

THE ONE WHO APPEARED TO STAND IN GOD'S HOLY PLACE

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church:

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

[He Who has} clean hands and (a) pure heart, Who does not lift up His soul to what is false, and (Who) swears not deceitfully; (He), will receive blessing from YHWH and justice from (the) Elohe of His salvation. This is (the) generation of those seeking Him, who are seeking your face – Even Jacob! Selah.¹

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

It is fitting this evening that the Psalm theme of the Day was reflected fully in the Psalm Hymn, “Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates.” That is because the Psalm itself appears to have been composed as one to be sung in preparation for the reception of the Lord Who was about to come to His people.² To that end, the Psalm Hymn was used this evening to prepare hearts and minds to hear of the Advent of Christ Jesus for the nations, the Gentiles, that is non-Jewish people who seek the Lord because of their witnessing His wonders in Creation.

That the Psalm's preparing the way for the strong and mighty Lord's entrance into the city of His people may sound like something you recently heard, should be no surprise. For the Epiphany Season's opening Propers (the changeable readings of the day) begin with the same Psalm that opened this past Advent season. That Sunday, the theme of the day was set by these words, “*Who shall ascend the Mount of YHWH, and who shall stand in His Holy place?*”³ The answer to that question you heard then was this:

“only the ritually clean and morally pure Man may approach the Presence of the Lord... that Man must be in the priestly office, for only the priests of YHWH could enter into the Holy Place in the Tabernacle and Temple. There is only One who could truly ascend the Mountain of the Lord and stand without perishing in His Holy Place while remaining perfectly pure.”⁴

¹ Psalm 24:3-6.

² Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, v. 5 *Psalms*, tr. Francis Bolton, Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, MA (1866) 2001, 201.

³ Psalm 24:3.

⁴ Morehouse, Michael A. *God's Public Service Continues in Each New Year*, Tucson: Catalina Lutheran Church, 2017, 5-6.

That One is Jesus Whose Epiphany we remember this night. With that in mind, we are moved to enter more fully into tonight's theme text. That marks our participation in the celebration of the second of the five Great Feasts of the Church Year. The answer to the faithful's eternal question, "*Who shall ascend the Mount of YHWH, and who shall stand in His Holy place?*"⁵ is declared from the 24th Psalm,

[He Who has} clean hands and (a) pure heart, Who does not lift up His soul to what is false, and (Who) swears not deceitfully; (He), will receive blessing from YHWH and justice from (the) Elohe of His salvation.⁶ This is (the) generation of those seeking Him, who are seeking your face – Even Jacob! Selah.⁷

That also may be heard in the phrasing of the Psalm hymn (#341 for you visual learners):

A righteous Helper comes to thee; His chariot is humility, His kingly crown is holiness, His scepter, pity in distress. The end of all our woe He brings; Therefore the earth is glad and sings. To Christ the Savior raise Your grateful hymns of praise.⁸

The Psalm teaches that the One who is fit to ascend God's Holy Mountain and stand in His Holy Place is one Who is ceremonially, that is physically, and more than that, fully pure in the center of His Being. The hymn verse describes Him as a righteous Helper. That is, the One who fits the description of the One to be received as the Lord Who has come to His people, is fully right with God the Father (verse 1 of the hymn). Of all the children of Adam, only one was conceived and born without sin, and thus remained completely right with God. He is Jesus, Whose manifestation in the flesh to wise sages of ancient times we celebrate tonight. He is the One Who appeared to stand in God's Holy Place.

By now, after some of you have heard the sermon drawn from the Psalm hymn at the Midnight Mass of the Feast of the Nativity, are hearing this one from tonight's Psalm hymn, and will hear the ones coming to declare the Christ in the Feasts of the

⁵ Psalm 24:3.

⁶ Psalm 4:4-5.

⁷ Psalm 24:6.

⁸ Weissel, George. *Lutheran Service Book*: "Lift Up Your Head, Ye Mighty Gates," stz. 2, tr. Catherine Winkworth. Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2006, 341.

Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost, you may be wondering why this year of the Psalm that the hymns are being used as sermon texts. Here are the reasons for that practice this Psalm year.

First, you will recall, that the Festival Service is the order by which we chose, years ago, to receive God's gifts on His big days! Second, you may remember that this order of service uses hymns to replace parts of the service that, on "regular" Sundays and Wednesdays are either spoken or chanted with direct Scripture quotes. Third, you should understand that the hymns chosen by our Church musicians and pastoral staff are all designed to support the proclamation of the Scripture on any given day at any particular service. Fourth, that ought to lead you to listen for the Word as it flows from each of the daily hymns. (You might even give yourself a bit more information about the tie between the source scriptures and a given hymn. After all they are listed at the bottom right of the page on which each hymn is written. Now you know a bit more about the methodology our trained music planners use for selecting the hymns for a given day. Is it not wonderful how much they care for you and your reception of God's Word)? Why the hymns as the basis for these sermons? Because they declare the Christ! Let us then return to our Psalm hymn and its proclamation of the coming of Christ to those who would be God's people, as we hear again, of the One Who came to draw all to Himself: *"His chariot is humility, His kingly crown is holiness..."*⁹

This night, we have heard of the visit of the Magi to worship the King of Jews. We remember they first looked in the holy city, in the place where kings, such as Herod the Great at that time, were known to be born and to rule God's people. Then, when the infant king was not there, they were led by the Word, *"O Bethlehem... out of you will be loosed a Ruler Who will shepherd the people of Me, the Israel"* and by a moving and standing star.¹⁰

⁹ *Lutheran Service Book*: "Lift Up Your Head, Ye Mighty Gates," stz. 2.

¹⁰ *Matthew 2:6, Micha 5:2*

Just so are you being led this night by the Word – in the hymns of the Church – to behold the star in the Faith, that which still guides wise men, women and children to the humble Christ. The Word and the star led the Magi of old out of the city of the Judahite and Israelite kings to the small village where the flocks destined for Temple sacrifice were shepherded. The Word which tells of the star leads you to recall that the Ruler foreordained from before the foundations of this creation were cast down, that the One Who would shepherd God’s people was born in a simple animal stall, and reclined for a time, not in a beautiful chariot, but in a feed trough. The Word and the star of which it speaks, moves you to remember that the Magi found the kingly Child in a house as He began His heavenly rule on earth as an infant waiting for the appointed time in King David’s ancestral home. That is what our hymn depicted in word and harmony, as we sang, *“His chariot is humility, His kingly crown is holiness...”*¹¹

Then, with that star illuminated image sounding in ears, hearts, and minds, our voices continued: *“His scepter, pity in distress. Then end of all our woe He brings...”*¹² In His humble estate, the Christ of Whom we sing, continues His reign in truth and faithfulness to God’s Holy Word. He who was God from eternity takes pity on those who dwelt in the darkness of sin and distress. He became one with them, with us, with you, was clothed in our flesh, He came to rule over all our foes – specifically, sin, death and the devil.

Our hymn then moves us to remember the response of the wise of the earth that day long ago. They who had come to find the infant King, as they entered His Presence veiled in humbleness in a simple home, worshipped him. That is what we sang of when these words sounded forth from our lips: *“Therefore the earth is glad and sings.”*¹³

We remember the Magi, as they rejoiced, laid before Him costly gifts. These, we know from the witness of Scripture, did not only foreshadow the burial spices used on His adult form after He died to pay the price demanded for all sin. The gifts would be

¹¹ *Lutheran Service Book*: “Lift Up Your Head, Ye Mighty Gates,” stz. 2.

¹² *Lutheran Service Book*: “Lift Up Your Head, Ye Mighty Gates,” stz. 2.

¹³ *Lutheran Service Book*: “Lift Up Your Head, Ye Mighty Gates,” stz. 2.

useful in that which was even then coming – the divine command to flee into Egypt to avoid the death for which Jesus was not predestined.

Even so, after He did die the transgressor's death, God raised Him from the dead. Due to His perfect faithfulness, His divine nature, His perfect obedience to the Word, God raised Jesus His Son and gave to Him the promises of today's Psalm: "*blessing from YHWH and justice from (the) Elohe of His salvation.*"¹⁴ That is one of the reasons we were led to sing, "*To Christ the Savior raise Your grateful hymns of praise.*"¹⁵

Long ago, more than 16 centuries before Herr Weissel composed the hymn which he intended to be used to open the Advent section of German hymnals, the composer of tonight's Psalm declared, as we translate: "*This is (the) generation of those seeking Him, who are seeking your face – Even Jacob!*"¹⁶ That generation – those who were born of the Word, in the Faith – first of the coming Christ, and since the incarnation and birth of Jesus, of the Christ Who has come – the generations born of the Faith are those who continue seeking His Face. The Magi followed the Word and the star and found the Christ Child.

You tonight followed the Word, and that Word moved you to and sing to Him, "*Redeemer, come, and open wide, my heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide*".¹⁷ In a way, that translation reflects the German from which it came, which literally rendered calls out: "*Come, O my holy Jesus Christ, My heart's door to You is open!*" The remaining text of the hymn informs singers and hearers alike that it is the Word of the coming King, the Good News of His salvation, that opens the gates and doors to anyone's center of being, his or her heart.

That Word, having prepared the Way, actually brings the King it proclaims. Tonight, He comes to you in His proclaimed, sung and preached Word. He soon will come bringing you more precious gifts than were given to Him that night in His infancy. He has heard your song, "*O enter with Thy grace divine...*"¹⁸. He responds, as He prepares

¹⁴ Psalm 24:5.

¹⁵ *Lutheran Service Book*: "Lift Up Your Head, Ye Mighty Gates," stz. 2.

¹⁶ Psalm 24:6.

¹⁷ *Lutheran Service Book*: "Lift Up Your Head, Ye Mighty Gates," stz. 5.

¹⁸ *Lutheran Service Book*: "Lift Up Your Head, Ye Mighty Gates," stz. 5.

again to enter into His Holy Temple with His Real Presence. He desires to feed you with His true Body and Blood, to grant you forgiveness, and strengthen you to life eternal. He, Whom the ancients honored in worship, with gold and frankincense and myrrh, gives to His faithful even greater gifts. On account of His continuing to grace us with the food of eternal life, the Church continues to sing, “*Eternal praise and fame We offer to Thy name*”¹⁹.

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

Epiphany (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 24; Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

January 6, 2018

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Solī Deo Glōria

¹⁹ *Lutheran Service Book*: “Lift Up Your Head, Ye Mighty Gates,” stz. 5.

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.²⁰

Who shall ascend the Mount of YHWH, and who shall stand in His Holy standing place?²¹

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.²²

This is (the) generation of those seeking Him, who are seeking your face, O Jacob. Selah.²³

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.²⁴

Who (is) this King of the glory?

YHWH, strong and mighty, YHWH mighty in battle.²⁵

All of you lift up, O gates, your heads, and lift up, O doors of eternity, and will come in King of the glory.²⁶

Who be this King of the glory?

YHWH Sabaoth (is) the King of the glory. Selah.²⁷

²⁰ Psalm 24:1-2.

²¹ Psalm 24:3.

²² Psalm 4:4-5.

²³ Psalm 24:6.

²⁴ Psalm 24:7.

²⁵ Psalm 24:8.

²⁶ Psalm 24:9.

²⁷ Psalm 24:10.