

Christmas Eve
December 24, 2010

Rev. David A. Kind
University Lutheran Chapel
Minneapolis, Minnesota

✦ Jesu juva ✦

LAUGHTER IN THE HEAVENS

Psalm 2, Micah 5:2-5a, Hebrews 1:1-6, Luke 2:1-20

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Tonight is Christmas Eve, the night in which we begin to celebrate our Savior's birth. Yes, around 2013 years ago in the city of David, Bethlehem, the Blessed Virgin gave birth. A Babe was born to be king, who is as the angels said to the shepherds, "Christ the Lord". And this Holy Child is the incarnation of both glory and peace; for in Him we find the very Presence and Being of God come down now in human flesh to dwell among us, and the One who would perform the greatest of Divine works, the salvation of all humanity. This night as we join again our voices to the angelic song, saying "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men," as we light candles, as we sing together the beloved carols and hymns, and travel in heart and mind to the manger at Bethlehem it is natural to rejoice, to laugh even with joy at the great thing God has done for us in becoming one of us, and the new Head of our race.

But not all of mankind rejoices at the birth of Christ. Even among those who celebrate this holy night with singing and Christmas parties and trees and decorations and the giving of gifts and the like, there are those who reject and rebel against the Lord Christ. In the Introit for tonight from Psalm 2, we hear of them: "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.'" Here is described the raging of the nations against Christ; not only the historic nations that opposed Christ Himself and the rise of Christianity, like the Jews and the Romans; but also the nations of today; all who refuse to hear the Word of God and who turn away from or even persecute Christ and His Church.

Let us not imagine that such people are only in distant places, far removed from our homes and from our church. For this describes the people of our own culture, of our own city and of our own schools and of this university; people who desire nothing better than to be free of any Christian moorings, thought, ideals, or faith; who call the gift and salvation in which we rejoice so greatly tonight, bonds and cords, things that bind and limit and entrap the mind and spirit. And they preach to us constantly this message of rebellion and unbelief. They preach it in our classrooms where faith in Christ is ridiculed, in our living rooms through the shows we watch on TV, in our workplaces where matters of faith are considered

a taboo subject, and even in our shops and stores, where as they profit greatly from the celebration of Christmas, they try with great might to secularize and make inclusive this Christian holy day.

But there is still laughter in heaven. The Lord Himself we are told in the Psalm laughs. He laughs at the folly of those who oppose the coming and reign of His Holy Son. He laughs in derision of His enemies. Luther in commenting on this Psalm says that when the Psalmist writes "Why do the nations rage" He means it in this way: "What is this, anyway? The nations conspire, and the peoples plot and take counsel not against the king of the Persians, not against the Turk (Muslims), but against the Lord. Will these efforts not prove to be ridiculous, stupid and foolish?" And so we are told: "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure. 'Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.'"

Yes what good will all of the efforts of the rebellious and unbelieving come to? Christ has come! He has been born of the Virgin. He has become one of us and has suffered for our sins. He has died and risen again from the dead, and having ascended to the heavenly throne, has sent out His Gospel to call the world to faith and to receive the peace He comes to bring. The Lord's whole plan is already a done deal. It cannot be undone by those who reject it. It is only they themselves who are undone by their unbelief and rebellion. The cords and binding they seek to cast away are the cords and bindings that draw mankind out of the pit of destruction, that pull Him up to life. What foolishness is this!?!

And so the Lord laughs in derision of these who reject His godhead and His gift. But we usually find it hard to share in that laughter. For it is not only men and nations that oppress us, but those spiritual enemies who harbor an even deeper hatred of Christ Jesus, and therefore of you, His people. I am speaking here about the devil and his demons, about the power of sin and the old sinner within you, and about the attacks they make against Christ through your conscience, trying to convince you that Christ's victory is not really for you; saying, yes Christ maybe died for this person or that person, but surely not for a sinner like you. Compared to these attacks, the assaults of the world seem mild.



And yet we must learn here to laugh with God.

Luther, acknowledging just how serious the attacks of the devil can be through one's own conscience, says that when these attacks come we should remember this Psalm and say: "These things are nothing to me, which even move my god who dwells in heaven to laughter. You will not prevail with your accusing and

gloom-spreading, nay, rather, I also shall laugh with my God, for I know your attempts are vain. For even if I am a sinner, even if the punishment of sin is eternal death, this will not keep me from laughing... You shall not sadden and frighten me at all. For He has arisen from the dead who has commanded me to be at peace. I shall, therefore, laugh and not wail, as you wish, as though I were alone and without a helper." (LW Vol. 12, 27-28)

This is, after all, why we celebrate this holy night. God sent down His Son to be that Helper, the one who has become one of us and in our flesh has defeated the devil by forgiving us all our sins and by rising victorious from the grave those sins wrought for Him. He who made the worlds, who is the express image of the glory of God, who upholds all things by His powerful Word, has, as the book of Hebrews tells us: come down and purged our sins, and now sits at the right hand of God. He has saved us! And so not only this night, but always, let us look at these things not according to what we experience in this world, not according to the world's rebellious ways, not in the way the devil would have us view them either, but in the way God Himself sees them. Let us say "What is this, anyway, sin? What is this you are trying to do you nations? What is this you accuse me of conscience? Christ has already beaten you. Your plots and attacks mean nothing and will come to nothing. The Lord sits on His holy hill of Zion. What are you going to do about that?" Yes, let us laugh with God in faith, for Christ the Lord has come and has become our peace. Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠