Unfortunately, due to human natures, such teachings about Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar – names given to the Magi by the Church about six centuries after the fact – have, at times, obscured the true message of the text.

That is, namely, that in Bethlehem, men who were learned in the wisdom of the world and the reading of the stars, had determined that a great king had been born. That King you know is Jesus. It is His triumphal entrance, for people from all lands, that the Church is to remember this night, not some made up legends in vogue by the fourteenth century that the three kings came from India, Persia and Arabia. Nor is it really important for the biblical narratives for this evening that we may know that *three gold-crowned skulls are housed in the largest reliquary in the world – a sarcophagus with seven feet of gilded silver and jewels* – have been residing in the cathedral in Cologne, Germany since AD 1162!⁴

No, what is important about this Feast, and the visit of the Magi, is that we recall and believe, that in God's appearance in our flesh, His miraculous manipulation of

³ Internet. <http://musiced.about.com/od/christmasnewyeararticles/qt/wethreekings.htm>, accessed 5 January 2014.

⁴ Morehouse, Michael A. "Where are the Wise Men today?" Epiphany Feast sermon, January 6, 2011.

His creation – a star that moved, stopped for a time, moved again, and then held fast over Bethlehem – was done to show that Jesus’ coming was to draw all men to Himself. He was no local God, but the God of the Universe, of the entire creation, as the opening words (not recorded in the Psalm Hymn for tonight) declare:

To YHWH (belongs) the Earth and all its fullness, (the) world and all the ones dwelling there; for He upon (the) waters has founded it, and upon all rivers made it firm.⁵

This “I AM” God has not a limited rule and dominion. He is the Creator God. The Psalm declares that to this God belongs everything, and everyone, on earth. Just as that truth was fitting to begin the New Church Year on Advent 1, it is also proper to focus our thoughts in this new calendar year.

Now, with the arrival of the Magi, the Church again remembers that her Creator, out of His love for His fallen creatures – Man and Woman, became one with us. For, as man fell and brought death and decay to the perfect world of the six days of creation, God comes to restore, refresh, and enliven His fallen creatures. The Psalm Song of the Day, “Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates,” takes the theme of God’s restorative work and points the singers and hearers to the end of this day’s Psalm and Old Testament readings. The Psalm, the basis for your hymn ends:

*Lift up, O gates, your heads, and all of you be lifted up, O doors of eternity, and will come in King of the glory.⁶
Who (is) this King of the glory?⁷*

⁵ Psalm 24:1-2.

⁶ Psalm 24:7.

⁷ Psalm 24:8a.

YHWH, strong and mighty, YHWH (the) mighty Man in battle. All of you lift up, O gates, your heads, and lift up, O doors of eternity, and will come in King of the glory.⁸

That song is of the Hero-god. There is the God all of us, in our fallen state, desire to have come to us. We want the Christ of the Last Day, glorious, coming on the clouds, the devil and his minions to cast eternally from us into the Lake of Fire. And, it is the God of Whom we sing when we remember the Magi visiting the infant Jesus in a house in Bethlehem long ago.

That is a very different image – an infant or toddler boy worshipped by wise men bearing precious gifts – that of which we have sung, “The King of kings is drawing near.” We want that King. We desire the Lord of glory to rescue us from all our sins. We, you, want the King Jesus heralded by the crowds on Palm Sunday, He Who will, “Save Now!”

Yet, we get a dependent Child. We behold God in revealed Word and illumined Psalm as one just like us – though without sin. We herald Him as He comes, drawing us near with the Light of Life – the Star, moving, burning as you might imagine with the image of God’s true glory, shown in His death on the cross. This is God with us, God for us, God in us and God among us. This is the Epiphany we celebrate, as the words of the Psalm Hymn declare the King of kings to us who even now worship amidst the lights of this night, as we hear again of the entrance of King Jesus into His City, His Temple, founded in the hearts of believers in this place, where He rules by His Word:

⁸ Psalm 24:8b-9.

*Lift up your heads, you mighty gates! Behold the King of Glory waits.
The King of kings is drawing near, the Savior of the world is here.
He brings salvation down to earth. Greet Him with shouts of holy mirth.
Our highest praise we bring, our God Creator King.*

*The righteous King is bringing peace; He comes the pris'ners to release.
His royal crown, self-sacrifice, It's jewel, mercy without price.
He brings our sorrows to an end. Shouts out your joy to God, our friend.
Our highest praise we bring. Our God, Redeemer, King.*

*O happy town, O blessed land That keeps our gracious King's command,
And blest the heart when He comes in His holy reign there to begin.
His entrance is the dawn of bliss; He fills our lives and makes them His.
Our highest praise we bring, God Comforter, and King.⁹*

*Unbar the gate, fling wide the door, Your heart to God's design restore.
Adorn its walls with all things right, With peace and love and joy and light.
Your King will then be glad to come And live within you as His home.
Our highest praise we bring To God, our Lord and King.*

*Christ Jesus, Lord and Savior, come, I open wide my heart, your home.
Oh, enter with your radiant grace, On my life's pattern shine your face,
And let your Holy Spirit guide To gracious vistas rich and wide.
Our God, we praise your name, Forevermore the same.**

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

Epiphany (Lutheran Service Book one-year series)

Psalm 24; Jeremiah 23:5-8; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 21:1-9

January 5, 2014

Pastor Michael H. Merdison

Soli Deo Gloria

* LW, Hymn 24

To David, Psalm:

To YHWH (is) the Earth and all its fullness, (the) world and all the ones dwelling there; for He upon (the) waters has founded it, and upon all rivers made it firm.⁹

Who shall ascend the Mount of YHWH, and who shall stand in His Holy standing place?¹⁰

Clean hands and pure heart, who does not lift up to what is false, my soul, and swears not deceitfully, will receive blessing from YHWH and justice from (the) Elohe of his salvation.¹¹

This is (the) generation of those seeking Him, who are seeking your face, O Jacob. Selah.¹²

Lift up, O gates, your heads, and all of you be lifted up, O doors of eternity, and will come in King of the glory.¹³

Who (is) this King of the glory?

YHWH, strong and mighty, YHWH mighty in battle.¹⁴

All of you lift up, O gates, your heads, and lift up, O doors of eternity, and will come in King of the glory.¹⁵

Who be this King of the glory?

YHWH Sabaoth (is) the King of the glory. Selah.¹⁶

⁹ Psalm 24:1-2.

¹⁰ Psalm 24:3.

¹¹ Psalm 4:4-5.

¹² Psalm 24:6.

¹³ Psalm 24:7.

¹⁴ Psalm 24:8.

¹⁵ Psalm 24:9.

¹⁶ Psalm 24:10.