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Outlines on Old Testament Texts (Synodical Conference)

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us and been our stay in the day of temptation and in the hour of affliction, and we want the future generations to be blessed by it. It is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, but we have found it to be the power and wisdom of God and the foundation of our trust in the grace of God. "By pagan pride rejected, spurned," the Word, given by verbal inspiration, is our greatest treasure. We thank God that He has permitted us to enlist in its service.

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken.' That is and must remain our battle cry. That is the device emblazoned on our banner. If ever our Synod should no longer hold this banner aloft, her fall would not be imminent but would already have set in, and she would be fit only to be cast away as insipid salt that no longer serves but only deserves to be trodden under foot." (Walther.) Taking up the battle cry *Γέγονα*, as the Captain of our salvation sounded it against Satan, let us earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints and preserve unto the Church the precious doctrine of verbal inspiration. (See *Walther and the Church*, p. 24.)

TH. ENGELDER

Outlines on Old Testament Texts (Synodical Conference)

Third Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 61:1-6

In this Advent season we like to dwell on the prophecies of the Old Testament in which the coming of the Redeemer is foretold. The saints of the Old Covenant lived in a period of waiting; their thoughts were directed to the future. In a different, but real, sense we in this season of the year are in an attitude of waiting, our thoughts occupy themselves with the coming Christmas festival when the birth of the Savior will be observed. It is quite natural that the old prophecies which thrilled the waiting hearts of the saints of the Old Covenant have a special appeal for us these days.

The contents of the beautiful prophecy before us today can well be summarized in the expression found here:

Beauty for Ashes

1

We find here statements referring to the *misery in which men are by nature*.

The speaker of the text is the Messiah Himself. That is

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clearly proved through Luke 4:18, where Jesus quotes the first part of the text with respect to Himself.

He points to the misery which is the natural condition of men before the Messiah has done His work for them. His natural lot is symbolized by ashes, ashes on the head, the sign of grief and mourning.

Other terms to be noted are: brokenhearted, captives, bound in prison, the spirit of heaviness. These are figurative expressions showing what a pitiful condition we are in without the work of Christ.

Man, created by God in beautiful garments of righteousness, cast these garments aside; being free, he made himself a prisoner of sin.

This is still the status of all unconverted people. See them serve unrighteousness. Observe the misery into which their wrongdoing leads them: evil conscience, suffering in body and soul, and finally everlasting death.

Do we make the application and realize the distress which is ours by nature?

2

The text furthermore speaks of the *joy and happiness which the Messiah has prepared for all*. The promised Helper has come and has brought beauty for ashes. He has taken away the ugliness of unrighteousness. He has removed the barrier separating God and man, the guilt of sin, paying the penalty for us.

This is described in beautiful figurative language. The wounded are bound up, the captives set free, the mourning are comforted, praise takes the place of the spirit of heaviness, the old wastes are built up, the desolate cities are repaired; the meaning is a full ransom is paid for sinners.

This is what the Messiah has been appointed to do for all men through His great sacrifice. All people are sinners and need such help. Alas! many will not be aided; they stubbornly and persistently refuse the Lord's help. But those that accept the Messiah as their own Redeemer will be called "priests of the Lord" (v. 6). Rich treasures will be theirs, treasures like those of the victors spoken of in the second part of v. 6. They have beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

This all points to the spiritual riches which the children of God possess: righteousness, forgiveness, peace, joy, a place in heaven.

Are these our riches? Do we accept the good tidings preached by the Messiah and the gifts He presents? God grant it.

W. ARNDT

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Hag. 2:6-9

Christmas is coming! Rejoice! Can we? Round about us we see war and bloodshed and heartache, falling like a blight upon the Christians' joy and dampening their enthusiasm for church work. In our text the Lord of hosts tells us

Why Can We Joyfully Do the Lord's Work in Troubled Times?

Because

1. *The Lord of hosts is the Ruler of the universe*
2. *The Lord of hosts makes His Church a glorious one*
3. *The Lord of hosts provides the means necessary for the building of His Church*

1

On the basis of Ezra 3:1 to 5:2; Hag. 1:1 to 2:5, describe briefly the historical setting of our text: Israel's disappointment at difficulties and opposition confronting them, their waning zeal, placing their own comfort above the concern for God's kingdom. God had rebuked them, 1:3-11; they had repented, and now the Lord promises, 1:13; 2:4, 5. As the first reason for joyful resumption of their work He mentions the fact that their God is the Ruler of the universe. They were a weak nation, Deut. 7:7; yet their God was not a weak God but the Lord of hosts. *I will shake all nations; cp. v. 22, 23; Is. 37:21-29, 33-36; 43:14-16; 44:6, 7, 26-28.*

Our God is still the Lord of all the earth, Josh. 3:11; Zech. 6:5. In particular the Christ child is He of whom Scripture prophesied: Ps. 8:7; Is. 9:6. Cp. Matt. 11:27a; 28:18; Eph. 1:21; Phil. 2:9-11. Our Savior by His will and word shapes the history and destiny of all nations. Just because He is given to be the Head over all things to the Church, Eph. 1:22, He will rule all things for the welfare of the Church at large and its individual members, so that His kingdom of peace will endure and grow forever. What a comfort for us Christians to know that in spite of war and tumult, confusion and disorder, Jesus, our Savior, rules for our welfare the whole world!

2

A. V. 9 b. Though the world has been torn by wars at all times, though war and bloodshed will continue to the end of times, one warfare of infinitely graver import, that warfare in which God was opposed to mankind, is at an end, has been ended 1900 years ago, when God Himself established peace through the Babe of Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace, Is. 9:6, who fulfilled Is. 50:6; 53:2-12. Cp. Col. 1:19-22; 2:13, 14.

B. Through this Gospel of peace God will fill His house, the

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Church symbolized by the Temple, with glory, v. 7, far exceeding the former glory, v. 9 a, both extensively and intensively. Extensively: compare the 50,000 inhabitants of Judea with the 125,000 members of our Northern Illinois District, the more than one million members of our Synod, the number of Lutherans, of Christians, in the world. Compare the little country of Judea with the territory covered by the Church of the New Testament. While the Old Testament Church was restricted to the commonwealth of Israel, in the New Testament "the desire" — those desired, loved, chosen, by God — "of all nations shall come," an innumerable multitude, Gen. 15:5; Is. 49:18-23; 60:1-16; Rev. 14:6; 7:9, 10.

C. The upheavals in the world must serve God in building His kingdom. Those century-long wars from which finally Rome emerged as the ruler of the world, and the Greek language as the universal language, not only caused innumerable Gentiles to come into contact with the Jews and to learn of their Messianic hope, but at the same time smoothed the way for the preaching and rapid spreading of the Gospel in all the world.

In a similar manner God caused Gutenberg to invent the art of printing just before the Reformation, moved the founders of our United States to write religious liberty into our Constitution, gave us the radio as a means of spreading the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. Even this present world war must serve the spreading of the Gospel. Through the sending of Christian soldiers to all parts of the earth the Gospel is brought to many that would not have heard it because of the sluggishness of so many Christians.

What comfort to know that even in the time of war and disorder God is building His kingdom on earth and bringing the Gospel of salvation to many who have not yet heard it.

3

One more question arises: Will not the war deprive us of our means to carry on the work of the Church? The Lord of hosts answers: v. 8. The God of that insignificant Jewish nation was infinitely rich, Ps. 24:1; 50:10-12. He was able to find ways and means even in times of financial difficulties to give to His people the necessary means to carry on His work, Ex. 12:35; Ps. 105:37. A circumstance that might have seemed to effectually stop further building served, by God's omnipotent direction, to move the powerful King Darius to support the erection and beautifying of the Temple in a truly regal manner, Ezra 5:3 to 6:12. This same God to this day is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, Eph. 3:20, and can give to Christians even in hard times the wherewithal to build His kingdom.

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This rich God makes us willing to offer our gold and silver to Him. Cp. Ex. 36:3-7; Ezra 2:69; 6:14-17; 2 Cor. 9:8-15. The poverty of our fathers did not prevent them from building God's kingdom. We still have silver and gold, God's gift to us. Let us use it in His service and trust Him to provide also in future sufficient means for our needs and the needs of His Kingdom of Grace, until He comes to take us to His Kingdom of Glory. Away with sorrow and fears! Let Christmas joy fill our hearts, for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts. Zech. 2:4.

TH. LAETSCH

Christmas

Isaiah 9:2-7

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men," Luke 2:14. So on that first Christmas night sang the heavenly host praising God. "On earth peace!" But the world is not at peace, it is at war! What, then, is that peace of which the angels sang? It is the peace which the Savior brought to sinners at war against God. Because multitudes of men despise this peace, they are still at war against God and also among themselves. They are trying to free themselves from the tyranny of man—for that purpose, we are told, the world war is being fought—but they are enslaved by a more powerful tyrant, by Satan himself, they are the slaves of Satan and of sin. We who by faith in Him are the Savior's people and are free from the tyranny of Satan and sin enjoy the glorious freedom and peace which Christ procured for the world. Let us anew be thankful and rejoice on this Christmas Day, and let us be encouraged to spread the Gospel of the great Liberator from sin, Satan, death, and hell. The Christmas message is the good news which we and the world so much need today.

Christ, Born at Bethlehem, the World's Great Liberator

Isaiah's prophecy speaks

- 1. Of His wonderful Person**
- 2. Of His great work of liberation**
- 3. Of His glorious kingdom**

1

To a world dead in trespasses and sins and subject to eternal damnation God has sent the Liberator, the God-Man, Jesus Christ. That this great Liberator spoken of in the text is Jesus Christ, is evident from the text itself; but also from Matt. 4:12-16.

a. "Unto us a Child is born," v. 6. Christ, born at Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary, true Man, Luke 24:39.

b. "Unto us a Son is given," v. 6. Matt. 1:23, Emmanuel, God with us; the Deliverer, or Liberator, is true God, Luke 1:35; given,

that is, the eternal Son was sent by the Father; God provided the Redeemer. Being the God-Man, His Name is "Wonderful," v. 6. Hymn No. 85:2, 3.

2

Ahaz despised God's help and called upon the King of Assur, Tiglath-pileser, who deported the inhabitants of Zebulun and Naphtali into exile, v. 1. Thus God's judgment upon Israel was begun. But this same region shall be among the first in New Testament times to receive the Messiah's blessings, v. 2; Matt. 4:12-16. There, in the Galilee of the Gentiles, Jesus first exercised His ministry; from that region came most of His Apostles.

a. *The darkness of sin and death* that had come upon the world is spoken of in v. 2. By the fall of man sin came into the world. That brought to man, *enslaved in sin*, misery and death, eternal death ("land of the shadow of death," v. 2), Rom. 5:12. — All the misery in the war-torn world today is the result of man's sin, of *our sin*. God's judgment is upon the world calling us and the sinful world to repentance, for God does not delight in the death of the sinner, Ps. 81:8-16; Ezek. 18:31, 32. And, thank God, there is deliverance from sin, for

b. God Himself has sent us *the world's Liberator* from sin, Satan, death, hell. The "great Light," v. 2, to dispel the darkness of sin has appeared. While the joy was not increased when the people multiplied and their sins multiplied, v. 3, now they can rejoice in their Savior from sin, even as there is rejoicing when the harvest is gathered in or when the victor divides his spoil, v. 3, for the yoke of the burden of sin, etc., has been broken, vv. 4, 5. This was done "as in the day of Midian," v. 4. As Gideon conquered the Midianites, not by the strength of men, but by the power of God, so man was delivered from sin and death not by his own strength, but through the "Child," the "Son," through the Savior sent by God, John 3:16. He alone could overcome for us sin, death, and hell (vicarious atonement).

The names given to the great Deliverer speak of His work of liberation or redemption: *Counselor*. Though man was in dire straits because of his sin and knew not the way out, He knew, He Himself became the Way, John 14:6. — *The Mighty God*, mighty to overpower all His and our enemies, Heb. 2:14. — *The Everlasting Father*, John 10:30; 14:9. With a fatherly love He will reign over and bless His people forever. — *The Prince of Peace*. He brought peace to man's evil conscience, for He established peace between God and man, Luke 2:14; Eph. 2:14-19; Rom. 5:1; 10:15.

Having such a Savior, we should repent of our sins and cheerfully and thankfully by faith, Eph. 2:8, accept Him and be members of His glorious kingdom of peace.

3

a. *The Prince of Peace*, who is Ruler over all things ("the government shall be upon His shoulder," v. 6), but who is especially the Savior of men, established His kingdom of peace, Rom. 14:17, His Church, of which He is the Head. Though men have deserved to be judged, condemned on account of their sins, the justice of God has been satisfied by the redemption wrought by His Son, so that the believer now is received into Christ's kingdom of peace, v. 7.

b. Of the *increase of this Kingdom* "there shall be no end," it shall take in all who through the Gospel believe in Christ, everywhere and at all times, v. 7; 1 Tim. 2:4.

c. It is an *eternal Kingdom*, Matt. 16:18.

"The zeal of the Lord," His love for sinful mankind, will perform this, so that it shall be so now and to all eternity.

The Christmas message of the world's great Liberator should anew be received by us in true repentance and faith, Mark 1:14, 15, fill our hearts with "joy unspeakable," 1 Pet. 1:8, persuade us "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world," Titus 2:11, 12, and compel us to preach the Gospel of peace, Rom. 10:15, to a world so much in need of it. Hymn No. 79.

Note: Hymn No. 106 (new hymnal) puts this text into verse. It may be sung after the sermon has been preached.

J. H. C. FRITZ

Second Christmas Day

Zech. 2:10-13

Is this a Christmas text? It is. The speaker is none other than Jesus Christ, whose birthday we are celebrating. No other person may call himself the Messenger of the Lord, v. 11, and yet identify himself with Jehovah, v. 10. Cp. Jesus' assertions: John 8:25-29, 42; 10:30; 14:9. This Jesus tells us of His coming into the world for a threefold purpose, each increasing our Christmas joy.

Let us Sing and Rejoice in This Happy Christmastide!

1. *In Christ Jesus the Lord has come to dwell in our midst*
2. *He still comes to build His Church*
3. *He shall come again in glory*

1

Already in the Old Testament God dwelt in the midst of His people, Ex. 13:21; 25:8, 22; Ps. 9:11; 135:21. Through Zechariah He foretells a future coming and dwelling in the midst of Israel.

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The fulfillment is found Luke 1:28-35, 68, 79; 2:1-14; John 1:14. The Lord of Hosts has come as a little child, Is. 9:6, in order to be our righteousness, Jer. 23:6; Matt. 1:21; Luke 2:21; John 1:12, 16-18; 2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 4:4, 5.

This prophecy and its fulfillment bids you rejoice, for your Savior has come. A Savior, willing to save, able to save to the uttermost, *your* Savior; He *has* come. Go to the manger and sing and rejoice.

2

V. 11 a. In the Old Testament, Israel was God's chosen people. Ex. 19:5, 6; Amos 3:2. In the New Testament God's people comprises the believers of all nations, Is. 2:2, 3; 49:6, 18-23; 60:1 f. "That day" is the day of Jesus and the preaching of His Gospel whereby those afar off shall be gathered to the Lord and together with believing Israel form one people. Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 1:21, 22.

V. 12. The Church of the New Testament, like towns without walls, Zech. 2:4, extends far beyond Jerusalem, Judah, Palestine. Wherever there are confessors of the Babe of Bethlehem, there is indeed "the Holy Land"; the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, chosen of God. To the believing exiles in distant Babylon was given the promise, Ezek. 11:15, 16. So Christ says Matt. 18:20. Cp. Is. 2:4-6; 1 Cor. 1:1, 2; 2 Cor. 6:16. Sing and rejoice! This Gospel has been preached to you. You have been added to the Church because the Child in the manger has by the Gospel drawn you to Himself.

V. 11 b. When we consider the conversion of multitudes of heathen, the remarkable change wrought in individuals and nations by the preaching of the Christ child, when we see the progress of mission work in spite of war and hatred, we realize that this Babe is indeed God's own Messenger, the Lord of Hosts, who by His omnipotent grace still carries on the extension of His Church. Sing and rejoice, and 1 Cor. 15:58.

3

In the Old Testament Christ's coming into the flesh is frequently linked up with His coming on the Last Day. His first advent was lowly. The second is described Luke 21:27; 22:69; 2 Thess. 1:7-10. Already He is rising up out of His holy habitation in heaven. Luke 21:10, 11. In the howling of destructive tempests, in the fury of devastating conflagrations, in the roaring of cannon and the whining of shells, in the noise and tumult of battle, we hear the rumblings foreboding His coming. Hence v. 13. "Flesh" is all mankind, God's enemy by nature. Cease your enmity, Ps. 2. Kiss the Son; acknowledge Him as your God and Savior; consecrate yourselves to His service. Then you will

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become His people. Otherwise you are hopelessly lost. Mark 16:16; John 3:36; 1 John 5:10.

This word is directed to us also. If we do not understand God's ways and judgments of today, be still! It is the Lord of Hosts, your Savior, who once lay in the manger at Bethlehem for your redemption, that rules the universe for the welfare of His own. We may suffer hardships, depression, hunger, poverty. Be still! All these tribulations are for those who see in the Babe of Bethlehem their everlasting Prince of Peace, the harbingers of a glorious and everlasting redemption from all evil. Luke 21:28; Rom. 8:21, 23. This Lord can and will be a wall of fire round about His own, Zech. 2:5, in evil days as well as in good, on the battlefield as well as in the safety of our homes. He can and will save to the uttermost them that put their trust in Him. Be still, and sing, and rejoice, and thank God for sending His Son to be the Savior of all mankind.

TH. LAETSCH

Sunday after Christmas

Is. 28:14-19

On this Sunday after Christmas the echoes of the great festival we have celebrated are still reverberating through the land. But even now the echoes of Christmas are growing fainter. Today is not only the Sunday after Christmas, but it is the last Sunday of the present year, and this causes us to think seriously about the waning year and the dawning new year.

This time is always a serious time for thinking people. It is serious especially in these days of dreadful warfare. At a time like this some try to bolster their failing spirits with false hopes, but we, the children of God, turn to our only refuge.

Christ the Only True Refuge

- 1. Multitudes seek safety in a false refuge*
- 2. Christians know and find the only safe Refuge*

1

A. Context and historical setting. Isaiah is speaking in serious times. King Ahaz had sinned by seeking protection against Syria not in the Lord but in Assyria, thereby making this country a scourge of Judah. This led to the invasion on the part of Sennacherib, which was definitely threatening at the time this chapter of the Book of Isaiah was penned. Hence the days were similar to our days, days of warfare and threatening invasion.

B. V. 14. This is a warning addressed to unbelieving rulers, scorning the word and judgment of the Lord. Cf. Ps. 1:1. Text emphasizes that those who ruled were scornful men. Always a sad

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situation when the heads of a nation depart from God. This was true in Israel. Certainly these rulers in Jerusalem, the Lord's city, should have been faithful; but they were not. Their wicked example influenced others. Sad also today that the rulers of so many nations are far from God. Certainly it is a situation that should give us grave concern and solicit our earnest prayers. Jer. 29:7.

C. The false security of these scornful rulers is depicted in v.15. These people thought that all was well. In their carnal security they felt sure of their lives even when the most dreadful judgments were abroad, as if they had made a bargain with death. To the Christian, who is at peace with His God through Christ, death comes at the right time and in the right manner. But to think of making a league with death while through sin we are at war with God is the greatest absurdity. In their self-confidence those scornful men thought that they would fare better than others and that the flood of invasion would pass them by. V. 15 c indicates that they had made their refuge in lies and in deceit; they trusted in their shrewdness, in their diplomacy, in their ability to make covenants with the rulers of other countries. They felt safe, but their refuge was uncertain and unsafe.

D. Let us not make the mistake of these people. Let us not trust in diplomacy. We know how often this has failed. Let us not think of the might of arms at this time. They have failed in times past, and they can fail again. Such things in themselves are a false, unsafe refuge.

E. Disaster was proclaimed to such as were scornful of God and His judgments. Vv. 17-19. Stress the heaping of expressions which indicate the doom that was to come upon the rulers. Just what they did not expect would happen. It would strike them, for "they would be trodden down by it."

F. The words of our text are a warning to all those who give themselves up to a false security, who trust in the unsafe refuge of good luck, clever diplomacy and lies. Also a warning for Christians. We do not wish to be swept away by destruction. Therefore turn to only safe Refuge, the one offered in the text.

2

A. V. 16. Now the Lord speaks. He does not lie. He never makes a mistake. Ps. 33:4. It is the word of the faithful God.

B. V. 16 b. God makes the promise of a safe refuge, a certain foundation and cornerstone. He speaks of the Rock upon which His Church is firmly founded. The "tried Stone," one who is Himself tried and tested and one who also tries and tests the hearts of the faithful. A "precious Cornerstone," a stone where the walls meet and thus make them stronger. "A sure Foundation," to stress

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the firmness and the solidity and safety. All these expressions point to the real security of the Refuge which God has provided.

C. We do not have to ask who this foundation of the Church is. We know that this promise of God was literally fulfilled in the Christ child, the Man of the cross. Cp. 1 Pet. 2:6-8; Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; Rom. 9:33; Eph. 2:20. In Christ all the promises made here have been fulfilled. Christ came; the Church was founded; the Church has been a refuge for the weary, a safe hiding place.

D. V. 16 c. "He that believeth shall not make haste." This is an appeal to have faith in God and in the Christ whom He has sent into the world. It is also a word of encouragement. Those who put their trust in the Lord Jesus, the safe Refuge, will not have to be ashamed. They will not have to flee in haste when disaster comes; but, trusting in the Lord, they can meet all situations in life and in death and are safe in eternity. This is real comfort for us in these trying times, real comfort to us at the end of the year.

E. L. ROSCHKE

New Year's Eve

Psalm 46

The year 1942 will be remembered as a year of war and strife, of confusion and perplexity. And the future is dark. We do not know what changes are coming. Is not the liberty of conscience we now enjoy in danger? 2 Cor. 4:8: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair." But only those can apply these words to themselves who say with Paul 2 Cor. 4:18. For comfort and courage we must look beyond this visible world, made miserable by sin, to the invisible truths revealed to us in Holy Scripture.

The Eternal Security of the Church

1. *God is our Refuge and Strength*
2. *All earthly powers fail, but the Church endures*

1

V. 1. This is the declaration of all those who by faith in Christ Jesus are God's children. They look up to their Father in heaven for help in trouble. Yes, there is trouble everywhere. What will the future bring? Will the Church be permitted to continue its work without intervention? Will the present economic order remain? Will death-dealing epidemics depopulate our land? Will our cities be bombed, must many of our loved ones die? We are beset with troubles. What must be our comfort? This: "God is our Refuge, a very present Help." We must always remember that.

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Vv. 2, 3. We need fear nothing. There are terrors coming, much greater than the present ones, the terrors connected with the final destruction of the world. Describe them briefly.

Vv. 4, 5. Here is the reason why we need not fear. The city of God is the Church, the communion of saints, the congregation of believers, all true children of God. In their midst is a river; there flow the streams of living waters, the means of grace, which convey and seal forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation to us, and thus make us glad. Through the means of grace God is in the midst of us. Therefore we shall not be moved, shall not perish. God's almighty hand protects us. "Right early." Our troubles fade away like the passing night. God's help is ever with us, even in the midst of trouble.

Vv. 6, 7. Behold, what our God can do. Let the heathen rage, let nations boast about their might and power. God rebukes them and they are crushed, their ragings become wailings, their might hopeless prostration and abject futility. Jesus lifts up His finger, and the storm subsides. But the Church triumphs: "The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our Refuge." There is the eternal security of the Church.

2

Vv. 8, 9. Behold what the Lord can do. History tells us about the mighty Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Many mighty, seemingly invincible nations have vanished from the face of the earth. What happened to the greatest and most dreadful power of this world, Popery? The Word of God was the sword from which it received its death wound.

And God's power is as great as ever. All the terrible modern weapons, the bombers, the warships, the cannon, the lies, etc., are less than nothing against the almighty power of God. V. 10. Cp. Is. 40:21-25. Remember the majesty of Almighty God, O man. Away with your pride, your impudent boastfulness. Remember Almighty God is above you. He demands that you give Him due honor and respect. Woe to you, woe to the nations that deny Him such honor. Woe to you if you fail to see the handwriting on the wall in the past and present dire visitations of the Lord.

But the Church—the family of God, His children who believe and appreciate His mercy in Christ Jesus, worship Him as the Author of their salvation—will endure forever. Not even the gates of hell shall prevail against them. No one shall pluck the believers out of His hand. Cf. Luke 12:32. The very Flood that caused such desolations on the earth carried Noah's ark to safety. Thus even troubles must serve the good of God's children. Indeed, the terrible collapse of this world must mark the final and complete liberation of the Church and its triumphant entry into heaven. Hymn 262.

H. J. BOUMAN

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New Year's Day

Psalm 121

The profound appeal of many psalms lies not only in their marvelous content, but also in their sublime imagery. That is evidently the case in other favorite psalms, such as Psalm 23, Psalm 46, Psalm 90. — In this case a scene of the great out-of-doors, with a majestic mountain in the background and the great expanse of the sky above, with the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night. One cannot escape the impression of majesty and of power, on the one hand, and of the protection afforded by the divine government and providence, on the other. These considerations are particularly valuable at the beginning of a new year, on the threshold of momentous events. We consider

A Psalm of Trust for the Beginning of a New Year

- 1. It expresses confidence in God as the almighty and merciful Keeper and Helper*
- 2. It emphasizes the certainty of the fulfillment of His promises*

1

A. The very names applied to God bring out this confidence: *Lord*, that is, the God of the covenant, the heavenly Ruler who was the mainstay of His people through the ages, as He Himself declared in His amazing revelation of His glory before Moses, Ex. 34:6, 7; *Keeper*, Guardian, one who extends His guarding and protecting hand over those who are His own, to whom the believers may freely look for protection, Ps. 17:8; *Shade*, a designation frequently used in Holy Scripture as an image of protection and security, Num. 14:9; Ps. 91:1; Is. 32:2.

B. This trust describes the Lord's merciful attitude, the fact that the believer's help comes from the Lord, v. 2, that He is the sure Source of all the assistance which we need, also in the future; that, specifically, His watchful care will not permit the Christian's foot to be moved, so that it will stumble and cause a fall, v. 3; all this being connected with the blessed fact that the Keeper of Israel is not in need of slumber or sleep, that His is a continual watchfulness, Ps. 139:1-13. V. 4.

C. Hence the believer in full trustfulness and absolute confidence in this almighty and merciful Lord lifts up his eyes to the hills from whence his help is bound to come in the manner best suited to his needs, v. 1. The expression "lift up mine eyes" is emphatic in bringing out this trust and assurance.

2

A. The believer's trust is brought out also by the description of possible dangers which may beset his path, the smiting of the sun by day and of the moon by night, the references bringing out the certainty of the heavenly Father's sheltering presence at all times. In tropical lands not only the sun in his full power is dangerous for the uncovered head, but also the moon. See Is. 49:40; Ps. 102:5; Jonah 4:8. This fact is to be applied to any condition or situation in which harm may come to the believer, in agreement with Ps. 91:3-6.

B. Finally, therefore, the believer expressly states his assurance of the Lord's protection, the psalmist so declaring and the heart of every true child of God responding. There is no restriction with regard to the Lord's help from *all evil*. And the significant fact is brought out of the *soul's* being preserved or kept (as the seat of life and of the confidence of faith itself). To keep us in all our ways, our going out and our coming in, in all the tasks and duties of life, under all circumstances of life: that is the glorious assurance which is ours on the basis of this psalm. We are certain that our heavenly Father will fulfill His promises, in His unbounded grace and mercy. Deut. 28:6; Prov. 2:8; 3:6.

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