

WHAT IS MAN THAT GOD THINKS OF HIM?

What is in a name? The Holy Spirit, reported through King David declares:

*YHWH, our Adonai, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth;
You Who has set Your praise above the heavens!¹*

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

It is kind of fitting that, in this Christmas season, the older Senior Pastor gets to have the final sermon words for 2017. It is also good and salutary that the younger Assistant Pastor gets to have the first sermon words for 2018.

That is about as far as that imagery should go! Our Altar Guild has not dressed me in a top hat and tails, given me a flowing white beard to paste upon my face, nor handed me a gnarled cane with which to hobble down the aisle. They certainly have not prepared for Pastor Palmer the oversized top hat and diaper to wear to symbolize the Baby New Year! (Ok, get those images out of your minds)!

What we both have received to wear, however, are garments that reflect God's regalia for all the baptized. Here, we are covered in white robes that remind us of that which the fully sainted ones are depicted in Scriptures' revelation of heavenly visions. It is fitting to mention that this evening, as this morning the congregation God assembled here at that time witnessed baby Christian Michael being cleansed of sin. In biblical terms, he is now to be beheld as having put on his baptismal garments. Those are his, as yours are yours, on account of the washing of regeneration and renewal all Christians receive from Christ Jesus through plain water and His Word. Such garments, whether worn symbolically or just spiritually, remind us of God's answer to the Psalmist's query:

*What (is) man that You will think of him;
the Son of Adam, that You care for Him?²*

The answer to that two-part question is: God thinks everything about man, for He reveals that He sent the Christ into the flesh to be the Son of Adam. This is what Jesus

¹ *Psalm 8:2. MT*

² *Psalm 8:5 MT.*

declares whenever He refers to Himself as the Son of Man. He became one with us, as True Man, to bear our sins, your sins, into death.

That means that you should understand clearly that this evening's Psalm is all about Jesus the Christ. Both St. Paul and the inspired author of the Letter to the Hebrews make that clear.³ This evening's Psalm is so significant in the life of Christians that New Testament authors, moved by the Holy Spirit, saw fit to quote its 10 verses (nine in English translations) five times directly, and at least once indirectly. Those parallel uses declare that Psalm 8 is also about you as you remain in that which keeps you from permanently soiling your spiritual baptismal garments. You may continue to learn that today's text is about you as you recall that which your baptism means. That is this: you actually bear the Name of Jesus in your person.

About five centuries ago, Dr. Luther stated that which has been declared here every four years for quite some time. That is, that this Psalm is a prophecy of the Christ. Luther connected it to the First Commandment, engraved there on our wall, and the Second Petition of the Our Father, *Thy kingdom come*. He went on to declare that the 8th Psalm teaches of Christ's incarnation, birth and sufferings in the flesh. It proclaims His resurrection from the dead, as well as His ascension into the heavens, where He rules through the proclamation of His Name.⁴ That last is how each Festival Half of the Church nears its end, even as the Psalm begins:

*YHWH, our Adonai, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth;
You Who has set Your praise above the heavens!*⁵

In other words, the ending Psalm of the Church Year declares the Name of God as it is revealed in the work of God in and through the Christ from before Creation. Its few verses lead us to think of His word in the Creation. It declares that the Christ redeemed His own from man's Fall. It speaks of His victory over death and the grave. It proclaims His ascension to rule over all things, the last, death, having been put under His feet.⁶

³ Hebrews 2:6; I Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:22; c.f. Acts 17:21ff.

⁴ Luther, Martin. *Reading the Psalms with Luther*, Bruce A. Cameron, tr. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007.

⁵ Psalm 85:2. MT

⁶ I Corinthians 15:27.

That is to say, Psalm 8 is the Festival half of the Church Year summarized in 72 Hebrew words, arranged in 10 verses. (Wow! God repeatedly sends out these 72 to declare His complete (10) work of salvation)! When you think about it, this Psalm presents a neat and tidy way to ring out any old year and chime in any new year!

In our Bibles, today's Psalm holds a superscription that is not recorded in our hymnals. It reads: *To (the) choirmaster; upon the Gittith, (a) Psalm of David.*⁷ That header informs the Church, those attached to Christ our Head, that the ancient Church thought that this Psalm was a King David composition. Since it states that it was offered to the choirmaster, we may understand that the Church meant it for singing. Further, we heard that it was to be accompanied by a joyous sounding stringed instrument. Therefore, we may realize, that for about three millennia, Psalm 8 has been used in the Lord's services as we have done so this evening. Its words begin with an ascription of praise, as it sounds forth:

*YHWH, our Adonai, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth;
You Who has set Your praise above the heavens!*⁸

The very first word declares God's Name – which may be translated, "I Am Who Causes to Be." It goes on to proclaim that Creator of all is "our Adonai," that is: Lord and Master. Those are the titles the Gospel writers often ascribed to Jesus as they record His disciples' addressing Him. As the Church chants, sings, or speaks those words, God's Name is hallowed on earth.

That is a first petition of the Lord's Prayer reality. Further, since Christ Jesus is the Name by which all may be saved, because He has ascended into the heavens to rule all things through the proclamation of His saving Name, He has truly fulfilled the Psalmists words and set His praise – honor – glory – splendor above His entire creation! The proclamation of the Word of His Name continues as the Psalm goes on to declare:

*From (the) mouth of babies and sucking infants You have built (a) fortress
on account of Your foes;*

⁷ Psalm 8:1 MT.

⁸ Psalm 8:2. MT

*to cause to stop Your enemies and Your adversaries.*⁹

What leaped into your mind when you heard those words? Was it Jesus' own interpretation of the Psalm?

If not, perhaps you need to be more attentive to God's Word during the annual recollection of the Palm Sunday events that preceded Christ's Passion depicted in those Stations of the Cross. Turn from inattention to the proclaimed Word. Return your hearts and thoughts to Jesus' use of the words of this night's Psalm in order to silence the chief priests and scribes as they called for Him to stop the crowds from shouting, Hosanna, that is, "Save Now," as He entered Jerusalem as the humble King.

Jesus' use of this text indicated, and still teaches, that His kingdom is established by the voice of children. They, with childlike faith, proclaim His rule by the Word of God and faith alone, and that muzzles the enemies of Christ, then, now, and forever! How fitting, that again this year, we have had another infant baptism in our congregation! Our evening, end-of-year, Psalm continues:

*When I look at Your sky, (the) work of Your fingers,
moon and stars which You have set in their places;
What (is) man that You will think of him;
the Son of Adam, that You care for Him?*¹⁰

From the words of those first two lines, we may understand that its human author likely wrote it he was meditation on God's work and Word while being alone at night. The Psalm writer directs his hearer to God's creation on the fourth day, though it does not mention the sun which was also created that day. It is fitting for us to use this evening, as we depart from here, that we may be encouraged to lift our gazes into the heavens and behold that which God gave to govern the night. We might think to a time in human history when no artificial lights illuminated the night sky. On this hill, if you move away from this building a bit, just to the other side of the parking lot, you may behold more stars than anyone living down in the city of Tucson. What beauty they

⁹ Psalm 8:3.MT

¹⁰ Psalm 8:4-5 MT.

reveal! That is declared as God's work in the Psalm. The 8th Psalm also speaks of the events of the sixth day of creation, that of the animals and man.

Then it proclaims the eighth day of Creation, the beginning of God's new creation in Christ, the Son of Man. We heard about that Good News earlier. The Psalm continues with the divine answer to God's thinking about the Son of Man:

*For You made Him inferior only to (the) heavenly beings,
and with glory and honor You crowned Him.¹¹*

Even as the bodily visible return of the Son of Man has been promised, in tonight's Gospel reading, will come at a time not even the faithful expect, so too was His first visible bodily coming into the midst of His people. People of the Faith had heard, for generation what to look for in His first coming. Even so, they did not know the day, nor the hour.

In His incarnation in our flesh He Who was, from eternity, the divine Son of God, set aside His glory, taking on our flesh. This is part of what it meant for God to be born of Mary. In His shedding first-blood in the circumcision that placed Him under His Law, He made it clear that He came to fulfill the demands of the Law perfectly. Jesus' human birth and submission to the demands of the Law made him lower than the heavenly hosts – for a time.

Even so, in time, God raised Him up. This He did only after He was lifted up to the glory of the cross. He paid in His sinless flesh the price God demanded for all sinners' transgressions against God's Holy Word. From that time forth, the Son of Man, Jesus the Christ, received back all the divine honor He, the Son of God, had set aside to buy back humans from eternal death. God exalted Him from the grave, and placed Him as the Head over all things for the Church, which is His Body. That continues to be composed of all of the followers of Him Who continues to fill all in all.¹² Our Psalm speaks of those realities, when it continues to say:

You have caused to make Him ruler over all Your hands have made;

¹¹ Psalm 8:6.

¹² Ephesians 1:22.

*all things, You have placed under His feet.*¹³

There, dear ones, is a description of that which Christ Jesus received in His ascension to the right of God the Father. From that position of highest honor, once held by the first Adam before his fall into sin, Jesus, the second Adam rules.

Even so, in the divine economy, He still, as Son, remains subordinate to the Father. It is the Father that places all things – even death, under the feet of Jesus. That means that, as Jesus is your Head, and the Church is His Body, and you are each members of His Body, all things in Christ are under your feet! You may be certain of that for you bear the Name of the Triune God, given by Him to you in Holy Baptism. With all of that in mind, the Psalm nears its conclusion as it further defines all things that remain under the Son of Man's exalted feet:

*Sheep and oxen, all of them, and also wild animals;
birds of the heavens, and fish of the sea,
the things passing through the paths of the seas.*¹⁴

Again, the Psalm brings to the mind of the faithful God's work in Creation. We hear of the creatures of day six, the animals, and of those of day five, the birds and fish. The exalted Son of Man's dominion extends over all His creation. It even reaches down to the depths of the sea – for the ancients the haunt and realm of demons.

The Psalmist declares that the Son of Man, whom you know to be Jesus, is Lord over all. He even rules over the powers and principalities of darkness, restraining their evil, and turning it to the good He wills in His time. With all of that in mind, the Psalm of the day concludes the proclamation of this old year as it sounds forth:

*YHWH, our Adonai, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth!*¹⁵

As the night Psalm began, so it ends, with the revealed Name of God, the declaration of His Lordship over us His faithful people. It concludes with the

¹³ *Psalm 8:6.*

¹⁴ *Psalm 8:8-9 MT.*

¹⁵ *Psalm 8:10 MT.*

proclamation of His Name, the Name of all Names, which, with all the baptized, you bear in your persons. For all of that we have reason to declare to one and all:

Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year!

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

Eve of the Name of Jesus (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 8; Isaiah 30:15-17; Romans 8:31b-39; Luke 12:35-40

December 31, 2017 PM

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria