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Cover Art

The anointing of David to be King over Israel
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Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1534

Forever Shall Abide

The Book of Psalms

read faithfully with Martin Luther



An Advent Devotional

Week One

Psalm 2

Psalm 32

Psalm 8

Psalm 69

Psalm 25

Psalm 110

From heav'n above to earth I come
To bear good news to ev'ry home;
Glad tidings of great joy I bring,
Whereof I now will say and sing:
To you this night is born a child
Of Mary, chosen virgin mild;
This little child of lowly birth
Shall be the joy of all the earth.

- Martin Luther

"From Heaven Above to Earth I Come"



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Psalm 2

“Will these efforts not prove to be ridiculous, stupid, and foolish? Let no one therefore fear, let no one allow himself to be terrified by these counsels, whose net result will show that they have been in vain.”

· Martin Luther

You know those movies or books where the bad guys make the mistake of going after the wrong man? That's the story of sin in the world. When we should be turning our attention on our own mistakes, on the ways in which we are our own worst enemies, we instead turn our sights on God. The world is deluded into thinking that true freedom is freedom from the Lord. If only we could eliminate God and religion, we would be truly free from every shackle and cord.

In the 1960s, Quebec instituted a program of secularization that continues to this day. The princes of the province have taken their stand against the Lord. In place of God they have put humanity, so-called common sense, and basic human decency. People are naturally good, they argue, even without religion.

But day after day, week after week over the last few years, the folly of the princes has shone forth. Corrupt police officers, politicians on the take, and embezzlement at every level have left people's confidence in the goodness of man shaken. The One who sits in heaven laughs. And He holds our so-called “human decency” in derision.

Over the city of Montreal in Quebec still shine forth two lit crosses. One can be seen anywhere in the eastern and central parts of the city. To the north and west one can see the second on the top of the Oratory of St. Joseph. No matter what the princes below might try, the Anointed One remains seated on the holy hill. Jesus wins the day against the princes of the world. He saves us from our own stupidity. He remains the right Son for us all.

- Rev. Charles St-Onge

Oratio

Lord Jesus, be our king and save us from our own laughable ignorance. Amen.

Psalm 110

“In the entire Scripture, there is nothing like this Psalm. It would be right to acknowledge it as the chief confirmation of the Christian faith. For nowhere else is Christ prophesied with such clear, plain words as a priest and an eternal priest.”

· Martin Luther

Jesus used this Psalm to confound His enemies (Mt 22:41-46). If David calls the Christ his “lord,” how can He also be David's Son? No one had an answer.

That is, none of Jesus' enemies understood this Scripture. But Peter came to understand and quoted it in his first sermon after Pentecost (Ac 2:34). Later the writer of Hebrews used this Psalm as inspiration for large sections of his letter of encouragement. Another dozen times or so, the New Testament alludes to Psalm 110.

This Psalm teaches that Jesus is fully God and fully man, both David's Lord and David's son. This Psalm teaches the exaltation of the Messiah over His enemies. This Psalm teaches the ultimate priesthood in the order of Melchizedek in which the king is the priest without beginning or end.

We have a rich history in the church of our praise searching out the depths of the mystery of God's grace. Our God is not simple. His grace layers upon grace.

This Advent season, dive deeply into the riches of the church's treasury of praise. Yes, there is joy in singing “Jesus loves me” again and again. We turn first in the season to the tunes that charm. But don't neglect the fourth-century “Of the Father's Love Begotten,” or Luther's own “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come.”

And in your prayers, let the words of praise trace out the splendor of David's Son being David's Lord. This is a great and mighty wonder deserving of every heart from East to West to wake and sing!

- Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

Oratio

Open my lips, O Lord, to sing forth Your praise from age to age and into eternity. Amen.

Psalm 69

“For surfeit now reigns to such an extent that there is much worship of God everywhere, but it is only going through the motions, without love and spirit and there are very few with any fervor.”

· Martin Luther

This is a season of the year in which we do things we have done many times before. We put up the tree. We hear “Jingle Bells” in the background at the grocery. We throw a dash of nutmeg over eggnog. Fruitcake abounds.

Some of these things have deep resonances. The smell of the nutmeg reminds us of Grandma. “Dashing through the snow” takes us back to childhood play. The ornaments on the tree mark the years—“We got this one with our first child!”

Other things (perhaps for some of us, that fruitcake) are just bare traditions, the trappings of the season. They don’t mean anything.

Religious practices follow the same pattern. One man can say the Lord’s Prayer a dozen different ways in one day, the Lord’s words sparking fruitful meditation and devotion. Another man zips through the words without thinking about a single one of them. No doubt, we aren’t surprised to hear that those two men can be the same man, too.

Luther recognized that Psalm 69 speaks against our complacency and lukewarm devotion. At the heart of this Psalm is the vision of the Messiah, who is as opposite of lukewarm as can be. “Zeal for your house has consumed me” is a verse the disciples remembered when Jesus chased out the money-changers (Jn 2:17).

Jesus watched Jew after Jew file into the Temple to offer lukewarm sacrifices. The people most engaged were those making money. He drove them out because He was zealous for what that holy house was supposed to mean.

Finally, that zeal consumed Him as He offered His life once for all on the cross. He was a stranger to his own brothers (Ps 69:8) and a reproach to the cynics of His age (Ps 69:9). Yet that zeal, rooted in faith and love, was and is victorious. His zeal restored God’s house and us.

- Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

Oratio

Pour out Your Spirit so that all complacency is replaced by zeal for You and Yours! Amen.

Psalm 8

“The prince of a land is its lord. . . Thus also Christ is to be made Lord, so that all might obey Him, men and angels.”

· Martin Luther

Psalm 8 seems to have it all. The moon and stars but also babies and infants; enemies and avengers but also lowly sheep and oxen; the majesty of the heavens in contrast to the creatures of the earth. It is truly a cosmic hymn, and one can sense that David has been inspired to stretch our vision and imaginations as far as they can go.

In the middle of all the majesty stands man. He seems so small, so hardly worth a second glance, that David is amazed God even bothers with him. Yet he has been made a little lower than “the heavenly beings.” The Hebrew here is quite clear: it should be translated as “a little lower than God.” The Son of Man is crowned with glory and honor. Dominion has been given to him, and all things placed under his feet.

The story of Jesus is the story of how what is small takes on cosmic significance. It’s the story of how what seems powerless—even infants—can show God’s strength against the Enemy. It’s the story of Jesus, and how a baby could ascend to the right hand of God and become ruler over all things in heaven and on earth. Jesus is born the Lord, but it is by His death that He received the right to rule as Lord from within creation, as a man.

In I Corinthians 15, Paul quotes from Psalm 8, pointing out that it is Jesus of whom David is speaking. Even death will be put under Jesus’ feet. The tiny baby born of Mary becomes ruler over all things. In Him, we see the one who will put our sin under subjection and will take dominion over our death. O Lord, how majestic *is* Your name in all the earth—and the heavens!

- Rev. Charles St-Onge

Oratio

Lord of all creation, Your strength over the Enemy is shown in taking what seems small and making it big. Care for us through Jesus in life and in death. Amen.

"The 25th Psalm is a psalm of prayer in which the righteous pray that God will make them godly, forgive their sins, guard them from sin and shame, and finally deliver them from all enemies and all evil."

· Martin Luther

"I have been extra good this year, so I have a long list of presents that I want." Those are the words of Charlie Brown's little sister, Sally, in the beloved special *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. She wants to remind Santa of what a good girl she has been and what she deserves. Her brother then responds, "Oh, brother!"

You and I may not be writing to Santa, but is this what we feel as we approach Christmas? Do we live our vocations in praise of God and the salvation He has given us, or do we consider our actions as "our part of the deal"? When things don't go as we plan, does it ever feel as if God is "not holding up His end of the bargain"? As Sally says, "All I want is what I have coming to me. All I want is my fair share." Is this *really* what we want?

David's plea is quite a bit different than Sally's letter. Luther notes that this psalm is a "prayer in which the righteous pray that God will make them godly, forgive their sins, guard them from sin and shame..."

We deserve only God's wrath for our sins. Take a look, instead, at what David asks God to "remember" and what He pleads He will "forget": "Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!" (Ps 25:7). And that's what God has done. Graciously, He assures us, "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (Is 43:25).

- Rev. David Tannahill

We pray

Lord, I have been sinful again this year. Grant me the undeserved gift of Your mercy for Jesus' sake, I pray. Amen.

"Our reason does not know what sin is and tries to make satisfaction for it with works. But the psalmist says that even saints are sinners. They cannot become holy or blessed except by confessing themselves as sinners before God, knowing that they are regarded as righteous only from the grace of God."

· Martin Luther

"The two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off to the wash-house that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper." That's the scene in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, where Tiny Tim and his father return home after attending Christmas Day service at church. As delightful as that scene is, it always made me scratch my head and wonder, "Why weren't his mother, his brother, and sisters in worship with them?"

In the hustle and bustle of the season, it's easy to lose sight of what counts.

The Cratchits are crushed in spirit as they watch the failing health of their son. But instead of hearing God's Word and the comfort of the One whose coming brings us salvation of body and soul, the focus is lost to the preparation of the meal.

David sings, "You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Ps 32:5). This baby, whose birth we prepare to celebrate, came to bear our sins and be our Savior. As Luther notes on this psalm, "All the saints are sinners and remain sinners. But they are holy because God in His grace neither sees nor counts these sins, but forgets, forgives, and covers them." It's because of this that we have life both now and eternally. That's the Good News of God's rescue that soothes crushed spirits. It's too good to miss.

At the end of the psalm, David concludes, "Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!" (Ps 32:11 NIV). Save the "pudding singing in the copper" for later. First hear the song of the righteous singing in His house. And bring the family with you.

- Rev. David Tannahill

We pray

Gracious Lord, gather us around Your Word and Sacraments and hear our voices sing thanks in Your house. Amen.