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Cover Art

David with his harp
Illustrated for the Wittenberg Bible
Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1534

Forever Shall Abide

The Book of Psalms

read faithfully with Martin Luther



An Advent Devotional

Week Three

Psalm 82

Psalm 130

Psalm 90

Psalm 132

Psalm 127

Psalm 139

“These are the signs that you shall mark:
The swaddling clothes and manger dark.
There you will find the infant laid
By whom the heav’ns and earth were made.”
How glad we’ll be to find it so!
Then with the shepherds let us go
To see what God for us has done
In sending us His own dear Son.

- Martin Luther

“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”



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"Where there is no government, or where government is not held in honor, there can be no peace. Where there is no peace, no one can keep his life or anything else... much less will there be room to teach God's Word and to rear children in the fear of God."

· Martin Luther

Luther teaches that the Psalmist speaks of earthly rulers as "gods." This language is used, Luther continues, so that we will respect and honor those with authority.

In our day and land, we are blessed to help elect our rulers through voting. This leads us to see our rulers as accountable to us. (Hopefully, the sense of accountability runs the other way, too!) Because we are regularly asked to judge our rulers, deciding whether or not we think they should continue or be replaced, we are under strong temptation to move beyond criticism to disrespect and despising.

Psalm 82 gives us a way to pray when frustrated with earthly rulers. We hear that God, not the voters, stands as the ultimate judge of those to whom He gives authority.

And we see why He gives this authority. "Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (82:4).

When we pray this Psalm, we begin with respect, noting that our rulers stand with godlike authority. But every man (save One) falls short of God's grace and justice. Those entrusted much power will "fall like any prince" (82:7).

Finally, the Psalm brings us to Christ, who "shall inherit all the nations!" (82:8). To take care of the fatherless and widow, He was willing to set aside all His majesty, suffering on a cross.

No matter how the next election ends up, Christ cannot be removed from His throne. He will establish eternal justice, while pouring out mercy on all who call on His name. All praise to Him!

- Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti

Our pray

O Zion's daughter, rise / To meet your lowly King, / Nor let your faithless heart despise / The peace He comes to bring. / As judge, on clouds of light, / He soon will come again / And His true members all unite / With Him in heav'n to reign. Amen. (LSB 331)

"The Psalmist here proclaims that incomprehensibility of the divine wisdom and goodness, whereby, in a wonderful manner, he himself and all men, with all their affairs, all their works and all their thoughts, both the greatest and the least, were predestined of God from everlasting."

· Martin Luther

Have you heard of the backwards hide-and-seek game called "sardines"? One person hides, and the other players all look for the hiding one. If you find the hiding one, you hide right there too. The last player to find everyone loses. Sometimes the hiding place gets crowded with everyone in there, so we call it "sardines."

Sinfulness offers the illusion of hiding. Sinfulness deceptively promises fewer complications in solitude, greater control and comfort in autonomy. Serving self instead actually detaches from fellowship. Using others disconnects from community. The Lord of life's laws retract the curtains by calling out, "Where are you? Do you see how far you've wandered, how naked and endangered you've become? I'm coming for you. I will find you."

Hear even in these condemning words the Father's compassion. "I'm coming for you. I will find you." He abides beside us even in the depths of sin and pain, through the very valley of the shadow of death itself. He has incarnated Himself among us, little like us, to fit with us in our tightest spaces. He assumes on Himself and endures in our place the claustrophobic crushing that we may breathe relief. The pressure binds both Him to us and us to Him. He has implanted Himself right next to us, and where He ascends, there we also will reside.

If the devil comes up against us, he comes up against our God too. If hurt and hell frighten or entice us, they must face our Savior also. Afraid or ashamed, we know He stays with us. Frail or failing, we trust He prevails for us. We hear His Word speak to us. We see His Word work on us. We remain sardines with Him, sealed secure in baptism's water.

- Rev. Michael Salemink

Our pray

Good Shepherd, I fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Amen.

“God is the power and strength of his people... this is the strength and fortitude of the people. To have God present with them.”

· Martin Luther

One of my favorite Christmas hymns is “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” (LSB 380). We enthusiastically sing with the angels of the peace and joy that is ours because, with the coming of this holy and innocent Christ child, God and man are reconciled. Heavenly and earthly voices join together to proclaim hope for a lost and broken world, that there might be peace on earth and good will towards all men.

Of today’s Psalm, Luther wrote, “They pray... for God’s Word and temporal peace. For where these both stand well, things go well.” We sing and pray and hope for peace, but peace is so hard to find. Each evening news cast is filled with reports of violence and discord. Our hearts are burdened and troubled by doubts and fears. Due to sin, mankind is in turmoil both with God and with one another. Yes, peace can be very hard to find. But in this Psalm the Lord makes a promise to His people. He promises that He will dwell amongst them and clothe them with salvation and righteousness so that “your faithful people sing with joy.”

As the offspring of the virgin’s womb, the Word became flesh. He was incarnate and dwelt among men. Jesus was born so that upon the cross He would win our salvation and cover us with His righteousness. We are reconciled to the Almighty and anointed with a peace that flows from Him to us. In and through this grace and mercy poured out upon us we have been born again.

In this Advent and Christmas season, and for all the days of the year, let us lift our voices, declaring to the world a peace that is ours, and a peace that can be theirs. Let us hail the light and life that Christ Jesus brings today, tomorrow and unto eternity.

- Rev. Richard Gizynski

Our pray

Dear Heavenly Father, You sent us Your promised Son. Grant that we might treasure this gracious gift and ever and always find hope, joy and peace in it. Amen.

“[‘Generation to generation’] means that from the beginning of the world to the end of the world God has never deserted His own.”

· Martin Luther

We count down to Christmas in various ways. There are Advent calendars, Advent observances in church, daily devotions, and the good ole X through each day on the wall calendar. For adults this time seems rather short and filled with much toil and possible tribulation with a sprinkling of joy on top. For children these few short weeks seem at least a thousand days.

We ask, “How long before Christmas?” more often than we think. As the Psalmist says, we have 70 or 80 years filled with toil. It is much toil since we live by the sweat of our brow due to the curse. In a sense, every time we ask, “How long before the Lord delivers me from this problem?” we are longing for Christmas. I don’t mean celebrating Jesus’ birth with family, friends, and presents. I mean the next coming of our Savior on clouds with His angels.

We know how long it is until Christmas. Sometimes we know when certain trials and tribulations will end. We do know they will end. They will end for us individually when the Lord leads us into His presence. They will all end for all people for all time at the coming of our Lord.

This is why our dwelling place is in the house of the Lord. I’m not advocating setting up a cot at church. I am advocating living in the new life we have now and looking forward with great joy to His return. And, like those children on Christmas morn, we will think the trials of life that seemed a thousand days were but as yesterday when standing in the presence of our Lord.

- Rev. Matthew Brackman

Our pray

Grant us Your grace, mercy, and peace amidst the toil of our lives. As we dwell in Your house, let us rejoice in Your good gifts. Amen.

Psalm 127

“This Psalm...so beautifully turns the heart away from covetousness and concern for temporal livelihood and possessions toward faith in God.”

· Martin Luther

The USDA thinks a child's worth \$233,610. Every year they calculate the costs anew. Housing, groceries, child care, education, health care, transportation, clothing, and the like add up to almost \$14,000 a year per kid. Middle-income parents can expect to spend approximately a quarter million dollars from birth to age 17. This year's price tag (which doesn't include college, by the way) represents only a 3% increase over last year's, which amounts to less than the 4.3% average annual inflation since 1960.

Of course, they sorely underestimate. Children cost you no less than everything. They require from you even the sacrifice of your very self. And what a blessed divestment. Without them we prove the more prone to squander existence only on ourselves. He who thus hoards life loses it anyway, for the Lord Almighty made lives for giving and selves to share. Property, prosperity, power, and fleshly pleasures can't accompany you into the everlasting kingdom, but progeny may. Children supply a chief means of storing up treasures in heaven. Converting earthly riches into Christian relationships makes deposits in eternal currency. Only what is shared with another is saved, and that which is given alone is kept.

Every effort at accumulation will fail. It simply runs counter to the nature of both creation and the Creator. He demonstrates His own ultimate omnipotence and authority by offering Himself entirely in His child Jesus Christ. He has shoehorned heaven and all He has into Jesus like the magician's physics-defying bottomless bag or the film trope where valuable contraband gets smuggled inside stuffed animals. Children embody and invite just such an emptying, which frees hands and hearts from sinful selfishness to receive the divine fullness forevermore. Indeed, the communion of saints makes this grace-and-faith blessing accessible even for those whose bodies have borne no babies.

- Rev. Michael Salemink

We pray

Heavenly Father, let us receive Your kingdom like little children. Amen.

Psalm 130

“In this little Psalm, therefore, the whole life, work, and activity of the inner man is masterfully described.”

· Martin Luther

Imagine falling off of a fancy cruise ship into the ocean. You're barely a raindrop in this vast body of water. You likely have anywhere from two to seven miles of water beneath you. Sinking to the bottom where no light penetrates and crying out for help is a pretty apt picture of our sinful condition.

It is into these depths that our Lord descends. He makes His splash on Christmas morn. He may have taken months to walk, but He didn't wait to dive into our sinful depths. Upon His death He reaches the ocean floor. On Christmas morning Jesus splashed into that vast ocean; thirty years later He had absorbed every last drop. He takes in the ocean of sin, and lifts His drowned people off the ocean floor and brings them up onto His holy mountain.

We as God's Advent people look for His descending. We, like watchmen waiting for the morning, look for the coming day to celebrate His birth, and we look for His glorious descending in victory. As eagerly as children wait for Christmas morning, we wait for our Lord's return. We look forward to the coming of the star rising in the East. We look forward to the light of Christ warming our hearts and minds.

Luther talks about this Psalm as summarizing the inner life of God's people because we know the depth of our sin and simultaneously eagerly wait for the promises of the Lord to be fulfilled. We look for His good gifts of forgiveness each day. We look for Him to lead us through the tribulations of life in this fallen world, and we look for Him to return and bring about the new creation.

- Rev. Matthew Brackman

We pray

Come quickly, Lord Jesus, and fulfill Your promises to Your people. Let us rejoice in the new life that You have given us and look forward to the even greater life that awaits us at Your return. Amen.