

Wednesday in Oculi, the 19th Day of Lent
March 18, 2009

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

✧ Jesu juva ✧

MOUNT ZION Isaiah 4:2-6

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

Tonight we visit Mount Zion. I think all of you are familiar with this mountain. It is the name often associated with Jerusalem, the holy city of the Old Testament. It was the place where the temple was, where God dwelled between the cherubim of the ark of the covenant. Although we will briefly take a look at the situation of the physical Mount Zion at the time of Isaiah's prophecy, we will spend most of the time tonight examining the spiritual Mount Zion, the place where the Lord dwells.

The situation of Mount Zion in the time of Isaiah was far from pleasing to the Lord. Once again we find the people of Judah and of the city of Jerusalem rebelling against God. They have turned away from Him, looking to false gods and human wisdom as the source of their peace and welfare. Previously Isaiah brought the Lord's condemnation prophesying: "Jerusalem stumbled, and Judah is fallen, because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of His glory. The look on their countenance witnesses against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves. Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him." And indeed the Lord God did give to the wicked according to their works. For He eventually sent the Assyrian army in upon the rebellious nation of Judah and they would be made subjects of this empire and would be horribly oppressed, just as the Lord warns throughout the book of Isaiah. Indeed people of Judah had already seen God's wrath in action when their northern neighbor, the Kingdom of Israel had been destroyed by these same invaders. Not only was that nation brought to ruin, but the people were sent into a permanent exile. Here the Lord was warning the people, lest they too be destroyed in His wrath.

Yet in the midst of these warnings, the Lord holds out a promise to the people. He says: "In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious; And the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing For those of Israel who have escaped. And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy -- everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning..."

Here was a promise for the people who remained faithful to the Lord. Here was a promise that they would not be completely destroyed by the Assyrians; that after the Lord had purged them from their sinfulness though the fire of His judgment and wrath, they would again be His holy people. All of this would happen "in that day".

Clearly that day was not one that would come to Mount Zion quickly. For soon after the Assyrian threat had abated, the people, under the idolatrous King Manassah, returned to their worship of

false gods. They even took in some of the Assyrian religion, practicing astrology and making human sacrifices to their false gods. The prophecy had not been fulfilled. For the nation had not been purged of its filth. Clearly these people of Mount Zion, of Jerusalem did not qualify to be called holy by God.

So when would this prophecy be fulfilled? In that day. In the great Day of the Lord; the Last Day; the Day of Judgment. But the beginning of the fulfillment has already begun, for this prophecy speaks not so much of the physical land of Mount Zion and the worldly city of Jerusalem, but of the spiritual Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem. What is the spiritual Mount Zion? What is the heavenly Jerusalem? It is the place where God dwells. It is His church, both here on earth and also in heaven.

The key to the fulfillment of this prophecy is that the Lord would purge away the sin of the daughters of Zion. And who are the daughters of Zion? These are the true people of God, the believers; the children of the Church. God has promised to take away their filth, their sins in thought, word and deed. And this taking away of their sins was to be the first step in the fulfillment of this prophecy.

We are moving, liturgically and ceremonially, toward that first step in Lent; for we are slowly traveling to Mount Calvary where the sins of the whole world and especially of the daughters of Zion were purged away in God's wrath. There the whole wrath and judgment of God was poured out upon humanity; upon one member of humanity in particular; Christ Jesus. For when He took up the cross and was crucified, then God's wrath was satisfied. There He paid the price for the sinfulness of all people, through the shedding of His own innocent blood. There the Branch of the Lord was hanged on a tree and purged "by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning."

And now we who remain in Zion are called holy; not because we are holy by ourselves, (indeed by ourselves, we are only wretched sinners, the unholy of men) but because we are made holy by Christ who has taken all of our unholiness away. We who are in Christ are the ones who are recorded among the living in the heavenly Jerusalem. We through baptism and faith in Christ Jesus have our names written in the Book of Life.

Surely this prophecy in Isaiah is not about the nation of Judah as a political entity, but is about you and I, the children of the true Zion, the Holy Christian Church. But there is more, we not only have our sins purged away by Christ and remain in the true Jerusalem, we also are promised a further benefit. Isaiah's prophecy continues: "then the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering. And there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm and rain."

✧ Soli Deo gloria ✧