

“O Dayspring (Rising Sun)” and “O King of the Nations”

Isaiah 9:1-7 and Isaiah 2:1-5

Advent Midweek III

December 14, 2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Tonight, we come to the fifth and sixth of the seven Great “O” Antiphons. We’ll consider the *seventh* on Christmas Eve, finding out what this phrase “Ero Cras” means... and (if you will) tie a nice bow on the series, but tonight we consider “O Dayspring” and “O King of the Nations.”

Consider them, first, from the wide lens that we’ve noticed throughout these antiphons. The first two antiphons revered Christ as the Creator and ruler of the Law; the middle two antiphons revered Christ as the Ensign upon the cross and the Key of the Gospel. So, having meditated upon Law and Gospel, what (one might ask) is left? Tonight’s antiphons teach us to revere Christ as the bringer of Eternal Glory – light everlasting and the cornerstone uniting all people. So, with that ‘wide lens’ understanding, let’s zoom in and focus on each in detail. First,

“O Dayspring, splendor of light everlasting: Come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.”

The final phrase of this antiphon certainly sounds much like last week’s second antiphon as it pleaded to the Key of David, “Come and rescue the prisoners who are **in darkness and the shadow of death.**” But, notice the subtle difference between “rescuing the prisoners” versus “enlightening”. To “rescue the prisoners” is to pull them out of something, namely bondage. To “enlighten” is to impart upon, to shine on, to fill with something of divine value from on high. Such is no wishful thinking, but Isaiah’s prophecy from our first reading says, “...*On them* a light has shined” and again, “*Unto us* a child is born; *to us* a son is given.” When the Dayspring from on high comes, he does not merely pull us out of a dark place, he beats back the darkness of the place with the brilliance of His marvelous light. And when His light shines on us, He reveals to us and shares with us the everlasting glory God has always intended for His people.

To better appreciate this, perhaps we would do well to ask what this word “dayspring” is all about. It can also be translated as the “Dawning” or, as on your bulletin cover,

“Oriens,” meaning “sunrise.” This is why the eastern nations used to be referred to as “oriental” (before that was deemed “racist”)... it was the term that referred to the fact that the sunrise comes from the east.

And just as that daily sunrise – or ‘dayspring’ – dawns upon and warms the earth each day, so that very moment of sunrise brings unmistakable light and an immediate beginning to warmth, how much moreso does the coming of the Christ dawn an eternal day upon the darkness of mankind, that all who hope in *Him* may share His glory and splendor of light forever. You perhaps best recognize the ‘dayspring’ theme through the words of Zechariah, who at the birth of his son and the Christ’s forerunner, John, sang

“You, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; when **the day shall dawn upon us from on high** to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Yes, that might be familiar to you, but you may best know this concept of the dawning glory of the Christ from those words you sing every Sunday in the Nunc Dimittis.

Simeon sings with you of this Christ child, “a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel.”

This is the greater truth of the forgiveness of sins which the coming Christ secured on the cross and pours out upon you. Yes, forgiveness is the greatest treasure, but we often fail to understand *why* because we only see it ‘in the moment.’ We see that it clears the conscience before God, even that it gives us confidence before his Holy Word to imbibe deeply and be ‘enlightened by His Holy Will... but we often fail to realize that the forgiveness of sins opens to us and keeps us sustained in the great dawning of glory and light everlasting that Christ shares with His Church forever.

In other words, it’s a “forever after” / eternal benefit that Christ brings to us, apart from which we would dwell in the darkness of death not just for a day – not unlike those earthly days of deep cloud cover or even of solar eclipse, those days where the sun does not shine brightly – but we would dwell in the darkness of death for all eternity. This is important for us to learn to meditate upon, for we often think of sin and the darkness of bad doctrine as that which causes us to muddle around in daily life and make poor choices and perhaps renders us immoral, but we fail to see the big picture – that, without

the coming Christ, we are lost in the shadows and darkness and ignorance that redefines itself as prideful knowledge and hubris – we are lost in error’s maze *forever...* meaning, until it is too late, and Christ’s return renders us subjects of wrath and condemnation.

But, with Christ, the darkness is chased away, our prideful hubris gives way to humility that confesses its ignorance and learns the way of the Lord, sin is acknowledged with repentance and shattered by forgiveness, and the future (or ‘eastern horizon’) is always bright and luminous and filled with the warmth of dawn and the rising sunshine upon the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Notice how the coming of Christ’s first advent is intricately connected – can never be separated from but always leads us to –his second coming, so that St Peter writes of that holy Word that chronicles Christ’s first coming:

“We have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place **until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.**”

Or, as St John hears from Christ at *the end* of Revelation,

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” ...

...to which, the Holy Spirit and the Bride of Christ say, “Come”... and Jesus responds regarding His final glorious advent, “I am coming soon.”

Thus, “O Dayspring, splendor of light everlasting: Come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” Or, as the hymnic version says it, “Cheer us by thy drawing nigh... death’s dark shadows put to flight.”

If the fifth antiphon meditates upon the coming Christ’s ability to turn the ebbing close of life’s little day into the dawn of the resurrection and the life of the world to come, then the sixth antiphon moves us to meditate upon the glory that awaits us when Christ brings us to His kingdom not of this world, the kingdom in which we will share His reign:

“O King of the nations, the ruler they long for, the cornerstone uniting all people: Come and save us all, whom You formed out of the clay.”

Interestingly, for such a meditation, we could remain in that chapter of the night’s first reading, when Isaiah famously prophesies,

“Unto us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder... Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.”

Yes, we *could* have stayed right there. But it’s important to note just how voluminous and replete are the prophecies not just regarding the Christ’s *first* coming to sacrificially die, but his final coming to grant unto us His kingdom and goodly rule... a kingdom not just for the lineage of Abraham, but for all who would be converted out of and brought from the corners of the globe’s nations... or, as the antiphon calls Him: *Rex Gentium* – King of the Gentiles (nations). Thus, not only from that most famous ninth chapter of Isaiah, but also from the second chapter of Isaiah, we hear:

He shall judge between the nations (gentiles),
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore.

When Christ comes, and Jew and Gentile is no longer a distinction but all are one in Christ Jesus... then the nations and

their governments have no coercive sway over the people. What need is there to fight, what need is there to bicker and enter into warfare when all relationships are grounded in ‘faith in God and fervent love toward one another’? Truly, if all would call on Christ as their King and Wisdom, then swords would be of no purpose... neither spears, nor the art of warfare. Where Christ is the cornerstone and foundation of the nation, all people are united in *love of* the holy Law; and the creation governed by the divine reign is Eden restored.

What might sound like utopia on earth, the most fervent **desire of the nations** this side of heaven, is true and certain under the reign of the King of nations on the ‘other side’ of heaven. In the New Creation, the kingdom will be glorious, perfect, peaceful, incorruptible, undefiled, free from partisan bickering, perfect in its promise-keeping, everlasting in its benefit. Yes, this is the kingdom of which we are citizens by God’s grace... as the Small Catechism rejoices, “He has purchased and redeemed me... that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom.”

And it all starts with that King invading enemy territory to overthrow the enemy and free those in bondage. If the conquest is to be achieved and the spoils of war shared and the

everlasting reign begun, there must first be an invasion by that coming King.

But, note *how* that King comes to invade... He does not come with an entire host and army, knocking down walls and fortresses to overpower the foe by might. No, he invades from within, as the wise men disclose to Herod: “We have come to worship him who is *born* King...” Just as Moses was raised up right under the Pharaoh’s nose, so also this one greater than Moses would be raised up in the very world over which the pall of sin and death hung.

And when that King grows up and his mission of rescue begins and the hour comes to mark his coronation, “Father, the hour has come, glorify thy Son that thy Son may glorify Thee” – then he boldly offers up his own life in battle for the sake of those whom he seeks to save and free.

And, having crushed the enemy underfoot, the Victorious One begins his rightful reign, his enemies being made his footstool, and He prepares His kingdom to forever house the captives made free, that they may return to their former glory – they whom were once His creation, whom He once formed out of the clay, are made His people again – but this time never to be made captive again, nor return to the dust

again, but to be raised up to forever flourish and prosper in His kingdom which has no end.

Thus, ““O King of the nations, the ruler they long for, the cornerstone uniting all people: Come and save us all, whom You formed out of the clay.”

So, in these fifth and sixth antiphons, we have learned to meditate on the kingdom that is Christ’s and the future that is ours as heirs of his victory. This is such a necessary Advent meditation, lest the Law and order of God seem pointless and lest the Gospel of Christ be rendered incomplete, stunted in its worth and lasting effect. No, if the Law and order of creation is to be divine and holy, then the Kingdom must last forever; and if the salvation and gospel of Christ is to be sufficient, then the good news must free us to be God’s people forever. Therefore,

O Dayspring... O King of the Nations... Come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death...
Come and save us all, whom You formed out of the clay.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +